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**Application to The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Video Department, MFA Program  
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My interest and work in the creative arts spans several mediums, and engages a dialogue among them so as to expand my understanding of them. About 12 years ago I began in creative writing, and by the time I started my undergraduate work I began to explore the links between poetic language and the visual image by studying the theory and history of video art, film, and photography alongside artist manifestos (Dada, Surrealist), and more contemporary experimental writing and language poetry (concrete poetry, found poetry, creative critical writing). I became particularly interested in experimental and avant-garde strategies like those used in the work of the Dadaists, Surrealists, Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, and the groundbreaking political/experimental/documentary work of collectives like TVTV and Sankofa. I corralled these interests into a self-designed interdisciplinary major that integrated creative and critical work in the areas of gender and queer studies, poetics, semiotics, collage, printmaking, photography, and video.

My senior thesis included a 9 minute video, *The Sister Is (Not) a Mister*, and a 40-page piece of critical and creative writing that explored both the theoretical and historical issues surrounding the tape, as well as a journal that documented my creative process. There was no video department or video faculty with whom I could work, so as a result my project was extremely self-directed and low-tech, involving an 8mm camcorder and a VHS cuts-only editing room. I relished this opportunity to forge my own paths in working out my ideas creatively in video, and to explore the video medium by experimentation. The tape addresses the erotics and ambiguities of gender through an exploration of drag as a representational or performative strategy. My interest in the mediation of identity through clothing and gesture led me to explore video as an equally representational medium with its own specific textures, surfaces, and temporal structures. In an attempt to achieve slow-motion, I played back my original footage on a TV at half-speed and recorded it off the monitor. The result was an at-times abstract, extremely grainy and/or lined image that becomes more legible as figures move or gestures begin. I found that this textural quality was another level on which ideas of mediation and identity, as well as desire itself, took

shape. As I worked with these images in the editing room, they began to evoke ideas of embodiment--both a physical, human one, and one of video itself as a skin, a surface.

In the past two or three years I have become consumed with the history and culture of public amusement--specifically amusement parks and carnivals, including the role of film and film-related exhibition there. I have found that my interest in these areas provides a fascinating space for creative and critical work that integrates film and visual studies, gender/sexuality and performance theory, political, social, and art histories, theories of history, and critical studies of mass culture of the 19th and 20th centuries. One of my particular interests in the spatio-visual environment of the amusement park/carnival is how pleasure and desire are constructed, and what kinds of ideological formations these 'pleasure visits' take. What kinds of psychic, emotional, and sensual/bodily experiences are described, advertised, or promised in the elaborate paintings, posters, and signage of these spaces, and what kind of performance might this hawking be? What is the logic of the design of rides, and what is the logic of the architecture of the entire amusement space? How is this a visual logic? How is it an aural or spatial logic?

A large part of my fascination with amusement parks is that the crop of them that were built beginning at the turn of the century through the 1950s are now gone, or stand in ruins waiting to be torn down for strip malls or condos. They have surfaced in my life mostly as cast-offs discovered on the edge of town, as have the things I collect from them--dirty tickets, a rubber stamp, a sign letter or poster, the grainy black and white newsreel footage of Jumbo the Elephant's public electrocution at Coney Island. I have imagined two specific projects that would engage these images and ideas.

The first is a longer experimental documentary centered around Fairyland Park, a now-demolished amusement park in Kansas City, Missouri. This park would act as the piece's structuring absence, a metaphor for the ephemerality of the illogical architecture of pleasure and desire, horror and thrills. The first time I visited the abandoned lot that was Fairyland, I was wandering through a game pavilion when I found an old Polaroid. The photograph seemed to be taken by someone riding a rollercoaster, turned around in their seat. It showed the fragmented torso of a child, head thrown back, only the open, screaming mouth visible, set against the deepest blue sky. The image was a ghost, there in that place, conjuring the fabulous din of the park in motion, and reaffirming the present silence. It also evoked an incredibly familiar sense of embodiment--that place you know you've sat in, that view you know you've seen. Similarly, in my

research of Riverview Park--the famous Chicago amusement park that used to sit on the Chicago River between Addison and Belmont on Western Avenue--I came across several nostalgia videos that were simply compilations of thousands of super 8 home movies taken by visitors falling from the sky on parachutes, hurtling through tunnels, and gazing out across the midway at the city beyond from 15 stories high. The amateur movies and photographs that document these spaces and experiences are a vast archive of a history of the body. The project would attempt to take on the history of the visual, social, and political culture of amusement parks primarily in the US from the turn of the century onwards through a rigorous attention to these kinds of details.

I've started working on the second project, which is a series of very short (1-3 min.) pieces, shot on super 8 and 16mm, transferred to video. I have been calling them "screen tests", because each involves a rather decontextualized character performance that resembles a test, or a try out, in which a character attempts to successfully portray a role. These pieces will borrow significantly from both the style of early cinema and from conventions of Hollywood screen tests. Frontal, static compositions, tricks and/or heavily coded poses, gestures, and characters will evoke the "cinema of attractions", while dialogue appropriated from Hollywood films will reference the audition. These pieces function as late 20th century reincarnations of some of the first exhibitions of film, which were short loops viewed on individual machines that required the user to deposit a coin and turn a crank. Many of these machines were located in early amusement parks. The intersection of early film exhibition and these public amusement spaces is no coincidence; the temporality of the film loop echoes that of the rollercoaster loop. And the momentary thrill of peeking through an eyepiece to view the instant of a man's sneeze is not at all unlike that moment spent out of time at the peak of the rollercoaster's first hill. These connections continue to evolve as I work on these pieces

I began an M.A./Ph.D. program in film/video with the intentions of continuing both my creative and critical work in an environment where this kind of praxis would be supported. I soon found that while I was deepening my understanding of film and video history and criticism, I was not encouraged to flesh out these ideas in writing/research and film/video simultaneously. I value those two years of study because I gained a much more complicated understanding of issues of representation, spectatorship, the intersections of art, popular culture, mass media, video, and film in an historical context. But most of all, I began to understand the strict divisions in place--both in academia and in the art/ production worlds--between so-called critical or theoretical work and so-called creative work, and I began to understand the difficult position I occupy in relation to them. I

don't know these worlds to be so disparate, and from what I know of it, the video department at The School of the Art Institute offers an environment that encourages work that defies these kinds of distinctions.

I see my work responding to that of other film/video artists which engages visual language and critical ideas in interesting ways. I have been particularly influenced by some of the work of Abigail Child because of her use of found footage (*Mercy*), experimental and revolutionary sound design, engagement with the modes and conventions of early cinema (*Perils*), and her exploration of the intersection of genre and gender (*Mayhem*). Similarly, I remember the first time I saw Sadie Benning's early pixel camera work. I was in the early planning stages of *The Sister...* and enrolled in a class that brought various film and video artists each week to screen and discuss their own and other's work. The week that Vanalyne Green brought Sadie Benning's work, I flew out of a creative paralysis at the realization that there was a community of people with which I wanted to engage, a body of work, however small it seemed at the time, into which my own work might fit. Her lo-fi, poignant parodies of dominant cultural 'scripts' of sexuality and gender amazed me with their searing brevity, their cockiness, and their complexity. I still relish these kinds of feelings every time I see Peggy Ahwesh's super 8 reels, or her *Scary Movie*, or *Martina's Playhouse*. Her interrogation of documentary conventions through her characters' startling performances vitally opens up new areas between documentary and experimental modes. This kind of work inspires and invigorates me like nothing else because it compels me to respond with work of my own.

My desire to pursue an MFA in the video department at SAIC stems in part from my need to resume the dialogue. I particularly appreciate the department's commitment to and support of work that challenges generic divisions, and the strong tradition of work around gender and sexuality that continues to be fostered there. Thank you for your consideration.