

From Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma, 1978



MATRIX is supported in part  
by a grant from the National  
Endowment for the Arts, a  
Federal Agency.

Immediately upon entering the MATRIX space the museum visitor is actively participating in Adrian Piper's Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma. With a persistence that is dazzling, an unidentified voice (the artist's) directly addresses the visitor, asking a series of intriguing questions about the visitor's own personal reactions to the installation itself. The questions merit careful consideration but so incessantly are they spoken that the listener is not through one thought before being delivered of another. Understandably the museum visitor is thrown off balance when realizing that his or her responses -- though they may legitimately remain private and known only to the self -- are the primary focus of Adrian Piper's piece.

Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma is not about the audio tape nor about the single puzzling photographic image on the wall. Rather it is about our own responses to these elements as strategically presented by the artist in the MATRIX gallery, and it is about our own expectations of contemporary art exhibitions in general.

Introspective examination of cognitive and creative processes and serious consideration of social and political systems have become important subjects for the visual arts in recent times. Many artists over the past fifteen years have made "art about art" and even "art about art about art." Much of their work has been intelligible to only a handful of art world colleagues. While some of these artists have often appeared to be on an intellectual bender intended to shut out the general public, Piper had an early adverse reaction to such exclusivity.

Strongly critical of the prevailing system by which art is exhibited, judged and marketed, Piper chose to function as much as possible outside this system. She has succeeded where most others have failed because she has not courted acceptance, approval

or financial support from the art world she has rejected. She has consistently maintained a remarkable degree of control over her work, determining how and even if it is to be shared with others. In short, Adrian Piper has resolutely refused to be a victim.

Initially her work outside the system consisted of improvised unannounced "performances" in public places and writings in which she clarified her own position as an artist. Since then she has occasionally and selectively placed her work in an art world context. She has done this when the context itself can be effectively utilized as a foil for her work.

Quite openly and quite consciously Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma makes use of the MATRIX situation (i.e. already established visitor expectations of this particular gallery space) to structure a strong experience for the Atheneum visitor. The photograph is intentionally lighted to present the viewer with not only the troubling sight of angry, forward-moving black people but also a mirror reflection of the viewer's own image. The audio taped inquiries are carefully phrased and timed to advance the visitor from passivity to self-reflection and on to revelation. Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma swiftly guides the museum visitor into face-to-face confrontation with the complexity of his or her own relationships to art, to artists and to some severely problematic aspects of society today.

By making works of art that are not marketable commodities Piper has managed to separate the aesthetic consideration of her work from the usual issue of value as investment. This separation is an emphatic one because she has simultaneously established herself in a second career which, unlike the first, is a financially supportive one. Piper is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy on the faculty at the University of



The boat people, like this Vietnamese woman refugee and her child seeking shelter from the hot sun in Thailand's Gulf of Siam, know best

the brutality of the pirates of Southeast Asia, who also prey on local fishermen. (AP file photo)

**Gosh, what a tragedy . . .**



The boat people, like this Vietnamese woman refugee and her child seeking shelter from the hot sun in Thailand's Gulf of Siam, know best

the brutality of the pirates of Southeast Asia, who also prey on local fishermen. (AP file photo)



The boat people, like this Vietnamese woman refugee and her child seeking shelter from the hot sun in Thailand's Gulf of Siam, know best

the brutality of the pirates of Southeast Asia, who also prey on local fishermen. (AP file photo)

**(sigh)**



The boat people, like this Vietnamese woman refugee and her child seeking shelter from the hot sun in Thailand's Gulf of Siam, know best

the brutality of the pirates of Southeast Asia, who also prey on local fishermen.

(AP file photo)

**Is this all? Where's the art?**

Michigan.

Altering the priorities in her own life, Piper stepped outside the narrow confines of the art world. From her unique vantage point and using her formidable talents she challenges some of our most basic assumptions. The eloquent works she creates are provocatively and profoundly ethical to the core.

Born in New York City in 1948, Adrian Piper received an A.A. in fine arts from the School of Visual Arts in 1969 and a B.A. in philosophy (summa cum laude) from City College of New York in 1974. Last year she was awarded an Individual Artists Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Later this year she will receive a Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University. Piper currently lives and teaches in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

On the occasion of this exhibition, the Wadsworth Atheneum is publishing a multiple work of art by Piper entitled Where's the Art?. It is designed to fit into the MATRIX notebook and like the MATRIX artistsheets will be available free.

Andrea Miller-Keller  
Curator of MATRIX

One reason for making and exhibiting a work is to induce a reaction or change in the viewer. The stronger the work, the stronger its impact and the more total (physiological, psychological, intellectual, etc.) the reaction of the viewer. The strength of such a work is a function of the viewer's response to it. The work is a catalytic agent, in that it promotes a change in another entity (the viewer) without undergoing any permanent change itself. The value of the work may then be measured in terms of the strength of the change, rather than whether the change accords positively or negatively with some aesthetic standard. In this sense, the work as such is non-existent except when it functions as a medium of change between the artist and the viewer.

Adrian Piper  
From Art as Catalysis, 1970

PLEASE NOTE: Adrian Piper will deliver a MATRIX Evening Lecture on Thursday, March 6, 1980 at 7:30 p.m.

Art for the Artworld Surface, a second installation piece by Ms. Piper, can be seen during the month of March at Real Art Ways, 197 Asylum Street, Hartford

Works in MATRIX:

Aspects of the Liberal Dilemma, 1978/1980, six-minute audio tape loop and one black and white photograph, c. 22" x 22". This is the second version of a piece originally made for an untitled exhibition curated by Janelle Reiring for Artists Space, New York City (September 1978).

Where's the Art?, 1980, four-page multiple (available free), edition of 3,500, published by the Wadsworth Atheneum.

Selected one-woman exhibition:  
Montclair State College, Montclair, NJ '76.

Selected Performances:

Streets of NYC, Catalysis Series '70-'71; Streets of NYC, Untitled streetworks '71-'73; Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Untitled '73; Streets of NYC, The Mythic Being '73-'74; The Fine Arts Building, NYC, Some Reflective Surfaces '75 (also at Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC '76); Cambridge, MA, Untitled streetworks '75-'76; Berlin and Heidelberg, Untitled streetworks '77-'78.

Selected group exhibitions:

Dwan Gallery, NYC Language III '69 (and Language IV '70); Seattle Art Museum, 557,087 '69 (also to Vancouver Art Gallery '70); New York Cultural Center, NYC Conceptual Art and Conceptual Aspects '70; Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, OH Art in the Mind '70; Museum of Modern Art, NYC Information '70; Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT 26 Contemporary Women Artists '71; Paris Biennale '71, '77; California Institute of the Arts, Valencia c. 7,500, also shown at the Wadsworth Atheneum; Philadelphia Civic Center Focus: Woman's Work American Art '74; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago Bodyworks '75; The Fine Arts Building, NYC Lives '75; Independent Curators Incorporated, Washington, D.C. The Sense of Self: From Self-Portrait to Autobiography '78 (travelled); Artists Space, NYC, Untitled Exhibition '78.

Selected bibliography by Piper:

"Withdrawal Statement" (from New York Cultural Center, May '70), Six Years: The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972..., ed. Lucy Lippard, Praeger (NYC) '73, p. 168 (see also p. 62, 70, 234+).

"In Support of Meta-Art," Artforum, vol. 12, no. 2 (October '73), p. 79+.

Talking to Myself: The On-going Autobiography of an Art Object, Hossman (Hamburg), MTL (Bruxelles) '74.

"Notes on The Mythic Being: I/You (Her)," Individuals: Post-Movement Art in America, ed. by Alan Sondheim, E.F. Dutton (NYC) '77, p. 267+.

"Catalysis: An Interview with Adrian Piper," The Drama Review, vol. 16, no. 1 (March '72), interview with Lucy Lippard, p. 76+.

"Political Self-Portrait #2," The Sense of Self: From Self-Portrait to Autobiography, Independent Curators Incorporated (Washington, D.C.), p. 33.

"Utility, Publicity and Manipulation," Ethics, vol. 88, no. 3 (April '78), p. 189+.

"Public Performance: Private Memory," (Roselee Goldberg) Studio International, vol. 192, no. 982 (July-August '76), p. 19+.

Selected bibliography about Piper:

Perreault, John. "Art," The Village Voice (March 27, '69), p. 15+.

Kosuth, Joseph. "Art After Philosophy II," Studio International, vol. 178, no. 916 (November '69), p. 161.

Mayer, Rosemary. "Performance & Experience," Arts Magazine, vol. 47, no. 3 (December '72), p. 33+.

Lippard, Lucy. "Transformation Art," Ms., vol. 4, no. 4 (October '75), p. 33+.

Lippard, Lucy. "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art," Art in America, vol. 64, no. 3 (May-June '76), p. 73+.

Lippard, Lucy. "Caring: Five Political Artists," Studio International, vol. 193, no. 987 (Summer '78), p. 197+.

Kingsley, April. "Art Goes Underground," The Village Voice (October 16, '78), p. 122.