DISORIENTING THE SMOG CITY: QUEER PRECARITY AND URBAN REFUSAL IN AMRUTA PATIL'S *KARI*

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ABSTRACT

The dominant discourses of "social innovation" within contemporary urban imaginaries often privilege visibility, productivity, and inclusion, while obscuring the lived realities of bodies that remain incompatible with heteronormative, domestic, and capitalist scripts of the city. This paper intervenes in such narratives by reading Amruta Patil's graphic novel Kari *(2008) as a subversive urban text that maps queer precarity not as a condition to be resolved, but as a mode of inhabiting and resisting the city. Set against the alienating landscape of the "Smog City,"* Kari *dismantles the myth of the metropolis as a coherent space of progress. Drawing on Judith Butler's theorization of precarity, the paper argues that the protagonist's fractured subjectivity and refusal of domestic futurity destabilize normative expectations of femininity. The paper focuses on the concept of "*cruel optimism*" further illuminates how the city sustains attachments to promises of love, stability, and belonging that remain structurally unattainable for queer subjects, producing affective states of exhaustion, and suspension rather than fulfillment. The paper undertakes a semiotic and media analysis of the graphic form, foregrounding panels, spatial composition, and the "gutter" as a visual and narrative site where social erasure and queer survival intersect. Positioned within Media Studies, this paper argues that* Kari *functions as a media intervention exposing the ideological operations of urban desire and the media complex. Ultimately, it contends that meaningful social innovation lies not in assimilating queer bodies into existing urban frameworks, but in reimagining the city through practices of refusal.*

Keywords: *Queer Precarity, Urban Studies, Graphic Narrative, Media Semiotics, Gender Performativity; Urban Affect*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary urban imaginaries are often shaped by neoliberal narratives of inclusion, visibility, and innovation that present the city as a space of opportunity, mobility, and self-realization. Within such narratives, urban life is imagined as progressive and enabling, while quietly demanding conformity to heteronormative, domestic, and capitalist scripts of success. The Queer lives, in this framework, are either erased or selectively accommodated through assimilationist models that require emotional stability, productivity, and reproductive futurity as conditions of recognition. The cost of this ideological formation is the marginalisation of life forms that cannot or do not conform to these normative rhythms and remains unrecognised. This paper intervenes in these dominant imaginaries by reading Amruta Patil's graphic novel *Kari* (2008) as a subversive urban text that maps queer precarity not as a personal failure, but as a politically produced condition of inhabiting the Indian metropolis. Patil situates her narrative in the fictional "Smog City," an environment saturated with pollution, decay, and emotional exhaustion. Rather than representing the metropolis as a site of liberation or upward mobility for queer subjects, *Kari* constructs the city as a space of stalled futurity. Kari, the protagonist, moves through a world marked by failed intimacy, estrangement, and an inability to imagine a stable future. The city is not merely a backdrop for her personal crisis; it actively shapes the conditions under which her life becomes precarious. The "Smog City" regulates where Kari can live, how she can love, and what kinds of relationships are rendered socially intelligible. This becomes especially visible in Kari's marginal living conditions and her emotional isolation. She occupies temporary, precarious spaces and drifts through the city without any secure sense of belonging. In this sense, Patil's urban imaginary resonates with Henri Lefebvre's argument in *The Production of Space* (1991) that space is not a neutral container but a socially produced field structured by power and everyday practice. Lefebvre insists that modern urban space is organized through dominant social relations that privilege certain modes of living while marginalizing others. For Lefebvre, modern urban space is shaped by what he terms "*abstract space*", a homogenized, functional, and efficiency-driven spatial order designed to serve capitalist production and state control.

This form of space privileges coherence, regulation, and productivity, while suppressing difference, ambiguity, and non-normative modes of living. As a result, abstract space does not merely organize physical environments; it actively structures social relations by determining which bodies, practices, and forms of intimacy are rendered legitimate or marginal.

Central to Lefebvre's theory is his spatial triad, which conceptualizes space as the interaction between spatial practice such as everyday routines and movements, representations of space as dominant, planned, and

ideological constructions of space, and representational spaces as lived, symbolic, and affective experiences of space. These dimensions do not exist in isolation but constantly intersect, often producing tension between how space is planned, how it is lived, and how it is felt. He further argues how space functions not only as a backdrop for social life but as an active force that produces inequality (Lefebvre, 1991). This concept of spatial triad symbolizes the "smog city" that does not simply contain Kari; it produces her vulnerability by privileging heteronormative domestic stability and productivity while rendering queer intimacy unintelligible. Kari's inability to occupy stable domestic space mirrors the city's refusal to accommodate her life within its normative spatial order (Patil, 2008)

The novel's visual and narrative texture reinforces this sense of suffocation and disorientation. The Smog City is saturated with shadows that creates a claustrophobic atmosphere. Kari herself observes, "I try to breathe as little as I can to prevent Smog City from choking me… Every day, the city seems to be getting heavier" (Patil, 2008, p. 13). This image of the city as something that weighs on the body foregrounds how queer life is lived as an ongoing negotiation with exhaustion rather than as a narrative of progress. The metaphor of needing "thick skin and resilient lungs" literalizes the idea that survival in the city requires bodily and emotional hardening. The Queer existence here is not simply marginalized socially; it is rendered physically and affectively unlivable.

Understanding Kari's emotional paralysis and stalled futurity requires engaging Judith Butler's theorization of precarity, most explicitly articulated in *Precarious Life* (2004). Butler defines precarity as the unequal distribution of vulnerability produced by regulatory norms that determine which lives are recognized as socially intelligible. These norms operate through social, political, and cultural frameworks that establish conditions of recognizability, rendering certain lives worthy of protection, mourning, and public acknowledgment, while relegating others to invisibility. Precarity, in this sense, is not an inherent attribute of particular bodies but a politically induced condition shaped by discursive regimes and dominant moral frameworks. Butler emphasizes that lives positioned outside normative structures of kinship and citizenship that often lack social recognition, making their suffering appear natural and inevitable. In this case, Kari's fractured sense of self, her estrangement from domestic futurity that she imagines, and her inability to sustain stable relationship with Ruth can be read not as psychological pathology but as the embodied effects of these norms. For instance, after Ruth's suicide attempt and her subsequent disappearance from Smog City, Kari is unable to articulate her grief in ways that the city recognizes as legitimate loss. Although Ruth survives, her departure leaves Kari suspended in a state of unresolved mourning that receives no social acknowledgment. It rather gets buried in the shadows of the smog city. Kari's grief remains socially invisible because her lesbian relationship does not fit dominant structures of the society. There is no sanctioned ritual, no public language, and no communal structure through which her loss can be recognized as real or grievable (Patil, 2008). In Butler's terms, Kari's grief becomes ungrievable not because Ruth has left, but because her love was never fully recognizable within normative social recognition. Her vulnerability, therefore, is not merely personal misfortune; it is a socially induced condition generated by an urban order that offers her no legible script through which her lesbian existence can stabilize itself. Similarly, Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism, developed in her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), further illuminates the affective economy of *Kari*. Berlant defines cruel optimism as an attachment to compromised conditions of possibility, in which the very objects that promise flourishing become obstacles to it. She argues that what makes optimism "cruel" is not the desire for these objects themselves, but the persistence of attachment even when structural conditions make their fulfillment impossible. These attachments sustain life affectively while simultaneously preventing genuine flourishing, producing states of, disappointment and suspension rather than progress or resolution. Berlant brings the concept of the "impasse", a temporal condition in which subjects remain stuck within the present, unable to move forward yet unable to let go of normative promises of a stable future (Berlant, 2011). For instance, in the novel the protagonist, Kari remains attached to the idea of love, home and what Munoz will define as "Queer Utopia" even though these promises are structurally foreclosed for her within the heteronormative wall of urban order where she inhabits (Munoz 2009). This is evident in her repeated attempts to reconnect emotionally with friends such as Angel, with strangers that she randomly meets, and even with the memory of Ruth despite knowing that such attachments repeatedly end in disappointment (Patil, 2008). The city sustains the promise of belonging through consumer culture, romantic imagery, and domestic ideals, yet continuously denies its realization for queer subjects like Kari. Her melancholy and emotional numbness are not simply personal traits; they are the affective consequences of being attached to futures that the city will never allow her to inhabit. Another instance of cruel optimism appears in Kari's attachment to the idea of "home" as a space of emotional longing. Throughout the narrative, Kari drifts through marginal living arrangements and temporary spaces that never cohere into a stable domestic environment. However, she continues to imagine the possibility of settling into a secure home life, even though the city repeatedly shatters this future for her. The fantasy of home promises emotional repair,

privacy, and protection from the hostility of Smog City, but it remains structurally unattainable for a lesbian subject without economic or familial support. This attachment becomes cruel because the idea of home offers hope without the material conditions required to realize it. Kari's repeated encounters with unstable housing such as the "Crystal Palace" where she lives in a very suffocated environment displacement that functions as a cruelly optimistic object. Now, this queer futurity rather than enabling comfort, this intensifies her sense of failure and inadequacy when she cannot achieve it. In Berlant's lens, Kari's attachment to home exemplifies how normative ideals of domesticity continue to structure queer desire even when those ideals are systematically denied. The result is not liberation but affective suspension: Kari remains emotionally oriented toward a future that the city will never allow her to inhabit.

While Kari's life appears frozen and directionless, her movement through Smog City can also be read as a form of spatial refusal of Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), distinguishes between the strategic rationalities of institutional power, which organize urban space through planning, zoning, surveillance, and regulation, and the tactical practices of ordinary subjects, who inhabit and subtly disrupt these spaces through everyday movement. For de Certeau, strategies belong to institutions and structures of power, while tactics belong to those who lack institutional authority and must operate within spaces. He argues tactics are temporary, improvisational, and non-totalizing; they do not overthrow spatial order but momentarily détourne it from within Kari's drifting, lingering, and non-goal-oriented walking can be read through this framework as tactical practices rather than mere signs of aimlessness (de Certeau, 1984). In this context, she does not move through Smog City in ways that lead to professional advancement. Instead, her movement repeatedly refuses the city's demand that futurity must always be purposeful, forward-looking, and economically productive. Kari walks without a destination that aligns with the city's normative scripts of success, thereby inhabiting urban space in ways that are structurally "out of sync" with its neoliberal tempo. In de Certeau's terms, Kari becomes a tactical user of the city: she appropriates streets, cafés, temporary shelters, and marginal spaces without converting them into stable sites of ownership, productivity, or domesticity. For instance, the spaces such as her travelling in the bus where she feels suffocated due to smell, wandering through the streets of the city, hoping to unclog the sewers, these spaces are fleeting and non-accumulative, which directly counters the strategic logic of urban planning that seeks to discipline bodies into predictable circuits of labour and consumption where the reality is different. Kari's wandering thus interrupts the city's spatial grammar, transforming regulated pathways into sites of queer deviation and temporal suspension (2008). This tactical mobility is politically significant precisely because it does not culminate in resolution. Kari does not "progress" toward a recognizable future; she inhabits what de Certeau would call a mobile, opportunistic present. Her refusal to settle, or move forward in sanctioned ways turns walking itself into a minor form of resistance, one that exposes how deeply the city equates motion with achievement and visibility with value. Rather than reclaiming space through ownership or visibility, Kari reclaims it through ephemeral occupation and non-aligned movement, making her everyday drifting a quiet but persistent refusal of the city's strategic demands. This refusal gains sharper political meaning when read through Jack Halberstam's theorization of queer failure in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011). Halberstam argues that failure, stupidity, passivity, and unproductivity states conventionally coded as negative within neoliberal cultures can function as modes of resistance to dominant regimes of success, coherence, accumulation, and progress. Against the linear narrative of self-improvement and achievement that structures modern urban life, Halberstam proposes a counter-logic in which "losing," not arriving, becomes a way of escaping the disciplinary force of normative temporality. In this scenerio, failure is not merely the absence of success; it is an alternative epistemology and a different way of inhabiting time. For instance: her fight to live and the constant struggle with the idea of death symbolizes Kari's inability to consolidate her life into emotional fulfillment can thus be read not as defeat but as a refusal of the narrow criteria used to define urban success. She does not accumulate capital, secure a stable home, or move toward romantic resolution. Instead, her life remains suspended, fragmented, and affectively exhausted states that neoliberal urban culture typically codes as pathological or wasted. Halberstam's emphasis on "low theory" and marginal practices further sharpens this reading. Rather than locating political resistance in grand acts of defiance or visibility, Halberstam attends to minor gestures, detours, and modes of non-participation that quietly disrupt dominant systems of value. Kari's exhaustion, stasis, and affective withdrawal operate in precisely this register. Her refusal to perform emotional recovery, productivity, or relational normalization becomes a low-intensity but persistent form of resistance to the city's demand that she become legible on its terms. Moreover, Halberstam's critique of heteronormative futurity especially the pressure to organize life around marriage, reproduction, and economic stability aligns closely with Kari's estrangement from domestic scripts (Halberstam, 2011). Kari's failure to achieve these milestones does not signal immaturity or lack; it exposes how deeply urban success is tethered to heteronormative and capitalist timelines. In this sense, her fragmentation becomes a queer temporal critique of the city's forward-driving logic. Kari does not "fail" the city; she reveals the city's failure to accommodate lives

that do not conform to its normative tempos and aspirations. The Smog City can be understood as a site of queer dislocation in the sense theorized by Gayatri Gopinath in *Impossible Desires* (2005). Gopinath conceptualizes queer subjects in postcolonial contexts as inhabiting the nation and the city as affective exiles rather than full citizens. Kari inhabits the city without ever fully arriving within it. She is not running away from the city but gets sustain within it. Her presence in Smog City is marked by transience and dispossession rather than rootedness or stability, reinforcing her status as a queer subject who remains structurally out of place. For instance: her constant dilemma of death, Kari's heteronormative surroundings that questions her identity adds to this affective exile (Patil, 2008)

This paper undertakes a semiotic and media analysis of the graphic form, foregrounding panels, spatial composition, and visual rhythm as sites where social erasure and queer survival intersect. The dense shadows, fractured layouts, and heavy visual lines do not merely illustrate Kari's emotional state; they materialize the structural suffocation of queer life in the metropolis. The "gutter" between panels that Kari sees becomes a visual metaphor for erasure, , mirroring the narrative gaps in Kari's life and relationships. Through this reading, *Kari* emerges not merely as a representation of queer suffering but as a critique of neoliberal urban life. Patil's graphic novel exposes how dominant urban imaginaries systematically foreclose queer futurity. By foregrounding this everyday refusal, *Kari* unsettles the normative terms through which urban success and coherence are conventionally understood. Smog City does not demand Kari's assimilation; it demands her disappearance. Her refusal to disappear her continued drifting, surviving, and lingering becomes the novel's most radical political gesture (2008).

QUEER VISIBILITY, MEDIA INTERVENTION, AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

As a graphic narrative published prior to the decriminalization of homosexuality in India, *Kari* operates within a media ecology where queer lives were largely absent, misrepresented, or rendered unspeakable. Prior to the late 2000s, queer identities in Indian public discourse were largely mediated through legal debates surrounding Section 377, sensationalist media coverage, and stereotypical cinematic representations that oscillated between ridicule and pathologization. As scholars have noted, the Indian public sphere historically framed non-heteronormative lives as either immoral, invisible, or socially disruptive, producing fear rather than recognition (Jain, 2022). The mainstream popular culture rarely offered sustained interiority to queer subjects, particularly queer women, whose lives remained doubly marginalized within both heteronormative and patriarchal frameworks. Queer desire was either erased or rendered hyper-visible through caricature, leaving little room for narratives of everyday survival, affective exhaustion, or non-heroic existence (Jagose, 1996). It is within this representational vacuum that *Kari* emerges as a significant media intervention. The graphic novel is widely recognized as one of the first Indian graphic narratives to foreground a lesbian protagonist without framing her story through moral instruction, or redemptive closure. Rather than explaining or justifying queer desire to a presumed heterosexual audience, *Kari* assumes its legitimacy and focuses instead on the conditions under which such desire becomes precarious within the urban landscape. This representational shift itself constitutes a form of social innovation. By making lesbian interiority visible without assimilating it into normative scripts of success or acceptance, Patil disrupts dominant modes of seeing queer life in India (2008). The scholars of media and visual culture have emphasized that innovation does not solely reside in new technologies or institutional reforms, but also in transformations of perception and public imagination. As Stuart Hall (1997) argues, representation is constitutive of social reality rather than merely reflective of it. In this sense, *Kari* innovates by producing a new visual language for queer urban life, one that resists spectacle. The choice of the graphic novel form is particularly significant here. Unlike prose fiction, which often circulates within elite literary spaces, or cinema, which demands mass appeal and narrative closure, the graphic novel occupies an ambiguous cultural position that allows for experimentation with form, pacing, and affect with discomfort, ambiguity, and incompleteness (Sirkar et al., 2025). This aligns with Nicholas Mirzoeff's argument that counter-visuality challenges dominant ways of seeing by refusing clarity and coherence (Mirzoeff, 2011). In *Kari*, queer life is not clarified for consumption; it is rendered opaque and resistant to narrative mastery. This opacity marks a departure from mainstream cinematic representations of queer life in India, particularly in Bollywood. For instance: Films such as *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (2003) or *Dostana* (2008) relied heavily on humour and misrecognition to contain queer possibility within safe, non-threatening frames. Even more recent films that engage queer themes often resolve narrative tension through familial reconciliation or social acceptance, reinforcing what scholars like R. Raj Rao (2010) identify as homonormative inclusion. *Kari* refuses such resolutions. Its protagonist does not achieve emotional closure, or social recognition. Instead, the narrative remains suspended, mirroring the structural suspension of queer life within the urban order. As Neha Jain (2022) observes in her analysis of Bollywood's queer gaze, mainstream cinematic narratives have historically framed LGBTQ+ identities through legal anxiety, moral panic, humour, or reformist arcs, often reducing queer subjects to

symbols of social tension rather than fully realized lives. Even when queer characters appear, their stories are frequently resolved through containment, either by reintegration into heteronormative family structures or by narrative disappearance. Such representational strategies reinforce the idea that queer life must be explained, justified, or corrected in order to remain socially legible (Jain, 2022). This refusal is precisely where *Kari* redefines social innovation. The dominant lens of innovation prioritize inclusion measuring success through visibility and integration. *Kari* challenges these metrics by foregrounding non-assimilative survival as a legitimate mode of social existence. Kari does not demand recognition from the city; she exposes its failure to accommodate lives that do not conform to heteronormative and capitalist timelines. Her endurance, drifting, and refusal to be resolved function as what Lauren Berlant (2011) describes as affective dissent, an interruption of the city's demand for optimism, productivity, and emotional coherence.

By making queer exhaustion, precarity, and fragmentation visible without translating them into narratives of recovery, *Kari* performs a pedagogical function. It teaches readers to recognize vulnerability not as individual weakness but as a socially produced condition. In this sense, *Kari* does not merely represent queer life; it reorients the reader's ethical relationship to the city itself. Its innovation lies in altering the terms through which queer life can be seen, felt, and understood within Indian urban culture. It also questions how lesbians have been double marginalized, firstly as a woman, and then being a lesbian (Anzaldua, 2022).

Furthermore, Kari enacts a notable media intervention by making lesbian life perceptible in Indian urban culture. She reflects, "I roll the word 'lesbian' in my mouth and it feels strange there. Sort of fleshly, salivating, fresh off the boat from Lesbia and totally inappropriate" (Patil, 2008, p. 79), capturing the bodily and social awkwardness of her existence. This estrangement intensifies at the Crystal Palace, where a gentleman asserts, "Eventually a woman needs a man and a man needs a woman" (Patil, 2008, p. 81), revealing the heteronormative gaze that Michel Warner critiques how society frames queer desire as illegitimate (Warner, 1993). For instance: The graphic novel's fractured panels, shadows, and visual pacing render these pressures tangible, turning spaces like Crystal Palace into zones of alienation. By presenting queer precarity and non-conformity without translating it into conventional narratives of recovery, Kari performs social innovation: it guides readers to recognize vulnerability as a structural condition and challenges the city's expectation of assimilation, productivity, and emotional normalcy. Kari's endurance and refusal to conform intervene in the visual and ethical perception of queer life, reshaping how it can be acknowledged and understood.

"I wait to watch their train leave just as I waited to watch their train pull in… I have temporarily regressed to being a guilt-ridden and miserable child… 'This is not how I raised you,' says Mama. 'Of all the people in such a big city, you pick the smut and the degenerate" (Patil, 2008, p. 31).

In this moment, Kari's interaction with her mother underscores the pervasive moral surveillance that shapes lesbian existence. The repeated train imagery symbolizes a sense of cyclical waiting and dislocation, while the muffled voice of maternal authority transforms into an almost physical pressure, compressing Kari's identity within the city's judgmental gaze (2008). By rendering her emotional turmoil through sensory cues as hesitations, and auditory assaults, the novel exposes the inadequacy of traditional narratives to capture queer interiority. The text compels the reader to inhabit the discomfort of non-normative life, making visible experiences that society often ignores or suppresses. The mainstream Indian cinema, including films like *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan (2020)*, often represents queer life through urban-centric, comedic, or romantic lenses that emphasize assimilation and social acceptance. These films frame LGBTQ+ desire in ways that are visually and narratively "palatable" to heteronormative audiences, smoothing over everyday precarity and affective struggle. In contrast, Patil's *Kari* foregrounds queer interiority and survival in a smog-covered city, using visual textures to picturize the blurred truth. As Yamini Anish Shah's study of South Asian-Canadian media demonstrates, documentaries such as Atif Siddiqi's *Solo* explore minoritarian identities by emphasizing introspection, vulnerability, and lived reality rather than conforming to mainstream narrative expectations. Like *Solo*, *Kari* intervenes in media representation by presenting queer life as messy, unassimilated, and ethically complex, producing a form of social and aesthetic innovation that resists the homogenizing tendencies of both popular culture and normative urban imaginaries (Jain, 2022). Kari's repeated confrontations with death and survival take on symbolic force in a scene where she reflects, "When the digestive system is unwell, it poisons the body with its toxins of its own making" (Patil, 2008, p. 41). This seemingly physiological observation mirrors her psychological and urban condition: the city, like a diseased internal system, circulates its own toxicity back into her affective life. The paralysis she experiences when Ruth almost dies, and her frustration that she is not able to die while her friend Angel is dying, becomes emblematic of a much deeper alienation, not just individual despair, but a structural failure of the city to provide safe, recognisable space for queer intimacy, meaning, and futurity (2008). This aligns with Gayatri Gopinath's account of queer subjects as affectively

dislocated, this metaphor underscores how urban life can circulate affective "toxins", shame, anxiety, social rejection, back into the body of the subject, making survival itself a site of ongoing struggle. Kari acts as a coherent narrative of grief, the city's internalized toxicity traps her in cycles of anxiety and meaning-seeking that never quite resolve (Gopinath, 2005). The somatic imagery such as the body poisoned by its own inability to metabolize, thus becomes a symbolic representation of lesbian dislocation: a life that cannot fully assimilate the city's promises of belonging, even as it continues to live within its structures. In this sense, Kari's embodied anxiety is not a personal pathology but an index of the affective violence that normative urban orders exact on non-normative subjects. Moreover, in *Kari*, the city mirrors the protagonist's emotional and bodily turbulence. Patil observes, "smog city looks more anemic in the sun" (p. 108), portraying an urban environment drained of vitality, where light itself fails to animate life. Later, she notes, "Add to this, streams of men and women, like robots and slaves, in equally tired colours. We are scared of too much colour" (p. 108), emphasizing the mechanized monotony of the crowd. Against this backdrop, Kari's physical and psychological responses, her anxiety attacks, nausea, and moments of affective exhaustion become inseparable from the city's oppressive force. Her body, reacting to the smog and relentless sameness, registers the cost of survival in an urban space that erases difference and stifles desire. The city suppresses individuality and enforces conformity, rendering both public life and personal identity anxious, muted, and constrained (Patil 2008). Through this interplay of bodily experience and visual texture, Patil symbolically represents the urban truth: a metropolis where vibrancy, and selfhood are constantly under threat, and where queer lives endure in quiet, and fragile resistance where they are compelled to live under shadows.

CONCLUSION

Amruta Patil's *Kari* exemplifies how graphic narratives can function as both media intervention and social innovation, particularly within contexts where queer lives have been historically marginalized or rendered invisible. By centering a lesbian woman's interiority in a smog-laden urban landscape, the novel refuses the familiar tropes of assimilation, moral instruction, or narrative closure that often dominate mainstream Indian cinema and popular culture. Through its fragmented visual textures, attention to bodily and affective experience, and refusal to simplify or resolve precarious identities, *Kari* maps the ethical and emotional complexities of urban queer existence. The novel's intervention lies not merely in representation but in its reconfiguration of the reader's ethical and perceptual engagement. Through its portrayal of the "Smog City," the graphic novel dismantles the myth of the city as a space of opportunity and progress, revealing instead a landscape that suspends queer futures. At a historical moment when queer identities were largely mediated through legal discourse, silence, or cinematic caricature, Patil's graphic narrative offered a radically different mode of seeing. By refusing spectacle, moral explanation, and narrative closure, *Kari* expands the representational possibilities of queer life beyond the limits imposed by mainstream media. Its use of fragmentation, negative space, and noir aesthetics produces a counter-visual cartography of the city, one that makes visible the affective costs of urban belonging without translating them into narratives of recovery or acceptance. Social innovation, as *Kari* suggests, does not lie in integrating marginalized bodies into hostile systems, but in unsettling the representational and affective logics through which those systems operate. By reimagining the city through practices of refusal and non-assimilative survival, *Kari* proposes an alternative ethics of urban life, one that prioritizes livability over legibility and vulnerability over productivity. In doing so, *Kari* reframes queer precarity not as a problem to be solved, but as a critical lens through which the limits of urban modernity and social innovation are laid bare.

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