# Persons and Profiles: Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani's *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-)

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# Persons and Profiles: Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani's *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-)

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This essay examines the artist project by Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-present), focusing on how the project entwines studio, research, and long-term site-responsive methodologies. It argues that the project's use of portraiture and alignment with radical archival practice offers methods for counteracting the antisociality of profiling, its sundering of kin and practices of capture. By way of the term antiprofile, the essay argues that *Index of the Disappeared* nourishes nourish life and sociality against racialized control, by producing new relationships between persons, their portraits, and profiles amidst the depersonalizing cultures of spectacle and security that have long targeted black and brown life before and after 9/11.

**Keywords:** contemporary art; surveillance; war on terror; 9/11; archive; profiling

*The index of democracy is the interval between inquiry and information;*
*The index of disappearance is the equal and opposite measure of the silence and erasure which meet our difference and dissent*
– Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, artist statements on *Index of the Disappeared*[1]

In the wake of September 11, artist Chitra Ganesh recalled how New York City was covered with posters and flyers, made by those who sought their disappeared loved ones, who were yet to be found by first responders. A year later, 760 men disappeared as a result of their 2001 FBI classification as "special interest" detainees, arising from unilateral executive actions initially undertaken by the Department of Justice, and subsequently legislated when Congress signed into law the USA Patriot Act on October 26, 2001. The Patriot Act expanded the government's ability to detain and deport terrorists as federal agencies and law enforcement received expanded capacities of secrecy, search and seizure; it also founded the Department of Homeland Security in 2002, along with such initiatives as the "Special Registration" program that year, which racially-targeted men between the ages of 16–45 from South Asian, Arab and Muslim countries who

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resided in the U.S. (Douglas and Sáenz 2013, 205). Even as these classifications were cat-
alyzed by the events of September 11, they followed in the wake of what Karen Manges
Douglas and Rogelio Sáenz have described as expanded anti-terrorism enforcement legis-
lation in the United States since the 1990s at both state and federal levels, the latter includ-
ing the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA), and the Illegal
Immigration Reform Act (IIRIRA) that further constrained non-citizens' limited rights
while strengthening powers in immigration enforcement and grounds for removal.[2]

In 2003, artist Mariam Ghani moved into a studio in the Woolworth Building for a
Lower Manhattan Council residency, with an aerial view overlooking Ground Zero and
its reconstruction. There, Ganesh and Ghani began developing a project about these racia-
lized disappearances wrought by the rounding up, detention and deportation of men of
Arab, South Asian and Muslim descent. They began with the list of people classified as
special interest detainees, seeking out reasons for their corporeal disappearances, and
why this list constituted the sole public document in circulation of their existence. In
doing so, Ganesh and Ghani investigated these individuals' "double disappearances,"
with respect to their lives and their documentation—which is to say, their personhood
and their profiles (Ghani 2006). But even as these racialized disappearances were devastat-
ing to friends and families, they were not socially-sanctioned candidates for public outcry,
mass sympathy and public sentimentality after September 11. These disappearances then
were ineligible for what Judith Butler has elsewhere termed "frames of war," whose insti-
tuted racisms and arraying of "consequential affective dispositions" differentially regulate
which lives are apprehended as precarious and grievable (Butler 2010, 14–15 and 24).[3]

In response, Ganesh and Ghani devised *Index of the Disappeared* in 2004 – an ongoing,
research-driven, multipart investigation into the post-9/11 security state's racialization of
disappearance and its documentation (Figure 1). Now into its sixteenth year, Ganesh
and Ghani's art project exists in two principle forms: first, as a physical archive of post-
9/11 disappearances encompassing DVDs, articles, news, legal briefs, reports, zines, ephe-
mera. When the artists initially brought together law, codes and case studies with activist
ephemera, human rights reports, videos and photographs in 2004, these constellations of
materials were not readily available online. Such materials moved interpersonally and
through social proximity, shared as they were between friends, communities and advocates
– and so the archive itself evidences relations structured by and beyond surveillant capture
(Ganesh and Ghani 2004). Second, the project has publicly appeared through the form of
organized events and exhibited installations, in response to an ongoing War on Terror.
These public-facing presentations excerpt from the archive, remobilize and further sup-
plement it, by way of events that are documented, materials that are added and new
work made by the artists (such as lightboxes, videos, films, drawings and painting).

To date, *Index of the Disappeared* has been productively examined within accounts of a
broader artistic counterculture after September 11. Theorist Gayatri Gopinath has impor-
tantly argued for the project as a mapping of "liens of queer affiliation between different
diasporic communities," through its attention to "affective attachments—to places,
people, things – that are experienced sensorially and through the body itself, and imposs-
ible to capture and quantify through conventions measurements and indices." More
recently, Ronak Kapadia has described the project as reorganizing the security state's sen-
sorium within the long trajectory of US Empire and forever wars, reorienting vision "from

web project, 2004
http://www.turbulence.org/
seethedisappeared

HOW DO YOU SEE THE DISAPPEARED? A WARM DATABASE
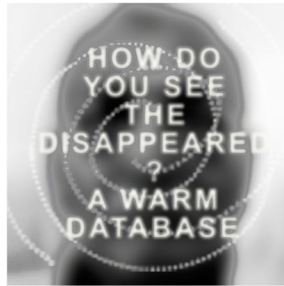
*How Do You See the Disappeared?* is an ongoing collaborative project by Mariam Ghani & Chitra Ganesh whose goal is to make critical interventions in the narratives of disappearance produced on all sides of the immigration debate by proposing new terms through which stories can be told and issues framed. *A Warm Database* is the web-based phase of this project, and is intended to serve three purposes: as an annotated guide for the uninitiated to and through the mountains of documents that surround detention, deportation and immigrants' rights; as a resource for and call to action; and as the starting point of a data collection project that will span multiple communities and languages. The *Warm Database* that is presented in this first version of the project is an interface for the further visualization and presentation of the data that we will collect and translate after the project's launch, as we've done in the examples of the small set of responses collected already.

*How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database* was conceived and designed by Mariam Ghani, produced in collaboration with Rob Durbin, Ed Potter and Chitra Ganesh, and is a 2004 commission of New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc., (aka Ether-Ore) for its Turbulence web site. It was made possible with funding from the Jerome Foundation and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. Work on the project was also supported by residencies at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, Eyebeam Atelier, and the MFA Computer Arts Department of the School of Visual Arts.

Figure 1. Screenshot of *Turbulence* (2004) website landing page. *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-present). Courtesy of the artists © *Index of the Disappeared* (Chitra Ganesh & Mariam Ghani).

the deadening logics of militarized detention" towards "sensuous imaginings of security and freedom that are less circumscribed by the dominant sensorium of the security state" (Kapadia 2019, 108). Building on these existing accounts, this essay brings together formalist consideration of artistic processes—to include its archival configuration, its relational research and production – with critical surveillance studies approaches (by Jasbir Puar, Simone Browne, David Fiske and David Lyon).

These approaches have examined cultures of control through non-totalizing or homogenizing methodologies, by examining "sites" of surveillance, their spread, interaction, variance, differential penetration and everyday points of contact. Browne has notably theorized those freedom acts by enslaved peoples, conceptualizing "dark sousveillance" to plot "an imaginative place from which to mobilize a critique of racializing surveillance, a critique that takes form in antisurveillance, countersurveillance, and other freedom practices" (2015, 21). In doing so, Browne theorizes the ground of dark matter against prototypical whiteness of biometric information technology, or "those bodies and body parts that trouble some biometric technology, like dark irises or cameras that 'can't see black people' or that ask some Asian users, 'Did someone blink?'" (2015, 162). Through dark sousveillant attention to dark matter, Browne reconstructs how all-encompassing control has itself been subject to subversion, evasion, contestation and other freedom practices of racialized Black subjects (Fiske 1998; Lyon 2007; Browne 2015, 13–14).

As Browne and other have made clear, processes of racial profiling have been long-standing techniques of surveillance founded in slavery, that are continually refined into the twenty-first century, to target an expanded geography of black and brown populations within the prison industrial and detention industrial complex. The material consequences of profiling activity—and their differential distribution by race, gender, nation and sexuality, both prior to and upon an online digital age—may be understood through what Browne has termed "racializing surveillance" (2015, 21).[4] Artists have importantly intervened in such profiling practices across informational, physical and online platforms, in a contemporary field of freedom practices resisting racial capture.

### Antiprofile

I emphasize how *Index of the Disappeared* notably plumbs relationships *between* living persons and document profiles, and relationships *with* surveilled peoples and their profiles. We may understand profiling as the reporting, recording, and patterning of pre-existing conditions and psychological, behavioral, or identity-based characteristics into a coherent body of facts that purportedly define persons (Browne 2015, 21). To be clear, profiling has proliferated since the inception of modern liberal democracies for the definition and categorization of populations by way of the schematic acquisition of information about them (across institutions of care, political and medical records). Nevertheless, the 1970s saw the expansion and development of behavioral profiling as a crucial technique of law enforcement and a means of refining military intelligence, building on developments in psychology and forensics.[5] The term "informational privacy" tellingly emerged into the realm of public policy that sought to regulate and advocate for the rights of individuals during the 1960s and 1970s at the same time that "data protection" similarly entered the vocabulary of politics (Bennett and Rabb 2003, 16). Within the realms of commerce and census (their boundaries becoming increasingly blurred as marketers began to use census information), the practice of profiling generated data sets in the 1960s and 1970s to map demographics, analyze publics and users, define interest groups, and target prospective users and consumers (Elmer 2003, 60–65).

In 1967, critics began calling attention to the emergent relation between developments in information processing and the heightened role of surveillance in managing public life. Alan Westin observed that although the computer revolution in data processing across the fields of business, government, medicine and science offered the capacity for "more fact-based, more logical and more predictable decisions," the general expansion of information gathering, record keeping, and data storage would also yield "a sweeping power of surveillance over individual lives and organizational activity" (Westin 1967, 158). All modern liberal capitalist societies have documented and identified individuals as a form of state surveillance. Yet, since the 1960s the U.S. produced increasingly networked and textual forms of describing and documenting individuals, confirming and checking of identity across personal documents (such as driver's licenses, social security cards, birth certificates, and bank books) administered by independent or third-party external sources (Lyon 2001, 293).

After the 1960s, profiling as a networked practice of identity management significantly expanded practices of gathering and aggregating data. Non-phenomenal modalities of certifying identity through data surveillance superseded or integrated earlier disciplinary

strategies premised on appearance, physical observation and individual experience (Levin 2002, 12–13; Groebner 2007). State control could thus be more effectively dispersed through everyday institutions of communication, transportation, care, service, and welfare, producing more complex data systems and faster information processing that increased data surveillance. Although data surveillance was by no means new to covert military activity in the United States, surveillance historian Blanche Wiesen Cook has emphasized how new information technologies such as closed-circuit television cameras attached to telephone poles and the development of military espionage and federal data banks grew exponentially after 1971 (Cook 1978, 177). Population censuses, registers, and government databases became increasingly sophisticated techniques of state governance as a kind of "surveillance by numbers" that would administer political subjectivity by way of mapping, counting, and making visible populations—managing persons through and as profiles (Rupper 2012, 209–216). With the advent of workplace and networked computing in governance and corporations, we may understand the aesthetic and representational category of a profile—a drawing, an outline of physical characteristics, form and shape – as a genre remade through the modern surveillant activity of generating, producing and collecting personal data.

The profile is an aesthetic genre that renders and captures personhood. Its contemporary manifestations include what David Lyon calls the "data-double or software self," that are central to producing and contesting the modulation of subjectivity within political and social systems (Lyon 2007, 4). Persons must negotiate relationships with their profiles as vectors of activity—profiles do not only describe or represent, they are endowed with effect and capacity, and may enact material, bodily consequence. Profiling as an aesthetic category not only constructs knowledge about a person, but charts and affects its trajectory through the world. The profile's power relies upon assumptions of its trajectory being transparent, verifiable, utterly and infallibly known. Lyon argues that information societies manage risk through a "drive for perfect knowledge." This includes "information about future development and not merely about past histories," monitoring individuals' data to calculate their prognosis of social, behavioral and bodily risk (Lyon 2001, 293–299).

Against the authoritarian fantasy of perfect knowledge of persons by their profiles—and by extension, unerring control and judgment of persons, through their profiles – I propose the significance of *antiprofile* responses that counteract the bodily, epistemological, and political violence of such perfect knowledge, upon which surveillance relies. In proposing this term, I draw inspiration from Huey Copeland's *antiportrait*. He uses the term to articulate those strategies by several Black artists who eschewed figurative representation while working during the 1990s, at the height of multicultural consumption of Black identity in a global art economy.[6] In practices such as Ganesh and Ghani's, which mitigate against post-9/11 anti-brown techniques of control (the latter advancing anti-Black practices of modern surveillance), the artists do not eschew portraiture in traditional media of painting and drawing, but wield it critically in tandem with alternate modes of addressing database and archival profiling. Entwining studio, research, and long-term site-responsive methodologies, portraiture in *Index of the Disappeared* aligns with radical archival practice to counteract the antisociality of profiling, its sundering of kin and enactments of capture. *Index of the Disappeared*'s antiprofile activity instead nourishes life and sociality against racialized control, by producing new relationships

between persons, their portraits, and profiles amidst the depersonalizing cultures of spectacle and security that have long targeted black and brown life before and after 9/11 (Fiske 1998; Lyon 2007; Browne 2015, 13–14).

## Warm data

Documents that compelled the research of *Index of the Disappeared* include the post 9/11 special registration questionnaires targeting immigrant groups, who were forced to out themselves so "the government could collect cold, hard data about them that could then potentially be used to detain or deport them," in Ganesh's words (Ashford et al. 2006, 47–48). As activist groups produced humanizing documentary portraits to "put a face" on those vanishing from public discourse while hypervisibly racialized as terrorists, Ganesh and Ghani focused on such questionnaires coercing the production of self and information, along with the heavily-redacted documents as the INS Special Interest List. The release of these made information publicly available, while withholding it in the very space of appearance before and after 9/11.

In contrast, Ganesh and Ghani produced a counter questionnaire that has now been completed by more than a thousand people, saved in the archive and occasionally displayed (Figure 2). The artists devised—or "divined" as Ghani put it—a "warm data" questionnaire, for which participation would be wholly voluntary. The questions solicit personal anecdotes, seeking to learn and inform without posing the possibility of prosecution through such questions as "Which past accomplishment are you the proudest of?" and "Who was the first person you ever fell in love with? (Who they were to you, not necessarily their name)." The artists term this information warm data. Ganesh has described warm data partly through its non-evidentiary character—"not cold hard facts, it's not anything that can be used in a court of law"—as well its subjectivity: by inhibiting yes/no answers, their questions yield variable and subjective responses (Ganesh and Ghani 2004). To the disappearances of people redoubled by their description—criminal alien, immigrant stereotype, perfect plaintiff—*Index of the Disappeared* sought to counteract the prevailing statist "poverty of language" around mass experiences of disappearance. For Ganesh and Ghani, "warm data," or information opposed to "state-sponsored processes of surveillance and erasure" would instead be "deeply personal but non-identifying information that spoke to the lived experience of being subjected to political invisibility of various kinds" (Ganesh and Ghani 2004). Gopinath has notably emphasized warm data's "power of the detail, the mundane and the everyday," whose excessive "relationalities and affiliations" exceed the "conventions of the official archive," and stand "against the monumentalism of state terror" (Gopinath 2018, 184).

We might understand warm data's family resemblance – but also its radical differences from – histories of investigative and factographic methods since 1960s conceptual art. In 1969, Hans Haacke presented *Gallery-Goers' Birthplace and Residence Profile* at the Howard Wise Gallery, a project that invited exhibition visitors to mark their places of birth and residence on the map. The resulting map situated the specific gallery-going viewer (of the host venue and the building in general) within the racialized, gendered, and classed demographics of New York City's geography.[7] Hacke's subsequent works of the early 1970s advanced this demographic mapping. Such works assumed the form

Figure 2. Screenshot of Warm Data questionnaire fields, website landing page. *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-present). Courtesy of the artists © *Index of the Disappeared* (Chitra Ganesh & Mariam Ghani).

of questionnaires inquiring after their viewer's birth, race, and gender, their political leanings, and specific views on subjects such as upcoming elections, racially integrated schools, and the relationship of cultural institutions to the U.S. government (Haacke 1975).

More recently, artists from the gallery American Fine Arts, Co (Andrea Fraser, Mark Dion, Simone Farkhohndeh, and Peter Fend) devised an extensive, satirical "Public Disclosure Questionnaire." With their art dealer Colin de Land, the artists produced this questionnaire during a long drive to an art fair in 1990. Their tongue-in-cheek introduction states:

> Being famous, and therefore formative, is the proper objective of anyone involved in art. But being famous has obligations as well as its privileges. The obligation is to serve as a model, a

role maker, for the public. The obligation is to help shape the policies, the attitudes, the material culture, the means of production, the Way of Life, of the Future. Anyone who wants to be an art world figure should seek also to be a public figure, and—like the politicians now commonly regarded as public figures—<u>has the</u> obligation of disclosing in a way available to all the public, assorted facts of otherwise private life. Hence, as a means towards making artists more accountable, more transparent, and therefore more powerful, we of American Fine Arts Company set forth–as first action–this Public Figure Disclosure Form. Those who would be public figures would respond. (de Lan et al.)

The questionnaire's expanded sense of the artist as public figure encompasses a person's vital statistics, family profession, income, education, vision/motor skills, athleticism, food preferences, religion, ideational obsessions, view of an artists' function in history, society, art history, the artist's relationship to the state, their income, professional and political beliefs, and more. This lengthy questionnaire situates the public figure of the artist as a vector of social, cultural, and economic assemblages. It also manifests how structures of psychic identification and kinship produce the habitus and the field of art. The authors further point to how multiple fields – psychiatric, military, nongovernmental – are immanent within the artistic field through the lives of those who work publicly within it. This document, was, however, barely utilized. Its disclaimer offers a hint as to why – it states, "all results are subject to publication, with attribution. You should be prepared to accept the consequences" (de Land 1990). One artist, Ken Lum, wrote in response, "This is stupid to service (unwittingly, I assume) the archives of reactionary institutions" (de Land 1990).

Lum's recalcitrance in 1990 – towards the exposition of personal information as part of producing popular opinion, the public citizen and liberal democratic subject – was hardly a new concern. In Alan Westin's 1960s writings, he observed that "the attempt to use total observational surveillance" often required "total self-revelation" on the part of the subjects under question (1967, 59). Such attempts at total comprehension and disclosure were themselves part of authoritarian attempts to run "perfect societies" by demanding the complete transparency of their subjects. Westin cautioned against the information age's relentless political, public and corporate acquisition of personal information, and expressed concern over how "individuals often do not know of the existence of many of the dossiers about them, or what is in those they do know to exist, there is usually no process to challenge the accuracy of fact, opinion or rumor the files contain. […] This situation creates a potential 'record prison' for millions of Americans, as past mistakes, omissions or misunderstood events become permanent evidence capable of controlling destinies for decades" (Westin 1967, 59).

Writing in 2019, Ghani observed how apparent it became in the post-9/11 context that "your databody was incredibly vulnerable. Things that happen to your databody actually could affect your real body" (2019). The need to adjudicate one's personhood against one's profile is an effect of the modern state's standardization and production of identity records and socioscientic production of criminal profiles that would appear as patterns of behavior or lists of characteristics. Jasbir Puar and other critics of contemporary surveillance assemblages have observed how convergences between law enforcement and intelligence after 9/11 have exacerbated these racialized effects of profiling upon persons. Puar has described how the easing of barriers to mining third-party private transactional data,

and the ease of obtaining warrants for electronic surveillance have produced a different kind of temporality, in her words, "the realignment from reactive to preemptive" (Puar 2007, 154–155). This temporality, she argues, produces a different subject – not a rehabilitative one but a regenerative population "culled through anticipation" in how comprehensive "data bodies" not only follow but also precede us in post-9/11 surveillance assemblages.

These precede and produce acts of transgression, subjects for control. We might understand the "warm data" of *Index of the Disappeared* as structured against the racializing surveillance of state-mandated forms of question design and information acquisition, such as those special interest detainee questionnaires that over a thousand Muslim people and men of South Asian and Arab descent were compelled to answer. In response, Ganesh and Ghani explicitly formulated their warm data questionnaire to speak in the genre of invitations rather than interrogations, while opening the questionnaire to both those immediately affected by detention and disappearance, as well as to people in relationship and alliance with them. That being said, when considering *Index of the Disappeared* sixteen years after its inception and its rhetorical and structural opposition of warm data to cold hard facts, it should be noted that affective invitation is not altogether incompatible with contemporary surveillant structures of feeling. Greg Elmer has observed that the affective modalities of contemporary dataveillance are themselves distinguished a blurring of punishment and reward, with personal information compelled by voluntary participation, requests and solicitation, rather than by overt dominance, command and control (2003, 21; Lyon 1994, 52). As Elmer observes, the power encoded in such forms of profiling operates both through "aggregated past choices and behaviors" and by the "blurring of punishments and rewards" around the solicitation of information by request rather than by command (2003, 6). With regards to *Index of the Disappeared*, Kapadia has observed how:

> in light of the HTS program, and at this point in the life of Big Data and the enduring domestic racialized surveillance of Muslims, with its increased focus on predictive policing and algorithmic criminality, it is conceivable that answers to the seemingly benign questions in the *Index*'s 'Warm Database' may well also be actionable, whether linked to concrete detainees or not […] even in the politicized artists' effort to create an alternative epistemological and affective relation to those targeted by the US forever war, the *Index* both capitulates to and reorganizes the surveillance states' rapidly evolving technological quest for data and information. (Kapadia 2019, 128)

I contend that significance of Ganesh and Ghani's concept and practice of warm data arguably lies both within its invitational register, and within its anonymizing structure. Surveillance studies have extensively narrated the significance of minoritarian populations' anonymizing strategies for evading the state's discipline, control, capture and commodification. These populations often rely on technologies, such as video/camera editing, which blur, reduce or destroy information from objects and can disrupt feeds, transmission, and tracking (Ferenbok and Clement 2012; Browne 2015, 120). Such anonymizing strategies have protected the privacy of racially surveilled subjects while affording openings onto freedom practices for the targeted and subaltern. Within this genealogy, *Index of the Disappeared* notably constructs, as Ganesh puts it, "a portrait of someone that would restore their humanity while maintaining their all-important anonymity—whether legally

mandated, as in the case of the special interest detainees, or dictated by fear of losing status or social stigma with former detainees and deportees" (Ghani 2006).

The project aims to elicit no answers that could be used in a court of law, or release any information that could implicate or endanger lived experiences of already-racialized subjectivity. Importantly, the anonymization of the project is not a one-time affair. *Index of the Disappeared*, as a long-term project, keeps pace with the ongoing modulations and technopolitical advances of surveillance in the twenty-first century: its conceptual structure is ongoing, archival, and contextual. The "warmth" of the work might not strictly lie its solicitation but rather the ongoing duration and temporality of responsiveness that commits to care for its subjects' and their profiles' visual dimensions and data analytics. In doing so, the artists seek to protect those "interlocking layers of vulnerability that are produced and distributed in their [profiles'] wake." Ghanesh and Ghani's antiprofile practice thereby mitigates against the threat of being determined for capture to privilege the alterity of personhood and the right to live without being known or determined in advance (Puar 2007, 155).

## Presenting disappearance

By turning to the visual and spatial processes of the work, we might understand how the aesthetics, environment, and presentation of *Index of the Disappeared* pragmatically and affectively anticipate the logics of surveillant pre-emption. In 2004, Ganesh and Ghani were commissioned to produce a project with the digital art organization Turbulence, which resulted in an interactive website, *How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database* (2004). The *Turbulence* website features an annotated guide through documents on detention, deportation and immigrant rights, and provides a discursive overview, a resource and call to action. Interspersed among these are individual perspectives and annotations that locate viewership and readership within the personal sphere and scenes of everyday life. The project landing page specified the work's components and goals: in the artists' words, the creation of "alternative systems for collecting stories from the immigrants whose lives as individuals are lost in the abstractions of legalities and headlines, to develop from those stories new terms and languages through which the issues of the immigration debate can be framed" (Ganesh and Ghani 2004) (Figure 1).

The project title *How Do You See the Disappeared* overlays a dotted spiral and a black and white headshot of a potentially masculine face. The effect is that of a passport photograph blurred out as though scanned at low resolution or digitally edited to protect the identity of the person depicted. Although the image is discernible as a typology of identity documentation, the person depicted evades identification, and remains indistinct. When the user clicks on this image, the page opens onto the first question of this project: the question of how one sees the disappeared, and how this seeing might itself be indexed. The affective range of *Index of the Disappeared* is also made possible by its aesthetic promiscuity, ranging across the studio arts, and the intermedial approach of post-studio work. For instance, new watercolors have been painted by Ganesh for different iterations of *Index of the Disappeared*'s presentation; and the artists have mindfully responded to the spatial dynamics of exhibition spaces, whether in situ or online.

A watercolor by Ganesh appears digitally on the Turbulence website as part of *How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database* (2004). Behind a peephole and turquoise grid

of prison bars, we glimpse part of a brown face. After clicking on the image, a line swirls out from the person's eyes as though figuring a path of sight that curls into written script reading "seeing the disappeared" under the banner of the words, "if you went looking for an image" (Ganesh and Ghani 2004). The overlay of representational portrait and information profile is here materially and figuratively threaded with a question that the artists have repeatedly posed throughout the duration of this project:

> how to give form and shape to disappeared bodies, bodies that have physically disappeared and been disappeared in legal language [...] how to fill in those blank black spaces where first heir names, and then their real lives and family ties, had been erased. How could I "give a face" to this issue, as immigrant rights advocates were telling me was necessary, when I wasn't allowed to see or speak to the people I wanted to portray? (Ganesh and Ghani 2004)

Ganesh explicitly turned to watercolor with an understanding of its use since the nineteenth century as a medium depicting bourgeois European leisure—pastoral scenes, intimate and casual activity—by painters working rapidly wet on wet, in studios and en plein air. The spontaneity and sometimes unpredictability of watercolor has historically yielded a vast range of effects, producing figural forms that are precise, layered and realist, or impressionistic productions dramatizing color, shade, stroke, texture, psychological space and surface. To date, Ganesh has produced a wide variety of watercolor portraits depicting their subjects' faciality with depth and detail—sometimes alone while evoking a private emotional life, at other times in company suggestive of sociality, or appearing amidst other elements within a scene or composition (Figure 3).

The depictions wrought by Ganesh, while based on existing photographs, notably opposed the aesthetics of state-sanctioned or state-compelled degraded black and white Xeroxed images, missing person flyers, and frontal mug shots that fix the subject in confined physical, pictorial and imaginative space. Ganesh sought to produce "a mode of observation that stands in stark contrast to the emphasis on demography and criminality at play in images of post 9/11 disappearance and detention."[8] These portraits imagine personhood in time and space, at leisure and within social worlds. In doing so, they exceed those "official attitudes and practices of imaging and data collection." Moreover, these portraits contest the pictorial impoverishment and lived degradation of "subjects whose humanity had been doubly disappeared preliminarily through practices like detention and deportation and subsequently through the actions of redaction in the letter of the law and the obscuring of both individual identities a feasible logic for indefinite detention."[9]

Over the course of the project, *Index of the Disappeared* has consistently produced both electronic and in situ spatial environments through which viewers could confront their relationship to the images, information, and conditions of disappearance. The first physical display of the *Index of the Disappeared* archive appeared at the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in 2005, following the artists' residency there. Bindu Bhadana has observed how this early installation contrasted "a 'warm' living space with books, picture frames and Persian style rug" with the "cold space of a colorless interrogation room consisting of bare stacked office shelves and a metal table." Here the "sound from the video voiceover

Figure 3.    Watercolor from *Black Sites I: The Seen Unseen* (2015) picturing Jamil Al Banna & family. *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-present). Courtesy of the artists © *Index of the Disappeared* (Chitra Ganesh & Mariam Ghani).

on immigrant rights created by Ghani spilled out onto the street and the hand-drawn flyers by Ganesh mimicked the multiple flyers doing the rounds of New York in search of the disappeared detainees" (Bhadana 2016, 95).

The installation brought together elements of furniture and décor with the distributive street forms of community-organizing communiqués, spatially connecting the gallery and the street, a domestic interior and networked space (Figure 4). Viewers were thereby positioned between the encroachment of surveillant space upon personal domains and the possibility of counterpublic resistance to such surveillant intrusion. The installation was conceived as a reading room in which visitors were drawn in to browse the archive and the project's pedagogical impulse further highlighted by panels that the artists organized on post 9/11 disappearance. Bhadana appropriately describes Ganesh and Ghani's methods as providing an "annotated guide" for uninformed viewers, less an activist intervention in the spirit of projects by such artists as the Yes Men and more akin to a "documentary strategy within the larger context of civil liberties and migrant rights, building the relationship between documentary evidence and the political imperative to bear witness."[10]

The work's first physical installation in 2005 was conceptually keyed and timed to the context of the "Cities, Art, and Recovery" summit that year, which examined the responses and roles of artists relative to social and political crisis. When the archive is presented during exhibitions, *Index of the Disappeared* becomes what the artists call "a mobile platform for public dialogue" (Ganesh and Ghani 2011). *Index of the Disappeared* and its

Figure 4.   2005 installation view, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council presentation of *Index of the Disappeared* (2004-present). Courtesy of the artists © *Index of the Disappeared* (Chitra Ganesh & Mariam Ghani).

affiliates have typically moved in dialogue or worked in explicit collaboration with such groups as Not in Our Name, Arab American Families for Freedom, and the ACLU. When *Index of the Disappeared* appeared at the *DETAINED* exhibition (2006) mounted at the Asian American Arts Centre—addressing the detention of Asian and Arab communities in Chinatown—the artists saw the relational importance of extending their work to such activist communities as DRUM, Desis Rising Up and Moving, the ACLU and Asian American Legal Defense funds.[11]

At the summit, the artists realized the exacting efforts required to convert a physical installation into a platform for public dialogue. Ganesh observed that people needed to be shown that they could use the space and interact with the materials presented, as the artists undertook "responsibility to get people in there and invite those who had contributed materials to our archive to use the space and in turn bring their own people in" (Ashford et al. 2006, 47–48). Consequently, the artists reconceived their role. They actively brought in audiences, utilized their pedagogical discussion and facilitation tools from teaching, and conscientiously invited both art-going and activist publics. As Ganesh noted, this "would

allow all parties involved—artists, activist organizations, youth workers—to solidify and retain their commitment over a period of time. Unlike what often happens in the art world context, where after the press release is sent out, the opening happens, and the show maybe gets reviewed, it's no longer so urgent or pressing an issue" (Ashford et al. 2006, 44).

The physical presentations of *Index of the Disappeared* are ongoing, variable, responsive and relational. When exhibited, the work's forms, sources and concerns draw from earlier and current community organizing. This content stresses the need to represent communities besieged by governmental surveillance, and to pursue legal actions of redress on their behalf. Even as *Index of the Disappeared* has addressed the immediate urgencies of time and place, the project has equally sought to expand the genealogical and geographical context by which post-9/11 disappearances might be understood (Browne 2015, 163). In 2008, Ganesh and Ghani organized panels across New York City art and educational institutions on agency and surveillance, archives, collaboration in relation to feminism and context. In doing so, they emphasized work by activists from Artists Against the War, with legal scholars such as Ramzi Kassem working on civil liberties after 9/11 representing Guantánamo Bay detainees, along with artists Jamal Cyrus + Kenya Evans from the organization Otabenga Jones & Associates, whose pedagogy and installations address the complexity of representation across the African diaspora of captured and freed peoples.[12] Recent research in the *Index of the Disappeared* has connected post-9/11 detentions to earlier 1996 death penalty laws, panels linking black site detention centers to the history of prison booms in California. Ganesh and Ghani have also convened events on radical archiving that brought together artists, activists and archivists from the U.S., Palestine and other countries. By forging these links, *Index of the Disappeared* bridged political projects that are often held apart, recognizing the historical imbrication of anti-brown post-9/11 detentions with an expanding anti-black U.S. prison industrial complex.

In addition to its reconstitutions of context, the remit of Ganesh and Ghani's investigation has spanned an increasing number of sites and locations. This is sometimes catalyzed by its various exhibition invitations, and, while specific sites of disappearance occupy each iteration, the discourse and practices of disappearance might themselves also constitute the site of the work.[13] Since the 1990s, writers such as Miwon Kwon, James Meyer, and others have theorized the unhinging of site-specific art. Previously bound to a discrete physical site and destroyed once unmoored from it, site-specific practices since the 1990s have regularly reconceptualized works from site to site, often producing them instead in ongoing and open-ended projects. In these instances, sites are not only physical and locational but equally discursive, historical and cultural—as in the ongoing War on Terror that constitutes the urgency of the *Index*'s continual study and response. *Index of the Disappeared* also finds affinity with many research-driven and long-term artistic projects of the post 9/11 period that have bridged the methodologies of political and studio practice, an investment in mass media and social movements, and working methodologies of adapting site-specific work (Ashford et al. 2006, 44). Such collaborative projects as *9 Scripts from a Nation at War* (2007) or Naeem Mohaimen and the Visible Collective's global mapping of racialized disappearance in their *Disappeared in America* (2004–2007) have notably sought to deepen public dialogue around the War on Terror's relationship to modern warfare, surveillance and control, and the carceral state.[14]

Although the archive exists as a physical collection (materials may be added, subtracted or extended) its presentation responds to prevailing conditions of exhibition, place and time, addressing immigration debates in their current incarnation by combining videos, questionnaires, a database, and archive. The visual aesthetics of the archive have assumed radically dissimilar presentational guises—partial, complete, "parasitic" or even "exploded." The artists respond to the dynamics of affect and attention in spaces, recontextualizing the archive in relation to the sensorium of each location.[15] In their efforts to absorb viewer's attention to uncomfortable materials and ideas, the artists routinely consider the intimacies of public spatial use. In *Index of the Disappeared: Codes of Conduct* (2008) at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City was presented as one of Creative Time's *Democracy in America* series of exhibitions, events, and commissioned works. This work drew upon what Ganesh described as the "specific resonances" of its site, which was a lavishly appointed setting within a former social club for New York's most prominent Gilded Age families, and a respite for the American military regiment. The installation specifically appeared at a former Colonel and Adjutant's lounge.[16] Its components included a slideshow, sound loop, and numerous documents scattered across and inside a wooden desk and filing cabinets installed within one of the rooms with additional documents shredded and strewn (Figure 5). Overall, the room appeared as though raided or hastily decamped, relative to those high-ranking military subjects occupying the site.[17]

The documents presented at the Armory contextualized what Ganesh and Ghani termed "The Guantánamo Effect" or a "military doctrine circulating far beyond the prison itself" that could be surmised from reading into connections between the presented existing documents and political events. Some of the documents addressed the post-2002 military strategies and their consequences, including reported suicides at Guantánamo Bay and affidavits about "dryboarding" torture practices at the same time. Through a flow chart mapping the interaction of operations and intelligence processes in military command, the installation synthesized those relationships producing these military sites of disappearances. Combining military manuals with audio/visual sources, the installation also included earlier historical material, such as instructions on POW treatment and military codes of conduct that were used during the 1960s within American wars in Korea and Vietnam with slides of PowerPoint presentations for the military in 2008 on the deployment of violence. *Codes of Conduct* geographically and genealogically recontextualized the ongoing torture practices at Abu Ghraib and marked resistance to these practices through documentation of senators refusing to sign Senate Armed Services Committee reports.[18] In presentations such as these, *Index of the Disappeared* appropriated the environment of its site to expand its contextual understanding relative to the urgencies of the present.

In linking the origins of the Armory as a militarized heritage site to the unfolding geographies and historical expansion of the U.S. military industrial complex, *Codes of Conduct* arguably produced a ground upon which figuration appears: by way of those codes, systems, and contexts producing individual experiences of disappearance. If figure-ground relations are traditionally understood within the sensory and perspectival perception of objects relative to space—in which positive form is differentiated against negative space—I propose rethinking what constitutes contemporary figuration today by

Figure 5.  *Index of the Disappeared: Codes of Conduct, site-specific installation (slideshow, sound loop, documents, shredded documents, office supplies) at the Park Avenue Armory for Creative Time's Democracy in America, 2008*. Courtesy of the artists © *Index of the Disappeared* (Chitra Ganesh & Mariam Ghani).

way of the profile. As an outline of the human figure distilled to its most essential and facial characteristics, the profile is the quintessential modern form of representing identity, whose usage serves the production of identifiable information.[19] Profiles are figures not only insofar as they appear as lines against blankness, forms against space, or persons within environments. Profiles also constitute a list of bodily characteristics upon a register, a photograph against a passport, a subject against those sites and databodies from which personhood emerges into legibility via analysis. If a figure stands against ground, a profile not only stands against data as a portrait against landscape, but also charts and defines that ground through sets, schemas, and algorithmic structures. Put another way, profiles today appear against—and as an effect of—data analytics, their databases, and their archives. The profile not only stands as figure upon the ground of biometric information, it moves and co-constitutes biometric information as ground, operating as its vector and performance.

### Radical archiving

The archive of *Index of the Disappeared* notably operates on several fronts: it is environmentally deployed in site-responsive and variable ways and its selections freighted with history and contextualizing the present. The archival structure of *Index of the Disappeared*

might be understood in comparison to what Hal Foster has described as an archival turn in contemporary art, traceable to how early and mid-twentieth century artists used repertoires of sources, appropriated images and serial formats. Such tendencies, he argues, became more prominent in work of the 1990s and 2000s, in which "archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present" by elaborating on found images, objects and texts and often presenting these in installation formats (Foster 2004, 3–4). Although Foster's notes how the language (e.g. "platforms") of much archival art echoes internet networks, he nonetheless argues that the "archives at issue here are not databases" but "recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation, not machinic reprocessing" (Foster 2004, 5).[20] Their contents and meanings, he contends, "remain indeterminant like the contents of any archive, and often they are presented in this fashion – as so many promissory notes for further elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios" (Foster 2004, 5).

Paraphrasing the formulation of Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator," Ghani poses the question of what is the "task of the artist in the archive."[21] In her words,

> What is the task of an artist in an archive, as she or he balances between the roles of archivist, historian, translator and narrator? Perhaps it is to understand which of the archive's preserved pasts relate to the present moment of danger, and find a way to translate and narrate that past into the present; not casually, not haphazardly and not nostalgically, but just when and where it is most needed. (Ghani 2015, 54)

The task of the artist here moves on multiple fronts, aggregating them. It is not opposed to the work of archivists, historians and narrators but shuttles between them and timing the translation of pasts into a dangerous present. *Index of the Disappeared* importantly supplements ongoing conversations in contemporary archival theory. Since the postmodern turn, archivists have increasingly perceived those records in their care as openings onto material and semiotic mutability. Archives are arguably constituted not only of presence and potential evidence, but equally by absence and omissions, opening onto multiple and even contradictory histories. Tara Hart has observed that "Archives, like bodies, are not static. As time passes, their material nature is at risk of deterioration, loss, or destruction. Archives themselves are marked by removals and gaps. Their meanings will change over time, depending on the contexts in which researchers interpret, select, and edit them" (Hart 2015). If curators and artists have previously claimed oppositional positions toward archives—at times by relying on outmoded notions of archival practice in order to uphold vanguard artistic activity – we can understand the work of Ganesh and Ghani as distinct from such tendencies (Darms 2009).

Instead, the artists have explicitly aligned their work with radical archives and radical archiving practices by archivists, activists, scholars and other artists, who are mindful of how archiving structures might themselves be reconceived in relationship to social movements, and the lives, embodied subjectivities, worldviews and needs of those peoples and cultures represented within, accessing, and stewarding the contents of archives themselves. Ganesh and Ghani have notably situated *Index of the Disappeared* in relation to feminist and queer approaches to archiving and collaboration. These approaches include the work of genderqueer art collective L.T.T.R., performance artist and archivist Martha Wilson.[22] The duo's

methodologies for selecting, grouping, and arranging information also notably draw upon radical archival, legal, and activist traditions. Even as their collection is now "quite staggeringly comprehensive," its purpose is not exhaustive coverage but rather annotation and guidance that enables Ganesh and Ghani to "sort through masses of information to retrieve and preserve small bits of significance, and then to make the connections that allow others to understand that significance by artists, activists, and archivists" (Ganesh and Ghani n.d.).

Coinciding with the ten-year anniversary of *Index of the Disappeared*, the artists co-organized the landmark conference *Radical Archives*, at New York University in 2014 (Ganesh and Ghani 2014, Figure 6). Ghani described the conjunction of the term "radical" to "archive" as such:

> (1) archives of radical politics and practices; (2) archives that are somehow radical in form or function; (3) moments or contexts in which archiving in itself becomes a radical act; and (4) attempts to make archives active in the present, rather than documents of the past or scripts for the future.
>
> Over the past ten years, *Index of the Disappeared* has worked with all four of these strands of radical archiving: we archive post-9/11 policies, their effects, the stories of people who resist them and the work of lawyers, activists and artists engaged in the struggle; we constructed our archive around absences in the records and organized it through poetic and polemical categories; we started the archive as a response to a larger absence, a gap in history, and we are constantly experimenting with new ways to activate the archive as a whole, or fragments extracted from it, through translation into new forms and contexts. (Ghani 2015, 58)

The radical archiving of *Index of the Disappeared* is reparative of absences in official history, relational in its response and responsibility to people, and experimental in its organizational and presentational forms. These experiments are necessitated by—and devised in opposition to—prevailing and surveillant forms of information-gathering, record-keeping and state archiving. Contemporary archivists and activists, with whom Ganesh and Ghani align their project, have continually critiqued and contested these activities while inventing alternatives to them.

To those contemporary art discourses that set artistic and archival practice in strict opposition, Ganesh and Ghani have notably produced an alternate discourse and archival counterpublic sphere. Indeed, they have organized existing communities of practitioners and created a record of their dialogue in an online archive of the *Radical Archives* conference that remains active today.

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With new works still commissioned and produced, *Index of the Disappeared* is an especially enduring and committed instance of site-responsive and project-based art. As the geography of the project expands, *Index of the Disappeared* has turned not only to the disappearance of people and their traces, but also disappeared landscapes of former black sites, their traces, information and witnesses. For this, the artists conducted field research in Afghanistan for *Black Sites I: The Seen Unseen* and presented for the first time outside of the United States at the Dhaka Art Summit of 2016. Work on the *Index* has recently turned toward the expanded prison and detention industrial complex of the past five years, incorporating into the archive materials and work on recent policies on family separation, sanctuary movements, and the experiences of LGBTQ migrants.
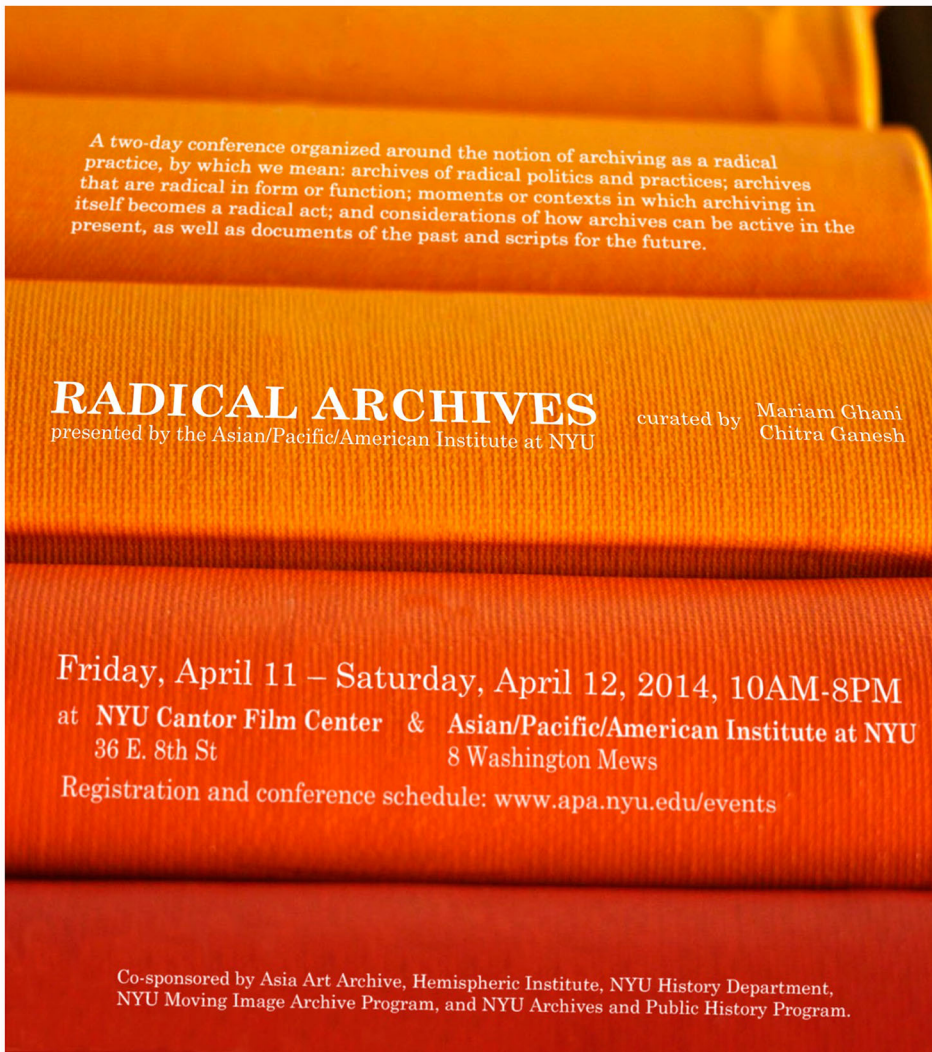
Figure 6.   Promotional material for the Radical Archives symposium at New York University. Courtesy of the artists © *Index of the Disappeared* (Chitra Ganesh & Mariam Ghani).

*Index of the Disappeared* now also addresses Islamaphobia in East and South Asia, along with the international context of policing dissent in the US. This includes both the dissemination of Israeli surveillance techniques to police and military in the US, and the use of American police tactics in Hong Kong.[23]

As a project merging the studio arts of portraiture and landscape with the post-studio methods techniques of research and installation, *Index of the Disappeared* has turned toward an expanded investigation into the disappearance of bodies and spaces, while assuming circulatory form across geographies of information and national borders. Attention to this work draws forward the emergence of profiling as an important aesthetic genre of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. If the term profile previously emerged in the seventeenth century to describe the drawing of outlines, landscape and facial views, by the eighteenth century, it would expand to include visual and literary genres of biography, character studies and sketches. By the mid-twentieth century, the profile would come to connote a summary of a person in writing with attention to their significant features and traits with literary, popular and criminal deployments (Hazelwood and Douglas 1980). Upon the twentieth century, the profile could be understood as a term not only suffused with modern visual, literary, biopolitical meanings. The profile does not only sediment meaning, it is equally operational: an activity, a portrait on the move, a consolidation and convergence of databodies, whose behaviors embroil its subjects in the production of public exposure with material effects in space and site within prefigurative and fluctuating temporalities. Today, profiles must be relentlessly maintained, updated and anticipated, controlling the vicissitudes of life and mobility across international waters and sites. Simultaneously visible and invisible, profiles are vectors of a future anterior tense: they are landscapes of our movement and portraits of who we will have been. As a site-responsive work of international geography, whose warm data is radically archived and ongoing, we might understand *Index of the Disappeared*, as an example of antiprofile alliance with alterity, staving off those scopophilic desires for omniscience and anticipation that would otherwise subsume the sociality of life to the stability of its abstraction (Ghani 2006 and Hussain 2007, 735).

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani for their generosity during the research process, and for the images. My thanks also to the editorial contributions of Kim Bobier, Marisa Williamson, the *Women & Performance* editorial collective and two anonymous reviewers for recommendations that substantially improved this essay.
2. These powers include imbuing "the INS [now Immigration and Customs Enforcement] with the power to arrest, detain and deport unauthorized immigrants while significantly curtailing, and in certain circumstances eliminating, immigrant rights to appeal the decision" (Douglas and Sáenz 2013, 205).
3. "Forms of racism instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable. The differential distribution of grievability across populations has implications for why and when we feel politically consequential affective dispositions such as horror, aguilt, righteous sadism, loss and indifference" (Butler 2010, 24).
4. In Browne's words, "For example, what Lyon calls "digital discrimination" signals this differential application of surveillance technologies, where "flows of personal data—abstracted

information—are sifted and channelled in the process of risk assessment, to privilege some and disadvantage others, to accept some as legitimately present and to reject others" (2015, 21).

5. In 1972, the FBI established a Behavioral Science Unit in its headquarters in Virginia that would produce theories and categories of offenders and crime scene analysis that after 1980 would become increasingly widely used. For example, see articles by BSU Special Agents Ault and Reese (1980), Casey-Owens (1984), Rider (1980), and Rizzo (1980).

6. Copeland describes the body's "flight from the representational frame" to refuse wholeness, resemblance and frontality. Copeland describes the production surrogates for Black embodiment – in art by Glenn Ligon and others employing found objects and commodities of slavery – as antiportrait approaches to Black embodiment in response to the fungibility of blackness as a historic commodity (2013, 9–11).

7. See Hans Haacke, *Gallery-Goers Birthplace and Residence Profile Part I* (1969) at the Howard Wise Gallery on New York's 57th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues; *Gallery Goers' Residence Profile, Part 2* (1970) at Galerie Paul Maenz, Cologne; *John Weber Gallery Visitor's Profile 1* (1972); and *John Weber Gallery Visitor's Profile 2* (1972).

8. Chitra Ganesh, Email to Author, March 14, 2020.

9. Chitra Ganesh, Email to Author, March 14, 2020.

10. It is described as comparable to works such peers as Ahmed Basiony and Trevor Paglen, addressing "issues such as human rights violations, "black sites" of clandestine operations and cases of discrimination in the name of national security" (Bhadana 2016, 95).

11. As Ganesh put it, "Persistence is also a key part of it—being open and going to meetings again and again to make
the connections. Also continuing to enter activists' domains, rather than exclusively inviting people into our spaces
or networks. And since it's an exchange over a period of time, its not like we have to go crazy going to twenty-five meetings a week for three weeks before we organize" (Ashford et al. 2006, 47–48).

12. Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, "Tracing the Index: 4 Discussions, 4 Venues" program brochure. Hosted and co-sponsored by the Bronx Museum of the Arts, NYU's Kevorkian Institute, The New School's Vera List Center for Art + Politics, Art in General. March 2–March 31, 2008. Events included: Collaboration + Feminism at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (March 2); Impossible Archives at the Kevorkian Center, NYU (March 3); Collaboration and Context at Art in General (March 26) Agency and Surveillance (The New School, March 31).

13. See Foster et al. (1994, 11–22), Meyer (1996, 20–29), Graw (1990, 137).

14. The Visible Project has also been represented in *Index of the Disappeared* zines and resource collections. On the tensions of keying works to political conditions rather than the timing or demands of museums and art institutions, see Mohaiemen's remarks in Ashford and Mohaiemen (2008). The Visible Collective has included Naeem Mohaiemen, Ibrahim Quraishi, Anandaroop Roy, Jee-Yun Ha, Donna Golden, Aimara Lin, Vivek Bald, Kristofer Dan-Bergman, JT Nimoy, Sehban Zaidi, Anjali Malhotra, Aziz Huq, Sarah Olson.

15. Conversation with Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, March 19, 2020.

16. Chitra Ganesh, Email to Author, March 14, 2020.

17. Chitra Ganesh, Email to Author, March 14, 2020.

18. Chitra Ganesh, Email to Author, March 14, 2020.

19. In doing so, I refer to contemporary aesthetics theories that have notably expanded the poles of modern figure-ground relations. For instance, in mounting a case for the modernist primacies of surface, Rosalind Krauss famously substituted a Klein group's many positions to dispute the primacy of the figure/ground opposition, suggesting the figure might not only appear against a field (or be defined in relationship to it) but otherwise ingest that field too (Krauss 1993, 14). In another context, David Joselit more recently extended figure-ground relations to a techno-political field, by proposing televisual space as ground, and with work in video by artists as figuration upon it. Or, in his words addressing critical video experiments of the 1960s and 1970s, "art stands against television as figure stands against ground, and television, in its privatization

of public speech and its strict control over access to broadcasting, stands against democracy" (Joselit 2007, xi.)

20. Foster's writings have been cited by Ghani, with regards to the imminent threat of disaster that all archives face, "perhaps, like the Library of Alexandria, any archive is founded on disaster (or its threat), pledged against a ruin that it cannot forestall. (2004, 5) quoted (Ghani 2015, 43).

21. In his 1940 essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin notably argues for a relationship to history as resuscitating fragments of the past in a moment of danger when these become necessary. See Benjamin (1973).

22. Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, "Tracing the Index: 4 Discussions, 4 Venues" program brochure. Hosted and co-sponsored by the Bronx Museum of the Arts, NYU's Kevorkian Institute, The New School's Vera List Center for Art + Politics, Art in General. March 2–March 31, 2008. Events included: Collaboration + Feminism at the Bronx Museum of the Arts (March 2); Impossible Archives at the Kevorkian Center, NYU (March 3); Collaboration and Context at Art in General (March 26) Agency and Surveillance (The New School, March 31).

23. Email from Mariam Ghani, March 19, 2020.

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