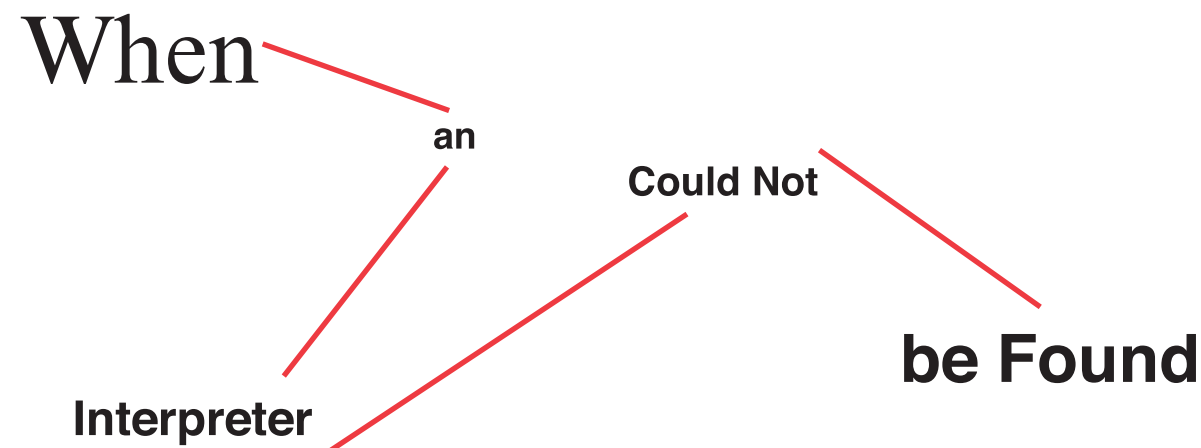


BROKE  
N  
GLISH





After 2001, rightwing anti-immigrant groups were able to rebrand themselves as super-patriots. The rise of the Minutemen militia came about in this context. At the same time, nativism was also barricaded at times by a pro-immigrant politics that seemingly (perhaps temporarily) had sturdier roots in America than it does in Europe. Consider for a moment that Reagan era, when a 1986 law<sup>1</sup> gave amnesty and a path to legalization for undocumented migrants who had been in America since 1982, or had worked on a farm as seasonal labour. The political process, in this instance, included a desire to reward those immigrants who had no criminal record, and who were willing to give labor, especially on the farm—landscape of labor deficit and symbolism. But in more recent times, such laws seem less likely (although the DREAM Act is an exception), because undocumented migrants are now permanently twinned with the idea of “security threat.”

In Europe, anti-immigrant groups had great trajectory and resonance as far back as the 1980s. In Germany, church asylum and anti-racist groups had tried to popularize the slogan “Kein Mensch ist illegal” with mixed success. They also joined forces with other European coalitions pressing for the rights of “sans papiers.” But these concepts became harder to argue in the last decade. After the 2005 London bombings, anti-migrant sentiment intensified as Tony Blair reminded the British people that immigration was no longer a right, but rather a privilege.

“Loyalty” and “belonging” now started to be framed through instruments such as a proposed “Britishness” test and a specialized German citizenship test in the province of Baden-Württemberg<sup>2</sup>. Back in 1990, British politician Norman Tebbit had said that the true test of the “Britishness” of British Asians was whether they cheered for India/Pakistan or England in a cricket match. Tebbit’s views became popular again after the London bombing. But there was also resistance to these ideas, such as BBC viewers’ responses to the “Britishness” test in the form of suggested questions<sup>3</sup>: “If the plural of ‘mouse’ is ‘mice’, what is the plural of ‘house?’”; “If someone bumped into you in the corridor and it was not your fault, would you still say sorry?”; “Is binge drinking a good idea?”; “What side should the port be passed on?”; “Which breed of dog does the Queen favour?” and, of course, “Shepherd’s Pie with ale or Lamb Bhuna with Cobra?”

Museum audiences sometimes wanted to consider *Visible Collective* as “representing” the post-2001 vulnerable groups. But *Visible Collective*’s members individual experiences were mediated by class privilege, citizenship and access. To underscore this, we frequently displayed a “Privilege Matrix” slide, which showed, through color-coded bars, the birth place and US citizenship status of each member. Birth places ranged from Kolkata to Los Angeles, but every member was either a “Birthright” Citizen, a “Naturalized” Citizen or a “Green Card”/Legal Permanent Resident. This contrasted with vulnerable groups of immigrants, in varying liminal states (“processing papers,” “out of status” or undocumented), with no access to public platforms.

Elsewhere, in the news, members of a new South Asian elite were being highlighted, drawing a distinction between “good” and “bad” immigrants. *Newsweek International* editor Fareed Zakaria, when asked by Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, replied “I am 100% legal.”<sup>4</sup> In the finance industry, Fareed’s brother Arshad Zakaria was the youngest co-president at Merrill Lynch before being ousted during palace intrigues against Stanley O’Neal (coincidentally the first African-American CEO of a major Wall Street bank)<sup>5</sup>. It was possible for the Zakarias to be in exceptional careers in seeming contra-stream to a time of intensified scapegoating. Fareed Zakaria’s cachet rose with his ability to explain “what do **they** think?” His successor at *Newsweek*, Tunku Varadarajan, went a step further when he wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that he was willing to go through racial profiling for the sake of collective safety<sup>6</sup>.

But working class migrants, lacking this smooth class privilege, experienced racial profiling differently. When border security inspects a “Muslim” identity, it is of course a problematic and semi-faux category (defined usually, and often incorrectly, by surname, place of origin and passport). But to the extent such measures were deployed, those most likely to be effected were blue collar labor migrants, not high-skill financiers, journalists and technocrats.

A throughline in this time was the idea of hyper-visibility (as suspects) twinned with continued invisibility (as working class population). In cities such as New York, working class South Asian migrants drive taxis, sell newspapers and coffee, sell restaurant tables and work in the kitchens. In the Middle East and elsewhere with similar in-between spaces, they work in cleaning, childcare, construction, and everything in between. Migrants are therefore intimately present in our physical space (the “our” also includes the city’s South Asian middle class and elite), but absent from the broader consciousness. Only when migrants become suspects do they acquire hyper-visibility as “your mysterious neighbors.” From this impulse comes the *New Yorker*

*Visible Collective* was a coalition of artists, educators, and legal activists exploring contested migrant identities (including religion as an externally-imposed, imperfect proxy for ethnicity) within the context of US post-2001 security panic. The Collective’s members included Naeem Mohaiemen, Anandaroop Roy, Jee-Yun Ha, Donna Golden, Aimara Lin, Vivek Bald, Kristofer Dan-Bergman, JT Nimoy, Sehban Zaidi, Anjali Malhotra, Aziz Huq, Sarah Olson, and Ibrahim Quraishi.

*Visible Collective*’s projects are archived at [disappearedinamerica.org](http://disappearedinamerica.org)

cover with a Bin Laden lookalike studying the subway map over the heads of sleeping passengers<sup>7</sup>, and the *Village Voice* cover with (another) Laden clone looking back from the taxi driver’s seat<sup>8</sup>.

These processes of hypervisibility and “othering” are not unique to South Asian, Arab or other (presumed “Muslim”) migrant groups, nor a new development. Think back to the tumultuous history of racial epithets (“wop,” “dago,” “spic”), signage (“No Niggers, No Irish, No Dogs”), physiognomy (magazine feature during WWII that identified “differences” between a “Jap” (enemy) and “Chink” (ally)), popular culture (antisemitism especially up to WWII), whispering campaigns (targeting German Americans during both World Wars), incarceration (Japanese-American internment), public hearings (the Second Red Scare and HUAC), and profiling (“driving while black”).

While there has been a continued evolution of “suspect” groups within the body politic, it is noticeable that as one minority group becomes the target population, members of other minority groups can be deployed as labor for this new policing. Taking popcorn cinema as a weathervane, we can look at scenes from the stoner-humor *Harold & Kumar* franchise for a glimpse into shifting positions of South Asian self-perception.

In 2004’s *Harold & Kumar go to White Castle*, Kumar taunts the white racists who torment Asian 7-11 clerks (“Thank you come again!”) But by 2008 in *Harold & Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay*, he clashes with a black security guard, accusing him of racial profiling (“**Security Guard**: Racist? Dude, I’m black! / **Kumar**: Please, dude. You’re barely even brown.”) Finally, by 2011 in *A Very Harold & Kumar Christmas*, there are miscegenation quips (“Sorry... I don’t date black guys”), underlining a simplistic rendering of “Muslim(Brown) is the new Black.”

*Visible Collective* was interested in subverting media spaces, especially advertising forms that burrow their way into public consciousness. For example, *Really Stephen?* riffed on Stephen Meisel’s Vogue Italia tableaux of waifish white models being patted down, strip searched, pinned to the floor and arrested by security guards at airports and riot police on the street. The text speculated how we would have fared going through those same checkpoints. Who is that “We”? Again, a position in flux—reminiscent of our satire of the Sarah Jessica Parker GAP campaign: “Casual, Fresh American Style.”

Within *Visible Collective*, there were debates about what we should work on and where to focus limited energies. These questions became channels for concerns about the impact of museum projects. What was the ripple effect? What were we accomplishing? A frictional concern about use-value came up repeatedly among collective members. By 2011, some members work in spaces distinct from the cultural context. AiMara Lin, *Visible Collective*’s member and antiwar organizer, is now in law school. Aziz Huq is a law professor at University of Chicago. Others have also shifted energy and efforts.

Conversations in visual spaces were valued by *Visible Collective* for the butterfly wing effect. The possibility of shifting public thought in more liminal ways. But we are also mindful that in the decade after 2001, many of the positive changes in migrant lives came because of legal cases and legislative victories. Therefore, a more results-based path (law, teaching, electoral politics) has become a focus for some of our energy-taking priority, at least for now, over more ephemeral museum projects.

1 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), Pub. L. No. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359, enacted November 6, 1986, also known as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act.

2 David Sells, “German citizenship test causes uproar,” BBC, February 17, 2006.

3 “Q&A: The road to UK citizenship,” BBC, February 25, 2004. Viewer comments at [news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/3078690.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/3078690.stm)

4 *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, March 28, 2006.

5 “Arshad Zakaria appointed Merrill Lynch co-president”, Rediff, October 8, 2001; Fran Hawthorne, “40 under Forty,” *Crain’s New York*, 2002; his firing is detailed in Bethany McLean and Joe Nocera, *All the Devils are here*, Portfolio/Penguin, 2010.

6 Tunku Varadarajan, “That feeling of being under suspicion,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 29, 2005.

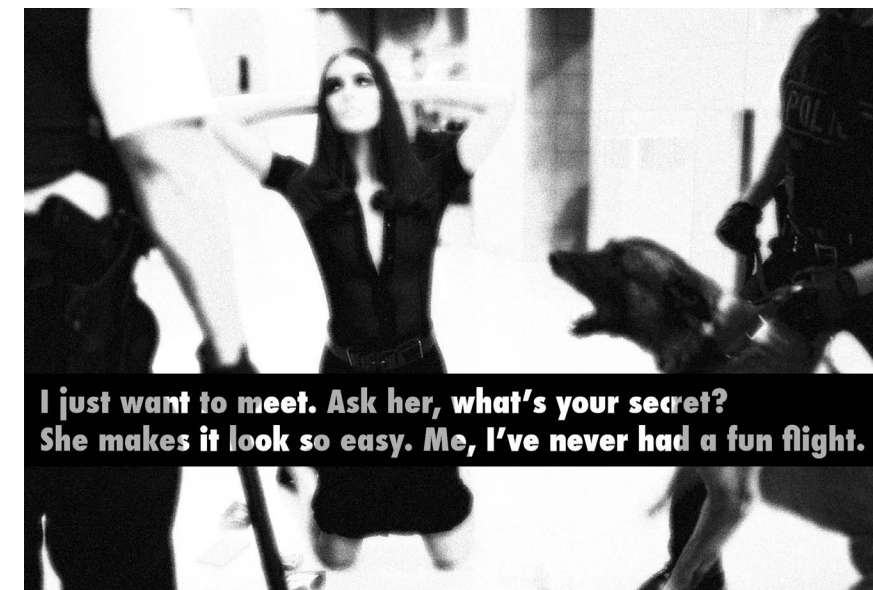
7 Edward Sorel, cover illustration for *New Yorker*, March 3, 2002.

8 Sarah Goodyear, “I thought my cabbie was a terrorist... so I called the FBI,” *Village Voice*, September 24, 2002.

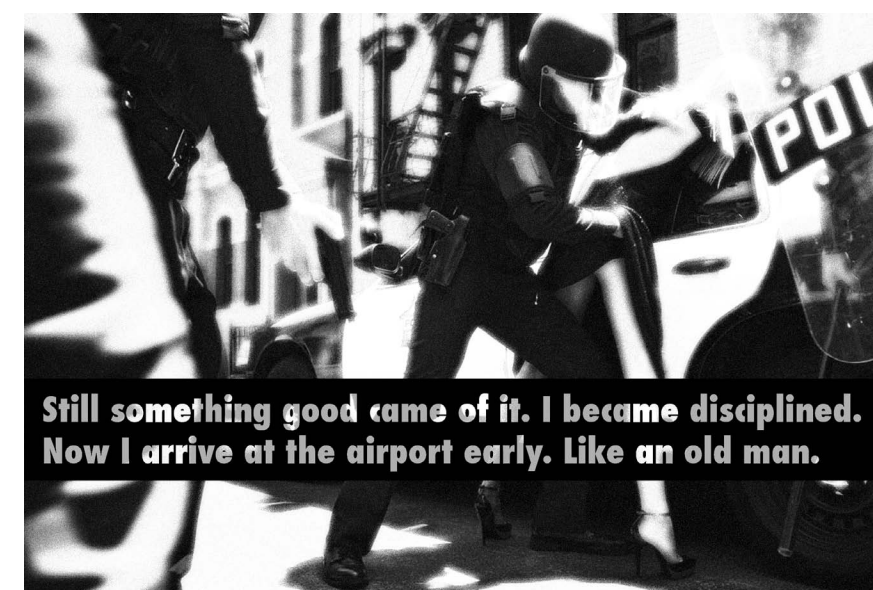
# Really Stephen?



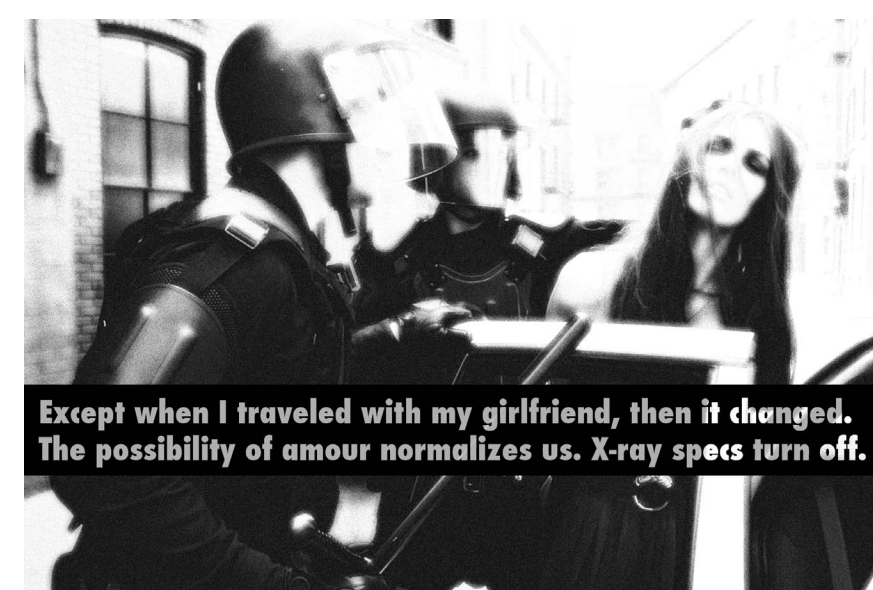
**I.**  
So we called Steven Meisel’s office and asked for it. Iselin Steiro’s phone number. Just like that.



**II.**  
I just want to meet. Ask her, what’s your secret? She makes it look so easy. Me, I’ve never had a fun flight.



**III.**  
Still something good came of it. I became disciplined. Now I arrive at the airport early. Like an old man.

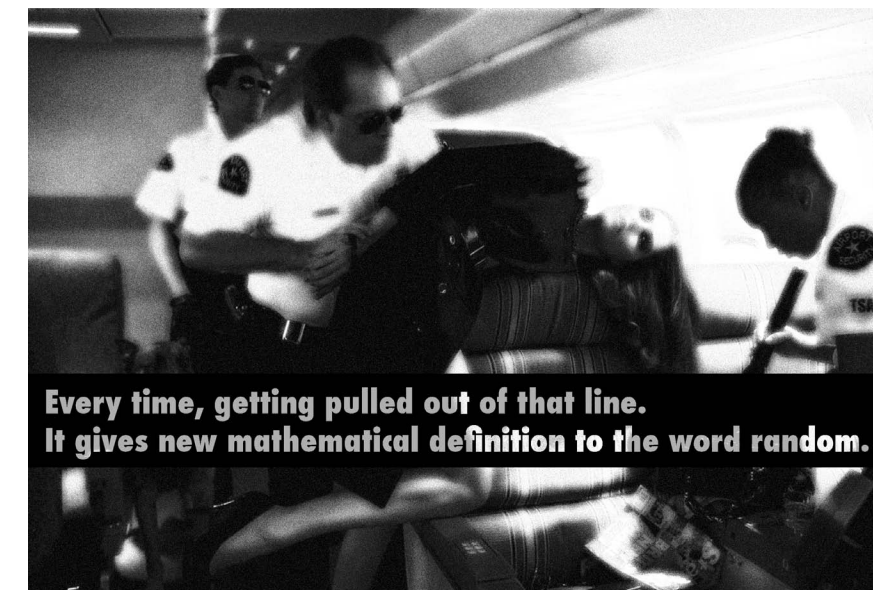


**IV.**  
Except when I traveled with my girlfriend, then it changed. The possibility of amour normalizes us. X-ray specs turn off.

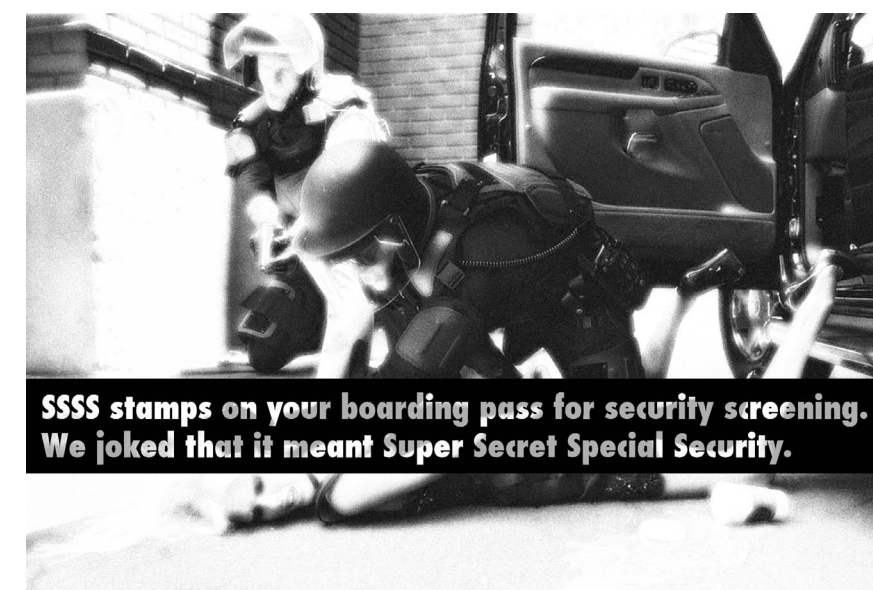
**V.**



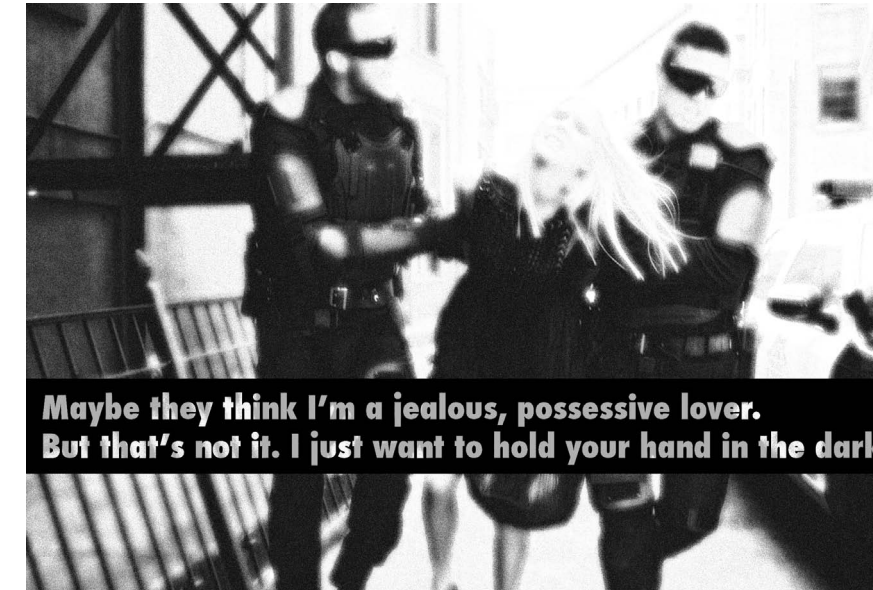
**VI.**  
Which photo shoot, the receptionist asked carefully. Vogue Italia. The June issue. You remember?



**VII.**  
Every time, getting pulled out of that line. It gives new mathematical definition to the word random.



**VIII.**  
SSSS stamps on your boarding pass for security screening. We joked that it meant Super Secret Special Security.



**IX.**  
Maybe they think I’m a jealous, possessive lover. But that’s not it. I just want to hold your hand in the dark.

**X.**