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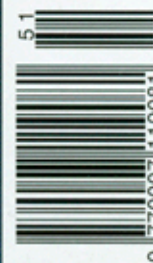
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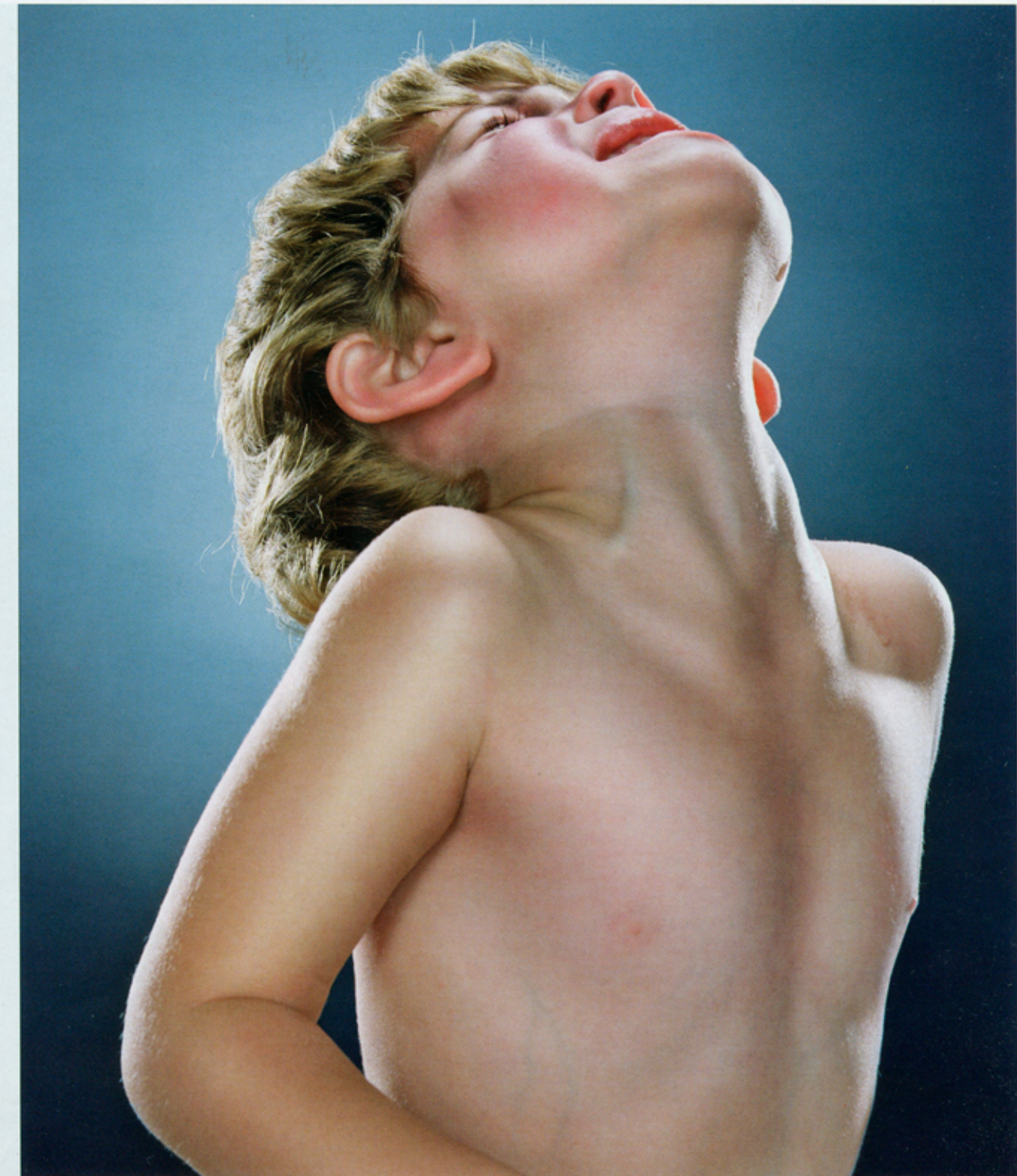
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SPECIAL ISSUE

ENFANTS TERRIBLE!

PHOTOGRAPHING CHILDREN



Just kidding

Jill Greenberg got quite a lot more than she bargained for with a series of photographs of crying children, finds Diane Smyth

'I was very surprised by the level of the reaction. I suppose if the images made people feel something then it was a compliment – if no one had cared it would have been a bad sign. But while

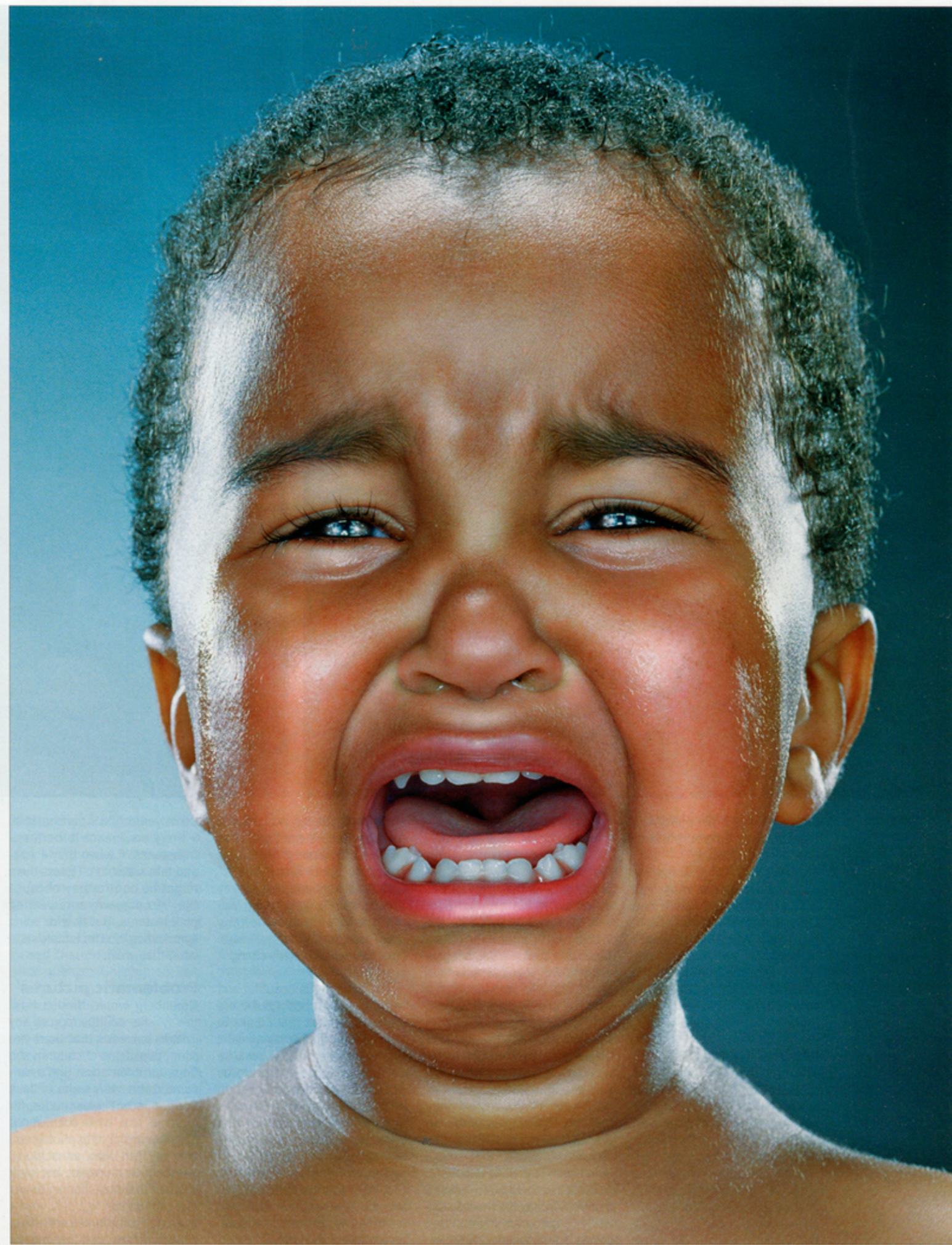
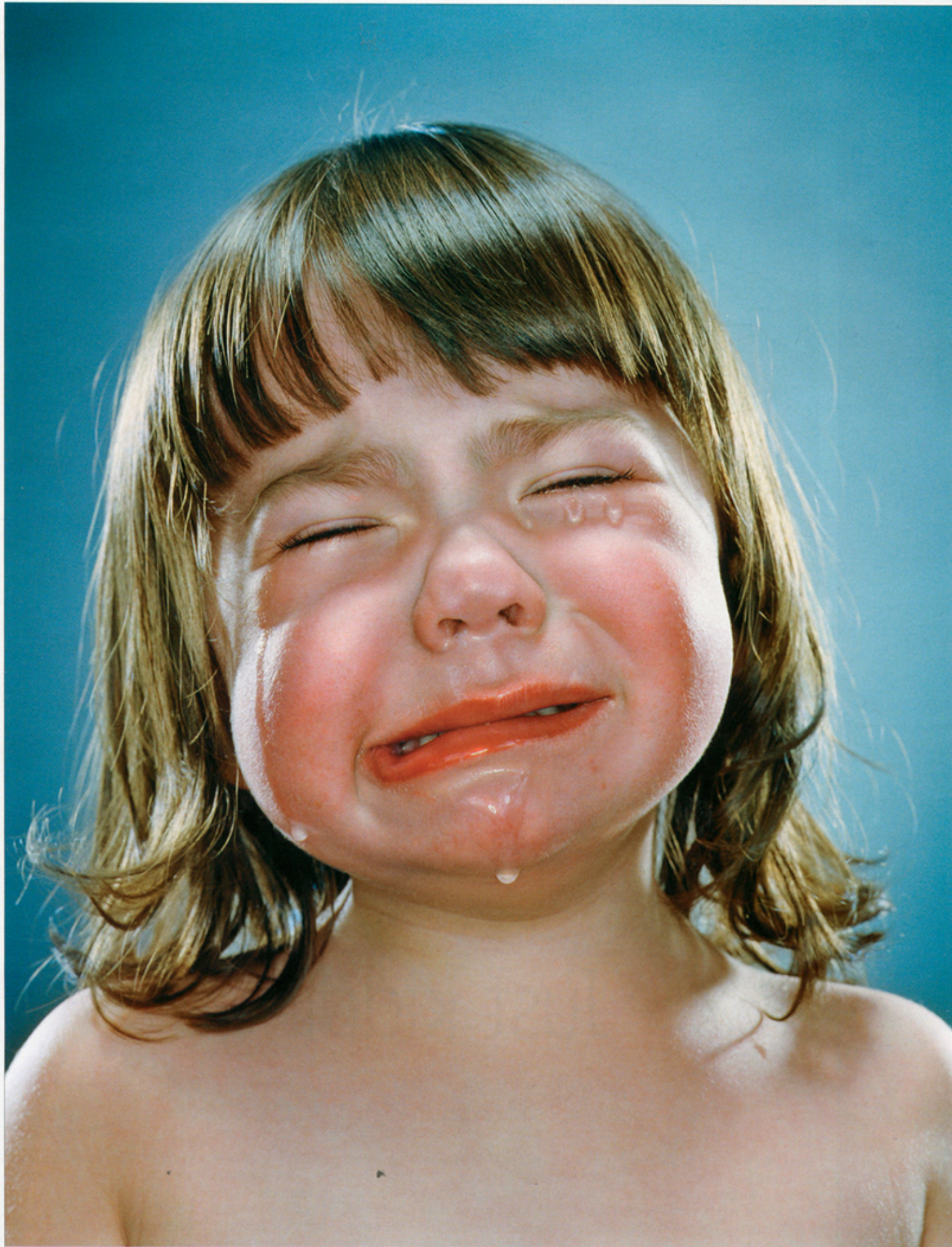
I wanted a reaction, I didn't want quite so much.'

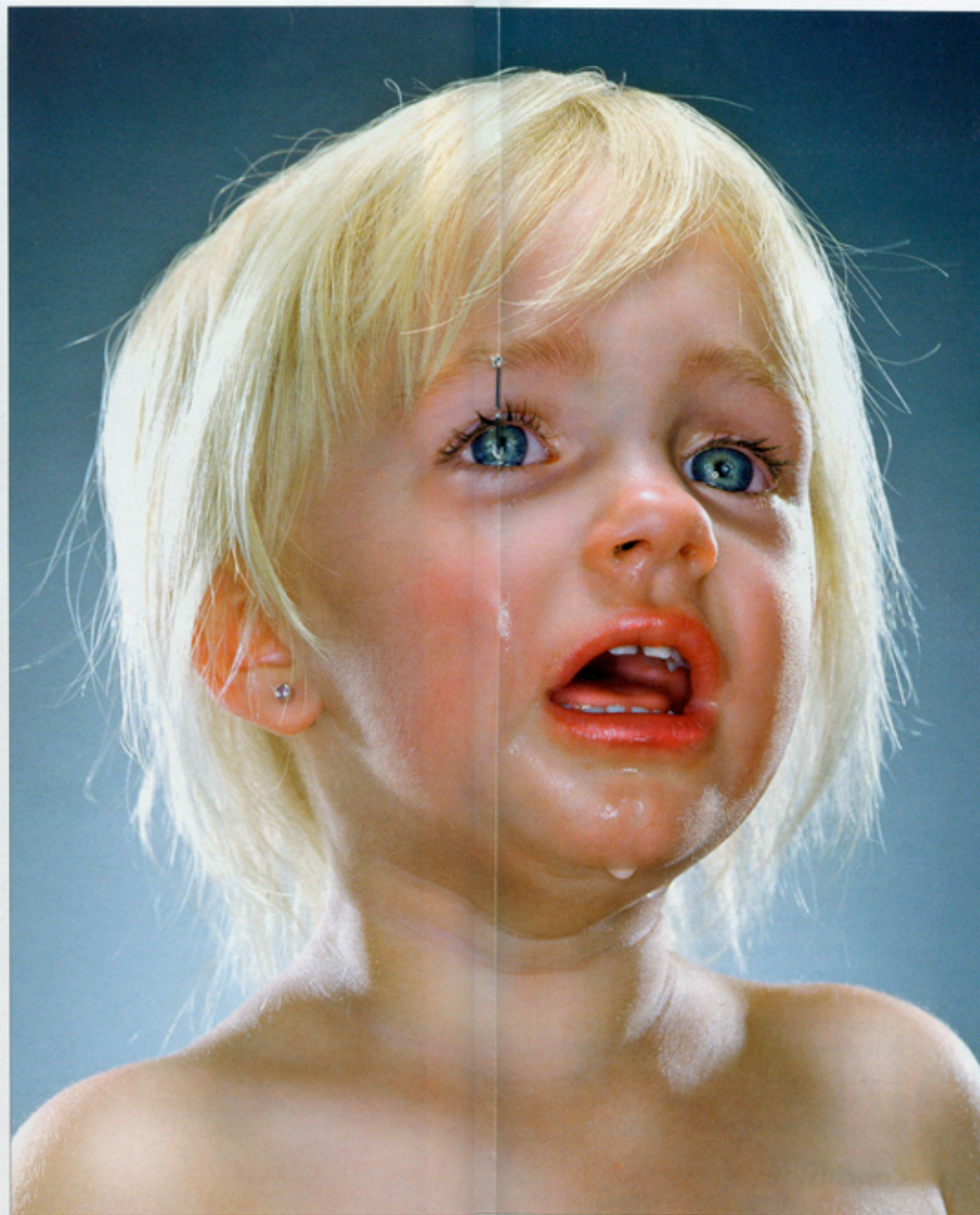
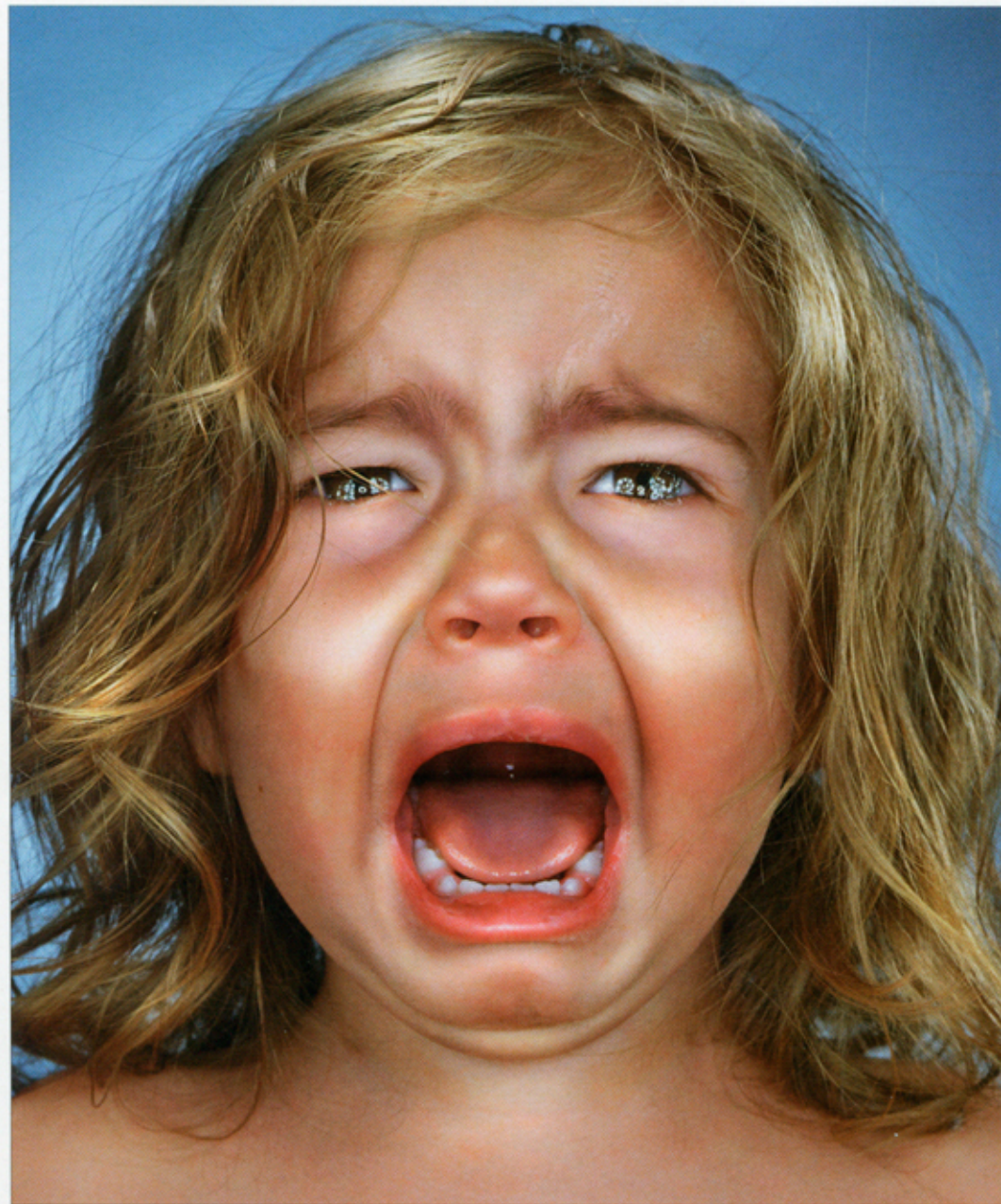
You can hardly blame Jill Greenberg for being surprised. In 2006 she exhibited a series of portraits of crying children, and

connected their distress with her own frustration with the Bush administration. Many of the children cried all by themselves for the camera, others she provoked by offering, then taking away,

lollipops. The resulting images are cute, amusing and touching

Left: *Unless*. Above: *Spin*. Overleaf: *Torture and The Truth*. All images © Jill Greenberg.





'End Times was controversial, but generally I think it's easier for me to shoot children because I'm a woman.'

but Greenberg, it fast transpired, had transgressed a surprisingly deep-seated taboo.

A small but vocal group sprang up, denouncing her images as 'sick' and Greenberg herself as 'a child abuser' and 'morally bankrupt'. 'It's upsetting because I have two small children,' she says. 'At the moment they're too young to understand but one day they will and I'll have to try to explain what happened.'

Motherlove

The fact that Greenberg is a mother was used both for and against her and, anticipating this reaction, she included her own daughter, Violet, in *End Times* (in the image *Unless*, page 26). Actually, though, she can't see why her motherhood should affect the perception of her images, stating: 'I don't know why that would make any difference

– I'm not above the law.'

She suspects it's a factor because it feeds into a wider prejudice: women who photograph children are expected to do so with a maternal eye, whereas men who do so are viewed with suspicion. '*End Times* was controversial, but generally I think it's easier for me to shoot children because I'm a woman,' she says.

'There was a period, when I was younger, when I shot a lot of diaper ads. I used to wonder if I was getting the work because I was a woman, because at that point I didn't know any children, had very little rapport with children and wasn't sure if I wanted children. In fact at that point I didn't even really like children.'

But, Greenberg adds, being a mother has affected the way she works. Photographing children comes with extra responsibilities,

she says, mostly bound up in the fact that minors can't give consent but also because the images can end up in sinister hands.

'You have to recognise that by photographing something, you make it into an object for any crazy person to look at,' she says. 'The internet has utterly changed everything.'

'My daughter is beautiful and has a beautiful body, but there are some images that I'd like to take, that I just can't take. I can't photograph her naked, because I'd hate for those images to be put on the internet and used in an inappropriate way. But does that mean that children can't be photographed in their swimsuits any more?

'I'm working on a personal project at the moment with my daughter and another little girl. It's called *Performance* because, as a mother, so much is bound

up in your child's performance – there are meant to be these milestones of when they'll walk and talk and so on. I guess there might be controversy because they're on a wire and wearing pink leotards. But they're doing gymnastics, so the leotards are what they wear.'

Problematic pictures

Greenberg would 'find it hard to say' she would suppress any image, but adds that there are some depictions of children she finds problematic. She's uncomfortable with some of Jock Sturges' recent colour nudes, for example, and, while she defends Sally Mann's right to photograph her children, has consciously chosen not to depict her own children that way. 'It is an issue,' she comments.

At the same time, she says, living with two children means

that she wants to take photographs of them. 'My daughter is sort of my muse,' she says. 'I really want to photograph her.'

And motherhood has also given her an insight into how much children cry – something that made her all the more surprised that *End Times* caused such outrage. 'Children cry very easily,' she says. 'It's part of their communication.'

'They're not like adults, who are repressed and have to really be in pain to cry. Children cry when they're just a bit upset, but adults project their emotions onto them and say 'Someone must have died for them to be so upset! Children look like they're going to die when they just can't have any more spaghetti. They're more honest – there aren't so many layers of feeling.'

That emotional honesty fascinates Greenberg, and it feeds her

fascination with animals too – she published *Monkey Portraits* in 2006 and is currently finishing off a book on bears. 'Photographing children and animals is tough but I like it because of their honesty,' she says. 'With adults there's an extra layer and you have to strip it away, especially with fashion models.'

Tech spec

Despite those reservations, some of Greenberg's favourite photographers work in fashion – she cites Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin, and Mert + Marcus as inspirations. Partly she admires their skillful use of digital manipulation – she's been doing her own retouching since Photoshop 1.0.

'I'm still shooting on film on a Mamiya 6x7 but scan all the work and retouch it myself,' she says. 'I work on the colours and

skin tones, altering the curves. I call it glassifying. I don't want to say too much about how I do it – people are obsessed with trying to figure it out. And actually a lot of it is done in-camera, because you can't fully recreate lights in Photoshop.'

'You can see I've used high-lights in the eyes in the *End Times* images. I call it the monkey lighting because I first used it for the work I did with the monkeys. I've photographed children and celebrities with monkey lighting. Even Gwen Stefani had monkey lighting.'

Stefani's not the only one – Greenberg is a very successful commercial photographer, and has photographed a host of A-list stars as well as a series of blue-chip ad campaigns (many of which she also shot with monkey lighting). She's now building a name for herself in the gallery

market though, and she hopes – like Lamsweerde and Matadin and Mert + Marcus – to be accepted in both the commercial and art worlds.

'When I first left art school I tried to do both but it was just too hard,' she says. 'I made a conscious decision to concentrate on commercial work. It allowed me to make a living from photography, and get the equipment together, but I always hoped to get to a level where I'd be able to do more personal work.'

'I think the next thing I want to do is a series of little boys, but I have to figure out how I'm going to do it. I have so many ideas I have to pace myself.' **BJP**

Contacts

To see more of Jill Greenberg's work, visit www.manipulator.com.

Left to right: *Victory*; *Revelations*; *The End*.