From Marks of Conformity to Acts of Transgression:
An Artistic M.F.A. Thesis of Autobiographical Reenactments for the Camera

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Abstract

This M.F.A. thesis text discusses photographic images that explore the relationship between past and present identities, emotions stemming from social conformity, and the process of autobiographical historical reenactment. The paper reveals how self examination through artmaking provides an entryway into the depiction of social psychology, feminism, reenactment, costuming the self, and memory. Overall, this paper examines the ways in which documented reenactment of one's past visualizes the relationship between past and present identities.

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Thank you also to those who helped me photograph the actions performed in the images, including Emily Buckius, Kathy Buckius, Ben Penner, and Jen Zee. Each of you repeatedly helped me photograph outdoor locations in temperatures below freezing or seemingly endless durations of stampings upon my skin.

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Richards

Introduction

I organized this thesis sequentially to emphasize my process of artwork creation. Immediately below, I provide general descriptions of my motives for the project, methods of creation, and choice of materials. A discussion of contextual information and the formal aspects of the work accompanies each section of the "Creative Work" portion of the thesis. The "Discussion" section describes overriding themes visually presented through the body of work. The "Conclusions" section discusses the unresolved issues and the overall conclusions reached.

Motives

For this thesis, I engaged in a previously unexplored art-making territory--myself. By using myself as the subject, I intended to depict personal and universal notions of molding identities, performing roles, and internalizing external rules. I wanted to investigate the use of photography as a method to capture personal actions and bring them into the public visual world. I also wanted to engage in an unfamiliar process of image making, whereby I would make images intuitively, and then reflect on them to uncover undesigned meanings.

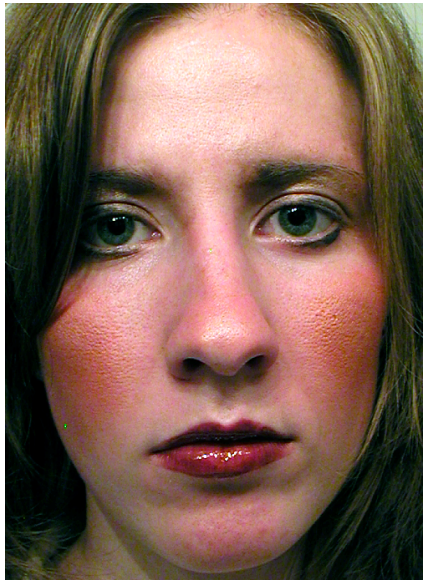
Methods

Prior to this thesis project, I engaged in a designerly artmaking process, beginning with a design concept and then adhering to a predetermined, linear trajectory. For this thesis project, I created images impulsively following the conception of an idea and then reflected on the inherent meanings afterwards. This process suited the subject matter of the work--emotional autobiographical reflection. By creating work in response to immediate feelings, the resulting images evoked my past and present psychological emotions. Self examination provided an entryway into the depiction of universal notions of conforming identities. Researching contextual information, including the works of other artists, academic researchers, and popular culture themes, revealed that many of the ideas presented in my work relate to the work of other individuals as well.

Materials

I used photography to capture my actions and singular performances. The resulting images document and present my actions to viewers not present during the singular happenings. As a result, the process of photography is both a means and an end--I perform for the camera, which captures an image that can then be displayed. Appropriately, I used my whole self, including my body, hair, skin, and emotions, as artistic material within the images. In addition, old uniforms, both my own and those of my parents, play material roles in my artwork. Architecture and rubber stamps become image-making "materials" to represent institutional authority.

Figure 1.6. Handwritten labels on skin.



they said i should
wear more makeup
to bring out my facial features

Figure 2.6 "Wear more makeup" action & text.

that special cream for wrinkles
didn't do anything so
i tried my own method

Figure 3.6. "Wrinkle reduction" action & text.

my pap smear mailer
had the box checked
next to the word "normal"

Figure 4.6. "Pap smear" action & text.

that lady on the Oprah show
said to use the tightest bra setting
for the best looking breasts

Figure 5.6. "Tight bra" action & text.

the latest issue of Cosmo magazine
said to wear "two pairs of panties
to draw out anticipation of
being in the buff"

Figure 6.6. "Double panties" action & text.

Creative Work: Body Markings & Actions

Personal Reflections

i don't like makeup because it makes my face itch, suffocates my skin, is a pain to apply, and hides me...but sometimes i do wear it. i don't want to wear my bra on a tight setting to enhance my breast shape and i don't want to wear two pairs of panties to increase my sexiness... but sometimes i do want to be sexy and have nice breasts. i don't like to be constantly reminded that i might have wrinkles on my face... but i also don't like to look "old". i wish i wasn't always prompted to fix myself by magazines and television... but sometimes i try out the suggestions. i don't want to label my body's flaws like i was instructed to several years ago, but why do i find myself doing so? i don't want to be considered abnormal if i take medicine for my mental state, but i must be "normal" if my pap smear mailer has the box checked next to the word "normal"...right?

Artistic Process

In the first part of my thesis process, I reflexively generated ideas and photographically captured actions upon my body. I enacted cultural demands to be beautiful and emotionally stable by writing on my skin, imprinting upon my skin, applying makeup to my face, and taping my skin (Figures 1.6-6.6). These images show my process of rule-following, a process that I, like many other members of society, simultaneously succumb to and resist. By actually following through with rules prescribed specifically for me, and for other women in society, I become a victim and perpetuator of such pressures. The actions are lit by the florescent lighting of my domestic bathroom, the location in which I, like many women, perform the often self-effacing ritual of studying physical appearance in a mirror-image. The unmediated quality of the images suggests the reality-based process of capturing the images. Along with each documented action, I handwrote a textual caption. These hand-written descriptions provide the specific guideline or rule that prompted the action depicted in the images. The texts reveal that the actions arose from others' dictations that I then internalized.

These images, while not presented in my final thesis exhibit, revealed to me how the words of others affect me. The next sequence of images in this text show that I built upon this idea of my internalization of others' words by depicting more personal messages and a more poignant visual metaphor (impressions) for the internalization experience. I chose not to show the images to the left because they did not reveal specific ideas related to my past. I found that I wanted to portray statements that had more of an impact on my identity.

Contextual Precedents: Creative Work

This work follows the works of Jo Spence and Jenny Holzer, both artists who physically wrote text on their skin (Figures 1.7-2.7). My work uses a similar method of message creation. Jo Spence's works, such as the one shown to the right in Figure 1.7, convey a sense of branding through her use of hand written text on her own body. In this way, she labels her body to claim personal ownership. Jenny Holzer marked upon skin using a mixture of ink and individuals' blood to write texts about the violence, rape, sex, and death in the war in Yugoslavia (Figure 2.7). Like these artists, I wrote words on my skin. Similar to Spence, the text in my images relates to autobiographical experiences, however, instead of claiming ownership of my body, my messages voice the commands of external cultural sources, such as magazine editors. In doing so, I give metaphorical ownership of my body to those who said the words. Like Jenny Holzer's statements on skin, my messages refer to power issues related to the female body and historical messages. My images differ in that I wrote upon myself, the subject of the commands.

Figure 1.7. Jo Spence, *self-portrait*, from Putting Myself in the Picture (c), 1986.

Figure 2.7. Jenny Holzer, *Fotografien aus der Serie LUSTMORD*, 1993.

Figures 1.8-13.8. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable*, c-prints, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to link to Appendix for larger images)

Figures 14.8-15.8. Installation of images in Figures 1.8-13.8.
(click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Creative Work: Skin Imprints

Personal Reflections

i'm impressionable. even though i might not understand the things people tell me to do or say about me, i often cannot stop them from affecting me. i am a very close listener who takes much of the words of others to heart. i often find that, whether i like it or not, i try to follow the rules that others dictate to me because of my desire to please others... sometimes i didn't want to wear matching socks, stop doodling in math class, take my medicine, pretend it was fun, act strong and assertive, stay in the basement, but i often still followed the rules and these rules became imprinted on my self... because... i'm impressionable.

Creative Process

Marking upon my body using pencil and tape seemed to lack the psychological impact of the dictated rules and words. I, therefore, began to imprint my skin using generic rubber stamp letters with words from societal pressures on ambiguous body parts (Figures 1.9-4.9). These general statements and locations lacked the specificity of my experience, so I began stamping specific phrases on my forehead and scanned my head on a flatbed scanner (Figure 5.9). The final images show directions dictated to me, such as "WEAR MORE MAKEUP," "STAY IN THE BASEMENT," or "TAKE OFF YOUR SHIRT AND REVEAL YOUR FLAWS" (Figures 1.8-13.8).

The process of creating these images caused my reactions to the experiences to evolve. In the beginning, I refelt the psychological impact of the commands upon my concept of self. The first iterations show my closed eyes to simulate my feeling of emotional pain from the imprinted words (Figure 6.9). Later in the project, I began to resent my impressionability and wish to expunge its effect on me. I even considered writing statements of refute on the images. My final images, therefore, show the imprints with my eyes open, in order to convey my process of self discovery (Figures 1.8-13.8).

The action of imprinting upon my skin parallels my mental internalization process, given that I tend to be an impressionable person. As social psychologists' research suggests, "people do conform to the expectations of others...Conforming to the expectations of others can lead to behavior change and hence to self concept change" (Brinthaupt 240). My images reveal my tendency to internalize the expectations of others, and then act according to my fulfillment of their wishes, a process of "bringing one's private concept of self into agreement with one's recent behavior" (Brinthaupt 233). By imprinting phrases from my recent and distant past, the images reveal my personal history of impressionability leading to rule-following.

The fact that I am printing my skin with commands spoken in the past suggests that my past conformity still affects my present self. Using my forehead as imprint location, harkens back to the idea of the scarlet letter, or even a billboard upon which others can view the imprinted words. I cropped below the eyes to reveal that, in the past, I could not express verbally my feelings about the orders, and that the deliverer and present viewer must stare back at me without my response. I printed the images full scale to create the sense that I, a living person, look back at the viewer. If the venue of my show had been different, I would have installed these images at my eye level to confront the viewer with a semi-realistic representation of me. With limited space, however, I installed them on multiple shelves, suggesting my various heights throughout my life (Figures 14.8-15.8).

Contextual Precedents: Creative Work

The visual artists Vito Acconci, Jenny Saville, and Hannah Wilke created images of marks made upon human subjects' skin. Similar to my work, both Acconci and Wilke create marks upon their own skin. Like Jenny Saville, my work shows autobiographical marks, but instead of painting these imprints, I physically impress upon my actual skin. Like Acconci, I photograph my imprints, but his impressions refer to "trademarks," while mine depict rules and orders. He actually uses his own teeth to create the impressions; he becomes the imprinting tool and imprinted material. By using a generic rubber stamper as my tool, my images show that an external "voice" imprinted upon my skin. Wilke applies gum sculptures to her skin as a way to signify scars. My images also signify "scars" from tattoos that I have reimprinted on myself after internalizing the words of others.

Figures 1.9-4.9. General statements imprinted on my skin.

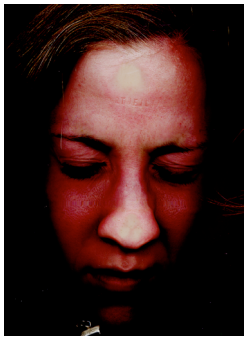


Figure 5.9. Scanned face with imprint.

Figure 6.9. First iteration of stampings with eyes closed.

Figure 7.9. Vito Acconci, *Trademarks* (Photographed activity/ink prints), 1970.

Figure 8.9. Jenny Saville, *Branded* (Self-portrait), 1992.

Figure 9.9. Hannah Wilke, *S. O. S. - Starification Object,* 1974.

Figures 1.10 & 2.10. Installation of images in Figures 3.10-11.10.
(click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figures 3.10-11.10. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles*, c-prints, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to link to the Appendix for larger images)

Creative Work: Hair Configurations

Personal Reflections

i often manipulate myself like a doll as i try to conform to different social contexts. sometimes I play a strong, confident role, sometimes i want to hide, sometimes i feel stretched between opposing inclinations, sometimes i feel like multiple disjointed selves, sometimes i try to cradle myself...

Creative Process

While creating the skin imprints, I worked simultaneously with hair puppetry. I collected my own hair, from my hair brushes and bathtub drain, to use as representations of me. I began first without knowing exactly what my narrative would be and shaped the hair into the form of a human figure (Figure 1.11 to the right). Thinking of this hair sculpture as a doll lead me to situate it on my lap, like I would a doll, and to photograph the hair sculptures in front of my nude stomach (Figure 2.11).

The final images, in Figures 3.10-11.10 to the left, show my hands configuring my hair as I mold "myself" into different configurations. My hands represent my actions of puppet mastery, pulling, shaping, molding, separating, and cradling. Similar to the activity of my childhood doll-playing, my hands enact my emotions upon my hair. In the images, however, I perform this childlike play as an adult, a fact made visible by cropping the images at the lower part of my breasts. In addition, I situate the hair in front of my womb and above my pubic hair. Cropping these images below my breasts and above my pubic area points to the adult woman who performs the childlike puppetry. The simultaneous juxtaposition of childlike and adultlike imagery revisits a past self within the mind of present, adult self. My past selves affect my present selves, just as I still hope to mold myself like a doll.

The hair sculpture images appear both cute and grotesque, thus evoking a simultaneous sense of curiosity and repulsion. Unlike children, many adults cringe at the sight of disembodied hair, not to mention the idea of collecting it. As an adult, I collected and then manipulated my own hair, thus juxtaposing my childlike fascination with my body and my adult notion of scandal. In addition, the images suggest a popular notion of voodoo, which fulfills an adult's devious desires through a juvenile means. In addition, this work references the spiritual notion of voodoo by which I imbue my hair with my spirit. The pieces, therefore, couple "cuteness" with grotesqueness and transgression resulting in visual and metaphorical shock. This shock value alludes to my subconscious desire for uniqueness in spite of my constant conformity.

These images show a typology of roles into which I molded/mold myself. Installed as a grid, shown in Figures 1.10 and 2.10, the images become "options" for emotional "moldings" that contrast with one another. Viewing them as a series reveals the multitude of ways in which I mold myself to fit different roles. Sometimes I play a strong, confident role, sometimes I want to hide myself, sometimes I feel stretched between opposing inclinations, sometimes I feel like multiple separate selves.

Contextual Precedents: Creative Work

Several artists use hair as a material in their artwork, including Mona Hatoum, Tom Freidman, and Jeanne Dunning. All three of these artists' works explore a fascination with the body and a cultivation of playfulness in artwork. Both Mona Hatoum and Tom Freidman perform arduous, painstaking tasks of transforming hair into new objects. Mona Hatoum's Hair Necklace, Figure 4.11 to the right, remodels hair from discarded human waste into a precious object. Friedman also transformed hair by carefully spiraling pubic hairs on a bar of soap (Figure 3.11). Both of these works juxtapose humor and grotesqueness with seriousness. The pieces reveal the absurdity of configuring hair into a useful object like a necklace or into a useless decoration for soap. In my images, I transform hair into doll-like objects, carefully configured to represent various roles. My images also possess a humorous tone, as I use my own hair to represent myself and then play with it like a doll.

In Jeanne Dunning's images, hair refers to sexual power relations, the grotesque, eroticism, and even the mythical emblems of hair. She photographs hair attached to the body, but often close-up in order to obscure its context (Figure 5.11). Although the hair in my images no longer adheres to my body, its location in front of my body obscures its origin, by alluding to pubic hair. In addition, my work refers to sexual issues of childhood and adulthood by juxtaposing a childlike action with an adult body.

Figure 1.11. Hair doll scanned on flatbed scanner, 2005.

Figure 2.11. Hair doll photographed in front of stomach, 2005.

Figure 3.11. Tom Friedman, *untitled*, soap and pubic hair, 1990.

Figure 4.11. Mona Hatoum, *Hair Necklace*, 1995.

Figure 5.11. Jeanne Dunning, *Head 2*, 1989.

Figure 1.12. Image sketch of my curled body photoshopped into a image of a business office.

Figure 2.12. Image sketch of my curled body photoshopped into a image of football stands.

Figure 3.12-6.12. Image sketches of my body photoshopped into a image of the exhibition space.

Creative Work: Intermediary Image Sketches

Personal Reflections

often i feel out of place. it is hard to constantly act like others in the group. it is hard to be smiley, or confident, or pushy, or beautiful, or normal...

Creative Process

As I manipulated my hair to reveal psychological and physical molding of myself, I began to realize the number of roles I have played in my life that made me feel slightly "out of place". I began making images to reveal my feelings of vulnerability, confusion, and frustration when attempting to fit into specific social contexts. I photoshoped myself into locations similar to those in which I once performed. The images to the left show my naked body attempting to hide in personally significant locations, including football stands and a corporate office (Figures 1.12 and 2.12). This process of digitally placing myself in the past, revealed to me the ways in which my work reenacted my past. I reexperienced my discomfort as both a cheerleader and a mechanical engineer at a large corporation. Then I examined my present discomfort at my own art exhibitions, so I projected myself in the upcoming thesis exhibition space (Figures 3.12-6.12). In doing so, I created the skeleton of a self-fulfilling prophecy once again, a pathway upon which I decided not to venture.

The process of digitally "stamping" myself within environments allowed me to sketch my ideas in photographic form. It also provided a desired crutch, keeping me safe within the confines of the studio. In addition, I had cropped out my face to suggest the lack of identity, but also subconsciously to "hide" from view. These images revealed to me that in order to effectively capture my feeling of being "out of place," I needed to exist physically in the spaces from my past. Not only could I create more effective images, but I could overcome my hesitation to physically perform.

I realized also that I wanted to show my emotional experience with abnormality in social groups. I, therefore, investigated each specific situation in which I felt disconnected from its "norms". I collected the old uniforms and paraphernalia that I wore and used in my past. The images to the right show first iterations of uniformed roles, including cheerleader, bride, and catholic school student (Figures 1.13-3.13). Again, I created these images by photoshoping myself into locations in which i performed the roles. These images do not appear in my final thesis exhibition, but the process of their construction segued into my research of personal history, the rules and norms of each role, literary research on the corresponding institutions, and the cultural impressions of these roles.

Figure 1.13. Image sketch of me in my catholic school uniform photoshopped into a classroom.

Figure 2.13. Image sketch of me in bridal uniform with scary doll.

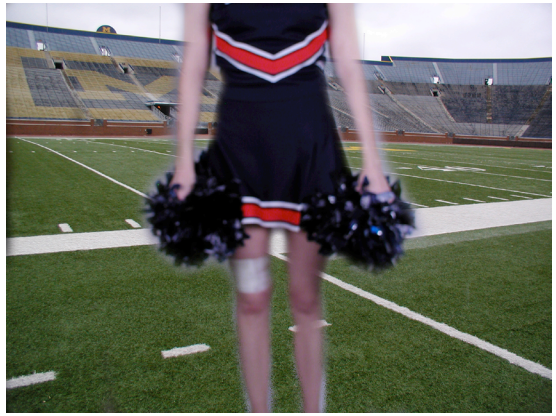


Figure 3.13. Image sketch of me in my cheerleading uniform photoshopped into a football stadium.

Figure 1.14. Sarah Buckius, *when i became a cheerleader like my mom*, c-print, 2005.
(click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 2.14. Sarah Buckius, *when i became an engineer like my dad*, c-print, 2005.
(click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

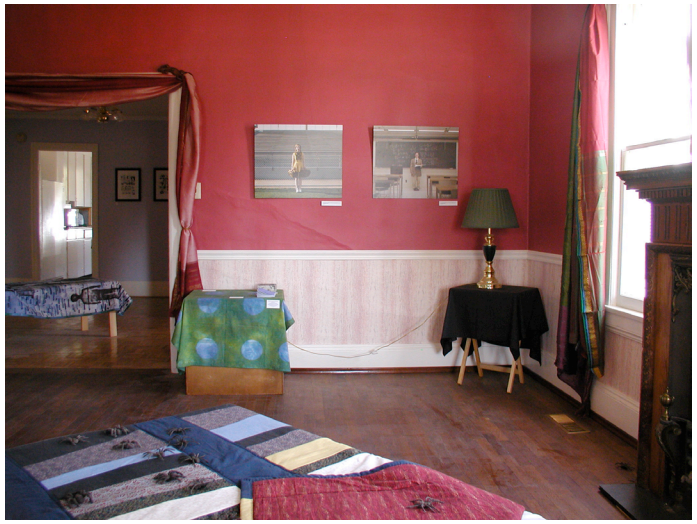


Figure 3.14. Installation view of Figure 1.14 and Figure 2.14.
(click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Creative Work: Role Models

Personal Reflections

i sometimes wish i could become the people i admire. i admire my mom for her charismatic personality. i admire my dad for his intelligence and dedication. i used to wish that I could be like them for these reasons. in fact, i "tried on" their roles as both cheerleader and engineer. although i may not really have performed these roles appropriately, i tried them out and learned about myself in the process...

Creative Process

I recognized that I subconsciously assumed the roles of those I admired--my parents. As a result, I began collecting their old clothes in addition to my old paraphernalia. To the right, Figures 1.15 and 2.15 show photographs of my parents as cheerleader and engineering professor. The two images to the left, Figures 1.14 and 2.14, depict myself in my parents clothing, performing our shared roles. Throughout the process of reenacting these roles for the camera--dressing, undressing, deriving an equation, shaking my pom-poms--I ruminated on my experiences as cheerleader and engineer. I realized how, for me, unlike my parents, I "performed" these roles. In other words, I mechanically enacted the appropriate attitudes, conduct, demeanor, and appearance with superficial, obligatory execution of expected behaviors and responsibilities. I wore the necessary smile in front of thousands of onlookers and spent countless hours calculating solutions to technical problems, but without a genuine zeal. I wondered how I sustained 10 years of cheerleading and over 4 years of engineering... I realized that, while I could "perform" these roles, I could not effectively assume my parents' deep-seated passion that I so admired.

In these photographs, I stand in locations similar to those in which I once enacted the roles, but without people in the stands or in the classroom. This emptiness refers to the fact that I perform these roles for the camera anachronistically. My facial expressions reveal a combination of confusion and blankness, suggesting my discomfort in these roles. Printed twice as large as portrait photographs on the wall of a home, Figure 3.14, these images are large enough to reveal the details of my small figure within a larger, authoritative environment.

Contextual Precedents: Creative Work

The work of Gillian Wearing and Elina Brotherus addresses similar issues because they both photographed themselves adorned in the garb and role of their family members. Gillian Wearing wore masks of her relatives to adopt their identity and visually transform herself into them for portrait-like photographs. Wearing explains: “I was interested in the idea of being genetically connected to someone but being very different. There is something of me, literally, in all those people – we are connected, but we are each very different” (Bayles). Unlike Wearing's, my images show, not a genetic connection to my parents, but a shared, yet distinctive, identity experience. My expression reveals my misfit, my inability to done the identity of my parents.

Elina Brotherus' photographs show her wearing the costumes of her mother and father in an ambiguous context, revealing her familial connection to them. In my images, I wear the uniforms of my parents, like these artists, but in contexts similar to those in which I actually played these roles. In this way, instead of playing unfamiliar roles, I replay the actual roles I shared with my family members, revealing the authentic connection between our experiences. This connection between my identity and those of my role models reveals my desire to assume the personas of those I admired.

Figure 1.15. High school cheerleading snap-shot of my mom, Kathy Buckius.

Figure 2.15. Photograph of my dad, Richard Buckius, researching as a mechanical engineering professor (fourth male from the left).

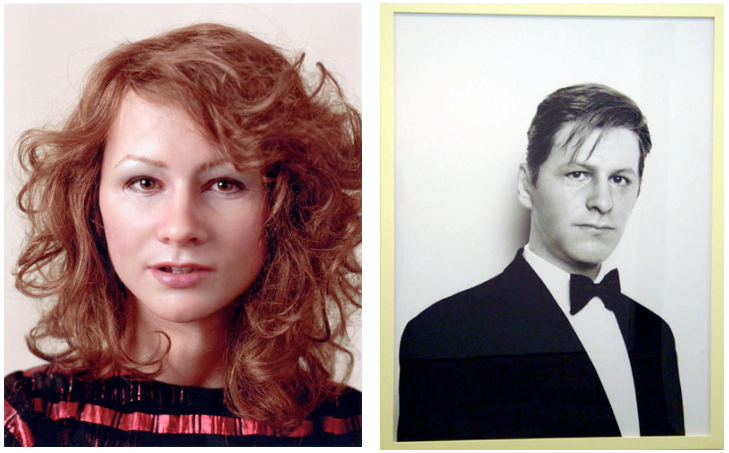


Figure 3.15. Images from Gillian Weariing's *Family Album,* series of 6 photographic prints, 2003.

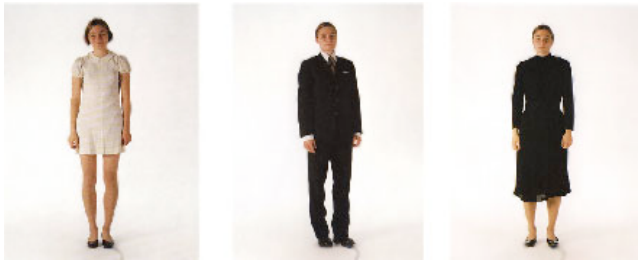


Figure 4.15. Elina Brotherus, *My mother´s wedding dress, my father´s wedding suit, my mother´s funeral dress*,1997.

Figure 1.16. *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Ballet Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 2.16. *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered First Communion Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 3.16. *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Catholic School Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 8.16. Installation of images in Figures 1.16-7.16. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 4.16. *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Cheerleading Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 5.16. *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Sorority Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 6.16. *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Business Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Figure 7.16. *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Bridal Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006. (click here to link to Appendix for larger image)

Creative Work: Altered Uniforms Still Images

Personal Reflections

i wear the uniforms that i am supposed to. i try to be the person that others want me to be, that others expect me to be. in catholic school i did not question religious rituals or educational practices. in cheerleading i tried to ignore the fact that i never wanted to be on television or to perfect my physical flaws. as a sorority member, i never wanted to wear makeup or fake a friendship or uphold the "values" of the house. in the corporate world, i tried to hide my sensitivity and be strong like all of the other engineers. but i never really felt like i had played these roles appropriately. i often fall into roles and perform them without really understanding the rules. when i look back on my role-playing, i realize that i didn't understand the rules for these roles and that i really didn't want to fit in. now i want to go back and revisit my inability, but also rejection, of "fitting in"...

Creative Process

While creating images about the roles I assumed from my parents, I realized that I have never "fit in" to many of the other social contexts in my life. I researched the social structures of institutions in which I belonged, including the rules for conduct and implicit and explicit appearance standards. I realized that I had not, in fact, understood or diligently followed many of the principal expectations. For example, I did not receive my First Communion believing that I was consuming the "body" of Christ; I cringe at the idea of eating a human body (see Figure 2.17 to the right). When pledging a sorority, I did not "research sorority history" (Thornton 12), "have a flattering photograph of myself made" (Thornton 33), "apply cosmetics in natural light" (Thornton 35), or "let them know you like them" (Thornton 47). As a bride, I did not wear a veil to indicate my "subordination of woman to man" or want to buy expensive bouquets of flowers. I did not, as a catholic school student, intend to relinquish my individuality and opinions (see Figure 3.17 to the right). As a woman applying for jobs in corporate America, I felt ill-suited in my business suit, not wishing to adhere to the masculine body structure of broad shoulders and small hips. As a cheerleader, I did not desire to be the center of attention by revealing my body (see Figure 4.17 to the right). The process of researching these inherent expectations, activated my desire to alter my old uniforms to fit my self today.

For these works, I refashioned my past uniforms to reveal my present convictions (Figures 1.16-7.16 to the left). I found the old uniforms stored in my family storage closet and altered them in various ways. I ironed creases into them (sorority), pined them to similar uniforms in my current size (ballet), hand stitched logos on them (Catholic school), and constructed additions to them (Catholic school, First Communion, cheerleading, business suit). I then performed reenactments in the locations from my past, in front of the doors of buildings, the entrance-ways into the authoritative institutions. Instead of entering as I did in the past, I stood outside, distanced from the experience, unable to behave appropriately, revealing my desire to break the rules. No longer a part of that close-knit social circle, I stand alone on the periphery, as an outsider in each one.

Throughout the process, I experimented with the relationship between my different facial expressions in the images and the emotions evoked by the resulting photographs. I created several iterations of the images in response to the resulting outcomes. I performed slight smiles, intense smiles, blankness, confused expressions, confident chin positions, and sad expressions. I chose my final expressions to reveal specific emotions for each role. For example, the cheerleader never frowns, the catholic school student appears vulnerable, the businesswoman seems blank, and the sorority girl and First Communion girl seem a bit mischievous.

Figure 1.17. Family snap-shot of my ballet recital.

Figure 3.17. Family snap-shot before first day of catholic school.

Figure 2.17. Family snap-shot before my First Communion.

Figure 4.17. Family snap-shot of college cheerleading.

Figures 1.18-16.18. *Autobiographical Reenactments*, video stills, 2006.
(click here to link to Appendix for other reenactment stills).

Creative Work: Altered Uniforms Videos

Personal Reflections

for me, reenactment is a process that requires both meditated and spontaneous performance of my roles from the past. this process does not include a singular instance, but instead involves meticulous recreation of old costumes, experience in actual settings, and even the adornment of emotional demeanors. given that i reenact with my present self, i cannot help but experience this process simultaneously innately and awkwardly. for this reason, the process of preparation for and engagement in reenactment tells the story...

Creative Process

The still images of me wearing altered uniforms failed to explicitly describe the act of reentering my past selves. To viewers unfamiliar with the uniform codes, my recreated apparel in these photographs might appear unaltered. I, therefore, questioned whether a performance can truly be captured in a single image and still reveal the complexities of the actions. As a result, I began creating photographs and videos of myself preparing for and enacting the past roles. Figures 1.19-3.19 to the right show the initial still images of trying to fit into my childhood clothing. Reflection upon these images revealed that still photographs could not capture the dynamism of a present self revisiting the past, thus I began making videos of my reenactments. Figures 1.18-16.18 to the left and Appendices 36.63-41.68 show stills from the videos and a DVD that accompanies this text shows the full video series.

Unlike the still images, the videos show the process of preparing and performing. The still images give evidence of the action, while the videos reveal the "work" necessary for their creation. Each of the preparation videos capture my performance of "trying on" past roles in the present. While wearing women's underwear, I struggle, to no avail, to fit into my ballet uniform from kindergarten. I also struggle to squeeze into my First Communion uniform, a child's dress juxtaposed with my bra and underwear.

My awkward failures in these videos humorously suggest the inability to reenter these roles appropriately, despite my dedicated effort. In each video, I enter the scene like a performer for an act, complete the activity imperfectly, and then the scene closes as I stand pitifully or exit in a silly or awkward way. I am a performer unable to perform, but with every intention to do so. The videos, therefore, reveal my playful, mischievous intentions resulting in human folly. My painstaking attempt at futile actions conveys a sense of self-effacing humor.

In the preparation videos, my unmeditated film angles and cropping result in visually distorted body scales, which in relation to the rooms, makes me appear to be larger than life. My body, therefore, seems out of place in its self-created theater. This malalignment of proportion contrasts the film angles and scale of the videos in front of the institutions. My body dwarfs the home environment and is dwarfed by the institutions. This contraposition highlights the difference between my private and public activity. My private activities appear genuinely subdued, while I *perform* the public reenactments with exuberant theatricality.

To exhibit the videos, I installed an old television on a bureau atop a rug from my childhood home in the 1980's (see Appendix 28.55). In doing so, the small television screen with brown wood paneling evoked a sense of nostalgia for viewers who lived during this time. The videos' silence also added to a sense of nostalgia reminiscent of historical silent films. In addition, the silence tends to direct viewers' attention to the activities in the videos.

Figures 1.19-3.19. Photographic still images of preparation for autobiographical reenactments.

Creative Work: Altered Uniforms (cont.)

Contextual Precedents: Uniform History

This section discusses research on the symbolism and history of uniforms worn in the images.

Uniforms represent a wearer's subjection to authority, conformation to unified standards, and dedication to one's affiliation with the organization. But, they also represent the potential for transgression. Often, subconsciously, the mere wearing of a uniform changes one's conception of him/herself. A uniform wearer must wear his/her uniform "properly--understanding and obeying rules about the uniform-in-practice and turning the garments into communicative statements" (Craik 4). Adhering to these social and psychological external attributes combine to influence one's idea of their persona and self (Craik 7). When one wears a uniform, he/she performs the imitation of those he/she admires or who are in authority. As in my case, while I perform these codes of dress, I often internalize understandings of myself in relation to the rules followed.

Failure to comply with uniform standards results in "loss of privileges, repeating uniform practice until perfect, humiliation and physical or psychological discipline" (Craik 4). As a result, uniforms can also possess the potential for transgression because the wearer may continuously straddle the line between obeying and disobeying the codes of dress. We understand "the public face of uniforms as coterminous with order, control, confidence and conformity" but "we also know about the other face of uniforms as subversion, transgression, punishment and shame" (Craik 4).

The internalization of these body techniques still affects me later in life, even when I no longer wear the uniforms. In my images, I look back and rethink these codes, transgress them, and point out inherent absurdities. The humor in my alterations reveals my process of realizing that "the rationale for uniforms often seems arbitrary or bizarre" (Craik 7). The alterations themselves reveal my simultaneous conformity and transgression. By wearing my actual old uniforms with alterations, I both succumb to and reject the codes of dress. The images, therefore, reveal my desire to both fit in and stand out within the social contexts.

Overall, my work suggests that by looking back at my experience of wearing uniforms, "Body techniques inscribed in uniforms contain a series of oppositional attributes: discipline versus spontaneity; group identity/conformity versus individuality/expressiveness; formality versus informality; compulsion versus choice; sexuality versus sexuality; and sexual innocence versus sexual perversion" (Craik 13).

Ballet Uniform: Tutus reveal the entire legs of ballet dancers in order to show off their intricate footwork, allow freedom of movement, reveal the outline of their figure, and to allow their teachers to "correct the technical and physical flaws" of their bodies (Ballet Dancewear History). My ballet instructor often yelled "hold in your bucks (butts)!" when she noticed limp rear muscles under the depths of the tutu. I decided to remake my ballet uniform to hide my "bucks" and challenge the established standards of gracefulness and freedom of movement.

First Communion Uniform: The white color of First Communion dresses symbolizes purity and the girl's veil symbolizes the tablecloth used at the last supper. Together this ensemble, "simulates a wedding gown...for in a certain way, every little girl becomes a bride of Christ in her first spiritual union with Him Who is fully present, Body and Blood, in the Sacred Host" (Horvat). I never understood or appreciated the idea of eating a body of flesh, I merely performed the ritual in order to follow the rules. I became even more disconcerted after learning that at First Communion I engaged in a simulated marriage to an imaginary entity. As a result, my new First Communion veil becomes a girl's party tablecloth, instead of a tablecloth for eating flesh or a veil for marrying a non-existent person.

Catholic School Uniform: My catholic school uniforms were "ugly and ill-fitting" (Craik 53) and represented to me both "attributes of masculinity—discipline, achievement, leadership, conformity" and "self-control and self-negation" (Craik 65). In my school, girls could only wear shirts or jumpers until my 7th year as a student. Our uniforms were, as Okely says, "composed of 'strange male traits'", including pleated tunics (reminiscent of Roman gladiators), thick navy blue socks, and regulation knee-length skirts (Craik 66). Craik argues that school uniforms persuade a student to "accept the discipline of the school…, conforming to dress codes and seeking not to stand out in the school assembly" (Craik 55). In doing so, she asserts that uniforms are designed for "not only controlling the body and its behavior but also actively producing the particular attributes of the self that are deemed desirable by the school" (Craik 54). Looking back upon my Catholic school days, I realize that indeed students felt a sense of uniformity and often tried to reveal their individuality through individualized backpacks, coats, hair styles, and even pencil cases. In addition, the uniform always signified "Catholic" student, so many of us ran home directly after school to change before going anywhere else. Today, I do not identify with the Catholic religion or many of its values. My present day image reveals this through my hand embroidered Planned Parenthood patch and Equal Human Rights patch. In addition, I adorned myself with brightly colored tights instead of the thick navy knee highs worn in the past. My altered uniform shows my desire to express my individuality, reject the discipline of the school, and even express my support of ideas not condoned by the school.

Cheerleading Uniform: Cheerleading uniforms must allow the wearer to perform dangerous athletic stunts and acrobatics while looking uniformly "sexy and cute, but never too over the top" (Royal). As Paul Fussell asserts, cheerleaders must "enact the part of the 'unattainable male macho dream girl'" and "follow strict rules of behavior designed to keep them objects merely of fantasy, never of sexual availability" (Fussell 118). As a cheerleader, rules required my uniformity in dress, movement, and even body physique in addition to the adornment of "unwavering smiles and minimal dress" (Fussell 118). When I was a college cheerleader, a coach even instructed us to "take off your shirts and point out your flaws." While I enjoyed the physical activity of cheerleading, I felt uncomfortable in my performed character. In my recreated cheerleading uniform, I wrapped a sign-like sheet around my body in order to break uniformity, conceal the curves of my body, and enhance the presentation of awkwardness.

Sorority Uniform: Three quotes from a sorority rush guide capture the essence of my experience with the sorority uniform.

"Clothes are the first thing sororities will notice about you. You must dress appropriately. Proper attire does not necessarily mean expensive designer clothes. (But wearing them can't hurt!) Rather, your clothes should fit into your personal style while expressing a sorority girl image" (Rose).

"The well-dressed sorority girl wears ironed or starched jeans, a jersey with Greek letters sewn on, a visor with Greek letters painted on, Greek jewelry, a headband, the most "in" sunglasses, a pearl necklace, expensive leather tennis shoes or penny loafers, and Lauren perfume" (Rose).

"A smile is the sorority girl's most important accessory...some girls... should practice smiling in front of a mirror before rush" (Rose).

Many of these unwritten codes of dress exist within the Greek System. The sorority uniform varies according to the activity performed. For rush, I often wore black dresses or skirts, nicely applied makeup, and high heels. For "going out," a common uniform included black CFM ("come fuck me") pants, skirts, or boots. As the "Ready For Rush: The Must-Have Manual for Sorority Rushees!" asserts, the potential sorority member should "go on a rush shopping spree," "have a dress rehearsal to try on all of your outfits for each round of parties," and "apply your makeup carefully and sparingly" (Thornton 34 & 35). In addition, one must "make sure every item is altered properly, ironed, and ready to go" and "style your hair in a well-kept and neat fashion" (Thornton 83). In this way, a sorority member's appearance and apparel symbolizes one's desire to uphold the values of the Greek System and specific chapter. I often felt the pressure to adhere to all of these dress codes, but uncomfortably. My redesigned sorority uniform breaks the rules of neatness with its applied creases and wrinkles and my unkempt makeup job and hair.

Business Suit: When I wore business suits to interview for jobs as a mechanical engineer, I felt stifled, uniform, uncomfortable, and masculine. As I hoped to get a job, I adhered to this desired code of dress, but why? Craik argues that these occupational uniforms provide "clear signs about the nature of the worker—special skills, the demeanor or attitude and values of the worker, the authority and perhaps ability to intervene and the nature of the service that can be provided" (Craik 133). Designed to replicate the angular lines and broad shoulders of a man's business suit, the women's suit I wore misrepresented me by portraying an overt sense of power and aggressiveness. Craik asserts that these uniforms intend to "bolster the persona of the wearer and equip them to perform" (Craik 133). In my case, I felt unable to perform, feeling ill-suited in a bolstered persona. My artwork asks whether the business suit must really "bolster" the wearer. In my reenactment, I inserted feminine curves into the lines of the suit to transgress this masculine, powerful code of dress.

Bridal Uniform: Historically, the bridal veil symbolized a woman's "submissiveness and a promise to obey her new husband" (History of Wedding Traditions). Susanne Friese proposes that the wedding dress symbolizes the act of "crossing the border from bride to married woman" and carries two meanings, a private and social meaning (Guy 64). Privately the dress signifies the process of enabling her to "perform a role she has never played before" and at the same time, "through socialization she has learned an idealized sense of this role and how to interpret and act it out" (Guy 64). I performed the "idealized" role of bride on my wedding day, not by choice, but by enacting expectations of my family and that of my future in-laws. I indeed "crossed the border from bride to married woman," but not feeling well suited in my veil and carrying my bouquet. The veil symbolizes submissiveness, but I did not feel submissive. Flowers in a bridal bouquet symbolize "fertility and everlasting love" (History of Wedding Traditions), but I wondered why they were so expensive. Aren't other living things just as beautiful and much less expensive? The veil in my reconstructed bridal uniform, therefore, rejects submissiveness. My bouquet of broccoli and radishes renounces the convention of lavish, expensive flowers.

Authoritative Locations: The architecture in the images represents the structures of authority that imposed rules upon me. These buildings background me with rigid, linear, geometric structure, contrasting the often curved, organic shapes of my body and uniforms. The straight lines and symmetric curves of the rectilinear steps and bricks, arched doorways, cement walkways, and even linear shadows create visual order in the images. This visual order symbolizes the standardization and uniformity imposed upon me within the walls of the institution.

Reenactment: My process of reenactment reveals both my past and present identities. The images show the uniforms of my past and the locations in which they were worn, with alterations created in the present. The process of creating these images shed light on my emotions, experiences, and opinions about issues related to the roles I played in my past, but through the lens of the present. Through reenactment, I reexperienced some of the emotions of the past and felt a sense of triumph when remaking the experiences in a new way.

Sven Lutticken posits that

> "Art can examine and try out--under laboratory conditions, as it were--forms of repetition that break open history and the historicist returns of past periods; it can investigate historical moments or eras as potentials waiting to be reactivated, in forms that need not resemble anything. Operating within contemporary performative spectacle, if from a marginal position, art can stage small but significant acts of difference... It may lead to artistic acts that, while not instantly unleashing a 'tremendous emancipatory potential', create a space--a stage--for possible and as yet unthinkable performances" (Lutticken 60).

In other words, artistic reenactments raise important questions about the past situations to be contemplated in the present through performance, with the intent to "transform the present" (Lutticken 43). As cult leader Jim Jones, of the Jonestown Re-enactment states, "Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Lutticken 42). But, reenactment requires more than mere "remembering," it requires constructed behavior, or "living by remembering" (Lutticken 193).

My work seeks to revisit the past to reconstruct the present. In experiencing and performing the past, I learned about the roles I played and how my convictions today differ from those of the institutions to which I belonged. Reenactment allowed me to "live by remembering," because I recognized how I truly feel about these conventions now. Making images of the reenactments provides a starting point for questioning the social identity roles played by myself and others. I hope the images pose questions for viewers about their own constructed identities in their past and present.

Role-Playing: Role-playing in my work causes aspects of my identity to resurface, revealing that I am a unified identity of multiple selves. My images oppose the post-modern conception that people perform multiple discontinuous selves, but instead prove that I instead possess "different perspectives on the same self...variations among the cognitive representations of the self (e.g., Higgins, 1987), but it is the same self" (Gilbert 682). In other words, these multifarious selves link to one another through awkwardness and oddity, revealing that they, in fact, make up my one

Figure 1.22. Nikki S. Lee, from *The Schoolgirls Project*, 2000.

Figure 3.22. Eleanor Antin, from *Portraits of the King*, 1972.

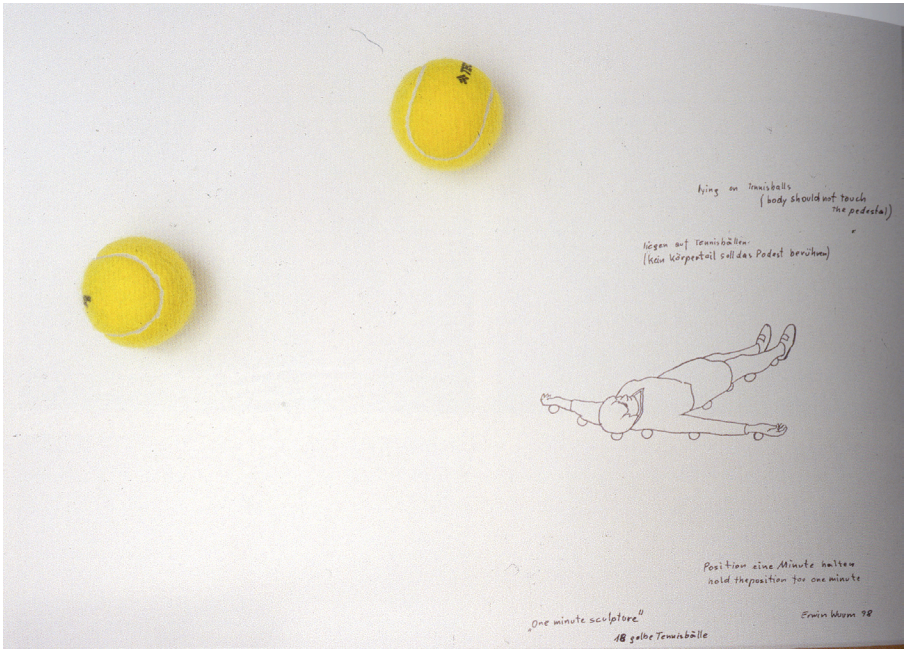


Figure 4.22. Erwin Wurm, *Hold This Position for a Minute and Do Not Think*, 1998.

Figure 2.22. Eleanor Antin, from *Caught in the Act*, 1973.

Figure 5.22. Erwin Wurm, *59 Positions*, video, 1992.

Figure 6.22. Erwin Wurm, *Outdoor Sculptures Taipei*, 2000.

unified self. Referring to one's person, William James says that "there are as many social selves as groups of individuals who know him, and that changes in behavior with different audiences resulted in 'practically' a division into different selves" (Gilbert 682). To some extent my images realize this statement, but with a linking thread--my inability to behave acceptability in these "groups". Perhaps my work proves that my multiple selves are "conceptions of the same self in different circumstances (and with different attributes)" (Gilbert 682).

Photography: The medium of photography allowed me to capture real performances. Using no digital modification, these images reveal my actual expressions and locations. The formal aspects of the photographs create visual links to the iconography of the family snap-shot. After creating these images, I began searching for old photographs taken of me in my uniforms. Astonishingly, I realized that my reenactments resembled the snap-shot photographs of my younger self playing these roles in the past! Perhaps, I subconsciously assumed the past roles despite the number of years since their performance. Assumption of the roles reveals the extent to which photographs influence our memories. I had not seen those photographs for years, but somehow I performed the roles for the camera in the same way I had in the past.

Contextual Precedents: Creative Work

These images follow the works of Nikki S. Lee, Eleanor Antin, and Erwin Wurm, who create artwork that deals with similar conceptual and formal issues.

Nikki S. Lee assumes various personas by researching subcultures, integrating herself into the social structure, and then photographing herself with members of the group (Figure 1.22). She adorns herself with the clothing, makeup, and attitudes of those within the subculture, even gaining or losing weight to play the role. Her images are snap-shots captured casually, spontaneously, and informally with a 35 mm camera. She does not compose the image, but merely asks another person to take the picture, either a friend or total stranger. She tries to integrate herself believably enough that a viewer could not pick her out as a "performer".

Similar to Lee, I wear clothing and photograph myself in specific locations appropriate for the roles. My images, however, reveal a sense of disconnect between me and the social situation--i am awkward and out of place in the roles. In addition, I construct the images so that I am the only entity in the frame that seems casual, spontaneous, or out of place in the often serious, formal settings. Instead of wearing suitable apparel, I alter the uniforms to emphasize my misfitness.

Eleanor Antin's work also involves performative photography and video. She assumes roles, enacts them, and documents the performances. She documents roles as a ballet dancer (Figure 2.22), a king (Figure 3.22), and a nurse using video and still image photography. Like her work, my work explores multiple selves, but unlike my work, her work reveals "other" selves "who she could have been or who she could dream of being" (Fox, Howard 59). She admits, however, that her own self exists within the selves she plays, "Role playing was about feeling that I didn't have a self. And I didn't miss it... [But] I am in all my pieces, even if you don't see me" (Steiner 37). My work documents my assumption of my own past roles, derived from memory, as opposed to from histories of other personae. Her images show her idealized self as male (king) and female (ballerina). In my work, instead of idealized, my work shows my assumption of these roles as mistaken, disconnected, and confused. In addition, like my images, Antin's images make use of humor to reveal stereotypes about role-playing. Her *ideal* ballerina falls, just as my *real* ballerina wears her tutu awkwardly.

Erwin Wurm's videos and images reveal a sense of "low-key but dedicated clowniness" (Cantz 19) as he captures the human's "repeated attempts to "get it right" " (Cantz 20) in ridiculous situations created by the artist. His work invites the performers to reenact a One Minute Sculpture (Figure 4.22), assume an uncomfortable, awkward position in clothing in 59 Positions (Figure 5.22), or pose oddly in Indoor and Outdoor Sculptures (Figure 6.22). In this work, he remakes the familiar, asking his viewers to consider the curious details of everyday life (Cantz 24). The "deliberately amateurish aspects of his video production" and the comedic tone of his work (Cantz 21) emphasize the experimental process and portray the idea of "integrating the possibility of failure into our planned actions and procedures" (Cantz 20). In his works, the "distinctions between body and object, sculpture and performance, animate and inanimate, are blithely blurred" (Cantz 16) because the performers attempt to assume absurd, stationary physical positions. His images possess elements of "self-effacing humor and commentary on art and psychology" (Cantz 9).

As in Wurm's work, my images reveal my feelings of the ridiculousness of performing everyday identity roles. Humor and absurdity in my images highlight my feeling of discomfort in the roles and my realization of the absurdity of many of the institutional conventions. Like the characters in Wurm's works, my images reveal my comic, awkward, failed attempts to fit in within social situations. The videos of the reenactments posses similar amateurish qualities, because of the unmeditated actions portrayed and the unedited cropping and composition, thus suggesting the quickness with which I performed the actions. My works also ask the viewer to refamiliarize themselves with everyday activities of dressing, preparing to leave the home, and enacting daily roles. Lastly, like Wurm's work, my work employs "self-effacing humor" to comment on photography and psychological activities in daily life. Unlike Wurm's work, my work emerges from personal specific experiences, thus commenting on issues that perhaps many people experienced and can understand.

Discussion

This section reviews the overarching themes running through my thesis work, including photography & video as a method of capture, identity roles & self concept, body & self as material, costuming the self, reenactment as performance of past and present, conforming to and transgressing from authority structures, playfulness & absurdity, and black humor/comedy.

Photography & Video as Method of Capture & Representation

Photography captures my actions and singular performances. The still camera documents the outcome of my hair manipulations, skin imprints, uniform alteration, and reenactments. The videos document the process of preparing for and performing these acts. The resulting images and videos allow the events to be represented for viewers not present at the actual locations, thus lending a sense of remade authenticity to the narratives. The reenactment photographs and videos possess a snapshot-like and amateurish quality respectively, suggesting quickness and my desire to avoid "getting caught".

Identity Roles, Self Concept & Self Portraiture

Through the process of self portraiture, I realized how much of my performance of self was "for the benefit of other people" (Goffman 17). Whether to ingratiate myself, satisfy others' expectations, belong within a social structure, or just remain inconspicuous, I tried to behave as expected in many situations. My work reveals the discrepancy between acting and truly being. As a performer, I realized that in some cases I was able to be a performer "fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (Goffman 17). This "act" was often short-lived as I began to feel awkward in the performances.

Body & Self as Material

Using myself, including my physical body, autobiographical places, and my recalled emotions, provided an entryway not only into investigating ideas related to me, but to larger issues of social psychology, memory, feminism, constructed identities, and structures of authority. According to viewers' comments, my work relates to many peoples' experiences growing up, self discovery, varied facets of identity, memories of childhood, and feelings of pressure from external authorities.

Costuming the Self

This work reveals how adornment constructs identities. My work both confirms and challenges the idea that "we are what we wear" (Fussell). In these works, I "wear" the imprints of others' words, my constructed hair formations, and altered uniforms. In each case, the adornments derive from the expectations of others but I perform the application of them to my body/self. Do I wear them because I want to, or because I have to, or both? These works challenge the idea that "we are what we wear" out of choice or even awareness.

Reenactment as Performance of Past & Present

Performance of one's past in the guise of present suggests the way identity evolves with growth and experience in the world. Imprinting my skin with the verbal directions pressed upon me throughout my life reenacts my past and present susceptibility to being impressionable--a process of internalization of expectations of others. Impressing my adult self with past directions reveals the impact which these experiences still play on my present self. Molding my hair into configurations represents my psychological states when conforming to past and present rules. The images juxtapose the body of a grown woman with the childlike act of doll manipulations, representing the reenactment of past emotions. Performing for the camera in altered uniforms from my past roles marks the subconscious desire to revisit past identities from a present mindset. In doing so, the images suggest that past identities still define a present self.

Authority, Rule Following, and Transgression

Simultaneous conformity and transgression within the images reveals the complexity with which I confront social pressures. The actions of molding hair and imprinting skin become physical manifestations of ways in which conventions shaped my character and emotions. The redesigned costumes break rules of uniformity, thus embodying my desire to deviate from the guidelines I followed in the past. The images suggest that often one follows self-created rules, but desires to transgress imposed rules. This conundrum emerges in the images through my conflicting desire to both "fit-in" and "stand-out", the desire to be unique, but still accepted as part of society.

Playfulness & Absurdity

The work presents a subdued, yet mischievous, playfulness. Manipulating hair, imprinting skin, dressing up in clothes that do not fit, and inelegantly performing children's roles appear comic and absurd. Critiques of the work point to its "childlike" nature referring to the mischievous, impulsive actions depicted. Similar to the way "the child plays with his body in order to explore it, to take inventory of it" (Goffman 76), I investigate my past through instinctive exploration. The humor in the work, however, emerges because I perform these explorations as an adult becoming cognizant of the mixture of past with present.

Identity confusion sometimes results from one's decision to break rules governing everyday behaviors. Rules that once dictated my conduct also provided a prescribed, internalized identity. Rules become imprints on my character and I mold myself to fit the roles prescribed by the rules. When I decide to stop following these rules, I must reconstruct my new self. At the same time, when I realize the absurdity of rules I have followed in the past, my conformity seems ridiculous. I realize now that I followed these rules without clear understanding of their origins, principles, and goals, and without comprehending the consequences of my conformity. This identity confusion visibly emerges through the awkwardness and jocularity of the costumes in the images.

Black Humor/Comedy

My work shows how black comedy can depict human folly and subversive ideas without repelling the audience into utter sadness or discomfort. I poke fun at life's everyday hardships to raise issues without distancing viewers through banality, glibness, sadness, discomfort, or depression. In fact, the humor tends to engross viewers as they recognize themselves in the situations presented. Yablonsky says "much of what we find funny, in life or art, is nasty, dark, violent, unforgiving, and often attended by the pain mirrored in the face of the classic clown" (Yablonsky). In other words, "clowns" provide access to complex and painful ideas through the experience of a viewer's laughter at human folly. In my work, my humorous failures allow viewers to relate without feeling self-effaced. Humor, therefore, draws one into the situation while also keeping them distanced enough to defuse threat. McEwen, an artist working with signage said, "Humor makes it possible to be subversive" (Yablonsky). As a result, I can also depict commonly unacceptable ideas, such as an adult dressing in children's clothes, breaking dress codes, and transgressing social constructs.

Conclusions

This section discusses the conclusions drawn and questions raised.

Results

This thesis project allowed me to integrate an intuitive art-making process with reflective analysis. I gained insights about myself through creating images in automatic response to my everyday emotions and then reflecting on them to ascertain intricacies of my psyche. Collecting my hair or writing on my skin were immediate responses to everyday emotions, which I then reenacted and reframed for the camera.

I also explored a process of using myself as the subject of my work. In this way, I became a medium by which to express my autobiographical ideas, but also to express more universal identity issues. In addition, researching other artists, psychology texts, and popular culture literature revealed that my ideas relate to more universal issues of personal and social identity, role-playing, and conformity.

Using photography and video as methods to document my actions allowed me to perform an event at the specific location and then display my actions to viewers in other settings, including art galleries, online, and for presentation. Photographs and videos reveal authentic views of my activities for the camera.

Lastly, my project tells a story of emotional conflicts between "fitting in" and "standing out". Using my own body, hair, skin, and costumes, I revealed the process I go through to simultaneously mold myself for roles and transgress their rules.

Questions for the Future

This project poses many questions to be investigated in future work. When do past and present coalesce in images? How can video and photography be effectively integrated? When does a reenactment cease to be only performed for the camera, but instead performed for an audience? How can "future" identities be constructed from understanding the past and present?

This project opens up many areas of investigation linking autobiographical study and representation of social psychology, feminist identity concerns, and, most importantly, the everyday presentation of self.

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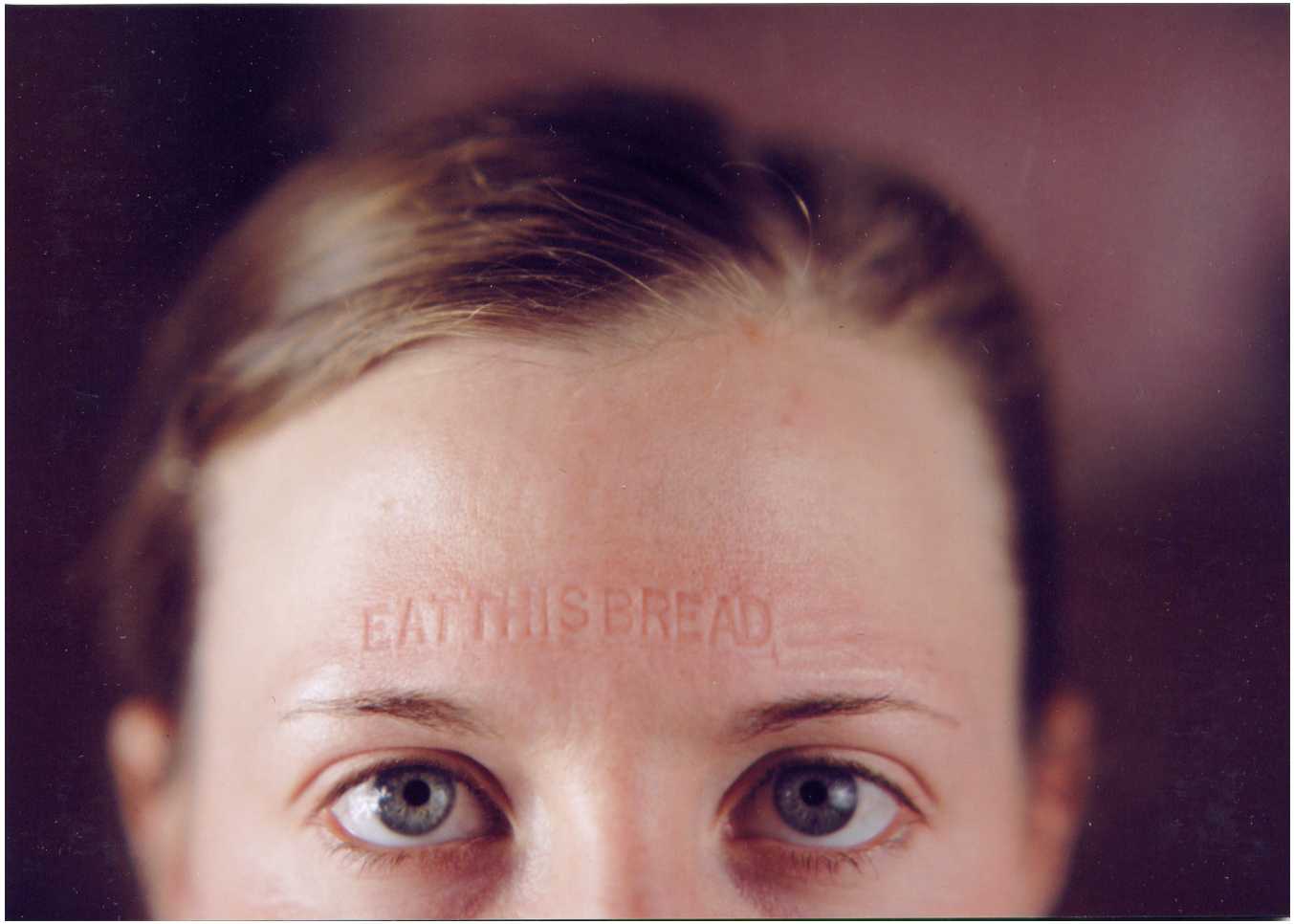


Appendix 1.28. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #1*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 2.29. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #2*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 3.30. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #3*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 4.31. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #4*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 5.32. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #5*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 6.33. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #6*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 7.34. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #7*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 8.35. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #8*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 9.36. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #9*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 10.37. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #10*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 11.38. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #11*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 12.39. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #12*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 13.40. Sarah Buckius, *i'm impressionable #13*, c-print, 5" x 7", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 14.41. Installation view of series *i'm impressionable,* 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 15.42. Installation view of series *molding myself for roles*, 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 16.43. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #1*, c-print, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 17.44. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #2*, c-print, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 18.45. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #3*, c-print, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 19.46. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #4*, c-print, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 20.47. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #5*, c-print, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 21.48. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #6*, c-print, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 22.49. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #7*, c-print, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 23.50. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #8*, c-prints, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 24.51. Sarah Buckius, *molding myself for roles #9*, c-prints, 8" x 8", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 25.52. Sarah Buckius, *when i became a cheerleader like my mom*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 26.53. Sarah Buckius, *when i became an engineer like my dad*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 27.54. Installation of role model photographs, c-prints, 20” x 24”, 2005.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 28.55. Installation of autobiographical reenactments, c-prints, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 29.56. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Ballet Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 30.57. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered First Communion Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

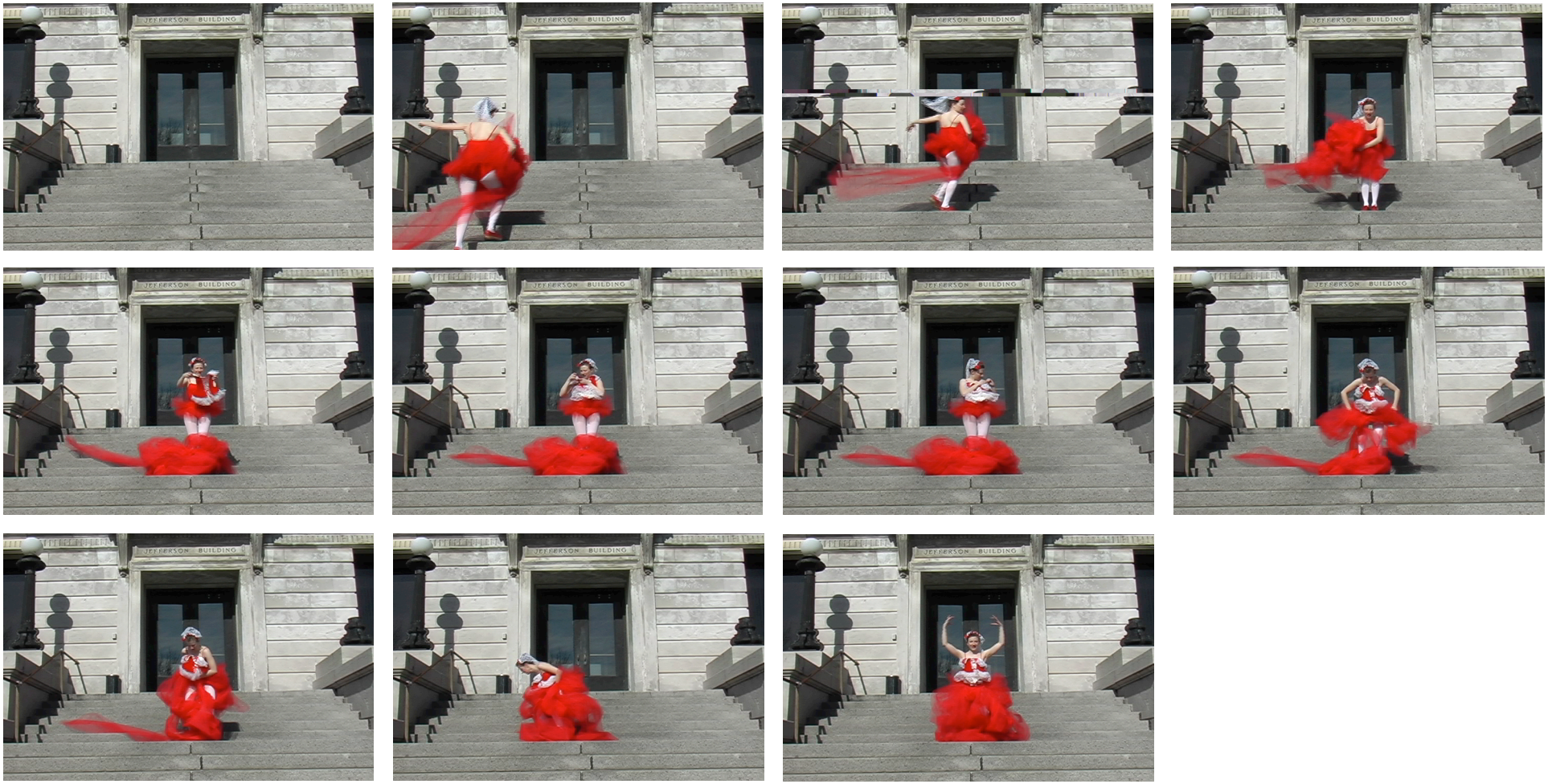
Appendix 31.58. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Catholic School Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 32.59. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Cheerleading Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 33.60. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Sorority Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 34.61. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Business Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

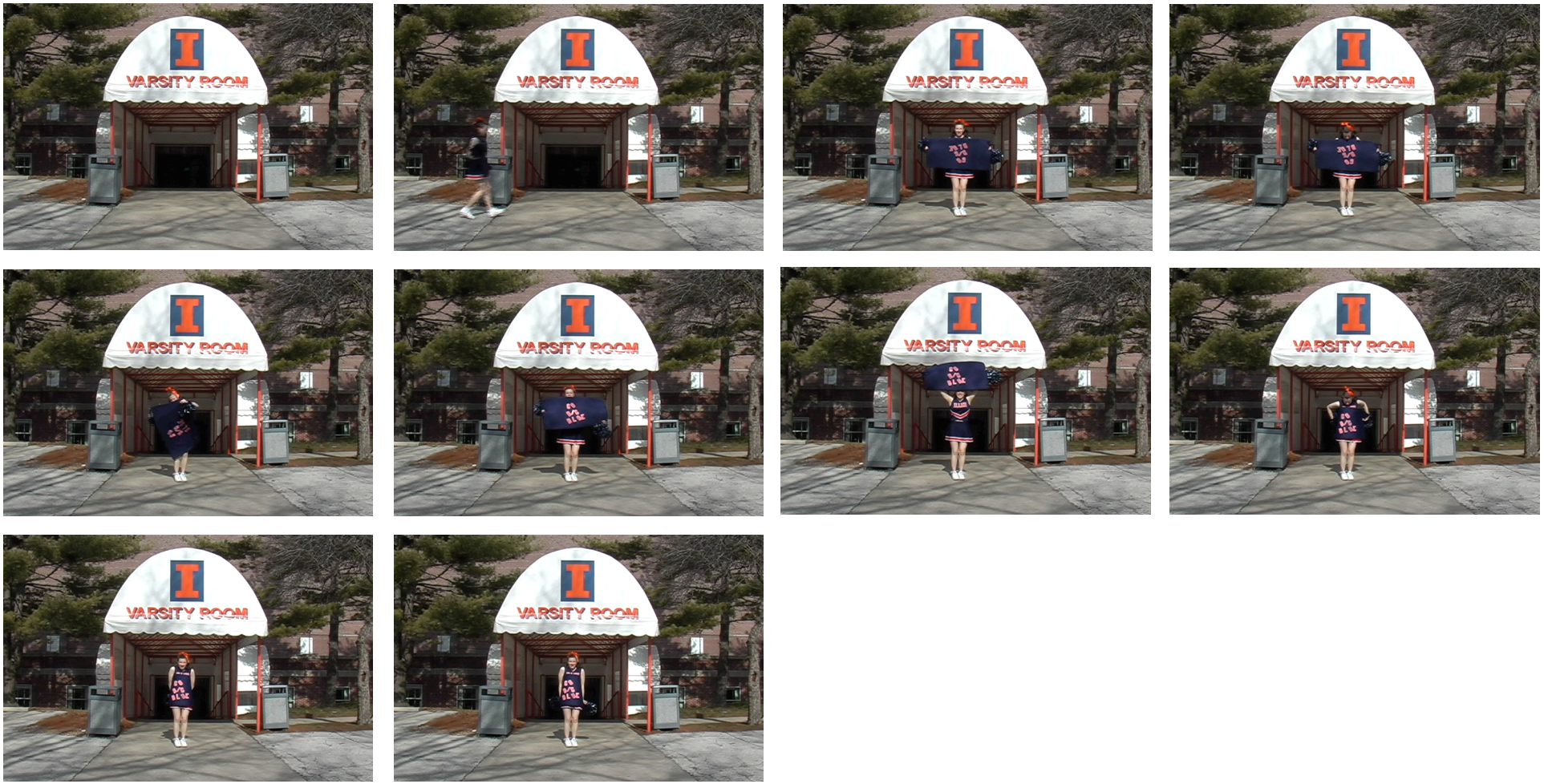
Appendix 35.62. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Bridal Uniform*, c-print, 20" x 24", 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).



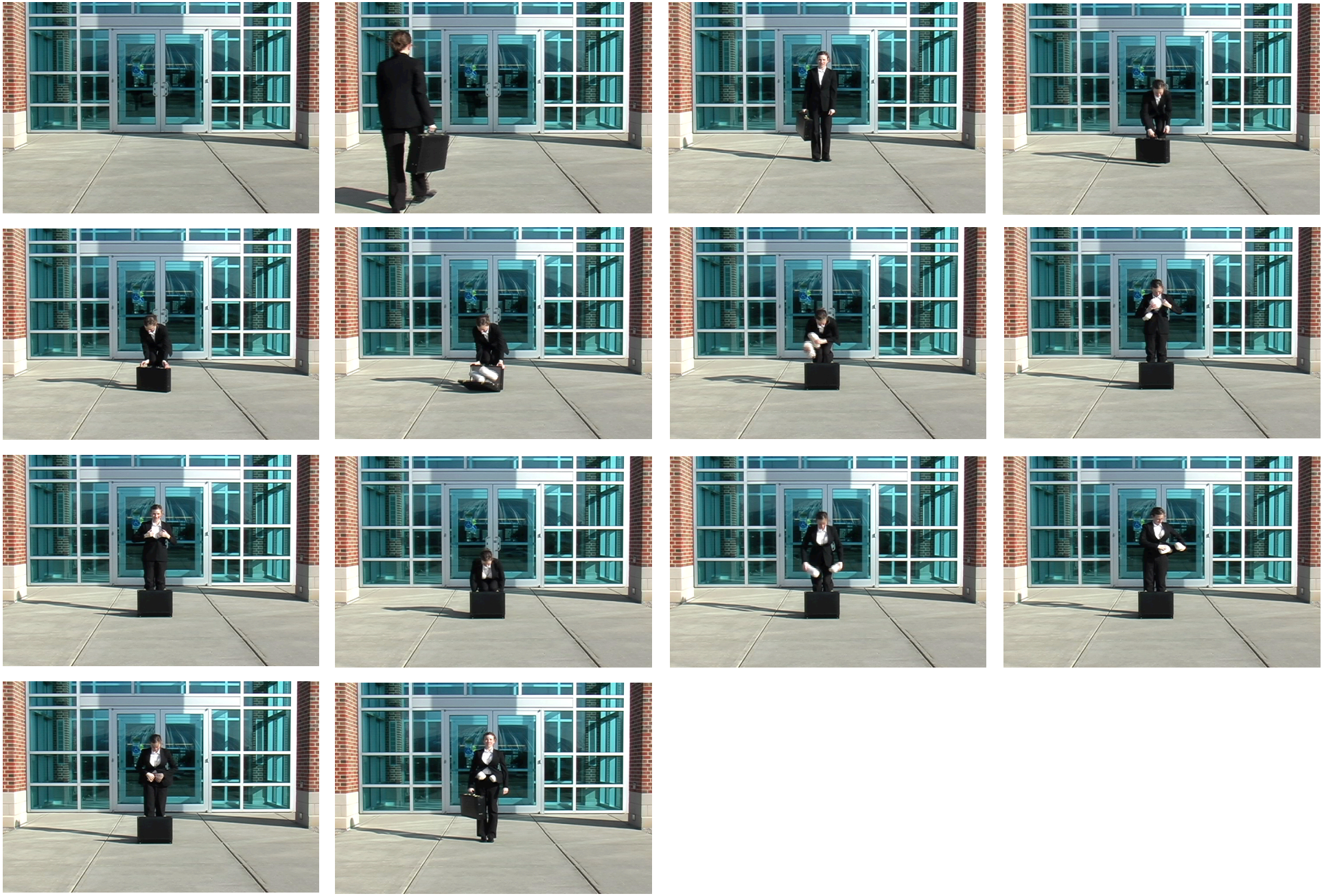
Appendix 36.63. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Ballet Uniform*, video stills, 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 37.64. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered First Communion Uniform*, video stills, 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Appendix 38.65. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Catholic School Uniform*, video stills, 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).



Appendix 39.66. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Cheerleading Uniform*, video stills, 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).



Appendix 40.67. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Corporate Uniform*, video stills, 2006.
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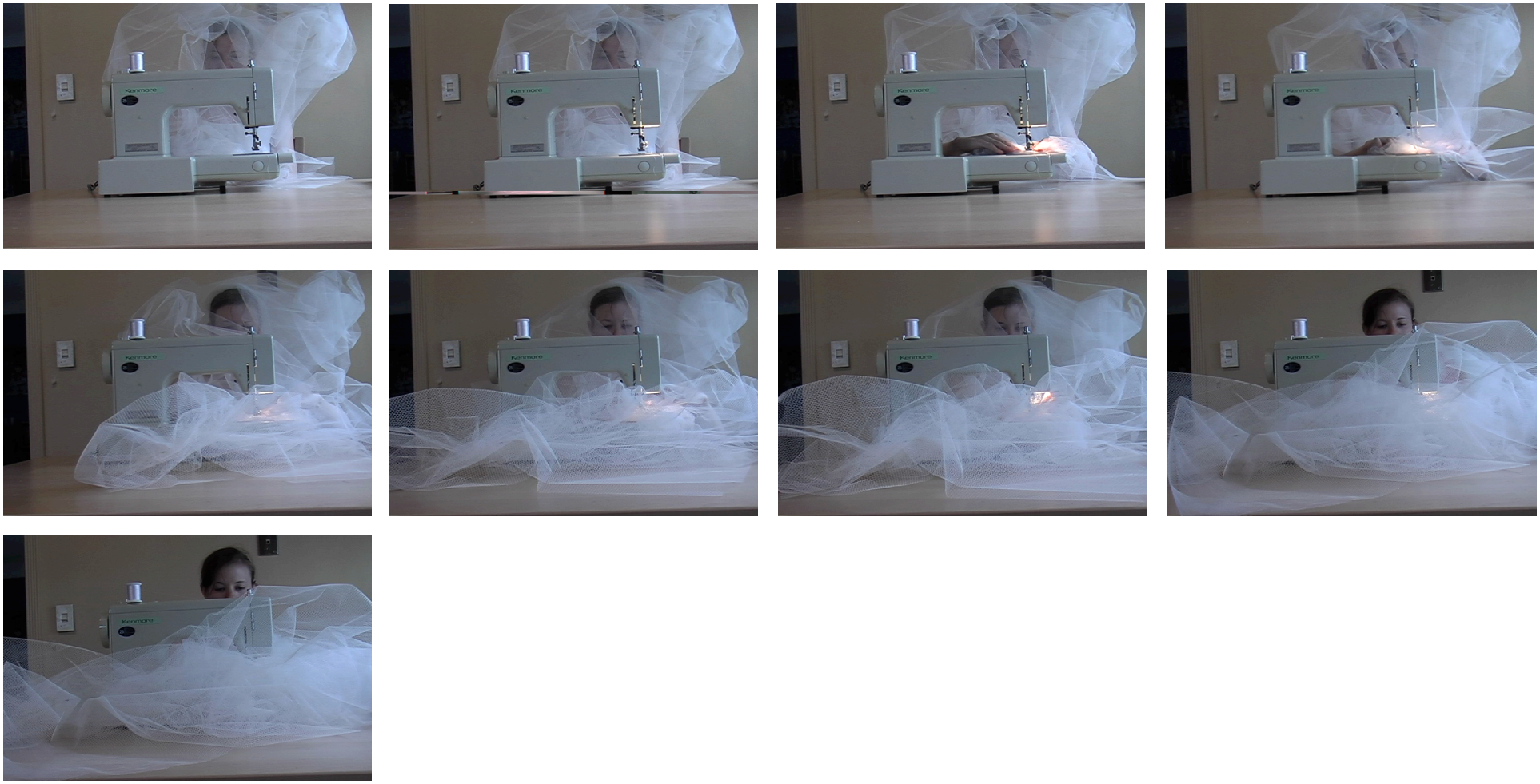


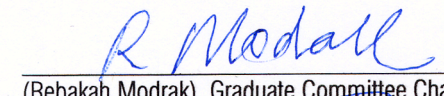
Appendix 41.68. Sarah Buckius, *Autobiographical Reenactment: Altered Bridal Uniform*, video stills, 2006.
(click here to go back to the Creative Work section).

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

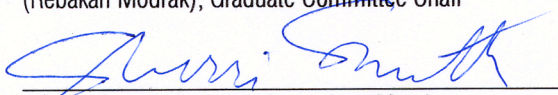
School of Art and Design
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan

May 1, 2006

Approved by:

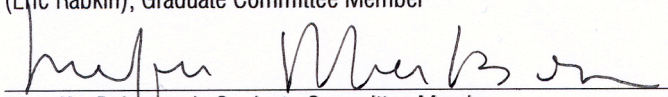


(Rebakah Modrak), Graduate Committee Chair



(Sherri Smith), Graduate Committee Member

(Eric Rabkin), Graduate Committee Member



(Jennifer Robertson), Graduate Committee Member

(Brad Smith), Associate Dean for Grad. Ed.

(Bryan Rogers), Dean, School of Art and Design

Date Degree Conferred: May 2006