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# Autism, Voice, and the Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary

**POOJA RANGAN**, AMHERST COLLEGE

**Friday, March 31, 2017, 4:00 p.m.**

GRUCCI ROOM • 102 BURROWES BUILDING



POOJA RANGAN

What can autism teach us about the documentary politics of “having a voice”? This talk, based on one of the chapters of my forthcoming book, *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary* (Duke University Press, June 2017), places autistic accounts of language and communication in conversation with critical and media theories of voice. I ask: what do the documentary tropes of persuasive speech have in common with contemporary therapeutic and humanitarian interventions around autism spectrum disorders? What would it look, sound, and feel like to realize an autistic voice in documentary — and how might such a voice unravel the metaphysics of voice in documentary’s reality-effects? I look at three films involving autistic protagonists — “I Am Autism” (2010), an advocacy video by the humanitarian organization Autism Speaks; *Autism Is a World* (2004), a television documentary; and “In My Language” (2007), a YouTube video by Mel Baggs — that represent a range of approaches to voicing in documentary that also map onto ongoing debates around autism, humanitarianism, and disability.

**POOJA RANGAN** is Assistant Professor of English in Film and Media Studies at Amherst College. Her book *Immediations: The Humanitarian Impulse in Documentary* (Duke University Press, June 2017) examines the humanitarian ethic of “giving voice to the voiceless” in global participatory documentary interventions that equip disenfranchised subjects with visual media as a means of immediate empowerment. Rangan’s writing has been published in *differences*, *Camera Obscura*, *Film Quarterly*, *South Asian Popular Culture*, *World Picture*, *Feminist Media Histories*, and other anthologies and magazines. Rangan serves on the board of the Flaherty Film Seminar.

This event is presented in conjunction with a reading by **Cathy Park Hong** sponsored by the Modern and Contemporary Studies Initiative, **Friday, March 31, 2017, 7:30 PM in 112 Chambers Building.**

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