

Section 2
1970-1975

PERSONAL POLITICS AND PERFORMANCE ART

Piper explains her artwork of the early 1970s as the result of her sudden political awareness, made as she became increasingly disillusioned with the possibilities of practicing art or philosophy removed from the social realities that confronted her on a daily basis. Reflecting on this moment in January 1973, she wrote, "In the spring of 1970 a number of events occurred that changed everything for me: (1) the invasion of Cambodia; (2) The Women's Movement; (3) Kent State and Jackson State; (4) The closing of CCNY [City College of New York], where I was in my first term as a philosophy major, during the student rebellion."¹ Elsewhere, the precise chronology of Piper's dawning political awareness is more vague than this. For example, Piper dates her interest in yoga to 1967 and her feminism and vegetarianism to 1968.² She began attending meetings of the AWC in 1969 and helped Sol LeWitt execute his first wall drawing for an AWC benefit exhibition at the Paula Cooper Gallery in May of that year.³ She had also begun to associate her study of philosophy with her practice as an artist by early 1970, as she told Kynaston McShine, a curator at MOMA.⁴ She took classes part-time at City College, where her mother worked in the admissions office, and so witnessed the 1969 student strikes over open admissions. She was a full-time student a year later when students went on strike because President Nixon expanded the war in Vietnam by invading Cambodia.⁵ Nevertheless, Piper describes the spring of

1970 and her experience with activism among artists and at City College as the turning point, when she began to think about her "position as an artist, a woman, and a black."⁶ In Piper's phrase, these terms appear interrelated and yet distinct, as if to ask how her work in art and philosophy determined her self-conception and how an increasingly urgent need to respond to current events required that she imagine herself anew.

The spring of 1970 is also the moment when Piper began to incorporate her body into her artwork specifically as a means to engage with other people's perceptions of her. Writing of her earliest Catalysis performances, begun during the summer, she describes confronting unsuspecting passersby while conspicuously adorned with smelly clothes, wet paint, or other repulsive accoutrements. She justifies interrupting the daily lives of unsuspecting viewers by drawing parallels with the way current events intruded upon her own life. She also describes how this caused her to recognize that silence and inaction were a choice, just like activism, and that the former could be taken to imply assent for the status quo. In retrospect, she offers an example of this from her experiences at City College, when the physical presence of protesting black students interrupted her philosophy courses in ways she replicates in her artworks, forcing her to stop studying for what she calls the self-reflexive "'reality check' in the mirror."⁷ She says, "What most affected me was the struggle for open admissions at City College . . . Black students were shutting down the campus. I was physically in this situation where I was trying to take notes in my philosophy classes and people would stride in and say, 'This class is over. We're having a rally. Now!'"⁸ She continues, "I was being confronted by urgent political struggles, and I was doing very rarefied and elitist work. I was feeling impatient to get past that scrim of obfuscation between me and the external world."⁹ She made artwork of her body to initiate a process for investigating how people saw and reacted to her and to, in turn, provoke her audience to self-reflection.

BODILY ABSENCE AND THE RAREFIED SUBJECT

Prior to 1970, Piper's Conceptual art had only occasionally included or referred to her body. For example, she presented herself as nothing more than the hypothetical origin for the perspective represented in her Hypothesis works, a situation of time and space that was physically absent and invisible. Piper is named as author of her work, but her name serves

no other purpose than to figure her absence as part of the work's past. Her presence is a hypothesis, neither certain nor assured. The viewer, on the other hand, finds him- or herself addressed and incorporated into each of Piper's works in concrete terms. In contrast to other artists' works that promise direct access to the artist's psyche (and never deliver it)—Action Painting, for example, was frequently presented as an example of this by artists and critics during the 1960s—Piper's works alienate themselves from their creator and thus viewer from artist. This established a situation that encouraged the viewer to take responsibility for his or her own point of view on the artwork.

In 1968 and 1969, Piper made a series of books, magazine projects, and mailed artworks that referred directly to the contingency of the viewer's relationship to the art object and, in some cases, to the artist. For example, her book project from 1968, *Here and Now*, is a highly stylized and systematized representation of place ("Here") and time ("Now") transported from the artist's studio to the recipient.¹⁰ It draws the reader's attention to the spatio-temporal circumstances of reading—here and now, elsewhere and again. On each of the unbound book's gridded pages, a brief text typed inside one of sixty-four squares describes its place on the page: "HERE: the square area in 3rd row from bottom, 3rd from right side"; the viewer is left to deduce the "Now." *Here and Now* establishes the conditions for an experience that might replicate the conditions of the artist's relationship to it but that it never achieves. Piper's objectivity removes her from the work, rendering the experience of reading *Here and Now* transmissible to anyone.

In 1969, Piper's book projects became more assertive. She addressed readers directly by inserting components into the *Village Voice* and sending others in the mail. In March, for example, she mailed a book project to a list of 162 people and art galleries identified as "exhibit locations," including the list with each set. She then appropriated recipients' homes and galleries by placing advertisements among the gallery notices in the *Village Voice* that announced, "ADRIAN PIPER/ from March on."¹¹ This project playfully mimicked the system of exhibitions, promotion, and collecting that shaped artists' careers, inviting recipients to self-consciously consider their roles in Piper's. The *Village Voice* art critic John Perreault reviewed the work like any other gallery show, and Piper included his review (her first) in her professional biography.¹² McShine filed his copy in MOMA's archives. In a later project, *Area Relocation #2*

(fig. 30), Piper employed the commercial and design aspects of the *Village Voice* itself, running her own advertisement among the gallery advertisements:

The area described by the periphery of this ad has been relocated from Sheridan Square New York, N.Y.

to (your address).

—area relocation #2

A. Piper¹³

Sheridan Square is where the offices of the *Village Voice* are located, where the daily business of selling and laying out ad space is conducted. Piper's ad asked readers to consider their relationship to the business of a weekly newspaper that served the local counterculture and artists, collectors, and galleries as an information clearinghouse, and she did so in phenomenological terms. The text articulates an ethics of reading, calling on the reader to take responsibility for determining the newspaper's effect: only once the *Voice* has been read can it be converted into commerce or political action.

On the other hand, her advertisements also informed readers of the gallery pages in the *Village Voice* that something was going on about which they knew little or nothing, a gesture that put the circulation of knowledge among art-world taste makers on display, if not available for critique. Piper's advertisements also appropriated the Conceptual art dealer Seth Siegelau's concurrent exhibition "One Month." Siegelau invited thirty-one artists, including some of Piper's friends, to create one artwork each that corresponded with an assigned day in March. As mentioned in chapter 2, at the time, Piper was working as a receptionist in Siegelau's gallery, although he never exhibited her work. Did her *Three Untitled Projects* make use of forms Siegelau pioneered—Conceptual art exhibitions that exist only as catalogues, advertisements, and mailed announcements—to establish a venue for her work while offering a simultaneous critique of her exclusion from his gallery except as "gallery girl," a position feminists protested?¹⁴ Piper's work establishes the conditions for this interpretation. However, Piper's project is, in the

the village VOICE, May 29, 1969

art

Continued from preceding page
autobiographical. If one reports one's reactions to a work of art—or to life—rather than describing or analyzing, it is one's sensitivity and one's truthfulness that determines the worth of the confession.

But back to the panel

discussion. First of all the panelists did not arrive at the appointed time. Charlotte Moorman filled in the gap by sitting on the stage all wrapped up in pink cloth, as was her cello. By 9 o'clock I began to think that the bastards had really done it and that the racials were not going to arrive at all. I toyed around with the idea and felt comfortable with it and felt it appropriate given the announced topic, so at 9:05, when they began filing in, I was a little

disappointed. It was an incestuous panel, just as this is, I suppose, an incestuous column. The panel: David Bourdon (Life magazine), was the moderator and was joined by Ultra Violet, Brigit Polk (of Cock-book fame), Walter Gutman, John de Menil, Gregory Battcock, Lil Finard, and Andy Warhol, who was introduced by Bourdon as a young man impersonating a rather well-known artist. Throughout Andy did not say a word, but occasionally used his Polaroid. To

make a long story short, thanks to Bourdon's cool and sometimes cruel wit, everything was light-hearted and fairly entertaining. At one point Brigit took off her blouse. Gregory exposed his cock to Warhol's camera, forgetting that those in the balcony could see what was going on and began shouting "How big is it?"

This was the third in a series of panels organized or disorganized by Jill and, yes, the topic "The

Galleries

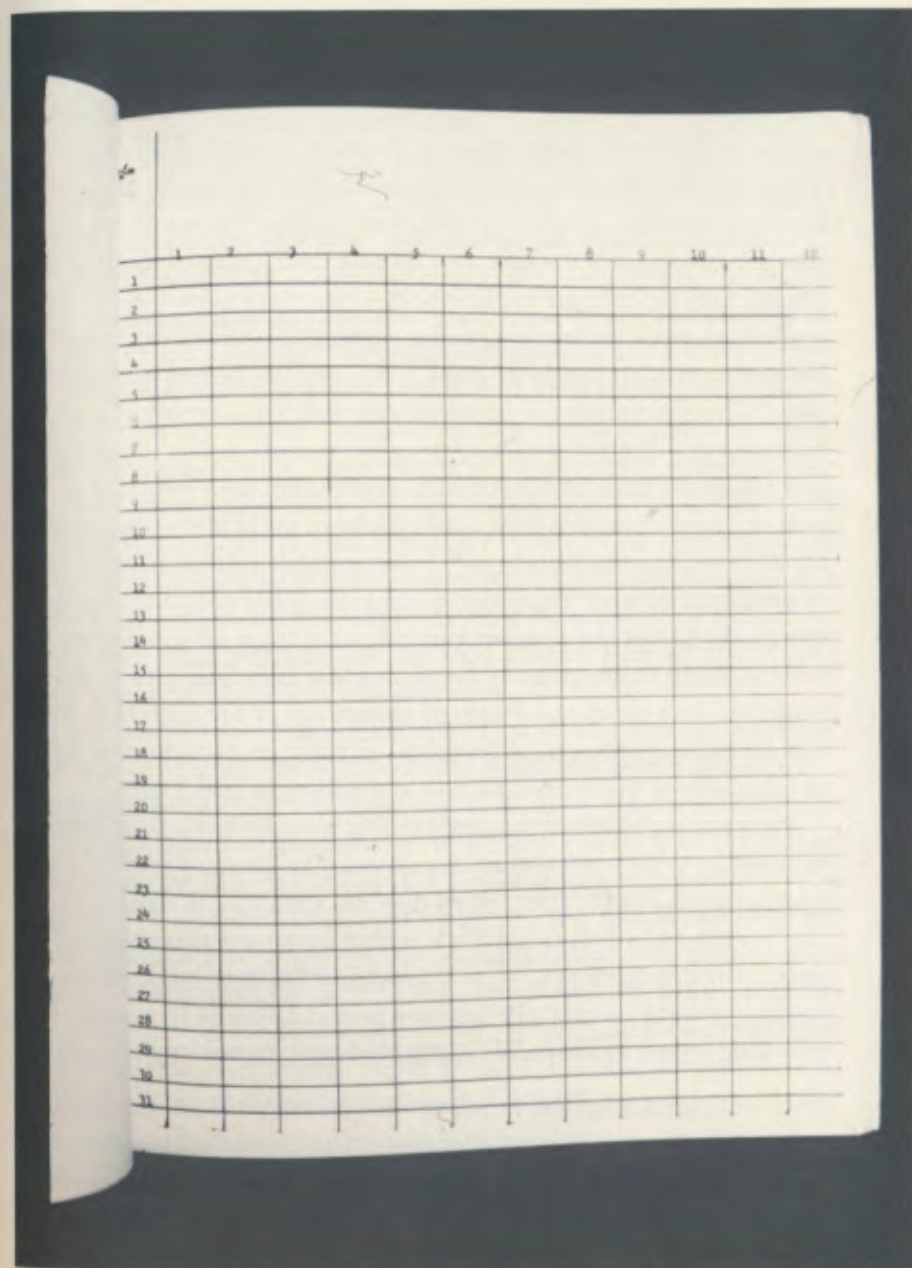
<p>NUMBER 7 Compiled By LUCY LIPPARD PAULA COOPER 94/100 PRINCE ST. Thurs. 7d., Sat. 11-4 & By Appl</p>	<p>IRVING Thru Mid-June KATZENSTEIN paintings GREEN MOUNTAIN GALLERY 17 PERRY ST. (Cor. 7 Ave.)</p>	<p>Small Thru June 8 GROSS THE MERRICK GALLERY 115 Thompson St. (bet. Broadway) Thurs. Fri. 11-6 Sat. 11-5, Mon-10:30</p>	<p>The area described by the periphery of this ad has been relocated from Sheridan Square New York, N.Y. to (your address) #2 —area relocation #2 A. Piper</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITY FOR ARTISTS If you want in SUMMER FESTIVAL FALL EXHIBITIONS, AN OPEN CALL OR OPEN LYNN KOTTLER GALLERY 1 E. 10th St. N.Y.C. 2E 4201 est. 1949</p>	<p>PORNOMETRY NAGLE opening June 3 to June 14 Loew Gallery Hudson 641E 34 34 St.</p>	<p>DORSKY 867 MADISON MICHAEL BIGGER 20 MAY — 15 JUNE</p>	<p>1969 NUDES Wickerson Gallery 159 Madison Ave. at 75th St.</p>
<p>THE JUDSON GALLERY presents THE BLACK EXPERIENCE THRU BLACK ART May 30th thru June 30th Sun. thru Fri. 1-7 p.m.; Sat. 1-10 p.m. 237 THOMPSON STREET</p>	<p>HOWARD WISE 50 W 57 T.V. as a creative medium</p>	<p>RENA MANDELBAUM SPECTRUM 1043 MADISON Howard Through June 30</p>	<p>WEISBURD "BOXED ENVIRONMENTS" 825 SEVENTH AVENUE AT 53rd CHELSEA MONDAY — FRIDAY</p>
<p>MICROFOCUS AND SURREAL OBJECTS Liba Bayrak, Gene Grogan, Carol Heineman and John Weichsal, with Martin Gray, Kathrine Korn, Geoff Hendricks, Helen Yrisary and Darya Panesoff May 26th — June 8th — Saturdays & Sundays — 11-5 GAIN GROUND, 246 W 80 (BROADWAY) 877-8584</p>	<p>BRUCE NAUMAN HOLOGRAMS, VIDEO TAPES & OTHER WORKS LEO CASTELLI 4 E. 77, NEW YORK</p>	<p>KOTTLER Med. Plates Free, No Development Leo Nordness Galleries 234 E. 75 St.</p>	<p>RALPH & SYLVIA MASSEY  CHAPMAN SCULPTURE GALLERY 822 Madison at 72nd Opening Today</p>
<p>2nd Annual Outdoor Art Show SATURDAY JUNE 21 & SUNDAY JUNE 22</p>	<p>ART NOUVEAU an exhibition assembled by PAUL MAGRIEL Through June 15</p>	<p> 903 Madison Avenue At 72nd Street Our Premier Exhibition</p>	

30 Adrian Piper, *Area Relocation #2*, advertisement in the *Village Voice* (May 29, 1969). Generali Foundation Collection, Vienna.

strictest sense, Conceptual art. It does not deliver a message but establishes conditions for the viewer's experience of specific information. The work offers no obvious criticism of Siegelau, and Piper has never denounced him outright (neither has she listed him among the male friends who encouraged her career in art).¹⁵ Rather, Piper's *Three Untitled Projects*—one copy of which she sent Siegelau—provides an invitation in lieu of those she never received, to take active part in her career.

Piper made *Three Untitled Projects* and the corresponding advertisement, *Area Relocation #2*, as her contribution to "Number 7," an exhibition Lucy Lippard curated for the Paula Cooper Gallery.¹⁶ Piper documented her advertisement in a notebook exhibited in the gallery, where it served as a conceptual device for provoking the viewer's awareness of the material, political, economic, and moral conditions for reading the newspaper. Piper made the artwork in the spring of 1969 during the City College strike over open admissions, an event that provoked her to begin reading the newspaper and attend political meetings—the moment she later refers to as the dawn of her political self-awareness.¹⁷

In July 1969, for another work in the *Area Relocation* series, Piper sent postcards to 170 readers of the magazine *o to 9*, directing them to her untitled grid project in the July issue (fig. 31) and designating the blank side of each card as an enlargement of one rectangle on the grid "relocated to" the recipient's address.¹⁸ The text draws the reader's attention to the project's material conditions as representation, setting up a conflict between the projects' stated conditions and their realization. Reading the postcard or the magazine project creates an event in time and space that depends as much upon its reception in the "here and now" as on the moment when the artist made it. In light of Piper's use of the *Village Voice*, her postcard asks readers of *o to 9* to consider the political implications of art and poetry, but also of her own highly abstracted magazine project. As much as this project indicates Piper's faith in provoking her work's recipients to self-consciousness, it also exemplifies the work that gained her entry into the art world—work Piper describes as "rarefied and elitist."¹⁹ *o to 9* was a small but important magazine of Conceptual art and poetry edited by Vito Acconci and Bernadette Mayer. Piper's work had first appeared in the same issue in which LeWitt published his essay "Sentences on Conceptual Art."²⁰ Why and in what ways would Piper come to see this forum as inadequate in 1970?



31 Adrian Piper, *Untitled* (detail), *o to 9* (July 1969). One of three pages, each 8.5 × 11 in. Collection of the Museum Library, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Piper's various accounts of being "kicked out" of the art world for the first time, "in 1970 when it became generally known that [she] was a woman," demonstrate what was at stake in being taken for a woman artist.²¹ Piper wrote in 1990: "My personal experience is of having been included in 'definitive' major museum shows of conceptual art in the late '60s, until the art world contacts I made then met me face-to-face, found out I was a woman, and disappeared from my life."²² Anna Chave argues that art critics and historians have allowed male artists associated with Minimalism to incorporate their bodies into their work—explicitly or implicitly—while maintaining a clear separation between art and artist. Women artists, on the other hand, have been allowed no such concession.²³ Chave's analysis can be usefully extended to Conceptual and performance art. She notes that some of the women artists whom critics and historians have associated with Minimalism were reluctant to appear in association with their work, partly to avoid distracting viewers from the work's formal qualities.²⁴ Piper responded differently. She came to anticipate viewers' reactions, incorporating her body into her work specifically to test their perceptions and make them self-conscious. Her early inability to imagine the discrimination she would face in the art world becomes proof not simply of naïveté but of her faith in Conceptual art and metaphysical philosophy—in short, in a universalist model of rationality as the clearest path to moral thought and action.

Piper's first performance is also the first recorded example of a viewer responding to her work as that of a woman. For "Street Works II," a one-hour-long exhibition presented on April 18, 1969, on the streets around the four sides of a designated block in Manhattan, she executed her first public performance according to her own preconceived instructions. According to her proposal, the untitled project involved two parts, first recording sounds as she walked a city block and then playing them back:

1. On Friday, April 11 from 4:30 to 6:30 PM, walk around the outer sidewalk boundaries across the street from designated block.

Record 1200 ft. of tape at 1½ IPS (two hours) of undifferentiated noise.

2. On Friday, April 18 from 5 to 6 PM, walk around inner sidewalk boundaries on designated block.

Play back previously-recorded undifferentiated noise at 3¾ IPS (one hour).²⁵

During the performance, Piper carried her tape recorder along a prescribed route, transporting two hours of recorded sound from April 11 to the hour-long exhibit held a week later and across the street. John Perreault briefly described the work of several participants in his review for the *Village Voice*. His discussion of Piper's work glossed over the formal issues of Piper's contribution, noting only that "Adrienne Piper carried sounds recorded in one area all away around the block at full volume."²⁶ Perreault's description is noteworthy for his misspelling of the artist's name, a mistake that indicates the critic's inability to watch Piper without seeing her as a woman.²⁷ Perreault's brief review demonstrates viewers' inability to see Piper's body as only the formal conditions for an objectively executed artwork. By allowing an audience to watch her work, Piper's performance for "Street Works II" inadvertently enabled a confusion of artist and artwork that her magazine and map projects had avoided. It is possible to read Perreault's review as indicating that the most remarkable aspect of Piper's contribution was that it was made by a woman. His review therefore supports Piper's assertion that her experiments with recorded sound are "the kind of work many art critics can't comprehend being made by a black woman."²⁸

Piper seems not to have anticipated the difficulty viewers had recognizing purely formal issues in a woman's body. Like several of her previous works, her project for "Street Works II" drew viewers' attention to the circumstances of its exhibition by declaring itself to be something it was not—in this case, a moment from the past transported to the present. The recording itself would have become nearly unintelligible when played back at double speed, drawing attention to its documentary claims by failing to fulfill them.²⁹ Viewers must have wondered about the artist who carried the tape recorder: is she a representation of someone who walked the block a week earlier or is she the same person? The ambiguous nature of Piper's activity rendered her body subject to analysis, formal and otherwise. The absence of her body from previous works allowed viewers to either ignore it or unwittingly jump to conclusions about who she was. By inferring from Perreault's reaction, it is clear the body unremarked on was a man's, and a woman artist's presence was considered anomalous.³⁰



32 Adrian Piper, *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City*, performance, Max's Kansas City, New York, 1970. Black-and-white photograph by Rosemary Mayer, 16 x 16 in. Generali Foundation Collection, Vienna.

On May 2, 1970, in her second public performance, *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City*, Piper walked about the bar at Max's Kansas City wearing street clothes, long gloves, a blindfold, and nose- and ear-plugs. Piper explains that in this performance for "The Saturday Afternoon Show," an hour-long exhibition organized by Hannah Weiner, she made an object of herself with the intention of defending her autonomy from the imposing presence of those around her.³¹ Sealed off from sensory perceptions, she would present herself as insular and individualistic. Impervious to the influence of others, she disrupted expectations of how a woman behaves in a bar. In one of the photographs her friend, the artist Rosemary Mayer, took of her action (fig. 32), Piper walks past men seated at the bar, their backs turned toward her as if her performance makes her inaccessible and uninteresting.³² Afterward, however, Piper expressed disappointment with the result. Mayer described the action in

a postcard to her sister, the poet Bernadette Mayer, as if Piper had meant to be more disruptive than she was: "Adrian was blindfolded, nose & ear stoppered. But she wasn't happy bcs. she thought she didn't bump into enough people."³³ When asked about this, Piper explained, "I didn't like the idea that most everyone seemed to have been sitting down watching the performance instead of milling around at Max's as they usually do. I remember feeling a bit frustrated that I'd designed a piece for a bar but unbeknownst to me the bar had turned into a stage."³⁴ Instead of functioning as a disturbance or obstacle in a bar popular with the well-known artists whose work was displayed on the walls (Warhol, Flavin, Judd, Chamberlain, Stella, Noland, LeWitt, and others),³⁵ on this particular afternoon, she could only be seen within the context of an exhibition of performance art.

Piper thus appeared as *the image* of someone incapable of sensory experience. This is how the work looks in another of Mayer's photographs of Piper's action (fig. 33). Piper walks toward the camera, watched by a table of women, one of whom gestures toward her and speaks, presumably about the sensory-deprived figure they watch. Piper's objectification is completed by Perreault's description of her action, published afterward in the *Village Voice*, which suggests that Piper was helpless to prevent her fellow artists from appropriating her for their own amusement. While the artist Ira Joel Haber played the Rolling Stones' single "Let's Spend the Night Together" over and over on the juke box, Perreault writes,

Adrian Piper plugged up her ears and nose and shielded her eyes and wandered around the place for an hour, bumping into people, being bumped into, and creating a startling image. (I thought that a good piece would be not to tell her when three o'clock finally arrived . . . Haber announced that he had turned . . . Piper into an illustration because at one point when she was stumbling around—quite beautifully—the sound to her sight, via juke box, was the Who's "Touch Me" from "Tommy.")³⁶

Piper could not help being seen as anything other than an "image" at Max's, a place where, one critic later recalled, art-world celebrities went "to see and be seen, combining voyeurism with exhibitionism and foregrounding performance art."³⁷ Max's clientele co-opted Piper's actions before her performance began.



33 Adrian Piper, *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City*, performance, Max's Kansas City, New York, 1970. Black-and-white photograph by Rosemary Mayer, 16 x 16 in. Generali Foundation Collection, Vienna.

Piper later explained that she anticipated the possibilities of being imposed upon or misunderstood during her Max's Kansas City performance and that the gloves, blindfold, and nose- and earplugs offered admittedly flimsy protection against the awaiting artists. Faced with the situation that "Max's was an Art Environment, replete with Art Consciousness and Self-Consciousness about Art Consciousness" so that "to even walk into Max's was to be absorbed into the collective Art Self-Conscious Consciousness, either as object or as collaborator," Piper says she tried to become the former. Asserting her individuality, she attempted to close herself off from the influence of her peers and exist for viewers as nothing more than a specific and obdurate object, "silent, secret, passive, seemingly ready to be absorbed into their consciousness."³⁸ Mayer's photographs and Perreault's description suggest she succeeded, to a point. She was unable to avoid becoming the object of scrutiny, gossip, and specula-

tion, partly "because [her] *voluntary* objectlike passivity implied aggressive activity and choice, an independent presence confronting the Art Conscious environment with its autonomy. [Her] objecthood became [her] subjecthood."³⁹ Piper had accidentally demonstrated the impossibility of Minimalism's hermeticism—of Robert Morris's proposal for artists to make nondescript "neutral" objects, for example, that might activate a situation without drawing attention to themselves.⁴⁰ In the process, she discovered how presenting her self as an object provoked viewers to respond to her as they always did, subjectively. On the other hand, Judith Wilson argues that Piper "discovered that such voluntary self-objectification functioned as its opposite—i.e., became a radical assertion of 'subjecthood.'"⁴¹ Piper had to admit not only that she was replete with what she calls Art Consciousness and Self-Conscious about Art Consciousness but that she appeared to be so, at least in performance. Her role as "collaborator" defined her selfhood as well as her objecthood. Piper concluded from the reception of her performance that she could not appear to others as a neutral object. In other words, she recognized that viewers would always interpret her presence as meaningful. In two works begun concurrently with *Untitled Performance for Max's Kansas City*, Piper would ask whether this was something she could control and how much the expectations and perceptions of her viewers controlled her.

THE DOCUMENTATION OF ACTIVISM AS ACTIVISM:
THE NEW YORK ART STRIKE AND THE POLITICS
OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

On May 18, 1970, to protest President Nixon's announcement at the end of April that he had expanded the war in Vietnam by invading Cambodia and as a response to the deadly violence with which subsequent antiwar demonstrations were suppressed, between one and two thousand members of the art world met at New York University to organize the New York Artists' Strike against Racism, Sexism, Repression, and War.⁴² Such large-scale, organized opposition to the war in Vietnam was unprecedented among New York's artists, many of whom expressed the opinion that art existed in a realm unrelated to organized politics. Participants called on art museums and galleries to close for a day in recognition that art could not remain unaffected by state-sponsored violence. Piper withdrew her work, *Hypothesis: Situation #18*, from the exhibition "Con-