



Figure 1. "Hand" by Manik. Courtesy of www.kids-with-cameras.org

Immaterial Child Labor: Media Advocacy, Autoethnography, and the Case of *Born into Brothels*

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Kids with Cameras

Running a Google search for *Born into Brothels* takes you directly to the Web site of Kids with Cameras.¹ As the homepage loads, the opening image features a grassy playground enclosed by a modernist concrete structure. A number of classrooms look out onto the yard, and the shadowy figure of a teacher gazes out benevolently through one of the windows. In the foreground, four young girls play soccer on the grass, and in the distance, two boys fly a kite atop the terrace of the concrete building, whose second level appears to hold a number of living areas. The image has a somewhat ghostly quality, and closer examination reveals that it is a digital composite of photorealistic figures superimposed on a simulated architectural scale drawing. The text overlaid on this image invites your participation in the Hope House campaign: “Help Us Build a Home for Children from Calcutta’s Red Light District.” Every few seconds, this image ensemble alternates with the cover art of the film *Born into Brothels: Calcutta’s Red Light Kids*

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(dir. Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, US, 2004), and the anonymous figures of children at play are replaced by the iconic faces of the eight children featured in the award-winning documentary film. Centered in a frontal shot, these smiling faces entreat you to donate money to the campaign by clicking the links embedded within and alongside the alternating images. Some links provide background information on *Born into Brothels*, detailing how Zana Briski's photography workshops with the children of prostitutes in Calcutta during the making of the film inspired the establishment of the nonprofit organization Kids with Cameras in 2002. Others connect you to satellite workshops in Haiti, Jerusalem, and Cairo that aim to "empower . . . children through the art of photography." Throughout the Web site numerous conspicuously located links solicit your support for the Hope House project by hosting fund-raising parties and purchasing merchandise related to the film, such as DVDs, sound-track CDs, and photographs produced by children in the workshops. But by far the most prominently visible sale items are books and prints of the original set of photographs showcased in the film *Born into Brothels*—these are located at the end point of a number of short-cut tabs, in addition to being the focus of the "Kids' Gallery," a highlight of the Web site. If your eye is not drawn here—this is unlikely, since the gallery link is located at an eye-line level with the title in the navigation bar—and you click instead on "About the Kids," a tapestry of portraits unfolds, revealing close-up individual photos of the child stars of *Born into Brothels*. These portraits, accompanied by the briefest of biographical descriptions, lead to the same set of prints organized according to their young authors.²

The network of links on the Kids with Cameras Web site makes manifest on a formal level the complex political economy of the film *Born into Brothels*, the contours of which this article will attempt to situate and analyze. The visitor to the Web site is hailed as a node in a global humanitarian apparatus who can, to borrow the slogan of the eponymous Web site, "save the world one click at a time."³ The structure of the Kids with Cameras site posits a causal link between purchasing a print or a book online and effecting change remotely in the lives of disadvantaged third-world children.

This promise of moral redemption for a minimal amount of effort on the part of the user/consumer (literally, clicking on a hyperlink) functions according to the Web 2.0 logic of user-empowerment that Tara McPherson has dubbed “volitional mobility”—a feeling of mobility marked by a heightened sensation of choice, subjectivity, and causality that is paradoxically an effect of formal constraint and structuring.⁴ But it also offers an important update to that logic. By referring the consumption of cultural difference to the (presumably Western, presumably middle-class) user as a solution to third-world problems, the Web site positions “clicking,” a particularly facile and transient mode of online interactivity, as a form of activism.

Crucially, the Kids with Cameras Web site’s model of appealing to the spectator as an agent of change also mirrors the ethos of emancipation through media that drives the narrative of *Born into Brothels*. The film chronicles an advocacy project carried out by the codirector and photojournalist Briski. While documenting the lives of women prostitutes in the Sonagachi district of Calcutta, Briski turns instead to teaching photography to the children of these prostitutes, to (in her words) “see this world through their eyes.” Initially, the film posits photography as an exposure to producing art—a means of building the children’s confidence and thereby transforming their consciousness. However, Briski’s project undergoes a gradual transformation of its own over the course of the film. No longer satisfied with merely widening the children’s horizons, Briski becomes invested in liberating the children from the brothels and a life of illegal sex work and installing them on the path to legality, higher education, and social repute. Her goal becomes to assist the children in their own emancipation by setting up a nonprofit (Kids with Cameras) to fund their continued education, fueled by the sale of their own photographs of brothel life.

This article questions the liberatory bent of the incitement to photographic production that shapes the representational discourses of *Born into Brothels*. The film frames Briski’s intervention in terms of the positive benefits to the children of literacy in media as an alternative to commercial sex work. But in doing so, it downplays the extent to which Briski’s project advocates auto-

ethnography, or a process of self-othering through photography, as a lucrative technique of commodification—one whose success trades on fetishizing the figure of the child. In the discussion that follows, I begin by situating *Born into Brothels* within a genealogy of autoethnographic media production that has its inception in the 1960s Navajo Film Themselves project and persists in the form of the indigenous video movement and more diffuse “media empowerment” projects in subsequent decades. I argue that the increasingly popular genre of “child media advocacy” projects to which *Born into Brothels* belongs carries forward a problematic set of ethnographic assumptions concerning the use of technology by subaltern subjects. Then, turning to the photographs taken by the children in Briski’s film, I analyze their discursive positioning within the narrative structure of the film as well as their afterlives as commodities that brand the film, paying particular attention to the system of rewards and controls developed for streamlining the content of the children’s artistic production as an instrument of their own self-determination.⁵ By investigating the qualities that make these photographs so appropriate for global circulation, I find that a coercive cultural logic underpins the invitation to subjecthood mediating the children’s autoethnographic labor.

These may seem a provocative set of claims to make regarding an independent film, claims that trivialize the decidedly noble aims of a relatively small-scale and even ostensibly feminist project or disparage the value of a film that has generated tremendous international support for its cause, in addition to garnering considerable critical acclaim for its achievements in realizing humanitarian goals on film.⁶ Others may find that the critique I make here is not radical enough—the *Born into Brothels* project has incited angered responses from both Indian activists and feminist critics abroad for ignoring local organizing efforts and for Briski’s alleged breach of ethical and legal boundaries in dealing with the sex workers featured in the film.⁷ Indeed, my intervention does not directly target the film’s moral and ethical stance—if I arrive at conclusions about these issues it is through a sustained interrogation of the film’s liberatory discourses regarding the use of photography as a medium of social mobilization. I argue that this

earnestly humanist film presents us with a rich site through which to examine the technologies of representation that encourage and enable otherwise invisible subjectivities to obtain currency in the circuits of global media, including the Internet, film festivals, art galleries, museums, and other fora. *Born into Brothels* affords us an opportunity to examine critically the current era of cross-cultural politics and to assess the stakes of media advocacy and its attendant logics of “empowerment.” The following discussion seeks to illustrate that the discourses of liberal/humanitarian media are not necessarily exempt from the exploitative neoliberal project of garnering “affective” or “immaterial” labor that we have grown accustomed to associating with the state, multinational capital, and mainstream media.

Navajo with Cameras—Autoethnography Then and Now

In the summer of 1966, the anthropologists Sol Worth and John Adair entered a Navajo reservation with 16 mm film cameras, tripods, and editing equipment and initiated the Navajo Film Themselves project, now widely acknowledged as one of the earliest attempts to “put the camera directly into native hands.”⁸ In their book-length chronicle of the project, *Through Navajo Eyes*, Worth and Adair describe their work as a study of “how a group of people structure their view of the world—their reality—through film.”⁹ They tentatively label their method “Bio-Documentary,” or “a film made by a person to show how he feels about himself and the world. It is a subjective way of showing what the objective world that a person sees is ‘really’ like . . . this kind of film bears the same relation to documentary film that a self-portrait has to a portrait or a [biography to an] autobiography” (25). While this insistence on questions of subjectivity and selfhood seems to gesture presciently toward the questions of self-othering that post-structuralist critique would bring to bear on ethnography in the 1980s, Worth and Adair are in fact ultimately empiricist in their approach to these issues. The authors argue that examining the visual coding, narrative syntax, style, and textual organization of films made by the Navajo can yield rich scientific material for

decoding the emotional, cognitive, and ontological dimensions of Navajo communication. Significantly, the factor that authorizes Worth and Adair to label their findings as distinctly and authentically “Navajo” is the physical handling of the equipment, materials, and processes involved in filmmaking by their six Navajo students after receiving some rudimentary training in filmmaking by Worth and Adair.¹⁰

Despite critiques of ethnocentrism and positivism from later scholars of indigenous media, Worth and Adair’s pioneering efforts in thinking ethnographically about film have been argued by Faye Ginsburg and others to have played a key role in legitimizing film as an object of anthropological study, and for the acceptance of visual and media anthropology as serious fields of academic inquiry.¹¹ Furthermore, their then radical “shared” approach to cultural knowledge production is thought to have precipitated the imperative toward self-examination, reflexivity, and experimentation that George Marcus, Michael Fischer, and others have described as a “crisis” in ethnographic authority in the mid-1980s.¹² Autoethnography has since emerged as a privileged site for such methodological reflection. The term *autoethnography* is now often employed as a shorthand for self-reflection or reflexivity in ethnography; for instance, Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner propose “evocative” or autobiographical narration on the part of the ethnographer as a postmodern strategy for challenging realist notions of empirical evidence, self-present voice, and coherent subjectivity.¹³ This paradigm of the “self as journey”—also adopted recently by the cinema scholar Catherine Russell—emphasizes the culturally constituted selfhood of the ethnographer as a site for critical reflection.¹⁴ However, the predominant understanding of autoethnography builds on Mary Louise Pratt’s use of the term to describe the discursive struggles of colonized subjects. Pratt’s coinage of the neologism *autoethnography* in her seminal 1992 text, *Imperial Eyes*, offers a critically informed and theoretically sophisticated rubric through which to revisit the impetus behind Worth and Adair’s notion of biodocumentary. She writes, “if ethnographic texts are a means by which Europeans represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts are those the

others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.”¹⁵

Pratt’s understanding of autoethnography, which emphasizes transculturation, hybridity, and ideological struggle in cross-cultural representation, resonates closely with the vocabulary employed by the anthropologist Ginsburg for describing the work of activist scholars working in collaboration with indigenous video-makers from the 1970s onward. Within the discipline of visual anthropology, Ginsburg, Terence Turner, and Monica Frota (née Feitosa) are generally considered heirs to Worth and Adair’s model of “shared anthropology”—and in the true tradition of successors, they work hard to distinguish their approach from that of their forefathers. The main intervention of these scholars, after acknowledging the intellectual and disciplinary contributions of the Navajo project, is to emphasize the importance of social process rather than filmic product in indigenous video production. Ginsburg exemplifies this position when she argues, “Worth and Adair failed to consider seriously potential cultural differences in the social relations around image-making and viewing. . . . Their project . . . to see if [Navajo] films would be based on a different film ‘grammar’ based on Navajo worldview . . . focused overmuch on the filmic rather than the social frame.”¹⁶ In contrast, she describes the use of video by Australian Aboriginal people as “innovations in both filmic representation and *social process*, expressive of transformations in cultural identities in terms shaped by local and global conditions of the late 20th century” (92, emphasis mine). In her various writings, Ginsburg repeatedly highlights the instrumental role of video in social transformation, such as internal and external communication, self-determination, and resistance to outside domination.

This chastening critique is mainly an indictment of the Navajo project’s disinterest in “empowering” its native participants through the use of film. Feitosa writes, “‘Through Navajo Eyes’ expresses a scientific experiment centered on the researchers instead of the ‘makers’ interests. The project did not by itself give rise to any further Navaho [*sic*] film projects nor provided a viable means of self-representation through visual media.”¹⁷ As we

see here, the polemic of indigenous video scholars also repudiates Worth and Adair's "scientific" interest in film language and medium specificity, an investment that such critics would argue was shared by contemporaneous theories of film semiotics and the cinematic apparatus (later known as *Screen* theory). Like proponents of media anthropology who locate themselves in the genealogy of British cultural studies, these indigenous media scholars are anxious to dismiss scientifically oriented explanatory frameworks as "totalizing."¹⁸ For them, the affordability, portability, ease of operation, and relative openness of video's distribution infrastructure represent the promise of a corrective to the orientalizing dimensions of ethnography that systematically "third world-ize" certain populations who do not enjoy continued access to advanced media technologies as a means of world-making.¹⁹ Ginsburg, Turner, and Frota therefore conceptualize providing indigenous populations with video equipment and training in warlike terms as a "defiant" appropriation, as a "taking aim" or "shooting back" by voices that have historically been silenced by the structural effects of the ethnographic binary;²⁰ or, to borrow Fatimah Tobing Rony's term, voices that have been rendered "ethnographiable."²¹

Ginsburg and her colleagues do in fact offer highly sophisticated, context-specific theorizations of how indigenous video can serve as a local tool for articulating specialized needs, improving community bonds, and preserving information for future generations over and above the more ambitious goal of rectifying ethnographic hierarchies by realigning local-global social relations. At the same time, there is a problematic tendency in their accounts to assume that the "indigenous voice" is, as Rachel Moore writes, "in and of itself a good thing," immune to discursive hierarchies of gender, caste, and social position, not to mention received rhetorical tropes from the anthropologists who provide them with equipment and training.²² However, the keywords that cluster around their discussions of video (advocacy, mobilization, activation, and the empowerment of "silenced voices") have proved attractive for a number of more recent humanitarian ventures that unproblematically borrow the indigenous media advocacy model and the slogan of empowerment for "liberating" a whole host of beleaguered oth-

ers, including children, women, girls, racial and sexual minorities, and the mentally or physically disabled. One such instance is what we might, for lack of a better term, call the child media advocacy movement. *Born into Brothels* and Briski's nonprofit organization Kids with Cameras would fall into this category, as would more recent emulations of the *Born into Brothels* model such as Through Our Own Eyes. Mounted in 2010 by the Europe- and Canada-based nonprofit Plan International, this initiative involves training fourteen street children in Dhaka, Bangladesh, to document their lives using photography and video so as to "speak out and promote their own rights."²³ ZoomUganda, founded in 2006, is another example. Funded by the Harambee Center, a US nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon, ZoomUganda is devoted to improving the lives of twelve orphaned Ugandan girls by equipping them with 35 mm consumer SLR cameras. The girls are encouraged to maintain accounts of their struggles in the form of photo-diaries, which are used by the nonprofit as a showcase for acquiring continuing financial support for the girls' education and housing. The ZoomUganda Web site and lecture presentations of the girls' photo-diaries by the founder Julie Resnick on the US academic circuit function as circulatory hubs for the trade-off between cross-cultural "awareness" and donations toward the cause.²⁴ More recently, Niños de la Amazonia was founded in 2009 by the schoolteacher Amy Coplan, following the same model as Kids with Cameras. Photographs taken by indigenous children from the Peruvian Amazon "who had never seen a camera prior to the project" are sold through Coplan's Web site in the form of prints and hardbound books to raise funds for establishing scholarships for the six indigenous child-photographers, as well as for other children from the same village.²⁵

Practices of giving cameras to children have been ongoing since the 1960s.²⁶ However, child-produced content has become increasingly common in personal and autobiographical documentary genres where, as Michael Renov has noted, the subjectivities of diverse historical minorities have emerged as a point of condensation since the mid- to late-1990s.²⁷ The documentary film *Desire* (dir. Julie Gustafson and Isaac Webb, US, 2005), for

instance, features footage shot by six young New Orleans women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds who are given digital cameras to make “intimate videos about their changing lives.”²⁸ In recent years, photographs and films produced by marginalized or disadvantaged children also frequently find exhibition venues in museums, art galleries, and film festivals: online initiatives such as The Girl Project (founded 2007), which features a curated selection of photographs taken by young girls who are supplied with cameras, after-school projects focused on inner-city children like Charleston Kids with Cameras (founded 2003), and traveling gallery exhibits such as Eyes of New California (2005), which showcases photographs taken by immigrant and refugee teens, have now become standard fare.²⁹ However, projects like *Born into Brothels* illustrate a distinctive new feature of the contemporary child media advocacy movement—a model of social mobilization that is set into motion by “empowering” children (particularly third-world children) to assume political subjectivity by becoming producers of viable cultural commodities. This model makes plain an economic incentive that figures less prominently in other initiatives that cite autoethnography as a medium for empowering children and youth to explore their own subjectivity, but which nonetheless emphasize an entrepreneurial relationship with image-making as an important dimension of child development.

These novel forms and venues for exhibiting media produced by children are undeniably a discursive by-product of the progressively accessible and user-friendly appeal of new technologies and interfaces and should be critiqued as such—Sarah Banet-Weiser, for instance, argues that the use of digital forums such as YouTube for broadcasting “girl-brand” media attests to a neoliberal transcoding of postfeminist discourses of “freedom.”³⁰ But the approach to the subjectivity of children in contemporary child media advocacy projects also has intimate ties with the prehistory of autoethnographic media: before finalizing their research methodology for the Navajo project, Worth and Adair conducted a number of “control experiments” by handing out cameras to inner-city teenage “Negro drop-outs” in Philadelphia and New York, “to determine the feasibility of teaching people in another culture to use film.”³¹ Worth and

Adair are not very forthcoming about why they chose this particular group, noting only that their interest was in textual analysis rather than community service and action (229). But given the social groups they list alongside the Navajo as rich subjects of other ongoing biodocumentary projects, with the exception of “middle-class whites”—“unwed mothers, grade-school-children (some as young as eight years), Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Negroes”—it is not difficult to detect an impulse to investigate subjectivities that are unproductive, inaccessible, or otherwise outside in relation to the social norm.³² Other than the “social average” group of “middle-class whites,” these “types” are all instances of what Rey Chow has dubbed “primitives”—marginalized groups whose subalternity can prove profitable for society when their reified identities are dialectically mobilized to rejuvenate and modernize the image of the dominant social groups. Chow locates this self-orientalizing tendency as the flip side of the liberatory impulse of autoethnography, which rests on the assumption that something in a state of repression needs to be “set free” or liberated. Reversing the terms of this “repressive hypothesis,” she argues that we need to attend to the positivities that are produced when cultural or ethnic “others” engage in an act of self-othering (or autoethnography) in a bid toward ensuring a potentially profitable situation of exchange.³³

The ideological stakes of inciting discourse from children by positioning them as “primitives” can be further elucidated by considering the tradition of social science research on children and media. There is a rich and well-documented history of the use of various media (including painting, drawing, photography, and video) by children and youth as research tools in medical, psychological, sociological, and therapeutic contexts—a growing area of the academic archive that attests to what Michel Foucault describes as the modern drive to engage in discourse about the self and to endlessly investigate it as an object of knowledge.³⁴ While this wide-ranging body of literature is beyond the scope of the present article, a common procedure in social and biological science approaches to child authors is that the “child” (typically under eighteen, or between the ages of four and twelve in situations where “youth” is employed to refer to teenagers) is preencoded into the

research methodology as a positive (legal, biological, physiological, psychical) subject rather than as a nebulous entity defined by the condition of being-on-the-verge-of-becoming a subject—or to borrow Gilles Deleuze’s term, simply “becoming.” These preconceptions are then used as a hypothesis against which to measure empirical findings. An instance of this can be seen in VIA-OAR (Video Intervention/Prevention Assessment—Overweight and At Risk), the most recent project of Richard Chalfen, a former student of Worth and a key member of the Navajo project, as well as the founder of the sociodocumentary approach to child-produced media. Chalfen provides overweight and at-risk children with camcorders to maintain video diaries that are said to “show and tell” doctors what is not yet empirically visible about the children’s mental and physical status.³⁵

A similar technique of confirming a priori premises is at work in the case of contemporary child media advocacy. The autoethnographic discourse of this movement seldom critically interrogates the extent to which it anxiously relies on the indexical status of the filmed image—or the hands-on handling of the media apparatus by children—as an authenticating mark of the other.³⁶ This is a problem that advocacy projects employing indexical media inherit from the deliberately untheorized approach of the indigenous video movement to formal aspects of medium specificity—an anti-“high film theory” tactic that video seems to legitimate and even demand.³⁷ The fallout of this “social activist” approach to autoethnography is that the other’s gesture toward self-referentiality stands in for the work of critical self-reflection. The commitment to minimizing the intervention of the ethnographer inaugurates a return to a rhetoric of directness and an aesthetic of immediacy reminiscent of direct observation, and concrete or *vérité* approaches to ethnography, techniques that have been discredited for their positivist approaches to the cinematic “real.” In the absence of the ethnographer’s ideological work of framing, the indexical sign is the ligature that pins down and guarantees the presence, immediacy, and identity of the other—in this instance, the child. Indexicality critically addresses the phenomenon that Ginsburg calls the “paradox of primitivism,” where the traditional

imagery of indigenous people that serves as a political tool locally can simultaneously reify the very cultural processes that indigenous people are committed to preserving.³⁸ As the following case study of *Born into Brothels* suggests, this paradox—Ginsburg’s “Faustian dilemma”—can be a tremendously productive site for engaging the discursive work mobilized by child media advocacy as a model of empowerment.

“Through Their Eyes”: Indexing Immediacy

It’s almost impossible to photograph in the Red Light district. Everyone is terrified of the camera. They’re frightened of being found out. Everything’s illegal . . . I knew I couldn’t do it as a visitor—I wanted to stay with them, and understand their lives. And of course, as soon as I entered the brothels, I met the children. The brothels are filled with children, they’re everywhere. And they were so curious; they didn’t understand why this woman had come and what I was doing there. They were all over me, and I would play with them, and take their photographs, and they would take mine. They wanted to learn how to use the camera. That’s when I thought it would be really great to teach them, and to *see this world through their eyes*.³⁹

These words are excerpted from Briski’s voice-over narration, which remains an intermittent structuring presence throughout *Born into Brothels*. The very first spoken words we hear, this confession occurs just a few minutes into the opening of the film, framing what follows as a document of Briski’s decision to teach photography to the children of prostitutes in the Sonagachi red-light district of Calcutta, rather than organizing the film around her own photographs of brothel life. Briski’s explicit vow of passivity is frequently championed in press interviews and biographies that cast her as a savior figure, and it has become part of the mythology surrounding the film. That Briski chose not to use the film as a showcase for her own work is only dramatized further by the fact that she had already won numerous prestigious awards for her “humanistic” documentary photography before embarking on the film project, the bulk of which were awarded for the very photographs of Sonagachi that are *not* the focus of the film.⁴⁰

In what follows, I sketch out the narrative shape taken by Briski's attitude of self-effacement, together with her claim that the children's photographs provide an uninterrupted view of brothel life as seen "through their eyes." I argue that Briski's cinematic language is constructed so as to cover over a number of less altruistic machinations — the self-serving rhetorical frame of her film, which functions as a vehicle for presenting the photographs shot by the children, the perspectival apparatus of photography itself, and the logic of the humanitarian "gift" of pedagogy, which obscures the deferred reciprocity of the transaction between Briski and the children.

Although Briski's own images do occasionally appear during *Born into Brothels*, her presence is minimal in the first half of the narrative, which unfolds austerely in the manner of a slide presentation, featuring testimony and photographs by each of the eight children from Briski's photography class chosen to be represented in the film. Preceding this, the introductory sequence accompanying Briski's initial narration mirrors the tensions enfolded in Briski's confession of her "outsider" status, and her resolution to overcome the difficulty of entering and representing the space of the brothels by enabling the children's autoethnographic photo practice. Bearing a bag full of cameras and optical toys, Briski is led by the hand by several children to a locked room (later revealed to be the home of one of the children), and one of the children unlocks the door to admit her. This overture poetically captures the trade-off set into motion by Briski's decision to offer free photography workshops for children dwelling in the brothels of Sonagachi—in exchange for lessons in photography, Briski's students afford her both literal and representational access to an illegal space that is, by her own admission, indecipherable and impenetrable. The visual and sound design of the two-minute long opening video sequence is accordingly stylized to accentuate the dangerous qualities of the space of the brothels. The message conveyed by its overview of various scenes of brothel life is that the children are forcibly embroiled within this illicit, transactive space. The lighting is predominantly red, and the camera speed is slowed down and sped up in alternation. Coupled with handheld camera movements filmed from a low

angle through the legs of passing pedestrians, the unpredictable texture of the sequence suggests that the perspective offered to us is the chaotic and surreal worldview of a child. The music is a drone-like raga, ominous and plaintive in its continual minor thematic elaboration. The scenes shown capture iconic elements of brothel life—young girls in thin, shiny clothing and bright lipstick waiting for customers at street corners, men approaching them in groups and alone, men and women emerging half-clothed from barely shielded doorways, liquor being poured into cheap glass tumblers, cigarette smoking, drugs changing hands. Nothing stays on screen for very long. The camera is mobile and snakes from place to place, creating the impression of an elusive but highly intimate point of view—a child’s point of view. Any confusion regarding this fact is clarified by the editing of this sequence. Briski cuts back and forth between scenes of brothel street life and the faces of children framed in extreme close-up around the eyes, soulfully lit in chiaroscuro style. We later recognize these faces as those of Puja, Shanti, Suchitra, Tapasi, Avjit, Gour, Kochi, and Manik, the eight children profiled in the film. Even though the opening sequence does not feature even a single photograph shot by the children, the effect is that Briski’s digital video footage persuasively conveys a perspective of brothel life seen from the specific point of view of the eight child photographers. Similar sequences recur throughout the film as transitions that bridge segments featuring the children’s photographs and Briski’s video footage of them using their cameras; they thus continue their rhetorical function as narrative devices that attribute Briski’s perspective of the brothels to her local wards.

Poonam Arora has identified a similar logic of borrowed ethnographic authority operating in films of the “urban realist” documentary genre such as *Salaam Bombay* (dir. Mira Nair, UK/India/France, 1988). Arora argues that *Salaam Bombay* masquerades as an indigenous feminist ethnography of a foreign space by highlighting the “insider” status of the director, Mira Nair. While purporting to offer the West a relatively new “angle of vision” by studying her own culture, Nair bolsters her indigenous authority by capitalizing on the ethnographic authenticity of the “real” street children recruited in this film as nonprofessional actors—a

technique employed again with great success by the British director Danny Boyle in his critically acclaimed *Slumdog Millionaire* (dir. Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan, UK, 2008). Arora contends that while *Salaam Bombay* constructs the appearance of documentary realism, the generic quality of Nair's character sketches and plot repeatedly disengages from the complexities and specificity of the sociopolitical and economic conditions that she claims to document. Consequently, Nair's film ossifies the space between the first and the third worlds as nontraversable, producing reified versions of third-world subjectivities for effortless consumption by the West.⁴¹

In a comparable move, *Born into Brothels* posits autoethnography, or providing the subaltern children in question with the means for representing themselves and their world, as a solution for addressing the space between the first and third worlds. Nevertheless, this merely produces a different iteration of the problematic identified by Arora. Rather than reflecting on the constructions produced by the children's learned autoethnographic representations, Briski's film obliterates the fact of mediation altogether, in a rhetorical maneuver that essentializes the identity of the children. The coffee-table book authored by Briski, which chronicles the *Born into Brothels* project and showcases the children's photographs, contains several instances of this kind of discourse.⁴² The introduction to this volume by the Sundance Documentary Film Program director, Diane Weyerman, chronicles the *Born into Brothels* project and showcases the children's photographs, extolling the children's "transformation" by photography: "Briski, a professional photographer, gives [the children] lessons and cameras, igniting sparks of artistic genius that reside in these children who live in the world's most sordid and seemingly hopeless world. . . . Their photographs are prisms into their souls, rather than anthropological curiosities or primitive imagery . . . they reflect . . . art as an immensely liberating and empowering force" (9).

Weyerman's characterization of the children's photographs as "prisms into their souls" privileges the capacity of photography to render its subject's consciousness self-present and fully knowable. Abigail Solomon-Godeau has argued that the indexical char-

acter of photography as a technology all too often becomes an alibi for discourses of documentary realism, leading to the widespread “common-sense” notion that all photography is “documentary” in nature. She writes, “the documentary image, like any other, is ‘spoken’ within language and culture . . . its meanings are both produced and secured within those systems of representations that a priori mark its subject—and our relations to the subject—in pre-ordained ways.”⁴³ That the autoethnographic photograph appears to “speak itself” should, as Solomon-Godeau points out, alert us to the mythologizing work of ideology in realist forms.

Weyerman’s earnest insistence that the photographs taken by Briski’s students should not be treated as ethnographic fabrications is predicated on the same assumption made by indigenous video scholars—that the authorization of the children’s “voices” through photography must mean that they are not objectified or spoken for in any way by Briski’s film.

A closer reading of the power attributed by the *Born into Brothels* project to “art” discloses the ideological work accomplished by its celebration of the children’s self-realization through photography. As witnessed in Weyerman’s statement, Briski is anxious to rhetorically position the children’s training in photography in terms of the therapeutic use value that accrues to them through the photographic process of self-writing. When Weyerman writes that Briski’s photography lessons “ignit[e] sparks of artistic genius that reside in these children who live in the world’s most sordid and seemingly hopeless world,” her implication is that being exposed to and producing “art” will transform the children’s consciousness, build their confidence, and provide the children with an avenue for self-valorization that is separate from the “sordid” exchange-based economy of the flesh trade that comprises the fabric of their everyday lives. The unspoken conceit of this reasoning not only reifies art as a sphere uncorrupted by exchange, but Briski’s aesthetic decisions redouble this reification by portraying the children’s artistic production as a natural aspect of their mimetic instinct, which merely needs an appropriate medium in order to rise to the surface as evidence of their humanity. A striking difference in color palette sets apart Briski’s more sober black and white photographs from

those of the children, which are shot on vibrant color stock, thereby leveraging the children's photographs as a more undisciplined, immediate, and ultimately "truer" index of Calcutta's garish urban underbelly. Whether or not Briski's decision to have the children photograph using color film stock is financially or aesthetically motivated, the evaluation of the children's photographs as "art" seems to be based on their guarantee of documentary immediacy, while Briski's own photographs speak the different and more composed language of professional photojournalism.

Briski's dramatic transformation from holistic teacher to promoter and fund-raiser over the course of *Born into Brothels* unveils the ethnocentric logic at work in the conceit of evaluating the children's photographs as a process of self-writing rather than as indexes of "authentic" reality. Approximately halfway through the film, Briski admits that the nature of her intervention in the children's lives has undergone an evolution from simply teaching them the elements of photography to establishing an infrastructure for them to instrumentalize their own photographs for ensuring their economic futures. Briski's reform project, which becomes the focus of the latter half of the film, has both a moral and an economic dimension which converge in the aim of extracting the children from the brothels—which are represented as bankrupt on both fronts—and "civilizing" them by securing admission for them in more strictly regulated private schools. Soon after, while traveling abroad to procure ongoing grant funding for her project, she reveals her new economic mission, announcing, "My goal now is to teach them but also to raise money for them using their own photography, selling their photographs to raise money for them. . . . The whole point of this is to get the kids out of the brothels." Briski's revised project (which has culminated in establishing Kids with Cameras as a forum for the children to sustain the sale of their photographs in the global market, thereby raising funds for their own education) makes it possible to see that the children's "aptitude for art" is not merely a dormant creative instinct but also a repository of untapped economic potential. The moral obligation of saving the children from the brothels merely provides an alibi

for liberating this potential from the limits of a local economy that is deemed unproductive.

Immaterial Child Labor

It may be instructive at this juncture to look closely at two photographs that occupy a special position in the diegetic and extradiegetic world of *Born into Brothels*. My reading of these photographs suggests some of the ways in which the film's aesthetic of immediacy works in tandem with the invitation to the children to assume subjecthood, toward a unique new form of cultivating the economic capacity of children as communicative subjects. Together, these strategies indicate the exigency of attending to the tremendous productive capacities of what I call "immaterial child labor."

Shot by a boy named Manik, the photograph in figure 1 has become more iconically associated with the *Born into Brothels* project than any other image produced by the children. "Hand" is often used as the cover image in sets of the children's photographs available for sale and also enjoys a special visibility in the film. It was one of the few photographs chosen for exhibition at the first local public show of the children's photographs in Calcutta, and it was featured in the invitation used to publicize the show in question. As Briski emphasizes in the film, Manik's image was also chosen to represent the work of the children in a press release about the *Born into Brothels* project in the *Times of India*, the most widely distributed newspaper in the country. When asked to describe his process of producing this image, Manik explains that his sister Shanti put her hand in front of the camera as he was pressing the shutter, producing the unusual effect of a blown-out silhouette of a hand against the backdrop of fairground lights in the distance. In effect, this photograph breaks all the rules of photography that Briski has taught the children: how to frame subjects, to strive for balanced and carefully measured compositions, to edit out bad photographs, and so on. It is interesting to contemplate why this particular photograph represents a certain value for the *Born into Brothels* project as a whole, given that it is unremarkable insofar as mastery of the

medium is concerned and that it objectively “defies” the children’s education in photography. The reception of this image at the Calcutta exhibition documented in the film suggests an answer. When the children are invited to the show, Shanti is asked over and over again by delighted members of the elite Calcutta audience to mimic her original gesture, to recreate the movement of instinctively “flashing” her hand in front of Manik’s camera that unexpectedly produced such an exposure during night photography. But rather than inquiring whether Shanti’s hand gesture may have been an intentional or unconscious defense against the invasive presence of her brother’s camera, Briski and the other exhibition attendees celebrate the photograph’s “spontaneity,” praising Manik and Shanti’s intuitive understanding of the contingencies of the consumer flash-camera apparatus. Beyond serving as documentary evidence of what Walter Benjamin calls the “mimetic” instinct of children, or their powerful impulse to play at “becoming” someone or something else, Manik’s photograph becomes reassuring proof that this primitive and unruly impulse to play at “becoming” something else can be “schooled” or usefully channeled into a socially productive form of “art.”⁴⁴

The popularity of Manik’s “Hand” image is indicative of Briski’s pedagogical tendency to encourage and favor those photographs that explicitly “arrest” their young subjects in the midst of various affective gestures and iconic childhood activities. Many of the children’s photographs featured in the film and on the Kids with Cameras Web site emphasize bustle and flow, capturing children, animals, and objects in the blurry midst of activity, movement, or play. Running, climbing, laughing, and jumping are frequent topics, and staged portraits are few. But in a resounding majority of images, the unexpected intimacy of what is exposed—a man preparing for a bath, a woman in a state of undress, a naked baby sprawled on its back—relies on the disarming speed and alacrity of a small child. While the aleatory nature of these photographs draws attention ever more to the irrevocable pastness of their content, the value of the images derives from the childlike status of their subject at the moment of taking the photograph—a playfully sensuous capacity threatened with extinction as the chil-

dren grow into young adults. It is telling in this regard that Briski's nonprofit organization Kids with Cameras does not advertise the sale of more recent photographs by the now teenaged stars of *Born into Brothels*. The primary proceeds come from selling the limited edition of photos featured in the film and compiled in Briski's book. The success of Manik's photograph seems related to its particular efficiency in encapsulating the quality that helps brand the children's photographs.

In addition to informing the economic logic of Kids with Cameras, Briski's preference for an aesthetic of childlike spontaneity also shapes the narrative style of *Born into Brothels*. The sequence preceding the presentation of Manik's photographs exemplifies the role that the children's still photographs play in the flow of Briski's video footage. This sequence stages a reenactment of the *mise-en-scène* of one of Manik's photographs, which captures a boy flying a kite from the rooftop of a tenement house. The first few shots cut back and forth in medium framing between Manik and his sister Shanti. Clad in just a pair of shorts, Manik is preparing to send off a kite into the evening air, while Shanti sits in a corner, talking to Briski. Next, the camera cuts to a long shot of a blue kite in the distance (presumably the one being flown by Manik) fluttering in the sky. The camera momentarily stays trained to the movements of the kite. Then the image abruptly freezes to a still of the blue kite, fading into the image of a red kite in a similar framing. The camera then zooms out, and the change in the texture of the image reveals that what we now see is not a freeze-frame of Briski's video footage but a still photograph of a shirtless boy on the same rooftop, flying a red kite. This still image introduces the segment that follows, entitled "Photos by Manik." Briski's decision to reproduce a digital copy of Manik's photograph is an ambivalent move—it runs the risk of suggesting that the contents of the children's photographs are somewhat commonplace. Nevertheless, the risk pays off, since the fade from digital video to photographic still image calls even greater attention to the uniqueness of the children's artistic production. The materiality of the 35 mm still photograph, posed in such direct contrast with its digital video counterpart, acquires through comparison the fetishistic status of



Figure 2. “Self Portrait” by Avijit. Courtesy of www.kids-with-cameras.org

the “real.” For the North American and European middle-brow television and elite film festival audiences to which the film is primarily addressed, the children’s still photographs evoke the nostalgic fondness reserved by the West for technologies on the brink of obsolescence. In the hands of these third-world children, the consumer SLR camera image—an already outdated commodity that Michael Taussig might call a “relic of modernity”—finds a renewed cultural cachet, reminding inhabitants of advanced digital societies of more innocent times.⁴⁵

The photograph featured in figure 2 is shot by a boy named Avijit, who becomes a major player in Briski’s plan for educating and reforming the children of Sonagachi. Most of the other children remain two-dimensional figures within the film narrative, functioning mainly as pathos-filled talking-head bookends for individual series of photographs. Yet Briski devotes significant screen and character-development time to Avijit during the latter half of *Born into Brothels*, and he becomes instrumental in personalizing the uplifting story arc of the film. Early in the film, Avijit is

singled out as having a “unique talent” for autoethnography. This is documented in the sequence in which his “Self Portrait” is shown and discussed in Briski’s photography class. As seen above, Avijit’s self-portrait frames him against the background of the Sonagachi street that his house is located on. The features of his face are somewhat blurred, and in contrast, the background is crisply clear—we see a dirty tenement building behind the boy, the walls spattered with mud and dirt, betel stains, graffiti, and posters. Several stories above Avijit and the woman who stands behind him, we see clothes hung up to dry outside windows. While Avijit’s face itself remains anonymous, the background of his “Self Portrait” abounds with signifying elements that confess his socioeconomic and cultural identity. Briski displays Avijit’s self-portrait to the children in the photography class as an example of a “good photograph,” noting commandingly that “we can see the street, the environment in which he lives.”

The imperative to self-orientalize implicit within Briski’s praise of this image becomes clearer by reading this sequence in juxtaposition with the one immediately prior to the class session, in which Briski films Avijit’s grandmother holding up a photo portrait taken of Avijit as a child. In this image, featured in figure 3, baby Avijit is posed for a photograph in the garb of the infant god Krishna. This tradition of portraiture is very likely familiar to Indian audiences—framing a child within a discourse of divinity is a common Indian trope for representing children in formal portraiture. The photograph held up by Avijit’s grandmother for Briski’s camera is an instance of such a formal photograph, one that conveys a specific collective history of community and religion, but not necessarily of class—in fact the divinity trope is discursively calculated to disavow rather than affirm the class determinism of a child having been “born into a brothel.” When Briski cuts immediately to Avijit’s self-portrait, valorizing it as an example of good photography, she sets up Avijit’s more “spontaneous,” “modern,” and “personal” expression of selfhood over and against the traditional posed portrait, which becomes relegated as simply another exotic curiosity, rather than as a vehicle for imag(in)ing the self in a collective register. Avijit’s “Self Portrait” tellingly empties the

history out of those indices that are not meaningful to the Western reader, replacing a mythological convention that encodes markers of familial and religious background with a documentary realist aesthetic that expresses his ethnic difference as a class distinction. Avijit models as the lesson of the day in photography class what Chow has described as “coercive mimeticism”—by displaying and mobilizing the terms that make him recognizably and irreducibly other in relation to the West, rather than representing himself in terms that erase his class-based otherness in the context of his local cultural community.⁴⁶

Avijit does more than simply model good autoethnographic habits for his peers. He also has all the trappings of a tragic hero, as far as the film is concerned. Although he is “gifted,” a number of personal tragedies pose threats to his continued success as a photographer. His mother becomes the victim of what Briski strongly suggests is a dowry-related killing, and his father is portrayed as a self-destructive alcoholic. Traumatized by his mother’s death, Avijit becomes diffident and withdrawn, and his interest in producing photographs dwindles rapidly. Avijit’s lapse into non-productiveness motivates Briski to assume the task of “liberating” the children from the brothels with a new urgency. His unhappy situation allows Briski to rationalize the importance of transferring all her students from the poorly supervised local municipal schools that they currently attend to privately funded and remotely located rehabilitative educational facilities. Framed by Briski as a therapeutic measure rather than as a disciplinary precaution, the plan to relocate the children is met with much resistance by some of the other children’s parents and grandparents, particularly Puja’s, although Briski ultimately prevails. It becomes apparent that not all the children share Avijit’s situation and that many of their families are nurturing, if nontraditional. The film wastes little time examining these family dynamics, preferring to justify Briski’s moral decision to save the children from the brothels by inserting a brief and troubling scene of a woman taking stern disciplinary measures with Manik. The decontextualized interjection of this sequence, offered without any exploration or analysis of the cultural history of corporal punishment in India, paints a quick portrait of the female

prostitutes of Sonagachi as bad mothers and the children as victims of their wrath.⁴⁷ A rather remarkable montage intervenes at this point. Briski documents a veritable laundry list of the bureaucratizations and medicalizations of the children's bodies undertaken to enter the children into the private education apparatus. Ration cards are applied for, HIV and blood tests are conducted, medical certificates are obtained, proof of prior schooling amassed, and passport photographs taken to overcome the legal obstacles of the children's often illegitimate parentage and to establish their status as citizens.

Special attention is lavished on Avijit, whom Briski becomes invested in transforming from a potentially "bad kid" into a star photographer. With the help of Robert Pledge, a professional photo agent recruited to generate global interest in the children's photography, Briski nominates Avijit as a child ambassador of the *Born into Brothels* project, charging him with the responsibility of representing the work of the children abroad. Following this, the narrative is all but given over to Briski's relentless pursuit of legal documentation to enable Avijit to attend a corrective school and to travel abroad to attend photo shows. A triumphant finale concludes the film when Avijit's passport arrives in time for him to travel to an international photography exhibition in Amsterdam. The last segment of the film is devoted entirely to Avijit's travel in Amsterdam and his participation at a children's tour of the photo show, where Avijit obligingly models his training as a cultural ambassador. Smartly outfitted in Western clothing, Avijit expounds to a rapt audience of children gathered over a photograph, "This is a good picture. We get a good sense of how these people live. And though there is sadness in it, and though it's hard to face, we must look at it because it is *truth*."

Borrowing Louis Althusser's influential description of the ideological scene of interpellation, Maurizio Lazzarato writes that under neoliberalism we are increasingly "hailed" to become "active subjects"—in other words, we are encouraged to mobilize our affective or creative desire for agency as "immaterial labor," setting it to work in a number of economic tasks that are not necessarily recognizable or measurable as work, and which are therefore

typically uncompensated or undercompensated.⁴⁸ More recently, Franco Berardi has suggested that “cognitive workers,” like call-center executives, digital workers, and entrepreneurial managers, represent the archetype of twenty-first-century immaterial labor in that their intellectual and communicative work is instrumental in shaping an economic climate in the form of industrial standards, cultural norms, fashions, tastes, and public opinion. Since these are not tangibly measurable commodities but rather favorable conditions that lubricate the machinery of capitalist accumulation, Marxist theorists like Berardi and Lazzarato, as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, have asserted that the expenditure of immaterial labor in the form of our creative, intellectual, and affective “will to power” heralds a new and unprecedented era of willful submission to exploitation.⁴⁹

The brand of child media advocacy practiced by *Born into Brothels*, which is couched in the language of enabling children to assume economic agency, reveals another disturbing adjunct of this problematic in the domain of humanitarian cross-cultural exchange—a realm that we too often imagine to be “above” such economic vices. The film makes the argument that being given access to the means of production of discourse will liberate the children from a life spent in conditions of extreme poverty and potentially coerced sex work. Through an extension of this logic, Briski offers the humane, benign, and even empowering solution of selling the children’s own photographs as a substitute for the far more egregious alternative of selling their own bodies. From a human rights perspective, Briski’s logic is hard to refute, particularly since contemporary international legal standards designate child prostitution as one of the four “worst forms” of child labor.⁵⁰ But such binary reasoning does not acknowledge that it simply seeks to substitute a legal form of affective labor for an illegal one (sex work) and, in doing so, endorses immaterial child labor as a culturally viable and even meritorious practice. Furthermore, my discussion of *Born into Brothels* suggests how this affirmative restatement of an exploitative economic imperative dovetails with its counterpart of a coercive representational logic to generate new ethnographic positivities. As for the children—perhaps they

supersede the call center and digital worker as the new figure of economic promise. The photographs sold on Kids with Cameras seem to crystallize this rich potential of childhood—they capture the children’s affective desire in a moment of becoming, while mobilizing it in determining what will be commodifiable in the future.

Notes

1. See the Kids with Cameras Web site, www.kids-with-cameras.org/home (accessed 5 February 2010).
2. These elements of the Web site can be seen by following the links to www.kids-with-cameras.org/aboutus/?page=partners (a full list of sponsors and partner organizations, which include NGOs like Amnesty International, philanthropic foundations, and corporate sponsors); www.kids-with-cameras.org/houseparty (donation and fund-raising suggestions); www.kids-with-cameras.org/kidsgallery and www.kids-with-cameras.org/aboutthekids (photo gallery and bios of the children). The children’s photographs are also available in the form of a hardcover coffee-table book: Zana Briski, *Born into Brothels: Photographs by the Children of Calcutta* (New York: Umbrage, 2004).
3. The Web site www.oneclickatatime.org (accessed 5 February 2010) claims to be a hub for hundreds of charitable organizations, organized by cause rather than name. It distinguishes itself from other online charity drives with the contention that the “only cost to [the donor] is time”—each click by the user is recognized by sponsors who donate funds in the form of advertising fees to the charity chosen by the user.
4. For McPherson, “volitional mobility” distinguishes the phenomenology of Web surfing from other media interfaces, wherein the sense of causality associated with interacting with a “live” link induces a visceral sensation of transformation that stands in for (and potentially stands in the way of) actual social change. Tara McPherson, “Reload: Liveness, Mobility, and the Web,” in *Old Media, New Media: A History and Theory Reader*, ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan (London: Routledge, 2006), 202, 205.

5. I refer throughout the article to Briski's authorial choices in *Born into Brothels*. This is not intended to deemphasize the role of her codirector Ross Kauffman; rather, I am merely reflecting the film's own mobilization of the primacy of Briski's authorship in its diegetic and public self-presentation—a topic that itself deserves further interrogation but which I do not take up here in any depth. While Kauffman is credited as the codirector, the cowriter, the coeditor, and the cinematographer, he is generally recognized more for his role as the producer of the project, particularly founding Red Light Films, the banner under which the film is produced, in association with ThinkFilm and HBO/Cinemax Documentary Films.
6. *Born into Brothels* has won awards at more than twenty-six film festivals, including the seventy-seventh annual Academy Award for best documentary feature and the 2004 Human Rights Watch Nestor Almendros Prize for Courage in Filmmaking.
7. The much publicized letter of protest against *Born into Brothels* by Swapna Gayen, the secretary of the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, an activist organization devoted to improving health and working conditions among sex workers in Sonagachi (and notably absent in the film), can be found in its original form at telegraphindia.com/1050315/asp/opinion/story_4491793.asp (accessed 5 February 2010). Some instances of leftist critiques of the film include Svati Shah, "Born into Saving Brothel Children," *Samar* 19 (2005), samarmagazine.org/archive/article.php?id=190 (accessed 5 February 2010). Shah recounts a number of local critiques of *Born into Brothels* (including those by the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee and by Partha Banerjee, an interpreter who worked on the film), arguing that the film's criminalization of prostitution and its suppression of regional histories of activism rehearses an orientalist drama of white savior–brown victim that ultimately advocates in favor of increased police and state enforcement over nongovernmental organizing efforts. Also see Jesal Kapadia, "Telegraph," *Rethinking Marxism* 17 (2005): 512–23. Kapadia's experimental "counterdocumentary" digitally reiterates the contents of Gayen's letter to stage a critique of the "neocolonial documentary conventions" of Briski's film through a "withdrawal of the image," which for Kapadia functions as an ineluctable site of epistemic violence.

8. Faye Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?" *Cultural Anthropology* 6 (1991): 5.
9. Sol Worth and John Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*, rev. ed. (Albuquerque: New Mexico University Press, 1997), 7.
10. "We reasoned that if a member of the culture being studied could be trained to use the medium so that with his hand on the camera and editing equipment he could choose what interested him, we would come closer to capturing *his* vision of the world." Worth and Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes*, 14.
11. Visual anthropology scholar Sam Peck, for instance, proffers that the Navajo project subscribes to a naive and ethnocentric view of autochthonous identity—for instance, Worth and Adair are said to have chosen Alfred Clah, an "acculturated" Navajo, to rank among their students, for the purpose of studying the effect of acculturation on "Navajo visual grammar," which is otherwise argued to be unique and untouched by the conventions of Western production and editing. Sam Peck, "Indigenous Media Then and Now: Situating the Navajo Film Project," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 17 (2000): 274.
12. See Faye Ginsburg, "Shooting Back: From Ethnographic Film to Indigenous Production/Ethnography of Media," in *A Companion to Film Theory*, ed. Toby Miller and Robert Stam (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999), 296; George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
13. Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 733–68.
14. Catherine Russell, "Autoethnography: Journeys of the Self," in *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 275–314.
15. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 7.
16. Ginsburg, "Indigenous Media," 95. A similar position is articulated by Ginsburg in Faye Ginsburg, "The Parallax Effect:

- The Impact of Aboriginal Media on Ethnographic Film,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 11 (1995): 64–76; and Ginsburg, “Shooting Back.”
17. Monica Feitosa, “The Other’s Visions: From the Ivory Tower to the Barricade,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 7 (1991): 48.
 18. See Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin, introduction to *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, ed. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 1–38.
 19. Ginsburg attributes the emergence of the indigenous video movement to a number of political, intellectual, and technological developments: the postcolonial movements toward self-determination and the radicalization of the academy in the 1960s that led to the poststructuralist turn in anthropology, the global dissemination and penetration of media in the 1970s and 1980s, in the form of an aggressive marketing of broadcast and VCR technologies as well as the advent of consumer media production technologies (especially inexpensive portable video cameras), and relatively democratic distribution possibilities for the same, such as public access cable. Ginsburg, “Indigenous Media,” 95–96. Ginsburg contends that ethnographic responsibility demands an interrogation of these new discursive conditions for representational politics, as well as sustained explorations of approaches such as indigenous video production that go beyond the models of “negotiated reading” made popular by the Birmingham Center for Cultural Studies. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, introduction to *Media Worlds*, 1–6.
 20. See Terence Turner, “Defiant Images: The Kayapo Appropriation of Video,” *Anthropology Today* 8 (1992): 5–16; Monica Frota, “Taking Aim: The Video Technology of Cultural Resistance,” in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, ed. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 258–82.
 21. Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 7.
 22. Moore also offers an excellent critique of the tendency of indigenous video scholars to encourage the “voicing” of dissent

- through discourse rather than traditional forms of violent conflict, arguing that the invitation to discourse ultimately functions as a disciplinary technique that is advantageous for governmental and nongovernmental entities, but not necessarily for the indigenous groups themselves. Rachel Moore, "Marketing Alterity," *Visual Anthropology Review* 8 (1992): 16–26.
23. See the Through Our Own Eyes project page at plancanada.ca/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=2522 (accessed 2 April 2010).
 24. See the ZoomUganda project page at zoomuganda.org (accessed 10 March 2010).
 25. See the Niños de la Amazonia project page at ninosladeamazonia.org/About_Us.html (accessed 10 March 2010).
 26. Richard Chalfen provides a list of these more occasional child-oriented media projects produced between the 1960s and 1990s in his "Afterword" to the revised edition of *Through Navajo Eyes*. Worth and Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes*, 294–95.
 27. Renov writes that in such works, "the representation of the historical world is inextricably bound up with self-inscription . . . subjectivity is no longer construed as 'something shameful'; it is the filter through which the real enters discourse, as well as a kind of experiential compass guiding the work toward its goal as embodied knowledge." Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 176.
 28. See the *Desire* project description at desiredocumentary.com/Home.html (accessed 11 March 2010).
 29. See the Girl Project at thegirlproject.org (accessed 11 March 2010); Charleston Kids with Cameras at charlestonkidswithcameras.org/about/ (accessed 11 March 2010); Eyes of New California at calhum.org/programs/uncvrd_teen_photos_sunrise.htm; articles.sfgate.com/2005-03-26/entertainment/17364039_1_volunteer-work-congolese-mission-high (accessed 11 March 2010).
 30. Sarah Banet-Weiser, forthcoming article on self-branding, girls, and social networking sites, in *Mediated Girlhood: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture*, ed. Mary Celeste Kearney (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, forthcoming).
 31. Worth and Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes*, 24.

32. Worth and Adair argue the usefulness of film as a palliative for eliciting information from hostile or resistant groups: "It has been our experience, and that of others working with teenagers or members of other cultures, that people who are normally suspicious and hostile about being taught—of anything like school—will readily accept being studied and questioned if . . . they 'can get their hands on that camera.' This unusual motivating factor is worth noting in relation to other possible educational or research attempts with people of other cultures." Worth and Adair, *Through Navajo Eyes*, 55.
33. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 20–21.
34. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994). For a range of examples of research on children and media, see *Visual Sociology* 14, no. 1 (1999), which is devoted to various methodological approaches to child-produced media in the social sciences. For a detailed literature review of the same, see the section entitled "Visual Media Created by Young People," in Michael Rich and Richard Chalfen, "Showing and Telling Asthma: Children Teaching Physicians with Visual Narrative," *Visual Sociology* 14 (1999): 51–71.
35. Rich and Chalfen, "Showing and Telling Asthma," 52–55.
36. Charles Sanders Peirce defines indexicality as the quality that sets indices (signs with a physical or causal relationship to their referent) apart from icons (signs that resemble their referents) and symbols (whose relationships with their objects are arbitrary or conventional). Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955), 101–15. A number of film scholars have recently drawn on Peirce's work for debating the medium-specificity of photographic media in relation to other media, particularly the digital. For a variety of perspectives on this issue see "Indexicality: Trace and Sign," ed. Mary Ann Doane, special issue, *differences* 18 (2007): 1–186.
37. In the editorial introduction to their seminal compilation on video practices, Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg argue, for

- instance, that the advent of an era of “user-based editing systems and consumer video” calls for a reconfiguration of traditional models of medium specificity and demands a new “media lexicon” of “plurality” and “multivocality.” Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg, “Introduction: Resolving Video,” in Renov and Suderburg, *Resolutions*, xi–xii.
38. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin, *Media Worlds*, 10.
 39. Transcription from *Born into Brothels*; emphasis mine.
 40. Prior to the *Born into Brothels* project, Briski was trained in documentary photography at Cambridge University and the International Center for Photography in New York City. She won the National Press Photographers Association Picture of the Year Award in 1996 and a New York Foundation for the Arts grant in 1998 for her photojournalistic work on female infanticide in India. Her work in India inspired the Sonagachi project, which she began in 1997, consequently winning a slew of awards, including 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). Briski’s Sonagachi photographs won her the Jerome Foundation, Sundance, and NYFA documentary film grants that funded the production of *Born into Brothels*, as well as solidifying the collaboration with Ross Kauffman as the codirector of the film. See “Awards” and “Bio” on zanabriski.com (accessed 12 March 2010).
 41. Poonam Arora, “The Production of Third World Subjects for First World Consumption: *Salaam Bombay* and *Paroma*,” in *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Diane Carson, Linda Dittmar, and Janice R. Welsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 293–304.
 42. Briski, *Born into Brothels*.
 43. Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 182.
 44. Walter Benjamin, “On the Mimetic Faculty,” in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: NLB, 1979), 160.

45. Walter Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (London: Routledge, 1993), 232.
46. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 107–8.
47. The ethical and legal ramifications of this representation, which deserves further investigation than I can provide here, are taken up in some detail in Shah, “Born into Saving Brothel Children.”
48. Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emory, in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 135.
49. Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 87; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York, Penguin, 2004).
50. See Holly Cullen, “Child Labor Standards: From Treaties to Labels,” in *Child Labor and Human Rights: Making Children Matter*, ed. Burns H. Weston (London: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 86–116. Labor rights scholar Holly Cullen clarifies that in the wake of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, international standards do not aim to abolish *all* child labor as violative of human rights. Instead, they advocate prioritizing and eliminating “those aspects of child work that are truly abusive or exploitative, as now expressed in the 1999 ILO [International Labour Organization] Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour” (87), with child prostitution ranked alongside child slavery, the recruitment of children in drug trafficking, and work harmful to the health, safety, and morals of children (94). Cullen argues that one of the key conceptual interventions of the ILO imperative to eliminate the “worst forms of child labor” is in differentiating between “child labor” (harmful for child welfare, hence impermissible) and “child work” (benign and having to do with child agency, hence permissible) (93). As a model of humanitarian intervention, Briski’s advocacy of child autoethnography fully reflects the hierarchy of priorities adopted by current international standards for responding to child labor and arguably illuminates some of the ideological implications of the category of “benign child work.”

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Figure 3. Portrait of Avijit in *Born into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids* (dir. Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman, US, 2004)