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Bakirathi Mani

Swarthmore College, bmani1@swarthmore.edu

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Viewing South Asia, Seeing America: Gauri Gill's "The Americans"

Bakirathi Mani

Gauri Gill: *The Americans*. Organized by Bose Pacia / Nature Morte Galleries. Bose Pacia, Kolkata, February 16–March 8, 2008; Nature Morte, New Delhi, March 15–29, 2008; Matthieu Foss Gallery, Mumbai, April 10–24, 2008; Thomas Welton Stanford Art Gallery, Stanford, California, July 8–August 17, 2008; Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, October 4–December 28, 2008; Bose Pacia, New York, January 9–February 7, 2009. Curated by Gauri Gill.

Gauri Gill: The Americans. Illustrated catalog, text by Jeet Thayil and Gayatri Sinha. Delhi: Nature Morte / Bose Pacia, 2008. \$40.00 (paper). Funding provided by Nature Morte, Bose Pacia, Stanford University, Chicago Cultural Center, and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR).

What is the visual landscape of South Asian American migration? Gauri Gill's exhibition at Bose Pacia, New York, opened with a disparate set of images: two businessmen leaning across a table littered with cocktails at a party on Capitol Hill; a group of women elaborately dressed for Halloween, roaring with laughter on a couch; teenagers flirting at a religious festival. Migrating from intimate snapshots of family and friends toward digitally edited diptychs and triptychs, Gill photographs sites of labor and pleasure created by South Asians across the United States. The exhibition showcased a series of prints that Gill developed during her travels from California to New York between 2000 and 2007. The accompanying print catalog, published in 2008, pays homage to Robert Frank's canonical collection of mid-twentieth-century images, also titled *The Americans*. Like Frank, Gill's photographs are characterized by a "politicized aesthetic of the everyday": the exhibition records public celebrations organized by large South Asian communities on the East and West coasts, as well as the private lives of new immigrants in Tennessee, Mississippi, and South Carolina.¹ Whereas Frank's collection foregrounds the racial, gender, and class politics that defined the United States during the cold war, Gill's

prints generate a different image of nationhood. Her documentation of public culture and family life not only redefines what it means to be “American” at the turn of the twenty-first century; it also elucidates the shifting topography of “America.” Gill’s collection is distinguished by a transnational aesthetic of locality that is evident in the formal composition of the prints, which focus on the relationship between immigrants and the material objects that populate their homes and places of worship. However, as a phenomenology of belonging, locality is also engendered through the relationship between immigrant subjects who attended the exhibition in New York and the photographic objects that lined gallery walls.² Reading these varied relationships between subject and object alerts us to the ways in which the question of locality shapes the aesthetic and ethnographic narratives of *The Americans*.

The Americans is Gill’s first solo exhibition, arriving in New York after shows in Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, California, and Chicago. Currently based in Delhi, Gill is an independent photographer whose work has been prominently showcased in India.³ Trained at the Delhi College of Art and the Parsons School of Design, Gill completed her MFA in photography at Stanford University in 2002. Gill’s other collections (*Rural Rajasthan*, *Urban Landscapes*, and *Nizamuddin at Night*), documenting the country of her birth, are shot entirely in black and white. Her exhibition at Bose Pacia is an aesthetic departure from her previous work in terms of form (using color photography) as well as content (focusing on diasporic subjects). As the photographs weave between sites of work, worship, and leisure, the exhibit also travels, like Gill, between India and the United States.

The problem of locality in *The Americans* mirrors, in part, the difficulty of situating Gill’s work in relation to other Indian and diasporic South Asian photographers. Gill’s collection diverges from U.S.-based artists such as Annu Palakunnathu Mathew and Jaishri Abichandani, who use photography to create critical representations of immigration. Characterized by pastiche, mimicry, and drag, Abichandani’s and Mathew’s self-portraits challenge received histories of post-1965 South Asian migration.⁴ *The Americans* is also distinct from the work of Sunil Gupta, known for his images of Asian, Black, and queer communities in London. In the series “Social Security,” Gupta interweaves family photographs with transcriptions of oral interviews to document his family’s migration from India to Canada, and from Canada to the United Kingdom.⁵ Gupta’s curatorial practice established a narrative of minority rights and citizenship that has, in turn, influenced portraits of queer British Asians by Poulomi Desai and Parminder Sekhon.⁶ Though Gupta currently coedits the independent photography journal *CameraWork Delhi* with Gill

and Radhika Singh, the thematic concerns shared by Gill and Gupta do not translate into a similar aesthetic in their solo projects.⁷ Gill's emphasis on diasporic communities also differentiates her from peers in India, such as the acclaimed photographer Dayanita Singh. In her collections *Privacy* and *Myself Mona Ahmed*, Singh depicts upper-class families and the working poor in highly formalized, static images.⁸ Though Singh's photographs are concerned with differences of caste and class, gender and sexuality in contemporary India, she claims, "I do not let my work get preoccupied by social concerns . . . I made the choice to be a photographer, not an activist."⁹ Although Gill also demurs at being named an activist, in my view her exhibition performs distinctly political work. Because Gill's collection cannot be located within a single national domain, her prints demand a bifocal analytical perspective that is equally attentive to subcontinental politics and the politics of race and ethnicity in the United States.

However, online and print reviews of *The Americans* describe the collection as a series of ethnographic images that codify dominant narratives of migration.¹⁰ For example, an anonymous blogger praises the "vibrant colors of saris, ornaments, artwork and religious icons," and proceeds to argue that the photographs "focus on the extent to which conformist American values infiltrate and hence confuse one's sense of Indian identity."¹¹ Emphasizing the contradiction between "Indian identity" and "American values," the blogger refuses to engage with the title of the exhibition. More surprisingly, the critic Gayatri Sinha, who has curated Gill's earlier work, extends this binary framework to the aesthetic composition of the prints. In her introduction to the exhibition catalog Sinha writes, "Set in the chromatic intimacy of the candid photograph, it is inscribed by the material residue of two cultures, of the glittering flecks of Bollywood and Hollywood, the Indian and the American dream."¹² Instead of foregrounding the transnational circulation and consumption of the images, Sinha reinforces a spatial and temporal segregation between India and the United States.

Viewing the exhibition as an ethnographic representation of "two cultures," forever irreconcilable, constrains the ways in which we can read the prints as a distinctly diasporic narrative of South Asian America. Focusing on diptychs that were prominent at the New York exhibition, I demonstrate how Gill achieves an aesthetic of locality by establishing spatial and temporal contiguity between national sites. This contiguity is achieved not through the seamless integration of visual markers of difference (clothing styles, religious iconography, and so on), but by emphasizing the ruptures of time and space that define immigrant lives. As Gill commented: "The material world—what

they [immigrants] use to recreate their world—becomes quite important. . . . The act of immigration for me . . . is also an act of imagination.”¹³ Visualizing these acts of imagination, Gill foregrounds the relationship between the human subject of migration and the material objects of immigrant desires. Her camera is trained on South Asians as well as the objects that fill immigrant homes and workplaces: videotapes, racks of clothing, artwork, trophies, memorabilia. This primary—perhaps even primal—relationship between subject and object is central to Gill’s prints, which merge images of work with the objects of labor. Although Gill refuses to organize her photographs into a taxonomic portrait of immigrant communities—the photographs are not grouped by religion, class, or region—these categories of difference are nevertheless reworked into the visual relationship between domestic and public space, between representations of “high” and “low” culture, and between human subjects and material objects.

In the diptych shown in figure 1, a photograph of a poster for an Indian American beauty pageant in New Jersey, held in 2002, is laid against an image from the Sikh Heritage Gala Awards ceremony, held in New York in 2007. The photograph is centered on two women: the poster of a young pageant contestant, and a patron at the awards ceremony whose crystal handbag and dress are as elaborate as the beauty queens’. The print projects two distinct public events, both of which celebrate gendered representations of “India” in America.¹⁴ Here, the events are bound by the formal symmetry of the diptych, as the rectangular frame around the pageant contestant’s image is mirrored in the high-backed chairs that dominate the foreground of the awards ceremony. The diptych traverses not only the temporal disjuncture between two events held over five years, or the spatial distance between immigrant communities in New Jersey and New York; it also sutures the difference of class that structures the ethnic beauty pageant and a gala awards ceremony. Establishing the primary relationship between material objects (the poster, the chair, the dangling accessories), the diptych generates a transnational aesthetic of locality. Neither a spatial nor territorial entity, locality becomes a structure of feeling that binds together members of a diasporic community.

The opening reception for *The Americans* at Bose Pacia, New York, in January 2009 attracted a large crowd of contemporary South Asian art collectors, young Asian American artists and students, and friends and family members of the artist. Gill, who curated each of her shows, hung the prints on unmarked walls without captions. These nameless, placeless photographs nevertheless produced powerful narratives of immigration that resonated among gallery viewers. In a walk-through of the exhibition that Gill and I



Figure 1.

Poster of an Indian beauty queen in an Indian restaurant, New Jersey, 2002; Sikh Heritage Awards Gala Awards, New York, 2007. © Gauri Gill.

conducted a week later, these stories of migration became a dominant motif of the viewers' engagement with Gill's work. Reading the encounter between photograph and viewer, as well as

between the viewers and Gill, demonstrates how locality can be collectively embodied and consumed.

Although *The Americans* collated a diverse range of images, including upwardly mobile professionals and service workers, children and the elderly, gallery visitors assimilated the photographs into memories of their own migrant lives. Despite the geographical and historical specificity of the collection, the absence of captions and curatorial narrative enabled several South Asian Americans to remark upon the ubiquity of Gill's photographs. The suburban homes portrayed in the diptychs, one viewer remarked, could have been his own relatives' house; the nightclubs that Gill documented were like those he regularly went to. Throughout the evening, viewers clustered around gallery walls to observe photographic subjects that they recognized—family members, a friend, community celebrations they had attended. For many South Asian American viewers I spoke with, the exhibition was not simply about "Indians";

rather, it was about their own experience as immigrants. Their sentiment is echoed in Jeet Thayil's poem in the print catalog: "It's me, barefoot in the ballroom of the dream / poised, posed, alone, almost American."¹⁵ As viewers located their experiences within the visual framework of Gill's prints, the collection engendered universal narratives of migration.

Encountering *The Americans* as an aestheticized narrative of personal history rather than a series of ethnographic images reflects the candid quality of Gill's photographs. However, it also demonstrates how some viewers established relations of identity with the photographic object by evading visible markings of religious, gender, and class difference that characterized photographic subjects. Though the prints were displayed without captions, each gallery wall showcased a cluster of images linked by formal or thematic concerns. One wall highlighted images of youth culture via diptychs of *bhangra* festivals and a panoramic print of a marriage convention. Another wall commented on class difference, juxtaposing prints of an Indian art collector's ornate living room with the disheveled apartment of a restaurant worker. Gill's Americans were Gujarati, Punjabi, and Malayali; Hindu, Sikh, and Christian. Given the range of migratory histories assembled in this exhibit, why did gallery visitors read *The Americans* as an authentic documentation of their own experience?

At Bose Pacia, New York, Gill remarked that the intimate engagement between viewer and print became more pronounced when the exhibit arrived in the United States. She noted, "In Delhi it was a lot of writers and artists who came, in Calcutta it was a lot of students . . . and in Bombay there were a lot of foreigners, a lot of Indian Americans." In Kolkata and Delhi, the exhibition operated as an ethnographic perspective on the "other" Indian: on those Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) who were familiar to many gallery visitors as relatives, acquaintances, and friends, but who were otherwise perceived to be American by virtue of their location in the United States. In Mumbai, by contrast, the exhibition attracted several Indian Americans who found their own experiences refracted in the prints. Like the subjects of the photographs, they had been raised in the United States, but were now pursuing economic opportunities in India. For these Indian American viewers, *The Americans* did not operate as an ethnographic collection; instead, it reflected memories of "home." Finally, in California and New York, Gill contacted several people she photographed, some of whom attended her gallery shows. As these viewers posed for pictures in front of the print in which they were featured, the exhibition turned into an autobiographical experience. Gill's own encounters in the United States as a student and professional photographer over fourteen years amplified the personal narratives documented in the exhibition.

As she remarked, "In some ways I was an insider and outsider . . . and there were also questions that I was asking of myself. Would I live here? Would I go back? What's it like [to live here]?"¹⁶ Circulating across cities in India and the United States, *The Americans* was alternately viewed as an ethnography, a documentary, and an autobiography.

As a traveling exhibition, Gill's *The Americans* departs from the nationalist concerns of Robert Frank's photographs. Frank, who received a Guggenheim fellowship to travel across the United States in 1955–56, aimed to produce "a composite picture of an entire nation."¹⁷ His iconic shots of highways and cars, jukeboxes and diners, and black, white, and queer communities, depict U.S. consumer cultures during the cold war. These racialized and gendered forms of consumption are central to Frank's critique of the mythical dimensions of America. In his introduction to Frank's *The Americans*, Jack Kerouac writes, "Robert Frank, Swiss, unobtrusive, nice, with that little camera that he raises and snaps with one hand he sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film."¹⁸ As the literary critic Caroline Blinder argues, Kerouac's prelude emphasizes the "romantic thrust within Frank's ethos . . . It is romantic, partly because it mystifies the photographic process, but more so because it maintains the illusion of an America heroically struggling to survive such things as industrialization, racism, and urban alienation."¹⁹ This "heroic" image of America, which Blinder suggests dominates critical readings of Frank's work, demonstrates how the 1958 publication of *The Americans* is circumscribed by a narrative of U.S. exceptionalism, even as this narrative is contested by Frank, Kerouac, and others.

Gill dedicates her exhibition catalog to Frank's *Americans*, but her photographs at Bose Pacia, New York, differ significantly from that collection in terms of visual technique and historical context. In one of her many diptychs documenting Sikh immigrants (figure 2), Gill displays images of Khalistani militants at the Gurudwara El Sobrante in California: men who were "martyred"—assassinated by the Indian army—for their revolutionary belief in a Sikh homeland, or Khalistan.²⁰ Fluorescent lighting distorts the faces of the militants, whose photographs are iconic in some Sikh communities as evidence for the persecution of religious minorities in India. Against this wall of photographs, Gill presents another image: a family of worshippers eating the ritual meal (or *langar*) at the West Sacramento Gurudwara. Their meal takes place in a dining hall dominated by a large map of the Punjab and an equally large television screening ongoing rituals in the prayer hall. The communal politics of postcolonial South Asia resonates across this diptych in the framed photographs of the martyrs as well as in the map of the Punjab, as two



California gurudwaras are linked through emblematic images of Sikh nationalism. Yet Gill also captures another temporality: the time of immigration. El Sobrante and West Sacramento frame a region of northern California that was one of the earliest sites of Punjabi migration in the late nineteenth century. Linking together these gurudwaras, Gill traces the unremembered histories of early Punjabi immigrants (as well as the "Punjabi-Mexican" families that they fathered) in the everyday social and political practice of Sikh Americans.²¹ By foregrounding hierarchies of social difference across geographic sites, the diptych produces a rhetorical link between religious political movements in contemporary India and ethnic minority politics in the United States.

Visualizing these rhetorical linkages in *The Americans* requires us to rethink the aesthetic and political relationships between postcolonial Indian and South Asian American photography. Contemporary scholarship on Indian photography has largely focused on the ethnographic dimension of what the anthropologist Christopher Pinney calls "picture-making" as opposed to "picture-taking": the means through which subaltern populations shape the history of photographic practice.²²

Figure 2.

Khalistani militants at Gurudwara El Sobrante, California 2000; Langar at West Sacramento Gurudwara, California, 2002.
© Gauri Gill.

Pinney's own work in *Camera Indica* and *Photos of the Gods* foregrounds the popular history of photography in colonial and postcolonial India, as well as the techniques of studio portraiture adopted

by rural and lower-caste populations within India.²³ This emphasis on contemporary photographic practice has been aided by historical analyses of visual cultures in colonial India, particularly the British preoccupation with photographic documentation of various indigenous groups.²⁴ Both archival and ethnographic studies offer photography as a means of reading the nation: that is, as a visual text that disrupts colonial representations and nationalist histories of modern India.

Postcolonial interventions in photographic practice reveal alternate narratives of nationhood, and yet our frameworks of seeing are still constrained by geographically bound notions of "national culture." How then does a collection like *The Americans* extend and challenge ways of seeing within geographies of diaspora? Reading Gill's exhibition as a visual text about South Asians in diaspora—rather than simply as an ethnographic documentation of "Indians" in America—requires consistently negotiating divergent narratives of locality: a postcolonial narrative of nationalism in contemporary India *and* a narrative of U.S. multiculturalism.



In the diptych shown in figure 3, narratives of national and diasporic subjectivity converge in images of Tamil Brahmins during an annual thread-changing ceremony. The production of culture is refracted through the mirror image at right, which depicts generations of men attempting to embody an "authentic" notion of Hinduism. But this religious/nationalist ideal is reinterpreted in the image at left, which reflects the silhouettes of men who prepare for the ceremony in a strip-mall storefront. An idea of India comes to life on the surface of the mirror at right and on the store windows at left: not as a real space but as a reflection. Across the diptych we also see signs of suburban California: storefronts advertising in Korean and English, a parking lot, the dimly lit room of a local community center. Fifty years after Robert Frank's iconic images of Californian roads and palm trees, Gill depicts California through the labor of immigrants. In this familiar but foreign landscape, the men are racialized

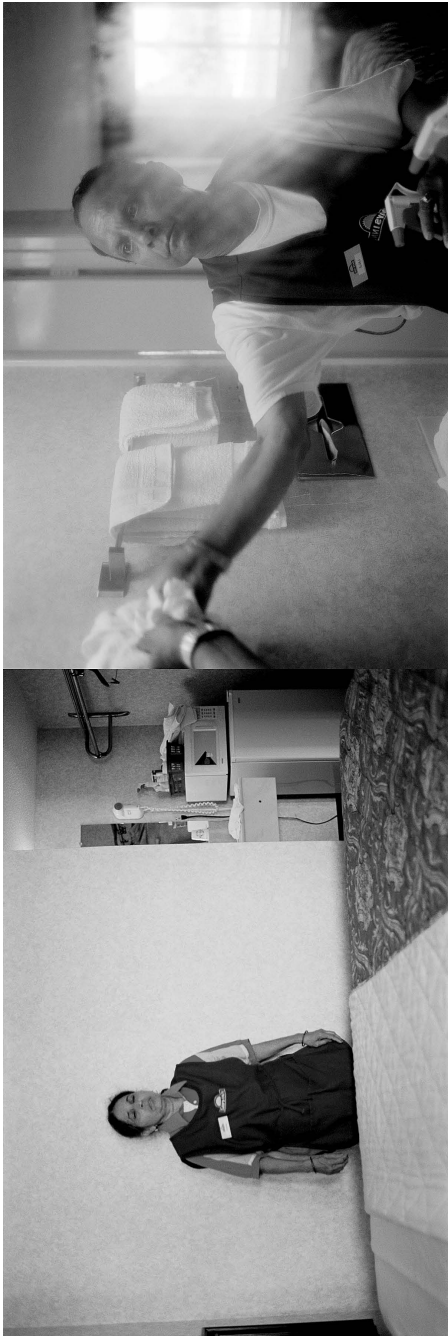
Figure 3.

Brahmin thread tying ceremony for Silicon Valley professionals in a local shopping complex, Fremont, California, 2002.
© Gauri Gill.

as minority subjects. The diptych stages an encounter between a series of mirror images that delineate the imagined space of South Asian America.

The transnational aesthetic of locality that emerges in *The Americans* is thus characterized by two distinct ways of seeing. First, the prints and diptychs are dominated by images of diasporic subjectivity, frequently refracted through mirrors or similar image-producing objects: storefront glass panes, television screens, swimming pools, car windows. In Gill's photographs, mirrors depict young men dressing for a *bhangra* competition, a couple nestling into each other at a gay nightclub, a husband and wife working as cleaners in a Mississippi motel. Gill's photographs also constitute a kind of mirror; her use of the candid shot revealing the "truth" of immigrant lives. Yet like the image of Laljibhai cleaning the bathroom mirror at a Days Inn (figure 4), the surface of Gill's mirrors often obscures the very person it reflects. Here, the scope of that reflection includes the subject of the print, the photographer, and the viewer. The proliferation of these mirrorlike surfaces demonstrates how the gallery visitor, like Gill herself, is drawn into a self-reflexive practice of seeing. *The Americans* makes visible not only the intimate relationship between Gill and her subjects, or between the prints and ourselves, but also the dialogic relationship between the viewer, the prints, and the photographer.

However, the frequency of mirrors also produces another way of seeing: the partial and fragmented image. Instead of creating photographs that memorialize and enshrine the experience of immigration, Gill's prints are broken and resutured through the form of the diptych. These discontinuous images of



migration represent locality outside the domain of nationhood. Inasmuch as Gill refuses to provide an ethnographic portrait of "Indians" in America, her prints also evade being identified as "American." The exhibition is defined by close and medium shots of interior spaces, rather than panoramic views of external terrain. In this regard Gill's exhibition is distinct from Robert Frank's collection, which includes exterior shots of regional U.S. landscapes. Gill chooses to defer these representations of national space onto the domesticated space of living rooms, bedrooms, and closets. At the gallery walk-through that Gill and I conducted, she related an anecdote from her exhibition in Delhi. When a critic asked, "Why don't you do pictures that look only like they're [taken] in America?" Gill responded that it was irrelevant whether a particular photograph looked as if it was shot in Gurgaon or Ludhiana, both cities in India. Her concern is not with marking geographic space, but with demonstrating how lived spaces come to represent histories of migration.

In figure 5, Bonnie Singh, a restaurant worker, sits in his living room with the remains of an evening meal. A "Bud Light" clock mounted high on the wall casts a neon aura. Below, a television screens black-and-white images from

Figure 4.

Laljibhai and his wife, Pushpa Ben Patel, work as cleaners at Days Inn West, Knoxville, Mississippi, 2004. © Gauri Gill.

an old Hindi film. To the left of the television are multiple VCR sets, and underneath are racks of videotapes. Singh's heavyset body is displaced right of center, and framed by a collection of assorted objects: a CD player, multiple clocks, souvenirs, a water bottle.

Singh, like the actor on the television screen, looks away from the camera with downcast eyes. His gaze is directed toward a glass table, which in turn reflects his image back toward him. Only the license plate on the mantelpiece at his right, which announces "KHALSA" in block letters, makes Singh's Sikh heritage visible. The tightly framed space around Singh's body leaves no room to see his geographic location in Nashville, Tennessee, or visualize the recent history of South Asian migration to the U.S. South. Instead, the print foregrounds the objects produced by Singh's immigrant labor: the remnants of his workday meal, the videocassettes, and the living room crowded with furniture.

Displayed in cities across India and the United States, Gill's photographs establish the transnational circulation and consumption of South Asian American visual cultures. Yet the aesthetic of locality produced by the exhibit exceeds the binary of "two cultures" that frames her print catalog. The topography of nationhood mapped by the collection is not limited to the geographic terrain of the United States, nor is it representative of India or Indians. Instead,



Figure 5.
Bonnie Singh in Nashville, Tennessee. © Gauri Gill.

the exhibition demands a bifocal analysis of diasporic visual cultures that remains incipient in Asian American studies, and is absent from postcolonial South Asian studies.²⁵ As an ethnographic and autobiographical text, the prints operate as objects of identification for many South Asian American viewers. At the same time, *The Americans* also reveals how diasporic subjectivity is itself an object of desire. The fractured narratives of identity produced through the migration of domestic objects in Gill's prints bind together the photographer with her subject, and the subject with the viewer. The practice of seeing that emerges through this dialogic framework underscores the material terrain of South Asian America.

Notes

1. Christopher Pinney, "The Americans" (lecture presented at the Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, November 7, 2008).
2. See Arjun Appadurai's discussion of "the production of locality" in *Modernity at Large: The Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 178–99.
3. Gill's work has been exhibited in several group shows in India, the United States, and Europe. Her collections also highlight the prominence of photography in contemporary Indian art: see Sunil Gupta and Radhika Singh, *Click! Contemporary Photography in India* (New Delhi: Vadehra Art Gallery, 2008).

4. See Annu Palakunnathu Mathew, *Alien: Born in England, Grew up in India, Becoming American* (Syracuse, NY: Light Work / Robert B. Menschel Media Center, 2002); and Jaishri Abichandani, "Under the Western Eye," www.nyu.edu/apa/gallery/abichandani/western_sky_01.html (accessed March 18, 2009).
5. Sunil Gupta, *Pictures from Here* (London: Autograph, 2003).
6. Poulomi Desai and Parminder Sekhon, *Red Threads: The South Asian Queer Connection in Photographs* (London: Diva Books, 2003).
7. Gauri Gill, Sunil Gupta, and Radhika Singh, eds. *Camerawork Delhi* (Delhi, 2008). The journal showcases trends in Indian photographic curation, criticism, and print technology.
8. See Dayanita Singh, *Privacy* (Gottingen: Steidl, 2003), and *Myself Mona Ahmed* (Zurich: Scalo, 2001).
9. Nandini Nair, "Reality in Dreams," *The Hindu*, February 22, 2009, www.hindu.com/mag/2009/02/22/stories/2009022250030200.htm (accessed May 1, 2009).
10. For reviews of Gill's exhibitions in India and the United States, see Marina Budhos, "The Uneven Promise of a New Land," *Tehelka Magazine*, March 29, 2008; Jackie Nusz, "Gauri Gill @ the Cultural Center of Chicago," <http://quiet.color.com/qc/?p=1925> (accessed May 1, 2009); David De Souza, "Life Is Elsewhere," *ArtIndia* 8.1 (2008): 133; Aweek Sen, "Vast Native Thoughts," *The Telegraph*, February 23, 2008, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1080223/jsp/opinion/story_8935381.jsp (accessed October 20, 2009).
11. N.A., "Sari to Be American?" *Arts Journalism Chicago*, December 8, 2008, <http://artsjournalismchicago.wordpress.com/2008/12/08/gauri-gill-the-americans/> (accessed May 1, 2009).
12. Gayatri Sinha, "Gauri Gill—The Americans," in *Gauri Gill: The Americans*, 7.
13. Gallery walk-through with Gauri Gill at Bose Pacia, New York, January 14, 2009.
14. I have discussed the Miss India USA pageant as a site for the transnational circulation and consumption of gendered modernity in "Beauty Queens: Gender, Ethnicity, and Transnational Modernities at the Miss India USA Pageant," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 14.3 (2006): 717–47.
15. Jeet Thayil, "The Future Infinitives," in *Gauri Gill: The Americans*, 3.
16. Gallery walk-through with Gauri Gill at Bose Pacia, New York, January 14, 2009.
17. Peter Halter, "Ut Pictura Poesis: Reading Robert Frank's *The Americans* as a Photographic Sequence," in *Literature and the Visual Arts in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Michelle Bottalico (Bari, Italy: Palomar, 2002), 45.
18. Robert Frank, *The Americans* (1958; Manchester: Cornerhouse Publications, 1993), 9.
19. Caroline Blinder, "'A Kind of Patriotism': Jack Kerouac's Introduction to Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1959)," in *Writing and Seeing: Essays on Word and Image*, ed. Rui Carvalho, Lambert Homem, and Maria de Fatima (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2006), 240.
20. Jasbir Puar argues for the representational economy of "the turbaned Sikh terrorist," which she suggests is mistaken for Hindu in early twentieth-century America, and misrecognized as terrorist in the early twenty-first century. In the context of Gill's exhibition, Puar's argument illustrates the iconicity of the turbaned male body, particularly as it inadequately "represents" the various subjectivities of Sikh/Punjabi/Indian/American/South Asian. See Puar, "Queer Time, Queer Assemblages," *Social Text* 23.3–4 (2005): 121–39.
21. The historian Karen Leonard has analyzed the uniquely "Punjabi Mexican" (often erroneously known as "Punjabi Hindoo") families created by early Punjabi immigration to California and antimiscegenation laws. See Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).
22. Christopher Pinney, "Introduction: 'How the Other Half . . .,'" in *Photography and Other Histories*, ed. Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Peterson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 14.
23. See Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), and *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
24. Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
25. Critical commentary on South Asian American visual artists is generally limited to interviews with the artist, personal reflections on the artists' works, and brief overviews of their collections. For recent interventions in Asian American art history, see Elaine H. Kim, Margo Machida, and Sharon Mizota, eds., *Fresh Talk, Daring Gazes: Conversations on Asian American Art* (Berkeley: University of

California Press, 2003); and Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). For a contemporary curatorial perspective, see Melissa Chiu, Karin Higa, and Susette S. Min, *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press on behalf of the Asia Society, 2006).