Divining the Question: An Unscientific Methodology for the Collection of Warm Data (2006)
Essay originally written for issue Viralzerosix of Viralnet, the online journal published by the Center for Integrated Media at CalArts, and updated for the forthcoming Conversation Pieces reader.

Unwritten Histories and the Digital Divide: On Critics, Archives and Networks (2005)
Excerpts from an IM roundtable with Jeanette Ingberman (Exit Art), Richard Rinehart (Berkeley Art Museum / Pacific Film Archive, CIAO, Archiving the Avant-Garde), Beth Rosenberg (Eyebeam Atelier), and Martha Wilson (Franklin Furnace Archives), July 2005. Moderated by Mariam Ghani for Arts + Leisure, a tabloid newspaper on art, criticality and complaint, published by e-flux and Art in General. A scan of the published text appears first, then a more readable e-version that includes a longer selection of excerpts from the roundtable than in the published text (the end of the published text is, however, marked).

Bidoun Questionnaire (2009)
Questionnaire sent by Bidoun, editors of the Sharjah Biennial 9 catalogue project (three books in total), to artists in the Provisions for the Future exhibition, several months before we produced our projects. Choreographer Erin Ellen Kelly, who collaborated with me on the SB9 project, and I describe our goals for the new video that SB9 commissioned in alternating blue (EEK) and green (MG) handwriting. This version was published along with a partial shooting script in the first Provisions catalogue, which focuses on the production process.

Afghanistan: Between the Tiger and the Precipice (2007)
"News-collage" article commissioned for the 25th anniversary issue of FUSE, Cultural Change in Real Terms.


New World Borders (2008)
Essay and "corrective redaction" project commissioned as Index of the Disappeared’s contribution to the newspaper Common Possibilities, printed for the exhibition How to Talk About Utopia Without Saying Utopia (a project by Anthony Marcellini + Matthew David Rana) and distributed in San Francisco in April 2008. Here the readable e-version is followed by a scan of the published text.

Notes on the Index (2008)

Text with Chitra Ganesh (as Index of the Disappeared). Originally produced for Bare Acts: The Sarai Reader 05, later published in various forms in Samar, Pavilion, and the Journal of Aesthetics & Protest. The version here is from Pavilion Issue 11 (part of the Documenta 12 magazine project).

Please note that earlier and longer critical texts and text projects can be found at:
http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/mariam/texts.html
Divining the Question:  
An Unscientific Methodology for the Collection of Warm Data

If tomorrow you found yourself with no passport and no birth certificate, and someone came up to you and said, “You no longer have the right to be an American,” what story, object, image or document would you offer as your proof?

With this question begins the story of Points of Proof, a video, photography, postcard and public dialogue project originally commissioned for the inauguration of the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan (2005), later expanded online thanks to a Longwood Digital Matrix commission (2006), and finally re-produced in Buffalo during a two-year community-based residency facilitated by CEPA and funded by the Mid-Atlantic Foundation (2007-09). The following essay about the issues and ideas behind the project was written for Viralnet in 2006 and updated for this reader; the excerpts are from postcards filled out or mailed by viewers in Detroit, NYC, LA and Buffalo from 2005-09; and the photographs are from Points of Proof: Buffalo as exhibited in Conversation Pieces.

When the AANM invited me to make a community-based project in Dearborn in March of 2005, I was in the second year of an ongoing, open-ended, collaborative project about the human cost of immigration policy, which has grown in the form of several nested and linked collections of what I call “warm” data, known collectively as the Disappeared project. Points of Proof emerged both in response to the specific conditions of that place and moment, and as a special case among the warm databases of the Disappeared project.

I first began thinking about the idea of warm data at the end of 2001, when I started following the cases of the “special interest” detainees – 760 men who were picked up by the INS on immigration violations just after 9/11/01, identified by the FBI as being of “special interest” in relation to 9/11, and then disappeared into the secret files, courts, and cells erased from the public eye by a Department of Justice blanket gag order, which prevented anyone connected with their cases from even speaking their names for much of the next three years. When the Special Registration program was introduced in the following year, I watched as immigrant men from “terror watch list” countries came forward to wait in long, cold lines for days, only to be asked long lists of dehumanizing questions, then often remanded to custody overnight and asked those same questions again, and again, before being detained or deported away from their families. I read the 1996 immigration laws, the Patriot Act, reports and legal briefs, and discovered the traps built by the language of the law: reactions that become terms that become classifications that enclose and exclude. I found the post-9/11 documents full of absences -- redactions, erasures, censorships -- that were paralleled by the absences visible in every immigrant community in the city, as midnight raids spread from neighborhood to neighborhood. I visited detention centers and followed the news on immigrant rights listservs. Each time I read a new story of disappearance I thought: This could have been us – my brother, my father, my mother, me. If I had been born earlier, in Afghanistan. If we had emigrated later, when political asylum became a decision hanging on the word of one airport customs officer. And I wondered: would it be possible for someone who had never come so close to being in our precarious position to make the same empathetic leap?
In the fall of 2003, I moved my studio into the Woolworth Building, thanks to a Lower Manhattan Cultural Council residency to develop a project about the disappeared. From the window of my studio, which itself had been gutted and left vacant after 9/11, I could see Ground Zero and the de- and re-constructions that surrounded it. Most of Manhattan was taken up with the debate over what, exactly, could be built in the footprint of the towers. In my studio, I had pinned up on the wall a copy of the list of special interest detainees, which was for many months the only document of their existence. I was worrying over the question of how to fill in those blank black spaces where first their 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? The impossible trick would have to be creating 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 social stigma or losing status, in the cases of many other former detainees and deportees.

The answer I arrived at was the idea of the warm data questionnaire: a series of questions designed so that each set of responses creates a unique and highly individual dataset – a data description of a person -- which at the same time lacks the identifying details that would usually link it to a real person. A warm data body is a portrait, not a profile; when a warm data body is erased, the real body remains intact. Warm data is easiest to define in opposition to what it is not: warm data is the opposite of cold, hard facts. Warm data is subjective; it cannot be proved or disproved, and it can never be held against you in a court of law. Warm data is specific and personal, never abstract. Warm databases are public, not secret. However, warm data can only be collected voluntarily, not by force; the respondent always has a choice – whether to answer at all, which questions to answer, on what terms she will answer, and what degree of anonymity she wishes to preserve. A warm database is distinguished from a corporate or government database not primarily by its interface or its underlying structure, but by the way its data is collected. There are two parts to the collection process: designing, or really divining, the right questions to ask; and creating the correct conditions for answering. The latter task usually entails creating a condition of trust between questioner and respondent, so that the question becomes an invitation rather than an invasion. I’ve found that the necessary trust can be created by working within a community, borrowing the bona fides of an institution, or using communication networks as anonymizers.

The process of designing a warm data question is somewhat more complex. For me, the process begins with research (into a community, issue, or idea), then a variable period of mulling over the materials unearthed by research, and finally some writing. During the writing phase, questions sometimes seem to emerge from thin air, but I suspect that they are really generated by a combination of intuition and that empathetic imagination I mentioned earlier. I also like to road-test questions on friends and/or community activists before I structure a project around those questions. For example, when I designed the warm data questionnaire for How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database, a web project commissioned by Turbulence in 2004, I began by talking to a human rights lawyer who had debriefed some of the special interest detainees just before they were deported. He described for me some of the questions that they were asked repeatedly during their interrogations. I found a group at the Riverside Church that went on weekly visits to asylum seekers being held at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Queens, and I started riding along with them to find out what kind of
conversations people who had been isolated from their families and culture might be interested in having. Then I did some further research online and with immigrant rights activists in New York, which led me to develop a list of all the questions that were asked during Special Registration and read about some of the statistical outcomes for immigrants relative to the different responses they gave. I took a few weeks to think about those questions, and then I sat down one day, thought about the questions that I would want someone to ask me if I were in detention for two years, thought about what questions the government would never ask me in that situation, and wrote a list. Then I invited both people who had been affected by detention and deportation, and people who wanted to fill out the questionnaire in solidarity, to answer the questions.

A few of those first warm data questions:
Who was the first person you ever fell in love with?
What place do you see when you close your eyes at night?
Describe an offhand remark that someone once made to you that you’ve never been able to forget:
What piece of music is always running through your head?
What is the one birthday present you always wanted and never received?

In 2005, I took another question from the Disappeared warm data questionnaire, and adapted it to generate the project that became Points of Proof, repurposing it in response to that specific moment and place. That spring the REAL ID Act was being debated in Congress, the media, and the many other arenas of the immigrant rights struggle. As I drove between the museum’s construction site in Dearborn, the most concentrated Arab community in the United States, and Detroit, still one of the most racially divided cities in the country, the bitter debate over this and other increasingly draconian pieces of immigration legislation rang in my ears. REAL ID, which strips illegal and temporarily legal immigrants of the right to a U.S. driver’s license and sets new, near-impossible standards of proof and credibility for asylum claims, was passed just before the exhibition opened in May. The question posed by Points of Proof thus reflects the situation in which ever larger numbers of American immigrants find themselves by asking viewers and interviewees to reduce their American identities to a single point of proof – points being the system used by a number of state DMV bureaus to rate different documents for their effectiveness as proof of identity.

The question at the heart of Points of Proof is successful because it demands specific responses, but ensures that they will be subjective and variable; it engages both memory and imagination; it immediately provokes the questioned to either confrontation or consideration; and it sets no standards for wrong or right answers, implicitly questioning the whole notion of proof. The question can be asked and answered in a video, on a sound recording, in a captioned photograph, on a postcard, in person, or through the web (at kabul-reconstructions.net/proof). To make the first version of Points of Proof, I taped interviews with 30 new and longtime Americans in urban Detroit and suburban Dearborn. The resulting video interweaves the surprising and complicated conversations started by this single question, throwing into relief the subjective nature of identity and the difficulty of pinning the constantly shifting idea of America within strictly national borders. The question of proof quickly raises other questions -- Is geography destiny? Does culture extend beyond citizenship? Is proof finally a question of faith and belief or does it depend on the material evidence at hand? -- whose answers are equally contested and complex. The project was re-produced with a similar structure in Buffalo, where I recorded video interviews with several different groups of residents.
between 2007 and 2009, including SEIU1199 union members and students and teachers in the ESL program at Grover Cleveland High School. Many of the Buffalo participants brought some (actual or symbolic) physical "proof" to the interviews; these are depicted and described in the accompanying series of photographs, formatted as mounted panels of captioned Polaroids.

Since the initial six-month run of the AANM show, the project has been further extended by a series of postcards filled or mailed to my home by Proof viewers, which have allowed the audience to add their answers to the warm database generated by Points of Proof's question. When and wherever the project is exhibited, more postcard responses accumulate, sometimes arriving in my mailbox months after a show ends. Given free (anonymous and unmoderated) rein, these postcard texts range from bitter to idealistic, pithy to verbose, serious to hilarious. The success of Points of Proof is that few of the 150-odd people who have answered to date have repeated each others' answers, and almost all have engaged with the hypothetical scenario posed by its question. So for a few moments, at least, you who have answered have imagined yourselves in our place.

Mariam Ghani // March 06 / November 09

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Points of Proof: excerpts from postcard responses 2005-07

I wouldn’t need to give proof because I already know I am!

I am an American just because I happen to have lived here for 37 years.

I would say that I was born in America, so I am part American. Just a little.

I chose to be an American.

I am American because I left my country to improve my life and my kids’ lives.

Both of my parents struggled in hope of a better life. Isn’t that supposed to be the American Dream?

The Native Americans are the real Americans and I would say go back to your country.

I would give them my Osage Nation tribal membership card.

The vial of red dirt and rose rock I keep with me to remind me of my home in Oklahoma.

An impulsive tattoo I got at a biker rally.

My lawyer’s business card.

A picture of a Red Indian.

My ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War to create the United States.

The blood, sweat and tears of my African ancestors who were brought to this country on slave ships.

My slave heritage is proof that I am American, brought against my will but happy now.

95-101066… That’s my inmate number, when I had to do time for this country.

My college tuition – the price I have to pay for my education, while my father is unemployed.

The heartache of my grandmother over watching me turn up my nose to Jamaican food.

My subscription to the American way of life …

Sure, I can prove it. Here’s how: (1) I eat junk food; (2) I’m addicted to bad TV; (3) I love SUVs. Hey … and I’m proud of all this.
(1) Extreme freedom of expression – almost weird [sic]. (2) Practicallity [sic]. (3) Tolerance. (4) Misspelling!

I can’t spell, so someone else had to write this for me. That makes me American!

My proof would be my poor skills at foreign languages.

When I am here in the US, I always complain; when I am away, I always brag!

My irreverence is what makes me American.

I’d use sarcasm. That’s American, right?

I’d probably laugh.

I’d question his/her right not to have me punch them in the nose.

If this person were European American I would question right back their own right of being an American.

If anyone questioned my identity, I would be ambivalent and wonder about it, and then I would remember that the US is full of marginalized and subordinated histories.

My right has already been questioned – as a lesbian, I can’t get married or adopt an American child.

I have been questioned, in that I was told “Why did you people come here?” (post-9/11/01). I reminded this group, first I was born here. Second the Constitution gives me this right. And third we “Americans” and all “American” ancestors stole this country from the natives of the Americas.

I would ask them what makes anyone “American”? The great thing about this country is its diversity. Nobody is any “more American” than anyone else. All of us make this country what it is.

Once we begin to tell people where they should go or belong, then where do you put multi-racial people? No one is 100% anything.

Anyone who uses prejudice against any group doesn’t understand that this country was built on immigrants.

My place of residence is in America even though my ancestors are from other countries. We should embrace difference of backgrounds and ideals and that embrace is American.

Being open to so many cultures makes me a great American. Land of the free!
I understand what “Old Glory” (the flag) means, because I defended that flag when I was younger in the Marines.

Loyalty to ideas – not to people, not to flags.

America is not a country we live in; it’s ideals, values and beliefs that live in us.

What makes me American is treating others right and in a fair way.

Being open to a diversity of ideas that become part of my identity.

The way I think – how open my mind is.

My desire to maintain the freedom of speech – and especially the right to express unpopular ideas. When we stop changing and challenging ideas, we will be un-American.

The desire to get away.

Being really angry about American policies.

What makes me want to be not-American is the conduct of the US towards the Arab world. Many times I am unsure whether to claim my citizenship.

I would not call myself an American anymore because President Bush’s policies have made me question the right to call our country a free democracy.

When I think of “America” I think of segregation, internment camps and racism. If that is “American,” I’m not!

Being American is just another title.

I’m just a citizen of the world…

I live here. I carry this passport. But I am human – part of all humanity.

I know all I’ve been taught in public schools in Detroit – but I feel invisible strings to patches of land all over our globe – and a bit beyond …

I can call myself an American because I recognize all of the rights and liberties I have (especially as a woman) and I don’t take them for granted. We are a young and imperfect country, but there is no place like home.
Without the documents, how do you prove that you are who you think you are? All the pictures I have are just records of my life - they don't really prove anything. Take this photograph - you can see me at age 6, in the Brownies. But it still doesn't prove that I'm an American. : Connie

My social security card, my I-94 card, my resident card - I carry them all with me wherever I go. So if anyone says that I'm not an American, I'm ready to show them the documents to prove that I am - any time, any place. : Fato
I would start with my Board of Elections card. I’m very proud of having the right to vote, and also to question our politicians when there are issues that I disagree on. I’m kind of known for doing that - for speaking my mind and writing letters. Strongly worded letters. : April

Through the years, I’ve met many people who don’t understand that Puerto Ricans are American citizens, or who just assume that because we all speak Spanish, we’re all the same. I’ve had encounters where someone said, “I’m going to call immigration on you,” and I had to say, “Go ahead. What are they going to do? They’ll come in and tell me I can be right where I am.” I would just sit there thinking, what do I have to prove? If I say I’m Puerto Rican, that should be enough. : Vivian
I'm a product of the American culture. And it is a culture. But it's not stagnant - it's an evolving culture. That's probably the result of the free flow of ideas here - the way that we're able to think whatever we want to think, go where we want to go, pursue whatever we want to do with our lives. And we're free to celebrate our individual religions and traditions and cultures within that larger culture. : Vince

I would say that I'm a teacher in a public school in NY State, and that's already proof of citizenship. But the way I see it, becoming an American citizen is an obligation - for example, to work for the state. Really being American - well, most of us originally came from other parts of the world, so being American shouldn't require forgetting those roots. : Patricia
Unwritten Histories & the Digital Divide:
On Critics, Archives, and Networks
—Moderated by Mariam Ghani

Excerpts from an IM roundtable with Jeanette Inghman (co-founder/director, Exit Art), Richard Rinehart (artist/archivist, Berkeley Museum of Art, Conceptual and Intermedia Arts Online), Beth Rosenberg (publications director, Eyebeam Atelier), and Martha Wilson (founder/director, Franklin Furnace Archives), moderated by media artist and teacher Mariam Ghani.

Mariam Ghani: Having spoken to several of you about digital archive initiatives and your own archive projects over the past few years, I thought it would be interesting to bring you together to talk about critical praise and unwritten histories, which is a phrase that often comes up in that context. To start: Why is the idea of unwritten histories so central to archive digitization projects?
Jeanette Inghman: Because to archive spoken history in a digital way produces a new way to see that history.
Martha Wilson: Jeanette coined the phrase "unwritten history," and Franklin Furnace uses it in relation to our efforts to place our event records online. If institutional archives are made accessible online, many different versions of history can be created. How do you think access versus critical value?
More and more art criticism in today's newspapers appears lost in space: not exactly sure of its methods, its terminology or its aims. It strikes me that we are in a kind of a press-release period of contemporary art, an era driven by curators and institutions who have already inserted self-reflexivity and self-criticism in the first paragraph of their texts. When I started to write art reviews for a daily newspaper in Ljubljana — it is now more than 5 years ago — I tried to avoid critiques that would offend, reveal personal biases, or veer away from what the exhibition or project was actually about — namely, the type of art criticism that prevailed in Slovene critical discourse at the time. I was (and still am) sure that there is such a thing as constructive criticism, a critique that by necessity exposes the obviously questionable elements of a project, but also its valuable parts and offers a reading based upon them. Thinking about constructive criticism — not just the written kind, but also that which exists in gesture, action and models of knowledge — I have come across the letters that Toni Negri wrote in the late 1980s about art and multitudes. He claims there that art is a collective action of liberation that presents itself as a surplus of being: "All artistic expression today cannot be any other but abstract and constructive... The possibility to construct the world belongs to us totally, as a possibility to construct it precisely as we have had the possibility to deconstruct it. In this radical operation art anticipates the movement of the humanity as a whole."

We are aware today that art production is closely connected to the institutionalization and commercial and bureaucratic laws that govern many of the previously disconnected parts on the geopolitical map of the world. Strategies of experimentation and resistance are becoming part of the institutionalization process. So when thinking about critical art today, this late capitalist machinery in which the visibility of any kind of counter-position plays the role of accomplice to the system, fewer tactics can be defined as outsider positions or historic approaches. An engaged or constructive criticality is one that "fits" back with the system's own tools and tries to offer some kind of alternative within the system. A prime example of this would be the open source and free software movements, and what followed afterwards, and the subsequent move for open content such as the Creative Commons project. Initiated and at first exchanged mostly within the community of programmers, Open Source and Free Software movements started as a hobby, the amateur's search for possible "counter-software" which arrived from a deep discontentment with the policies of software companies like Microsoft. The

—By Natasa Petresin

world of alternative computer software circulating outside mainstream commercial circuits some say Lessig calls a "free culture", where sharing creative content under the same copyleft rules and licenses is what legitimizes its existence, and also what guarantees its honesty and ethical intentions. The free software movement and its sharing of files, codes, ideas and commons is an example of human creativity that strives for expression, ethics and a more tolerant global community.

What we need today is less a piling up of complaints, since we so often end up preaching to the converted, and more of the comprehensive vision that is lacking in so many situations and realities that we all participate in.
Raimundas Malasauskas: You are the producer of reality TV series that blend the competitiveness of the art-world with the extreme format of competition which is reality TV. Would it be appropriate to claim this merges eludes a certain critique of the artworld?

James Fuentes: It can be read differently. For me it works like this... Reality TV is perhaps the most banal, played out, horrendous format on television today. It brings about very interesting issues about objectivity and is a threat to the believability of even the most objective seeming anthropological documentaries. This idea of a format (the documentary) being emasculated by Reality Television is very interesting to me because ultimately no matter how well it is presented and written in the middle of the world. As for it being a critique of the art world, by its very nature ARISTAR it is playing off a phenomenon that the "art world" is perhaps of the better term) would prefer to think it is above. Witnessing the success of artists whose practice weighs heavily on their ability to be celebrated by the media (that includes

RM: In the program of CAC TV that I've been co-producing we said that through "re-programming a reality show we aim at re-programming reality." What do you think about this statement?

JF: I think it's confusing.

RM: John Waters claims that "My life is a reality show. Everybody has a great reality show if you go out, if you live a life. I think the only people who really love real-

Trend Report #1

The New York art world is taking one more crack at reality TV with a sexy new show called "Making It." Young attractive artists, desperate to get ahead, were asked to cast aside their inhibitions and try their luck at selling the premise to ABC television during production of the first episode. None of the contestants had known at the time of shooting that the show was conceived as a critique, most agreed with the artist's statement and affirmed that they felt exploited.

CAMEL

Unwritten Histories & the Digital Divide

(continued from PG 9)

MW: I just mean that the American avant-garde is valued more by institutions in Vienna and UK than by institutions here.

MG: Why do you think that is?

BR: Because in Europe, art is supported by the government.

RR: Are alternate spaces a byproduct of capitalism then? As in we need them. Or, another question might be, "What do alternate art spaces remember (or behalf of us all)?"

JF: We all have a part of that history. That's why it is so important that our archives talk to each other and are accessible together. All this is important that Martha and Rick have been working on for a while. This big "digital archive project" is a real opportunity to have impact and importance, which is why I hope we can work it out so that they can connect technically.

MG: Interoperability and accessibility.

RR: Exactly.

MG: Do you think that the digital interface - the database structure - will change the way people experience, think about the content of the archives? Can new

world still does not "get it." But that's nothing new (to any alternate/emerging genre), is it?

JF: Well, we are also part of the mainstream. We disagree with that reality but we are part of it. I don't think of what we do as alternative, it's just another way to express the culture.

RR: Good point, Jeannette. I am comfortable as part of the mainstream. Just that my area of digital art is a specific part of the mainstream, not well understood by certain other parts perhaps.

BR: Eyebeam has had some experiences with reporters who really don't understand new media at all. It takes a toll.

MG: I feel like a certain self-consciousness has been generated about how the lists have to take on the task of writing new media. Which may or may not be true.

RR: Too bad art critics can't be more interdisciplinary. Maybe the next generation of critics will?

MG: Especially with web-based work. I think there's a tension between expectation and experience - net art is not much like surfing a commercial site, but should it be? I wonder if digital archives, once they are online, will deal with the same questions of database and interface that a lot of net art has struggled with.

RR: Well, Mariam, I guess net art is like video art in that it occupies a "commercial" media space, but on purpose to leverage that confusion and bypass the baggage of whether it's "ART?" The question is whether it's interesting content...

BR: Perhaps we are still at the stage where net artists are so fascinated with the technology that the content is secondary, and perhaps in the future this will reverse.

RR: The "first wave" of net artists were often formally concerned with the medium, but the younger generation is not so much.

BR: Yes, that's true, but I still think we have a ways to go, don't you?

RR: Well, formalism or other ways of commenting on the medium itself is not bad per se, but we do need to allow a broadening of the practice in net art. That is, we need to allow "alternative practices" even within net art.
Mariam Ghani: To start things off: could each of you maybe speak briefly about how you became involved with or interested in digital archives?

Richard Rinehart: I'm a digital artist (coyoteyip.com) and involved in a multi-organization project to preserve digital/media art (bampfa.berkeley.edu/ciao/avant_garde.html). Also the Director of Digital Media for the UC Berkeley Art Museum.

Martha Wilson: Franklin Furnace is applying to the NEH to provide online access to the first ten years of its glorious history.

Jeanette Ingberman: It's the most practical and democratic.

Beth Rosenberg: Eyebeam is a center for art and technology in New York and we're just beginning to deal with archive issues-- we've done online forums since 1996 as well as R&D projects online like fundrace and reblog.

MG: Jeanette, could you talk a bit more about what you mean by practical and democratic?

J: You have immediate results with the touch of the button and return it to millions of people.

R: Return what to millions, Jeanette?

J: The information you make available on the web.

R: Ah. So, Mariam, what were some of your questions?

MG: Well, having spoken to several of you about digital archive initiatives over the past few years, I thought it would be interesting to bring you together to talk about critical praise and unwritten histories, which is a phrase that comes up a lot in connection with these projects. So to start: Why is the idea of unwritten histories so central to archive digitization projects?

J: Because to archive it in a digital way is a new way to see spoken history.

M: Jeanette coined the phrase, "unwritten history," and Franklin Furnace uses it in relation to our efforts to place our event records online. If institutional archives are made accessible online, many different versions of history can be researched.

MG: So the medium re-writes the history?

R: I'd put the answer to your question in the reverse of the question: digital archives are central to unwritten histories because archives=social memory. If we don't archive it, we forget it.

B: By unwritten histories, I'm thinking particularly of how women artists have been neglected from art history.

J: We are all involved in the unwritten history of American art, and there is a whole new generation out there who is hungry for this information, both about new artists and about the artists we have all been showing for the last 20 years. And digitization has given us a natural path to establishing these histories.
R: And access=research. If it's not archived and made accessible, it's not used for research and teaching and thus it's forgotten and not "discoursed."

J: The major museums, as we know, do not have this information. If we don't get it online, it could be lost and only those histories [that are already written] will remain.

M: Online access will allow scholars to write about the ephemeral practice we are digitizing and that in turn puts us in art history books.

MG: I like Martha's point that the rise of the digital archive, or rather archives, can also create new ways of reading history as histories - multiple intersecting narratives instead of linear progression.

B: Who writes history?

J: I find it very interesting, and I wonder how others experience this, that many young people are coming to us and wanting to know these histories.

M: Today we were trying to figure out what academic departments would be interested in Franklin Furnace's archives and found 10!

B: Of course they are… I'm not surprised. FF has a rich history for students to explore. The question is what kind of information will the students pick to archive?

R: I teach at UC Berkeley, etc. and also find a great eagerness for this stuff, but it's currently so inaccessible; it's hard to teach it.

MG: That brings up another question - should changing the critical or scholarly evaluation of an artist or movement be the goal of archive projects? And is it a possible goal?

B: I think it just adds more to our understanding of the artist and his/her work.

J: The goal is to get the information out there - we can't control what happens to it.

R: Any project that brings a lesser-known artist to light will change their notoriety, and since Academia is all about specialization and finding new material, eventually EVERY artist that is accessible will get attention.

M: We save everything because who knows when the work of Teh-Ching Hsieh will have value to mainstream art history? But I should add that Karen Finley's files get the most traffic.

R: Plus, there's a big difference between promoting general public knowledge and critical/academic attention.

M: Rick, isn't Google changing the game by providing access to everything American, freaking out the English scholarly community?

MG: How do you think access versus critical praise functions in determining future historical validation?

B: This is a question that is so interesting to me because with the influence of blogs and so forth, everybody is a critic.

MG: But can access ever trump market value?

R: To speak to Beth's good point; everyone IS a critic now. Journalism has been changed as a field because of this, but not the slow-moving art world yet. Not really.

J: You know all of us are in this because we chose to work this way and not to
work within the market. We don't ignore it, but it is not how we define ourselves or look for validation.

B: Maybe the point [of online access], as Jeanette said earlier, is to promote more democracy/less criticality.

MG: Going back to your earlier point, Rick, who are the intended users of these archives once they're online?

B: Future PhD projects?

R: Intended users. Not an often-asked question. Usually it's "build it; they will come" or "general access is good." Which I agree with. But a more aggressive strategy is necessary to penetrate the walls of the Academic and the Critical apparatus.

J: We never know who will be interested – that's the beauty of the Internet. Even now we get daily requests for information from such a broad variety of sources.

MG: Right, but if you want to change what is taught in art history classes - or at least what is available to be taught -- don't you need to think about the needs of scholars and learners at the design stage?

M: Mariam, what are some of those needs?

MG: From what is brought to our committee at CAA [Diversity Practices], it seems like there is still a real lack of resources to teach outside the art historical canon -- especially in less well funded or more isolated universities & colleges.

R: I agree with Mariam. Everyone asks our Berkeley profs why they don't teach media or digital art and they say it's because classrooms are not equipped to even show them (and this is Berkeley, relatively tech-rich); but the other reason is, of course, access. There's still too little access to information about lesser-known histories.

B: Even the School of Visual Arts has no online repository for slides...and requesting multi-media is difficult!

R: I think what helps the effort to reach multiple audiences is to place our digital archive content in multiple venues, so that it's not just accessible on our own websites but also through copies deposited in all the major scholarly/university library resources, as well as general public resources, which are online. Design is taken care of by the different venues; our expertise is in the content under the design.

M: Today I met with the Director of Collection Development at ArtStor who said they are continually being asked to provide contemporary content.

MG: Exactly. Many people in academia are unaware of the resources that are in your archives and archives like yours.

J: Could it also be generational? Because this information is available.

R: Jeanette, I don't think the information is available yet. Not in the places scholars look. We can't expect them to go hunting on all of our various websites; we need to consolidate content.

J: But I feel it is also up to us to help promote each other and what we do. And build bridges to the large museums and universities that need our content.

R: Jeanette, I totally agree. It's only together that we can make a difference (does that sound like a lame political soundbite or what?) but we need to be more
strategic than just good-mouthing each other, or providing links to each others' websites. We need to be systematic and structured about it.

MG: Maybe someone can speak here about the Art Spaces Archive Project (www.asap.org)? David [Platzker, the project director] couldn't be here because he's offline this week...

M: Regarding ASAP, this is an effort to locate living and defunct art spaces, and establish a centralized Location Database to facilitate scholarly access. The goals of ASAP would be to get the art spaces to value their archives and also inject the events produced into the art historical narrative.

B: Ultimately, though, don't you think the book is not dead? Online is great, but universities and books go hand in hand.

R: "Books and universities" do go together, but universities are not avoiding digital resources, it's just that they don't subscribe to a lot of little organizational websites. They like big masses of content from all over the place in one accessible spot online.

MG: Much as I try to steer CAA committee members toward digital resources, they keep wanting books.

R: That's because books count for tenure; digital does not.

B: Maybe we're not doing such a good job making this information available in book format as well?

M: It is so expensive to produce books and the information becomes outmoded immediately!

R: Books are a dead end for us. Terribly expensive, limited distribution, and younger students do not consult them.

B: Eyebeam just started a small technology bookshop where we're just carrying titles directly related to technology...I'm amazed how thirsty the public is. Yes, it's very expensive to produce books, but why does it have to be?

R: Good point; books might be good for the general public if not for academia...

M: Sunny Yoon, Librarian, says even librarians consult Google.

J: In an ironic turn - we used to be asked for and give out more info with slide requests.

MG: Rick mentioned to me that he's teaching a class on new media and social memory next spring, and I thought that would be an interesting idea to raise in the context of the archive. To what extent do you feel that the archives of art spaces, or the new "archives" being generated by new media networks, are keepers of particular memories of the broader society and culture beyond the art world?

R: Well, what are archives (and libraries and museums) if not mechanisms for collective memory?

J: In the Bard graduate program on curatorial studies, there's a course on important exhibitions since WWII at Bard and when I asked what shows they teach from the alternative spaces - well they don't. I was appalled.

MG: Haven't alternative spaces often been havens for art that reflects and intervenes in contemporary culture and society? So are their archives particularly important as keepers of this memory? And how does this relate to the status of
their histories as written or unwritten?
B: I am very impressed with the recent book on the history of Artists Space -- not to stick to the topic of books!
J: I think that the book is still very important, and I hope that it will be possible for all the spaces to be able to publish something like the history of Artists Space. I think in a way (without sounding corny) we are the conscience of a lot of people and of the period in which we exist. Our programs reflect the important issues of our time.
M: Alternative spaces occupy a very unpopular social position. But the material we have presented has value now in Europe and will have value here in 100 years.
MG: That's interesting, Martha - would you say that there are different factors that determine the critical or historical value of work in Europe as opposed to here?
M: I just meant that the American avant-garde is valued more by institutions in Vienna and UK than by institutions here.
R: I didn't know that, Martha.
MG: Why do you think that is?
B: Because in Europe, art is supported by the government!
R: So does that mean they don't need or have alternate spaces? Or do they have more of them?
M: There are certainly alternative spaces like Artpool in Budapest, Zone in Milan, and De Appel in Amsterdam.
R: Are alternate spaces a byproduct of capitalism then? As in - we need them. Or, another question might be, "What do alternate art spaces remember (on behalf of us all)?"
B: Gosh, I think alternative spaces are so important. I think about how important the Difference show at the New Museum was in the 1980s -- that show really preceded so much thinking related to psychoanalysis and art.
R: The New Museum is an alternate art space?
B: According to the ASAP site, which I looked at today -- it's on there! I was a bit surprised myself... But, then we get the question of how do we define this or that?
R: Well, even museums (like mine) have interesting, unknown stuff in the basement waiting to be revealed....
MG: Isn't it possible to begin as an alternative space and metamorphose into an institution?
R: Seriously, we're all doing the same thing; museums, alternate spaces... museums just move more slowly and take less risks.
J: We all have a part of that history. That's why it is so important that our archives talk to each other and are accessible together, which is something that Martha and Rick have been working on for a while. This big "digital archive project" is a big opportunity to have impact and importance, which is why I hope we can work it out so that they can connect technically.
MG: Interoperability and accessibility.
R: Exactly.
MG: One issue I'd like to talk about is preservation. Once they're digital, how will the archives survive changing file formats, etc.?
R: Digital preservation is possible, both for digital documentation and for original digital art works, but the latter are much more tricky.
B: Well, has Eva Hesse's work survived that well?
R: But of course this kind of preservation comes as an operational and budget need ON TOP of every other existing cost.
J: Rick, do you mean it is not a priority for most institutions?
R: No, just that it cannot usually be carved out of the existing budget. One cannot give up public programs, janitorial services or preserving good ol' paintings to make way for digital preservation. It's a new expense.
B: In terms of digital preservation funding, isn't it sort of bleak out there? I mean, there's the Langlois Foundation, but what other foundation/corporation is really stepping up?
R: No, I don't think it's bleak. The NEA funded us, and they're not usually a radical organization. Plus many other communities are interested in digital preservation. Congress gave the Library of Congress $100 million to tackle it.
MG: How can new media networks like Rhizome function as alternative models of digital archives -- community-centric, open-ended, constantly writing & re-writing their own histories? Or, do you think that the digital interface -- the database structure -- will change the way people experience / think about the content of the archives?
B: The open-source-ness of Rhizome's archives as well as of ASAP is so great. It allows cultural creators to self-archive, which maybe will help alleviate future challenges.
R: Self-archive is an interesting term. But how does it really work?
B: You are your own archivist! Meaning that you put up your work, tell why it is important, and so on.
R: Jon Ippolito started "The Pool" at Maine which is open like Rhizome's and we plan to start something up here at Berkeley too....
MG: The Pool is a really good example because it has such a specific interface.
B: Jon and I did an online forum about distributed creativity which featured The Pool. It's an interesting experiment in sharing.
R: Self-archiving. Yes, you can input text about your work, to help preserve the words. But preserving the actual digital work is much trickier and most artists are not set up to do it long term (especially after they die).
B: Preserving the actual work...yes, absolutely...I can't tell you how difficult it was to even show a recent Jim Campbell piece at Eyebeam, much less think about preserving it!
R: Beth: we're going to show some older Shirley Shor and Ken Goldberg works and I agree! Hard enough just to resurrect them.
J: I was recently in LA with 40 other arts organizations from around the country and it is really surprising how many places are NOT thinking about this at all, And that is scary. My concern is that the media organizations will have it more together than we visual arts spaces do.
B: Media organizations – meaning Harvestworks or EAI?
J: Anyone more savvy about technology -- Eyebeam, Rhizome, etc.
R: The digital organizations may not be more savvy, but they're more pressed for time. They cannot afford to wait 20 years.
J: Of course Eyebeam has more technology information, while places like Exit Art, FF, White Columns, Artists Space, Creative Time, are way behind.
B: It was a different time when those important spaces came into being. How do we go back and go forward?
MG: Exit Art and Franklin Furnace have always experimented a lot with technology, so it's not surprising that you would be on the leading edge of visual art organizations.
R: I think it’s about vision too. Martha and Jeanette see beyond the latest Monet exhibition!
B: That’s true. At Eyebeam we record everything digitally--audio and visual. The question is what do we do with the records? I’m fascinated with podcasting – any thoughts?
J: We are doing a podcast of the current show. I think it’s a great tool to communicate to a larger and younger group.
R: What's funny too is the pace of discourse around this. Net.artists and curators communicate via listservs and blogs, not via conferences, journals and books, so the pace is much faster.
B: Well, it does seem like the "latest and greatest" way to record and preserve.
R: It might be useful to tease apart "record" from "access" from "preserve" -- very different activities, but often conflated.
MG: Are listservs criticism?
B: Or, if I can add, do they promote or inhibit criticism?
MG: Or, produce or correct criticism?
R: I would suggest that listservs are criticism, but they are not Criticism. In the same sense as modern vs. Modern. They are discourse, but they are not recognized by any existing (cultural/Academic) authorities.
B: You can get so much information from a listserv. But do you actually want to write to the list? It takes a certain personality, I think.
R: It does take a different personality; it's a different culture really.
B: Do you think online forums are dead?
R: In the same way that many folks feel uncomfortable sipping wine and standing at an art opening...
B: Yes, I agree, I'd rather see the art myself and put my kids to sleep!
MG: On the new media listservs lately, much discussion has centered around mainstream critical writing about new media, and how "wrong" it is.
B: Which listservs?
MG: Rhizome, especially.
R: Yes, I often feel that the mainstream art world still does not "get it." But that's nothing new (to either digital art or any alternate/emerging genre), is it?
J: Well, we are also part of the mainstream. We disagree with that reality but we are part of it. I don't think of what we do as alternative, it's just another way to
express the culture.
R: Good point, Jeanette. I am comfortable as part of the mainstream. Just that
my area of digital art is a specific part of the mainstream, not well understood by
certain other parts perhaps.
B: Eyebeam has had some experiences with reporters who really don't
understand new media at all. It takes a toll.
MG: I feel like a certain self-consciousness has been generated about how the
lists have to take on the task of writing new media. Which may or may not be
true.
B: Too bad art critics can't be more interdisciplinary. Maybe the next generation
of critics will be?
R: I often feel (no insult intended) that the mainstream mistakenly views digital art
through the lens of visual art alone. Sometimes I think digital discourse would
make more sense in the performing arts communities....
MG: Especially with web-based work, I think there's a tension between
expectation and experience - net art is not much like surfing a commercial site,
but should it be?
B: It should be intuitive!
MG: I wonder if digital archives, once they are online, will deal with the same
questions of database and interface that a lot of net art has struggled with.
R: Well, Mariam, I guess net.art is like video art in that it occupies a "commercial"
media space, but on purpose to leverage that confusion and bypass the baggage
of whether it's "ART." The question is whether it's interesting content...
B: Perhaps we are still at the stage where net artists are so fascinated with the
technology that the content is secondary, and perhaps in the future this will
reverse.
R: Beth, I clearly see a generational aspect to what you are saying in my
teaching.
B: Will you explain how so? I'm curious.
R: The "first wave" of net.artists were often formally concerned with the medium,
but younger kids are not so much.
B: Yes, that's true, but I still think we have a ways to go, don't you?
R: Well, formalism or other ways of commenting on the medium itself is not bad
per se, but we do need to allow a broadening of the practice in net.art.
That is, we need to allow "alternative practice" even within net.art.
J: The next generation is so comfortable with what we call new media that they
probably don't even call it that. I recently asked one of my interns if he
remembered a time before computers and he said "No, only a time of slower
computers." Gulp!
MG: I know we're still a ways off from that point, but have any of you given
thought to what your archives will look/feel like online? Will they be archive art?

//here's how far you got in the edit
B: Maybe someone will just invent a way to archive new media in all its formats?
Any takers?
MG: Has anyone thought about interface yet?
J: We are not there yet.
R: Design/design/re-design...the million dollar question! I have not given interface a lot of thought yet, except to separate it from my content. I want my content to be adaptable to different venues with different interfaces.
MG: That's a great point.
R: By "my content" I mean digital archives I'm working with.
B: The question for Eyebeam is once you have archival material, how do you deposit it? where? why?
MG: I was thinking about the Database Imaginary show at the Banff Centre last year, or the show at PS1 a while back about storage and archiving in art. It would be great to get some of the artists who have been interested in archives and databases involved in the design of your interfaces.
R: I love shows about archiving, storing, and libraries and information. GAS has a photo series up now by an Australian artist who took photos of documentation at AMNH. So cool...and interesting.
B: Oohh -- I think immediately of Kevin and Jennifer McCoy and their "database" art.
MG: Maybe multiple possible artist interfaces, adding another level of interest, attraction, accessibility, value or whatever you want to call it.
R: Since I'm all about separating content from interface, I'd like to have in fact multiple interfaces to my archive representing different cultural readings of the material.
J: I think we are visual art spaces so our online archives of course will be well designed - congratulations to Martha and Franklin Furnace who continuously redesign their site - but we shouldn't over-design it. It has to be really easy to use.
MG: True.
J: I am still amazed how many people don't know how to use the internet, my trainer only checks her email once a week!
R: Yes, we need a "basic" library-type interface for a certain use of the material, and then perhaps other interfaces too.
M: Speaking of digital archives, we save all the previous avatars of FF's website, never throw anything away.
J: I find now that we are being approached by more artists that work with technology, and what you call "net.art" and we try to include it naturally within the context of the show and not isolate it, but I feel that there is still a distance between the artists. Rick, how can we bring net artists together with other artists, I fear that they feel some kind of intimidation here.
MG: Jeanette, one of the ideas that's been discussed on Rhizome lately is that net art is really a time-based art, not a visual art.
R: Yes, thus my comment about "performing arts" communities...
J: All art is visual.
MG: All art is visual, yes, but the idea being that what is missing from some critical / viewer understanding of net art is the time element, that is the idea that
you should be giving it that precise duration of attention that you give to a film or video.

B: Do viewers really spend time with net art and/or video … meaning the time needed to really see the piece?

MG: Well, some net art is about computational time, i.e. infinite time.

R: Yes, Jeanette, most art is visual (except for sound art). But nonetheless, visuality may often not be the main purpose for a work of net.art. For my own net.art for instance, it's much more about constructing a social environment, watching and organizing interactions, than it is about visual interface.

J: Well I guess I disagree, I think even sound is visual, look at the writings of Kandinsky,

M: How about all art is conceptual? This is where the visual, performing, and net.art worlds meet.

MG: I agree, Martha.

R: Visual Art has a specific language and discourse that does not always apply to digital / media art, which is sometimes more time-based or performative.

J: This is very interesting and needs more discussion (and probably wine) but I am not referring to specific visual art terms

R: Also some digital art is specifically invisible; it's about the invisible, microscopic processes within the machinery (process being the operative concept though). Jeanette, I know you're not talking about specific visual art terms, but I meant to say that the language of visual arts is sometimes what creates that separation from digital artists. Digital artists are not so much about visuality as visual artists; it's often there, but as a byproduct, not a central concern. So, to see it as central misses the point (as does the mainstream art media).

MG: Yes, because sometimes digital artists are speaking another language entirely - a (mathematical) language of process.

J: LOL. I was thinking the opposite to be true.

MG: I really liked your phrase about constructing social environments for interaction in your work, Rick. It seemed relevant also to what Franklin Furnace funds these days - live art on the Internet - that idea of the net as a social, performative space.

R: Yes, I think of my work as "social sculputure" in the Beuys sense. Sometimes more than visual art. And certainly not all net.artists work like this, but some do.

MG: I definitely do!

J: Rick, I totally understand what you are saying, I just feel that as someone who looks at art, enjoys art, etc. there are a lot more similarities for me in all of these methods of working.

R: So, I guess in the end we're all right (how nice eh?) beause even net.art includes the visual centered (John Simon) and the performative (us) and other strains as well.

M: Adrianne Wortzel just launched a robot that provides psychoanalytic sessions over the Internet, which completely conflates the body of the artist and the body of the net.
B: I need that!
MG: Eliza Redux, right?
B: She showed a prototype of that work at Eyebeam last year.
J: Rick and Mariam, I might not use the same specific language as you do, but I also found myself at the other end of the divide when I was in graduate school for art history. That’s exactly why I started Exit Art with Colo - to exit from all those boundaries of definitions.
R: Jeanette, I agree that all artists have a lot in common - creative process, etc. and to some extent visuality often, but oftentimes that latter focus is actually the area of difference (among sameness). Seeing art without boundaries is great, but oftentimes it ends up that the "sameness" by default is the hegemonic discourse of the visual arts.
J: Rick, not having boundaries does not mean having sameness, which I know is not what you were saying.
R: We're in spiritual agreement, Jeanette. All else is just the flesh talking.
J: Martha and I used to spend countless nights on the phone, way into the night, commiserating about how misunderstood we were. Remember, Martha?
R: I love that image, Jeanette!
M: We should do it over IM these days.
J: And now we find ourselves trying to define things so exactly for the archives.
MG: I think one of the reasons why placing the archives online seems to make so much sense is because the net is at the same time at the margins of culture and wide open -- it's ripe for your intervention. Ω
1. Could you tell us about the work you're showing in the Biennial?
2. Could you have possibly made this work outside of Sharjah? How is it of this place, if at all?
3. What challenges have you faced so far in thinking about and realising the work?
4. Who is this work for?

We're producing a new video for the Biennial, with the working title "Smile, you're in Sharjah." The title, as anyone who's been to Sharjah might guess, comes from this Emirate's own brand of welcome sign, spelled out in rocks and flowers in the middle of a traffic circle. The video will basically be a study of the patterns and rhythms of movement through shared spaces of the city-state, with a slight twist: we'll be intervening in some of the patterns that we film. We'll be identifying places and moments in the city and its suburbs/exurbs where inhabitants' movements are already somehow or somewhat choreographed / ritualized / syncopated. In some of those places, we'll film what we find; in others, we'll give the 'actors' we find there some minimal choreography to enact, which will heighten or make more evident for the camera their already existing patterns of behavior. Our final movement study, a kind of choreography of/for Sharjah, will emerge in the editing of the different elements together. We're hoping to construct a video that gives the viewer a sense of the cycles of this particular place - day to night, weekday to weekend, construction to demolition, labor to leisure - but also to explore the different currents of commuting and consumption required to connect and sustain those cycles.

The project is designed specifically for Sharjah, and Sharjah will be the protagonist of whatever narrative develops in the final video. We're also taking a lot of cues for our selection of places to film from interviews with inhabitants of Sharjah, which we're conducting as part of our preparation for the shoot. So the project could not be made outside of Sharjah. The greatest challenge we've faced in thinking about this project has in fact been making it specific enough to make sense within our collaborative practice, which is based on site-specificity, without having a prior long-term engagement with the place. At the proposal stage, we evaded this problem by drafting a concept for Dubai, which Mariam does know pretty well, and which allowed us to explain our methods with some specific referents. The first question that Jack had after reading the proposal was naturally, "Intriguing, but how would you do this in Sharjah?"

M: I responded that I would need to spend some time in Sharjah to figure out exactly what we could do there. The Biennial promptly flew me out for a quick research trip (at the end of October). I explored the city on foot and in cars, took photographs, talked to people informally and also recorded interviews with students at AUS about their perceptions of and relations to Sharjah as city. After reviewing together what I saw, heard and photographed, we put together the new concept. When we go back to shoot in Sharjah we will conduct several more rounds of interviews with people from various sectors of the city, which will most likely not make their way into the final project, but instead will inform our decisions on the final set of locations and shooting script. The challenge in realizing the project, meanwhile, will really be realizing the choreographic interventions, as that will involve obtaining permissions and collaborating with several different groups.

E: Having never been to Sharjah, the United Arab Emirates, or any other country nearby means I have no visceral impression of that part of the world. I have a conceptual impression from my research, but nothing sensorial or tangible. My inexperience with the
social/ natural environment particular to Sharjah means that I will have to develop movement that embodies characteristics of Sharjah very quickly, without months upon months, or years upon years of refinement. I think, though, that challenge will keep the work very fresh, very present. We also plan to be working with and choreographing people with no dance/acting experience, which will be something new for me, but it is actually something I am quite excited to do. Because we'll also be improvising with people in the moment / on the spot, I won't have worked with them at all until just before we shoot, and so I won't know the range of movement of which their bodies are capable, or what they are willing to try. I will have to find a language to extrapolate movement out of these bodies that I have never worked with before. Improvising performed responses to specific sites has become common practice for us over the years of our collaboration; the new element here will be working with non-performers as performers in the improvisations. While all of our collaborative projects share the common objective to film performances that are equally specific to the medium of video and to the place where they were made, this project will also, I think, link our collaborative work more closely or more evidently to some elements of my individual practice - for example, my work about the reconstructions of the city of Kabul and my warm data projects, which are structured around questions and answers, like the interviews that are feeding into this project. With this project I am able to continue exploring the environment's effect on people, and people's effect on the environment. A subtle thread of this exploration is woven through each previous video piece, without overt proclamations or judgments - rather, the theme is embedded in the way the work presents a symbiotic relationship between site and physicality. We are making this work, selfishly, for us first - the project presents so many new opportunities and challenges and problems to be solved. For those who live / work / study in Sharjah, second, because hopefully the process of engaging with us and being asked to think through (in the interviews) and act out (in the video) their relationships to the city will be enjoyable for them. For the international Biennial audience who are most likely to see the final video, third, because it might offer them a different perspective on the city and the roles that even they might play while passing through it.

5. If you weren't an artist, what would you be doing?
6. Where do you do your best thinking?
7. How do you feel about artist statements?

Perhaps I would be a botanist or a geologist because, in my present incarnation, in my free time I like collecting rocks, bones, feathers, plants and flowers. I do my best thinking while taking a walk, after dancing, and in the bath.

I think my alternate-world career paths are probably anthropologist, semiotician, or sysadmin. In this world, if I couldn't be an artist, I would probably be a professor (which I am anyway) or a programmer. I do my best thinking in hotel rooms, airports, and on my living room couch, almost always while seeming to do something else entirely. As far as artist statements are concerned, I find that writing about specific projects can be surprisingly helpful - sometimes you discover a lot about your work while trying to describe it - but writing an all-purpose artist statement is almost always painful, because trying to define your entire practice in perpetuity is fairly futile if that practice is (as it should be) flexible and changing. What disturbs me most about artist statements is generally the lack of proofreading.

8. What rhymes with Sharjah? Not a whole lot in English - but a few words in Arabic, maybe!
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AFGHANISTAN: BETWEEN THE TIGER AND THE PRECIPICE

This Pashto proverb, a particularly Afghan version of the “rock and hard place,” was recently quoted by a man from Helmand asked by an IWPR interviewer to describe his present situation. Since spring 2007, Helmand – a Southern province that produces close to 40% of the world’s opium - has become the flashpoint for confrontations between NATO, the Talibban, local poppy farmers, drug traffickers, the International Security Assistance Force, Afghan National Army soldiers involved in the Afghan government’s much-vaulted but largely failed drug eradication campaign and local law officers increasingly perceived as corrupt or outright criminal.

While the Helmand’s confusion of victors, victims, actors and reactors, represents an extreme even within Afghanistan, it is by no means an anomaly. In today’s Afghanistan, those armed to fight the rule of law frequently don fake police uniforms to carry out their attacks, but the real highway police are arrested for real highway robbery; the same Taleb who once burned fields of poppies now protect them (while swearing alternately that they do and do not); the mujahedin claim to have surrendered their guns to the disarmament process, but suddenly everyone has a brand new Kalashnikov; the government supports media freedom, as long as journalists are willing to issue retractions every time an official objects to how he is presented on TV; and former enemies join hands in a new political United Front and talk of peace, all in order to grant themselves amnesty for the crimes they committed during years of brutal battle against each other. A stalled and infighting Parliament and the President’s role in a kidnapping negotiation that set free an Italian journalist while leaving his Afghan driver and translator dead at the hands of the Talibban have sown doubt and distrust of the central government in the provinces.

When statistics were compiled for 2006, revealing it as the worst year since 2001 for school violence, with 197 schools torched and 64 students and teachers killed, the public saw that soon the current administration’s educational programs, too, could crumble into dust. With only half of all school-age children remaining in school, the government has now admitted it cannot protect them and organized local communities into their own school defense committees.

Little wonder, then, that ordinary Afghans have come to view promises of support, hope, and a better future with skepticism; whenever the military strikes – whichever military (or militia) it might be -- all they see are the civilian casualties. And even when it comes to those casualties – an increasingly explosive issue in Afghanistan – no one can agree on the numbers, perhaps because in a place like Helmand, no one can walk between the tiger and the precipice forever without finally, reluctantly perhaps, choosing which way to fall. [Mariam Ghani]

SOURCES:
Institute for War & Peace Reporting, Afghan Recovery Reports Nos. 260(7/16/07), 258(6/29/07), 257(6/19/07), 253(5/17/07), 251(4/27/07), 248(3/29/07), 245(3/13/07), 241(2/9/07), 239(1/19/07), with reporting by Hafizullah Gardesh & Wahidullah Amani, Kabul; Sayed Yaqub Ibrahimi, Mazar-e-Sharif; and IWPR trainees, Helmand.
http://www.iwpr.org/

http://www.rferl.org/

IMAGE CREDITS:
Background image: poppy pods, by Flickr user visual density, via Creative Commons attribution license; modified by Mariam Ghani.
Bottom right images: supply drop from a C-130 and Afghan artillery unit firing a Soviet D-30 cannon in combat, photographed December 9th, 2006 by Flickr user Sheph, via Creative Commons nc-nd-attribute-sharealike license.
When I first traveled to Kabul in the last days of December 2002, completing the same diaspora in reverse as thousands of other Afghan-Americans that year, I was lucky enough to have a precise artistic mission that gave shape to the often overwhelming rush of impressions generated by the oddly familiar disorientation of being in my father’s country for the first time. That mission was to create a project about the reconstruction of Kabul that would take as its starting point a video that I would shoot myself during my trip, but would then expand to include multiple perspectives on the complex processes transforming the city through a series of interventions by collaborators invited to update and revise my view of reconstruction. At the moment when my plane landed on the asphalt strip of Bagram Airport and taxied past the crumpled carcasses of helicopter wrecks gone by, the precise nature of that collaboration was yet to be determined, but I knew that the intended venue for the project – the exhibition Exit Biennial: The Reconstruction at the venerable New York alternative space Exit Art – was conceived as a show of site-specific installations that would evolve continuously over its three-month run. So it made sense to set up a collaboration that could feed the evolution of the piece from a video that captured a single, static moment in time (albeit through moving images) into an installation that would be responsive both to changes in the situation in Kabul, the city into which it would provide a portal, and its immediate situation in the context of Exit Art’s new raw space, which would be inaugurated with this constantly self-reinventing show.

As I drove through Kabul over the next two weeks, camera pointed out the window as the car wound through congested traffic circles, busy markets, bustling ministries, eerily vast Soviet housing projects, embassies and NGOs barricaded with sandbags and razor wire, and everywhere, at every turn, the construction sites with their steady rhythm of activity, a video began to emerge that explored the idea of reconstruction as both a process and a metaphor. The process was clearly both the literal renovation and new construction going on all around me, and also the bureaucratic promises of large-scale social and economic redevelopment that as yet were visible only in the failures of the past, like the unfinished apartment blocs from the Soviet era now occupied by hundreds of returnees. The metaphor became the much more personal way in which I was, like many other Afghan-Americans suddenly forced onto intimate terms with a heritage that had formerly seemed remote and inaccessible,
engaged in my own reconstruction of Afghanistan – piecing together an image of this place (embodied for me in the city which was the only part of the country I was able to visit myself) from the scraps of information transmitted in family stories, traditions and recipes, or read between the lines of mass media reports. When I shot the last part of the video, the last night before I left Kabul, in the bedroom of my parents’ house, it was a private performance where I took off the clothes I had been wearing to navigate the city as an American woman and dressed myself in my father’s (traditional Afghan men’s) clothes instead. When, back in New York, I made this performance the anchor of the final video, I was acknowledging that for me the literal reconstruction of Kabul – this public, political activity humming away on the other side of the world – had become part of my personal construction of an identity that was also undergoing radical change.

So where does collaboration fit into an artistic practice as personal as the (re)construction of identity? Uneasily, at first. The collaboration I had set up during my trip to Kabul, with the young video and photography students of the AINA Afghan Media Center (http://www.ainaworld.org, an NGO with the mission to train the next generation of Afghan journalists to report their own stories), was designed to provide updates on the real reconstructions taking place in Kabul for the project’s New York audience and also to open up that audience for the students’ work, giving them their first professional outlet. After running through a few possible scenarios for transferring material back and forth, we settled on the idea of setting up a weblog for the project. This necessitated another collaboration on my part, with Exit Art programmer Ed Potter, who adapted, rewrote and added on to existing models and modules of blogger code in order to create a weblog (now at http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/index.php) to which multiple users could upload and caption multiple files in multiple formats (QuickTime video and audio, JPEG images, PDF documents), over dial-up connections, with an interface as simple as those familiar from email attachments. Once the blog was working and online, already a few weeks into the exhibition, the anxious wait for the first transmissions from Kabul began. In the meantime I had decided to invite more bloggers into the mix, thinking that it would be interesting to get some more perspectives on either the literal or the metaphorical side of reconstruction from other Afghan-Americans -- including my younger brother Tarek in California, who had just returned from a year of working for the interim Afghan government in Kabul.

After some prodding on my part, these blog-based collaborations did bear some fruit: the Brooklyn-based poet Zohra Saed contributed some lovely, reflective texts; Tarek uploaded a few key development documents; I tracked Western
media coverage of the reconstruction; somehow among the staff changes and
general disorganization at AINA (4 different teachers exchanged emails with me
over 4 months), one photography student, Masood, produced and uploaded a
series of photographic studies of construction sites, and one video student,
Nassima, sent a thrilling three-minute video essay on the Malalai maternity
hospital (later followed by two others on other aspects of reconstruction). In the
meantime, however, I was pursuing a different kind of collaboration onsite at Exit
Art, where I had set up a replica of a UNHCR-issue refugee tent to house the
three-channel video, website kiosk (an ancient iMac on a desk with a folding
chair), and a carpet and cushions that every Saturday for three months became
the stage for a public dialogue performance. On those Saturdays I would sit on
one of the cushions and invite visitors to the tent to sit down with me to watch the
video; I would then serve them tea and World Food Programme biscuits while
offering to answer their questions about the project, the reconstruction of Kabul,
and its broader Afghan context. The conversations that grew out of this invitation
almost always produced unexpected revelations not only about my visitors’
various relationships to the idea, image and reality of Kabul, but also (through
their questioning about the personal motivations behind my project, and the
exchange of family diaspora stories usually initiated by that questioning) about
their own evolving constructions of identity in relation to changing configurations
of family and cultural networks. Moreover, each invitation issued and accepted,
each question asked that I could successfully answer in this dedicated space,
gave me more authority and more ease in assuming the new public, rather than
private, Afghan-American identity that had been forced onto me after September
11th, 2001 – when the questions had come fast and thick, without invitation and
without respite, in every arena of my life, and which had triggered the drastic
reorganization of my personal diasporic network.

After the Exit Art exhibition had run its course, the kabul-reconstructions.net
website had received enough press and was being linked to from enough other
pages that it seemed worthwhile to continue the blog experiment. As time went
by, though, that particular set of collaborations seemed to have lost all
momentum, and my enthusiasm for maintaining the site as a media archive was
waning. What was missing from the site was the galvanizing input of strangers,
new visitors who would interact with the material from the fresh vantage point of
relative ignorance and bring new questions to the project. I went back to Ed
Potter with a sketch of a new section for the site, Ask A Question
(http://www.kabul-reconstructions.net/ask), which would issue the same invitation
to the casual net visitor that I had made in person from my tent in Hell’s Kitchen.
We created a second PHP/MySQL database that allowed anyone to submit
questions and enabled any of the bloggers to submit answers to them, explaining to the audience that I and the other participants would transmit the questions to Kabul through our diasporic networks – in my case, usually by calling or emailing a family member – which would then try to find the answer and carry it back to the site within a few weeks of the asking. The original blog database would now be accessible under the section Follow the Information, and would also take its broad directional cues from the questions submitted by viewers.

To inaugurate the new incarnation of the project, I sent out an email invitation with the subject line “www.kabul-reconstructions.net/ask: open for questions.” The body of the email explained how to submit a question, how the questions would be answered, and added the additional incentive that questions submitted by mid-December of 2003 would help to determine what footage I would shoot and add to the site during my second trip to Kabul, exactly one year after my first visit; it also asked people to forward the invitation to anyone who might have an unanswered question about reconstruction. In addition to sending this invitation to my own list of contacts, I posted it to Rhizome, Nettime, and Afghaniyat (an Afghan news mailing list with about 11,000 members). Rhizome published the invitation on their front page, and almost everyone who received the email then forwarded it on to more lists, both personal and public; the invitation turned up on Sarai in India and C3 in Eastern Europe, and links to the site appeared on other blogs along with various flavors of commentary. As someone new to the wide-open world of net art, I greeted this phenomenon with grateful wonder – which became even more pronounced when surprisingly specific, difficult and provocative questions started to turn up on the Ask A Question page of the site.

I quickly became absorbed in the reconstruction again, setting aside other work to race down each fresh track of exploration indicated by a new question. I often posted two or three answers to each question over a period of weeks or sometimes months, as new ideas or connections would occur to me or new information became available. And my confidence – or maybe my conviction that I was an Afghan in something more than just name – grew as I found that I was able to answer a surprising number of question through my own knowledge or research. Through their interaction with the website, these mostly anonymous strangers were placing their trust in my newly acquired and publicly proclaimed authority to represent Kabul, which however was derived entirely from my private identity and private, mostly familial networks and which acquired its authority in the public sphere primarily from that very trust – in fact it was being collaboratively constructed by them at the moment of their questioning. Another interesting feature of this transaction was that most of the questioners had turned
to my privately-constructed network for answers precisely because the information they wanted was not forthcoming on the usual public channels.

This motivation provoked a flashback to my frequent bemusement as a teenager faced with high school and college classmates completely ignorant of any but the broadest strokes of world politics. Didn’t everyone live in a house where you got world news not just from the television but also from the telephone? Long distance might be expensive, but at least it didn’t come with sound-bite time limits. Diasporic networks like my Afghan-American web are amazing carriers of information; in order to maintain the unities of extended families across widening gaps of geography and culture it is necessary that the networks process and distribute not only gossipy intimacies and moral imperatives but also precise and highly sensitive social, political, and cultural barometers that register every change in temperature in the homeland and all its satellites. Through these migrant networks, the United States is far more connected than it appears to all the sites considered by the majority of its citizens to be irrevocably foreign and inevitably strange. So when I became the personal source for answers to the questions about Afghanistan being accumulated by all my newly curious acquaintances at the end of 2001, at first I resented the intrusion into my private life; then I began to appreciate that I really did have, if not all the answers, at least a much more effective way of asking the questions, already just a dial tone away. Making the private family network into a visible manifestation on the Internet, and the private transaction of question and answer into a public exchange in the gallery and online, was obviously more efficient and, less obviously, became a transformative act of performance: my own performance of the border between Kabul and New York, between my American and Afghan identities, as a line I could cross daily with ease, blurring its contours with every step.

When I returned to Kabul in December 2003, I had many more missions to give shape to my days: find and photograph a particular school for one viewer who wanted to find it a U.S. sponsor; shoot ten minutes of crowd footage in a marketplace for another; document the Telekiosk computer classes in the post office for a questioner interested in the role of the Internet in daily life; shoot a follow-up to the reconstruction video for a curator in Brazil; ask people if they were happy; research the roles of women and technology; conduct interviews about the new constitution; attend the Loya Jirga. I walked off the plane, down the newly immaculate airstrip, and into my mother’s arms; then into the car and down the roads familiar as dreams by now from hours in front of the looping monitors; I was home.
Imagine yourself the cartographer of a “brave new world.” How would you draw your map? Would you reproduce, redistribute, or erase existing borders? Does a utopian project aspire to a borderless state, open to refugees and migrants from other communities, or cherish the borders that separate its “ideal society” from societies characterized as less than ideal?

Our current perspective suggests that the elision of borders does not untangle the questions of migration, nor solve the larger problems that motivate both forced and economic migrants to relocate. In the new “Fortress Europa,” for example, we find a community of European nations whose mutual agreements structure a series of borders more permeable than ever before, but only for those few defined as acceptable members of that community. In North American, Pan-American, and WTO trade agreements, we see a very specific set of rules formulated to shuttle consumables from their origins to their consumers, which effectively funnel resources from the least to the most powerful. In failed, failing and fragile states across the world, including the United States itself in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, we can track the desperate movements of internal refugees, displaced and dispossessed without ever crossing a national border. And within our particular circle of interest, the policies affecting immigrants in the USA, we hear story after story exemplifying the peculiarly vulnerable position of the stateless in the cycle of detention and deportation; those who cannot be “repatriated” because they have no (officially recognized/administered) homeland to return to can be indefinitely held in our immigration prisons, where everyone who arrives is considered a risk to national security until proven otherwise.

If the borderless world seems like less than a dream, how then should we dream the border? We begin by considering the border neither as a simple “line in the sand” drawn to demarcate the furthermost edges of a nation-state, delineating its exit and entry points, nor as the increasingly (re)current militarized model of border, a protective armature securing a territory from invasion. Instead, we conceive the border as a complex network of relations between places, communities, and companies both nearby and far-flung. This border is the medium through which pass flows not only of people but also of capital, resources, energy, ideas, products, power and influence. In this mode of analysis, our discussion of an existing border like that between the US-Mexico not only encompasses the current political debate on keeping the “undesirable” southern neighbors from crossing north (with all the attendant security fences, unmanned aerial vehicles, and tacit license for freelance vigilantism), but also examines the history of that border, the geopolitical shifts it has undergone over the centuries, how California and other border US states were once and in some ways will always be Mexican. We also consider the present of the NAFTA-enabled schemes whereby US corporations shift their production facilities south into the virtual no-mans-lands of “free trade zones” and maquiladora company towns like Ciudad Juarez, keeping up with the US demand for cheaper products by moving jobs to a place where labor is also cheap. We map the relationship of the hard geopolitical (international) border to the multitude of soft (economic, social, cultural, and intranational) borders dependent on it. And we do not overlook the various pipelines and trafficking networks that bring people, goods and resources from all over the region to the US through the border with Mexico.
Rather than imagining a borderless world, which would allow an even more free flow of capital and resources from the powerless to the powerful, we need to reposition existing borders as productively precarious: zones where contingent, conflicted, critical and contestational positions can be produced. Staking out our place on the border allows us to engage two directions at once: north and south, east and west, oppression and resistance, past and future. Around the border, any border, the fears and hopes, friends and enemies, corruptions and crises of a nation-state and its imagined community are clearly marked and understood. No matter how many fences are erected or walls built up, the architecture of a border is inherently porous; it always preserves some measure of transparency. We can and should look not just at borders, but through them – playing on the power of the border to filter and frame ideas as well as people and territory. The border, perpetually susceptible, is always a site of potential resistance.

Taking this idea as a point of departure, the accompanying text piece playfully intervenes in documents extracted from "official" discourse around the sharp rise in surveillance and suspension of civil liberties that accompany US border policing, framed by President Bush as an inevitable consequence of post 9/11 security threats. Specific terms that repeat themselves throughout these documents are correctively redacted and replaced with an alternate constellation of terms that illuminate the real tactics and motivations underlying current constructions of “dangerous” and “secure” borders and border crossers.


\[\text{For definitions and statistics on “internally displaced persons” see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internally_displaced_person.}\]

\[\text{Current immigration policies in the US, UK, Europe and Australia have instituted mandatory detention for asylum seekers until their cases have been reviewed and decided, which can take anywhere from a few months to several years and often results not in the offering of asylum but the deportation of the asylum seeker to their country of origin. (While most of the laws in effect provide for “humanitarian parole” from mandatory detention, this parole is granted only in a very few cases.) For stateless migrants and asylum seekers marked for deportation, the result is “indefinite detention” as the deporting country endeavors to contract another state to accept the “return” of the rejected refugee. Palestinians are most likely to fall into this immigration limbo. Notable examples include Ahmed Ali-Kateb in Australia and Mohammed Bachir in the US.}\]

\[\text{For an example of this discourse see President Bush’s November 2005 speech on border security and immigration reform in Arizona, archived at http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/speech_0263.shtm.}\]

\[\text{AFSC’s The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Activism Since NAFTA, published in 1999, provides the following definition of maquiladoras:}\]
The maquiladoras—foreign-owned assembly plants clustered along the Mexico-U.S. border—are one manifestation of a worldwide trend in which industrial production is concentrated in areas of the world with an abundant supply of low-wage labor. Also known as “export-processing” plants, such factories operate in economic enclaves or “free-trade zones” with relatively little interrelationship with the economies of their host countries. Capital investment, upper management, and even supplies and components are brought in from outside, and products are likewise destined for foreign markets.

For more information on maquiladoras and Ciudad Juarez, see http://www.afsc.org/mexico-us-border/learnabout.htm
Imagine yourself the cartographer of a "brave new world." How would you draw your map? Would you reproduce, redistribute, or erase existing borders? Does a utopian project aspire to a borderless state, open to refugees and migrants from other communities, or cherish the borders that separate its "ideal society" from societies characterized as less than ideal?

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APSC's "The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Activism Since NAPTA," published in 1999, provides the following definition of maquiladoras:

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For more information on maquiladoras and Ciudad Juarez, see http://www.nfsc.org/mexico-us-border/learnabout.html.

The American people understand the stakes in this struggle. They want their children to be safe and their city to be restored. Congress has done little in the last three weeks since the last recess, and they should not leave for the Easter recess without getting the Senate bill to my desk.

Thank you.

END 9:25 A.M. EDT

Return to this article at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2008/03/20080313.html

Unfortunately, the Kaweah Commonwealth ceased publication after slightly more than two years. The last issue, dated April 20, 1960, was published in March 1960. By that time, the paper was a monthly and had suffered severe financial problems, as well as a battle over who was printing the paper. That final issue was a poor quality newspaper that was published by a group of former staff members who wanted to continue the newspaper's publishing. The newspaper's staff consisted of former employees who had worked for the newspaper since its inception in 1957. The newspaper was able to continue publishing until April 1960, when the staff decided to cease publication, citing financial difficulties and a lack of support from the community. The newspaper had been in operation since 1957 and had published a weekly edition until March 1960, when it became a monthly publication. The newspaper was published in the city of Visalia, California, and covered local news and events, as well as national and international news. The newspaper was known for its in-depth coverage of local issues and its critical analysis of national events. The newspaper's staff included a mix of journalists, editors, and photographers who were dedicated to providing quality news coverage to the Visalia community. The newspaper's success was attributed to its high-quality journalism, strong community support, and dedication to providing accurate and timely news coverage. The newspaper's legacy continues to be remembered and celebrated in the Visalia community, and its contributions to the local and national media landscape are still recognized today.
Chitra Ganesh + Mariam Ghani have collaborated since 2004 on the project Index of the Disappeared, which is both a physical archive of post-9/11 disappearances and a mobile platform for public dialogue.

As an archive, Index of the Disappeared foregrounds the difficult histories of immigrant, ‘Other’ and dissenting communities in the U.S. since 9/11. Through official documents, secondary literature, and personal narratives, the Index archive traces the ways in which censorship and data blackouts are part of a discursive shift to secrecy that allows for disappearances, deportations, renditions and detentions on an unprecedented scale. The Index builds up its collection by collaborating with others actively engaged in political and legal challenges to the policies we track, and draws on radical archival, legal and activist traditions to select, group, and arrange information.

As a platform, the Index presents discussions on ideas and issues related to the materials it archives, and draws upon materials in the archive to create text based, site-specific works installed in a range of physical and virtual spaces, including galleries, museums, universities, community centers, libraries, conferences, publications, windows, the street, the web, and the mail. These visual forms of public dialogue are designed to confront audiences with the human costs of public policies, challenging them to re-consider the abstractions of political debate in specific, individual terms.

An index can be a trace, a signpost, an indicator or a measurement. Our Index begins in the gaps where language ends; that is, in the records of absence and absence of records where official language fails and new languages must be developed in its place. The Index in its most material form, the archive, preserves and presents the traces of redactions and erasures in the official record, alongside the words of the original actors and witnesses of the histories it explores. For the Index, the gaps in those records are not flaws in the archive, but rather the key to its organization. We configure the bits of information remaining in the public domain in order to make visible the missing links, the submerged body of secret information below the simple surface. Presenting the Index archive as an artwork-in-progress, constantly readapated to the specific sites in which it is installed, encourages visitors to approach it not as researchers seeking facts but rather with the critical awareness that the ‘facts’ they encounter are in flux, defined and redefined in relationship to time, to their context and to each other.

At the same time, the Index archive’s steadily increasing mass is a visceral measure of the slow and steady creep of the troubling policies it chronicles, through every echelon of our society and every facet of our culture. In our own research with these materials, we have tried to probe the texts for productive breaks and slippages, moments where language escapes from official to unofficial registers, from public to private domains, from political to poetic testimony. These moments become the extracts and fragments of the Index, literal signs and visible trails that we circulate in the wider world.
WHAT WAS SOCIALISM, AND WHAT COMES NEXT?

CAPITALISM

SOCIALISM
Notes on the Disappeared: Towards a Visual Language of Resistance

by Chitra Ganesh + Mariam Ghani

By proposing new terms through which stories can be told and issues framed, our collaborative visual project—drawing from an ongoing participatory inquiry into the human cost of US immigration policy—aims to make critical interventions in how narratives of disappearance are produced on all sides of the US immigration debate. We explore two key features of disappearance: the mass immigrant detentions and deportations sweeping the US since 9/11, and the radical limitation of representation, by both law and mass media, of the immigrants who are caught in the system.

Over the past few years, immigrants and their advocates have come to understanding how gag orders, media stereotypes and convenient abstractions hang like a veil between people directly impacted by detention and deportation, and the majority whose silence consents to the disappearances. The struggle to generate a collective history of individual disappearances has therefore been at the core of activist initiatives addressing this crisis.

However, much of the advocacy work around detention and deportation is mobilized through the law or mass media itself. Thus, narratives of resistance assembled by that advocacy risk being subjected to the very codes and language they seek to contest. For example, the recurring use of directed testimony, statistics and expert witnesses in activist documentaries about detention and deportation both recall courtroom dynamics, and reiterate the pundit-driven rhythms of network news. Our work departs from this understanding of the situation of post-9/11 disappearance, where individuals are ‘disappeared’ for a second time in the narrative and troubling visual representation offered as their history in mass-mediated and legal domains. Our artistic inquiry thus exists in continual tension between collaboration with the activist movement towards a collective history, and an effort to reconceptualize the terms through which that history is now addressed.

We seek to mine the rich possibilities of the visual as a site where audiences come face to face with the specific details of lives that are impacted by post-9/11 disappearance, but must also engage with the core cultural and systemic breakdowns that lie beneath current events. Our common belief is that this deeper awareness can be activated by a commitment to form as content, and a profound engagement with the medium and materials through which ideas of political art are communicated. Through translations and deconstructions that reconstrue viewers’ perspectives, we hope to produce unexpected visual experiences that trigger a reconsideration of social codes and histories.

In this project, we collect from the everyday past lives of the disappeared the unquantifiable data which otherwise goes unnoticed. We create a space for this information to be read and considered without being reduced; we do so by framing it within intersecting nonlinear narratives where meaning is produced in both the convergence and disjuncture between text and image. This project shares concerns that are at the heart of our practices: an interest in exploring how memories and their repression shape moments of personal and social crisis, and the mapping of contrapuntal narratives that emerge in the border zones between cultures in conflict.

Through this active translation of raw data and formal choices that disrupt conventional modes of seeing, the Disappeared project aims to elaborate a visual language that truly exists: the descriptive and narrative conventions and one-to-one relationships accumulated in the legal and media treatment of detention and deportation cases. Our belief is that only through a visual language of resistance can a more nuanced representation and sharper analysis be articulated.
this is all you may find:

where public secrets swallow

private lives behind the bars & in between the lines

or after the question and before the answer

the unspeakable truth of

Berta Cruz...for not having an Indian last name.

your finger on the vanishing point
HOW DO YOU SEE THE DISAPPEARED?

1. WHERE ARE YOU?

The digest is delivered to me every day. I read it with my morning coffee. Reading my way with purpose but of the fog of sleep.

I read between the lines as if somewhere to be seen

pretty town with bungalows and backyards and American flags are the traces of the disappeared

the hardest-working kid I've ever seen the warm and breezy outlines of vanished years
trembling like phantom limbs in the vast blurs of the waves.

The weightless adjectives and nouns that are meant somehow to contain the arcs of lives.
3. THE QUESTIONS

The worst of it:
How random this unmaking comes to feel,
How casual the knife that slips
between the stitches.

As if you were nothing more
than the number, nationality, religion
scrawled across a case file.

The double disappearances:
first your days as you lived them,
and the nights you slept them;
then all the rich and varied language
that once described them
your many names
and sayings, words favored
on the tongue;
Reduced to this:

Mr. Ali’s father, a busdriver, was required to register
Shamefully reported to immigration authorities; she said,
and deported last year. His family stayed behind.

In 2000, Cindy Hervey, a 54-year-old 
and driver, was stopped by immigration agents in the airport.

He was in New York on a tourist visa when he fell in love

Asrar Ahmed, 42, a Pakistani immigrant,

A former Boston cab driver
Chinese woman, dead.

Where does it start?
With the lists

Or the questions?

Somewhere between the cold, hard facts
approved for entry into your secret file
and the start, anonymous light
that shines; in the story
of your dealings with the system
lies the improbable truth of who you were.
Perhaps who you still are.

The one truth you have not testified
Ovidiu Pecican

Romanian historian, essayist, novelist, short-story writer, literary critic, poet, playwright, and journalist. He is especially known for his political writings on disputed issues such as regional autonomy for Transylvania, and for his co-authorship of a controversial history textbook for 11th and 12th grade high-school students. Pecican is co-editor of Caietele Tranzitiei and a contributor to major newspapers, including Contemporanul, Cotidianul, and Ziarul Financiar. He has also written works of science fiction. He wrote 18 books and is a professor at University of Cluj, Romania.

Katherine Verdery

She earned her Ph.D. from Stanford University and comes to The Graduate Center from the University of Michigan, where she was Eric R. Wolf Collegiate Professor of Anthropology. Prior to that she spent twenty years teaching at Johns Hopkins University. She has conducted multiple field projects in Romania, investigating such themes as ethnic relations, nationalism, the transformation of socialist systems, and the changes in agricultural property relations. She is the author of The Vanishing Hectare; The Economy of Sectoral Reductions; The State, Capital, and Globalization; and Transylvanian Socialism, and What Comes Next?; National Political Lives of Dead Bodies; What Was the Author of The Vanishing Hectare; The Changes in Agricultural Property Relations. She is authoring a study on the collectivization of agriculture in 1950s Romania. Professor Verdery is a member of the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Cities, a Member of the Council of Foreign Relations, and Chair of the newly formed Information Technology, International Cooperation and Global Security Committee of the SSRRC.

Pascal Bruckner

French writer, contributor of the “Liberation”. Bruckner’s novel Bitter Moon was made into a film by Roman Polanski. His other works include The Temptation of Innocence: Living in the Age of Entitlement, Lunes de feli, Parias, and The Tears of the White Man: Compassion as Contempt. He was awarded the Académie Française Prix 2000 and Medici Prize 1995 for Essays. He is an active supporter of the US cause and the invasion of Iraq, signing letters and petitions in favour of Donald Rumsfeld, along with Romain Goupil and André Glucksmann (Le Monde, 4 March 2003).

Marina Grzinic

Philosopher and new media theoretician based in Ljubljana, Slovenia. She works at the Institute of Philosophy of the Research and Scientific Center of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts. She is professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria. She has produced more than 30 video art projects, a short film, numerous video and media installations, Internet websites and an interactive CD-ROM (ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany). Her last book is “Fiction Reconstructed: Eastern Europe, Post-Socialism and the Retro-Avant-Garde” (Vienna: Edition Selene in collaboration with Springerin, Vienna, 2000).

Saska Sassen

Ralph Lewis Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, and entenial Visiting Professor of Political Economy in the Department of Sociology at the London School of Economics. Her most recent publications include: Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages, Princeton University Press 2006; and Denationalization: Territory, Authority and Rights, Princeton University Press 2005, based on her five year project on governance and accountability in a global economy. Her other works include: Guests and Aliens, New York: New Press 1999; and her edited book Global Networks/Linked Cities, New York and London: Routledge 2002. The Global City came out in a new fully updated edition in 2001. Sassen’s books have been translated into twelve languages. She is co-director of the Economy Section of the Global Chicago Project, a member of the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Cities, a Member of the Council of Foreign Relations, and Chair of the newly formed Information Technology, International Cooperation and Global Security Committee of the SSRRC.

Vladimir Tismaneanu

Dr. Tismaneanu, born in Romania, is Professor in the Department of Government and Politics and Director of the Center for the Study of Post-Communist Societies at the University of Maryland (College Park). In 2006, Romania’s President Traian Basescu appointed Vladimir Tismaneanu chair of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania. In December 2006, President Basescu presented the conclusions of the Commission’s Report to a joint session of the Romanian Parliament.

David Walsh

Arts editor of the World Socialist Web Site, and the author of many incisive and critical essays on contemporary art and culture from a Marxist standpoint.
He was recently elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Gunalan's research interests include art and biology, robotic arts, nanotechnology and toys. 

Slavoj Zizek  
Professor at the Institute for Sociology, Ljubljana, and at the European Graduate School EGS, who uses popular culture to explain the theory of Jacques Lacan and the theory of Jacques Lacan to explain politics and popular culture. He has lectured at universities around the world. He was analysed by Jacques Alain Miller, Jacques Lacan's son in law, and is probably the most successful and prolific post-Lacanian, having published over fifty books including translations into a dozen languages. Aside from Lacan he was strongly influenced by Marx, Hegel and Schelling. In temperament, he resembles a revolutionist more than a theoretician. He was politically active in Slovenia during the 80s, a candidate for the presidency of the Republic of Slovenia in 1990; most of his works are moral and political rather than purely theoretical. Zizek was a visiting professor at the Department of Psychoanalysis, Universite Paris-VIII in 1982-3 and 1985-6, at the Centre for the Study of Psychoanalysis and Art, SUNY Buffalo, 1991-2, at the Department of Comparative Literature, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1992, at the Tulane University, New Orleans, 1993, at the Cardozo Law School, New York, 1994, at the Columbia University, New York, 1995, at the Princeton University (1996), at the New School for Social Research, New York, 1997, at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1998, and at the Georgetown University, Washington, 1999. In the last 20 years Zizek has participated in over 350 international philosophical, psychoanalytical and cultural-criticism symposiums in USA, France, United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Island, Austria, Australia, Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Spain, Brasil, Mexico, Israel, Romania, Hungary and Japan. He is the founder and president of the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, Ljubljana. Zizek’s most recent book is The Parallax View (Short Circuits, 2006). 

Chantal Mouffe   
A political theorist educated at the universities of Louvain, Paris, and Essex, Chantal Mouffe is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Westminster. She has taught at many universities in Europe, North America and Latin America, and has held research positions at Harvard, Cornell, the University of California, the institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Between 1989 and 1995 she was Directrice de Programme at the College International de Philosophie in Paris. 

Misko Suvekevic  
Professor of aesthetic and art theory at the Belgrade Faculty of music and at Interdisciplinary Studies at Belgrade University of art. Has published more than 15 books, including “Impossible Histories” (Cambridge MA, 2003) and “Politics of painting” (Kopar, 2004.). 

Ana Peralca  
Freelance curator and theorist, graduated philosophy and art history, post academic researcher of art, Curator of Jan Van Eyck Akademie (1999-2001, Maastricht), attended PhD courses at University of Amsterdam (2001-2004). Awarded UNESCO-IFPC, Jan Van Eyck subsidie, twice OSI Network Scholarship, and twice BKV (Fonds voor Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam). She gave papers on symposiums as What is the Enlightenment, Chapter 2 (Jan Van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, 2000), Intermediales (IAPL-international association for philosophy and literature, ERASMUS University, Rotterdam), but also in art centres such as Atlantis (Palaes des Beaux Arts, Brussels). She was a curator of 11 Adria Art Annale (Split, 1997/8), co-curator of Rows-Curves-knots (Oreste, Biennale in Venice, 1999), assistant curator at Indiscpline (Vanderlinden and Hoffman, Brussels, 2000), selector at Museum in Progress-Global Positions (Obrist, Der Standaard, 2001), selector at East Art Map (Irwin, 2002-2006, Afterall Publ., London/Los Angeles). She was also a selector of new media programme at Split Film Festival (Split, 1998) and Histories of the New ISEA -- International symposium of electronic arts (Stockholm-Helsinki-Talin, 2004). She is a regular contributor of art magazine Springer (Austria) and has written two programs (Media theory and Critical analysis: art today, according to Bologna convention for the Fine Arts Academy, where she was teaching as a quest lecturer. 

Jonathan L. Beller  
Visiting assistant professor of history of consciousness and literature, University of California at Santa Cruz, is the author of “Dziga Vertov and the Film of Money,” boundary 2 (1999). 

Cătălin Avramescu  
Dr. Avramescu is a political analyst, philosopher and Professor of Political Science at the University of Bucharest. He is contributor to several periodicals. His last book published was “ 

Felix Vogel  
Theoretician and curator. He is co-curator of the 100 MINUTES exhibition series, assistant curator of BUCHAREST BIENNALE 3, member of the advisory board of PAVILION and contributor for different magazines. Currently, he is living and working in Karlsruhe and Konstanz, Germany. 

Xavier Ribas  
Artist. Studies of Social Anthropology at the University of Barcelona (1990) and Documentary Photography at the Newport School of Art and Design (1993). Since 2000 he is Senior Lecturer at the University of Brighton and visiting Lecturer at the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (since 2004). as artist he exhibited around the world. 

Dana Altman  
Theoretician and writer. She studied linguistics and text theory at Exeter College at Oxford, UK, and has a doctorate in linguistics. She writes contemporary art criticism and fiction. She lives and works in New York. 

Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset  
In 1995 the artists Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset began their collaboration on what has since become a wide range of installations, performances and environmental works. They have been exhibited since then in all major art spaces around the world. 

Dan Perjovsch  
Artist and journalist living and working in Bucharest. His recent solo exhibition includes “Naked Drawing” Ludwig Museum Koln 2005, vanAbbe Museum Eindhoven or “On the other Hand” Portikus Frankfurt 2006. He participate to Istanbul Biennal 2005 and Limerick Biennal 2006 and to group show such as “I still Believe in Miracles” at ARC Muse d’Art de la Ville de Paris 2005 or normalization at Rooseum Malmo. He receive George Maciunas prize in 2004. He’s represented by Gregor Podnar Gallery Ljubljana. 

Chitra Ganesh – Mariam Ghanı  
Mariam Ghanı works in video, installation, new media (including interactive installation and net art), and tactical media (including public dialogue performance). Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally since 1999. Recent and upcoming projects include screenings at the Liverpool Biennal, the Danish Film Institute, the d.a.u.b.o. festival, Rooftop Films, Cinema East, the New York Video Festival, the Asia Society, the Boston Center for the Arts, Smart Project Space in Amsterdam, the 13a Mostra Curtacinema in Rio de Janeiro, and transmediale.03 in Berlin. Chitra Ganesh’s work explores how memory and its repression shape moments of personal and social crisis. Her work was recently included in the group exhibition 637 Feet of Running Wall at the Queens Museum, Queer Virtualite at Stonybrook University, NY, and Shaken and Stirred at Bosc Paca Modern Gallery in New York. 

Marjetica Petro  
Ljubljana-based artist and architect. Her work has been featured in exhibitions throughout Europe and the Americas, including the Sao Paulo Biennial in Brazil (1996, 2006); Skulptur Projekte in Muenster, Germany (1997); Manifesta 3 in Ljubljana, Slovenia (2000); and The Structure of Survival at the Venice Biennial (2003); as well as in solo shows at the