The Look of Silence:

Rape and the Art of Diane Arbus, Adrian Piper, and Ana Mendieta

BY

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

Rape Culture is complicated; it's about as much as what is *not* said and imagined as it is about what is said. It thrives in the silence–the silence of survivors, the silence of people denying its existence, and the silence of people who don't know how to handle this sensitive topic. It is imagined in what is said; the pervasive behavior of victim blaming, slut-shaming, sexual objectification, or trivializing rape. Each engagement continues to normalize our societal attitudes about gender and sexuality, and Art History is complicit in that normalization. We continue to reproduce rape images through movements like the Renaissance, Rococo, Baroque, Modern, and Contemporary art, which in turns pushes survivors into isolation or risk silencing them forever. This thesis will navigate three women artists, Diane Arbus, Adrian Piper, and Ana Mendieta, to analyze how rape has affected the work of each of these artists. Most importantly, to demonstrate how engrained rape culture is in our society, and how representing images of rape accurately can start a necessary dialogue to combatting rape culture.

Diane Arbus was sexually assaulted from the time she was a young child until a few weeks before she committed suicide, Adrian Piper's work deals with the objectification of violence against White women, and Ana Mendieta depicts explicitly violent rape images.[1] Each artist was silenced in their own way, and I hope to alleviate that silence through this paper; to undermine Art History's contribution to rape culture and think critically of the depiction of rape. I will argue that images of rape deserve a place in Art History, considering that Art should reflect the world, but it must be done sensitively and accurately. No more objectification or trivializing rape through images–rather, holding Art History accountable for our current state of rape culture, and how we should rectify the wrongdoings of the past.

[1] "White" and "Black" will be capitalized throughout this paper when I am referring to race. This is to distinguish between the colors versus race.

I. ART HISTORY HAS LET WOMEN DOWN

Rape is an intimate and violent act that affects millions of Americans daily. According to Rape Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), approximately every 73 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted.[2] On average, there are 433,648 victims of rape and sexual assault each year in the United States. About 1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or complete rape in her lifetime, and approximately 1 out of every 10 rape victims are male.[3] Rape is a part of our daily lives; It exists in both the real and fictional world through images; including, but not limited to, Renaissance, Rococo, Baroque, Modern, and Contemporary art. Rape is everywhere, and consequentially, normalized in our society. Our constant exposure to rape has led to it being accepted as inevitable. When we normalize rape, effectively it becomes less troublesome and confuses people about what constitutes sexual assault. Worse, it leaves survivors isolated and silenced; isolated, because it produces the effect that what happened to you wasn't a big deal, or was silenced, because what happened to you could have been worse. I can relate to this sentiment for various reasons, but primarily because I was sexually assaulted very young. I think to some extent I always knew what happened to me was wrong, but I never thought of it as rape or a personal attack against me; it was just something that happened, and I was alive, so what more could I have hoped for? I didn't start to think critically about my assault until I enrolled in "Introduction to Women's Literature" in college at the University of New Orleans in 2016. In this class, I found the tools to voice what happened to me, challenge how I normalized the assault, and began to understand the assault as

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[2]Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2018 (2019). National Institute of Justice & Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey.

[3] "Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics," RAINN, accessed September 24, 2019, https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence.

both personal and systemic. It's becoming more common to challenge how engrained and normalized rape culture has become with our society, but it's time to push Art History to be a part of that conversation. Through literally any art movement we can find images of rape, or violence against women as a general theme. We even have artists like Artemisia Gentileschi from the Baroque period who is known primarily by her rape, and through her rape we analyze her paintings. Art History continues to, consciously or unconsciously, normalize rape and sexual violence. The #MeToo movement challenges how normalized rape culture has always been in our society and attempts to hold people accountable for their violent crimes. On the same note, we must hold Art History accountable for its contribution to rape culture.

Art History normalizes rape in several different areas; first, we view images of rape as aesthetically engaging and ignore the manifestation of brutality because our eyes are trained to see the horrific act as beautiful; to aestheticize the violence. Secondly, even if the viewer isn't trained to see the image as beautiful, the public can become desensitized to the plethora of violent images. Either way, this normalization renders people silenced in many ways. I will demonstrate the three different levels of silencing women through individual case studies of Diane Arbus, Adrian Piper, and Ana Mendieta. Diane Arbus was silenced solely by the fact that she didn't have the tools to understand what happened to her; Piper was silenced through efforts of self-preservation; and Mendieta was silenced by Carl Andre. Rape culture is complicated; it's as much about what is not said and imagined as it is about what is said. It's through these silences that we accept the violence, and it is through finding our voice that we begin to challenge rape culture and deny its prevalence. Through each of these case studies, I hope to analyze how the normalization of rape has effectively changed each of these women's lives, and push to a more hopeful conclusion for how the discipline should change to rectify these wrongs.

This paper will be organized into five separate chapters: introduction, methods, Diane Arbus, Adrian Piper, Ana Mendieta and the conclusion. The methods section will be separated into two main points: discussing rape and the mythologization of women artists. The first Part will introduce the sociological concept of rape culture as a setting where rape is pervasive and normalized due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality. Behavior commonly associated with rape culture includes victim-blaming, slut-shaming, sexual objectification, trivializing rape, denial of widespread rape, refusing to acknowledge the harm caused by sexual violence or some combination of these. This chapter will include an account of my experience with Bernini's *The Rape of Persephone* to demonstrate the feminist framework that led me to challenge Art History's tendency to aestheticize violent images. My biggest critique of rape images is the level of dehumanization that happens to the rendered bodies, and subsequentially the viewer. Through discussion of Bernini's *The Rape of Persephone*, and my personal history with this image, I will demonstrate how damaging it is for survivors to see violent subject matter be rendered beautiful. My goal is to encourage Art Historians to stop the aestheticization of violence against women's bodies, but rather depict the horrific act of sexual violence as accurately as possible. We must think critically about how depictions of rape images should exist. I don't want to come across as naïve and say that rape shouldn't be depicted at all, because that simply isn't true; if something is to exist, it must be represented in art. The second section on myth and women artists will explain my choice of discussing Arbus's, Piper's, and Mendieta's biographies. I believe there is a strength in using biography when discussing their artworks, and this section analyze my effort to humanize each of these artists, solely because each engaged both personally and professionally with sexual violence.

Lastly, in each case study, I will discuss Diane Arbus, Adrian Piper, and Ana Mendieta. I chose these artists because I think they are artists working towards understanding aggression and violence against the body in an effective manner, and because they've all been silenced uniquely. Each artist comes from a different background with different experiences. Dealing with issues of sexual violence, domestic violence, racial discrimination, and many more, each artist can demonstrate how rape can affect people differently. While exploring how each woman individually found her strength and expressions of personal freedom, I hope for the discipline to humanize artists dealing with rape and challenge the aestheticization of rape.

II. Rape and Mythologizing Women Artists

A. Rape

I honestly don't remember when I first saw Bernini's *The Rape of Persephone* (fig. 1). My mother was a studio art major, so she had a lot of textbooks about the art masters ranging from the Renaissance to Baroque. I was in awe of these images, mostly because I wanted to impress my mom, but also because I felt these images were important in the sense that they could tell me something about my culture. By the time I was introduced to this image in high school, I had accepted this image as beautiful. None of these encounters really resonated with me until I was taught Bernini's *Rape of Persephone* in an undergraduate Baroque and Rococo class. My teacher told us of the mythology behind the sculpture (which was clear from the title), and Bernini's technique for creating it. Above all, her opinion of the sculpture being beautiful was through affect; she justified her opinion of beauty by Bernini's technique, and how realistic the image appeared with tears running down Persephone's face. Each person was depicted as realistically as possible, like models were used to reenact this horrific scene. So, there I was, along with a room of mostly female art history students, being schooled in the aestheticization of rape.

I'm not sure if words could capture what it was like hearing an image of rape described as beautiful. "Sublime" comes closest, because I didn't know how to interact with it, or even begin to challenge it. The difference for me at this point, as opposed to all the other times, was my enrollment in the introduction of women's literature with Dr. Shelby Richardson. Here I read texts like *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Wollstonecraft, *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Gilman, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* by Alice Walker, *Happy Endings* by Margaret Atwood, and

countless other texts. They started changing my perspective of the world, and my relationship to it. Then, I questioned my relation to the world through art historical images.

My engagement with this sculpture had been broadened by my understanding of the gender and women's framework. Central to my new understanding was the idea of rape culture, the sociological concept for a setting in which rape is pervasive and normalized due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality.[4] In general, this semester was really difficult for me because I was beginning to understand the social constructions in place designed to prevent me from success in the same manner a man could. In that moment, I wasn't even sure if I should continue studying art history because of its contributions to rape culture, either subconsciously or consciously. After reading the riveting essay on "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists" by Linda Nochlin, I had hope that the discipline could change and be used as an agent to better women's lives. I felt it was time for me to start asking questions.

So, I stayed after class and asked my teacher how she could handle seeing horrific images of rape. Her response was that she never really thought about it as rape, but rather it was art. Being a survivor of sexual violence and knowing several different women and men with the same experience, I was shocked by my teacher's words. This sculpture was not *just art*. It didn't exist in a void–rather, it had a considerable pull in our social environment. It seemed to me that the constant exposure of rape images led to desensitizing my professor, but it isn't just her issue. Art and Art History have equated images of violence to "fine art" and lacking proper representation for how brutality can manifest itself in an image. Whether it is conscious or unconscious, quite frankly, doesn't matter–rape is one of the most prevalent themes throughout

[4] John Nicoletti, Sally Spencer-Thomas, & Christopher Bollinger, *Violence goes to college: The authoritative guide to prevention and intervention*, (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 2010), 32.

the history of art. Art History has let women down by accepting that images of rape are aesthetically engaging, or simply, beautiful.

I'm not the first scholar to have analyzed the aestheticization of violence. For example, Stephen Eisenmann researched this theme in relation to the Abu Ghraib photographs that emerged in the midst of the United States war with Iraq.[5] He described an "Abu Ghraib Effect," in which young soldier-photographs unconsciously drew on a history of art full of images that would be brutal and traumatizing if we did not see them aesthetically. This aestheticization slowly, but surely, desensitizes us to images of violence. Eisenmann states,

> What if the sexualized scenarios, so frequently visible in the Abu Ghraib photographs, rather than rendering the images of abuse and torture more horrific, made them appear less so? What if the US public and the amateur photographers at Abu Ghraib share a kind of moral blindness—let us call it the "Abu Ghraib Effect"—that allows them to ignore, or even to justify, however partially or provisionally, the facts of degradation and brutality manifest in the picture? And Finally–and more hopefully–What if the "Abu Ghraib effect" can in some small measure be undermined, or at least made alien by means of its exposure, analysis, and public discussion?[6]

Eisenmann believed that the "Abu Ghraib Effect" could have less of an impact on the public if we just acknowledged it. I believe that we need to acknowledge it, but also deconstruct what aestheticizing images of rape has done to us, and push for art history to depict rape as accurately as possible. That's why I'm trying to articulate the ways in which Art History has contributed to rape culture, unconsciously or consciously, and how labeling it can enact social change in the field.

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[5]These photographs originated from an Iraqi Prison in 2004 and revealed a series of human rights violations or sexual abuse, sodomy, torture, rape, and murder committed by the United States Army and the Central Intelligence Agency.

[6] Stephen Eisenmann, *The Abu Ghraib Effect,* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 8.

B. Mythologizing Women Artists

While I was developing each artist's case study, I consistently worried about contributing to mythologies of each artist; myth affects women artists by minimizing their voices, and ultimately constricting their power and political efficacy. Such myths are harmful to telling the story of women in our society, including, but not limited to women artists, activists, and politicians. In past writings, I've argued that myths allow women artists' strength to be distorted and misrepresented. Anne Wagner discussed the mythological presence of post-minimalist artist Eva Hesse. In her article, "Another Hesse," she analyzed how most scholars expressed regret at not knowing Hesse personally, even though they "[felt] he or she knew [Hesse] through her work, and consequently think of Hesse's traumatic experiences and the hard life she endured."[7]

To understand how myth operates on the reception of Hesse, and other women artists, I turn to Roland Barthes' essay "Myth Today." Barthes gives us a way to understand myth as a type of speech with three parts: the signifier, signified, and the sign.[8] This signifier is the object itself, the signified is the representation of that object, and the sign is how the signifier and the signified are connected. For example, if we think of roses, the signifier is roses, the signified is passion, and the sign would work to communicate passion to its audience. Working with this structure, Barthes continues to show his idea of a myth as a further sign, with its root in language, but to which something else is added. To make a myth, the sign itself is used as a signifier, and a new meaning is attached, becoming the new signified. When a new meaning is attached, it isn't done arbitrarily since myths are created for a specific reason.

[7] Anne M. Wagner, "Another Hesse," *October 69* (1994): 49.
[8] Roland Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies*, (New York: Hill and Hang, 2012), 221.

Barthes devotes his essay to arguing that myth has an explicit relationship to power. A myth is based on human history and cannot naturally occur. There are always intentions in myth, and it can easily be changed or destroyed during participation in the creation of an ideology. Its goal is not to show or hide the truth when creating an ideology; it solely wants to deviate from reality. The principal function of myth is to naturalize a concept or belief and purify a sign. By clarifying the sign, it fills the myth with new meaning that is relative to the communicative intentions of those who are creating the myth. In the latest sign, there are no contradictions that could raise any doubts regarding the myth, because it is not deep enough to have these contradictions. Instead, it simplifies the world by making people believe that signs have inherent meaning. Myth "abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences."[9] Myth is powerful; way more powerful than any rational explanation that can disprove the myth. The intentions have been naturalized by the myth, thus preventing any further questioning.

When addressing natural concepts that aren't naturally occurring, Barthes uses the terms "ex-nomination," or the "outside of naming." Dominant groups in society create concepts that are considered naturally occurring, when in fact they are not. This mechanism is done covertly so that they don't draw attention to themselves by producing a name. They're just the "normality," against which everything else is judged. Barthes states, "[the bourgeoisie] makes its status undergo a real ex-nominating operation: the bourgeoisie is defined as the social class which *does not want to be named.*" This is removing our understanding of concepts and beliefs that were created by humans, human-made concepts, and presents them as something natural and innocent.

[9] Barthes, 243.

For Hesse, when she passed away at 35 due to a brain tumor, her myth as a tragic figure was formed. Articles appeared with titles like "Heartache Amid Abstraction," "Fragile Artist's Agonized Life," "A Portrait of the Artist: Tortured and Talented," or "Growing Up Absurd;" each title centered around the idea that Hesse was "endlessly gorgeous, girly, incomplete, immature, melancholic … a symptom of the pathology of the female condition."[10] Wagner explicitly states that the writers during this time couldn't resist taking advantage of Hesse's death because it was so topical. In fact, most of the writers who were addressing Hesse's myth-forming in hopes of demystifying the artist were still adding to the myth by addressing it in the first place. The signifier, which is the image used to stand in for something else, would be the youthful, tragic death of Hesse, making the signified, or what it stands in for, as Hesse being less than her male counterparts; she is more immature, and her appearance is weighed more in value than the work she's creating. Her work is not enough to stand on its own. It will never reach its peak because of her untimely death.

While I am discussing these women's biographies, and I acknowledge that mythologizing women artists is a real issue that's done intentionally to separate women from power. Similarly, separating women from their biography has the same effect: separating women from the power of relating to a broader audience. In recent scholarship, it has come to light that Diane Arbus was sexually assaulted by her brother, Howard Nemerov, for her entire life. Without considering the sexual violence inflicted on Arbus, critics have created this myth of her being an exploitative monster. The exploitation doesn't go away, and it never will, but understanding where that violence stems from within Arbus allows us to humanize her and to engage with her work on a social level rather than theoretically. The other two case studies on Adrian Piper and Ana

[10] Wagner, 55.

Mendieta will challenge our current understandings of their work when evaluating them through the lens of rape culture. Each of these case studies will include topics of trauma, repression, child abuse, domestic violence, racial discrimination, and many more. These are sensitive topics that often get discussed in academia insensitively; that insensitivity can develop internalized sexist thoughts and nurture different levels of the patriarchy. Art History must do better. It must be better.

III. DIANE ARBUS

A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you, the less you know.
-Diane Arbus

Diane Arbus's photography has been idolized since her debut in "New Documents," a 1967 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. The Curator, John Szarkowski, discussed Arbus's work as betraying sympathy "for the imperfection and frailties of society." He wrote,

> They like the real world, in spite of its terrors, as the source of all wonder and fascination and value–no less precious for being irrational. This exhibition shows a handful of pictures by three photographers of that generation. What they hold in common is the belief that the commonplace is really worth looking at, and the courage to look at it with a minimum of theorizing … The portraits of Arbus show that all of us–the most ordinary and most exotic of us–are on closer scrutiny remarkable. The honesty of her vision is of an order belonging only to those of truly generous spirit.[11]

Arbus's art was viewed as honest, generous, and most importantly, real. Her goal was to photograph "freak" people like nudists, twins, female impersonators, and mentally handicapped to make them a part of everyday life. Her works command the audience to question the humanity in her subject's persona. Despite Arbus's effort to make her subjects appear "normal," her photography is categorizedby Susan Sontag in her book *On Photography* as aggressive and destructive, and it was. She tends to photograph "freaks" as pathetic, pitiable, repulsive, without any compassionate feelings.[12] Susan Sontag, a huge critic of Arbus's work, argued that her photography "expresses a desire to violate her own innocence, to undermine her sense of being privileged, so vent her frustration at being safe."[13] Her photographed subjects described the

[11] John Szarkowski, wall label for "New Documents" exhibition (1967) in *Arbus, Friedlander, Winogrand New Documents, 1967*, (New York, NY: The Museum of Modern Art, 2017): 1. The three featured artists were Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand.
[12] Diane Arbus often referred to her subjects as "freaks." I do not agree with this categorization of her subjects, so will only use this term in direct quotes from Arbus or other critics to not continue the exploitation of her photographic subjects.
[13] Susan Sontag, On Photography, (New York: Rosetta Books LLC, 1973), 26.

encounter as being "Arbused" of having her expression imposed on them.[14] Arbus's camera operated as a tool to "procur[e] experience, and … acquire[e] a sense of reality." Her fascination with marginalized groups, in Sontag's view, was to merely understand her surroundings with no goal or desire to make their realities any better.

In past writing, I described Arbus's work as representing the sublime in the sense that that she lacked the ability to empathize with their struggles, and argued that her photography is exploitative, inhumane, and immoral.[15] My opinion of Arbus's work changed after learning about her life; rather, I think the fascination with her subjects manifests in aggression and brutality through her photography. I argue that these symptoms of aggression stem from Arbus lack of understanding the violence against her.

Arbus described her subjects as, "being born with their trauma," stating:

> There is a quality of legend about freaks. Like a person in a fairy tale who stops you and demands that you answer a riddle. Most people go through life dreading they will have a traumatic experience. Freaks were born with their trauma. They have already passed their test in life. They are Aristocrats.[16]

To be born with trauma is being born without a chance; without a chance to avoid violence and being traumatized from your existence. To have no say in your personal reputation and officially be defined "the other." Arbus was adamant about not facing any adversity herself, stating

> One of the things I felt I suffered from as a kid was, I never felt adversity. I was confirmed in a sense of unreality which I could only feel as unreality. And the sense of being immune, ludicrous as it seems, a painful one. It was as if I did not inherit my kingdom for a long time.[17]

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[14] William Todd Schultz, *An Emergency in Slow Motion: The Inner Life of Diane Arbus*, (New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2011): 26.
[15] "Sublime" as defined by Kant in *Critique of Pure Reason,* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999).
[16] Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus,* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972): 3.
[17] Arbus, *Diane Arbus*, 5.

This quote seems to say all that we need to know about Arbus's life; she was never challenged, never faced adversity, and was fascinated with her subjects solely because they had issues. Arbus grew up wealthy on the Upper East Side of New York City; her father owned a clothing store on Fifth Avenue, and she had nannies and chauffeurs her entire life. Despite this, Arbus wrote in her diary about feeling "suffocated" and "sealed-off [from the] world." In recent literature about Arbus's life, we learned that she was sexually abused by her older brother, Howard Nemerov, for most of her life. Howard acknowledged that he and his sister experimented sexually when they were young.[18]. The revelation came about in a therapy session; Arbus confessed to being intimate with Howard in adolescence that simply never ended. Howard was three years older than Diane. The last time she went to bed with him was in July 1971, a couple of weeks before she committed suicide.

The therapist described the discussion as casual, and her journals often referred to their sexual liaison in an "offhand way, as if there was nothing so remarkable about it."[19] In other words, she looked at the relationship with her brother as normal rather than abusive. Maybe, in Arbus's mind, she truly thought she hadn't been abused. A couple of years ago I listened to a TEDTalk by Leslie Morgan Steiner titled "Why Domestic Violence Victims Don't Leave."[20] Steiner discussed her relationship with her ex-husband as a story-book romance that quickly turned violent. What started as a happy pairing eventually turned into him beating her every day. When she left her husband, she asked herself why she had stayed for so long. She stated,

> The answer is easy. I didn't know he was abusing me. Even though he held those loaded guns to my head, pushed me down stairs, threatened to kill our dog, pulled the key out of the car ignition as I drove down the highway, poured coffee grinds on my head as I dressed for a job interview, I never once thought of myself as a battered wife. Instead, I

[18] Arthur Lubow, *Diane Arbus: Portrait of a Photographer* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 18.
[19] Lubow, 19.
[20] Leslie Morgan Steiner, "Why Domestic Violence Victims Don't Leave," *TED*, https://www.ted.com/talks/leslie_morgan_steiner_why_domestic_violence_victims_don_t_leave?language=en.

> was a very strong woman in love with a deeply troubled man, and I was the only person on Earth who could help Conor face his demons.[21]

Similarly, without feminism, how would Diane Arbus know she was being abused? She grew up in a time when there was no feminist consciousness and consequentially no awareness of what constituted abuse. For most of Arbus's life, she was never given the tools to understand her trauma or emotionally express herself. Maybe she tried through her photography, but it seems that her photographs took on a new form of aggression and abuse towards her subjects and herself.

Arbus's self-aggression can be seen in her self-portrait taken in 1945. *Self-portrait in Mirror* (1945) (fig. 2) captures the artist staring into a mirror with her breasts exposed and head cocked to the side. Positioning herself carefully, her hands are resting on both her camera and pregnant stomach. This self-portrait doubled as her pregnancy announcement to her husband, Allan Arbus, while he was serving in World War II.[22] Arbus claimed to be excited about motherhood, but she didn't want to do it alone with Allan away. Using the 5x7 Deardorff view camera that her father gave her, Arbus documented her swollen belly and enlarged breasts.[23] In this photograph, she is wearing only white cotton underpants, and looks remarkably young and slightly out of focus. Lubow claimed that Arbus took this vulnerable self-portrait also because her husband wanted her to. The Arbuses met when Diane was 14 and Allan was 22. It seems that Allan envisioned white as being virtuous and pure and that these were things he wanted Diane to be. Pati Hill, writer and close friend of Diane Arbus, remarked, "It was the desire of Allan that she should wear the cotton underwear … the desire to make her look like a child bride."[24] After

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[21] Steiner, 10:10.
[22] Andrea Liss, "A Revolutionary Promise of Justice: Diane Arbus' Self-Portrait, *Pregnant*, 1945, NYC," *Studies in the Maternal* 9, no. 1 (2017): 8.
[23] Lubow, 59–61.
[24] Lubow, 59.

she gave birth to her first child, Doon, Arbus suffered from postpartum depression. She wrote a few days after Doon was born that,

> I love our lack of connection: that she doesn't feel anything towards me, and I feel in such an odd, separate way towards her. I expected great changes (first I expected it from pregnancy, then when it didn't come, I expected it from birth) but I'm glad I didn't change or at least feel changed. I trust myself better as I am.[25]

Considering Arbus's tendency to photograph families, some scholars claim that her obsession with family photography is reflective of her want or need to revisit her childhood.[26] I believe Arbus used her art to process the emotional abuse inflicted in her lifetime. She yearned to make the world happy, and she thought she could do that through her photography. Hearing Arbus speak about her artwork is extremely different from how it is perceived. She spoke of her photography as working with the subject to build her portraits, an experience, again, that was commonly referred to being "Arbused."[27] This symptom of aggression seems representative of Arbus being conflicted with her past, of not really understanding what had happened to her, and having a disconnect with reality.

While the self-portrait suggests Arbus's vulnerability, compositionally, it suggests the camera as being a part of her identity and intrinsically depicted how she interacted with the world. Photography is a special medium in the art discipline because it requires minimal attention to detail; rather, it can manifest "realism" by the click of a button. One of Arbus's teachers, Alexey Brodovitch, would have his students cut out a rectangle from a piece of cardboard in order to take mental pictures through it, further framing the world until the photographic way of seeing replaced the ordinary way and camera-users became cameras.[28] With

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[25] Lubow, 60.
[26] Schultz, 9.
[27] "Arbused" was used to describe how the photographic subjects' expressions were not their own, but that of Arbus's.
[28] Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd, 2005): 144.

its capacity to hold the world at a distance and to fix and de-realize it, photography is key for Arbus to further herself from her subjects. This aestheticized way of seeing may have served as protection for Arbus; she often described the feeling of holding a camera as feeling nothing real or harmful could happen to her. Towards the end of her life, close friends described how she would wear her camera always: "I never take it off."[29] Towards the end of her life, Arbus took photographs of every moment. In Patricia Bosworth's biography, she tells the story of a close friend going to the steam room with Arbus after Arbus discovered that Allan was romantically involved with another woman. Arbus proceeded to go into a frenzy, declaring that she couldn't take it anymore, that she wanted to be numb, and to do that she would take photographs. She proceeded to take photographs most of the half-naked women around her, refusing to stop until the camera was taken from her hands and management threw her out.[30] This suggests that Arbus turned to photography to escape from her own reality, and possibly, that photography transgressed Arbus's view of reality. Susan Sontag discussed the power of the camera, and its ability to depersonalize our relationship to the world. She stated,

> Photography, which has so many narcissistic uses, is also a powerful instrument for depersonalizing our relation to the world, and the two uses are complementary. Like a pair of binoculars with no right or wrong end, the camera makes exotic things near, intimate; and familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away. It offers in one easy, habit forming activity, both participation and alienation in our own lives and those of others -- allowing us to participate, while confirming alienation.[31]

Photography was enough interaction to keep from isolation while maintaining protection for Arbus. Yet, even while she felt protected behind the camera, she was forgetful of how her photographs could impact her subjects. As stated in the beginning, Arbus's photography was

[29] Bosworth, 154.
[30] Bosworth, 179.
[31] Susan Sontag, 130.

described by critic Susan Sontag as "pathetic, pitiable, as well as repulsive, but it does not arouse any compassionate feelings."[32] Arbus general disconnect with the world manifested in aggression against her subjects, with both her demeanor towards them and how she presented them to the world. Shockingly, most of Arbus's photographs do not show emotional distress; we do not see their pain, rather their emotional detachment and autonomy of the photograph. Sontag discussed at length the experience of being photographed by Arbus, stating:

> Arbus wanted her subjects to be as fully conscious as possible, aware of the act in which they were participating. Instead of trying to coax her subjects into a natural or typical position, they are encouraged to be awkward–that is, to pose. (Thereby, the revelation of self gets identified with what is strange, odd, askew.) Standing or sitting stiffly makes them seem like images of themselves.[33]

Sontag discusses the poses of Arbus's photography also emphasizing their difference from the viewer. The frontality makes sense for ceremonial pictures, like weddings or graduations, but the frontality in these images implies the subject's cooperation: "To get these people to pose, the photographer has had to gain their confidence, has had to become 'friends' with them."[34]

She goes on to describe how Arbus's work was interpreted following her suicide; that it was compassionate and sincere, and not voyeuristic. "Her suicide seems to make the photographs more devastating, as if it proved the photographs to have been dangerous to her."[35] Her disconnect is perplexing; Arbus's attitude recalls the kind of disembodied, dispassionate and euphoric fascination towards her subjects. She often used words like "terrific," "sensationalized," or "fantastic" when describing her subjects. This implied infatuation with her subject material furthers her disconnect from her photographs; when she photographs her subject, she knew how

[32] Sontag, 26.
[33] Sontag, 29.
[34] Sontag, 30.
[35] Sontag, 31.

she *should* feel during the interaction, but failed to articulate that interaction through her photographs. According to Patricia Bosworth, Arbus experienced this social disconnect since she was a young girl. She knew at eleven years old that she was supposed to be excited about boys, but only felt "still and empty inside."[36]

Feelings of detachment and unreality obviously have their advantages—they allow immunity from upsetting feelings. Arbus entered a state of post-psychological person: rarely self-revelatory, remarkably un-introspective, and with little sense of her own desires. Arbus's sense of self was dominated by the absence of arbitrary facts. She could do little to understand her feelings because inevitably understanding her feelings would change nothing. Arbus once said,

> Very often knowing yourself isn't really going to lead you anywhere. Sometimes it's going to leave you kind of blank. Like, here I am, there is a me, I've got a history, I've got things that are mysterious to me in the world, I've got things that bug me in the world. But there are moments when all that doesn't seem to avail.[37]

Arbus was incapable of connecting to her subjects, and that inherently labels her as exploitative. Her subjects had no say in their representation and couldn't truly interact with Arbus in any meaningful way. I could argue that Arbus understood and liked that aspect of her interaction with her subjects. She was fully aware of the power of photography. She once commented that by holding the camera, you have acquired "some edge" to fix people. By "fix," I'm sure Arbus meant holding her subjects still in a photograph, but also to hold them still in a frame and free from interactions with other people.

Now, I return to Arbus's subjects being "born with their trauma;" was Arbus born with hers? Was she really all that different from her subjects, or was she attracted to photographing

[36] Bosworth, *Diane Arbus*, 28.
[37] Diane Arbus, *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, (New York: Aperture Foundation Publishing, 1972), 7-8.

them because they reminded her of herself? I used to believe it was dehumanizing to say that someone was "born with their trauma" because that suggests one is already born suffering from a violent experience, but maybe it isn't dehumanizing. Maybe it's a reality for the marginalized in our world. Of course, I can only speak to the experience of being a woman, but women are born into a prevalent system of violence. The interesting thing about trauma is that it isn't predetermined; people can go through the same acts of violence and not be traumatized. I believe Arbus was.

Arbus's trauma manifested itself in her separation and lack of engagement with her photographic subjects. I don't want to justify the way Arbus treated her victims, but to a certain extent, maybe she was set up to fail because of her gender. Her aggression was apparent both towards herself, as we see in her self-portrait / pregnancy announcement to Allan, and to others, as is apparent in *Child with Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park* (1962) (fig. 3). She seemed to believe that without her photographs, these people would vanish away; "there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them."[38] This egotistical thought is a symptom of aggression stemming from her abuse and sexist treatment. Arbus's family did not support her photography in the same manner they supported Howards' poetry. Arbus was born, subjected to sexual violence for most of her life, and hardly spoke of it to her family.[39] Arbus never identified as a feminist, never related her experience to feminist issues, and never saw them as part of a larger picture.

She did seek help from therapy towards the end of her life, but she discussed losing touch with everything around her, including her photographs. When Arbus first started photographing,

[38] Arbus, *Arbus,* 15.
[39] While there wasn't any documentation of Arbus speaking to her family about the abuse, Lubow strongly implied that he assumed the family would know since the abuse happened for a prolonged period.

she adored her subjects. She photographed the same ones repeatedly. Towards the end of her life, something changed–the pictures were no good.[40] While I've never met Arbus, and truly have no method to understand what she went through, but this situation can easily be identifiable to any person who suffered from sexual violence. As you're trying to run away from what you're afraid of dealing with, you lose yourself in other hobbies, like Arbus did with her photography. But if you never deal with the issue firsthand, then it not only becomes normalized but also internalized. Sexual violence is the kind of behavior you accept when you deem yourself worthy of it. Going back to Steiner's TEDtalk, you can never properly identify abuse until you find self-worth; and, let me tell you, finding self-worth through the abusive and grossly inadequate representation of women in society is one of the hardest things ever to be accomplished, if it is even possible. Art History has contributed to that difficulty—not only through representations of rape, but of women in general. As the comedian Hannah Gadsby stated in her Netflix special *Nanette*,

> I understand the world I live in and my place in it. And I don't have one … Art history taught me there's only ever been two types of women: A virgin or a whore. Take your pick. Ladies' choice![41]

This perpetuation to depict women based solely on their appearance rather than power or dreams leads to internalized sexism. It's irrational, awful, and can happen when you're raised in a sexist world. If I didn't have classes like "Introduction to Gender and Women's Studies" or "Women's Literature," I would have continued down the same internalized sexist path that my childhood set out for me. When I was younger, I was taught how to protect my body through methods of shame, i.e. closing my legs when sitting down, carrying around pepper spray, and taught how to

[40] Schultz, 11.

[41] Hannah Gadsby, *Nanette*, Netflix Official Site, June 19th, 2018, video, https://www.netflix.com/title/80233611.

react physically when—not if—I am attacked by a man. Preparing myself for sexual abuse seemed conditional being female. I had two older brothers, and I never heard my family tell them not to sexually assault women.

This condition of being female was challenged through various waves of feminism, leading up to the #MeToo movement of holding the systemic violence accountable to their contributions to rape culture. One of the earliest examples of challenging femininity and finding happiness was published in 1963 called *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. She conducted a survey of her former Smith College classmates for their 15th-anniversary reunion; most of them were unhappy with their lives as housewives, which they were pushed toward their entire life. Friedan called it, "the problem that has no name"—the "problem" was the widespread unhappiness of women in the 1950s and 60s.[42] Women had no other way of picturing a different life, because they had no representation of another life. With this publishing, women were given agency to challenge systemic violence and assert their agency. This book sparked the second wave feminism, but Diane Arbus did not own it.[43]

The precedent for treatment towards women in our society was put in place long before Diane Arbus hit the photography scene. She suffered from sexual violence both systemically and first-hand and took that suffering and caused suffering to others. While not all of this can be attributed to Art History because the problem is systemic in and of itself, but it is important to note how Art History has not challenged our preconceived norms and enabled cultural acceptance for rape culture. Systemic violence works through constant conditioning; it happened to me each time I viewed *The Rape of Persephone*, because the representation of sexual violence

[42] Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963).

[43] *Diane Arbus: The Libraries*, (San Francisco: The Estate of Diane Arbus, 2004). I'm inferring Arbus did not own *The Feminine Mystique* because this catalogue documentdc a significant portion of Arbus's personal library and did not display Friedan's book.

from Bernini's sculpture is more graceful rather than accurate. Similarly, Arbus's photography is aggressive and was shaped through her understanding and interactions with the world.

I hope that moving forward from this section that you can get a new appreciation for Diane Arbus's photography or challenge the way we analyze her work. I do agree with the understanding of her work as exploitative or manipulative of her subjects, and frankly her demeanor when discussing them to be the same. For instance, *Child with Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C.*, we can see a little boy in serious distress staring at the camera in a gawking manner. He cannot be more than 12 years old, but we do not see his family near him as Arbus is photographing him. His clothes are very messy, and it invites the viewer to pity this child who looks uncomfortable. The little boy is staring directly into the camera, almost confrontationally at the viewer, looking almost deranged. Looking at her photographs is such an ordeal. Mostly anybody Arbus photographed was a "freak" and it begs the question if they agreed to be photographed like that. Sontag notably asked the questions in *On Photography*,

> A large part of the mystery of Arbus's photographs lies in what they suggest about how her subjects felt after consenting to be photographed. Do they see themselves, the viewer wonders, like *that?* Do they know how grotesque they are? It seems as if they don't.[44]

When I first saw this image, I pitied the little boy being photographed because it was clear that he knew he was being photographed solely because he looked different. Arbus loved the differences emphatically to the point where her capturing the differences successfully modeled her subjects as *the other*; as people who didn't have a place in the world; as a stereotype; as a "freak."

Yet, when we look at this image through the lens of Arbus's abuse, we can see her work as a consciously managed attempt to say something that's important to the person making it.

[44] Sontag, 28.

Lubow noted that what drew Arbus to photograph this child was that his outfit reminded her of her childhood. Lubow noted the process of creating this photograph took up about 11 frames, stating that,

> She exposed eleven frames–almost a full roll of 2 ¼ X 2 ¼ film–as the child pranced, smirked and clowned for the camera. In most of the shots, he has his hands on his hips, smiling. But in the one that she printed … he displays one of his prized toy grenades, gripped in his right hand, and extends the left hand in a matching gesture, clawed but empty … "He was just exasperated with me," Arbus said, remarking on what was happening in the photograph. But when Wood, as an adult, considered the portrait, he regarded it differently. "I was impatient," he said. "She saw in me the frustration, the anger at my surroundings, the kid wanting to explode but can't because he's constrained by his background and by this overly clothed babushka in the background. She's sad about me. 'What's going to happen to him?' What I feel is that she likes me. She can't take me under her wing, but she can give me a whirl." [45]

This anecdote demonstrated not only that Arbus photographed people who reminded her of her childhood, but also that she didn't consider the photograph violent or exploitative in any way. In fact, she was infatuated with his free spirit. Yet, she made a deliberate attempt to not print this boy skipping, but rather gazing into the camera awkwardly without a glimmer of happiness. Regardless of her attitude or personal relationship to the kid, it seems that she was unable to show his happiness in a photograph. This picture would have been completely different if Arbus chose to print the boy skipping and smiling, rather than awkwardly standing by himself in N.Y.C. Through the lens of her abuse, maybe Arbus felt that she depicted her subject as happy and full of life, but rather her unconsciously performing the abuse.

Next, I'm going to be discussing the case study of Adrian Piper to demonstrate a situation where the artist isn't repressed and is actively engaging with violence and acting out her aggression. Piper differs from Arbus because she is actively aware of the systemic violence acting against her, and is confronting that violence; specifically, in *Cruising White Women* and

[45] Lubow, 267–69.

Getting Back from *The Mythic Being* series. While Piper isn't repressed in the same way that Arbus is, they both are experiencing different symptoms of similar trauma, and use their artworks in vastly different methods.

IV. ADRIAN PIPER

My experiences as a third-world woman in mainstream society have been strongly influenced by attempts to marginalize or ostracize me … or, at the very least, to put me in my place.

- *Adrian Piper*

Adrian Piper, born on September 20th, 1948, was raised in Manhattan and attended school with mostly wealthy, White students. Her education background is extensive; first, she studied art at the School of Visual Arts where she obtained an associate degree in 1969. She obtained her bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1974, a master's in philosophy in 1977, and received her PhD from Harvard University in 1981. Her background in philosophy seeps into her artwork extensively; she often journaled about her obsession with Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* when discussing violence, both systemic and physical, against black bodies. While often facing scrutiny for being half black, but passable as White, Piper has built her career off resisting stereotypical roles for people and women of color. Her resistance to racial discrimination comes from both moral obligation and self-preservation; both ideas were lost upon Arbus. Arbus was traumatized to where she couldn't engage with the public in any meaningful way and lost her sense of agency. Piper conducted her performance work with an emphasis on personal interactions, and always to preserve herself in a racist or sexist world.

In 1971, when Piper was studying for her master's degree, she became absolutely obsessed with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, or "the most profound book [Piper] has ever read." She described her involvement in it being so great that she thought she was losing her mind, "in fact losing [her] sense of self completely."[46] While trying to anchor herself in the real world, she would routinely conduct a "reality check" by taking the photograph of *Food for the*

[46] Adrian Piper, "Food for the Spirit" in *Out of Order, Out of Sight Vol. I: Selected Writings in Meta-Art 1968–1992,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), 55.

Spirit (1971) (fig. 4). There are similarities from Piper's self-portrait and Arbus's: the naked bodies, including the camera in the composition, and being vulnerable with their audience, but they serve very different purposes. Arbus didn't want to take her self-portrait but was strongly encouraged by her husband off at war; Piper took the portrait solely to remind herself that she was alive. Piper stated,

> The sight and sound of me, the physically embodied Adrian Piper, repeating passages from Kant reassured me by demarcating the visual, verbal, and aural boundaries of my individual self.[47]

As Piper felt that she was getting lost in Kant's words, she continuously set out for a reminder of who she is and her own individuality. Once she had a deep understanding of herself and her physical limitations, she was able to transcend that into political self-awareness through projects like *My Calling (Cards)* or *The Mythic Being: Getting Back* and *Cruising White Women.*

My Calling (Cards) was created when Piper found herself in confrontations with her colleagues after they made a racist or sexist remark (fig. 5).[48] Working in academia during the late 80's proved to be toxic for Piper; she often found herself hearing racist or sexist remarks from coworkers at social events. Often, Piper would journal that her coworkers thought they were in "sympathetic company;" i.e. other White people who also thought racist or sexist remarks. Since Piper passed as White, but was acutely aware of her heritage, she often found herself questioning how to handle herself, or how to resolve this issue; Should she say nothing? Confront them without disclosing that she was black? Make a general announcement that she was black to avoid the situation? Instead, Piper used her artwork to handle the confrontation. Piper could assert her identity without being accused of being manipulative; in fact, the general

[47] Piper, "Food for the Spirit," 55.
[48] Adrian Piper, "My Calling (Cards) #1 and #2 (1986–1990)," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight Volume I: Selected Writings in Art Criticism,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999): 219.

character of the statement acknowledges the person receiving the card is behaving in typical and predictable ways; the very fact that Piper had a response ready for their comments would signify that this *exact* experience happens a lot, and provides a concrete experience of what being defined by a stereotype feels like, and what it's like to be the object of one. Many of Piper's performances are challenging notions of racial discrimination, but I think her series on *The Mythic Being* goes beyond the scope of self-preservation, and creates a persona out of stereotypical roles; in the process of making this fictional person, Piper gave them an entire identity complete with journal entries that established an entire life for the being.

Piper spent two years of her life planning and executing *The Mythic Being* series in the last remaining years of her undergraduate career. In her journals, Piper argued that she wanted this series to document stereotypical encounters between a racialized being and a White public in order to understand the boundaries of people of color in everyday life. She was dressed in an afro wig, large sunglasses, male coded shirts, pants, and brown boots as she performed random unannounced actions throughout New York City; this alter ego was named *The Mythic Being*. Her random actions featured mugging a White man or "cruising White women" as they walked down the street. Regardless of Piper's intention to create a generalized male figure, she created a "racialized being;" using a large Afro and black turtleneck signaled the Black American male nationalist, while the mustache and cigar signified Che Guevara and Fidel Castro. Ideally, this investigation would lead to challenging stereotypes, and it did. However, Piper invested so much into this series that the result was creating a person out of the stereotype; by posting advertisements in *The Village Voice* Piper created a hypermasculine body living in the public area, and a vulnerable subject in the publication.

The Village Voice ads were probably the most important part of this series. So important, that Piper had to borrow money from friends just to afford the monthly posting (fig. 6).[49] The text in the advertisements, which also served as mantras chanted during performances, came directly from Piper's journals that she kept for over 14 years. This series was manifested in many different parts, including documenting through photography, collages, posters, Piper's own journal, other series, and, most importantly, through The Village Voice advertisements. Piper took out ad-space to develop the hypermasculine racialized man's background story. Before these advertisements, this persona only existed in the abstract, composed of preconceptions of how he should behave in public. In effort to materialize a real person, Piper invested in creating the persona's history by connecting him with personal mantras from Pipers journal. Each mantra had to oblige by a few rules Piper laid out First, they had to be short, no longer than a short paragraph. Secondly, they must contain the term "about" or "I" and no objective description. Thirdly, they must deal with important events in Piper's life, or important relationships, and lastly, it would be good if they could all involve women.[50] The process of selecting mantras would occur on a regular basis. The advertisements appeared on a monthly basis in the *Village Voice* on the Gallery page, but before she would post them, she wanted to disassociate herself from the mantras. In her personal journals, Piper stated,

> During that month, the mantra and the autobiographical situation that provoked it became an object of meditation for me. I repeat it, reexperience it, examine and analyze it, infuse myself with it until I have wrung it of personal meaning and significance. It becomes an object for me to contemplate and simultaneously loses its status as an element in my own personality or subjecthood. As my subjecthood weakens, the meaning of the object thus weakens, and vice versa. The end result is that I am freer for having exhausted it as an important determinant in my life, while it simultaneously gains public status in the eyes

[49] Adrian Piper, "Preparatory Notes for *The Mythic Being* (1973–1974)," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight Volume I: Selected Writings in Art Criticism*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999): 102.
[50] Piper, "Preparatory Notes," 103.

> of the many who apprehend it. The experience of the Mythic Being thus becomes part of public history and is no longer part of my own.[51]

Selecting the mantras were intense for Piper; it made sense why she had avoided this project for so long: "I've been B.S.ing around this piece for months now … All I've done is hypothesize halfway realizations … that have no substance … the fact is that I'm scared shit."[52] She was always aware of how important it is to remain aware of herself and her existence in the face of her penchant for abstract philosophical formulations, so to create another person out of her memories, and then dress up and act like that person was terrifying. Through her journaling, Piper was able to process her emotions and decide that *The Mythic Being* was important, and that she needed to be the one to experience it. *The Mythic Being* became an abstract personality, a folk character. His history constitutes the folktale used to explain some current social phenomena, namely Piper, Piper's behavior, and Piper's relationships; as such it is a part of the common folklore and folk consciousness of all who read the *Village Voice*.[53]

Piper developed a plan for 12 cycles with 12 entries for each cycle ranging from journal entries of September of 1961 to July of 1972; however, only 17 advertisements were published in *The Village Voice.* Piper argued that each month in the cycle would represent a thought of this new persona, but *The Mythic Being's* experiences would be their own. Piper wrote,

> It may be objected that I have a privileged tie with the Mythic Being because our utterances appear to be identical during a certain period of my life, that is 9/61 to 12/72. But this is not so, since the Mythic Being is, unlike myself, a public figure, existing in the common consciousness of all those who think about him. His thoughts become public property as soon as they are apprehended by readers of the *Village Voice* Gallery page. Those thoughts are themselves quite common and symbolize all occasions on which anyone has thought those things. The order of his experiences are unique as are

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[51] Adrian Piper, "Notes on the Mythic Being (1973–1974)," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight Volume I: Selected Writings in Art Criticism,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1999): 117.
[52] Piper, "Preparatory Notes," 94.
[53] Piper, "Preparatory Notes," 112, n. 6.

> everyone's. So the only "privileged" tie we share is a common use of the English language and idiom and a coincidence of wording.[54]

And with that, Piper published the first advertisement in *The Village Voice* on September 27th, 1973 (fig. 7). Based on their size, it's very difficult to say if these works grabbed the reader's attention, but they continued to challenge stereotypes. The first advertisement stated, "Today was the first day of school. The only decent boys in my class are Robbie and Clyde. I think I like Clyde." Piper's chosen mantras were complex; *The Mythic Being* had crushes on other (male and female) children, explored their sexuality, ached for maturity in their relationships, cried for help, went to therapy, went to parties, and much more. The viewer could form an attachment to this character; without the particulars, the persona wasn't a real person–it was just a stereotype. Even though someone could touch or speak with *The Mythic Being*, no one could engage on any meaningful level. Piper successfully transformed the stereotype into a portrait of a person with a history, sexuality, feelings, emotions, and vulnerability. Before Piper vulnerably opened herself to having her journal being read, she first had to demonstrate what the general audience was afraid of. Piper performed many actions throughout New York City, but I'm going to focus on *Getting Back* and *Cruising White Women*.

Piper performed *Getting Back* by physically tackling a White man to the ground; Piper tells the story of her "getting back" at this random stranger (fig. 8). Piper states,

> The performance consisted in loitering on the sidewalk reading a newspaper, while David, a stranger, reads over my shoulder and tries to strike up a conversation containing many of the features just described. I react with violent and barely suppressed anger, asking him to please get out of my face. Shocked, he withdraws, having appropriated the newspaper I've finished reading. But my hostility hasn't been fully expressed, so I decided to mug him and steal his money. I follow him to the nearest park, jumping him

[54] Piper, "Preparatory Notes," 112, n. 7.

> from behind, throwing him to the ground, and making off with the newspaper (he has no money).[55]

Piper is acting unreasonable, aggressive, hostile, and all towards a White man*;* essentially, everything the public is afraid of. The performance title suggests a play on Black fantasies of vengeance for the inequities of American racism and White fears of Black retribution. She continues to perform White America's fears in *Cruising White Women*; *The Mythic Being* is defiantly staring down White women walking down the street, ogling and sexualizing them; the White women keep their distance from *The Mythic Being* (fig. 9). Addressing this performance, Piper stated,

> This one is called *Cruising White Women*. As you can see, there I am, cruising white women. Again, the idea is to not actually violate the conventions of behavior but simply to set myself up as an altered object of perception and explore those differences.[56]

Piper did not want to violate or hurt any women in the process of this performance, but she did want to question why a Black person being in a public space could generate feelings of discontent or general discomfort. She knew that behaving in stereotypical fashions would garner a specific response from the public; being gawked at, and/or inducing fear from her confrontations. Piper successfully created a case study to demonstrate labeling theory. This theory discusses how the self-identity and behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them; more commonly known *stereotyping.*[57]

Some scholars have argued that hypermasculinity is projected by Black men in order to combat feelings of powerlessness imposed by societal standards. bell hooks argued that the merging of Black identity and masculinity has "overdetermined the identities Black males are

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[55] Adrian Piper, "The Mythic Being: Getting Back" in *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Art Criticism,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 1999): 148.
[56] Adrian Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present II: Lecture," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight Volume I: Selected Writings in Art Criticism,* (Cambridge Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 1999), 89.
[57] Marvin D. Krohn, "Official Labeling, Criminal Embeddedness, and Subsequent Delinquency: A Longitudinal Test of Labeling Theory," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 43, no. 1 (2006): 68.

allowed to fashion for themselves," perpetuating negative stereotypes of all Black men as inherently violent and dangerous.[58] This stereotype of Black men being violent and dangerous has been instituted since slavery; Black bodies have been brutalized and killed, and furthermore, justified by claiming Black bodies being subhuman. From this violence emerged lynching photography, which was used as a propaganda tool to objectify Black bodies and induce fear, reinforce social dynamics, and discipline. Other movements tried to fight against the idea that Black people are inherently violent, and some embraced hypermasculine attitudes; the Black Power movement acted hypermasculine to preserve the African American community. They would go around communities with law books and combat police brutality with knowledge of the law. Consequently, they were described as one of the biggest threats in the nation; the threat of refusing to make the White community comfortable at the expense of Black lives. Piper wrote that,

> The oppressive treatment of African-Americans facilitates this distancing response by requiring every African-American to draw a sharp distinction between the person he is and the person society perceives him to be; that is, between who he is as an individual and the way he is designated and treated by others.[59]

The dramatic difference between Piper and Arbus is how they thought critically of their relationship to the world; Arbus, simply, never did. Rather, she advocated to avoid getting to know yourself; "knowing yourself wouldn't lead you anywhere."[60] Piper's approach was vastly different, being that she constantly revisited her performances, lectured, and carefully journaled to document every step of her performances. She journaled her fears, her excitement, her doubts, even phone conversations where she discussed her projects; this was an effort to protect herself

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[58] bell hooks, *We real cool: Black men and masculinity*, 1st edition. (Routledge, 2003): 11. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/lib/uic/detail.action?docID=200865.
[59] Adrian Piper, "Passing for White, Passing for Black," 1992, in *Out of Order, Out of Sight Volume I*, 285.
[60] Quoted from Arbus's Section, page 19.

from pain inflicted by the outside world.[61] Not only pain that Piper personally endured, but pain from generational violence's committed to her family, and the Black community. Her great-great grandmother was a slave, and her great-great grandfather was a slave-owner; they married after the civil war ended.

The Mythic Being costume adopted the afro hairstyle associated with the Black Power movement. *Cruising White Women* sexualized White women as they walked by, while reminding the audience of how sexual attraction between Black men and White women was deadly. A prominent example is 14-year-old Emmett Till. In 1955, young Emmett Till was visiting his uncle in Mississippi from Chicago. He was there for roughly a week when he allegedly "talked fresh" or whistled at Carolyn Bryant, a White-women who worked at a local, White-owned corner store. Four days later, two me—Carolyn's husband and brother in law—kidnapped Till in the middle of the night, tortured and killed him, then tied a cotton gin fan around his neck, and threw his body into the Tallahatchie River.[62] As it turns out, Carolyn Bryant made the whole thing up; further demonstrating how being Black is presumed guilt.[63] 14-year-old Emmett Till didn't do anything wrong, but that didn't stop them from killing him.

Rape Culture played a major part in the death of Emmett Till; by labeling White women as pure, innocent, and vulnerable explicitly marked anyone who approaches them with sexual undertones, or even accused of sexual comments, guilty. This presumed guilt affects the individual existing in a public space, and Piper's work directly deals with that existence. Piper stated that her work,

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[61] Adrian Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present I: Essay," in *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Volume I: Selected Writings in Art Criticism,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, 1999): 245.
[62] Heather Pool, "Mourning Emmett Till," *Journal of Law, Culture, and the Humanities* 11, no. 3 (2012): 415.
[63] Richard Perez-Pena, "Woman Linked to 1955 Emmett Till Murder Tells Historian Her Claims Were False," *The New York Times* (New York: NY), Jan 27th, 2017.

> Intentionally holds up for scrutiny deep-seated racist attitudes that no individual socialized into a racist society can escape, no matter how politically correct or seasoned such an individual may be. And to have to confront those attitudes in oneself can be particularly painful for those who pride themselves on how politically correct they are.[64]

Piper wanted her work to "contribute to the creation of a society in which racism and racial stereotyping no longer exist;" in this society, the public wouldn't just tolerate people's differences, but accept them full-heartedly.[65]

I think very highly of Piper's work; it models exactly what the discipline needs to be. She understands how violence plays in our society, and actively engages with the violence in a productive manner. She encapsulates the violence and brings it to interpersonal relations for accountability and urges reformative action. While her work-predominantly deals with issues of racism and identity, the issue of sexual harassment in *Cruising White Women* reminds the general public that Art History hasn't solely let down women–it has let down men like Emmett Till; i.e., men who were deemed sexual assailants because of their race. Her work is very personal to her and her existence; she always questions the tautology that if "one is to start trying to solve these problems, one must start with themselves."[66] Hopefully, through this lens of navigating Art History's contributions to Rape Culture, we can garner understanding of our relationship to it, how we contribute to it, and open ourselves up for criticism. Maybe then it will make navigating this topic a little bit easier.

Next, I will be discussing the case study of Ana Mendieta and her pieces of *Untitled (Rape Scene)* and *Untitled (Rape Performance)* to examine the differences from Piper and Arbus. Mendieta is very expressive with violence, as opposed to Piper and Arbus; she highlights female

[64] Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present I: Essay," 251.
[65] Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present I: Essay," 245.
[66] Piper, "Xenophobia and the Indexical Present I: Essay," 247.

victimization and expresses grief in a conventionalized sense. Mendieta plays between being vulnerable and the aggressor, and ultimately brings us full-circle with depictions of rape images.

V. ANA MENDIETA

I think all my work has been like that–a personal response to a situation … I can't see being theoretical about an issue like that.

- *Ana Mendieta*

In the wake of Ana Mendieta's death on September 8th, 1985, feminists' anger was felt around the country and, quite frankly, never stopped. In 1985, Mendieta was living in a Greenwich Village apartment with her husband of 8 months, Carl Andre; She tragically died from falling out of the window of their 34th floor apartment. Moments before her death, neighbors heard the couple violently arguing.[67] When Carl Andre called 911, he said:

> My wife is an artist, and I'm an artist, and we had a quarrel about the fact that I was more, eh, exposed to the public than she was. And she went to the bedroom, and I went after her, and she went out the window.[68]

A year later, Andre was acquitted of all charges; Justice Alvin Schlesinger of State Supreme Court stated Andre was not proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Despite the verdict, Andre's work has been protested for decades following the event, with the latest protest occurring in April of 2017; protestors gathered at Andre's retrospective to hand out cards at the Geffen Contemporary with the statement "Carl Andre is at MOCA Geffen. Where is Ana Mendieta?"

"Where is Ana Mendieta?" marked the absence of the artist; she was not there and had no say in Andre's critical acclaim after she perished more than 30 years prior. Many protestors felt that there was significant evidence that proved Andre guilty, including Mendieta's acknowledged fear of heights, witness statements of audible struggle, and Andre's testimony

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[67] Sean O'Hagan, "Ana Mendieta: death of an artist foretold in blood," *The Guardian,* September 21st, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/sep/22/ana-mendieta-artist-work-foretold-death.

[68] Carl Andre, quote by Ronald Sullivan in "Greenwich Village Sculptor Acquitted of Pushing Wife to Her Death," *The New York Times*, February, 12th, 1988, . https://advance-lexis-com.proxy.cc.uic.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SJ5-5990-0014-54TD-00000-00&context=1516831.

being heavily contradictory with evidence argued in court. For many of Mendieta's close friends and family, they saw this acquittal as a larger problem with the justice system rather than Andre's innocence; Mendieta was a woman of color, immigrant from Cuba, victim of domestic violence, and artist whose scathingly vulnerable artwork was used to prove her instability; she echoes the stories of so many who suffer under societal biases that infect both the art world and beyond.

After her death, activists continued to pressure Andre in effort to hold him accountable, so that Mendieta's voice wouldn't be silenced by her violent demise. This was very honorable considering Mendieta's oeuvre. She devoted her college days to speaking out for victims of sexual violence and in 1973 began a year-long series of works addressing violence toward women and murder. They were all in response to the brutal and highly publicized rape and murder of nursing student, Sara Ann Otten, by another student in March 1973.[69] The first piece was *Untitled (Rape Scene) (1973)*; Mendieta invited her fellow students to her apartment nearly a month after Otten rape and murder (fig. 10). Mendieta purposefully left a door open, for her classmates to walk in and find her half-naked body exposed to her peers. Her body was bloodied; dish shards were scattered about the floor; a hanger was left near the table in the middle of the room; cigarette butts were in the ashtrays; and there was blood in the toilet bowl. She planned this performance from the details of the rape and murder that had been published in the press. Eventually, Mendieta recalled that her audience, "all sat down, and started talking about it; I didn't move. I stayed in position for about an hour. It really jolted them."[70] In 1980, Mendieta commented that the raped had "moved and frightened" her, elaborating "I think all my work has

[69] Jenna Sauers, "Portrait of the Artist, Ana Mendieta, Iowa City, 1973," *The Village Voice*, September 19th, 2017, https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/09/19/how-ana-mendieta-made-art-out-of-the-things-we-try-not-to-see/.
[70] Ana Mendieta, Gloria Moure, Donald B Kuspit, *Ana Mendieta*, (Galicia, Spain: Centro Galego de Art Contemporanea, 1996): 127, n. 11.

been like that–a personal response to a situation … I can't see being theoretical about an issue like that."[71] On another occasion, she explained that she had created this work "as a reaction against the idea of violence against women."[72]

Mendieta raises an important question: how can you be theoretical when dealing with issues of rape? Probably my biggest criticism of Art History by far is that we seem to be discussing broad themes of rape as if it exists in the abstract. That is divorced from reality: according to RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), we have nearly 433,648 victims of rape and sexual assault each year in the United States. Women and girls experience sexual violence at high rates, and it is estimated that nearly 1 out of every 6 American women has been the victim of an attempted or completed rape in her lifetime (14.8% completed, 2.8% attempted). Men and boys are also affected by sexual violence, and the number gets higher when considering people of color, transgender people, or members of the LGBTQIA community.[73] Mendieta created her works against the idea of violence against women and treats her body like a placeholder for any woman experiencing sexual abuse. Violence is the subject of the piece, and she clearly marks that with her tied hands, blood smeared all over her, and remnants of a struggle surrounding her limp body. However, the represented victim, although *literally* Mendieta, seems anonymous; the identity of the artist is not important to the meaning of the work. Anyone can look at this piece and have an emotional response to it. When I first looked at it, without context, it seemed like a police photo; I was looking into a horrific rape scene with a dead body plastered all over it. Why else would we be photographing a woman in this position if she wasn't already

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[71] Mendieta, 90.

[72] "Ana Mendieta: Earth, Body, Sculpture, and Performance 1972-1985," Hirshhorn, Smithsonian, March 3rd, 2019, https://hirshhorn.si.edu/exhibitions/ana-mendieta-earth-body-sculpture-and-performance-1972-1985/.

[73] Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2018 (2019), https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence.

dead? If she were alive, ideally, she would be brought to the emergency room and given any medical attention she would need; if they're photographing the body, then they are recording the crime.

Ana Mendieta is attempting to address a sensitive topic sensitively, but also confrontationally and realistically; the piece suggests that she wants the audience to be shocked, but also empathetic towards the young woman. Yet, most importantly, I think Mendieta wanted her audience to think about what their role in this violence was. There is no assailant present in the photo; rather, it's just a bloody body and an audience to stare at her. After this performance, Mendieta continued with her tableaux dedicated to the memory of Otten in *Untitled (Rape Performance)* from 1973 (fig. 11). This scene was outdoors; Mendieta continues to use blood, which was a symbol for life, death, and the experience of being a woman. Her position is blocking the viewer from seeing her face; once again her face doesn't matter, but rather that this experience could happen to any woman. Mendieta acknowledges this full heartedly, and a lot of her work deals with either the absence of a body or focuses on the body.

Lucy Lippard, one of Mendieta's close friends, described being "struck … by her intensity." Mendieta argued that her work usually would, "really get it, because I was working with blood and my own body. The men were into conceptual art and doing things that were very clean."[74] Even when men were handling images of rape, they were doing it in ways that distanced themselves from the subject of violence; arguably, because they have that privilege. For example, in 1969, around the same time period as Mendieta's work at Iowa State, Marcel Duchamp had his last work, *Étant donnés (Given)* installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art

[74] Ana Mendieta quoted in Judith Wilson, "Ana Mendieta Plants Her Garden," *The Village Voice*, August 13–19th, 1980.

(fig. 12).[75] Both artworks have striking similarities; they both show women lying naked in a forest, no face or head in the frame. Duchamp's *Given* is holding up a light fixture, symbolically suggesting that the woman is alive; Mendieta doesn't give the same allowance for her viewers. Her use of blood denotes violence against the body, but we're left questioning what happened; why is she alone, bleeding, naked in a forest? Is she okay?

Lucy Lippard wrote in an important article on women's body art, comparing body art by women and men. "There are exceptions on both sides," she wrote, "but, when women use their bodies in their artwork, they are using their *selves*; a significant psychological factor converts their bodies or faces from object to subject."[76] Although Mendieta didn't cause her body any physical harm by making these artworks, we cannot account for violence of the mind she underwent when enacting these horrific scenes. And still, she created these graphic images because the Sara Ann Otten case resonated with her; she was affected by the case. Even though it's stated that the Otten case was highly publicized, I couldn't find any information on it; no biographical information for Otten, no mention of her friends or life at Iowa state, I only knew her major was nursing. Yet, her story lives on through these images because of Mendieta's work, and it transcends the original story; now it represents a systemic issue and theme of violence against women's bodies. Because of this, Sara's death isn't lost in history as another statistic; she is given agency and voice, she is remembered. She is not silent.

Similarly, Mendieta is not silent; throughout her career, she placed herself repeatedly at the center of issues that concerned her, and consequently, she has grown a fan base that remembers her work and protests the injustice against her. Immediately following her death,

[75] I will be referring to Duchamp's piece as *Given* for the remainder of this section.
[76] Lucy Lippard, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: Women's Body Art," *Art in America* 64, no. 3 (May 1976): 75, 79.

Ohio State University of Fine Art presented "RAPE: Dedicated to the memory of Ana Mendieta, whose unexpected death on September 8th, 1985, Underscores the violence in Our Society." They noted how rare it was to see such a realistic portrayal of a raped woman in art. In the introduction, Arlene Raven noted how rare it was to have the artist *herself* be the subject and not an object. She noted how Mendieta allowed empathy for Otten, a case that would have become "invisible, anonymous, interchangeable, untouchable, whose name we would not know and whose sufferings we have never truly heard" rather invited our empathetic responses. Raven ends the essay with a quote from Audre Lord: "And when we speak, we are afraid, our words will not be heard, not welcomed, but when we are silent, we are still afraid, so it is better to speak, remembering, we were never meant to survive."[77]

Ana Mendieta's work is explicitly violent, but instead of violence for violence's sake, Mendieta's serves the purpose of representation. Something unsettles her, like the Sara Van Otten case, and she uses her artwork not only to express grief in the conventional sense but to force other viewers to acknowledge the violent act that happened. Mendieta's passion and empathy toward young Sara Van Otten speaks volumes to her character; Mendieta used her artwork to process the emotional grief of the violence done to Otten. Successfully, Mendieta gave a concrete example that the art world isn't a separate entity. Now it is up to us to continue with Mendieta's legacy; she is not here to speak her truth anymore. Who is to say where her artwork would have gone after her untimely demise but her legacy continues today through various institutions like the Women's Action Coalition (WAC) and the No Wave Performance Task Force continue to protest exhibitions that include Carl Andre; these actions suggest refusal by the general public to forget the violence that happened to Ana Mendieta. Through this refusal,

[77] Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival," in *The Black Unicorn* (New York, NY: Norton, 1978): 31-32.

Mendieta's voice stays active while communities around the world express their grief roughly 30 years after Mendieta's death.

VI. CONCLUSION

...and when we speak we are afraid
our words will not be heard
not welcomed
but when we are silent, we are still afraid
so it is better to speak
remembering
we were never meant to survive.

\- *Audre Lorde, 1978*

Silence is complicated. Sometimes people are traumatized into silence based on circumstances beyond their control. Other times people are silenced for self-preservation, creating a barrier of protection. Rather sometimes participating in silence provides solace in times of grieving. Lastly, there is silence you can never find yourself out of—death. Visualizing silence is never as black and white as it may seem. Throughout its intricacies, Art can be used as a powerful tool of defense and aggression; defense to protect yourself, to survive, and aggression as a symptom of dealing with violence against you. Yet, The interesting thing about silence and violence, is that it marks those who participate with silence as inherently complicit with violence; that if you don't speak out against the horrendous acts of the world, then you are accepting it.

Art History has played a significant role in normalizing and desensitizing our interaction with rape. Yet, it is also through Art History that we can develop case studies of Diane Arbus, an artist who was rendered silent regarding her experience with rape since she didn't have the tools to understand the act herself; Adrian Piper, who uses silence to obtain self-preservation; or Ana Mendieta, who uses silence as a way of grieving while -honoring people, like Sara Ann Otten, who are permanently silenced. Art History gives women a space to address issues they find important, it gives a platform to think through issues of rape culture, and hopefully Art Historians can provide context for women whose stories would have been lost otherwise.

I hope this section allows the reader to understand how survivors of rape or sexual assault aren't simple; each interaction impacts people differently. Some people are traumatized and can never move past it, others use their pain to create meaning, both responses are okay, but we need to treat the topic more humanely. One of the smaller things we can advocate for is consideration on the role of artists to handle a personal and sensitive topic sensitively. Moving forward, I encourage other writers to think critically of an artist's background and the way they process their relationship to the world. Lastly, with this notable epigraph from Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival," we must create a safe space for people impacted by sexual violence to come forward and share their stories when they are ready; it is through this that hopefully, we can work through the fear, and establish a universality for how we should treat each other. Through this silence, we lose out on powerful voices; quite frankly, we've already lost too many great women to history; we don't want to lose anymore.

FIGURES

Figure 1, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Rape of Persephone*, c. 1621, marble.

Figure 2, Diane Arbus, *Nude Self-Portrait*, 1945, Gelatin Silver Print.

Figure 3, Diane Arbus, *Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C.*, 1962, Gelatin Silver Print.

Figure 4, Adrian Piper, *Food for the Spirit*, 1971, Gelatin Silver Prints.

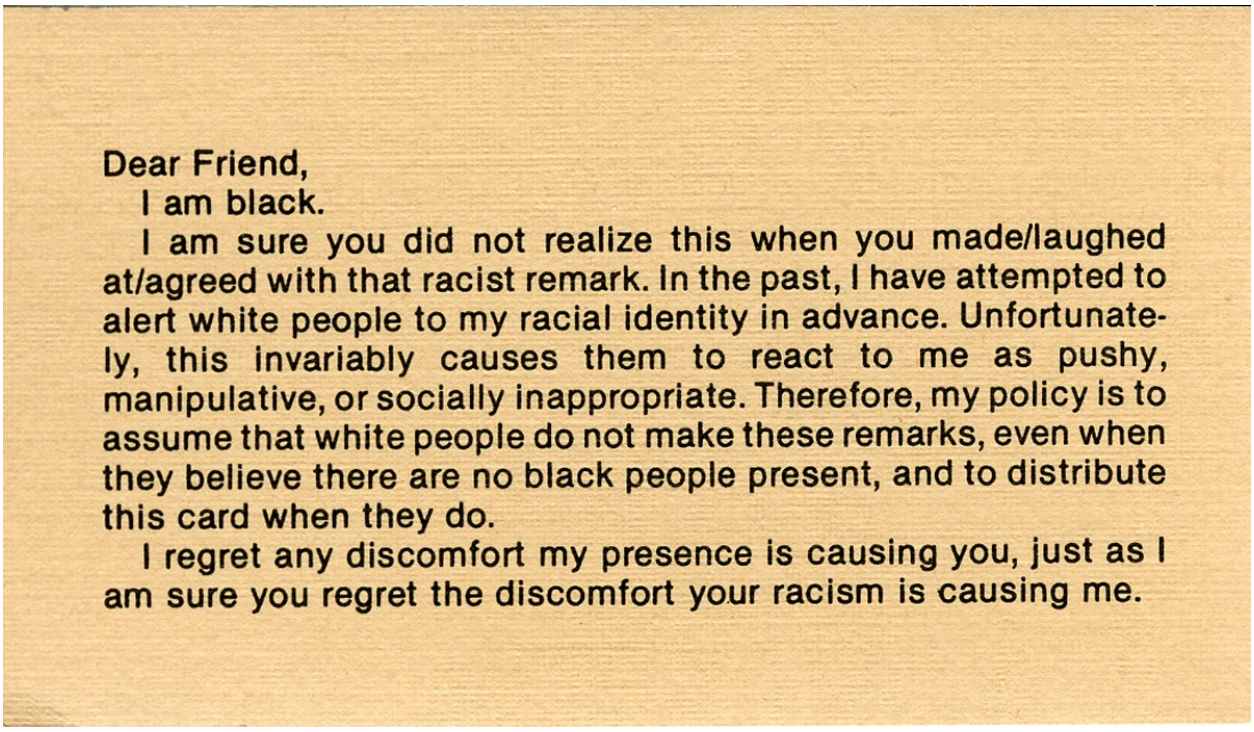

Figure 5, Adrian Piper, *My Calling (Card) #1*, 1986.

Figure 6, Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: Village Voice Advertisements*, Sept. 1973, 17 x 14 in, Newspaper in plastic sleeve.

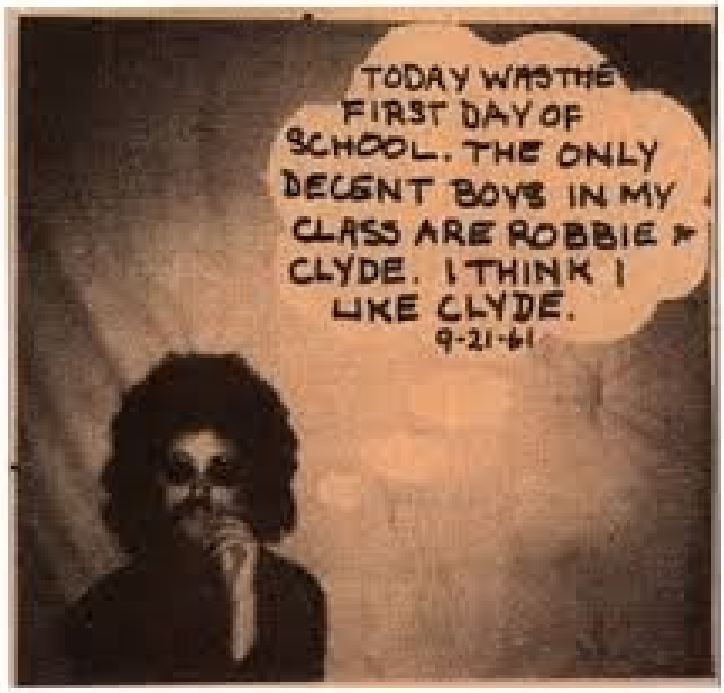

Figure 7, Adrian Piper, *Mythic Being Advertisement*, 1975.

Figure 8, Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: Getting Back #1*, 1975, Gelatin Silver Print 8 x 10 in.

Figure 9, Adrian Piper, *The Mythic Being: Cruising White Women #2*, 1975, Gelatin Silver Print.

Figure 10, Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Rape Scene)*, 1973, photograph color on paper.

Figure 11, Ana Mendieta, *Untitled (Rape Performance)*, 1973, photograph.

Figure 12, Marcel Duchamp, *Étant donnés: 1. La chute d'eau, 2. Le gaz d'éclairage (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas),* 1969, mixed media assemblage.

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