

I ALL. IT WASN'T INTENTIONAL. I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHERE THIS  
TRY TO GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF. THIS IS A COMPLETE SURPRISE  
MIND. I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS. ISN'T THIS  
Y TO THINK ABOUT THINGS. I JUST CAN'T RELATE. WE CERTAINLY  
THINGS. YOU'RE MAKING TOO MUCH OF THIS. NOTHING'S THE MATTER  
E BLOWING THE WHOLE THING OUT OF PROPORTION. EVERYTHING'S FI  
PROBLEM? YOU'RE BEING PARANOID. YOU'RE OVERSENSITIVE. YOU  
OP JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS. IT DIDN'T OCCUR TO ME. YOU'RE O  
INK IT HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH THAT. IT WAS JUST A SIMPLE M  
YOU'RE SEEING TOO MUCH IN THIS. NOTHING'S GOING ON. I CAN'T  
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT  
INK YOU'RE OVERDOING IT. YOU'RE JUST TIRED. DON'T TAKE EVERY  
YOU'RE JUST PROJECTING. YOU'RE OVERREACTING. NOTHING HAPPEN  
E ANYTHING TO GET UPSET ABOUT. I DON'T SEE WHAT YOU'RE GETT  
OBLEM. WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU'LL GET OVER IT. DID SOMEONE  
ING ON? WHAT'S THIS ABOUT? WHAT'S WRONG? STOP MAKING SUCH  
T SEE ANYTHING WRONG WITH THAT. EVERYONE DOES THAT. SO WHA  
OTHING LIKE THAT. JUST A MISUNDERSTANDING, THAT'S ALL. MUCH  
UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS IS ABOUT. I'M MYSTIFIED BY YOUR REACTI  
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THAT? IT WAS JUST AN INNOCENT SLIP-UP.  
AL BEHAVIOR. I SEE NO PROBLEM WITH THAT. YOU'RE THE ONE WITH  
CHARITABLE INTERPRETATION. IT'S SO UNNECESSARY TO TALK ABOUT  
S ANYTHING TO DO WITH THAT, REALLY. WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABO  
. YOU'RE AWFULLY QUICK TO CAST ASPERSIONS. YOU CAN'T PROVE  
. HOW DO YOU KNOW? THAT'S CRAZY. YOU'RE IMAGINING THINGS.  
, IT'S NOT THAT AT ALL. THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH IT. THA  
THAT'S A NATURAL REACTION. THAT DOESN'T MEAN WHAT YOU THINK  
IVING EXPLANATION. WHY BRING THIS UP? YOU SEE EVERYTHING IN  
Y IS THAT OBJECTIONABLE? YOU'RE COOKING UP PROBLEMS WHERE TH  
ING THINGS UP. I DON'T BELIEVE THAT HAPPENED. I'M NOT SAYING  
OUR PERCEPTIONS ARE DISTORTED. IT'S NOT NECESSARY TO SEE THI  
O UPSET TO THINK CLEARLY. WE'LL DISCUSS IT LATER. NO, NOT DIS  
LE. YOU'RE SEEING THINGS THAT AREN'T THERE. THIS IS RIDICUL  
IT IT. SO HOW ARE YOU OTHERWISE? I REFUSE TO DISCUSS THIS.  
CHANGE THE SUBJECT. PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPRESS THEMSELV  
O THIS. YOU TAKE EVERYTHING TOO PERSONALLY. YOU MUST HAVE B  
SURE YOU'RE MISTAKEN. I'M SURE THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN QUITE THE  
ELY YOU'RE EXAGGERATING JUST A LITTLE. YOU'RE BEING IRRATION  
HAT. THIS IS SO UNNECESSARY. NOBODY WANTS TO HEAR THIS. AN  
STOP INSISTING ON THIS IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU. YOU  
E WAY OUT OF LINE. IT'S NOT YOUR PLACE TO SAY THAT. DON'T B  
ET OFF IT. YOU'RE SPEAKING OUT OF PLACE. LIGHTEN UP. YOU'RE  
BEING INAPPROPRIATE. NOBODY CARES WHAT YOU THINK. YOU'RE LE  
E CRUISIN' FOR A BRUISIN'. PUT A LID ON IT. CAN I **NO MA** STUFF  
IT. I WOULDN'T PURSUE THIS ANY FURTHER IF I WERE YOU. YOU'D  
WANT TO GET IN TROUBLE? YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT. YOU'RE STICK

**TO THE MEMORY OF SOL LEWITT**

**ADRIAN  
PIPER**

**A SYNTHESIS  
OF INTUITIONS**

**1965-2016**

**CHRISTOPHE CHERIX  
CORNELIA BUTLER  
DAVID PLATZKER**

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART  
NEW YORK**

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## Hyundai Card

Hyundai Card is proud to sponsor *Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965-2016* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. This far-reaching and ambitious exhibition provides an unparalleled glimpse into the artist's pioneering oeuvre throughout her career of more than fifty years.

Hyundai Card is committed to pursuing the kind of innovative philosophy that is epitomized by Adrian's artistic practice. As Korea's foremost issuer of credit cards, Hyundai Card seeks to identify important movements in our culture, society, and technology, and to engage with them as a way of enriching lives. Whether we're hosting tomorrow's cultural pioneers at our stages and art spaces; building libraries of design, travel, music, and cooking for our members; or designing credit cards and digital services that are as beautiful as they are functional, Hyundai Card's most inventive endeavors all draw from the creative well that the arts provide.

As a ten-year sponsor of The Museum of Modern Art, Hyundai Card is delighted to make *Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965-2016* possible.

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# WHO CALLS THE TUNE? IN AND OUT OF THE HUMMING ROOM

## CHRISTOPHE CHERIX

*When I am alone in the solitude of my study or studio,  
I am completely out of the closet: I move back and forth  
easily among art, philosophy, and yoga (my third hat).  
It's the only time I feel completely free to be who I am.  
So I will go to almost any lengths to protect my privacy.  
If I lose that, I lose everything.*  
—Adrian Piper<sup>1</sup>

An installation of contemporary art calls for its curator to focus on a work of art in relation both to the artist's practice and to visitors to the exhibition, so that two logics apply simultaneously: one remarkably singular, carrying the artist's structures of thought, and the other multiple by definition, as various as the perceptions of the public that will see it. An exhibition that has managed to remain faithful to the artist's vision while also attending to viewers is *Do It*, an itinerant and ongoing project that started in 1993 as a conversation between a curator, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and two artists, Christian Boltanski and Bertrand Lavier. The art for this exhibition exists primarily as instructions dictated by artists, and it is up to the curators at each venue to fabricate the works according to the requirements of their specific space as well as to the idiosyncrasies of their given public—thus the injunction, “Do it!” The different iterations of *Do It* have revealed, however, that the initial injunction might have meant different things to those who first conceived the show: to the curators it has suggested the freedom to interpret and carry out the instructions of the artists, while to some of the artists it has suggested direct engagement with the public. Indeed, most of the artists involved with *Do It* have chosen participatory works—works that ask viewers to take part in the art itself, either by being directly asked to do so or by interacting with the work more spontaneously—such as Felix Gonzalez-Torres's proposal for a sculpture made of candies that visitors could take and eat.

Adrian Piper was invited to participate in *Do It* in 2012, and for it she designed a participatory work titled *The Humming Room*, made up of an empty room guarded by a security officer (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> On the work's origins, and the particular events that triggered its conception, Piper has noted,

*The Humming Room* was conceived in direct response to Hans Ulrich's invitation, and it came up in my mind very quickly after I heard from him. It emerged fully formed, POP! out of my subconscious. I didn't have to think or reason my way to it at all. But I do think the particular events going on in my life at that time had an influence on it, definitely. I had been having very friendly communications with an academic institution on my side of the Atlantic that had expressed an interest in further affiliation, and this presented a conflict. On the one hand, I was very flattered because it was so highly ranked in the world of academia; on the other hand, my prior experiences of the dysfunctionality of highly ranked academic institutions (I talk about some of these in [the memoir] *Escape to Berlin*) had produced a very pronounced aversive reaction to the very thought of any such affiliation. Then I realized that of course my designated identity as African American was enhancing my attractiveness, and that was also part of a very familiar

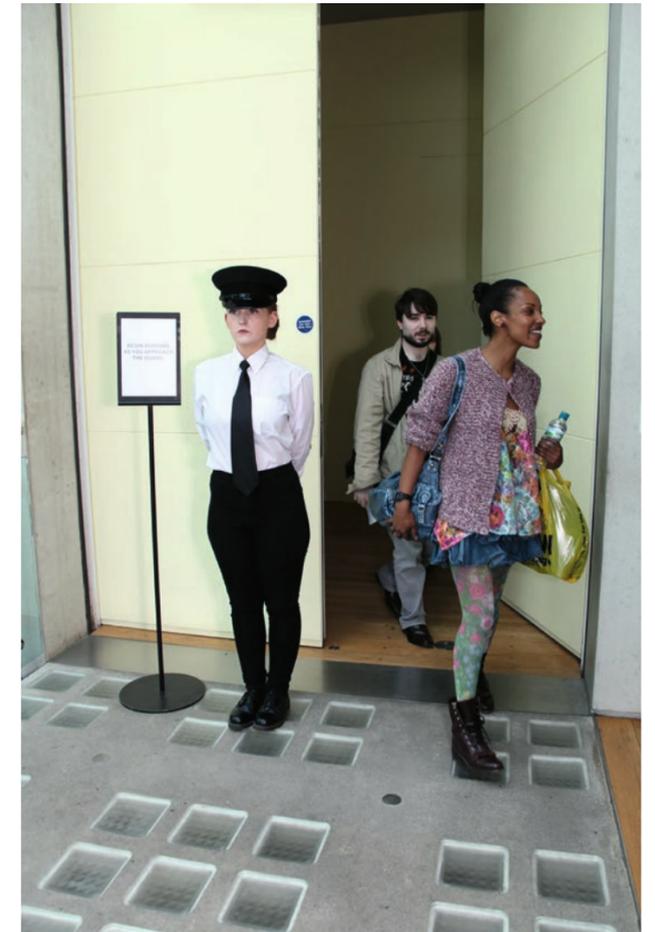


Fig. 1  
*The Humming Room*. 2012  
Voluntary group performance. Full-time museum guard, empty room equipped to echo, and two text signs, one above the door and one adjacent  
Dimensions variable  
Installation view in *Do It* 2013, Manchester Art Gallery, U.K., July 5–21, 2013  
Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin

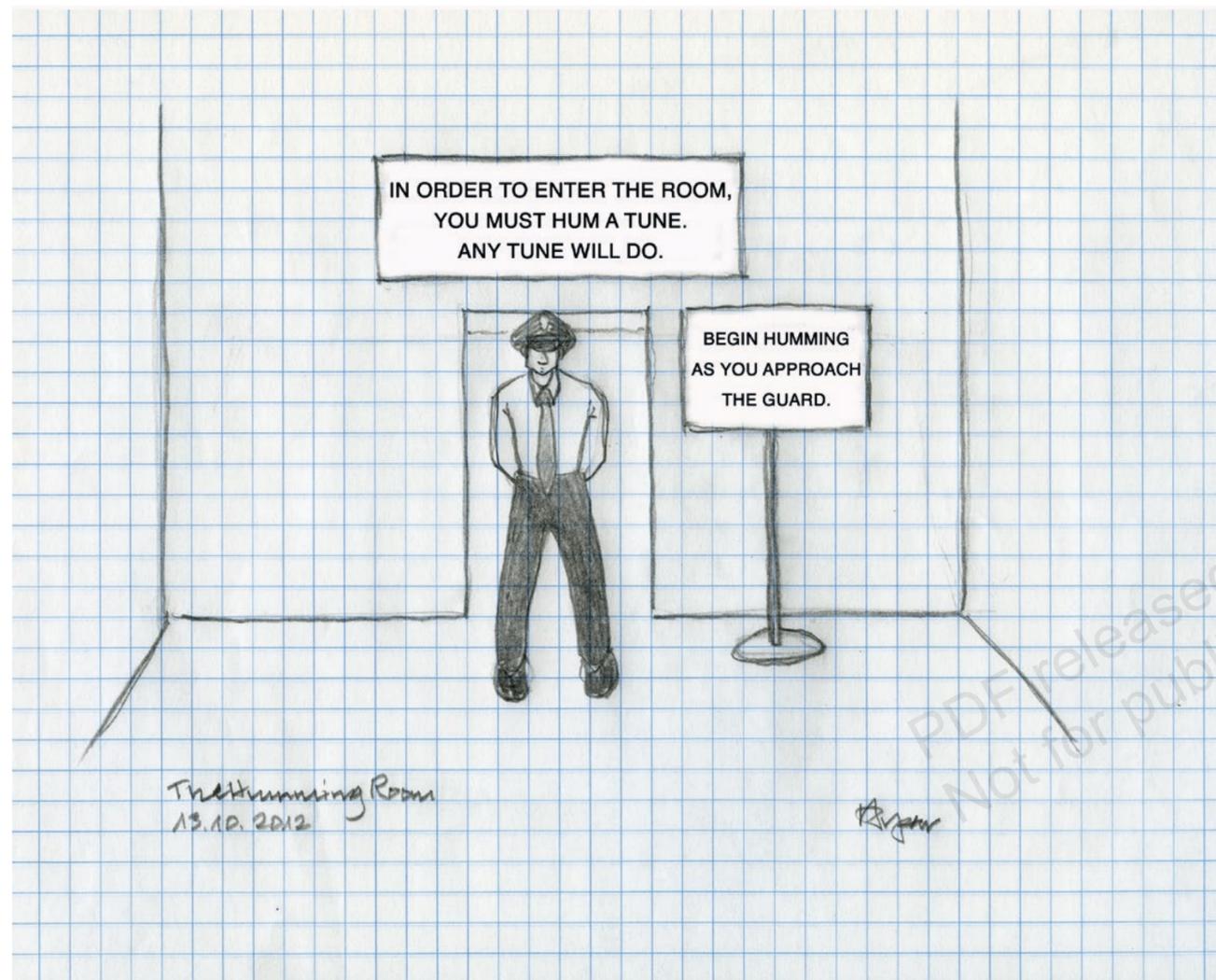


Fig. 2  
*The Humming Room*. 2012  
 Exhibition instruction. Pencil on graph paper with digital additions  
 8½ × 11 in. (21.6 cm × 27.9 cm)  
 Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin

dysfunctional pattern I had previously experienced. My piece *Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, A Moment of Embarrassment* (fig. 3) came up in my mind on the heels of that realization. That piece had an incredibly liberating effect on me. It made me laugh at myself, at all such institutions, at their dysfunctionality, and at their pretensions to authority. So when I received Hans Ulrich's invitation, I was in a very happy, jubilant place. Psychologically, I had just detached myself from any dependence on such authority for my sense of self-worth. I was feeling free and humorous. That was the soil in which *The Humming Room* took root. It was a perfect expression of my state of mind at that moment, a joyous celebration of my final release from a whole set of needs, desires, anxieties, and ambitions connected with institutional validation.<sup>3</sup>

Any visitor who wishes to enter *The Humming Room* is given the following instructions, also printed above the door to the room: "IN ORDER TO ENTER THE ROOM, YOU MUST HUM A TUNE. ANY TUNE WILL DO." Right at the entrance, visitors are met with a paradoxical proposition—an obligation that can be fulfilled any way they wish. "Any tune will do" allows everyone—of all ages and backgrounds, with or without prior knowledge of the artist's work—creativity and personal interaction in an otherwise apparently inflexible framework. "I firmly believe," Piper added,

that everyone is creative and everyone is potentially an artist. All children are artists. I believe that they stop drawing or painting or singing or dancing in response to social pressure—from their family or peers or figures of institutional authority, who force them to shut up in order to fit in. But just because their creative impulses to self-expression are suppressed doesn't mean that they are extinguished. They're still there, waiting for some context that will give them permission to emerge.<sup>4</sup>

A freestanding stanchion, reminiscent of border-control signage, next to *The Humming Room's* entrance informs visitors to "BEGIN HUMMING AS YOU APPROACH THE GUARD." No material record of this work is meant to outlast any specific installation, other than a sketch Piper drew at the time of its creation (fig. 2), the primary function of which was instructional, for the curators. Everything else—the guard, the room, the signage—has changed at each subsequent presentation of the work. What is distinctive about *The Humming Room*, beyond the preposterous nature of its directive, is its ephemerality and ever-changing nature. It seems safe to say that there will never be identical tunes hummed simultaneously in any of the empty rooms. The work is also characterized by how it cancels out the very possibility of an audience: because visitors must hum while they are in the room, they automatically become performers of the work. They carry out the artist's directions but without the artist's being physically present. For this reason, only a participating audience can experience *The Humming Room*; the work forces those who enter to cross the mirror between artist and public. Visitors thus take on, for a brief moment, the role of the artist. They are free to forget where they are, what brought them there, and even who it was who gave

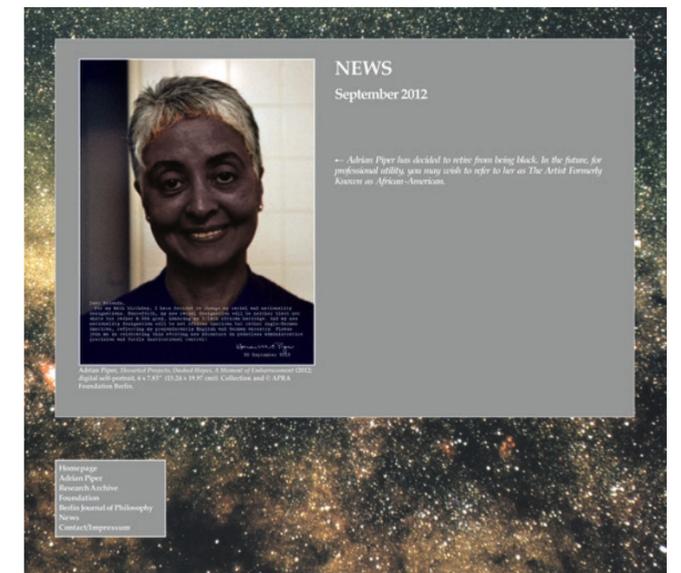


Fig. 3  
*Thwarted Projects, Dashed Hopes, A Moment of Embarrassment*. 2012  
 Digital file  
 Dimensions variable  
 Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin

them such mysterious instructions. Until they exit the room, the agency is all theirs: their private tunes to hum, their sole encounters to stumble upon, and their own show to run.

*Adrian Piper: A Synthesis of Intuitions, 1965–2016*, the artist's 2018 retrospective at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, will be the first time in MoMA's history that the work of a living artist will occupy the entirety of its sixth-floor special-exhibitions gallery. And in this presentation, *The Humming Room* will undergo a slight but significant change. Rather than inhabiting a separate room, as it has in various iterations of *Do It*, the only times it had been staged until now, *The Humming Room* will be positioned two-thirds of the way into the vast spaces of the show—slightly altering the strict chronological order of the works up to that point—as an obligatory passageway, the only way to get from the first two-thirds of the exhibition to the last. This placement doubles the inconvenience of failing to agree to the terms of the work: uncooperative visitors exclude themselves not only from *The Humming Room* but from the rest of the exhibition—which they will either have to miss entirely or else gain access to by backtracking and reentering at the other end. But for both the visitors who do go through and those who do not, the concept of authority might suddenly signify differently—as arbitrary, perhaps, or as ridiculous as the instruction to hum a tune. On this particular placement of the work, Piper has recalled,

The suggestion to situate *The Humming Room* two-thirds of the way through the exhibition, and to require viewers to pass through it in order to access the final third of the show, was Glenn [Lowry]'s brilliant idea. As soon as he described it, I realized that we had to do it. The work that precedes it is from the 1990s, a period in which I was battling American society literally every day, to protect my civil rights as an American citizen and as a high-functioning professional, as well as the singularity of my personal identity and the value of my work. I was acutely aware of being on the receiving end of repressive forces from many different directions, and all of this found expression in the work of that period. People often say about it, "Why's she so angry? She can pass for white!"—as though somehow that were cause for less anger rather than more. But if you take the aggressiveness and confrontationality of the work as a measure of the aggressiveness and confrontationality of the racist and misogynistic attacks I was fighting, it becomes clear that the work is a fully proportional and justifiable reaction to them. This reaction is what viewers of this work are required to deal with and absorb as they move through this part of the exhibition, regardless of whether they themselves have racist and misogynistic attitudes or not! It's a very intense and difficult journey for any viewer. It's why I refer to this section of the exhibition as the Corridor of Pain. Following it with the empty, inviting, cheerful space of *The Humming Room* provides an open environment for relaxed improvisation, a kind of pressure valve that allows viewers to let off steam, to release the anger and tension and anxiety that always build up in reaction to the work of the 1990s, by humming. Instead of shouting or having a heart attack or punching one of the guards

or posting a virulent message on social media or writing a scathing review in order to release that anger, viewers can transform it into a tune that they like and that they can hum as long and as loud as need be, until that dark cloud of pent-up emotion floats up on the air and dissipates into music. This interlude makes it so much easier to perceive clearly and on its own terms the more recent work of the 2000s, which moves beyond those issues—in the same way and at the same time that I was moving beyond American society and preparing to emigrate to Germany. In a way *The Humming Room* is like the departure hall at airport check-in, where you sit and wait and make ready to leave; you let go of the preoccupations attached to where you've been, in order to refocus your attention on where you're going. In the final third of the exhibition, you find out where I'm going, and where that more recent work is taking you.<sup>5</sup>

Piper's work has confronted viewers in similar ways in earlier pieces, notably in *Food for the Spirit* (1971) (fig. 4 and pages 186–93), a sequence of fourteen gelatin silver prints showing a mirror reflection of Piper holding a camera pointed at herself, in the mirror, and at the viewer: always in the same pose, with or without clothing, in various degrees of darkness. The work came about during a summer when Piper was obsessively studying Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and felt herself in danger of disappearing:

I rigged up a camera and tape recorder next to the mirror so that every time the fear of losing myself overtook me and drove me to the "reality check" of the mirror, I was able both to record my physical appearance objectively, and also record myself on tape repeating the passage in the *Critique* that was currently driving me to self-transcendence.<sup>6</sup>

But in the photographs Piper seems to stare as much at us as at herself, so that the work ultimately feels less about depicting the artist than about bringing us into the work. When we lock gazes with the artist, we become the object of her camera. The photographs become an improbable mirror image of the viewer on the verge of disappearance not only literally, into the darkness of the room, but also metaphorically, forcing us back on to the question of how, often unconsciously, we differentiate ourselves. Captured by the camera pointed toward us but perhaps not resembling the person represented in the image facing us, we nevertheless, despite all evidence, become her reflection, and she becomes ours.

From very early on in Piper's practice, the relationship between viewers—exhibition visitors, passersby, or fixed audience—and artwork has been paramount. Piper belongs to a generation of artists who emerged in New York right after the advent of what is called (much too reductively) Minimalism, in which works of art exist through their spatial surroundings, often completed by the viewer's physical engagement with them. In many ways Piper, in parallel with artists such as Hanne Darboven, Dan Graham, and Vito Acconci, liberated themselves from Minimalism by pushing its logic further. Some of them rejected the object altogether. By not necessarily



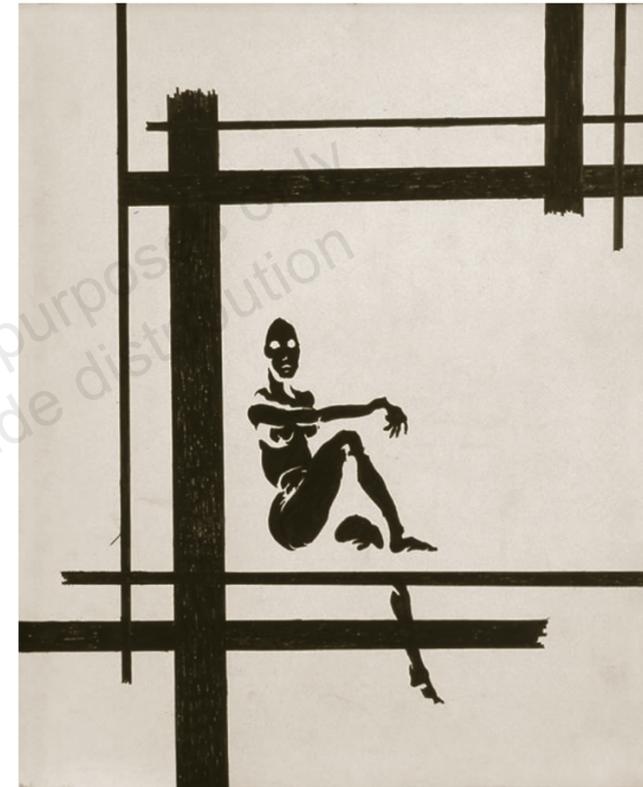
Fig. 4  
*Food for the Spirit* #8. 1971  
Gelatin silver print (printed 1997)  
14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 14<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (37 × 37.7 cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Family of Man Fund  
Detail: one of fourteen



*LSD Mirror Self-Portrait*. 1965  
Charcoal and colored pencil on paper  
22½ × 17¼ in. (57.2 × 43.8 cm)  
Collection Liz and Eric Lefkofsky



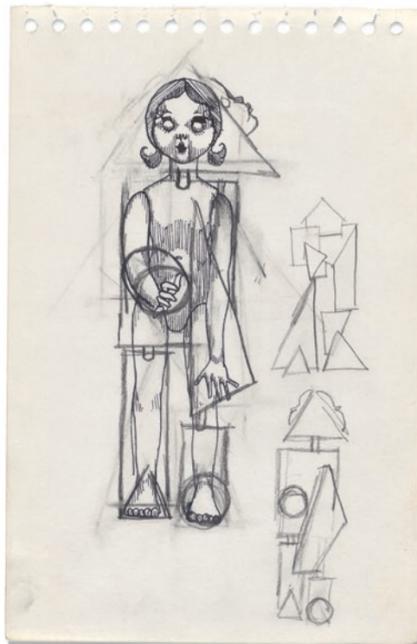
*LSD Alice [Study for Alice Down the Rabbit Hole]. 1965*  
Felt-tip pen, ballpoint pen, and pencil on paper  
11<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 9 in. (30 × 22.8 cm)  
Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin



*Negative Self-Portrait. 1966*  
Felt-tip pen on paper  
17<sup>1</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 14<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in. (45 × 37.5 cm)  
Emi Fontana Collection



*LSD Self-Portrait from the Inside Out. 1966*  
Acrylic on canvas  
40 × 30 in. (101.6 × 76.2 cm)  
Emi Fontana Collection

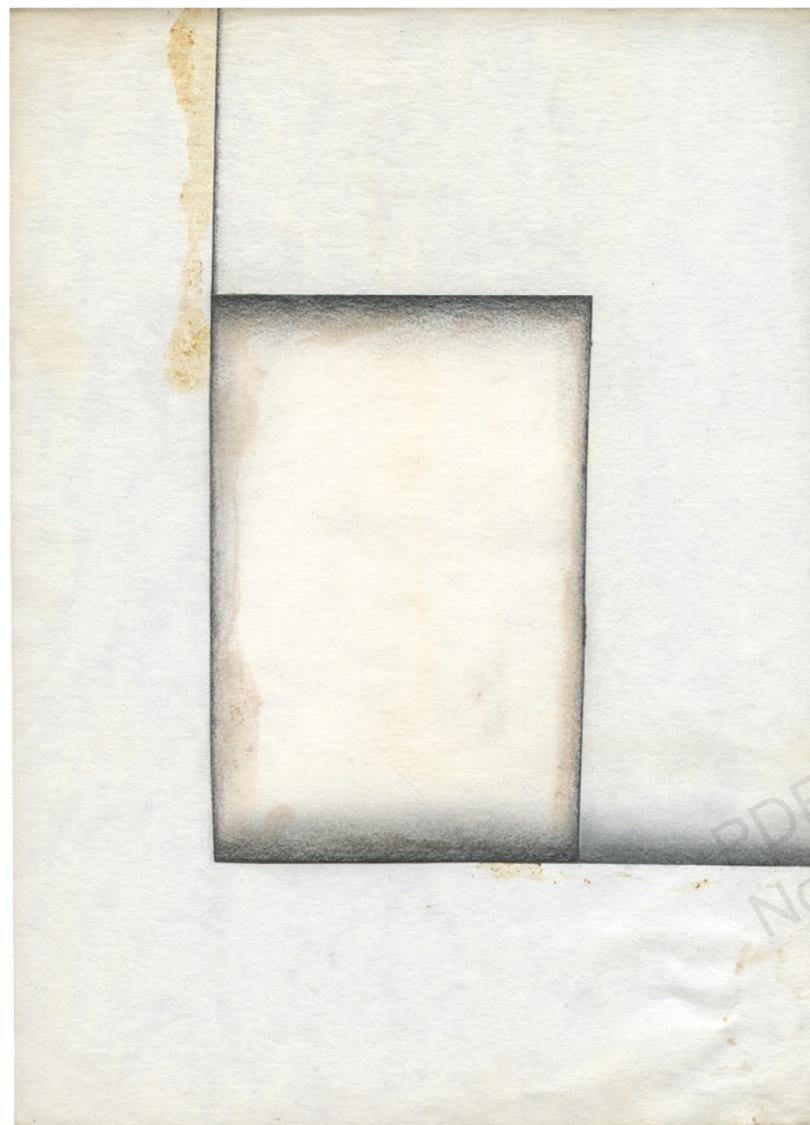


The Barbie Doll Drawings. 1967 (see page 108)  
 Details:  
 Barbie Doll Drawing #1  
 Barbie Doll Drawing #33

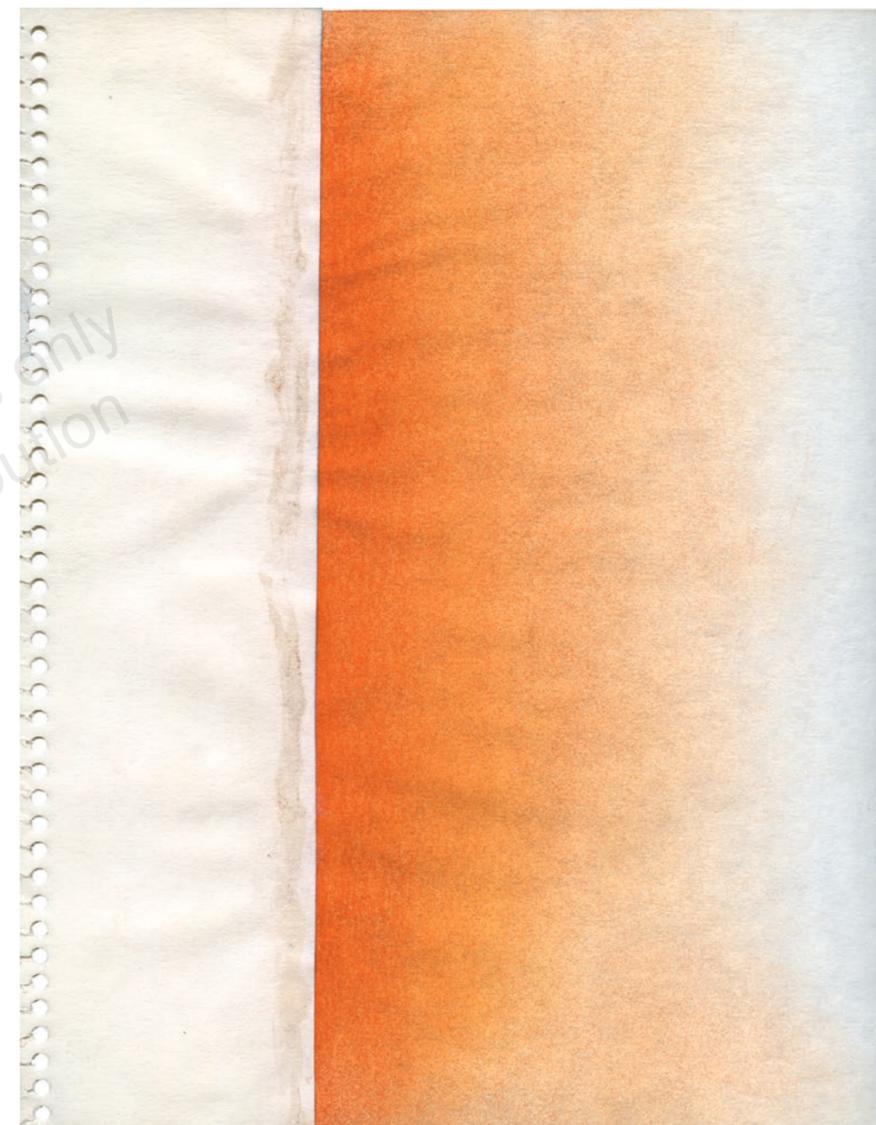
Barbie Doll Drawing #4  
 Barbie Doll Drawing #8



Untitled Self-Portrait. 1967 (later signed "1968")  
 Pencil and charcoal on paper  
 11 x 8½ in. (27.9 x 21.6 cm)  
 Collection Sands and Robin Murray-Wassink, WASSINIQUE INC., Amsterdam



*Drawings about Paper and Writings about Words #11. 1967*  
 Cut-and-pasted paper and pencil on notebook paper  
 11 × 8½ in. (27.9 × 21.6 cm)  
 Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin

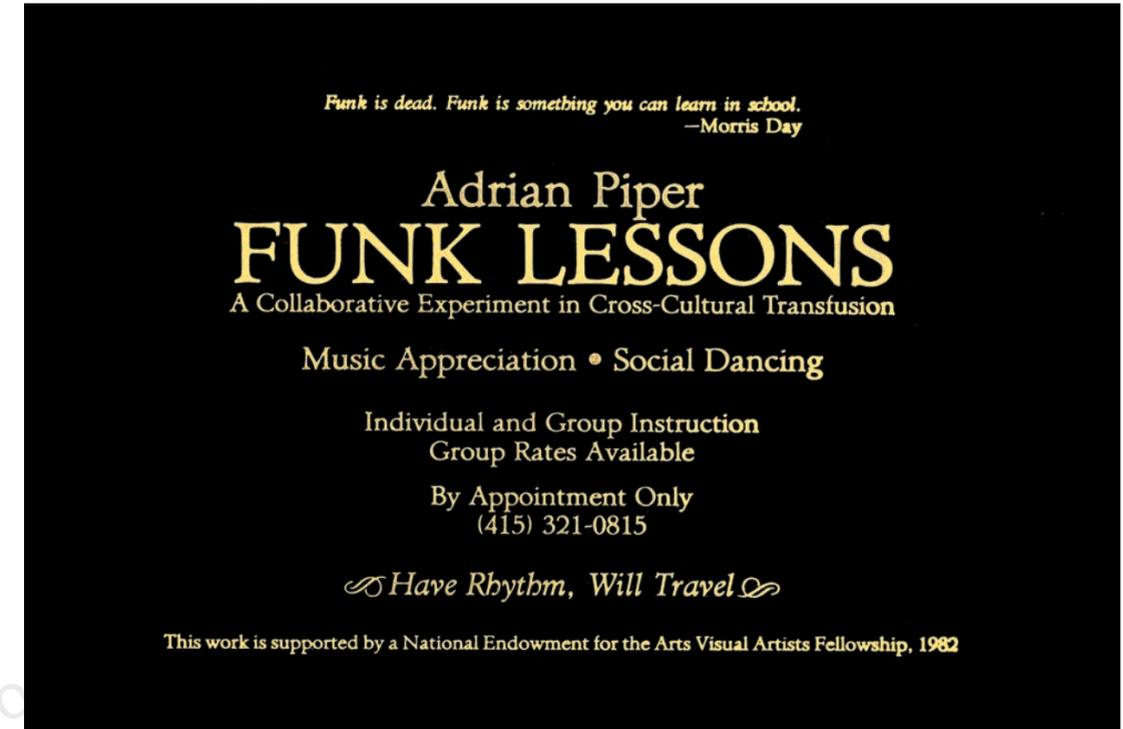


*Drawings about Paper and Writings about Words #16. 1967*  
 Cut-and-pasted paper and pastel on notebook paper  
 11 × 8½ in. (27.9 × 21.6 cm)  
 Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin





*Funk Lessons: A Collaborative Experiment in Cross-Cultural Transfusion*. 1984  
 Photolithograph  
 24 x 18 in. (61 x 45.7 cm)  
 The Museum of Modern Art Library, New York



*Funk Lessons Direct Mail Advertisement*. 1983  
 Letterpress card with gold leaf  
 5 3/4 x 8 3/4 in. (14.6 x 22.2 cm)  
 Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin

*Funk Lessons*. 1983–84  
 Documentation of the group performance at University of California, Berkeley,  
 November 6, 1983. Color photograph  
 Collection Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin





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The exhibition will travel to:

Hammer Museum, Los Angeles  
September 30, 2018–January 6, 2019

Haus der Kunst, Munich  
April 12–September 22, 2019



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*Decide Who You Are: Right-Hand (Constant) Panel.*  
1992

Screenprinted text on paper, mounted on foam core  
72 × 42 in. (182.8 × 106.7 cm)  
Various public and private collections

Back cover:  
*Drawings about Paintings and Writings about  
Words #5.* 1967  
Pencil and charcoal on notebook paper  
11 × 8½ in. (27.9 × 21.6 cm)  
Collection Louise Fishman