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UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI  
COLLEGE OF DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE, ART AND PLANNING

**Adrian Piper and Immanuel Kant: Toward a Synthesis of Art and Philosophy**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE ART HISTORY FACULTY  
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BY  
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## ABSTRACT

Adrian Piper (b. 1948) is both an artist and a philosopher. In the late 1960s, while still in school she established herself as an important Conceptual Artist. In the 1980s Piper went on to become the first female, African-American tenured philosophy professor in the United States. These two aspects of her professional life are usually treated strictly separately by scholars, however given the conceptual nature of her art, her philosophical ideas inevitably would have a lot to add to the reading of her artwork. In this study, I take a detailed look at Piper's Kantian philosophy and its affects and insights on her art.



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## INTRODUCTION

Whether the rule in force is social, sexual, artistic, or intellectual, Adrian Piper is repeatedly the exception not only by birthright or as a result of her actions and ideas, but by dint of her undeterable will to explain the reasons for and ramifications of her position.

—Robert Storr<sup>1</sup>

Adrian Piper (b. 1948) does not fit neatly into the written histories of the avant-garde of the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially into the framework of Conceptual Art. Due to the complex locations of her work, as Kobena Mercer has written, she has been written out of the histories of neo- and post-Conceptualist art as well as the trajectories that align those approaches to contemporary practice.<sup>2</sup> Piper's marginalization is largely due to the complexities of her work and the difficulty in categorizing it. Piper's infusion of personal social content into her artwork from 1970 and after has kept this work out of the history of apolitical, "first wave" Conceptual Art, while her commitment to Kantian inquiry during the same period establishes her practice as a conceptual one.<sup>3</sup> And in turn, her very interest in Immanuel Kant, as opposed to poststructuralist thinkers has excluded her from the debates surrounding successive generations of Conceptual Art that reintroduced political content to conceptual practice.

As an artist of African descent, Piper's work is often oversimplified as angry, autobiographical and entrenched in racial politics. Xenophobia, personal experience, and the rational construction of the self all come into play within her work, yet her work is not about

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Storr, forward in *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968–1992*, by Adrian Piper (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), xv.

<sup>2</sup> Kobena Mercer, "Decentering and recentering: Adrian Piper's Spheres of Influence," in *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective*, ed. Maurice Berger (Baltimore, MD: Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County, distributed by D.A.P., 1999), 48.

<sup>3</sup> The term "first wave" is taken from Kobena Mercer's essay listed above where she refers to the exhibition catalog, *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, ed. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 1995.

being an angry black woman. As she wrote in 1988, “ There is the issue of my racial identity, and the conflicts between the way I perceive it and the way others do. I don’t perceive my racial identity in any way at all.”<sup>4</sup> Despite the misinterpretation that her work seems to be prone to, Piper prefers to be an artist on the margins. “My marginality is a major resource for me both in art and philosophy,” she has written, adding that this position gives her a clearer vantage point from which to observe the mainstream.

Adrian Piper is a valuable piece of the Conceptual Art puzzle, and her study of Kantian philosophy makes her a unique figure within the landscape of late twentieth and early twenty-first century art. Modernism, as well as the enlightenment philosophy that supported it, has been the favorite target of artists and critics since the late 1960s. Within the thick of modernism’s blacklisting, Piper was fully vested in Kantian philosophy as a professional philosopher. Her philosophical views have rarely been presented in direct relation to her artwork, and with the fervent anti-modernist views of many contemporary art historians and critics, this is not surprising. In contrast, this study will explore Piper’s hyphenated professional life as an artist-philosopher, showing Kant’s effects on her artwork as well as using her own Kantian philosophy as an interpretive model of her art.

My exploration of Piper’s relationship to Kant will take place against the claim that she is an important member of the history and trajectory of twentieth and twenty-first century Conceptual Art. Conceptual Art, like most broad categorical terms, is not made up of an easily identifiable, discrete group of artists and artworks. It is still a contested category despite the many attempts to historicize it, and even locating its founding moment is contentious. Critic and filmmaker Peter Wollen has written, “purists would argue, New York Conceptual Art began in

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian Piper, “The Joy of Marginality”, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968–1992* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 233.



1968 with the *Xeroxbook* show organized by Seth Siegelaub and John W. Wendler.”<sup>5</sup> Art Historian Benjamin Buchloh places the beginnings of Conceptual Art in 1962, whereas Charles Harrison, editor of *Art-Language*, the primary British journal for Conceptual Art, gives the parameters of 1967 to 1975 for the “less gullible.”<sup>6</sup> The disagreements among historians and participants is part of the reason Piper’s location in this history is so complex. It’s hard to shoot a moving target. It may be easier to neglect categorizing Piper’s work altogether, however by not evaluating Piper’s role as a conceptualist, two important things would be lost. First, her relationship to other contemporaries and to history would be impossible to grasp. Second, Piper’s artistic process follows Sol LeWitt’s description of Conceptual Art as, “the idea becomes the machine that makes the art,” and ignoring this conceptual process that is consistent throughout her work would be negligent.<sup>7</sup>

Piper was the only first wave conceptual artist to earn a terminal degree in philosophy, receiving a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1981. Many historians note her philosophical studies but none to date have shown the extent of the effect they had on her artwork. Piper’s doctoral dissertation “A New Model of Rationality,” was based on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, a subject about which she has continued to write, most recently in a large two-volume study on “Kantian Metaethics.”<sup>8</sup> Piper’s first encounter with Kant’s writings came in 1969 when she read the first book of Kant’s three-volume treatise on metaphysics, *Critique of Pure Reason*

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Wollen, “Global Conceptualism and North American Conceptual Art,” in *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s – 1980s*, Luis Camnitzer et. al (New York: Queens Museum of Art: Available through D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), 74.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Harrison, “Conceptual Art and Critical Judgement,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alberro and Stimson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 538.

<sup>7</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 12. This essay was originally published in *Artforum* in the Summer of 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self: A Two-Volume Study in Kantian Metaethics*, The Adrian Piper Research Archive, 2008, <http://www.adrianpiper.com/rss/index.shtml> (accessed on May 6, 2009).

(1787). She refers to the Critique as “the most profound book I have ever read.”<sup>9</sup> The following year, in 1970, she completed her first performative works of art and withdrew her work from both the “Information” show at the Museum of Modern Art, and the “Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects” show at the New York Cultural Center.<sup>10</sup> This sudden redirection of her practice is most often attributed to the affect of external political events on her conscience, such as the Vietnam War, the Kent State Shooting, and the general political activism that occurred in 1968. Yet I would also insist that Piper’s introduction to Kant played a much greater role in creating a radical shift in her artwork, and this claim in no way mitigates the political views held by Piper.

To explain the influence of Kant on Piper’s life and work I will address Piper’s intellectual biography, treating her artistic and philosophical work with equal importance, and creating a more holistic picture than that which has been offered by other historians. I will also discuss her life and work in terms of its historical significance, both as it relates to the genre of Conceptual Art and to art history in general. I will be using Kantian philosophy as an interpretive guide, *not* as a way to describe Piper’s intentions. My goal is to build a clear relationship between Piper’s art and her philosophical ideas, not to unearth her unstated or subconscious aims. I will be using Kantian philosophy to understand her art, and I will argue that it exemplifies Kantian ideas, both pertaining to Kant’s original theses and to Piper’s interpretation and expansion of Kant’s ideas.

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<sup>9</sup> Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968–1992* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 55.

<sup>10</sup> *Information*, exhibition # 934 at MoMA, New York, NY, July 2 – September 20, 1970; *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects*, New York Cultural Center, New York, NY, April 10 – August 25, 1970, organized by Donald Karshan and curated by Joseph Kosuth.

## The Adrian Piper Research Archive

In order to “promote a fuller and clearer understanding of Piper’s work,” including her art, philosophy and yoga, Piper created the Adrian Piper Research Archive (APRA). APRA is both a physical archive housing the documentation of her work and life, as well as an online resource for scholars. In addition to utilizing APRA’s online resources heavily for this study, I attempted to interview Piper directly for this study, since she is a currently a living artist. My request, made through APRA, was denied because Piper was not giving interviews or lecturing at the time. Despite the refusal, Dr. Constanze von Marlin, Director of APRA, wrote that, “Adrian thinks your research topic is a wonderful one.”<sup>11</sup>

## Literature Review

Piper’s study of Kant is not unknown. Most historians and critics of Adrian Piper mention her philosophical study of Kant, and some even venture to associate her philosophical studies with her artistic output. In some cases the mention of Kantian aspects of Piper’s art is incorrect, as in the case of Eleanor Hartney’s article “Blacks, Whites and Other Mythic Beings” (2001).<sup>12</sup> Likewise Peter Osborne’s “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy” (1999), claims that Piper is not an “exclusive conceptualist” while at the same time stating that she has used, and continues to use her “philosophical work in her art.”<sup>13</sup>

In most cases, the mention of her philosophical study is no more than a brief summary, such as the following from Jayne Wark’s book, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*, “Piper’s study of philosophy enabled her to articulate her artistic concerns

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<sup>11</sup> Dr. von Marlin, email message to author, May 12, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Eleanor Heartney, “Blacks, Whites, and Other Mythic Beings,” *Art in America* 89, no. 11 (November 2001): 136–142.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Osborne, “Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy,” in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 54.

more precisely as an investigation of subject-object relations.”<sup>14</sup> This quote is followed by a description of *Food for Thought* (1971), one of Piper’s artworks most obviously connected to Kant’s writing.<sup>15</sup> After that paragraph, a few pages later Wark returns to the idea that “Piper’s work...is grounded in her engagement with Kantian philosophy,” by way of “Piper’s strategy for addressing racism.”<sup>16</sup> Wark spends another short paragraph on the topic, includes a long quotation from Piper’s essay, “Xenophobia and the Indexical Present,” and leaves the topic altogether. In the end Wark leaves the reader with a circular argument that never truly unpacks the relationship between Piper’s study of Kant’s ideas and her artwork.

In “Decentering and Recentering: Adrian Piper’s Spheres of influence,” an essay Kobena Mercer wrote on the occasion of the 1999 traveling retrospective exhibition of Piper’s work, the discussion of Piper’s artwork in the context of Kant’s writings is shallow. Mercer argues the basic premise that this introduction began with, namely that Piper’s location in art history requires a re-examination. Mercer chronicles the ways in which Piper has been “simultaneously upfront, underground, and ahead of her time,” covering wide chunk of her work and its reception.<sup>17</sup> In this essay, Mercer works to correct the dislocation of Piper’s art., connecting it to “Frantz Fanon’s phenomenology of the gaze” and “the linguistic turn” found in the work of many Conceptual Artists, such as Joseph Kosuth, Bruce Nauman, and Mary Kelly. Yet these updates to the understanding of Piper’s oeuvre do not bring it any closer to her Kantian ideas.

Maurice Berger’s essay from the same exhibition catalogue, “Styles of Radical Will: Adrian Piper and the Indexical Present,” helps reinforce the suggested schism between Piper’s

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<sup>14</sup> Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 142.

<sup>15</sup> For a full description of this piece see Chapter Two, pages 29–30.

<sup>16</sup> Wark, 144.

<sup>17</sup> Kobena Mercer, “Decentering and Recentering: Adrian Piper’s Spheres of Influence,” *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective* (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), 46–59.

“staunchly Conceptual works” and her “explorations into identity and discrimination,”<sup>18</sup> rather than treating these works as interrelated. In his essay, Kant is mentioned only once when he is cited as one source among others for Piper’s “conception of the indexical present.”<sup>19</sup> Despite the essay’s title, only two paragraphs are devoted to unpacking Piper’s philosophical ideas surrounding the indexical present, which “underwrite most of her socially oriented art,” according to Berger.<sup>20</sup>

The lack of thorough discussion of Kant’s writings in relation to Piper’s art has no doubt been partially the result of Kant’s contribution to Enlightenment philosophy, his common association Modernism, and Clement Greenberg’s employment of his ideas. Peter Sloterdijk’s *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), is an affectionately critical text about the failure of the Enlightenment, based on Max Horkimer’s and Theodor Adorno’s writings as well as Kant’s original Critiques. This book has helped to solidify the polemic between modernism and anti- or post-modernism, effectively placing Kant on the side of modernism and making both critically unpopular.

To date, the exhibition catalogue for Piper’s 1999 retrospective exhibition is the only major text exclusively devoted to Adrian Piper, which was not written by the artist herself. She has been included in many themed books, such as Alexander Alberro’s and Blake Stimson’s *Conceptual a Critical Anthology* (2000), *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, by Michael Newman and Jon Bird (1999), Jayne Wark’s *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (2006), *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, by Grant Kester (2004), Claire Bishop’s *Participation* (2006), and Alberro’s and Sabeth Buchmann’s *Art*

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<sup>18</sup> Maurice Berger, “Styles of Radical Will: Adrian Piper and the Indexical Present,” *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective* (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), 18.

<sup>19</sup> Berger, 27.

<sup>20</sup> Berger, 26.

*After Conceptual Art* (2006). In all of these books, Piper's work is at the service of the theme of the author or editor. This results in many different readings of her work, and in general a lack of meaningful consensus about her actual contributions as an artist.

Of the books listed above, the best analysis of Piper's Kantian philosophy can be found in Grant Kester's book, *Conversation Pieces*. Kester spends about seven pages discussing Piper's understanding of Kant. He assigns Piper's "attempt to link Kant's ethics to his account of epistemology in the first Critique"<sup>21</sup> as one of her most important contributions to the study of Kantian philosophy. Kant wrote three critiques, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Critique of Practical Reason* and *The Critique of Judgment*, which are usually treated separately despite Kant's intention that they be parts of a greater whole. Kant covers ethics in his second volume, the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), while the first volume sets the stage for individual reasoning and knowledge. The critiques are often treated separately despite being a set. The reading of one volume of the critiques often leads to misunderstanding, as Piper herself has written.

The neglect by contemporary Kantian ethicists of Kant's first Critique has been particularly unfortunate. It forecloses a deeper understanding of Kant's own ethical views, and robs us of valuable resources for addressing contemporary issues in metaethics and applied moral philosophy.<sup>22</sup>

Piper's attempt to right this wrong and understand Kant's overall writings has lead her to theorize racism and social relations in general, Kester argues. For Piper, Kester writes, "identity [is] a performance in which empirical encounters with others act on or modify an existing subjectivity."<sup>23</sup> In short, others form one's sense of self. Despite the thoroughness with which

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<sup>21</sup> Brian Kester, *Converstaion Pieces* (Berkeley, CA:University of California Press, 2004), 74.

<sup>22</sup> Adrian Piper "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," *Philosophical Forum XXIV*, 1-3 (Fall-Spring 1992-93): 188.

<sup>23</sup> Kester, 76.

Kester draws out Piper's use of Kant's philosophy to form new ideas on identity and community, the relationship between of these ideas is only loosely tied to Piper's art. Kester's work on Piper and Kant offers an informed starting-point from which this study proceeds.

At present, the most thorough texts discussing Piper's work are those she has written herself. Piper has written extensively about her own work and about art in general, the culmination of which has been a two-volume collection of these writings entitled, *Out of Order, Out of Sight*, which was published in 1996.<sup>24</sup> The first volume Piper includes formal essays as well as notes and journal entries that detail her artistic education, development and intentions. The second volume contains her art criticism and essays on the art world in general. This collection of texts has provided me with voluminous information on Piper's art.

To collect the philosophical information I turned to Piper's published as well as unpublished philosophical essays, including, "Two Conceptions of Self" (1984), "Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic" (2009), "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism" (1992), and *Rationality and the Structure of the Self* (2008). To balance Piper's Kantian claims against other ways of reading his work, I turned to Allen Wood's, *Kant* (2005), *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, edited by Paul Guyer (1992), as well as Henry Allison's, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism* (1983).<sup>25</sup> For direct access to Kant's writings I used translations by F. Max Muller, Thomas K. Abbott, and James C. Meredith found in Allen Wood's book, *The*

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<sup>24</sup> Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968–1992*, and *Volume II: Selected Writings in Art Criticism 1967–1992* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press), 1996.

<sup>25</sup> Allen Wood, *Kant* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing), 2007. Wood provides an account of all of Kant's major ideas as intended for those not yet familiar with them. Paul Guyer, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press), 1992, and Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 1983.

*Basic Writings of Kant* (2001).<sup>26</sup> These texts informed my understanding of Kant's theories and to fully understand where Piper diverges from them in her philosophical work.

Finally, three very disparate texts underpin many of the ideas in the fifth chapter of this study: Jason Gaiger's "Constraints and Conventions: Kant and Greenberg on Aesthetic Judgment" from the *British Journal of Aesthetics* (1999), *Philosophy and Conceptual Art* edited by Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (2009), and Rodolph Gasche's, *The Tain of the Mirror* (1986). The first by Gaiger, is an essay devoted to chronicling the fidelity of modernist critic Clement Greenberg's aesthetic ideas to those of Kant. The second book is a collection of essays written by analytic philosophers, who unpack the effects of Conceptual Art on aesthetic theory. I looked especially at Diarmuid Costello's essay "Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art."<sup>27</sup> Finally, the pivotal text is a book on the history and interpretation of philosophy in which Gasche links Kant's transcendental reason to Jacques Derrida's theories of deconstruction, using Derrida's philosophical and literary texts.

## **Organization of Chapters**

In the study following I will divide the findings of my research into five chapters. In the first chapter I will briefly explore some key aspects of Piper's work prior to her discovery of Kantian philosophy. Thus, I will discuss her initial historical connection to first-wave Conceptual Art. I will also discuss her *Hypothesis* series in detail in this chapter because it lays the groundwork for her future embrace of Kantian concepts, and forms a bridge between her

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<sup>26</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason* (A and B editions) was translated by Muller, *Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* and *Critique of Practical Reason* were translated by Abbott, and *Critique of Judgment* was translated by Meredith. All translations are included in Allen W. Wood, ed., *Basic Writings of Kant* (New York, NY: The Modern Library), 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Diarmuid Costello, "Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art," in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 92–116.



conceptual investigations on paper and her performative conceptual investigations from 1970 onward.

In the second chapter, I will discuss the connection of Piper's work to her discovery of Kant's writings. This will include a breakdown of the biographical facts surrounding the change in her artistic production that occurred around 1970. This detailed view of a very narrow span of time in Piper's allows me to fully illuminate the forms of, and the causes for, the shifts that took place between 1969 and 1971.

In chapter three I summarize and discuss Piper's major philosophical arguments. These arguments include: the Kantian self, which is an argument for a rational as opposed to a desire-motivated self; transpersonal rationality, which is a model of ethics based on the assumption that we are all rational subjects; and her aesthetic theory which is a blend of yogic and Kantian philosophy. Chapter four offers three specific works of art by Piper discussed in terms of her own Kantian philosophy.

Chapter five gathers all the ground covered in previous chapters by discussing what Piper's use of Kant's writing, both philosophically and artistically, means for art history and aesthetics. This will include a discussion of Greenberg's use of Kant's ideas and the effects this had on art history. It will also include a discussion of deconstruction and Piper's use of Kant's work.

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Adrian Piper is one of the few females, and the only African-American to be part of first-generation Conceptual Art. She is a trailblazer, a historical anomaly, and continues to influence artists in a significant way. This study will attempt to chart a connection between her philosophy

and artwork, a task that has never been completed before. Filling this gap in the literature on Adrian Piper, I hope, creates a more thorough understanding of her artwork, but also expands the understanding of Kant's philosophy within the context of art.

## CHAPTER ONE

### ADRIAN PIPER BEFORE KANT

In the late 1960s, while she was still a student at the school of Visual Arts in New York City, Adrian Piper became a rising star in the international art world, thanks to the wide international acclaim that Conceptual Art had at the time. It was this very success that led to her first, temporary withdrawal from the art world, during which time she read Kant's first *Critique*. It was her sincere investment in conceptual methods in art-making that shaped her later work and led her to Kant's thought in the first place. Thus, understanding her work before Kant is crucial to charting the effects of this philosophy on her trajectory as an artist.

#### **Piper's Education and Introduction to Conceptual Art**

At the beginning of the 1960s, the dominant force in the art world was artistic Modernism, which placed emphasis on the formal evaluation of the art object as it was perceived above all other criteria. As the decade progressed, the emergence of Conceptual Art and the "dematerialization" of the object in the late-1960s were to some degree a reaction to that hegemony. As scholar, Thomas Crow has described the "various dematerializing practices" of the 1960s, they "depended for their force on [the rejection of] the fetishization that accompanied the modernist cult of the autonomous object."<sup>28</sup> It was from within this culture of dematerialization that Piper was educated as an artist. She attended the School of the Visual Art (SVA) in New York between 1966 and 1969, soaking up the dominant trends in the artworld while she was enrolled there. Institutions, especially educational ones, change rather slowly compared to culture at large. As Piper moved away from making formal objects towards

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Crow, "The Birth and Death of the Viewer: On the Public Function of Art" in *Discussions in Contemporary Culture: Number One*, ed. Hal Foster, (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1987), 1.

presenting minimal documentation of her abstract thoughts about space, time, and the objects within it, her practice was met with “disapproval of some of [her] teachers at SVA.”<sup>29</sup> This is not surprising since pedagogy in Fine Arts today still retains many of the conflicts over teaching traditional skills and craft, while allowing students to embrace conceptualism and the deskilling which became popular in the 1960s.

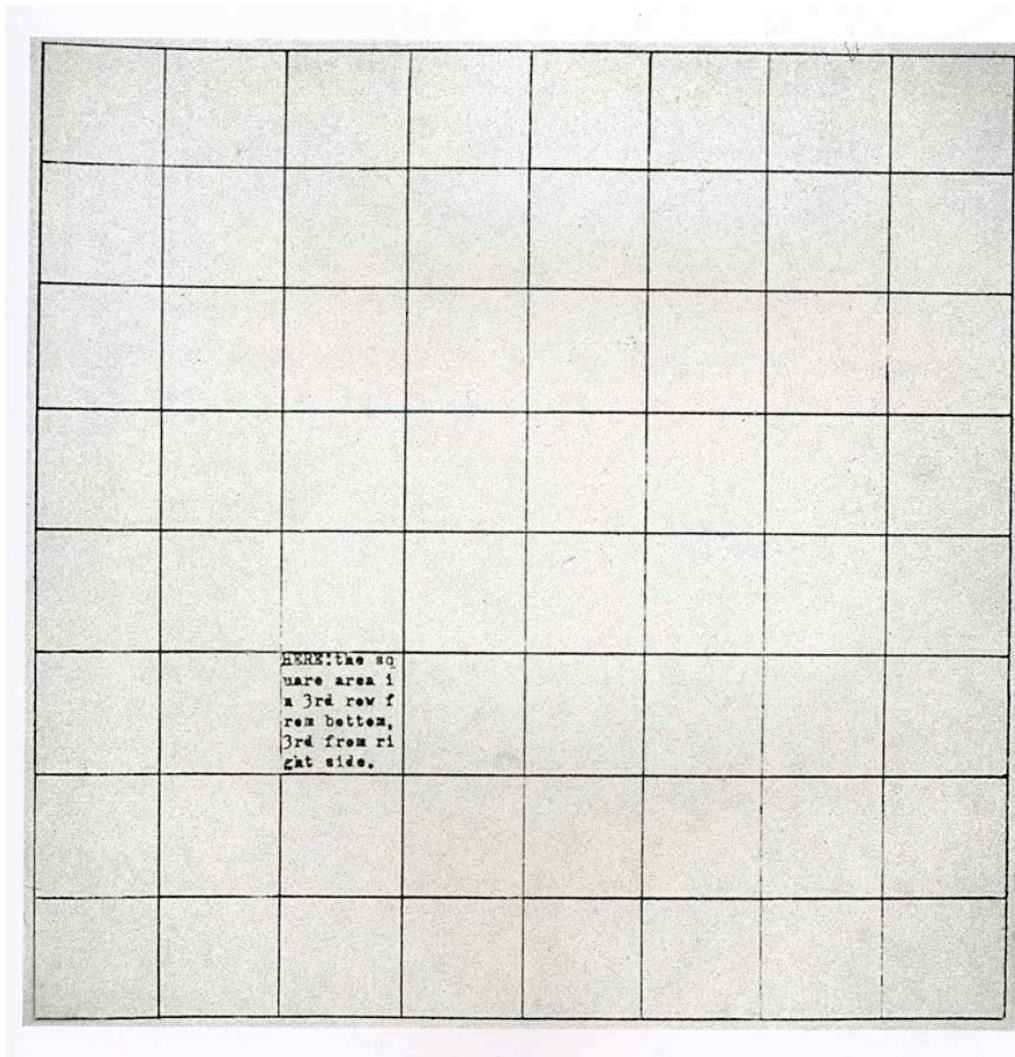


Figure 1.

<sup>29</sup> Adrian Piper, "Flying," in *Adrian Piper: Reflections (1967 – 1987)* (New York, NY: The Alternative Museum, 1987), 27.

By 1969, Piper had become a relatively successful Conceptual Artist. She had exhibited work in the Dwan Gallery, the Paula Cooper Gallery, and been included in two major shows of Conceptual Art, “557,087” at the Seattle Art Museum and “Plans and Projects as Art” at the Kunsthalle Bern.<sup>30</sup> During that time, Piper was preoccupied “with the grid as a coordinate system for locating infinite numbers of points in space and time.”<sup>31</sup> One example of her work from this period is *Here and Now* (1968) (Fig. 1), a 64-leaf folio that treats the grid and the page as sites that refer “both to themselves and also outward, to the world of abstract, symbolic meaning.”<sup>32</sup> This work, as she calls it, “pure conceptual work” uses a fixed perspective, and assumes her point of view (and perception) to be objective.<sup>33</sup> The objective viewpoint Piper used in these works, omits subjectivity and perceptual limitations; in other words, it ignores the self-consciousness of the author as an important part in the formation of the work. Piper’s goal was to connect abstract concepts with “the indexical, self-referential present.”<sup>34</sup> This work was strongly influenced by the work and writings of her mentor and friend, Sol LeWitt (1928 – 2007).

In the 1960s, Sol LeWitt was largely responsible for both the formation and reception of Conceptual Art as an easily identifiable category. The publication of his “Sentences” and his “Paragraphs” on Conceptual Art in the Summer of 1967 and Winter of 1969, respectively, helped disseminate the complicated and heterogeneous group of artists, objects, and ideas that made up the “new art.”<sup>35</sup>

Beginning in 1967, Piper and LeWitt shared a long-term professional affinity and close friendship until his death in 2007. This relationship began with LeWitt’s exhibition, “46

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<sup>30</sup> Cherise Smith, “Re-member the Audience: Adrian Piper’s Mythic Being Advertisements,” *Art Journal*, vol. 66 no. 1 (Spring 2007): 49.

<sup>31</sup> Adrian Piper, “The Hypothesis Series (1968–69),” The Adrian Piper Research Archive, [http://www.adrianpiper.com/art/g\\_hypothesis\\_text.shtml](http://www.adrianpiper.com/art/g_hypothesis_text.shtml).

<sup>32</sup> Piper, “The Hypothesis Series (1968–69).”

<sup>33</sup> Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 241.

<sup>35</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” first published in *0-9*, New York, 1969, and in *Art and Language*, England, May 1969.

Variations on Three Different Kinds of Cubes,” at the Dwan Gallery, about which Piper wrote, “It opened my mind and revolutionized my practice as an artist.”<sup>36</sup> While her SVA professors disapproved of her conceptually geared artworks, LeWitt’s work and writings offered her “the tools and encouragement to pursue this line.”<sup>37</sup> Later, LeWitt even helped support Piper’s work financially during her *Mythic Being* series.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to her friendship with LeWitt, Piper was also a receptionist and administrative assistant for the art dealer, Seth Siegelaub (b. 1942) in 1969. This job placed her in direct proximity to the major players at the moment of Conceptual Art’s period of peak visibility. Alexander Alberro, one of the foremost art historians of Conceptual Art, writes in, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (2003), that Siegelaub developed “highly innovative exhibition and distribution practices” and played a crucial role in “the commercial packaging of conceptual art.”<sup>39</sup> Piper’s ideas about art were in no doubt affected by this influential dealer. In fact, her first solo show, an exhibition-in-print produced by Vito Acconci’s and Rosemary Mayer’s 0 to 9 Press, was no doubt modeled on Siegelaub’s pivotal *Xeroxbook* show of 1968, which included xeroxed copies of works by Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Lawrence Weiner.

### **A Note About Conceptual Art**

I do not want to narrowly define Conceptual Art. To suggest that Conceptual Art ended in the late 1960s, as Benjamin Buchloh does, or in the mid-1970s as Alexander Albarro does, closes

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<sup>36</sup> Adrian Piper, “Sol (1928 – 2007),” The Adrian Piper Research Archive, <http://www.adrianpiper.com/art/sol.shtml>.

<sup>37</sup> Piper, “Flying,” 27.

<sup>38</sup> For more on the *Mythic Being* series see Chapter Four.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 4-5.

this category as if it were simply another style among the progression of styles which make up the history of art. Like Howard Slater, I view the labeling of 'Conceptual Art' as,

working a category into a concept that is subject to competing definitions as well as means of both entering into the lineage of current art practice and being drawn towards discovering an art practice of the past whose ramifications should be highlighted and re-circulated.<sup>40</sup>

I treat it as an open category, one which is still under construction.

Once conceptualism worked its way into the fabric of art production and education, artists using conceptual methods had no use for staking a claim on the term. LeWitt and Kosuth published treatises on Conceptual Art in part to clarify the groundbreaking work they were doing, and in part to claim dominance over the avant-garde. Piper's work follows just behind the work of these two artists, and does not attempt to claim a genre or even to be part of any previous ones. What is more important than including or excluding in an attempt to define language, is an understanding of Piper's processes and methodologies as broadly and basically conceptual.

In opposition to this viewpoint are ones that consider Piper's work after 1970 as something other than Conceptual Art, primarily due to that work's political content. The course of this study will, in contrast, connect Piper's philosophical ideas to her artistic pursuits, and provide an overall analysis of Piper's oeuvre as a continuously conceptual body of work which is keyed to various kinds of politicization.

### **Kantian Philosophy in Piper's *Hypothesis Series***

As an art student Piper was first introduced to philosophy by way of reading the Austrian-British philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951). She chose to read Wittgenstein's theory of language after learning of its influence on the American artist, Jasper

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<sup>40</sup> Howard Slater "The Spoiled Ideals of Lost Situations: Some Notes on Political Conceptual Art" *Infopool*, no 2 (2000), <http://infopool.org.uk/hs.htm>.

Johns (b. 1930). A year or so later, while still enrolled at the School of the Visual Arts, her friend, Philip Zohn, read her statement about the *Hypothesis* series and said, “Look, if you are really serious about this you need to read Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.” And so, she did.<sup>41</sup> The friendly suggestion eventually led to her to study philosophy at the City College of New York.

The *Hypothesis* series lasted until 1970, and its inception in 1968 preceded Piper’s introduction to Kant’s philosophy. *Hypothesis* includes a series of documents that dryly chronicle objects and her won movements through space. The concept behind this series indicates that Piper was thinking along the same line, as Kant was when ne wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the late 1700s. But one must be cautious not to simply presume this connection; rather it makes more sense to understand how the series was crucial to her later understanding of Kant’s work. Each “situation” in the series, of which there are 19 on record, is a map of the artist’s observations gathered during the space and time of a particular situation. For example *Hypothesis: Situation #19* (January 1969), (fig. 2), documents Piper’s perceptions as she, in her apartment, circles slowly around an old cane rocking chair given to her by Sol LeWitt. The documentation of her perceptual experiment includes a grid system that locates the order of her observations in a series of space-time coordinates, a series of black and white photographs of the chair she was circling, and an information key which uses type-written, truncated, efficient language to describe her perceptions of the object and the intervals at which she documented those observations.

The *Hypothesis* statement, the same one read by Philip Zohn, is usually displayed in conjunction with each of the situation-specific documents. This text lays out some of Piper’s assumptions about the nature of human perception, which the recorded situations both use and demonstrate. Some of her statements in the essay are almost identical to Kant’s ideas. For example, she wrote, “The primary ordering of sensory information is into space and time

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<sup>41</sup> From an interview with George Yancy in, *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations*, George Yancy ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 54.



continuums,” which is equivalent to Kant’s view of space and time as “a priori conditions of human sensibility”.<sup>42</sup>

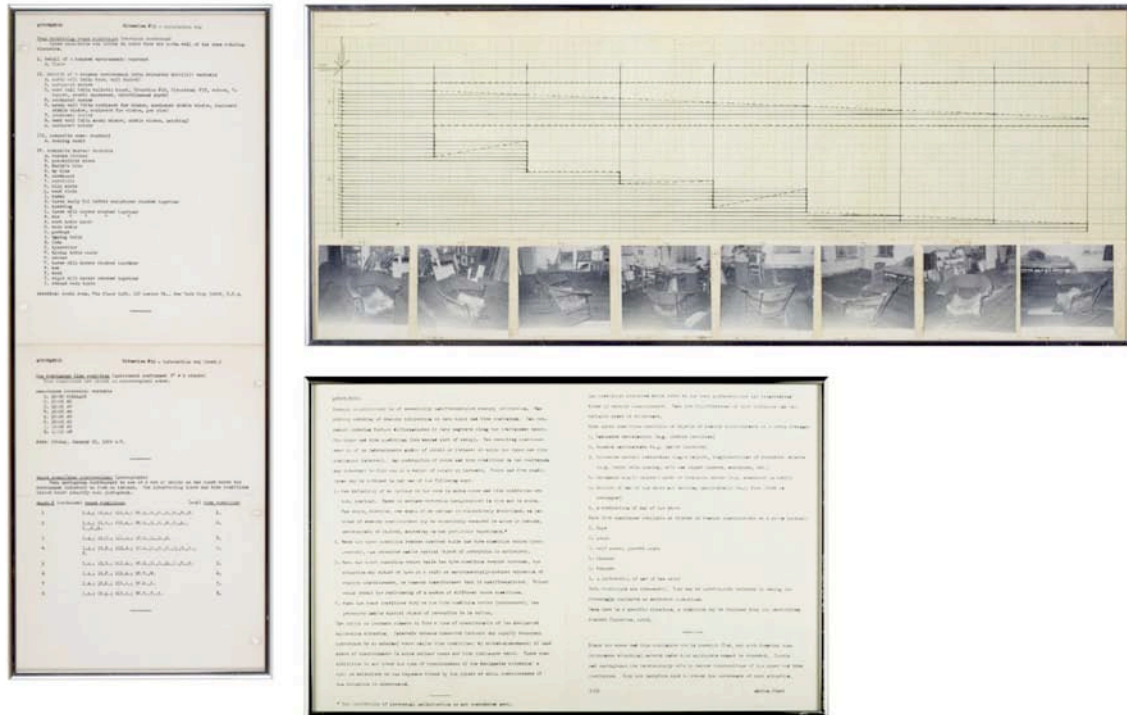


Figure 2.

Like her previous conceptual work, Piper presents a viewpoint in the *Hypothesis* situations that is unmediated and fixed, assuming a supposedly objective stance. Unlike past work, however, her role as observer is made implicit by the dry documentation of her copious observations. The perspectival character of human perception is inferred by the act of recording sensory information. In addition, that perspective is assumed to be unique and individual, as Piper states in the essay, “because the space and time continuums are in constant flux, any work (sensory consciousness situation) entered under this hypothesis cannot be repeated.”<sup>43</sup> Some of these inferences many seem like obvious facts of human experience, but they are important here because they mimic the Kantian philosophy that Piper would discover a short time later. The

<sup>42</sup> Henry Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 8.

<sup>43</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 21.

duality between the singular, unrepeatable situation and its accompanying observations, and the universal, objective viewpoint with which Piper records and presents the information in the *Hypothesis* series mirrors “the ground of Kant’s duality of intuition and thinking”.<sup>44</sup> Intuition for Kant is equivalent to immediate, sensory experience, which is individual and subjective, while thinking is comprised of judgments about those intuitions and allows for the possibility of objective or universal truth. This duality underpins all of Kant’s epistemic ideas, and without knowing it Piper illustrated this very duality in the *Hypothesis* series.

Piper’s Kantian parallels are interesting given her closeness with Sol LeWitt and late 1960s Conceptual Art in New York. LeWitt in his “Sentences on Conceptual Art” states the following:

- Conceptual Artists are mystics rather than rationalists.  
They lead to conclusions that logic cannot reach.
- Rational judgments repeat rational judgments. Illogical judgments lead to new experience.
- Once the idea of the piece is established in the artist’s mind and the final form is decided, the process is carried out blindly.
- The process is mechanical and should not be tampered with.  
It should run its course.<sup>45</sup>

Several of these statements have a clear connection to Piper’s *Hypothesis* series, such as “Once the idea of the piece is established...” and “The process is mechanical...” The series clearly had a determined structure for carrying out each situation. Also, the actions employed in the various situations are illogical (such as circling a chair to use an earlier example), and so is the obsessive documentation of them. Thus, in LeWitt’s terms the situations in Piper’s *Hypothesis* series use mechanical process to carry out illogical judgments. Paradoxically—at least to LeWitt’s statements—the new experience this series leads to is aligned with Kantian rationalism. That Piper should end up mirroring Kant while using the processes of Conceptual Art to get there suggest

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<sup>44</sup> Allen Wood, *Kant* (Blackwell Publishing: Malden, MA, 2007), 33.

<sup>45</sup> Sol LeWitt, “Sentences on Conceptual Art,” first published in *0-9*, in New York, 1969, and in *Art and Language*, England, May 1969.

that the premises of Conceptual Art were never truly opposed to Kantian Philosophy.<sup>46</sup>

“Conceptual Art is generally portrayed as a rejection of aesthetic theory,” including Kant’s aesthetic ideas, especially as they were used by Clement Greenberg, so Piper’s parallel is more than unusual, it is an earthquake that shakes the foundation of the “orthodox art-historical” narrative.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> This argument will be continued in Chapter Five of this study.

<sup>47</sup> Diarmuid Costello, “Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art,” in *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (Oxford University Press: New York, NY, 2007), 92.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SHIFT IN PIPER'S ARTWORK AND HER INTRODUCTION TO KANT

As a plethora of recent magazine articles and news stories have reminded us, as if we needed reminding, it has been 40 years since riots of the oppressed exploded across the globe. The range of historical events which took place during the spring and summer of '68, of which riots were only one part, cannot be adequately summed up by words like "uprising" and "political unrest." Historians have yet to determine why the vast social and political changes—which were strangely synchronized across the globe "before anyone knew what 'global' was"—came to a head in the spring of 1968.<sup>48</sup> In spite of a lack of unified brevity, however, that time exists today in the collective memory as a pinnacle of political activity, whether the spire is real or not.

Similarly, in the so-called art world of New York, this time has become an imagined pinnacle of politically engaged artistic production. It is a time that many—especially those that lived through it—hold as the last days of the avant-garde. Within the cannon of American Art, 1968 falls in the midst of Conceptual Art's turn as the torchbearer of the avant-garde. Conceptual Art's favor for the dematerialization of the object as well as its ability to criticize certain art institutions from within, made it appear as the end of days, especially for someone like Joseph Kosuth who understood the history of art to be a history of objects selected by connoisseurs who are, in turn, sanctioned by institutions. Conceptual Art, however, was quickly folded into the very social and political structures it challenged, in turn receiving its very own connoisseurs and institutional sanctions.

When Conceptual Art is freed from the narrow box that historians like Benjamin Buchloh place it in, we find a politically engaged conceptualism that continued on in various forms, under

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<sup>48</sup> Sylvere Lotringer, "The Great Refusal," *Artforum*, vol. 46 no. 9 (May 2008): 303.

labels like Neo- or Post-Conceptual Art. The inception of these strands is usually linked with the reported political awakenings of the late 1960s. This connection surely has validity in some cases; like most causal relationships, however, it is not universal. In Adrian Piper's case in particular, politicized content began showing up in her work in 1970, which has led some to make easy and obvious conclusions as to why this happened. The major texts which chronicle Piper's oeuvre, including some of those written by the artist herself, lead the reader to believe that the political events of the late 1960s were, at least among the most important factors that precipitated certain changes in her art if not the sole cause. This misinterpretation does not account for the deep content of her work, implying that it is simply "political." It also erects a barrier between "Conceptual Art" as her earlier work is categorized and her later work which is no less conceptual despite its acknowledgement of Piper's role as a political subject.

### **"The Personal is Political"**

The frequently quoted slogan of feminist origins, "the personal is political," reminds us that all political issues arise from individuals' needs, wants and conflicts, and the same is true of the political content of Adrian Piper's post-1970 art. The issues that Piper has investigated in her works, even themes that appear to be more abstract, have personal roots. Not only public political events, but introspection and inward growth were contributors to the introduction of performance and social content in her artwork. That growth was partly intellectual growth, which was the result of her study of philosophy.

In the introduction to the two-volume anthology of her writings Piper elaborated this causal relationship:

In the late 1960s, my work was abstract, general, systematic, and formalistic. The more my habits of thought about my work, my situation, and the art context inclined in this direction (as the

result of my increasing involvement with analytic philosophy), the more concrete, political, and confrontational the work itself became, and the more it issued from an understanding of my own sociopolitical position.<sup>49</sup>

Piper's "increasing involvement with analytic philosophy" includes a chain of events beginning with her initial reading of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1969.

This event was followed by her enrollment in the philosophy program at the City College of New York in 1970, and then the completion of her Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University in 1981, and finally her promotion to tenure at Wellesley College, which made her the first tenured, African-American female philosopher in the United States.<sup>50</sup> Philosophy has played a crucial role in Piper's life. Despite the importance of both art and philosophy, she reports trying to keep these spheres as separate pursuits. In an interview with George Yancy she described that separation in the following way:

I never try to think about the connection between art and philosophy. I mean, I think there are connections but there are connections that I really prefer to discover rather than try to forge. And so the connections are always retrospective.<sup>51</sup>

This quotation is important for two reasons. First, it alludes to why Piper may have downplayed the presence of Kantian philosophy in her artwork.

In 1973, Adrian Piper published "In Support of Meta-Art" in *Artforum*.<sup>52</sup> This essay is pivotal in understanding the relationship between her art, on the one hand, and the texts that accompany her art, or *meta-art*, as she terms it, on the other. Meta-art is defined by Piper as the "activity of making explicit the thought processes, procedures, and presuppositions of making

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<sup>49</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, xxxi.

<sup>50</sup> Yancy, 50.

<sup>51</sup> Yancy, 65.

<sup>52</sup> Adrian Piper, "In Support of Meta-Art" *Artforum* XII, no. 2 (October 1973): 79–81.

whatever kind of art we make.”<sup>53</sup> What Piper is suggesting is an opportunity for artists to investigate themselves as objects and to view their “role of artist reflectively.” This “new occupation” was meant to differ from art criticism by not simply focusing on the final artistic product but instead investigating the pathways to that point. To this end she has published many texts over the course of her lifetime, the most extensive being *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Vol I: Writings in Meta-Art 1968 – 1992*. Collected in this volume is the text, written between 1970 and 1973, in which she ascribed the big shift in her work to external political events, and avoided any mention of Kant almost altogether.<sup>54</sup> If Piper did want to keep her art and philosophy separate, it’s only logical that she would not include Kant in this meta-art text. The coincidental timing of this text and her explication of meta-art in *Artforum* only further supports this case.

Second, the above quote gives valuable instructions as to how to proceed when rejoining the two, Piper’s art and philosophy, retrospectively. Piper chose not to include philosophy as an intentional part of her artwork, thus when forming a reconnection the philosophy has to be seen as an interpretive guide or as part of a general background from which she drew. One cannot say, for example that because Piper was studying self-reflexive philosophy she chose to make self-reflexive artwork. This would make Piper out to be a liar or someone who misrepresents herself, and for an artist who made such a point of making her artistic processes transparent, this seems unlikely. As Piper stated in the quote at the beginning of this section, her “increasing involvement with analytic philosophy” pushed her towards making artwork that was more “concrete, political, and confrontational,” but she never sought to present her philosophical ideas in artistic form. Instead, philosophy changed her thought processes and her outlook, which then

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<sup>53</sup> Piper, “In Support of Meta-Art,” 81.

<sup>54</sup> Adrian Piper, “Talking to Myself: The Ongoing Autobiography of an Art Object,” *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 29 – 54.

changed the way she made art. To better understand this change, considering the chronological facts of the most dramatic point in this transition is useful.

### **Roles of “Self” in Piper’s Performances**

The most dramatic point during Piper’s transition from “pure conceptual art”<sup>55</sup> to her later more “political and confrontational” artwork occurred between 1969 and 1970. As discussed earlier, in 1969 Piper was working within the *Hypothesis* series. Other pertinent facts of Piper’s life during 1969 include: She graduated from the School of Visual Arts with an Associate’s degree, she worked as a receptionist for Seth Seiglaub, she published her first solo exhibition-in-print, she was showing her artwork widely, nationally and internationally, and she read Immanuel Kant for the first time.

In 1970, Piper had planned to show the *Hypothesis* series in two different exhibitions of Conceptual Art: The “Information” show at the Museum of Modern Art, and the “Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects” show at the New York Cultural Center. For the latter show she simply withdrew her work in protest, and in the former she replaced the *Hypothesis* piece with the following text:

The work originally intended for this space has been withdrawn. The decision to withdraw has been taken as a protective measure against the increasingly pervasive conditions of fear. Rather than submit the work to the deadly and poisoning influence of these conditions, I submit its absence as evidence of the inability of art expression to have meaningful existence under conditions other than those of peace, equality, truth and freedom.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Adrian Piper, “Xenophobia and the Indexical Present II: Lecture” *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968-1992* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 262.

<sup>56</sup> Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Object from 1966 to 1972*, (New York, NY: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 168.



The “conditions of fear,” implied several different political events. The student protests for racial equality at City College, Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia, and the Kent State shootings are some of the specific events Piper cited in *Out of Order, Out of Sight*. The above revision is the usual evidence held up by historians for the argument that external political events caused the shift in Piper’s work. Instead of overwhelming evidence, I believe this text to be a very pointed message meant in part to have a political effect but also meant to be an honest account of her conscience at the time. In terms of the broader picture of the shift in Piper’s work this is simply one piece of evidence that shows her newly found distrust of aesthetic isolation and the artworld in general.

I recognize that some of Piper’s personal experiences, which mirrored larger public issues of the day, may have served as agents of change for her art. For one, she had begun showing her artwork internationally, though she did so without traveling to Europe. Her artwork and name alone were the only things many European curators knew of her, and consequently many made the assumption that she was a white male. When such curators visited New York and met a person who did not fit their expectations, Piper was quickly dropped from shows.<sup>57</sup> Similar slights happened in the States, as well, when her gender and race became well known. Interviews and articles were never published, critics and curators stopped promoting her work, and dealers found her true destiny to be an “outstandingly creative gallery receptionist,” rather than a great artist.<sup>58</sup> Even though such discrimination appears a very plausible motivator for Piper to change direction within her work, these retrospective realizations are coupled with Piper’s own reports of not registering these negative experiences at the time they occurred. Therefore like philosophy, Piper’s personal experiences of racism are to be taken as background information. It

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<sup>57</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 262.

<sup>58</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, xxxv.

was not until later in her career that her work began to deal explicitly with issues of racial prejudice.

Piper remained unfazed by her marginalization within the elite enclave of late 1960s avant-garde artists at the time primarily because it coincided with her own choice to leave that world behind. Piper went through a period of aesthetic isolation, which is mirrored by her very first performance that took place in April of 1970. *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City* was carried out in the popular hangout of the same name, frequented by artists of the 1960s and 70s, such as Joseph Kosuth. To avoid being sucked into this “self-conscious” art environment, either as active or passive collaborator Piper blindfolded herself, wore earplugs and gloves, and essentially cut off all sensory input from her surroundings. Just as she chose to detach her artistic practice from the sanctioned methods of art production and circulation, she was present at Max's and yet cut-off from the social and sensory surroundings. Later on that year, Piper writes of the “difficult impasse” she encountered during the summer when, after having rejected the medium of conceptual documentation, she was unable to find another medium in which to express her ideas because she found the entire art context inadequate.<sup>59</sup> During this impasse Piper stopped making work altogether.

When she began making work again it was from a newly formed viewpoint about how art should function in the world. In a note she wrote in October of 1970, Piper describes her loss of faith in galleries, receptive audiences, the isolated studio-artist model, and personal privacy.<sup>60</sup> Of all the things covered in this lengthy text, she describes three major revelations in her thinking that are worth noting here. First, she had come to realize that the driving force behind the art displayed by museums and galleries was capitalism. As part of this system, she also realized that

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<sup>59</sup> Piper, “Talking to Myself,” 31.

<sup>60</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 38-47.

art (in the form of objects) was beholden to capitalist markets first and foremost, before it was subject to aesthetic concerns. Second, she realized that political action and political art are not the same thing. Being aware that political activity—things such as lobbying, picketing, and voting—is a very special kind of activity shaped the way Piper thought of her own work as politically active. Rather than thinking of her artwork as a vehicle to effect political change directly, she thought of it as a didactic tool, something that could yield certain insights about the society of which it was a part if studied for its sociopolitical implications.<sup>61</sup> And third, she realized that she was inherently a social being. In this context, “social being” means that she saw herself as inextricably part of society rather than a fully independent person. She saw that her role in the social fabric shaped who she was, and that in turn her labor and art illustrated the society from which they sprung. This reciprocal relationship between individual and the group is a fundamental idea to all of Piper’s artwork after 1970, and well as much of her later philosophical work.

Also in the October 1970 note, Piper wrote that the above realizations came to her as a result of her interactions with “non-art-world contacts.”<sup>62</sup> Within this note Piper does not give any identity to those contacts, other than to say that they are not artists nor other artworld participants. Despite this, knowing from her biography that in the fall of 1970 she began taking classes as part of the philosophy program at the City College in New York, we can reasonably assume these contacts were found there. Discussions, both in and out of class, with her fellow students and professors must have led her to the following conclusions:

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<sup>61</sup> Returning to the text that Piper showed instead of her work at the two Conceptual Art shows, this subsequent revelation adds new insight. It shows that the placement of this text could have been naïvely intended by Piper to be a political action in itself. The “Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects” show went up in April 1970, well before she wrote the October 1970 notes so it is plausible that the placement of the text was something she had not fully thought out.

<sup>62</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 41.

The art world is not coextensive with the world at large, and the unspoken presuppositions that allow me to exhibit and discuss my work within the art community are practically unacceptable to anyone outside it. This makes me think that there must be something wrong with a system of aesthetic values that can be preserved only in isolation from the rest of society.<sup>63</sup>

The above quotation illustrates just how severe her crisis of consciousness was in 1970. Piper, as described here, completely rejected the aesthetic values and the institutional structures, of which she had been an active contributor and participant less than a year earlier. The chain of biographical events paired with her own notes shows that this crisis of consciousness was a direct result of her burgeoning study of philosophy which began in 1969 with her introduction to Kant and deepened with her formal philosophical education in 1970.

### **Becoming an Art Object**

In the wake of having rejected aesthetic values and institutional structures, Piper began the *Catalysis* series in 1970. In this series, Piper performed socially abnormal behaviors and appearances in mundane, public spaces. In one such performance, she rode the D subway train during evening rush hour while wearing clothes that had been soaked in a mixture of vinegar, milk, cod liver oil, and eggs for a week. In many ways this series is remarkably different from all her previous artwork, and within that differentiation was an attempt to correct the schism between art and life, which is described by Piper above. For the first time she took her work out of the gallery and into the street, and sought out a general audience rather than performing for a limited art crowd. In addition, in this series she eliminates the use of discrete form as the vehicle for meaning. Instead, an active performer plays off of existing social structures, placing the meaning somewhere between artist, audience and the social structure both are enveloped in.

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<sup>63</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 41.

In a 1971 text Piper described her role in the *Catalysis* series in the following way, saying that: “This process/product is in a sense internalized in me, because I exist simultaneously as the artist and the work.”<sup>64</sup> Her body and self as performer had become the art object that was manipulated and altered by herself, the artist. This dissolution of the subject-object dichotomy was a central motive in the creation of the specific public actions that made up the *Catalysis* series. Even though retrospectively this body of work is categorized as art, at the time it was performed Piper avoided defining the actions as art and herself as artist in an effort to maximize disorientation for herself and the audience. The very act of announcing a performance creates a barrier between artist and audience whether a physical stage is present or not. Thus Piper attempted to keep herself in the most vulnerable and immediate position possible, confronting others without the comfort of separation that a separate “audience” provides. This lack of separation also allowed her to assimilate an “other” into her sense of self, which from her description of the series and her psychology surround it, seems to have been the underlying intention.<sup>65</sup> Returning to Piper’s disgust of the isolation of the artworld, the *Catalysis* series can be read as an attempt to break free from that isolation and get as close as possible to the outside world. She literally mixed the other/outside-world/audience into her perception of self.

The *Catalysis* series is often called confrontational and has been described as her “boldest move to date into the context of the real world,” however the meaning and effects of this series were primarily personal.<sup>66</sup> At face value, the work could be read as a provocation of the audience and an effort to wake people from their passive state. On closer inspection, however, the audience was given nothing to go on except an abnormal other, something that is not too

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<sup>64</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> Piper “Talking to Myself,” 50.

<sup>66</sup> Berger, 17.

uncommon on the streets of New York. In this light we see that the most jarring position to be in between artist and audience in this context is Piper's. "I define the work as the viewer's reaction to it," Piper wrote in January 1971.<sup>67</sup> Placing the power of shaping the work's meaning in the viewer's hands put Piper in a passive role, as she waited to see how others would react and formed her thoughts in reaction to that feedback. In this sense, the audience was telling her something rather than the other way around.

Even though she had left the traditional media and venues of art behind, Piper was still engaged in a form of conceptually based, self-reflexive art making. The primary difference after 1970 was that the self-reflexive form she was working with was her own consciousness. Using herself as the art object, the actions and appearances she created put into question the conventions of action and appearance she otherwise conformed to. As described above the *Catalysis* series centered mostly on self-reflection, which is why Piper describes that period of work as solipsism. This series is the first sustained work in which she made art after her embrace of philosophy, and thus is an important first step not a finished masterpiece. *Catalysis* lays the groundwork for later works, which are more actively social and political rather than just social in form.

After that period of extroverted action, Piper spent an entire summer secluded in her New York City loft working on *Food for the Spirit* (1971). For two months Piper fasted on juice and water, went out only to go to the store and take walks for exercise, and read Kant's *First Critique* obsessively. "I would read certain passages that were so intensely affecting and deep that I would literally break out into a cold sweat," she wrote of the experience. The seclusion, fasting and intense studying lead her to feel as though she were losing her individual self completely. So, in

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<sup>67</sup> Piper, "Talking to Myself," 42.

order to provide an anchor she created a documentation ritual to ground herself in the objective reality of physical form. This ritual included photographing herself in the mirror and using a tape recorder to capture her own recitation of whatever passage was leading her to madness at the time.

This performance is the only artwork by Piper with an overt and directly acknowledged relationship to Kantian philosophy, however it is less about Kantian ideas than it is about Piper providing herself with a coping mechanism. Like *Catalysis*, there seems to be little there for the viewer. Biographically, however, it tells much of the effect Kant had on Piper's intellectual and psychological growth, and it solidifies the claim that Piper's introduction to Kantian philosophy was life changing. Clearly, Kant's philosophy became a very personal thing for Piper. She writes of the first *Critique*, "The Critique was the most profound book I have ever read, and my involvement in it was so great that I thought I was loosing my mind, in fact loosing my sense of self completely."<sup>68</sup>

Aesthetically, both *Food for Spirit* and *Catalysis* are instinctive exercises that represent Piper's novice forays into new media. The truly political and social artwork happens later, but has clear roots in these two works. Kant's central role in her biography of this period, and within *Food for Spirit* particularly, strongly suggests that his philosophy would affect later artwork as well.

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<sup>68</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 55.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ADRIAN PIPER'S PHILOSOPHY

Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) was an eighteenth-century German philosopher. His ideas had a profound effect on philosophy as a whole, serving as a bridge between the rationalists and empiricists, as he “irreversibly transformed the nature of western thought.”<sup>69</sup> Kant’s “Copernican revolution” was an attempt to resuscitate and reformulate metaphysics by calling on “reason to undertake anew the most difficult of all its duties, namely, that of self-knowledge” (Axi), as he wrote in the preface to the A edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>70</sup> Kant’s inquiry was primarily a study of the formation of knowledge in the human mind, thus his writings both investigate self-knowledge and then reflexively explicate the nature of philosophical thought.

Adrian Piper became enraptured with Kant’s philosophy after reading the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1969. Kant wrote three critiques, the first addressing rational judgments, the second, moral judgment, and the third, aesthetic judgment. Often, Kant’s three critiques are treated as separate texts with independent ideas therein. For example, philosophers investigating ethics may only consider the second *Critique* and Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) to understand his theories on morality. Piper, however, treats the three critiques as interdependent, taking the first *Critique* as an essential key to understanding the second and third.

The texts presented here span 25 years of philosophical scholarship, from 1984 to 2009, and represent a highlight of Piper’s major contributions to the discipline. Her arguments for the Kantian model of the self, transpersonal rationality, and yogic philosophy as a supplement for

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Guyer, *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3

<sup>70</sup> “Copernican revolution” was found in *Kant*, by Allen Wood, 1; and the quotation is from the translation of F. Max Muller in *Basic Writings of Kant*, ed. Allen Wood (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2001), 5.



Kant's aesthetic theory, are all an exception to the consensus view within the field of western philosophy. These arguments are all built on a thorough understanding of Kant's core concepts, which is a reflection of Piper's scholarly training at Harvard University and the University of Heidelberg in Germany.

### **"Two Conceptions of the Self"**

"Two Conceptions of The Self" is the title of an essay by Adrian Piper published in 1985.<sup>71</sup> This essay explains a core concept which would be used in her later arguments about xenophobia and transpersonal rationality. The "two conceptions" refer to two branches in Anglo-American analytic philosophy that disagree on the nature of rationality in the way the self is structured. The dominant of the two models is the desire-centered structure argued by David Hume (1711 – 1776). The Humean self is structured by first order and second order desires, and rationality is subordinate to these motivating wants as a means to those ends. This model runs into problems, as Piper argues in her 1985 essay, when applied to the psychology of self-evaluation and moral judgment. In terms of self-evaluation, the higher, second-order desires are supposed to provide the criteria for evaluation, because it is these higher desires with which we identify ourselves, according to Hume. Substantial questions are left unsolved by this model. Why should the succession of hierarchically ordered desires stop at level two, Piper and others have questioned, when no reason is given for second-order authority, or for any regress to a high order in the first place. In other words, what makes us aware of what a higher and lower level desire is, is unclear in this model. The main problem, as Piper points out, lies in the identification of self with certain desires. She wrote, "If the infinite regress inhibits one's rational self-

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<sup>71</sup> Adrian Piper, "Two Conceptions of the Self," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 48, no. 2 (Sept. 1985): 173-197.

identification with any n-order set of desires, then there can be no actions to which one can commit oneself wholeheartedly without reservation—not necessarily because one has conflicting impulses, but rather because the worth of any such impulse is automatically subject to doubt.”<sup>72</sup> This problem with self-evaluation leads to questions of how the self makes any higher-order decisions at all, which would lead to moral paralysis.

The alternative model of the structure of the self is the rational model, or as Piper terms it, the Kantian model. Piper resolves the problems implicit in the Humean self by elevating the role of rationality from slave of first and second-order desires to the role of “highest order norm.”<sup>73</sup> She also introduces the notion of internalized norms as both motivators and organizers of the self. Piper points out that most actions that make up our lives are reflexive actions that come naturally, such as saying hello when answering the phone. These natural, reflexive actions are the result of habit, upbringing or social conditioning, and they constitute the behavioral norms that help define the self. These behavior-governing norms are labeled by Piper as “motivationally effective norms.”<sup>74</sup> These norms do not need to be stated by the self, nor are they something that the self consciously strives towards. Nonetheless, we are *able* to state these norms to ourselves and others. This ability is the result of “motivationally effective cognitive and linguistic norms that enable us to conceptualize all our behavior and experience to ourselves.”<sup>75</sup> More plainly, we can think, speak, and write about who and what we are; and we can share these thoughts, stories, and words with others, who can do the same. It is these thoughts, stories, and words that we identify with. So there are norms that govern actual behavior while there are also norms that the self identifies with, which Piper relates to the “normative self-conception” and the

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<sup>72</sup> Piper, “Two Conceptions of the Self,” 177.

<sup>73</sup> Piper, “Two Conceptions of the Self,” 181.

<sup>74</sup> Piper, “Two Conceptions of the Self,” 182.

<sup>75</sup> Piper, “Two Conceptions of the Self,” 183.

motivationally effective norms and the and the normative self-conception may be coherent or totally at odds with each other, depending on the self in question.<sup>76</sup>

Despite the fact that these two notions of self may appear to be at odds with one another, internally the self employs rational generalizations that keep the self unified. “Thus we defend the rational coherence of our experiences by rationalizing, dissociating, or denying any phenomenon that threatens it,” as Piper puts it. This “rationalizing” is not a rational process, because it truncates experience in order to preserve coherence, it is “pseudorationality.”<sup>77</sup> This pseudorationality, which supports the fictional coherence of the self is a defense mechanism that separates the “self” from the rationality it seems to defend.

The “self” that this essay describes is termed “Kantian” because of Piper’s use of Kant’s ideas and because of the high premium that she placed on rationality. There are many passages within the first *Critique* where Kant describes the “consciousness of the self as synthesizer” or where he defaults to “reflective introspection” as the method of conceiving of the self.<sup>78</sup> Piper’s theory about the defense mechanisms, which she calls “universal and innate,” are not concepts described by Kant, however the hierarchical structure that they are employed to protect is part of his understanding of how the self functions as an edifice. She cites 298 of the A edition of the first *Critique* and 355 of the B edition as support for the structure she proposes.

Piper’s attack on the prevalent, Humean, desire-centered model allows her to implicate social assumptions that could have far-reaching effects. Hume’s model of the self is not just prevalent in the abstract and cloistered field of philosophy, but has influenced the model of the individual that is present in economics, and other “social sciences” as well. Neo-classical

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<sup>76</sup> Piper, “Two Conceptions of the Self,” 184.

<sup>77</sup> Piper, “Two Conceptions of the Self,” 188.

<sup>78</sup> Guyer, 211.

economics, the dominant form of economic thought in the marketplace as well as the classroom, assumes the individual to be self-serving, and motivated by desire as well as self-identified by its desires and possessions. This has of course resulted in the culture of brand identity, which places a higher value on packaging over substance in the hope that people will make purchasing choices with the same level of commitment and faith as they do religious ones. It has also lead of course to a rampant consumerism, which has created a huge disparity between rich and poor and continues to devastate our natural resources.

The problems with neo-classical economics and capitalism were present in the 1970s when Piper published, “A Proposal for Pricing Works of Art” in the American Conceptual Art journal, *The Fox*. Her essay suggests alternatives to selling works of art via the capitalist standard of exchange. Piper’s arguments against this economic system reject desire as the creator of agency in the market and instead take a rational approach to economic exchange. This argument suggests the rational model of the self was already on her mind in 1975. This text also demonstrates how Piper’s abstract philosophical ideas could be applied to her more mundane interests.

### **Xenophobia as rational defect**

In 1992, Piper built on the Kantian conception of self to analyze xenophobia, in “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism.”<sup>79</sup> Through her arguments in this essay, Piper shows how Kant’s ideas about the rational subject provide a psychological theory that accounts for xenophobia. Her theory explains why xenophobia occurs, yet it does not explain xenophobia as an inescapable. Kant is not an obvious support for a critical interpretation of this topic, especially

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<sup>79</sup> Adrian Piper, “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism,” *Philosophical Forum* 24 (Fall-Spring 1992-93), The Adrian Piper Research Archive, [http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/xenophobia\\_kantian\\_rationalism.pdf](http://www.adrianpiper.com/docs/xenophobia_kantian_rationalism.pdf) (accessed April 7, 2009).

since his views “on Black people are highly conceptually distorted,” however the unlikely ground of his writings is fruitful for Piper’s purpose, and she authors a compelling case for understanding xenophobia as the result of pseudo-rationality.<sup>80</sup>

In this essay, she expands on the Kantian notion of “self” that she introduced in 1984, filling in more details of this self’s make-up. Piper is faithful to Kant’s original ideas in the first *Critique* most of the time. In this essay she modifies Kant’s claims in one major way: she throws out Kant’s twelve *a priori* concepts from the “Table of Categories” (A80/B106) in the Metaphysical deduction and leaves only the subject-predicate relation as the primary transcendental concept or judgment-form.<sup>81</sup> Kant’s twelve categories are: Unity, Plurality, Totality, Reality, Negation, Limitation, Inherence/Subsistence, Causality/Dependence, Community, Possibility/Impossibility, Existence/Non-existence, and Necessity/Contingency. These concepts, according to Kant include “all possible judgments,” because they “completely exhaust the understanding and comprehend every one of its faculties.”<sup>82</sup>

Like many other Kantians, Piper understood the weakness of Kant’s argument for the universality of the twelve specific judgment forms, and instead only retains the root of those twelve categories, the basic logical relation between subject and predicate, as inherent in the mind. Kant’s forms of judgment are “functions of unity among our representations.”<sup>83</sup> Without conceptual unity in judgment the thoughts that we have would be “nothing but a blind play of representations, that is, less even than a dream” (A112).<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Yancy, 63.

<sup>81</sup> Wood, *Kant*, 43.

<sup>82</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by F. Max Muller in the *Basic Writings of Kant*, ed. Allen Wood (New York, NY: The Modern Library, 2001), 59.

<sup>83</sup> Allison, *Kant’s Transcendental Idealism*, 117.

<sup>84</sup> Piper, “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism,” 8.

The “transcendental judgment-forms”—which Piper reduces to simply the subject-predicate relation—have two functions according to Kant. First, they structure sensory information to fit into our preconceived ideas of the unified outside world forming coherent cognitive patterns, and second they unify those multiple cognitive patterns into abstract concepts. In Kant’s terms, the difference in degree of this cognitive unification is labeled “transcendental” in the former and transcendent” in the latter, where the former one refers to the unifying concepts that are the preconditions of experience and the latter one refers to “that which exceeds or surpasses the limits of experience.”<sup>85</sup>

The matter of degree was important when Piper evaluated the concept of personhood in the pseudo-rational case of Xenophobia. Personhood, as she explained in Kant’s theses, is a transcendental and a transcendent concept. It has both properties because it is both something that we intangibly experience from the first-person perspective (transcendent) and something that we empirically observe in other’s actions (transcendental). Thus, personhood is a tricky concept for empirical rationality, and self-knowledge is always incomplete because we can only know our own thoughts and our own perceptions. Yet this experience of self that we “know” is a completely subjective experience and cannot serve as an objective rational notion of selfhood. We can, however, observe other peoples’ actions and gather empirical data on selfhood that way. Often though what we observe in others does not sync well with our internal experiences and we are forced to employ pseudo-rationality to keep the concept of personhood coherent in the face of conflicting data.

Xenophobia is a fear of those who look or act differently than we do. As Piper defines it:

Xenophobia is fear, not of strangers generally, but rather of a certain kind of stranger, namely those who do not conform to one's preconceptions about how persons ought to look or behave.

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<sup>85</sup> Piper, “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism,” 17.

It is therefore a paradigm case of resistance to the intrusion of anomalous data into an internally coherent conceptual scheme – a threat to the unity of the self defined by it.<sup>86</sup>

If we suppose the Kantian model of self that requires rational unity, then to a self that uses its own appearances as the model for their concept of personhood in general, people who do not look or act like that self would be a threat to that self's rational coherence. Piper argues that Xenophobia is inherently a defect in rationality and a "special case of a more general phenomenon, namely the disposition to resist the intrusion of anomalous data of any kind into a conceptual scheme whose internal rational coherence is necessary for preserving a unified and rationally integrated self."<sup>87</sup> Thus when a self encounters someone outside their conceptual scheme of what a person is, they would react with xenophobia. In other words, "it is a fear of individuals who violate one's empirical conception of persons and so one's self-conception."<sup>88</sup>

The "pseudorational mechanisms of rationalization, dissociation, and denial" are employed in Piper's view to validate the simplified-internal and external-concept of personhood that is the result of the initial xenophobic reaction. This leads to a "provincial" view of oneself and the world, and is the origin of many forms of discriminatory stereotyping, such as anti-Semitism, sexism, racism, homophobia and classism.<sup>89</sup>

But how entrenched, Piper wonders, is this xenophobic reaction? Is it a "hard-wired cognitive disposition that is impervious to empirical modification," or is it a result of a person whose education and/or culture supports a narrow conceptual view of what constitutes personhood? In Kant's terms, do persons have to conform to my transcendental and empirical concepts of what people are for them to be part of my coherent experience; or do they only need

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<sup>86</sup> Piper, "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," 3.

<sup>87</sup> Piper, "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," 2.

<sup>88</sup> Piper, "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," 32.

<sup>89</sup> Piper, "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," 33-34.

conform to my transcendental concepts? If the latter is true, xenophobia could be avoided by having a broad concept of personhood, including even those whose actions and behaviors are unfamiliar, based on a definition of person that is not empirically limited. Piper sides with this latter option and she points to the early part of the Dialectic in Kant's first *Critique* for support.

For Kant, reason produces a "dialectic" or "logic of illusion" that gives us the false sense that we can know things as they are from the empirical evidence we gather about them.<sup>90</sup> This happens because reason works reflexively, attempting "to enlarge our understanding by searching for further data by which to explain it."<sup>91</sup> In other words, inquiry is the process of reason: questions lead to more questions the answer of which are successively more broad, general and inclusive. The illusion enters because reason takes off from empirical data, creating inferential conclusions that over-reach what the initial empirical data concludes. Thus, reason leads us to believe that we can know things in themselves from whatever limited set of empirical data—and empirical data is always limited because our minds are finite—we have. Kant's use of the term "transcendental" to describe the categories of perception is designed to thwart the dangerous illusion created by reason and designated the categories of the understanding as existing beyond reason, as if they are transcendent.

Piper describes the consequences of the inquisitive properties of reason as a "dissatisfied" restlessness that "remains, even when literal self-preservation has been achieved."<sup>92</sup> Concluding the essay on a positive note, she even proffers the idea of xenophilia. The inverse of xenophobia, she explains is the result of the restless inquisition of reason, which seeks out new anomalous

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<sup>90</sup> Wood, *Kant*, 84.

<sup>91</sup> Wood, *Kant*, 85.

<sup>92</sup> Piper, "Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism," 53.



data as “irresistible cognitive challenges.”<sup>93</sup> These challenges prove (or disprove) the truth of our conceptions and are seen as the missing pieces to our coherent concepts. In the specific case of personhood, xenophilia may be the cause of the way children tend to view “human difference as intrinsically interesting,” and as a result react to new and different people without inhibition.<sup>94</sup>

### **Philosophy, power, and transpersonal rationality**

“Transpersonal rationality” is a term Piper introduces in her culminating two-volume study on the Kantian metaethics, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self* (2008). This study presents an extremely thorough argument for the Kantian model, as opposed to the Humean model of self, and it combines the Kantian model with metaethical theory.<sup>95</sup> This combination forms the concept of transpersonal rationality as a “motivationally effective” automatic, mental dispositions that justifies “a certain range of moral theories as rational final ends” and compels us to adopt those theories.<sup>96</sup> These automatic rational “dispositions” include things such as, “impartiality, intellectual discrimination, foresight, deliberation, self-reflection, and self-control.”<sup>97</sup> These dispositions are hard-wired according to Piper, and they contribute to, and are in service of, the rational unity of the self, which was key to her earlier arguments for the Kantian conception of the self.

Piper argues that transpersonal rationality is more embedded in the individual’s psychology than advocates of the Humean model of the subject would admit. The Humean

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<sup>93</sup> Piper, “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism,” 53.

<sup>94</sup> Piper, “Xenophobia and Kantian Rationalism,” 54.

<sup>95</sup> Metaethical theory evaluates and theorizes the metaphysical presuppositions of normative ethical theory, normative ethics being an applied or practical version of ethical theory that seeks to specifically prescribe what we ought to do, as well as to define what is good, right and valuable. This is taken from Adrian Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self: A Two-Volume Study in Kantian Metaethics*, The Adrian Piper Research Archive, 2008, <http://www.adrianpiper.com/rss/index.shtml> (accessed on May 6, 2009), 22-23.

<sup>96</sup> Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, 37.

<sup>97</sup> Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, 1.

model of morality, which is in turn based on the Humean conception of the self, is an individualistic model that places personal desires at the helm of agency. This model supposes transpersonal rationality to be ineffectual when it comes to initiating human action and in turn moral discrimination.

Ultimately, within Piper's lengthy two-volume study, most of the arguments presented are ones she previously published elsewhere. The study presents the most thorough philosophical work of her career, with important implications not only for Kantian rationality and metaethics, but for the profession of philosophy as well. In the general introduction to this study, Piper takes current philosophical practice itself as the case study through which to display her arguments for transpersonal rationality. The example allows her personal proximity and also addresses the lack of self-consciousness present within the profession.

I do not find widespread recognition in the field that philosophers' virtually universal obsession with the topic of rationality – with defining it, critiquing it, defending it, rejecting it, elaborating alternatives to it – is implicitly an activity of professional *self*-definition, *self*-critique, *self*-defense, *self*-rejection, and *self*-elaboration of the methodological foundations on which the practice of philosophy itself rests.<sup>98</sup>

The modern profession of Philosophy connects to transpersonal rationality more directly through its loyalty to the Socratic Ideal, which equates rational knowledge with righteous conduct.

Professional standards for presenting philosophical arguments align with the norms of transpersonal rationality: "clarity, structure, coherence, consistency, and fineness of intellectual discrimination," Piper points out.<sup>99</sup> These are the tenants of the discipline so to speak, the code of conduct by which philosophers identify themselves. Philosophy's exercise of transpersonal rationality, a central feature of the structure of the self, means that through philosophical practice

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<sup>98</sup> Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, 4.

one strengthens the “rational dispositions of the self”, as Piper argues. This places added moral responsibility on philosophers to use that increased strength justly and compassionately.

Like all ideals, moral or otherwise, very few live up to the standards of transpersonal rationality, and instead fall prey to more selfish desires. This is especially true, as Piper points out, in the realm of professionalism, where a competitive environment of limited resources pits philosophers against each other. Piper outlines several case studies of behavior styles that betray both the Socratic Ideal and transpersonal rationality in the service of professional advancement within the field. She names those styles, “the Bulldozer, the Bully, the Bull and the Bullfinch.” Her titles are very descriptive, so without describing the behaviors specifically here, one can imagine how they might prohibit dialogue by means of verbal abuse. The problems within the field of professional Philosophy, namely that its self-conception does not match its behavior, can be compared to the problems inherent in selfhood, outlined in the previous section. Deference to authority is prized and rewarded over argumentation and critique, creating a cycle which robs both the individuals and the group of seeing the benefits of transpersonal rationality. This downward spiral that places the “imperatives for professional survival” over “transpersonal obligations of philosophical practice,” speaks to “our inability to transcend structural conflicts between the democratic prerequisites of a genuine philosophical meritocracy and the inequitable consequences of a market economy.”<sup>100</sup> Again, Piper returns to the applied arena of economics, demonstrating that these issues are never far from her thoughts.

### **Aesthetic Judgment**

Throughout her career Adrian Piper has written about aesthetics, though this has usually happened in the context of art rather than philosophy. Most of her published texts on aesthetics

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<sup>100</sup> Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, 20.

have been part of her “meta-art” texts, and therefore kept separate from her philosophical work. In 2009, however, she published the essay “Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetics,” in *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy, and Art Practice*.<sup>101</sup> The compendium includes essays by artists, historians and philosophers yet Piper’s essay is presented in the section of the book called “Aesthetics in Philosophy” so it is clearly situated as a “philosophical” writing.

In this essay, Piper seeks to correct a misreading of Kant’s third critique, the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which claims that aesthetic judgments do not have to meet the same criteria that other intelligible judgments do. Without stating it explicitly Piper refers to those who have treated the third *Critique* without paying heed to issues in the first and second critiques. In the field of Art History and criticism, Clement Greenberg would be an example of someone who has misread Kant’s aesthetic theory.<sup>102</sup>

By Kant’s aims the third *Critique* was meant to offer a solution to the “incalculable gulf” inherent in his philosophy between the tangible experience of objects in the world and the transcendental, or supernatural source of all things.<sup>103</sup> Judgments of taste, as opposed to other sorts of judgments, present a special occasion to examine this gulf because of their odd location beyond both rationalism and empiricism. If I find something agreeable or pleasurable that is most obviously a subjective experience and opinion; however, if I call it beautiful then my subjective experience must be somehow objective. Beauty is a shared principle so for things I

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<sup>101</sup> Adrian Piper, “Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetics,” in *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice*, ed. Francis Halsall, Julie Jansen, and Tony O’Connor (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>102</sup> After 1943 Greenberg refers to Kant often. Some of his most famous writings come from this period, namely those that truly shaped the initially dominant theories of artistic modernism. In his “Seminar” essays in the 1970s he does correct some of his misuse of Kant, but these are largely overlooked texts.

<sup>103</sup> Whether and how he solves this dualism is still up for heated debate among Kantian scholars.

find beautiful to actually be such someone else has to find them beautiful as well. Thus beauty is neither a rational conclusion nor an empirical fact, rather it rests somewhere between.

Piper situates aesthetic judgment, and the paradox described above, within Kant's account of our knowledge of objects in the Transcendental Aesthetic, found in the first *Critique*. There Kant sets up the two poles of understanding: intuition, which is the unmediated empirical experience of objects, and knowledge, which is the conceptualization of those objects resulting from reason. In order to recognize the concrete particulars of our intuition we must have some knowledge of the concepts to which those intuitions apply, according to Kant. Similarly, Piper points out, "without any interference of any form of conceptual indoctrination," we can have direct and unmediated contact with concrete particulars. This either/or situation sets up a dilemma, especially in the case of practicing artists. Artists have direct and unmediated intuitive access to the spatiotemporal things they create, but according to Kant's dichotomy of intuition and knowledge, artists should have no idea what they are doing. What Piper, through Kant's work, has presented strongly relates to the contemporary scientific and educational debates on left-brain and right-brain knowledge. To resolve the dilemma Piper turns once again to Kant's conditions for the unity of the self, as she has in previous writings. What makes this essay crucial, however, is her incorporation of yogic philosophy.

Kant argues for a "dual subject" as Allen Wood refers to it in his book, *Kant*. This dual subject corresponds to the duality of perspective with which each individual subject experiences the world. For Kant, knowledge of the world is formed by a combination of intuitions and judgments. Intuitions in the Kantian context are not gut feelings as most would identify them, but direct sensory experiences. These raw intuitions, gathered by the senses, are then made sense of by the mind. A perceiving subject after experiencing a round, red, smooth object would then

make a judgment that the object is an apple. “Intuitions without concepts are blind.”<sup>104</sup> The dilemma rises out of Kant’s definition of consciousness as a “the coherently organized experience of a unified subject, that is, of an individual ego.”<sup>105</sup> In this model we must organize sense data according to conceptual categories to be conscious of things at all, and those categories are inherent to the ego and cannot be separated from it. Thus a subject can have no unmediated experience of an object. To get around this problem, Piper suggests trading the model of self that is found in Samkhyan philosophy for the Kantian one.<sup>106</sup> Samkhya and Vedanta are two main systems of Hindu philosophy, which are based on the intellect. Spirit and matter are considered two independent principles of existence in Samkhya, while in Vedanta spirit and matter are considered two parts of one greater ultimate reality.<sup>107</sup> In Samkhya rational thought is a function of the mind, as is the ego, meaning it is objective and impersonal, akin to a mechanical device. Yet the consciousness is someplace beyond the mind, not inextricably connected to it. In other words the mind and the spirit are not the same, whereas within the Kantian self, the mind is one and the same with the spirit or the soul and cannot be separated.

The advantage of using a philosophy where ego and mind can be separated from the innate part of the self is that we can entertain the possibility of experiencing an unmediated reality. This unmediated experience is the very goal of advanced yogic meditation, and it is achieved through the “dismantling or death of the ego,” which is, “not equivalent to the death of consciousness.”<sup>108</sup> The path of yogic enlightenment is outlined in reverse in Kant’s account of synthesis as Piper points out:

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<sup>104</sup> Wood, *Kant*, 39.

<sup>105</sup> Piper, “Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetics,” 206.

<sup>106</sup> Piper, “Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetics,” 207.

<sup>107</sup> I. K. Taimni, *Man, God and the Universe* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1974), 212.

<sup>108</sup> Piper, “Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetics,” 208.

Kant's whole point is that there is only one set of representations that, properly systematized, simultaneously and interdependently constitute both. Tersely put, there are subjects if and only if there are objects of consciousness; dismantle one and you automatically dismantle the other.<sup>109</sup>

From this complex and technical argument, we find that Piper's philosophy of aesthetics is based on the fully interdependent relationship between subjects and objects. This means that the more deeply we understand and unravel the complexities of a work of art, the more we come face-to-face with our own selves. This also means by extension that to fully have direct and intuitive contact with an artwork the viewer would have to sacrifice their ego to do it. Thus the dilemma is unsolvable according to Piper, because the solution she presents is beyond the normal parameters tolerated by the current social structures of art.

Piper's final act of throwing out her own solutions for practical reasons is not only disappointing, but it sells her own theory short. Though she does not provide a simple solution to judging works of art, I don't believe her theory is without use. What she provides in this essay is an abstract theory that could be an aesthetic model that artists and critics strive towards, regardless of whether they are actually able to reach it.

Providing an aesthetic theory that transcends normal social interactions is akin to Kant's own aesthetic theories. Kant understood beauty and the sublime as special ways to access morality. Kant thought that, "beauty and sublimity give us an authentic feeling for morality, and even an experience of freedom."<sup>110</sup> If indeed, as Piper suggests, unmediated experience of works of art unravel the mysteries of the self, and ultimately reveal other truths as well; and Kant's "experience of freedom" could very well be the freedom that is felt when the consciousness lets go of the ego.

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<sup>109</sup> Piper, "Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant's Transcendental Aesthetics," 208.

<sup>110</sup> Wood, *Kant*, 152.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ADRIAN PIPER'S ARTWORK IN KANTIAN TERMS

In 1969, Piper wrote an essay in which she discusses Conceptual Art. Within this essay Piper wrote, “there are two basic kinds of art idea: ideas that use life conditions, and ideas that use ideas or theories about life conditions.”<sup>111</sup> This separation of phenomenal ideas from analytical ideas mirrors Kant’s separation of these forms of knowledge in the first *Critique*.

This chapter, as a companion to the previous, will use Adrian Piper’s philosophy to interpret her own artwork. In part due to Piper’s own insistence to keep her art and philosophy separate, and in part due to the unpopularity of Kant’s aesthetics in the past thirty years, an interpretation of this sort has never been done. I will look at three specific series/works made over a period of fifteen years by Piper. Within these works, it is Piper’s lack of allegiance to a specific medium as well as the philosophical qualities of her artwork that make her a conceptual artist, not only historically but also actively.

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<sup>111</sup> Adrian Piper *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume II: Selected Writings in Art Criticism 1967-1992* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 5.



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## Fjord

Continued from preceding page

least likely actress ever to be cast in the role, if a handout accom-panying the program didn't cite an earlier production with Sandy Dennis. The difference between them is that Miss Chris, a gifted and disciplined actress, knows how to work. Wrong as she is for the part, she earns her way, patiently and feelingly, into what must be termed a successful performance. The extra points she gets, for her care and courage in attempting work so difficult, wipe out my objections, which are mainly concentrated in the first two scenes anyhow. David Sack-eroff's lighting effects are very helpful, and Christopher Thom-ber's Svoboda-style string set, though sometimes cramping the already small space, is quite love-

ly at moments. And oh, the play. See it.

The influence of Pinter on young writers, like that of Handke, has been a baleful one. I suppose it comes from the fact that they think slavish imitation is enough: Pinter's original impulse is lost, and nothing fresh is added. Which is a backhanded way to introduce Allan Knee's "SANTA ANITA '42," at the Clark Center, a play which owes something to Pinter but has, to my delight, new purposes for its use of Pinter techniques, and new skills of its own to add. The subject is a big, important, and scaring one: The treatment of Japanese-Americans in California during World War II. (Many were actually interned at Santa Anita race track, where they lived in stables;

Continued on page 14

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### ***The Mythic Being* (1972 – 1975)**

On September 12, 1973, the *Mythic Being* first appeared in the “theater” section of the *Village Voice*.<sup>112</sup> Piper’s choice of placement for this “advertisement” which appeared among other ads for theatrical supplies or lessons, including one offering lessons in mask, dramatic improvisation, clown, and corporeal education for actors, may have been a signal to the viewer as to what was being pictured (fig. 3). *The Mythic Being*, which began the year before the ad was published, consisted of Piper dressing in an “auburn shag wig, reflecting sunglasses, black pants and turtleneck, brown boots,” and attempting to appear as a young black male in theaters, galleries, museums, and other public places in New York. Piper, over the three years the series lasted, was constructing a myth, a vehicle for personal and cultural reflection.

In her preparatory notes for the *Mythic Being*, Piper describes witnessing an encounter between a “seedy” looking black man smiling as he swaggered through the park and another “seedier looking man sitting on a bench.” The man on the bench asked the other man for a few cents, and the walking man replied, “how can you take some cents from a man who got no sense?” Piper was very impressed by the man’s “poetic” performance, and in response to it she wrote:

I was really dumbfounded. He had done it—achieved a near perfect balance of behavior and self-consciousness...It seems that the tension he achieved had a lot to do with the degree to which he could both EXPRESS his state of mind and also self-consciously acknowledge it.<sup>113</sup>

Piper refers to her own performances, such as the *Catalysis* series, as “over-intellectualized” in comparison to the crazy man’s boisterous act. As she worked to resolve balancing self-consciousness and expression in her work, Piper drew from that model and it allowed her to

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<sup>112</sup> This inaugural “ad” was the only one placed in the theater section, where as all the others were placed in the “galleries” section next to ads for exhibitions.

<sup>113</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I*, 92.

shape the *Mythic Being* series. In the series, she disguised herself as a young black male by both physically transforming herself—wearing an afro wig, dark sunglasses, and a mustache—and transforming her behavior—walking with an aggressive stance and conspicuously “cruising” white women.

*The Mythic Being* series directly followed the *Catalysis* series described in chapter two, and in many ways is a more sophisticated version of that earlier series. Piper continued to act as artist as well as art object for the *Mythic Being* as she did in *Catalysis*. This in part applied to the performative portion of the series, where her body and behaviors served as the art object, but also more importantly it applied to the way she herself became the object of inquiry. As Piper noted about the project in October 1973, its point was a “dispersion” of “self, objecthood, identity,” and “individuality.”<sup>114</sup> She conceived of the *Mythic Being* persona as her “opposite,” and hoped he would achieve “personhood, independence and history,” by the end of the project.<sup>115</sup> She collected excerpts from her personal journal and these sentences became mantras for each month of the project. These lines were recited repetitiously as a chant in her home and out in public while she wore the mythic being persona. These same lines were then added in a comic book type bubble to the Polaroid photo of her in the *Mythic Being* costume, which completed the *Village Voice* ads. She later describes the *Mythic Being* as, “an alternative of myself...One of the many possible products of my experiences and history, though I myself am the only actual one.”<sup>116</sup> She saw the material existence of the *Mythic Being* as a way to step outside of herself

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<sup>114</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1*, 107.

<sup>115</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1*, 105.

<sup>116</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1*, 109.

and gain some objectivity to her own, actual position in the world, and a way to achieve internal metamorphosis by identifying with this “other”.<sup>117</sup>

The *Mythic Being* was a “double movement of self-reflexivity and social confrontation,” the cultural critic, Kobena Mercer wrote.<sup>118</sup> The self-reflection in this context is enabled by the breakdown of the subject/object dichotomy. This breakdown is fruitful because “the very same rules that provide objective structure to an object of consciousness and situate it in an external world of spatiotemporal and causal relations also provide structure and unity to the subjective consciousness that contemplates it,” as Piper quotes Kant.<sup>119</sup> Thus, through the *Mythic Being* series, and in all her work where she collapses the artist/artwork distinction, Piper is enacting Kant’s theory of synthesis of recognition in concepts. It is also this idea of synthesis between subjects and objects that underlies Piper’s aesthetic theory outlined in the prior chapter. This means that Piper’s contemplation of the *Mythic Being* results in self-knowledge, and in turn the audience’s contemplation of the *Mythic Being* would result in the same self-revelation. An individual confronted with the *Mythic Being*, and one who chose to investigate it, would eventually see through the socially constructed representation which stereotypes the young black male, and he or she would also eventually see through their own socially constructed persona.

Kant’s work divides the world into representations and things in themselves, the former comprise the conceptual categories which make knowledge possible, and the latter are the transcendent nature of what things truly are. This is a basic point of Kant’s philosophy of reason, and a point that Piper made use of in the later incarnations of the *Mythic Being*. Rather than exploring the actual qualities of blackness or African-American experience, she was exploring

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<sup>117</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1*, 123.

<sup>118</sup> Mercer, 50.

<sup>119</sup> Piper, “Intuition and Concrete Particularity in Kant’s Transcendental Aesthetics,” 208.



the representation of blackness. By 1974, Piper felt that the qualities of her opposite, the *Mythic Being*, had been fully articulated within her, and her focus shifted towards the iconography of the *Mythic Being*, treating it as a sign or symbol. Piper began making posters and postcards which featured the *Mythic Being* in public or private settings, with text written across the image. Portions of the image were photographic and others drawn, and the hand drawn text was placed in a white cloud that is reminiscent in some cases, and identical in others, of the comic-book-dialogue-bubble Piper employed in the previous *Village Voice* ads. The later posters and cards function more like a comic strip, with clear linear succession, specifically in the case of *I am the Locus #1–5* (1975), *I/You (Her)* (1974), and *A 108 Kant #1–6* (1975), (figs. 4,5, & 6). This linear sequencing of representations mirrors Kant’s theory of “transcendental synthesis” which states that we organize representations we receive from empirical data into non-arbitrary linear sequences (A102). These linear sequences of representations make up the categories of the understanding in Kant’s transcendental deduction. Piper uses that linear structure of representation to complete the representation of the *Mythic Being* that the non-linear structure of the ads in the *Village Voice* could not. When looking back at the ads, she later considered them as cryptic, and adopted the more rational linear format to solidify the iconography of the myth of the *Mythic Being*. As the well-known cultural philosopher, Roland Barthes wrote, myth is a socially determined, inverted reflection that makes the culturally contrived appear “natural,” thus Piper’s efforts to make the *Mythic Being* appear natural so that it could act as a mirror, a point of reflection, for the socially constructed representations of race and gender.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Roland Barthes, “Change the Object Itself,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1977), 167.

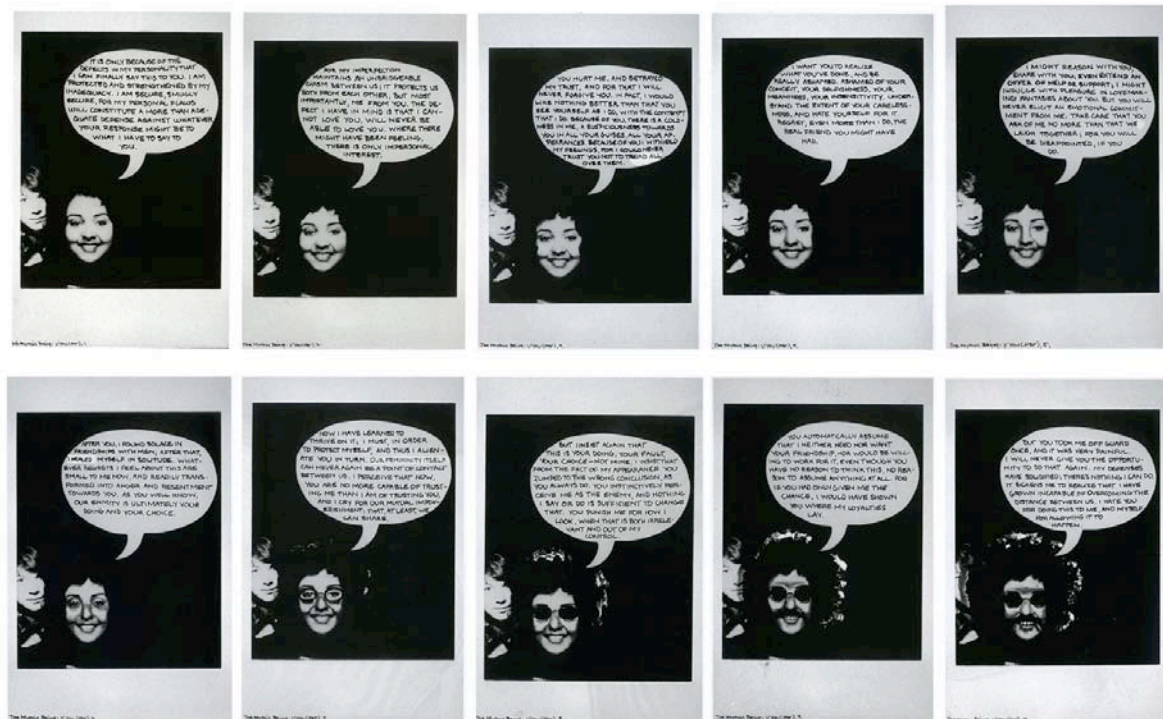




Figure 6.

### ***Funk Lessons* (1982 – 83) and *Cornered* (1988)**

In *Funk Lessons*, Adrian Piper aimed for participants in the performance to “Get down and party. Together.”<sup>121</sup> For these pieces Piper performed the role of teacher or cultural docent, demonstrating basic dance movements standard to black culture and slowly familiarizing the audience with the branch of black popular music called Funk. In a two-step process Piper would begin the “lesson” by introducing the basic dance movements while explicating the “cultural and historical background, meanings, and roles they play in black culture.”<sup>122</sup> The audience was then asked to try the movements, rehearse them, and finally improvise upon them. Once the audience had sufficiently grasped the moves Piper would gradually introduce and discuss the funk music itself, describing the relationship between the dance and the music. This two-step process was meant to gently warm the primarily white audience to a better understanding, and enjoyment of funk music.

The music and dancing served not only as pedagogical subject matter but also “for experiencing self-transcendence.”<sup>123</sup> This suggests that Piper was not only interested in sharing knowledge about funk music but in the internal transformation of the audience members. On the

<sup>121</sup> *Funk Lessons* was performed at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Canada, in Berkeley, California, New Langdon Arts in San Francisco, CA, and the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

<sup>122</sup> Not Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume 1*, 195.

<sup>123</sup> Jean Fisher, “The Breath between Worlds,” in *Adrian Piper: A Retrospective*, ed. Maurice Berger (New York, NY: Distributed Art Publishers, 1999), 42.

one hand, her supposed concern with the internal state of audience members is related to her belief that racism begins at the individual, interpersonal level. On the other hand, this could also be related to her understanding of xenophobia as a disposition to resist the intrusion of anomalous data into previously formed conceptual schemes. This resistance, as explored in Chapter Three, is the result of a type of self-preservation that attempts to maintain a rationally coherent concept of self. Thus, allowing for audience members to experience self-transcendence in the process of encountering new and different forms of music and dance provided a means to circumventing the xenophobic defense mechanism. In short, in *Funk Lessons* Piper helped people to get over themselves.

Funk, disco and other types of music from black popular culture showed up in Piper's work prior to *Funk Lessons*, however within these earlier examples, Piper's use of this type of music was more casual than resolved. Due to the lack of calculation Piper was surprised by the xenophobic comments she received in response her use of those idioms of black working-class culture. As she wrote, "These responses made me realize that I was not, in fact, as fully assimilated into white society as I had always thought."<sup>124</sup> From that she realized that assimilation is not necessarily one-way street, even though it normally is. The content of education usually flows from the top down, like Reganomics, trickling down from the centers of power and wealth to the "less fortunate". Within the space of Piper's *Funk Lessons*, the content or knowledge is culled from those with the least power and wealth and used to educate the "largely white, upper-middle-class audience."<sup>125</sup> Thus she set out to help those unfamiliar or uncomfortable with black working class culture assimilate through the teachable and shared language of dance.

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<sup>124</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume*, 201.

<sup>125</sup> Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume*, 203.



Piper also takes on the role of educator in the video installation *Cornered*, from 1988 (fig. 7). The video shows Piper in the guise of a T.V. newswoman dryly stating the facts of her racial identity. She opens the monologue with, “I am Black,” simply, calmly and plainly stated. Next, she spends the remainder of the 16-minute video describing what the viewer might be feeling in response to this statement and what logical result those feelings have. In turn she further describes what those logical results mean for the possibility of a “relationship of mutual trust and good will” between Piper and the imagined viewer. Ultimately this honest statement of racial identity leaves her cornered, as she says, by the equally undesirable options of either passing for white or stating her blackness and leaving the viewer feeling “nervous, uncomfortable and antagonized.” Piper’s use of the first person somewhat undermines her otherwise authoritative tone and stance. Some may confuse the content of this video as autobiographical, and miss the entire point she is trying to make, namely that race is a social construction, not an unequivocal or biological fact.



Figure 7.

Behind the T.V. set on which the video is playing, two birth certificates are placed on either side, both belonging to her father. One certificate labels him as white while the other labels him as black. These certificates are the documentary evidence to support her on screen statement that “no one is safely, unquestionably white.” These objects are displayed in a corner behind an overturned table, essentially placing Piper (on the T.V. screen) in a cornered position. In addition, the installation also “corners” the viewer by forcing them to either confront, reject or ignore the truths of their own racial heritage. The upturned table whose legs point aggressively towards the viewer, as if the woman on the video needed to be physically defended, reinforces this psychological cornering of both Piper and the viewer.

Despite Piper’s dry and calm manner of presenting information in *Cornered*, this piece has elicited very strong reactions from viewers and critics alike. At the opening reception in 1988 where this piece was viewed for the first time a man shouted, “Nobody’s going to tell me I’m not white.”<sup>126</sup> Time as well as a trained eye has not prevented strong and negative remarks in response to her work. Art critic, Ken Johnson wrote in a review of Piper’s retrospective exhibition in 2000 that her work was, “abrasive, didactic, and aesthetically blunt,” and that her tone is “off-putting and bullying.”<sup>127</sup> It is ironic for Johnson to refer to Piper’s work as off-putting when she lays out that exact potential reaction in the *Cornered* monologue:

It’s also our problem if you think I’m telling you I’m black to exploit an advantage, or gain publicity, or make it big as an artist. If you think this you must be feeling pretty antagonized and turned off by what I’m saying. So, I’d be interested in hearing more about exactly how you think my antagonizing and turning off my audience is going to help me make it big as an artist.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Berger, 32.

<sup>127</sup> Ken Johnson, “Adrian Piper” *New York Times* (November 17, 2000): E41.

<sup>128</sup> Transcribed from Adrian Piper’s monologue in *Cornered*, 1988.

In his 2004 book *Conversation Pieces*, Grant Kester also criticizes Piper for talking down to her audience and assuming their guilt in advance. Particularly in the case of *Cornered*, the work has no claim of authority and the self-reflexive elements of the installation should not be confused as making self-evident claims. Exterior supports, such as the birth certificates and the verbally stated statistics from research on the racial ancestry of the United States, add validity to Piper's claims and connect the installation with the world at-large. Piper's introductory arguments in this video, however, may appear as bullying, especially using Piper's own description of the term as referring to someone who uses implied authority and intimidation "designed to forestall objections."<sup>129</sup> This tactic has a very specific purpose as Piper described in a philosophical context in 2008:

Even though I know these views to be controversial, I wanted you to swallow them on faith, for the moment, without questioning me, so I could go on a build on those assumptions the further points I wanted to make.<sup>130</sup>

Yet to criticize this work as tyrannical is to misunderstand Piper's methods of argument. The ostensible bullying serves the purpose of getting the view past their potentially negative initial reactions so that they can absorb large, substantiated claims.

The interpretation of both *Funk Lessons* and *Cornered* deepens when Piper's theory of transpersonal rationality is applied to them. If we take this theory as the ethic behind these works, then they become an effort to establish a mutually equitable balance of power, which is the ideal state of exchange within transpersonal rationality. To achieve this balance, Piper not only uses rationality and rational argument to empower herself, but to help bring about the rational empowerment of her audience. These works are informative, and by experiencing them

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<sup>129</sup> Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, 11-12.

<sup>130</sup> Piper, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, 12.

we learn something. Rational dialogue is the method of transpersonal rationality, and despite the monological stance taken by Piper in these works, dialogue is presupposed within their content. Both address cultural forms that often receive xenophobic reaction as well as socially constructed norms that have been built as a result of those xenophobic reactions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### KANT AFTER PIPER

Within the history of western philosophy Immanuel Kant's work stands at a crossroads. As contemporary philosopher, Ken Wilbur wrote, "Kant was either the last of the great modern philosophers or the first of the great postmodern philosophers. He was probably both."<sup>131</sup> Others have called him the first to realize the "universal requirement for unity," present in self-reflection (and in reflection in general, and the one who set the new "philosophical agenda" for those who came after him.<sup>132</sup> Despite the honors bestowed on him by philosophers, the reading of Kant's work within the parameters of art criticism and art history has been rather narrow. Kant's ideas have usually been used solely to support formalist art theory and artistic modernism, however Piper is not an artist that fits into either of those categories. Thus, her close involvement with Kant's writings and in turn my application of her reading of Kant's work to her artwork, not only changes the way we understand Piper's artwork but the way we understand Kant's philosophy as well. This has the potential to breathe life into a philosophy that has been out of favor for over 30 years within the artistic avant-garde.

Returning again to Conceptual Art, it is "generally portrayed as a rejection of aesthetic theory as an adequate basis for understanding artistic value or significance."<sup>133</sup> Conceptual Art is also often held up as the "paradigm" for the arguments against artistic modernism and aesthetic theory's relevance to art in general. It can also be seen as the beginning of the trend within art theory and criticism to turn to linguistic and literary theories instead of exclusively

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<sup>131</sup> Ken Wilbur, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 1998), 87-88.

<sup>132</sup> The first quote is by Rodolphe Gasche, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 14; and the second is by Allen Wood, *Kant*, 1.

<sup>133</sup> Diarmuid Costello, "Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art," in *Philosophy of Conceptual Art*, p. 92

aesthetic ones. As a result, Kant and Conceptual Art have routinely been viewed as polar opposites. This accepted antithetical relationship is built on Clement Greenberg's references to Kant's ideas in his texts on artistic modernism and formalist art theory. Greenberg's frequent references to Kant, though revealing a close reading of the text, are less than faithful. As primary example, in his famous 1960 essay, "Modernist Painting", what Greenberg took from Kant's work was the *motif* of self-criticism found in the first *Critique* rather than any direct philosophical support.<sup>134</sup> By then making claims in Kant's name Greenberg almost single handedly turned Kant into a "whipping boy" for both the aesthetic formalists, and those opposed to modernism in general.<sup>135</sup>

Some authors have taken up the traditionally unpopular task of arguing for a reinterpretation of Kant, such as Belgian critic and theorist, Thierry De Duve and British philosopher Diarmuid Costello. In, "Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art," Costello links Kant's aesthetics with Sol LeWitt's seminal texts on Conceptual Art. He creates this link by first establishing the major differences between LeWitt's and Joseph Kosuth's versions of Conceptual Art. Kosuth's is based on the belief "that a self-reflexive stress on the artist's declarative intentions...could suffice to determine what is actually achieved in a work of art."<sup>136</sup> Whereas LeWitt's version, though it maintains the artist as the creative source of the work of art, favors a systematic way of fulfilling the initial creative vision that avoids subjectivity. According to Diarmuid,

LeWitt's stress on preventing the subjectivity or willfulness of the artist from coming between their idea and its realization in the work, and hence between the work and

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<sup>134</sup> This position is presented by Jason Gaiger's in his essay "Constraints and Conventions: Kant and Greenberg on Aesthetic Judgment," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 39, no. 4 (October 1999), pp. 376 – 391.

<sup>135</sup> Diarmuid Costello, "Kant After LeWitt: Towards an Aesthetics of Conceptual Art," *Philosophy and Conceptual Art*, ed. Peter Goldie and Elisabeth Schellekens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93.

<sup>136</sup> Costello, 106.

its receiver, is compatible with Kant's theory of genius as the productive ability responsible for fine art.<sup>137</sup>

Since LeWitt was Piper's friend, mentor, and by far the most influential of the conceptual artists on her work, LeWitt's relationship to Kant sheds some light on the foreshadowing of Kantian philosophy in Piper's pre-Kant artwork, as discussed in chapter one. Thus, Piper's relationship to Kant further supports Costello's argument.

In addition, LeWitt's view of artists being "mystics rather than rationalist" is mirrored in Piper's aesthetic theory that places yogic philosophy at the center of her model, as discussed in chapter three. Kant was fully aware of the limits of rationality and empiricism, especially where matters of taste are concerned. Greenberg, in his later essays, ultimately parts with Kant in favor of an empiricist aesthetic theory where ultimately subjective aesthetic judgments are proven over time.<sup>138</sup> Rather than leave Kant behind as Greenberg did, Piper incorporates eastern philosophy to rectify Kant's subjective, self-reflexive aesthetics with universal truth.

In contrast to Greenberg who throws out Kant's method of transcendental philosophy, Piper keeps the majority of Kant's methods in tact. The one thing she does change is the location of the individual ego in relationship to one's consciousness. Within Cartesian philosophy one's consciousness is part of the individual ego, whereas in Samkhyan philosophy the ego is part of the mind, which is more a tool of individual consciousness rather than the home of it. This subtle yet profound change allows her to keep Kant's transcendental aesthetic mostly intact, while solving the problem of the unity of individual consciousness that is created by subject-predicate conceptual framework of reflexive, Cartesian philosophy.

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<sup>137</sup> Costello, 109.

<sup>138</sup> Jason Gaiger, "Constraints and Conventions: Kant and Greenberg on Aesthetic Judgment," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 39, no.4 (October 1999): 376-391.

Piper's theory of transcendent consciousness takes the place of Kant's idea of "free play" between the imagination and the understanding, which Kant described as part of the experience of beauty. Initially, the third *Critique*, in which Kant's theory of beauty is found, was meant to "bring his entire enterprise to an end" by joining the first two critiques of theoretical and practical reason. "Free play" does not however solve the problem of unity and self-consciousness that has occupied philosophers from Hegel onward. This problem and its history within the field of philosophy is the subject of Rodolphe Gasche's book, *The Tain of the Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*. In this text, Gasche links Derrida's deconstruction with Kant and the philosophy of reflection as a whole, by looking specifically at the source of consciousness that is beyond reflection, in other words, the backing or "tain" of the mirror. For Derrida, unity is a myth employed by reflexive philosophy in order to lay claim to its ability to reflect things that are in fact beyond reflection.<sup>139</sup>

Likewise, Piper and Gasche recognize the limitations of reflection and have therefore sought to explore alternative structures, (Derrida's deconstruction for Gasche and yogic philosophy for Piper), to understand that which is beyond reflective thought. Thus, through Gasche's ideas, Piper's work can be linked to Derrida despite her thorough grounding in Kant. As a result, since Piper does not eliminate Kant but integrates her additions to his original theories, Kantian philosophy, (at least in part and through Piper), can be connected to deconstruction and post-structuralism. In terms of art criticism and "theory" Piper's resuscitation of Kant's ideas, challenges the hegemony of the anti-aesthetic.<sup>140</sup> In other words, the importance

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<sup>139</sup> Gasche, 237.

<sup>140</sup> The term "anti-aesthetic" emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s joining several concerns about the "aesthetic alienation" of art. Buttressed by French theory, these concerns sought to open up the privileged aesthetic realm of art by considering issues of history, place, and cultural difference when dealing with works of art. The anti-aesthetic was reinvigorated and further solidified by Hal Foster's book of the same name published in 1983. Taken from Robert Gero's essay "The Border of the Aesthetic," in *Art History Versus Aesthetics*, James Elkins ed.



of Piper's use of Kant's writings, and in turn the use of Kant's ideas to interpret Piper's work, is the bridge it is able to create between artworks as aesthetic objects and artworks as historical constructions.

## CONCLUSION

Since 2003 Adrian Piper has been working on the *Everything* series. All of the work in this series originate with the single phrase, “Everything will be taken away.” The series includes appropriated photos and video, image and text installations, sculptural editions, and a collaborative performance. In its incarnation at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery in 2008, the focus is a familiar one for Piper: American racial inequality. Made more poignant by a lack of color and a sparing amount of images, wall text, erased photos, colorless, soundless news clips all tell stories of natural or human atrocities that have unfairly affected blacks. Despite the heavy atmosphere in the gallery, there is a positive side to Piper’s “chilling apocalyptic statement.”<sup>141</sup> Piper explains it as “detachment from all the relationships, communities, values, and practices that make anomaly and ostracism possible.”<sup>142</sup> So instead of the victim Piper imagines a self-imposed erasure, a return to ground zero, a cleansing that removes all baggage good and bad, everything.

Stepping back briefly to the previous chapter, it sounds as though Piper is describing the tain of the mirror, the place beyond self-reflexive rationality, and the goal of yogic enlightenment. As the exhibition’s press release reads, “her artwork has begun to intersect more explicitly with her philosophical work.”<sup>143</sup> This suggests that Piper has begun to move towards a practice of philosophical expression of the sort she purposely avoided earlier in her career. Whatever the case, the increased mixing of her philosophical and artistic work will require that the historians and critics thorough understand and interpret both aspects of her professional production.

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<sup>141</sup> Lauren O’Neill-Butler, in an art review of Adrian Piper’s solo show at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery, published in *Artforum*, May 2008.

<sup>142</sup> Taken from the exhibition press release the solo exhibition of Adrian Piper’s work, *Everything*, (March 1 – April 19, 2008) at The Elizabeth Dee Gallery, <http://www.elizabethdeegallery.com/exhibitions/view/everything> (accessed on August 18, 2009).

<sup>143</sup> *Everything*, exhibition press release.

The title of this study, “toward a synthesis” implies that this is a first step in the process of working towards an integrated reading of Piper’s work as a philosopher-artist. By no means does this study presume to be a conclusion or even a full picture of the union between Adrian Piper’s philosophy and artwork. To cover that amount of analysis and information would require a much longer paper than this. Instead, the goal here is to take the first step in the hopes that others will follow and fill the gaps.

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