

Re-Member the Audience: Adrian Piper's Mythic Being Advertisements

Smith, Cherise, Art Journal

On page fifty-

six of the September 27, 1973, issue of The Village Voice, one finds a sea of advertisements arranged in vertical columns by size and visual "weight." Scanning the page, one sees that John Fitzgibbon of the Open Eyegroup offers acting lessons for beginners, the Jean Cocteau Theatre is playing Medea, Waiting for Godot, and The Lesson, and Steven Baker presents AllMale Revue. The advertisement containing a photograph of a figure with a big, curly Afro, mustache, and dark sunglasses might be overlooked, were it not for the bulbous-eyed, Mr. Heat Miser-

looking mask of the neighboring adthat draws attention to this portion of the page. The head and shoulders of the figure appear in the lower left quadrant of the frame. He stands in front of a plain, light-

colored backdrop, wearing sunglasses and a black turtleneck and holding a cigar to his mouth. To the right of the figure are bubbles that increase in size and lead toward a thought balloon. Rather than announcing auditions, lessons, or an upcoming play in the demanding, impersonal tone of an advertisement-

language, the handwritten text, reading "TODAY WAS THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL. THE ONLY DECENT BOYS IN MY CLASS ARE ROBBIE & CLYDE. I THINK I LIKE CLYDE. 9/21/61," is oddly personal and anachronistic.

This single-

panel object is not an advertisement in the usual, commercialsense: it doesn't seem to sell anything. Rather, it is one piece in a series that is, in turn, part of a larger project, titled The Mythic Being, that the artist Adrian Piper worked on from 1973 through 1975. She began work on The Mythic Being when she was twenty-

four, bringing to life the fictional male persona, pictured in this advertisement, by dressing in "drag" and wearing an Afro wig, mustache, sunglasses, and "working class" clothes.¹ During the two years that Piper adopted the male form, the Mythic Being performed on the street in public environments, roaming around Manhattan and Cambridge, Massachusetts, riding the subway, and attending concerts and movies. Once, he even (fake-

) mugged another man. He appeared in a film as well as in private performances that are documented in still photographs.² The resultant products are diverse and manifold, yet together they demonstrate that "dispersing" The Mythic Being was a major thrust of the project.³

To distribute the fictional persona, Piper devised a complex mathematical structure, like those she employed in earlier works, through which she would "isolate" and mine 144 passages from her diary, mount the same number of performances, then "publicize" and circulate the same number of two-

dimensional works through a "widely distributed newspaper."⁴ The artist did not follow through with the strict numerical component of the project. However, sixteen more single-panel, comiclike works were published, and all of them are anchored by the same photograph. The first advertisement appeared in the "Theatre" section of the *Voice*; the remainder were published in the "Gallery" section roughly once a month from October 25, 1973, until February 2, 1975.⁵

The use of alternative exhibition venues, such as newspapers, magazines, and public spaces, and unconventional methods of distribution, including mail and mass-

communication systems, are, as historians as diverse as Lucy Lippard and Benjamin Buchloh have pointed out, among the standard strategies Conceptual artists employed to critique the gallery-museum system and the commercial art market it supports.⁶ The Mythic Being project participates in that history, and this essay explores how Piper used *The Village Voice* as an alternative space and mode to exhibit and deliver the Mythic Being advertisement-

works. It considers the formal strategies Piper employed in the making and dissemination of the Mythic Being advertisements and compares them to publicity vehicles used by other artists during that time. In publishing the ad-

works in the *Voice*, Piper used strategies that approximate contemporary marketing practices as a way to subvert and critique commercial institutionalization of her art.⁷ The artist's implementation of mass-

media and marketing tactics had another effect as well: it increased her artistic capital. My goal is to re-

member or, at the very least, better understand both the real audience that encountered the ad-works and the imaginary audience that might discover them, because the advertisement-works testify to Piper's interest in engaging the public or, more to the point, a specific public.

Methodologically speaking, conjuring up the reactions of naive and uninformed viewers who, no doubt, happened upon this and the other sixteen Mythic Being ad-

works that Piper placed in *The Village Voice* from the two-

year period is tricky: it is difficult for twenty-first-

century historians, for whom the Mythic Being series is a well-

known if enigmatic project, to ascertain whether these works grabbed attention, to imagine how reader-

viewers responded to them, to contemplate whether their seriality was recognized, to hypothesize about whether they garnered a devoted readership or following, to speculate about how the symbols signifying the figure's gender, race, and class might have been interpreted, and to determine if (art-world) viewer-

readers knew that Piper's identity was cloaked by that of this mysterious figure. Trying to reconstruct the audience is slippery because the Mythic Being performances, for example, were generally mounted in the space of a non-art-

world public that, one must assume, did not know it was witnessing performance art, which, subsequently, resulted in the lack of recorded accounts and responses. The Village Voice advertisement works present a unique opportunity to flesh out Piper's and Mythic Being's audience.⁸

I would like to begin that process by traveling back in time momentarily, to the late 1960s and early 1970s, prior to Piper's Mythic Being project, to a time when the artist's work had not yet become a part of the hallowed Conceptual art "hall of fame" and before it had been co-opted as representative of "identity politics" art.⁹ Back then, she was a practicing Conceptualist whose work had, by 1969, been shown at the Dwan Gallery and Paula Cooper Gallery, two of the leading exhibition spaces for Conceptual art in New York. She had been included in major group exhibitions of Conceptual art, such as *557,087* at the Seattle Art Museum (1969), *Plans and Projects as Art* at the Kunsthalle Bern (1969), and *Information* at the Museum of Modern Art (1970).¹⁰ In spite of these early successes, Piper reports that, by the early 1970s, she had been "dropped by the art world" because certain of its representatives learned some of the particulars of her identity: namely, that she is a woman and black.¹¹ That experience, in conjunction with the social, political, and military upheavals in the world, changed who she was as an artist, student, and person in the world. Piper reconceptualized her practice: the body—that is, her body-figured prominently, and her exploration of subject-

object relations was activated. She launched the *Catalysis* works (1970–71), a series of public performances that radically and humorously brought attention to herself while confronting the audience, and *Food for the Spirit* (1971) a group of private performances designed to "anchor" the artist "to the physical world" during a period of intense philosophical and metaphysical study.¹² In her next project, *The Mythic Being*, Piper continued in the street-performance vein, exchanging the *Catalysis* props, such as the rancid-smelling clothes and freshly painted shirts, for the jeans, turtleneck, sunglasses, Afro wig, and mustache that constitute the Mythic Being male persona. This period marks a shift in the artist's practice in which social and political subject matter is incorporated with formalist concerns.

Piper's use of *The Village Voice* as an outlet for parts of the *Mythic Being* project reflects some of her larger artistic and political interests from that time. For instance, she was concerned about the commercial appropriation of her work: "I don't make concrete, spatiotemporally unique, discrete objects that cannot be multiply reproduced. ... I don't rely on discrete, spatially unique art contexts for presentation of the work. I utilize art contexts only in their information-disseminating capacities." In addition, she felt "victimized... by the recondite and elitist character of contemporary art" and recognized that "the failure of communication between the art-educated and the non-art-educated [is] closely related to the . . . socioeconomic discrepancies that exist between rich and poor." Piper's appropriation of the single-panel comic format in the *Mythic Being* advertisements can be seen, then, as a way to make her work "potentially as accessible as comic books or television."¹³ In that respect, placing the ad-works in the *Voice* is an infiltration of "low," popular art into the commercial space of "high" art. Moreover, the use of the single-panel comic convention, a format known for its serial structure and dispersion, is a sly and erudite nod at the seriality prevalent in art practices of the time.

Likewise, Piper's integration of text into the *Mythic Being* advertisements is more than a reflection of the Conceptualist problematizing of how language means. Rather, the *Mythic Being* texts are peculiarly private. They are, in fact, personal thoughts that "deal with important events," which the artist excerpted from passages in her diary. These passages became "mantras" that Piper would recite over and over before and during the mounting of (public and private) performances in order to transform herself into and remain in character. The artist reports that the ritualized recitation functioned to assign the sentiments to her mythic character and "disperse" the troublesome moments into the world. The passages also encourage engagement by readers because they contain floating signifiers that render open and inhabitable the positions of "I" and "my." This was purposeful: Piper imagined that the sentiments expressed in the passages—in this case, regarding a budding sexuality—and contained in the ads were "common" to all people and that *Voice* readers would empathize with them.¹⁴ Stripping the personally significant memories of power required that they be scattered among the audience.

The *Mythic Being* advertisements also show Piper's increased attention to matters of race and gender. Interestingly, Piper did not address the racial specifics of the persona in her writing from the time. In 1980, a full five years after she had finished performing the persona, Piper described it as her "seeming opposite: a third-world, working-

class, overtly hostile male." Some years later, as her critical interest in racism grew, she eventually referred to the character as a "young black male." During the period, she calls the Mythic Being "the third world."¹⁵ The "third world" generally refers to the underdeveloped areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where people with darker complexions live, thus the phrase "third-world" was and, for the most part, continues to be synonymous with "raced" people (whether red, black, brown, or yellow). Piper's word choice suggests a political affiliation that was popular among leftist people of color. Using this term allows her to circumvent the specifics of the Mythic Being's racial or ethnic designation. She also adopts anthropological-sounding language to define her idea of a mythic being: "A mythic being [is] a fictitious or abstract personality that is generally part of a story or folktale used to explain or sanctify social or legal institutions or natural phenomena." The "mythic" persona would be "an immaterial art entity," "a personality who is at the same time not an individual" with a personal history and experiences.¹⁶ In other words, the persona had a mythic rather than specific place, history, and context. In fact, the Mythic Being's history would be culled from Piper's own.

Regardless of Piper's intention to create a generalized male figure, some of the signs she used, such as the large Afro and black turtleneck, signal the black American male nationalist, while others, including the mustache and cigar, point to an international radicalism personified in the figures of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Similarly, in her writing from the time, she hints at the Mythic Being's racial otherness by calling him "an alien presence in the heart world, but a familiar presence in the rest of the world."¹⁷ Yet in spite of Piper's use of ethnic and cultural signifiers, this and other *Voice* ads stand in contrast to other photo-works from the project, such as *The Mythic Being: I Embodiment*, *The Mythic Being: It Doesn't Matter*, and *The Mythic Being: Getting Back*, in which the character is portrayed as possessing an exaggerated hypermasculinity that is bound to aggressive behaviors like "cruising whitewomen," adopting intimidating postures, and "mugging" people.¹⁸ By contrast, the ad-works depict the Mythic Being as an androgynous, liminal, or third-sex being. The figure looks like a man, but has thoughts that often seem those of a girl or woman. Piper's placing of a gender-, class-, and racially-indeterminate figure in the newspaper piques the audience's curiosity and challenges its assumptions; these actions are in keeping with her increased awareness of issues of class, gender, and race.

The *Mythic Being* ad-works were not Piper's first appearance in or use of *The Village Voice*; rather, they are part of her ongoing relationship with the newspaper and continued interest in alternative venues of exhibition.

n and modes of delivery.¹⁹ In fact, Piper had hired ad space in the *Voice* on two earlier occasions: first, to announce the March 1969 exhibition that the *0 to 9 Press* published, and second, to place one of her *Area Relocation* pieces in the "Gallery" section of the *Voice* in the May 29, 1969, issue. Her work had also been mentioned in John Perreault's popular "Art" column several times.

The *Mythic Being* advertisements are just one installment of Piper's enduring critique of and engagement with traditional venues and experimentation with alternative modes of distributing art. This experimentation began with her first solo exhibition in March 1969 and reveals, on the part of the artist, an elegance of thinking that marketing specialists could certainly admire. Marketing can be defined as the execution and "planning [of] the conceptualization, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals." Further, marketing strategy is grounded in three principles, sometimes called the "3 Cs": company/competencies, competition, and consumer.²⁰ In conjunction with the "3 Cs" operate the "4 Ps": product, which "refers to brands, packaging, product attributes, and new product development," price, which "relates to final selling price . . . trade prices, and agreement of trade margins," place, which correlates to "distribution . . . and getting goods to market," and promotion, which "concerns the best way to communicate or publicize the product."²¹ In the scenario I propose, the "company" refers to Piper's art-making practice. She was in "competition" with other New York-based Conceptual artists working at the time to "promote" her "product" to the "consumers." To ensure her target audience consumed the product, Piper distributed it in untraditional ways and exchanged it at prices that were decidedly below market. We will see that, for the artist-turned-marketing-

specialist, the cost outlay was rather low, but the returns could be significant. The brand "Adrian Piper" could be successfully promoted, and her product(art) could be actively exchanged; at the same time, her practices remained within the limits of acceptability that are demarcated by Conceptual art's critique of institutions.²²

For her first solo exhibition, Piper's artwork consisted of a mimeographed booklet that was published by Vito Acconci's and Rosemary Mayer's *0 to 9 Press*. She distributed the product by mailing it directly to audience members' addresses rather than gathering a group of objects in the physical space of a gallery.²³ The method of distribution is significant because Piper effectively bypassed the gallery and museum system that governs an artist's introduction and exposure by mailing her exhibition directly to the target audience in the hope that it would be consumed in these virtual venues. She did not send the booklets to just anyone: she sent them to a mailing list that she borrowed (without permission) from Seth Siegelaub, the organizer and producer of important Conceptual art exhibitions, for whom she worked as a gallery attendant.²⁴ By using his list, she reached an

audience that consisted of artists such as Yvonne Rainer, Robert Smithson, and Eva Hesse, and critics including Perreault, Siegelaub, and Willoughby Sharp. Had she mounted an exhibition in the physical space of a gallery, she could almost guarantee that the target audience of important and influential art workers would not go to see her first art-showing effort.

Thinking of Piper's mail-

art exhibition in relation to marketing demonstrates that, even at twenty-one years of age, the artist was tactically shrewd and intellectually rigorous, in addition to having a keen sense of humor.²⁵ Her use of mail art was in keeping with that of her peers, but the "borrowing" of an established critic's mailing list to reach a target audience demonstrates a healthy professional ambition to establish a dialogue with and insert herself into a particular community of art workers. Indeed, in our current era of direct-mail advertising, mail bombs, and anthrax-laced letters, it is difficult not to see the mail-art exhibition as a guerrilla act on the audience: after all, Piper's art literally infiltrated recipients' houses.²⁶

Piper had, by the launch of the Mythic Being series in 1973, also used performance as a way to circumnavigate the gallery and museum system and distribute her art at little or no cost, while simultaneously increasing recognition of the "Adrian Piper" brand.²⁷ She had participated in a festival of street art called Street Works, organized by the Village Voice art critic Perreault in the spring of 1969, which brought together disparate artists who staged events at specific times and locations in Manhattan.²⁸ These actions undermined the position of galleries and museums in the distribution of art at the same time that they signaled a desire to reach two distinct but non-exclusive audiences: a non-art-world public that would be unaware it was witnessing art and an art-world-specific public of artist-participants whom might happen across one another.

Piper continued to explore the relationship between art and audience and establish a more direct method of distribution, while prefiguring the temporary alteration of her appearance with costume for the Mythic Being, in her Catalysis performances from 1970-

71. For Catalysis I, Piper wore rancid and stinky clothes on the subway during rush hour and while browsing through a popular bookstore on a busy evening. A photograph of Catalysis III shows pedestrians giving the artist wide berth upon noticing that her shirt is soaked with the wet paint that the placard she wears announces. Similarly, in Catalysis IV, Piper stuffed a towel in her mouth and, with distended cheeks and towel hanging down to her chest, rode the bus, subway, and Empire State Building elevator.

The photographs documenting the *Catalysis* performances give lie to the notion that Piper traveled through these public settings as a passive object. Effectively, these were provocative actions that the artist performed on the audience. In the essay "Art as *Catalysis*" from August 1970, she writes that "one reason for making and exhibiting a work is to induce a reaction or change in the viewer." She adds that "the strongest impact that can be received by a person in the passive capacity of viewer is the impact of human confrontation (within oneself or between people). It is the most aggressive and the most threatening, possibly because the least predictable and the least controllable in its consequences."²⁹ When studying photographs from the *Catalysis* actions, it seems that they were designed to stimulate reactions from non-art-world passersby.³⁰ An experiment in the externalization of difference and exploration of the subject-object dichotomy, the *Catalysis* works also demonstrate Piper's desire to bypass museums and galleries and challenge audiences.

Piper's use of the mail system, performance, and publications as alternative modes of delivery is abundantly clear, but, in regard to audience, one crucial question remains. Why did she circulate the *Mythic Being* ad-works in *The Village Voice*, rather than publish them in other New York-based publications, such as the art magazines *Artforum* and *Avalanche*, the daily broadsheets *The New York Times* and *Daily News*, or the weekly *Amsterdam News*?³¹ There are some easy answers to the above question—namely, that the young artist simply could not afford space in the art magazines and the daily, large-distribution newspapers, or that she was not interested in reaching the constituencies of the *Daily News*, *Amsterdam News*, and *Times*. But that tells only part of the story. Another part, perhaps more difficult to reconstruct, is how Piper's publishing the works in the *Voice* reflected her intent to reach a specific audience.³² It is important to remember that all of the above publications represent various points on the ideological, political, and demographic spectrum—from the progressive, African American-centered *Amsterdam News* (based in Harlem, where Piper grew up) to the (white) liberal but staid *New York Times*—and, correspondingly, each has a divergent readership. In other words, if the artist had selected a publication other than *The Village Voice*, then the ad-works would have been encountered by a distinct audience that would receive them in a dramatically different way.

Because each provided space where artists could think out loud about and exhibit their increasingly dematerialized work, Artforum and Avalanche warrant a bit more attention in relation to the issue of audience. At the time, Artforum had shed its skin as a West Coast-specific art magazine and was establishing itself as the dominant voice of and leading advocate for a particular type of art and style of criticism. With a readership of about seventeen thousand, the magazine was becoming an increasingly commercialized endeavor whose many advertisers and advertisements, some of the editorial staff feared, would threaten to overtake editorial content.⁵⁴ Piper recalls that Artforum's content tended toward conservatism.⁵⁴ Avalanche was an alternative to Artforum. It was started in SoHo, the lower Manhattan neighborhood where artists such as Sol LeWitt, Acconci, Gordon Matta-

Clarke, and Piper lived and worked, due to the affordability of space. As a result of its location and editors' relationship to the SoHo artist community, Gwen Alien points out, the magazine focused on issues concerning the practice of a certain type of art making and took a tone of neighborly camaraderie.⁵⁵ Yet, in spite of its grass-

roots beginnings, Avalanche was no less dogmatic than Artforum in its support of a specific practice and restricted group of practitioners. In that respect, the audiences for Artforum and Avalanche were more limited and select and, as a result, quite different from that of The Village Voice.

Returning to my earlier question: if Piper was a regular reader of Artforum, lived in SoHo most of the time that she worked on the Mythic Being project, and showed with and engaged the ideas of her conceptually oriented counterparts who were featured in Artforum and Avalanche, then why did she place the ad-

works in The Village Voice rather than in an art magazine? I'd like to propose three possibilities. First, Avalanche might not have been an attractive option because—perhaps due to a combination of age, gender, and race—

Piper was not the entrenched member of the SoHo art scene that one might imagine she was. Second, at this phase of her career, the artist, like a great many others, stood against the commercial forces of the art market. Given her resistance to the gallery-

museum industrial complex, it seems unlikely that she would place the works in Artforum, which was coming under increasing scrutiny for its commercialism.³⁶ Finally, and most important, the Voice offered access to a readership that contained both art-world-specific and "nonspecialized" audiences, ones Piper wanted to reach.³⁷

Though current readers might lament the alternative newspaper's commercialism, The Village Voice was, during this period, an organ for leftist and counterculture politics with a circulation of approximately 145,000, eight times that of Artforum and thirty times that of Avalanche.³⁸ Known for

With its support of the civil rights and women's rights movements and its condemnation of the Vietnam War, the Voice was widely read by left-leaning individuals, liberal intellectuals, and artists of various stripes. In short, the newspaper offered Piper a way to reach an "educated and intellectual but non-specialized" audience.³⁹

At the same time, the Voice found an especially attentive readership in the New York art community as a result of its weekly distribution: in contrast to the monthly or roughly quarterly publication schedules of Artforum and Avalanche respectively, its articles, advertisements, and columns, such as Perreault's "Art," were up to date.⁴⁰ Thus, while the Mythic Being advertisements were seen by a "nonspecialized" audience and we might see correlations between this audience and the non-art-world audiences that saw Mythic Being performances—they were certain to have been encountered by an art-specialized audience as well. It is safe to assume, then, that a fair number of Piper's target audience of counterparts and colleagues in the art world saw the Mythic Being advertisements, if only inadvertently, as a result of reading articles and exhibition announcements in the Voice.

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The Mythic Being advertisement from the January 3, 1974, issue of the Voice presents an opportunity to consider how the advertisements and the overall project relate to works by other artists working during the period. It features the same photograph of Piper wearing the Mythic Being uniform, but the text is different. It reads "NO MATTER HOW MUCH I ASK MY MOTHER TO STOP BUYING CRACKERS, COOKIES, AND THINGS, SHE DOES ANYWAY, AND SAYS IT'S FOR HER EVEN IF I ALWAYS EAT IT. SO I'VE DECIDED TO FAST. 12-12-

64." If the first advertisement that Piper placed in The Village Voice made assessing the Mythic Being's gender difficult, then later examples, such as this, the fourth in the series of seventeen, would only further the confusion. Again, the figure appears to be male, but the passage, written when Piper was sixteen years old, seems to wrestle with the issue of regulating body image through dieting that is typically relegated to women. This ad, like others, consciously plays with gender and racial stereotypes.

When Piper launched The Mythic Being in 1973, popular and academic discourse was steeped in radical theories of identity. The notions of "race" and "gender" and the framework behind identity

had not yet come into question. Instead, identities were thought to be natural, authentic, and stable. "Identity" was a category in which individuals found community and to which they automatically belonged.⁴¹ These were watershed years when many women artists explored gender identity through what Moira Roth has termed "persona-

play" performances.⁴² Incorporating equal parts autobiography and mythology, feminist persona

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play artists dressed as and acted out characters thought to represent or embody gender types.⁴³ In 1972 Linda Montano began dressing up as the mythic persona Chicken Woman and launching performances in the streets of San Francisco. The same year, Eleanor Antin created and performed as the male persona The King of Solano Beach in San Diego. By assuming the facial hair, clothing, and behaviors of a seventeenth-

century nobleman and acting as though Solano Beach were his kingdom, Antin enacted the sense of privilege, entitlement, and humor that she imagined the new gender and class afforded her. A few years later, Lynn Hershman created Roberta Breitmore (1975-

78), and, as the character, led a quotidian existence that included opening bank accounts, attending Weight Watchers meetings, and going on dates in various parts of the country.⁴⁴ In another part of the country, Suzanne Lacy explored age, gender, and class dynamics by performing as the characters Bag Lady (1977), Old Lady (1977), and Donaldina Cameron, a colonial missionary (1977).⁴⁵ A short time later, Howardena Pindell created the video Free, White, and 21 (1980), which stages a confrontational and troubling conversation between the artist and the character White Woman (Pindell plays both roles), and Lorraine O'Grady protested at the New Museum with her persona Mile Bourgeoisie Noire (1980). These persona performances allowed women artists to examine and critique the alienating effects of gender and class conventions-

and, some might argue, racial and ethnic identity-

while temporarily trespassing their boundaries, and Piper's Mythic Being ad-works and performances participate in that history.

Piper's Mythic Being ads also participate in the exploration of gender conventions that was being played out in the advertisements that artists, both male and female, were placing in art magazines in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This trend saw artists using photographs of themselves, rather than of their art, as publicity. Some of these advertisements announced upcoming exhibitions. Examples include Judy Chicago's full-

page Artforum advertisement from 1970, in which she appears as a boxer in a fighting ring; Hanna Wilke's ad from the Summer 1972 issue of Avalanche in which she, wearing a shirt, pantyhose, and boots, bends over a table, presenting her backside; Lynda Benglis's full-page ad from the April 1973 issue of Artforum in which she takes an aggressive posture in front of

her Porsche; and Robert Rauschenberg's centerfold ad from the December 1974 issue of Artforum, which features him in a pose that can be interpreted as either flirtatious or confrontational.⁴⁶ Others-

such as Ed Ruscha's "Say Goodbye to College Joys" spot from the January 1967 issue of Artforum, in which the artist appears in bed and sandwiched between two women, Marjorie Strider's Avalanche ad from Winter 1972, in which she appears bare-breasted and riding a horse, and Benglis's controversial Artforum advertisement from November 1974 (see page 42), in which she appears nude brandishing a dildo—do not announce exhibitions, but instead seem to promote the artist as personality.⁴⁷

Piper's Village Voice advertisements share some commonalities with the above examples. For instance, the proliferation of advertisements featuring photographs of artists demonstrates that they were interested in and using publications as an alternative mode of distribution. One could also argue that, like Piper, all of the artists listed above were engaged in a type of personaplay: they were toying with gender and class conventions while performing the role of "artist."⁴⁸

The Mythic Being ad-

works also represent a significant departure from these examples. The most obvious difference is that Piper's works are smaller and more modest than her colleagues' large-scale advertisements, likely due to financial constraints.⁴⁹ Other meaningful differences are that, in her advertisements, Piper appears in costume and under the cloak of an assumed personality, rather than as herself, and she is not in some stage of undress.⁵⁰ Equally important, Piper was absent and present simultaneously: the disguise rendered her anonymous so she could act out in aggressive ways and give voice to sentiments that she might otherwise have kept confidential, yet she was visible and articulating her own thoughts and ideas.

In addition, by placing the Mythic Being advertisements in an inexpensive local newspaper rather than publishing them in a glossy art magazine, Piper reached a non-art-world audience that extended past the walls of the artworld. However—and this is critical—the Voice was still part of the artinstitution: Piper's art-world-specific target audience would also see the ads, which meant that she might garner its recognition and attention. In that way, she was guaranteed to reach non-art-world and art-world-specific audiences simultaneously.

The placement of this work on the newspaper page suggests that, beyond participating in the use of publications as an alternative mode of distribution, the advertisements were a way for Piper to

insert herself into and publicize her work in the art world. Though one must assume that Piper had little power to determine the work's placement on the page and that its location was subject to the whims of the editorial staff, one cannot help but see that her work is wedged between advertisements for exhibitions by members of the art establishment. Nor can one ignore the humor and irony of the ad's placement: Piper appears in drag (a la Marcel Duchamp's Rrose Selavy) and airs private issues relating to body image just a few inches away from a photograph of Duchamp that illustrates an article about the retrospective exhibition of the work of the grandpere of Conceptual art, on display at the Museum of Modern Art.

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The advertisement Piper placed in the April 25, 1974, issue of *The Village Voice*, the eighth in the series, signals the unprecedented control that Piper exerted over the form, content, and regularity of the distribution of her work and brand. In it, Piper appears under cover of disguise—and this time, for good reason. For the text reads "I REALLY WISH I HAD A FIRMER GRIP ON REALITY. SOMETIMES I THINK I HAVE BETTER IDEAS THAN ANYONE ELSE AROUND, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOL LEWITT AND POSSIBLY BOB SMITHSON, WHOSE IDEAS REALLY RESPECT. 4-12-68." Here we witness an important instance of double-voicedness that is made possible to Piper by the racial and gender ambiguity and anonymity of the Mythic Being costume. The artist establishes a dialogue with and pays homage to her more senior colleagues, LeWitt and Smithson, who had also distributed art through publications.⁵¹ At the same time, she acts out at them and anyone else who might see and read, announcing that the ideas behind her work are "better" than those of her art-world counterparts. Funny? Yes. Sophisticated marketing? Certainly. Confrontational and aggressive? Absolutely.

[Sidebar]

The Village Voice, September 27, 1973, page 56, newsprint, 14 7/8 x 11 1/2 in. (37.8 x 29.2 cm) (photograph provided by Adrian Piper Research Archive)

[Sidebar]

I thank Gwen Alien, John McKiernan-Gonzalez, Frank Guridy, Juliet Hooker, Meta DuEwa Jones, Deborah Paredez, Jemima Pierre, and Geoff Sorrick for reading versions of this paper. I am also appreciative of the useful comments I received.

ived from audience members at the Art History Research Roundtable atthe University of Texas at Austin and at Columbia College in Chicago.

[Sidebar]

Adrian Piper, Village Voice Ad #1, Mythic Being, Cycle 1:9/21/61, Sept.27,1973, newspaper ad. C ollection of the Adrian Piper Research Archive.(Artwork ©Adrian Piper Research Archive)

[Sidebar]

Adrian Piper, Village Voice Ad #4, Mythic Being, Cycle 1: 12/12/64, January3, 1974, newspaper a d. Collection of the Adrian Piper Research Archive.(Artwork © Adrian Piper Research Archive)

[Sidebar]

The Village Voice, January 3, 1974, page 23, newsprint, 14 7/8 x 11 ½ in.(37.8 x 29.2 cm) (photog raph provided by Adrian Piper Research Archive)

Adrian Piper, Village Voice Ad #8, Mythic Being, Cycle 1: 4/12/12/68, April25, 1974, newspaper ad. Collection of the Adrian Piper Research Archive.(Artwork © Adrian Piper Research Archive)

1. Adrian Piper, Out of Order, Out of Sight, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,1996), 102 and 147. The expressions in quotation marks in my text here andin the following paragraph are Piper's ow n terms.

2. Piper is interviewed in Peter Kennedy's film Other Than Art's Sake (1973).During the filmed co nversation. Piper transforms into character by putting onan Afro wig and mustache; the Mythic B eing then walks down a busy streetuttering a "mantra."

3. Piper, 103.

4. Ibid.

5. There is one significant exception: the ad-work for June 27. 1974, wascensored by the Voice because it contains the word "masturbate." A s mallrectangular text-advertisement appeared in its place and announced thattheadvertisement could be seen at the "J

aap Rietman Bookstore on 157 SpringSt." E-mail interview with author, February 1, 2006. The substitute ad is available online at www.thomaserben.com/artists/piper/vv_ads_10.html. The censored ad is at www.thomaserben.com/current/98-99/piper/current.html.

6. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Benjamin D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (1990): 105-43.

7. My thinking here is influenced by Alexander Alberro, who considers a variation of the issue in both "A Media Art: Conceptualism in Latin America in the 1960s," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, ed. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), and *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

8. This essay is part of a manuscript in which I compare The Mythic Being to (gender, racial, class, and/or cultural) boundary-crossing performances by Eleanor Antin, Anna Deavere Smith, and Nikki S. Lee to examine their negotiation of identity categories and occupation of liminal spaces where they are self and Other simultaneously. My research on these artists' projects suggests that identity is both an individual performative process, wherein one acts out the identity one means to project, and a participatory method, in which one needs an audience to ratify, witness, or mirror the identity one is acting out.

9. Much critical dialogue interpellates Piper's work as always and only tackling race and xenophobia, thereby ghettoizing it as "identity politics."

10. In addition, Piper withdrew her work from *Conceptual Art and Conceptual Practices* at the New York Cultural Center in protest to the invasion of Cambodia and in response to the Kent State massacre (1970).

11. Interview with the artist. November 9, 2006.

12. Piper, 55.

13. Ibid., 120-21, 122, and 122.

14. Ibid., 103, 103, 109, and I 12.

15. Ibid., 147, 263, and 147.

16. Ibid., 108-09 and 108-09.

17. Ibid., 138.

18. The phrase "cruising white women" comes from a group of photographs-titled The Mythic Being: Cruising White Women (1975)-in the series. I use the word "mugging" (my term, not Piper's) to describe the action that appears to take place in the photographs of The Mythic Being: Getting Sock (1975). in which the Mythic Being appears to overtake another man. These photographs were taken by James Gutman, a photographer in Cambridge. E-mail interview with author, February 2004.

19. Piper continued to use aspects of mass media in her later work. See, among other examples. Art for Art World Surface Pattern (1976), in which the artist reproduced photographs and pages relating to poverty, war, and torture from The New York Times; the Vanilla Nightmares series (1987), in which she produced charcoal drawings on pages of The New York Times; Cornered (1988), in which she adopts the medium and manner of the broadcast-news anchor; and Black Box, White Box (1992), in which she appropriated George Holliday's recording of the Rodney King beating.

20. Dictionary of Business, ed. Graham Bannock, Evan Davis, Paul Trott, and Mark Uncles (Princeton: Bloomsberg Press, 2003). 214 and 366.

21. The 4 Ps were devised by E. Jerome McCarthy and first articulated in his Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach (Homewood, IL: R. D. Irwin, 1960). They have since become standards for the field; see Dictionary of Business, 218.

22. I'm indicating here a contradiction that other commentators have pointed out. Conceptual art was then and has continued to be institutionalized, so that even ephemeral works are collected by private and public collections.

23. Pamela Franks provides an excellent and thorough analysis of the mail-art exhibition in her dissertation, "Mythic Is as Mythic Does: The Making of Adrian Piper, 1967-1975" (University of Texas at Austin, 2000).

24. E-mail interview with the author. February 1, 2006.

25. Though Piper leverages contemporary marketing techniques in a sophisticated manner, she also violates some rules of marketing. For example, traditionally, marketers would raise brand recognition by using broad-reach vehicles, such as newspapers, before targeting consumers with direct mail pieces.

26. One might say that her action had its desired effect: Perreault discusses Piper's mail-art exhibition in his column in the March 25, 1969, issue of *The Village Voice*, which means that she reached an even larger and more diverse audience than her initial art-world-specific target. John Perreault. "Art." *The Village Voice*, March 27, 1969, 18.

27. Piper's work and the "Adrian Piper" brand were unknown at this point; in effect, underpricing enabled her product to enter the market. The effectiveness of that strategy would diminish with increased recognition of her work and brand. The perception of exclusivity and rarity would need to be cultivated in order to maintain artistic cachet and brand value.

28. Franks, 123.

29. Piper, 32 and 34.

30. Rosemary Mayer, Piper's friend and fellow artist and Vito Acconci's wife at the time, documented these and other *Catalysis* actions in photographs.

31. I choose *Artforum* for this discussion because it was a popular magazine that Piper read regularly at the time and that published art as art (as opposed to art as illustration) by the likes of Dan Graham, Sol LeWitt, Stephen Kaltenbach, and Robert Smithson. I choose *Avalanche* because it catered to a precise segment of the art world that lived and worked in SoHo—where Piper lived and practiced. I mention *The New York Times*, *Daily News*, and *Amsterdam News* because, of course, they are also newspapers, but they each have a different circulation and demographic than *The Village Voice*. My thanks to Frank Guridy for reminding me of these other New York-based publications.

32. Piper now terms this audience "educated and intellectual but non-specialized." E-mail interview with author. February 1, 2006.

33. "Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation." *Artforum*. November 1974, 82. Rosalind Krauss recalls that she and Annette Michelson "felt that both in terms of length and content, the editorial space was being pressured by the demands of advertising." Amy Newman, *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-*

1974 (New York: Soho Press, 2000), 388. See also Richard Meyer. "Bone of Contention: Richard Meyer on Lynda Benglis's Controversial Advertisement," *Artforum*, November 2004, 73 and 249.

34. E-mail interview with author. February 1, 2006.

35. Gwen Allen, "From Specific Media to Mass Media: The Art Magazine in 1960s and Early 1970s" (dissertation, Stanford University, 2004).

36. Meyer, 249.

37. E-mail interview with author, February 1, 2006.

38. In 1974, when Piper placed the majority of her Mythic Being advertisements, the Voice circulated between 140,000 and 150,000 copies. "Audit Report-Newspaper," Audit Bureau of Circulation, 1974. Demographic statistics for Voice readership were not recorded at that time.

39. E-mail interview with author, February 1, 2006.

40. The artist and critic John Perreault had a regular column in which he chronicled art-world happenings, including shows, lectures, and exhibitions, that interested artists and other art professionals. see Kevin Michael McAuliffe, *The Great American Newspaper* (New York: Scribner, 1978), 219.

41. It is also worth remembering that the phrase "the personal is political" reigned among feminists during this time. For more on the solipsism of art of this period, see Peter Frank, "Auto-Art: Self Indulgent? And How!" *Artnews* 75 (September 1976): 43-48.

42. Moira Roth, interview with author, April 2003.

43. Piper claims to have been unaware of the narrative performances that were taking place on the West Coast. E-

mail interview with the author February 2004. Suzanne Lacy, Moira Roth, and Josephine Withers have argued that because California feminist performance was quite theater-oriented, it was different from the more Minimalist-based performance art of New York that was practiced by Yvonne Rainer, Carolee Schneeman, and Laurie Anderson. see Moira Roth, "A Conversation with Suzanne Lacy," *Artforum* 19, no. 3 (November 1980): 42; and Josephine Withers. "Feminist Performance Art: Performing, Discovering, Transforming Ourselves," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Abrams. 1994). 161.

44. For accounts of Montano's, Antin's, and Hershman's characters, see *The Amazing Decade: Woman and Performance Art in America, 1970-*

1980. ed. Moira Roth (Los Angeles: Astro Artz. 1983). 65, 65, and 102. respectively.

45. Roth, "A Conversation with Suzanne Lacy," 42-43.

46. The announcement of Judy Chicago's exhibition was financed by the artist and her agent; Susannah E. Rodee. executive director of Through the Flower, phone conversation with the author December 11, 2006. I am not certain whether the other advertisements were paid by the artists' respective galleries. Susan Richmond discusses these materials in relation to Benglis's work in "Put-Ons and Take-Offs: Lynda Benglis. Feminism, and Representations of the Body, 1967-1977" (dissertation. University of Texas at Austin, 2002).

47. While I am not certain, I assume that the fees for these advertisements were paid by the artist. Here, I use Benglis as an example: she was required by the *Artforum* editorial board to pay twice the regular fee for the advertisement because several of its members found the photograph offensive. See Meyer. "Bone of Contention," 73-74. 249-

50; and Susan Richmond, "The *Artforum* Controversy of 1974." in "Put-Ons and Take-Offs," 7-20.

48. One could argue that Piper's colleagues were also playing with racial conventions and stereotypes.

49. Piper did not sell her work at this time, nor did she have gallery representation to pay the fees.

50. It is worth noting that the politics of portraying a nude, young, black female body were, and continue to be, different than those of portraying a young, nude, white female body. The significance of this distinction seems not to have been lost on Piper. By this point, she had mounted the private performances of *Food for the Spirit* (1970-71), during which she recorded her largely nude body photographically. While her text about *Food for the Spirit* was published in *High Performance* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1981), she did not distribute the photographs publicly until 1997, when they were printed by the Thomas Erben Gallery. Franks, 111 and 209.

51. See, for examples, Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 79-83; and Robert Smithson. "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan," *Artforum* 8, no. 1 (September 1969): 28-33, reproduced on page 43 of this issue of *An Journal*. Interestingly, Piper borrowed money from LeWitt to undertake the advertising arm of the *Mythic Being* project. Piper, 102.

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Acting Others; Identity Performance in Works by Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deover Smith (under contract with Duke University Press).

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