# IMMEDIATIONS

## THE HUMANITARIAN IMPULSE IN DOCUMENTARY

POOJA RANGAN

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A *Camera Obscura* book

# Immediations

## THE HUMANITARIAN IMPULSE IN DOCUMENTARY

*Pooja Rangan*

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FOR MY FAMILIES, OF HEART AND MIND

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*Introduction*

# IMMEDIATIONS

## THE HUMANITARIAN IMPULSE IN DOCUMENTARY

What does endangered life do for documentary? As practitioners, critics, and spectators of documentary, we rarely ask this question. Instead, we commonly believe that documentary works on behalf of disenfranchised human beings by "giving a voice to the voiceless." This book argues the opposite. I argue that endangered, dehumanized life not only sustains documentary, but supplies its raison d'être. This is especially true, I propose, of participatory documentary, whose guiding humanitarian ethic—giving the camera to the other—invents the very disenfranchised humanity that it claims to redeem.

François Truffaut's *The Wild Child* (*L'Enfant Sauvage*), a film set in Enlightenment-era France, poignantly dramatizes the follies of this humanitarian ethic. The film's protagonist, Dr. Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard, has rescued a mute and seemingly feral young boy, hoping to educate him and thereby reveal his latent humanity. The experiment is not going well. Itard's attempts to socialize and educate the "wild child" are met with hostility, violence, and several escape attempts. More than once, the boy collapses during Itard's unrelenting language lessons, flailing in distress and bleeding from the nose. Paradoxically, it is when the boy successfully demonstrates his humanization (he has returned to Itard after a failed escape attempt, having lost his survival instincts) that Itard experiences his deepest doubts. He longs to return the boy to his "innocent and happy life." Realizing that his rescue mission has created a prison from which there is no escape, Itard steels himself in his task, and resolves to redeem the boy's lost innocence—his humanity—through further education.

Itard's dilemma is a perfect allegory of the internal contradictions of participatory documentary. The fantasy of the wild boy's lost humanity not only allows Itard to embrace the misguided reasons for his humanitarian intervention, but reinforces the intervention's importance. The gesture of giving the camera to the other is motored by a similar fantasy. Participatory documentary views its beneficiaries as deprived of both humanity and its latent essence—a latency that fuels the humanitarian impulse to redeem and evidence their humanity by giving them a voice.

I aim to produce a critical and philosophical understanding of this humanitarian documentary impulse. I focus on contemporary humanitarian rescue missions in which documentary serves as a humanizing prosthesis for dehumanized subjects: photography workshops among the children of sex workers in the film *Born into Brothels*, live eyewitness reporting by Hurricane Katrina survivors, therapeutic attempts to facilitate autistic speech, and the rehabilitation of Asian draft elephants as painters. I ask, How does the perception of humanity at risk drive the production of humanist aesthetic forms that *produce* the "humanity" that they claim to document? How does the urgent ethical imperative of representing lives at risk lead to new formal innovations in the "creative treatment of actuality"? Why does the dubious pursuit of humanity reinforce documentary's reputation as a progressive, reflexive discourse, and what do the so-called beneficiaries of this discourse stand to gain or lose from this pursuit?

Questions such as these begin to suggest how disenfranchised humanity is repeatedly enlisted and commodified to corroborate documentary's privileged connection with the real. They also return us to the unfashionable historical connections between documentary and immediacy, which documentary scholars have been at pains to undo. The word *immediate* derives from the Latin *immediātus*, meaning "without anything between." The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the adjective *immediate* as indicating a direct relation or action between two things or persons that can be spatial ("involving actual contact or direct relation: opposed to *mediate* and *remote*"; "having no person, thing, or space intervening") or temporal ("occurring, accomplished, or taking effect without delay or lapse of time; done at once; instant").[1] Both senses of *immediate* are encapsulated in the documentary values of directness and urgency championed by the Scottish filmmaker, critic, and theorist John Grierson, who is credited with coining the term *documentary*, as well as the phrase "creative treatment of actuality," as a definition of the genre.[2] The son

of a schoolteacher, and a student of moral philosophy, Grierson envisioned documentary as a form of cinematic pedagogy for drawing public attention to contemporary social problems such as unemployment, homelessness, poverty, and hunger.

The goal of documentary for Grierson was "social not aesthetic"; he believed in propaganda first, and art second.[3] In an essay titled "The Documentary Idea: 1942," Grierson elaborates: "the documentary idea was not basically a film idea at all. . . . [T]he medium happened to be the most convenient and most exciting available to us. The idea itself, on the other hand, was a new idea for public education."[4] A few pages later, he adds, "It is not the technical perfection of the film that matters, not even the vanity of its maker, but what happens to the public mind. . . . [Good propaganda must] create a sense of urgency in the public mind, and gear it in its everyday processes to the hardness and directness which make for action and decision."[5] Grierson wished to innovate a form of cinematic mediation in which the role of the aesthetic was to refer the spectator to urgent social realities in a direct, immediate, and didactic fashion. As Jonathan Kahana puts it, documentary, for Grierson, was "always about something more or other than what it depicts."[6]

The interwar and wartime context in which Grierson developed his ideas regarding documentary, as well as his subordination of documentary's aesthetic and creative potential to the higher goal of social purpose, indicates that documentary came about as part of the modern ethical imaginary that Elaine Scarry and Craig Calhoun have named "emergency thinking."[7] *Emergency thinking* (a term I will soon elaborate on) institutes a humanitarian order of priorities in which saving endangered human lives takes precedence over all other considerations, including the aesthetics and politics of representation. The humanitarian mandate demands action over thinking, ethics over aesthetics, and immediacy over analysis. Grierson's prescription of these priorities as ideals for the emerging genre of documentary can be read as an impulse toward humanitarian media intervention at a moment of disillusionment regarding the integrity of global democratic structures: as Brian Winston notes, the "suffering humanity" of "social victims" is the most powerful legacy of the Griersonian school and remains a staple of the realist documentary to this day.[8]

*Immediations* argues that contemporary participatory documentary interventions that seek to immediately empower dehumanized subjects are the heirs of Grierson's humanitarian mission. My goal is to theorize the aesthetic

and political implications of the audiovisual tropes that are mobilized when documentary operates in the mode of emergency—that is, when it seeks to redeem dehumanized lives as a first-order principle. I call these tropes *immediations* in order to emphasize the mediated quality of their emphasis on immediacy. The neologism is a call to theorize the medial frames that are at work precisely when mediation seems to disappear or cease to matter. I ask, How does documentary render suffering humanity *immediate*? What aesthetic, formal, and narrative tropes does it invent to generate the sensations of temporal urgency and direct spatial presence? How are the effects of these representational conventions made to seem immaterial, secondary, or even irrelevant when it comes to the ethical mandate of saving lives? By posing such questions, I aim to understand how the concept of the human fuels documentary's investments in narratives of social and representational progress. I insist on the circular quality of these seemingly emancipatory narratives, as well as the openings that result from a documentary ethic that is oriented not toward the human, but toward all that it excludes as other.

The language of documentary immediacy is most insidious when it is employed by disenfranchised subjects representing themselves. This is why I focus on tropes of documentary immediacy—or immediations—in the context of participatory documentary. The immediations that I examine include the photographic aesthetic of innocence employed by non-Western children (chapter 1), the televisual codes of "liveness" used by disaster victims as a testimonial strategy (chapter 2), the use of the first-person voice-over to give voice to nonverbal autistics (chapter 3), and the self-portrait as evidence of animal intelligence (chapter 4). These tropes share a common feature: they rely on the truth effects of documentary, invoking its status as actuality rather than creative artifact, to guarantee the humanity of the dehumanized subjects who deploy them. The time-sensitive predicament of human lives at risk legitimates and even calls for the documentary rhetoric of immediacy. I argue that the endangered humanity of these lives is a red herring: it demands that we ignore the discursive work of the immediations (such as the self-portrait or the first-person voice-over) that are actively involved in regulating the meaning of the human even as they present the appearance of truth or self-evidence.

I aim to undo the mutual reinforcements of documentary's claim to an unmediated encounter with reality and the humanitarian appeal to the ambiguous and elusive concept of humanity. The emergence of the child as a

humanitarian emblem of innocent and pure humanity is a paradigmatic instance of these reinforcements. Truffaut's film about the wild child dramatizes the persuasive power of this emblem despite all evidence to the contrary. The purported innocence of children also prompts one of the maxims of participatory documentary: that placing a camera in children's hands will allow us to "see through their eyes," free from the defilement of mediation. This is the central conceit of the film *Born into Brothels* (2004), discussed in chapter 1. The photographic aesthetic of "feral innocence" adopted by the children who star in this film contains the threat that these children, whose mothers are sex workers in Calcutta, pose to the humanitarian fantasy of childhood innocence by flattening the embodied position they allegedly speak for into a fetish. The discourse of photographic spontaneity thereby affirms the belief that children exist outside discourse and productive economies even as it enlists non-Western children in the production of humanitarian commodities. Such an appeal to humanity as a form of documentary proof obliterates the historical specificity to which documentary aspires, and which documentary scholars identify as the basis of the genre's political and ethical potential.[9]

The analytical work of this book consists of articulating how the aesthetic of feral innocence and other humanist tropes of documentary immediacy exploit the concrete material circumstances and labors of disenfranchised individuals—and do so in a manner that reinforces their status as other. This effort extends the tradition of feminist critics of documentary like Trinh T. Minh-ha and Fatimah Tobing Rony. In the 1990s Rony and Trinh mounted important critiques of documentary that centered on the realist tropes of "romantic naturalism" (Trinh) and "romantic preservationism" (Rony) frequently employed in ethnographic depictions of the non-West.[10] Even when they were not explicitly racist in intent, these scholars argued, the use of "objective" or "neutral" conventions (such as long takes, wide-angle shots, and explanatory third-person commentary) to represent non-Western and indigenous cultures nonetheless marked them as authentic, timeless, and untouched by civilization—that is, as other. Little has been done to update these critiques of documentary humanism in the past twenty-five years. Instead, documentary scholars agree that the genre has achieved a certain reflexivity and sophistication, in part because technical and social advances have enabled documentary's others to represent themselves (in *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols includes the "participatory mode" in his schematic of enlightened documentary approaches). Much of the recent work in

documentary studies, although excellent in its own right, regards the tendencies critiqued by Rony and Trinh as an unfortunate historical misstep and focuses on the documentary genre's redeeming interests in irony, spectacle, subjectivity, and avant-gardism.[11]

This book challenges this consensus and its investments in technological and representational reflexivity. I argue that the practice of othering has not abated with the advent of participatory documentary. Rather, it has found new sites, moving from indigenous cultures to the figures I discuss in each of my chapters, including the child, the refugee, the autistic, and the animal. It has also taken on supple new forms that operate not through exclusion and setting apart but through inclusion, participation, and empowerment. I show how the documentary tropes that I call immediations exclude these figures as other but do so through the seemingly inclusive gesture of inviting them to perform their humanity. In this regard, I subscribe to Michel Foucault's theory that modern power operates through affirmation and not negation, and that its logic is proliferative, not conservative.[12] Foucault and his interlocutors, who have mobilized his insights to identify large-scale shifts in the dynamics of labor, subjectivity, and difference in modernity and postmodernity, are foundational to the book.

I see the humanitarian impulse in participatory documentary as an example of what Rey Chow calls the "inclusionist, liberalist cultural logic" of dealing with difference in the post-Enlightenment West.[13] Chow explains this logic using the example of the term *ethnic*: in modernity, an open, inclusive attitude has replaced the premodern, discriminatory attitude toward ethnic difference. And yet, although *ethnic* is used to connote a universal humanity ("we are all ethnic"), the term is deployed to discriminate against cultural particularity ("those ethnics over there") whenever political, economic, or ideological gains are at stake. For Chow, the predicament of ethnicity is symptomatic of the internal violence that is endemic in the affirmative logic of multicultural liberalism. The impulse to valorize the humanity of all seems at first to be democratic and modern. However, when humanity is upheld as a primary principle and imperative, it can turn into an alibi for discriminatory and violent acts—all performed in the name of humanity. Ethnics pay the highest price for this modernizing narrative, in the form of painful psychic and material losses: the liberatory practice of claiming their humanity inevitably entails the abjection and exclusion of the particular, embodied facts of difference, which are seen as a primitive form of captivity.[14] Humanitarian

tolerance thus operates as a softer version of what Foucault dubs racist biopower. Ethnicity serves as a line of inclusion as well as exclusion for expunging difference from the social field, such that some are made to suffer while others are made to thrive.[15]

Ethnicity is not the only site of difference through which this narrative of covert exclusion is currently being played out. Childhood, refugeehood, disability, and animality are all boundary conditions that have risen to prominence in contemporary critical and popular conversations as emblems of a universal human condition. The humanitarian preoccupation with the child as a symbol of universal humanity is one example of the contemporary fascination with liminality. Another, from academic quarters, is Giorgio Agamben's protest that we all share the bare, exposed condition of the refugee, who can be killed but not sacrificed ("we are all virtually *homines sacri*").[16] Similar assertions of this type have also recently been made regarding the conditions of disability and animality. I ask, What do these universalizing claims share with the humanitarian ethic of benevolent inclusion? Under what circumstances does this ethic turn corrosive and exclusionary?

Participatory documentary offers a unique opportunity to examine the stakes and the casualties of the liberal, humanitarian ethic described above. The act of giving the camera to the other is intended to resolve the discriminatory paradigm of representation discussed by Trinh and Rony. This gesture, which acknowledges the other's humanity, makes it clear that participatory documentary partakes of the ongoing critical and popular investments in otherness as a litmus test for humanity. The turn to society's others to locate the essence of humanity also reminds us that humanity—as the signifier of both an ambiguous collectivity and the equally ambiguous traits proper to the human—is always "defined by its breach," to quote Ruti Teitel.[17] We would do well to pay close attention to these breaches and to their perception as breaches. It is only in the *perceived* absence of humanity, I argue, that we can pinpoint the ideological work that goes into defining its attributes, which can otherwise appear perfectly natural, transhistorical, and self-evident. I focus, therefore, on various humanizing attributes, such as liveness and voice, that are attributed to dehumanized subjects who are thought to have been denied them.

Immediations, I propose, are the documentary tropes of evidencing these attributes of humanity in all their immediacy. If humanity is the "ultimate imagined community," as Dominic Pettman puts it, then documentary imme-

diations can be regarded as part of the ritual, tropic performances of belonging to this community.[18] Through them, we begin to grasp the normalizing calculus that goes into defining the benchmarks of humanity in the liberal West, the complicity of documentary media in regulating these definitions, and the unevenly distributed costs of achieving these benchmarks. In each of my chapters, I show how the ostensible goal of humanitarian intervention—that is, mitigating the impacts of a hostile or absent state—leads participatory documentary initiatives to function as makeshift humanitarian entities to which disenfranchised subjects must appeal using the tropes of immediation. My analyses of these tropes examine what ethical, perceptual, and relational modes are excluded from the definition of humanity, and how the formal conventions of documentary representation are implicated in naturalizing these exclusions. I also attempt to paint a picture of the humanitarian documentary conventions, networks, and institutions that are made to thrive as a function of these very exclusions. At its core, *Immediations* argues that documentary, especially in its most benevolent, humanitarian guises, is thoroughly implicated in the work of regulating what does and does not count as human.

In *The Open*, Agamben offers a compelling insight: he argues that the human is an entity with no positive attributes other than the ability to recognize itself as human. His insight emerges from symptomatic readings of a variety of philosophical sources, including the founder of modern taxonomy, Carl Linnaeus. Linnaeus's enigmatic taxonomic classification of *Homo sapiens* lists no specific qualities but rather an imperative: "Know thyself." Agamben interprets this to mean that the human is not a clearly defined species or substance. Strictly speaking, *Homo sapiens* has no fixed meaning; rather, it is an "optical machine" or "device for producing the recognition of the human."[19] Agamben differentiates between two iterations of the "anthropological machine": an ancient version, which operates by humanizing the animal, that is, by incorporating an outside; and a modern version, which operates by animalizing the human, or isolating and excluding the nonhuman within the human. Either way, the device functions by producing a caesura within the spectating entity that has ripple effects across the social field—looking in this device, the not-yet-human entity (mis)recognizes itself as human by isolating and casting out those elements that do not correspond to the image of the human.[20]

Immediations are a potent example of such an optical device through which the human is manufactured. My analyses of these devices suggest that

the two versions of the anthropological machine described by Agamben may be productively considered as simultaneous interpellative operations facilitated by participatory documentary interventions. The trope of the first-person voice-over in documentary films produced by and starring autistic protagonists (chapter 3) offers a striking illustration of how immediations simultaneously expand the community of humanity and expunge it of difference: this seemingly self-evident convention of "having a voice" not only holds up a mirror to so-called voiceless autistics, calling on them to express their interiority in a normative way, but also hails humanitarian spectators to recognize and connect with their humanity, conceived in the same normalizing terms. In this way, autistics are taught to speak the language of human personhood and intersubjectivity—they are humanized—while in the very same movement autistic modes of communication and relationality are excluded and coded as nonhuman.

I respond with a two-pronged critical approach. First, I identify how the ethic of immediation gives rise to humanitarian genres of participatory documentary, such as child-produced photography or the animal self-portrait. I trace how humanity is coded in the audiovisual and narrative language of these different documentary forms, and how their legitimating claims, exhibition sites, and political economies are bound up in the effort to separate "us" from "them." Second, I propose strategies of reading that denaturalize the coded interpellations that I call immediations, revealing that what is constructed as self-evidently human is both cultivated and calculated. The "other" often suggests these strategies; frictions inevitably ensue when familiar forms find themselves in unfamiliar hands. What is more, evidence of these frictions can often be found hiding in plain sight. Amplifying them requires close, careful formal analysis, for which I draw on vocabulary from documentary studies as well as media and cultural studies more broadly. In sum, I aim to cultivate an attunement to the contradictions that emerge from the liberating encounter with difference before they are smoothed over by the ideological glue of humanism.

These twin critical tasks share a philosophical goal: to find ways of realizing the radical potential of giving the camera to the other, even if this means letting go of the human, or, at the very least, of what we think the human is. Throughout the book, I confront mediation as an ethically fraught but dialectically generative process at the heart of the humanitarian encounter. Although I begin with documentary, the scope of my pursuit spills over its ca-

nonical domain: some of my main interlocutors do not write about media but about child labor, human rights, autistic perception, and animal ethology. My engagement with them does not indicate my disinterest in the traditional pursuits of documentary studies so much as my investment in its interdisciplinary openings. This book is not addressed solely to documentary film scholars but rather speaks more broadly to those who are interested in the social issues to which participatory documentary seeks to give voice. It is my hope that this address will suggest the vitality of documentary for broader conversations in which the meanings and limitations of humanity are being debated, and vice versa.

### Reading Emergency

One of this book's aims is to theorize how emergency is mediatized and to reinforce the notion that *reading* emergency against its humanitarian justifications is a political act. Calhoun defines *emergency* as a particularly modern imaginary engendered by the human suffering caused by the escalating incidence of catastrophe, war, conflict, and state violence. The temporality of emergency is that of a sudden, unpredictable event that emerges against a background of ostensible normalcy, demanding an urgent response. The claim of emergency, to cite Scarry, is that one must act *now*, for there is no time to think.[21] The implication is that lives hang in the balance: since the casualties of emergencies are often subjects who have been deprived of their civil rights and protections, emergency calls for a humanitarian, not political, response—a "sense of ethical obligation based on common humanity, rather than on citizenship or any other specific loyalty."[22]

Emergency has become a pervasive theme in the political and critical theory of the last several decades. In part, this is a response to current events such as the war on terror, disasters related to climate change, and the overall shift toward emergency rule, that is, nonconstitutional and nondemocratic modes of governance, across the globe over the last sixty years. However, as Bonnie Honig points out, the thematization of emergency may be a symptom of its thoroughly discursive character rather than a response to empirical events. The reality of emergency is more and more difficult to tell apart from its perception, Honig notes, thanks to "the media tendency to market everything as urgently exceptional and as, therefore, worth watching."[23] I argue that we need to read the medial frames of emergency in order to theorize how emergency is produced as a mediatized spectacle. Lisa Cartwright's work

on the technical and political transformations that produced an emergency imaginary around the figure of the orphaned child in postdictatorship Romania is a model for my own analysis of the children of Calcutta sex workers in chapter 1.[24] I am also indebted to Lilie Chouliaraki and Mary Ann Doane, both of whom have theorized and critiqued the mediatization of emergency described by Honig in their studies of television news.[25] I aim to extend these scholars' approach in relation to the reality effects of participatory documentary.

I refer to participatory documentary as a "humanitarian media intervention" in order to highlight the role of documentary representations in the discursive construction of emergency. Participatory documentary often evokes the logic of emergency as a justification for its rhetoric of immediacy: media exposure is positioned as an urgent, humanizing remedy for subjects who have been deprived of various rights. To cite an example from my second chapter, "live and direct" eyewitness images of destitution are sought from poor African American victims of Hurricane Katrina who have lost everything but their lives. I argue that the humanitarian demand for referentiality and immediacy consolidates a particularly apolitical discourse of human rights that is grounded in abstract, essential characteristics of humanity (e.g., "life itself").[26] In such a context, participatory documentary exhorts destitute individuals to showcase the very bare humanity whose lack it purports to remedy as a mediatized spectacle—the ultimate drama of the real. When we decline to read images of immediacy as an extension of the discursive conditions under which they were produced, I argue, we participate in and exacerbate this spectacle.

The challenge of reading emergency may also be stated as a question: what does it mean to *read* a human rights speech act, that is, an urgent speech act produced under conditions of emergency? The discourse of human rights, which can be conservative in practice, is in principle potentially radical, and the difference between the two lies in approaching human rights speech acts not as self-evidences but as representational acts that require interpretation. Jacques Rancière and Thomas Keenan locate the radical potential of human rights discourse in its rhetorical structure, which operates through a counterintuitive claim: human rights speech acts insist that those who do not stand for humanity may speak for humanity.[27] These acts exemplify what Honig calls "the paradox of politics" in that they appeal to an imagined community of humanity that does not yet exist but that they hope

to remake in their own excluded image.[28] The human in this discourse is invested with political and not merely ontological significance: it is an open space that remains to be defined—for better or worse—through an unending process of discursive struggle (this is why I do not argue in favor of a posthuman position: as a placeholder for a political subject yet to come, the human is just as adequate and flawed).

I focus on participatory documentary as an important site of this discursive struggle, in which the meaning of the human is constantly being redefined and radicalized through human rights claims. But, like Keenan, I am also convinced that we cannot take these communiqués for granted. The most radical speech acts are not immediately legible; they require their audience to take a leap of faith into the unknown. Part of the work of this book involves developing a critical and analytical vocabulary that makes these acts legible without rendering them fully transparent or immediate. How do human rights speech acts use the language of documentary immediacy to transform it? How do they remake the structure of the documentary devices and tropes that produce a recognition of the human and, in the process, change what counts as human?

#### Ethics after Humanism

The work of reading emergency that I have just described problematizes the Levinasian ethical framework that preoccupies contemporary debates regarding humanitarian response. The ethical turn spearheaded by Emmanuel Levinas displaces the ontological investment in being-for-itself by positing the superior moral priority of being-for-the-other. Levinas argues that the primary relationship that constitutes being is the relationship with the other, whose essential vulnerability, which he famously designates as the *face* of the other, suspends the natural right to self-survival, replacing it with the moral obligation to respond. In his words: "To expose myself to the vulnerability of the face is to put my ontological right to existence into question. In ethics, the other's right to exist has primacy over my own, a primacy epitomized in the ethical edict: you shall not kill, you shall not jeopardize the life of the other."[29]

The gist of this ethical principle, if not its source, is often evoked in support of humanitarian response. In an essay criticizing the complicity of humanitarian and military intervention, Didier Fassin reserves the following praise for its underlying ethic: "one has to be reminded that in the humanitarian ethics, the potential sacrifice of one's life reasserts the sacredness of

others' lives, which is precisely denied by the military necessities."[30] The theological bent of Levinasian ethics is evident in Fassin's rendition of the vulnerable other, who represents killability as well as a divine prohibition against killing. Fassin's point is that even though humanitarianism can, in practice, perpetuate undemocratic modes of governance, its ethical mandate is humanizing and democratic: humanitarian agents reassert the worth of human lives that have been stripped of their political value in their willingness to sacrifice their own (politically significant) lives. What is more, Fassin regards the importance of "bearing witness," that is, representing the humanity of dehumanized lives, as being on par with physical acts of relief and rescue.[31]

In her book *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler considers the defacement of the face, understood in the Levinasian sense, as one of the most devastating representational and philosophical consequences of the permanent warfare inaugurated by the events of 9/11.[32] Butler clarifies the stakes of Levinas's work for media scholars in some important ways: she notes that the face, as Levinas defines it, is not literally a face or even exclusively human, even though it is a condition for humanization. Rather, the face is an abstract and wordless "cry" that confirms the inadequacy of representation for conveying the essence of the human, which can only be glimpsed at its limits.[33] For Butler, the framing of specific faces as human at the cost of others, who are depicted as inhuman and therefore killable, is an instance of war being carried out through representational means. She concludes her analysis by calling for reform of the normative schemes of intelligibility through which the human is understood. The task, as she puts it, is to "establish modes of public seeing and hearing that might well respond to the cry of the human within the sphere of appearance, a sphere in which the trace of the cry has become hyperbolically inflated to rationalize a gluttonous nationalism, or fully obliterated."[34]

On one hand, Butler sets forth an undeniably valuable critique of humanitarian ethics in the vein of Fassin. She identifies representation as the ground and battleground of ethics but also warns that the tactic of humanizing the other by "capturing" their humanity in some representable trait (e.g., the face, the eyes) is just as problematic as the dehumanization that warrants it: both locate the essence of the human in some foundational quality. Butler's critique of humanitarian ethics resonates with my own in that she situates its problems and prospects squarely in the domain of representation. On the other hand, this critique is an uneasy fit with Butler's own humanism of the other. Like Levinas, Butler operates within an ethical frame in which the

other's relational modes and motivations can be understood only in terms of the rational, humanist goal of self-preservation. To put it another way, the cry of the other can only be heard by Butler in terms of suffering, and that suffering can only be interpreted as being inflicted from outside. Butler naturalizes self-preservation as the grounds for an ethical understanding of the human, and, in doing so, she engages in the very foundationalism that her work critiques.[35] This normative turn in Butler's thinking, which has caused much consternation among her critics, is less surprising when we consider her concern with self-preservation—or saving lives—as a symptom of emergency thinking. The consequence of such emergency thinking is that Butler cannot imagine relational modes that lie beyond the purview of self-preservation and that may appear on the surface to be irrational, illogical, or even self-destructive.

But what happens when the cry of the other challenges every basis of what it means to be human, to relate to others, and even what it means to be alive? How do expressions such as these reconfigure the humanitarian representational codes of documentary, and how are we to respond to them? These are the kinds of questions I pose by focusing on encounters with alterity that exceed or frustrate the Levinasian ethical paradigm. I am interested in subjects whose relational modes and motivations are at odds with their self-preservation as well as with the humanitarian ethic of participatory documentary—such as the working child, the hurricane victim turned volunteer, the autistic who rejects human faces, or the suicidal animal. This line of inquiry has already been advanced substantially by feminist and postcolonialist scholars (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's groundbreaking essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is one example) but has recently been taken up in new and exciting ways in areas such as childhood studies, disability studies, and animal studies. Scholars like Olga Nieuwenhuys, Erin Manning, Lisa Cartwright, and Laura U. Marks, who work at the intersection of these areas, issue important challenges regarding the nature of the interhuman bond that is taken as a given in discussions of humanitarian ethics and human rights media. These scholars are some of my closest allies: I value and emulate their commitment to examining the specificity of relational modes that place humanity, as we know and inhabit it, at risk.

This is a risky scholarly path, because it can appear at first to support ethically fraught practices such as child labor and animal abuse. I willingly take this chance with a larger goal in mind: evolving an approach to media prac-

tice and analysis that is perpetually oriented toward what resists definition as human. Ultimately, I argue, this is a more capacious and far-reaching approach to media ethics that opens up the horizons of humanity rather than presuming them in advance.

### Mediation and Beyond

I enact my commitment to a nonhumanist ethic of mediation in the way I approach media analysis. I approach the author, spectator, and medium of documentary as dynamic contingencies that are coproduced in the event of mediation and that do not precede or follow from it in any predetermined manner. This open-ended approach to mediation as a multisited encounter is not typical among my fellow travelers who write about images of immediacy and the spectatorship of suffering. Although these scholars are ostensibly engaged with the same topic as this book, their analytical focus on the figure of the spectator leads them to pursue different lines of questioning.

As an outcome of the aforementioned ethical turn in discourses of humanitarianism, it is now widely acknowledged that human rights are articulated through acts of representation and spectatorship. There has been a corresponding surge of attention over the last decade to the spectatorship of distant suffering, instigated by and responding to Luc Boltanski's landmark book *Distant Suffering*. One of the important themes Boltanski introduces (although he treats it as salutary, not problematic) is the obliteration of distance by televisual images that invite compassion, a sentiment typically associated with proximity and immediacy, for the suffering of distant and unknown victims of war, disaster, and the like. The consequences of normative moral and emotional states, and the forms of action associated with these states, have subsequently become a prominent theme in analyses of the news media and photojournalism. Disappointingly, the bulk of this literature focuses on the decline of spectatorial response in the form of denial, moral atrophy, or "compassion fatigue."[36] Others, like Cartwright and Chouliaraki, have challenged this tendency, critiquing the consequences of the presentist politics of compassion cultivated by images of immediacy. I join these scholars in objecting to instrumental approaches to humanitarian mediation that view the documentary image as a means of engineering humanist sentiments.

What is needed, to quote Cartwright, is an analysis of "the nature of the real in all of its mediated forms including the visual, and with all of the troubling immediacy of impact that the visual brings."[37] Sharon Sliwinski, Leshu

Torchin, and Wendy S. Hesford have all recently responded to Cartwright's call in their respective monographs on the visual culture of human rights.[38] I share these critics' belief that images of suffering are crystallizations of, and a site of contention regarding, the historical and representational norms that shape the recognition of rights. I do, however, diverge from their concern with the public (or its representative figures, the witness and the spectator) as the primary target that is reshaped by such contentious images. Keenan theorizes human rights images as "operations in the public field," adding that the "public" should not be understood in the Enlightenment tradition as a preexisting community or people. For Keenan, the public is "something that comes after the image, a possibility of response to an open address. The public, we could say in shorthand, is what is hailed or addressed by messages that might not reach their destination. Thinking about the images at hand, we could even say that what defines the public is the possibility of being a target and of being missed."[39]

I propose that the hailing described by Keenan should be theorized in terms of not only the encounter between the spectator and image but also the encounter between the producer and the medium. If Keenan is interested in what comes after the image, I am interested in what comes *before* documentary. What "message" is sent to society's others when they are asked to document themselves and claim their human rights? To what extent is this message embedded in the conventional language, narrative norms, and itineraries of documentary media, or even, at a more fundamental level, in the bodily comportments that such conventions presume and invite? What happens when the message is missed, rejected, or misrecognized—can this lead to new engagements with the medium that transform the kinds of encounters it can facilitate?

I approach the discourses surrounding participatory documentary with these questions in mind. These have led me to often surprising and instructive answers. In chapter 2, I examine how a celebrated theoretical model of participatory media, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's account of communicative biopolitics, fails to examine the coded norms of documentary technologies that are deemed democratic, and therefore what comes before them. In chapter 1, I find an antidote to this tendency in an early and much-derogated anthropological experiment in giving the camera to the other. Despite (or perhaps because of) its acknowledged problems, Sol Worth and John Adair's Navajo Film Themselves Project offers valuable lessons regard-

ing the aforementioned norms' potential to be misinterpreted or subjected to a foreign logic even before they materialize in an image. What is more, Worth and Adair are attentive to the acts of translation required to apprehend the socioeconomic valences of this logic, and to the new vistas of mediation that such attention can bring about.

The idea that documentary may be encountered as something other than a representational medium becomes a central theme in the second half of the book. In chapters 3 and 4, I introduce alternative concepts of medium and communication derived from autistic and nonhuman modes of being in the world, drawing on Erin Manning's and Mel Baggs's accounts of autistic perception and Roger Caillois's and Laura U. Marks's accounts of mimesis. These accounts suggest that mediation need not be understood strictly in terms of a representation designed for interpretation by a human subject, and that documentary therefore need not be apprehended as a force intervening between subject and object, or spectator and reality. In these chapters, I move beyond the representational mandates of voice and visibility that define the humanitarian impulse in documentary and explore nonverbalization and surrender as modes of mediation. These two chapters pose the question: can there be a noninterventionist mode of encountering the other?

#### A Note on Method and a Summary of the Chapters

The challenge of evolving a noninterventionist mode of encountering the other also confronts this book at the level of method. My suggestion in chapter 4 that surrender can be an alternative to intervention may be read by some as an acknowledgment of the impossibility of this challenge, and hence of the conceptual limits of my project. As one reader, responding to an early draft of this book, put it, "If taking a picture of a needy other is a form of domination, and giving a needy other a camera is a form of humanitarian resistance doomed to lead to cooptation, the only thing left is to refuse to treat the image as a viable tool or weapon of politics." It may seem paradoxical, therefore, that the theoretical interventions of the book emerge from close readings of images and other media texts, rather than from a counterhistory or genealogy of participatory documentary.

I do not see this as a paradox, but as a dialectic that propels and emerges from this book's methodology. To clarify, I do regard representing the humanity of suffering others and inviting them to do so themselves as two sides of a misguided problematic. The problems of these twin stances are revisited

in each chapter, and in chapter 3 I dub them the "dominant" and "resistant" voices of documentary in order to signal their ubiquitous presence across the landscape of humanitarian media. I am, however, invested in the possibility of a third, *autistic* voice that exceeds the dualistic horizons of humanity defined by the other two and that persists in its alterity—a voice that may initially seem unintelligible. I glean the conditions of possibility and the itineraries of this voice through close, careful reading. My aim is not to enable this autistic voice to speak authentically, or to prescribe how and when such a voice might speak; the former would locate it outside discourse, while the latter would predetermine the time and place of politics. I aim instead to locate such a voice within existing immedial conditions that are already fraught, but that are nonetheless the precondition for an encounter with alterity that can shift our sense of the possibilities of images beyond the interventionist metaphors of "tool" and "weapon."

The movement from the first two voices to the third voice is also the logic governing the movement of the four chapters, from child media advocacy and live eyewitness reporting by disaster victims to autistic voicing and animal art. Each chapter iterates a classic scene of humanitarian mediation: the scene of taking the other out of the jungle and humanizing them by giving them a camera. The parts of "other," "jungle," and "camera" are played by different characters in chapters 1 through 4: child–brothels–innocence; refugee–disaster zone–liveness; autistic–"prison of silence"–voice; and animal–zoo–self. Over the course of the book, I slowly unravel this scene until we arrive at its inverse: the scene of dehumanizing the camera by surrendering it to a nonhuman logic. The opening two chapters deconstruct the logic of participatory documentary, while the final two chapters aim to construct an alternative to the humanitarian media intervention. In chapters 1 and 2 I read the "resistant" voices of documentary's others as symptoms that make visible the internal contradictions of the "dominant" humanitarian vision of their humanity, whereas in chapters 3 and 4 I focus on minoritarian existences that challenge the very notion of resistance or speaking out as a politically reflexive act. I employ a variety of approaches to reading that are sometimes referred to as "critique"—these include deconstruction, symptomatic reading, and discourse analysis—in an effort to work against the emphasis of immediations on surface reading, face value, and self-evidences. I do not dispense with these methods of reading in chapters 3 and 4, but these chapters raise questions about the limited meanings of mediation that are reinforced by

their emphasis on disillusionment and defamiliarization as the bedrocks of reflexive critique. These final two chapters evolve new approaches to mediation by reading with the grain of dissenting, autistic voices that speak in what may seem to be an incomprehensible idiom. Only by engaging with the limits of political and formal reflexivity am I able to identify the liminality of these voices in relation to the medium, and the reasons the position to which they are addressed can be difficult to inhabit.

A final methodological note: the practices and texts to which this book is devoted are defined by their immediacy and crude realism. They are usually considered unworthy of critical attention, let alone sustained theorization. At best, they are scrutinized for their faithfulness to the reality they represent, and, at worst, they are treated as tools, significant only for the actions and responses they catalyze. The academic attention they are afforded is usually of the historical and technical variety reserved for what Nichols calls "the discourses of sobriety."[40] *Immediations* resists this self-fulfilling prophesy of documentary. The chapters emphasize rigorous analyses of emblematic cases leading to theoretical proposals, rather than broad overviews of scores of films culminating in a taxonomy of documentary genres and conventions, a tendency that dominates writings on documentary. This is a calculated choice: I insist that the tropes of documentary immediacy not only should be read closely but can be a portal to compelling speculations regarding the meaning of the human. My approach is not straightforwardly historical but works diagonally, across disciplines and media forms, to locate the theoretical antecedents—and futures—of current practices of participatory documentary. Thus, I prioritize oblique connections and polemical reframing over historical depth and fidelity to the letter of the extant critical literature. What this approach loses in precision, I hope it makes up for in vitality.

In chapter 1, "Feral Innocence: The Humanitarian Aesthetic of Dematerialized Child Labor," I connect contemporary child media advocacy with two of its precursors: cinematic representations of "wild children" and early experiments in shared ethnographic filmmaking. The chapter revolves around the film *Born into Brothels* (2004), which documents the efforts of photojournalist Zana Briski (also the film's codirector) to save the children of prostitutes in Calcutta, India, from a future in sex work by training them to produce and sell photographs of their lives in the brothels. I spend a lot of time analyzing the self-effacing visual devices of Briski's film and photographic pedagogy. I introduce the concepts of "pseudoparticipatory documentary" and

"feral innocence" to describe how the film enables its audiences to take pleasure in the savage eroticism of the children's photographs while still regarding them as spontaneous creative expressions of their inner innocence (or "prisms into their souls," to cite a phrase commonly mentioned in praise of these photographs). These two concepts serve as pivots in my analysis of the humanitarian impulse to salvage childhood as a state prior to culture, mediation, and labor. I consider both the media-historical contexts and ideological ramifications of this impulse, concluding that the practice of child media empowerment dematerializes the concrete role of child labor in the production of humanitarian commodities.

The concept of dematerialized child labor offers one way of thinking about how the labor of the dispossessed supplies an electric charge of urgency and immediacy to humanitarian documentary images. Chapter 2, "Bare Liveness: The Eyewitness to Catastrophe in the Age of Humanitarian Emergency," approaches the problem from another direction, focusing on the televisual rhetoric of liveness and documentary representations of catastrophe. *Liveness* refers to a set of rhetorical conventions designed to convey the technical capacity to transmit events in real time. I examine the humanitarian emergency as a special genre of live media event in which liveness has added currency as a testimonial code of unmediated exposure to death, or what Agamben calls bare life.[41] I look closely at the tropes of liveness performed by professional television reporters to establish their presence at disaster scenes and propose that these tropes are both inspired by the bare lives of disaster victims and subsequently imitated by these victims as a means of leveraging their eyewitness status. My case studies include a performance art project mounted by a Haitian youth collective in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2010, Anderson Cooper's coverage of Hurricane Katrina for CNN, and *Trouble the Water* (dir. Carl Deal and Tia Lessin, 2008), a documentary acclaimed for its inclusion of eyewitness footage shot by Katrina survivor Kimberly Roberts. Reading these texts in conjunction, I ask what it means that the precarious circumstances of disaster victims inform the documentary codes of the humanitarian emergency, and sustain its spectacle.

The guiding mission of participatory documentary is to "give a voice to the voiceless." This adage, which invokes documentary's commitment to enabling marginal social subjects to express themselves, also refers to its emphasis on the spoken word—a quality that distinguishes documentary from fictional

genres. In chapter 3, "'Having a Voice': Toward an Autistic Counterdiscourse of Documentary," I examine how the challenges of autistic voicing complicate the documentary tropes of persuasive and legitimate speech and urge us to rethink the implicit logocentrism of the documentary politics of "having a voice." My inquiry centers on the trope of the first-person documentary voice-over. The authoritative immediacy of this trope, which lends alarm to the controversial advocacy videos of the humanitarian organization Autism Speaks, has also been appropriated in a number of recent films that depict autistic protagonists resisting humanitarian representation by "speaking for themselves." I isolate and analyze two of these films: Gerardine Wurzburg's CNN documentary, *Autism Is a World* (2004), and Mel Baggs's short video "In My Language" (2007). Whereas Wurzburg's conventional use of the first-person voice-over promises to liberate protagonist Sue Rubin's autistic interiority, Baggs's subversion of this convention shows how the documentary tropes of articulate speech pathologize autistic modes of communication. Her work evokes an autistic counterdiscourse of voicing that animates Foucault's ideas regarding a discourse of unreason on reason. I position the videos of Autism Speaks and the films of Wurzburg and Baggs as different approaches to the politics of documentary voicing (dominant, resistant, and autistic) that also map onto various representational tendencies in contemporary diagnostic debates around autism.

Baggs develops a yielding, tactile approach to the audiovisual medium that is informed by perceptual and environmental modes that are ordinarily regarded as nonrelational or even nonhuman—modes that I suggest are imperceptible to a humanitarian radar. I continue to investigate this theme through the rubric of "mimetic surrender" in chapter 4, "The Documentary Art of Surrender: Humane-itarian and Posthumanist Encounters with Animals." This chapter begins with a reading of a viral video of an elephant painting a self-portrait—an example of the increasingly popular humanitarian practice of rehabilitating endangered animals as artists. I argue that the anthropocentric discourse of exposing the selfhood of animals as evidence of their worth has an unexpected analogue in the posthumanist technique of "bringing to light" formerly imperceptible and invisible nonhuman modes of agency. Both approaches are challenged by the French social theorist Roger Caillois's writings, inspired by insect behavior, on mimesis as a radically passive comportment toward a media milieu. *Immediations* concludes with readings

of experiments by a number of contemporary artists who surrender media such as video cameras and GPS devices within nonhuman milieus to invite animal collaborators to physically manipulate, inscribe, and repurpose them. In them, I find a suggestive and provocative model of how a mimetic ethic of surrender can transform our understanding of what can come before, and after, documentary.

# NOTES

**Introduction: Immediations**

1. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "immediate," accessed March 24, 2016, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/91838?redirectedFrom=immediate.
2. Per John Corner, Grierson's first use of the term *documentary* is in a review of Robert Flaherty's film *Moana* for a New York newspaper in 1926. Corner, *Art of Record*, 2. Corner notes that the phrase "creative treatment of actuality," which is commonly attributed to Grierson, is actually difficult to find in Grierson's most commonly cited writings; its first usage is likely in the article "The Documentary Producer," written by Grierson for *Cinema Quarterly* in 1933. Corner, *Art of Record*, 13.
3. See Hardy, Introduction, 18. Hardy quotes from the *Fortnightly Review* (August 1939), where Grierson writes that "the basic force behind [the documentary film movement] was social not aesthetic."
4. Grierson, "The Documentary Idea: 1942," 250.
5. Grierson, "The Documentary Idea: 1942," 257.
6. Kahana, *Intelligence Work*, 7. Kahana reads Grierson's review of *Moana* in 1926 as an ambivalent document that is less certain about the meaning and potential value of documentary than his later manifestos. Kahana notes, "In fact, Grierson emphasizes that the instrumental elements of Flaherty's film do not inhibit what is truly admirable about the film: its capacity to link us to the timeless values of nature, human and otherwise" (5). Kahana views this ambivalence as evidence of an allegorical tendency in the documentary form—one that he argues cultivates an interpretive attitude that continually articulates the particular to the universal, while retaining the specificity of the particular (7–8).
7. See Scarry, *Thinking in an Emergency*; and Calhoun, "Idea of Emergency."
8. Winston, *Claiming the Real II*, 46.
9. For example, Michael Renov writes that "at the level of the sign, it is the differing historical status of the referent that distinguishes documentary from its fictional counterpart not the formal relations among signifier, signified, and referent." "Introduction," 2.
10. See Trinh, "Mechanical Eye," 57; and Rony, *Third Eye*, 102.
11. See, for example, Juhasz and Lerner, *F Is for Phony*; Beattie, *Documentary Display*; Lebow, *Cinema of Me*; and MacDonald, *Avant-Doc.*

12. See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1.
13. Chow, *Protestant Ethnic*, 29.
14. See Chow, *Protestant Ethnic*, esp. chaps. 1 ("The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism") and 4 ("The Secrets of Ethnic Abjection") and "Introduction: From Biopower to Ethnic Difference."
15. In a different context, legal scholar Ruti Teitel writes, "Today as before, humanity posits the core defining line; in law as in morals, it circumscribes the legitimate exercise of force in the international realm." "For Humanity," 225.
16. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 115.
17. Teitel, "For Humanity," 225. Teitel locates the discursive origins of the term *humanity* in "an amalgam of natural law, the law of human rights, and the law of war" (225). Also see Thomas Laqueur's "Mourning, Pity, and the Work of Narrative in the Making of 'Humanity,'" which traces the modern usage of the term *humanity* to the late eighteenth century, in conjunction with sentimental humanitarian narratives of suffering.
18. Pettman, *Human Error*, 2.
19. Agamben, *Open*, 26; also see p. 25.
20. Agamben, *Open*, 37.
21. Scarry, *Thinking in an Emergency*, 7.
22. Calhoun, "Idea of Emergency," 30.
23. Honig, "Three Models," 46.
24. See Cartwright, "Images of Waiting Children."
25. See Chouliaraki, *Spectatorship of Suffering*; and Doane, "Information, Crisis, Catastrophe."
26. Richard Rorty refers to this as the "sentimentalist thesis" of human rights. Quoted in Laqueur, "Mourning," 31.
27. See Rancière, "Who Is?"; and Keenan, "Where Are Human Rights . . . ?," 65–66.
28. Honig, "Three Models," 59.
29. Levinas and Kearney, "Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas," 24.
30. Fassin, "Humanitarianism," 508.
31. I discuss Fassin in greater detail in chapter 2.
32. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 143.
33. As Butler notes, Levinas associates the face with a prelinguistic vocalization that exceeds translation. *Precarious Life*, 134, 161. The connections between face and voice in Levinas require further parsing beyond what I can provide here. I merely note that he employs these terms in a manner that retains both their literal and metaphorical significance.
34. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 147.
35. Sina Kramer points out that both Butler and Levinas take for granted Spinoza's law of nature as self-preservation, which Levinas rewords as overcoming selfishness in order to prolong the life of the other. See Kramer, "Judith Butler's 'New Humanism.'"
36. See, for instance, Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue*; and Cohen and Sue, "Knowing Enough Not to Feel."

37. Cartwright, "Images of Waiting Children," 206. Also see Chouliaraki, *Spectatorship of Suffering*; and Chouliaraki, *Ironic Spectator*.
38. Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera*; Torchin, *Creating the Witness*; and Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics*.
39. Keenan, "Publicity and Indifference," 107–8.
40. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 3. This is a point also made by Elizabeth Cowie in the introduction to her excellent book on documentary style and form; see Cowie, *Recording Reality*, 4.
41. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

**Chapter 1: Feral Innocence**

1. All quotes are transcribed from my viewing of the films in question. For *The Wild Child*, I transcribed the English subtitles from the DVD version of the film.
2. See Linnaeus, *Systema naturae*, 1:21. Rousseau's enthusiastic positive regard for the vigor, robustness, and tenaciousness of "natural man" and his imaginative description of a "serene, sylvan, solitary" state before speech, sociality, and culture are frequently contrasted with his predecessor Thomas Hobbes's pessimistic view of life in the state of nature as "nasty, brutish, and short." See Rousseau, *Social Contract*, 90–107; and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 186.
3. See Yousef, *Isolated Cases*; Murray, *Autism*, 40; and Pinchevski, "Displacing Incommunicability," 165.
4. As Michel Foucault has noted, the same "parental complex" would soon be adopted by Pinel at Bicêtre, and by his contemporary Samuel Tuke at the York Retreat, in their pioneering efforts to develop a humane method of "moral treatment" that would "liberate the insane from their chains" by enlisting them as wardens of their own supervision. See Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 253. Later, Foucault elaborates, "[Tuke and Pinel] did not introduce science but a personality, whose powers borrowed from science only their disguise, or at most their justification. These powers, by their nature, were of a *moral or social* order; they took root in the madman's minority status." The physician was "Father and Judge, Family and Law. . . . Pinel was well aware that the doctor cures when, exclusive of modern therapeutics, he brings into play these immemorial figures" (271–72; italics added).
5. See Yousef, *Isolated Cases*, 109.
6. Worth and Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes*, 138.
7. Briski received her training in photography at the University of Cambridge and the International Center for Photography in New York City. After winning the National Press Photographers Association Pictures of the Year Award in 1995 for her photojournalism on female infanticide in India, she initiated the Sonagachi photography project in 1997, for which she received the Open Society Institute Fellowship (1999), the World Press Photo Foundation Award for "Daily Life Stories" (2000), and the Howard Chapnick Grant for the Advancement of Photojournalism (2001). *Born into Brothels* was produced with the help of grants from the Jerome Foundation, the Sundance Institute, and the New York State Council