

Question 2: Exploring art made or curated outside the gallery space, discuss how artists have developed art practice utilising space (and/or place). Providing evidence from at least 2 artists and thinkers.

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Phenomenology in the Curation of Art Outside the Gallery

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Introduction

This essay will discuss the sculptural artist, Nancy Holt, and the performance artist Adrian Piper in relation to their practise within the public realm and their utilisation of space and audience. The appearance of Piper's and Holt's work are apparent in difference, but both fundamentally frame the important implications of the interaction between art, landscape and people. Through this analysis, we see Piper and Holt express their involvement in understanding the humans place in space and time, the individual experiences and perceptions induced by this and the phenomenological exploration of gender and race, as well as the exploration of location and subjective consciousness.

With the use of phenomenologist philosophers and theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Edmund Husserl, there will be an analysis of Adrian Piper's *Mythic Being* series (1973-1975) regarding Piper's process and concept and the phenomenology of her work involving race and gender, then Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* will be analysed in conjunction with Piper's work, looking at her thought process, matters of the universe in relation to humans and the experience of perception and vision.

With insight into these artworks of their utilisation of space, we will also gather a greater understanding of the role of phenomenology within the creation and experience of art. The discussion will be structured with firstly an inquiry into Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* and then Adrian Piper's *Mythic Being*, looking at both of their personal process and their philosophies in application to their pieces and the role of the public arena. This will be

followed by an exploration of the phenomenological experience that takes place, with a conclusion to define the research and examine the phenomenological importance in public art.



Piper, A. (1974). *The Mythic Being* . [Photograph] Source:
<https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/36095> . image 6 1/4 x 9 7/16 inches (15.9 x 24 cm); sheet:
7 15/16 inches x 10 inches (20.2 x 25.4 cm).



Holt, N. (1978a). *Sun Tunnels*. [Film Still] Source: <https://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-liverpool/display/nancy-holt-sun-tunnels> .

Sun Tunnels and Subjective Consciousness

In Utah's Great Basin Desert, somewhat in the middle of nowhere and a remote piece of landscape, is where Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* have remained on display since 1976.

The area spans forty acres, of which Holt had bought specifically as the site for her work. The *Sun Tunnels* in question are not consumed by the vast landscape; their visibility is easily spotted whether in close or distant proximity to them as Holt designed them to be large concrete tunnels (fig 1), each tunnel stands eighteen feet tall and has

an outside diameter of nine feet and two and a half inches with their layout being in an open X (Holt, 1977).

The curation of these tunnels, their layout and the process of mapping them in relation to the Desert, was formed from Holt's interest in the positioning of the horizon in the specific site of this landscape. "The idea for *Sun Tunnels* became clear to me while I was in the desert watching the sun rising and setting, keeping the time of the earth. *Sun Tunnels* can exist only in that particular place-the work evolved out of its site," (holtsmithsonfoundation.org, n.d.).

With how these tunnels are angled, it wasn't just to capture the sun's horizon, but also to capture the moon and constellations.



Figure 1, Holt , N. (1973). *Sun Tunnels*. [Photograph] Source: <https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/everything-and-nothing-nancy-holts-sun-tunnels-1973-76> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2025]. Landscape photograph of Sun Tunnels. 9 ft . 2-1/2 in. x 86 ft. x 53 ft. (2.8 x 26.2 x 16.2 m); length on the diagonal: 86 ft. (26. 2 m).

On all four tunnels, they individually have four holes cut into them of different sizes in correspondence to the stars in four different constellations. These being Draco, Perseus, Columba and Capricorn, Holt's decision behind this was reflective of the magnitude of the stars which would shine through the holes. Then during the day, a pattern would emerge of pointed ellipses and circles of light casted on the bottom of each tunnel. As time passes, you can observe changes in the shapes and positions of the light as it's relative to the positions of the sun and moon (Holt, 1977) (fig 3).

Holt's creation of this piece meant becoming integrated into the landscape, using the help of astrophysicists and surveyors, she observed the rising and setting of the sun with measurements to locate where the tunnels would go and how the holes would match up with the change of shadows and lights. The construction of this meant using a

team of concrete pipe company workers, core drillers, cameramen, soundmen, helicopter pilot, photography lab workers, and more such as truck operators, a carpenter and so on. There is a possibility of viewing this work in film, where there is documentation of the space during its process in working with the horizon and setting up the tunnels (Holt, 1977) (figure 2).

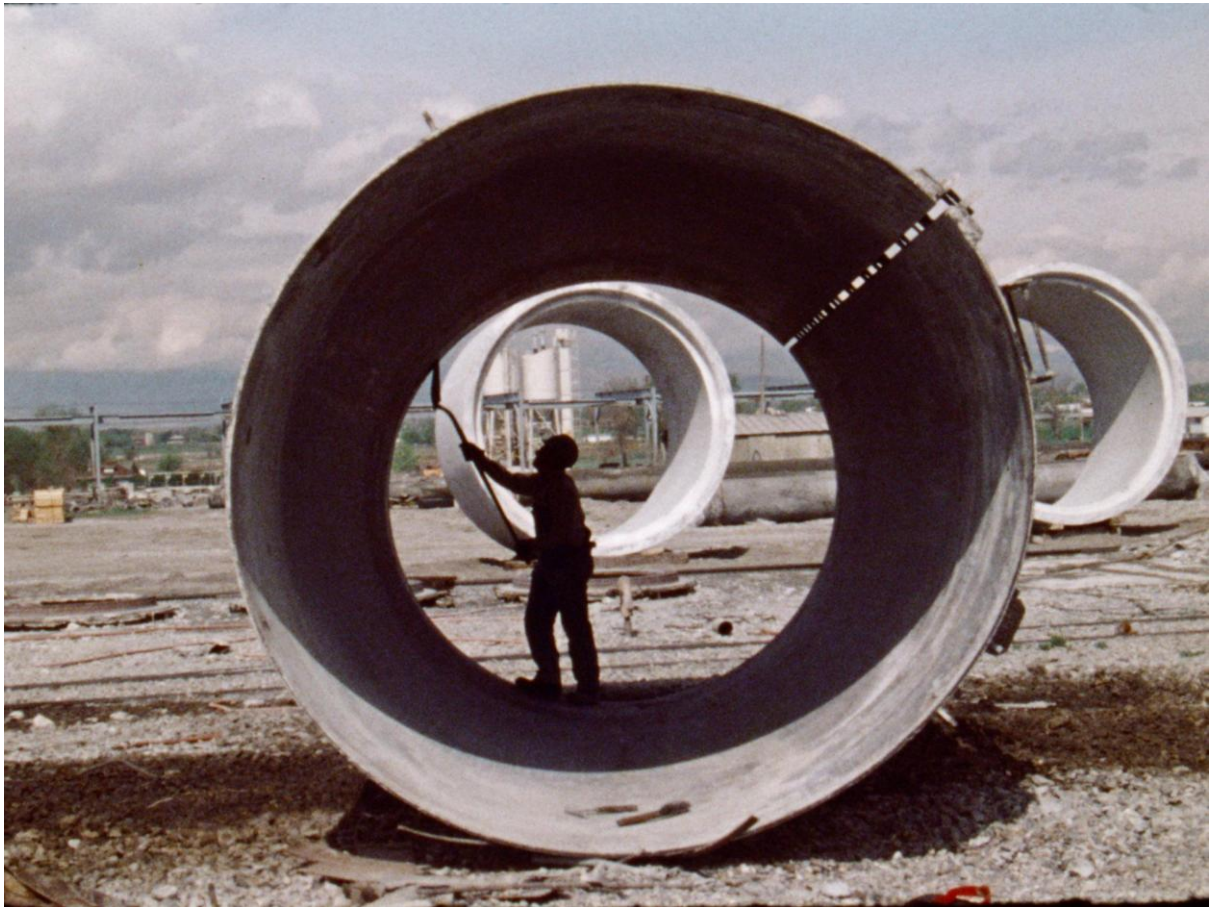


Figure 2, Holt, N. (1978). *Sun Tunnels (film)*. [Film Still] Source:

<https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/sun-tunnels-film> [Accessed 12 May 2025].



(Figure 3, Holt, N. (1973). *Sun Tunnels*. [Photograph] Source:

<https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/sun-tunnels> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2025]. Concrete tunnels with the shadow and light shifting through. 9 ft . 2-1/2 in. x 86 ft. x 53 ft. (2.8 x 26.2 x 16.2 m); length on the diagonal: 86 ft. (26. 2 m).

Phenomenology philosopher Edmund Husserl, theorised that our experiences and conscious perception of objects, location, time, people, etc, was not experienced outside of us but within us, that individually we have a subjective experience which cannot be determined by sciences such as psychology, and our own conscious thoughts are only seen from us, thus creating a unique experience within our location and time (Zahavi, 2025).

Husserl was concerned with the notion of *phenomena*, how things appear to us, within Holt's *Locators* and *Sun Tunnels* we see the development of this exploration of

phenomena through the lens of holes and locations, specifically her work *Locators* (1972) will be used to further understand her approach of *Sun Tunnels* and phenomena. The concept behind Holt's *Locators* were to create basic sighting devices, like viewing something through a camera, but using metal structures fabricated as steel, each Locator was a vertical pipe with a horizontal pipe on top with which the viewer could look through and view the landscape but with the constraints of what's through the pipe, this bringing the gaze from the inside to the outside (Holt, n.d. pg 4). The phenomena of looking were a focal point in *Locators*, each pipe being intentionally placed to perceive the physical world in varying ways, what's seen through one end isn't necessarily what appears through the other (Holt, n.d. pg 11). Husserl's notion of subjective consciousness was confronting not the collective seeing but the individual seeing, the "adumbration" of something (ralphammer, 2024). Holt's *Locators* captures the essence of this, as Husserl theorised, we perceive something in its whole despite seeing a part of it (ralphammer, 2024).

"My sculpture is a way of seeing in a particular place" (Holt, n.d. pg 12), the form of Holt's sculptures is formed in reflection of the first-person consciousness, then using her sculpture to view the landscape more objectively across a collective, to achieve this, Holt makes her sculptures come from out of the world rather than art itself (Holt, n.d. pg 12).

With her *Avignon Locators* (Fig 5), Holt utilises this awareness of space with eight steel viewfinders directed towards compass points based on astronomical north. Each of the locators guide the viewers eyes towards details of the site, but also towards the North

star (Holt, n.d. pg 48). The phenomena experienced through these works circulate back to *Sun Tunnels*, our body as a point of reference placed in the Utah desert, frames our positioning in relation to the sun, stars and moon. Holt used this area of space as a physical reflection on our subjective consciousness and our interaction with spatial objects by using a specific site and landscape.

The specific experience of this house, this body, of a world as such, is and remains, however, according to its own essential content and thus inseparably, experience “of this house”, this body, this world; this is so for every mode of consciousness which is directed towards an object. It is, after all, quite impossible to describe an intentional experience—even if illusory, an invalid judgment, or the like—without at the same time describing the object of that consciousness as such.

(Zahavi, 2025)



(Figure 4, Moore, P. (1972). *Locators with Loci*. [Photograph] Source:

<https://holtsmithsonfoundation.org/locators-loci> [Accessed 26 Nov. 2025]. Four steel pipes, black paint Locators 60 x 12 x 2 in. (152 x 31 x 5 cm).



(Figure 5, Paul, S. (2012). *Avignon Locators*. [photograph] Source: <http://www.nancyholt.com/locators.html> [Accessed 5 Dec. 2025].

The Mythic Being and Individual Experience

The strongest impact that can be received by a person in the passive capacity of viewer is the impact of human confrontation (within oneself or between people). It is the most aggressive and the most threatening, possibly because [it is] the least predictable and the least controllable in its consequences

(Bowles, 2011, pp. 256)

In 1973, Adrian Piper began to embody a persona she named the *Mythic Being*, this embodiment of the *Mythic Being* involved periodically dressing up in masculine attire to have the appearance of a male throughout the streets of New York. Piper would wear an afro wig, a bushy moustache, sunglasses and a cigar coming out the side of her mouth, paired with these performances were the inclusion of photographs of Piper performing as the *Mythic Being*, with touch ups of the imagery to have Piper's gender and race be ambiguous to the viewer, creating a blur between distinction and identification. As Piper describes this persona, he is a "paradoxical figure of liberation" (Bowles, 2011, pp. 229).

Through the use of Pipers performances, posters, photographs and texts, these forms of interaction with the public audience pose questions of the preconceived notions of gender, race and xenophobia through an experimentation of becoming outside of

herself, in a setting where we delineate ourselves to the assumptions placed upon us by the outside beliefs of others.

Philosopher and theorist, Frantz Fanon, recognised the difficulty a subject has in inhabiting or evading the racialised role one is assigned to, presenting the idea that a subject can only exist through the recognition of others. If someone were to operate outside of the normative system, according to Fanon, this would mean embracing madness (Bowles, 2011, pp. 232).

The norm is effective, therefore, because it supplants every other possible public and private image of blackness. Communication must itself be made strange if it is to be denaturalized and offered for critique

(Bowles, 2011, pp. 232)

So as Piper embodies the *Mythic Being* she faces the recognition that she operates within the guidelines of what others pose upon her within the public space, she exists through this awareness, she must see herself in relation to the unjust image others have of her (Bowles, 2011, pp. 232). Throughout the performance of the *Mythic Being* where she walks through a busy pavement, Piper had used sentences from her old diary, in which she repeatedly said the same sentence (Fig 6). Piper transforms the writings of this diary from a twelve-year-old version of herself into the form of the masculine *Mythic Being*, this persona remembers these thoughts and feelings as they were his own. Doing this allowed Piper to experience parts of herself she may have denied, this image the

being has conjured up of racialised and gendered fear not only belongs to Piper but also to the viewer, Piper works with the audiences' beliefs, if the *Mythic Being* appears familiar, then Pipers audience must acknowledge their part in creating him (Bowles, 2011, pp. 242).



Figure 6, Kennedy, P. (2018). *The Mythic Being*. [Video still] Source: <https://www.frieze.com/article/open-letters-adrian-piper> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2025]. The Mythic Being walking through a busy street, repeating the same sentence from Piper's old diary.

Piper's reasoning for embodying this figure was due to the constraints of galleries, and confrontation of the public, as seen in the quote above. The *Mythic Being* was perceived as an alien presence within the art world, a presence that was not paid much attention to unless directly faced with (Bowles, 2011, pp. 251). Not only was the public facing this

being on a busy street, but advertisements of the *Mythic Being* could be viewed more passively, giving the viewer decision as to whether you pay attention to them. The approach of this was a reflection on what it meant to be a black woman artist of that period, becoming conscious of herself and provoking viewers to reflect on their assumptions of race and gender (Bowles, 2011, pp. 236). Before beginning her performances on the streets of New York, Piper took to *Village Voice* Ads with seventeen advertisements, each involving an image of her as the *Mythic Being* with a thought bubble hanging over her head (Fig 7).

The old journal excerpts which Piper included in her adverts infused a macho-ness to them, they never include her name, but what stands out in the advertisements is the use of iconography in popular culture of that time. There are simplified and exaggerated signals of masculinity which are associated with 'Blaxploitation' movies during the seventies that are paired with the thought bubbles, once again creating the *Mythic Being* through the lens of preconceived ideas of race and gender (Piper and new, 2018, pp. 36). However, Piper contradicts this stereotype with what is written in the bubbles (fig 8), which does not conform to the iconography presented but alludes to the originator of the work, who is a woman artist, and challenges the phenomenological experience of another being.

Frantz Fanon's approach of gender and racial identity within existential phenomenology proposes the notion that black people are locked in blackness, and white people are locked in whiteness (Dabrinski, 2019). That much of ontological outcomes are a result

of social structures, this has been an especially overlooked conversation around colonialism and race, where Fanon accounts for the often-overlooked phenomenological experience of black and colonised people (Dabrinski, 2019). In terms of Piper's *Mythic Being*, oppression against black people from colonisation has in turn created a deformation of identity, language and desire between interracial relationships. Once again, circulating back to the notion of racialised projection placed upon the human experience, that the lived experience of colonised people has historically and persistently been stuck in the role placed upon them (Dabrinski, 2019). Piper visually presents how anti-blackness affects the experience of past and future identity, how the minority forms themselves to the gaze of another person, in both her on street performances of the *Mythic Being* and her *Village Voice* Ads she enrolls as a stereotype whilst stepping outside of the stereotyped *Mythic Being* through text and wording (Piper and new, 2018, pp. 218), where there is a confrontation between Piper and the audience, the *Mythic Being*'s strong presence along with the conscious invisibility displayed by viewers speaks to the nonrecognition that relates with a social privilege which Piper unravels through the conscious act of the *Mythic Being* (Piper and new, 2018, pp. 120).

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"Chorus: Life is a rock but the radio rolled me./Gotta turn it up louder like my DJ told me./Life is a rock but the radio rolled me./ At the end of my rainbow lies a golden oldie."

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MY CULINARY counter-phobia has led me to sample some pretty weird foods. I thought I had been through the whole spectrum from sweetbreads to tripe, to brains, but I just received a copy of a new cookbook called "Innards and Other Variety Meats" which proved challenging to even my gorged palate.

Written by Jana Allen, a food editor for the San Francisco Chronicle, and Chinese food expert Margaret Gin, "Innards" has collected its recipes from a wide variety of cooking traditions. Jana's Basque background offers such unusual dishes as Saguetto, a provincial entree which is essentially herbed fresh blood sauteed in goose fat. And Margaret's Oriental heritage has supplied little gems like Braised Mountain Oysters in Broccoli, a tender way to stir-fry beef testicles.

Other recipes range from Brazilian offal stews to the intestinal Scot favorite Haggis to Kosher stuffed spleen, Gefilte Miltz. If you can't find "Innards" in your bookstore, it's \$4.45 post-paid from 101 Productions, 834 Mission Street, San Francisco, California 94110.

As "Scenes" good-taste secret for the week, here's a sample recipe—

SON-OF-A-BITCH STEW

3 pounds beef chuck, flank or brisket
1 onion, diced
1 pound tripe
1 beef heart
1 tripe
1/2 pound mountain oysters (optional)
1 pound sweetbreads
1 pound tripe or lamb kidneys
1 pound liver (optional)
1 pound calf brains
1 1/2 pounds marrow gut (intestine of an unwashed calf)
1/2 pound beef kidney meat
2 or more dried red chilis, chopped
1 teaspoon oregano leaves
1 teaspoon sage leaves
2 tablespoons salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground pepper

Clean and dice all meats in half-inch cubes, with the exception of the tripe and brains. Prepare brains according to Steps 1 and 11 in basic instructions; leave whole. Place chuck, tripe, tripe, heart, tongue, mountain oysters, marrow gut, and salt in a large pot with chilis, oregano, sage, salt, and pepper. Pour in water just to cover (or part coffee and part water). Bring to a boil, skimming away any foam that rises to the surface. Cook and simmer three hours. Remove tongue, skin, and dice in half-inch cubes. Return to pot with sweetbreads, kidneys, liver, and brains. Stir into other meats, cover, and simmer for another 20 minutes. Serve hot in deep bowls with sourdough biscuits or bread and a green salad.

Serves 12 generously.

WE'VE BEEN TWISTIN'. Flip-pin' and Frugging, but now Billy Smith would like to see us chopping, kicking, and breaking roof-tiles on the dance floor as well.

Billy is the New York representative for 20th Century Records, which has just acquired U. S. rights to the number five chart single in England, entitled "Kung Fu Fighting." Billy's made a name for himself promoting Barry White's singles through the 40 or 50 discotheques in the metropolitan area. He figures that if he can start a dance called the Kung Fu, he'll be able to sell the records.

"It would only go over with the black Long Island or New York crowd," says Billy. "Whites don't like dance contests. The Kung Fu dance will probably be very much like a dance they're already doing called the Robot. I'm starting off with five dance contests with \$100 for the couple who can originate the best dance."

Apparently the same thing will be done in Chicago and Los Angeles by 20th Century as well. It's almost like being back in the '30s.

SCENERY. Everything from Kandaini Centers to the Renaissance to the Love Project is described in the annual Directory of the International Cooperation Council, which lists 180 of the furthest out communities, foundations, and research centers around the world. It's \$2.95 from ICC, 17819 Route Boulevard, Northridge, California 91321.

—Howard Smith
Brian van der Horst

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Figure 7, Piper, A. (1973). *The Mythic Being, Village Voice Ads*. Source: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/130862> [Accessed 25 Nov. 2025]. Dimensions, each: 17 x 14" (43.2 x 35.6 cm)

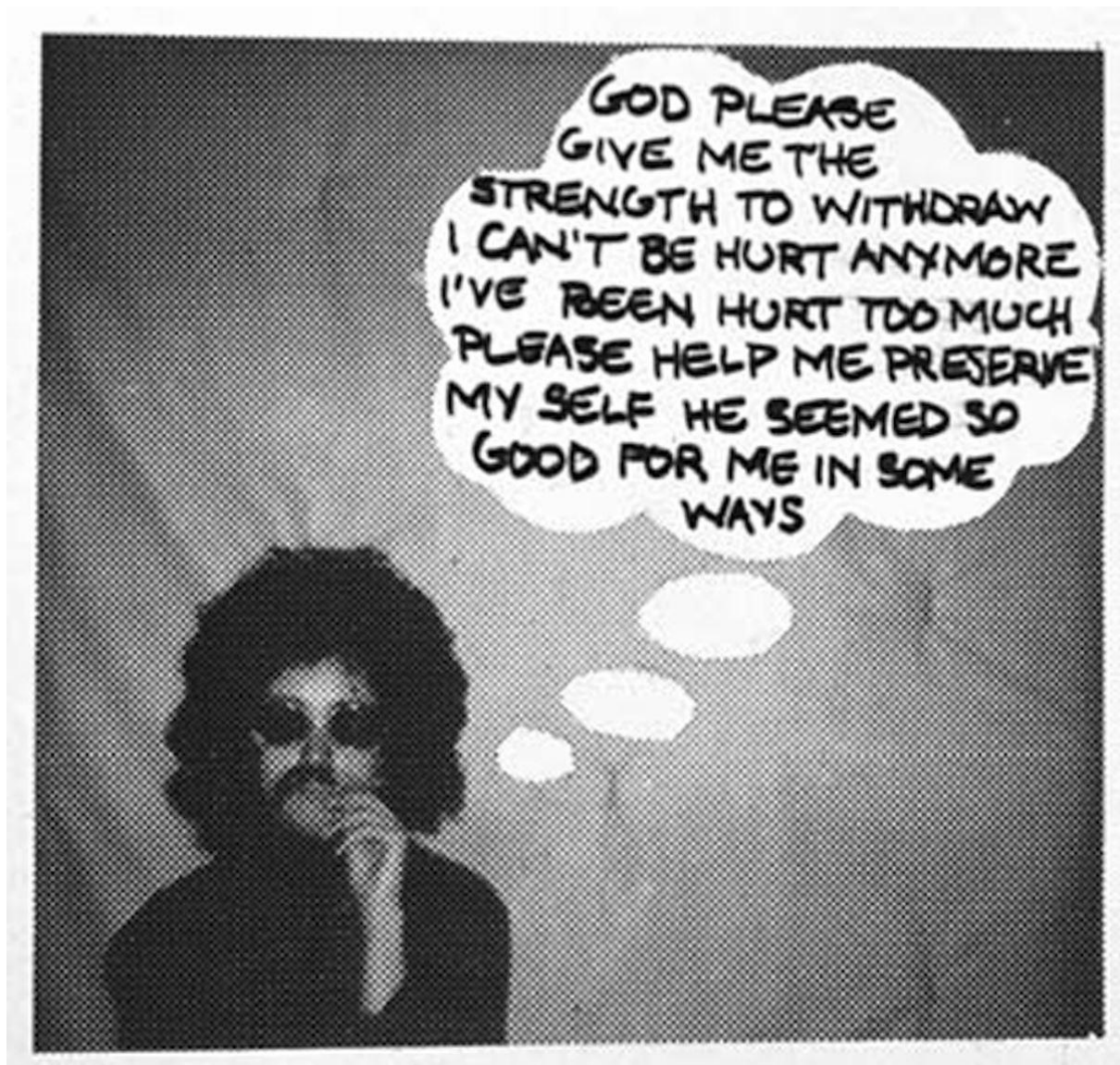


Figure 8, Piper, A. (1973b). *Village Voice Ad, God Please Give Me Strength*. [Felt tip pen on B/W photograph] *Thomas Erben Gallery*. Source: <https://ocula.com/artists/adrian-piper/> [Accessed 11 Nov. 2025]. 2.5 x 2.6 inches

Conclusion

Nancy Holt's and Adrian Piper's methodology of using the public realm differ in their expression and interaction with space, but their themes of phenomenology hold a prevalence throughout the development and progression of their work. Holt's site-specific work of *Sun Tunnels* encapsulates the experience of location, time and light through her mapping of the falling and rising of the horizon as well as constellations which fall into place through each of the tunnel's holes. *Sun Tunnels* holds insight into Holt's thought processes of perception and connection between the relationship between humans and the Universe by utilising the Utah desert, the application of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological philosophy to Holt's sculptures allowed for a deeper evaluation and understanding of how Holt created the pieces to achieve a shift in perception and subjective consciousness with placements of the tunnels in correlation to space.

In contrast to this was Adrian Piper's *Mythic Being*, which similarly used phenomenology in greater understanding individual experience in relation to race and gender. While Holt's *Sun Tunnels* were an interaction through physical objects, Piper directly addressed the general public through her embodiment of the *Mythic Being* to critically assess matters of class and identity with the audience having to make a recognition and claim a personal responsibility of these conditions. Using Frantz Fanon's conversation of existential phenomenology, there was an assessment of how the *Mythic Being* presents the artist as an artwork which confronts viewers with physical evidence of their racism, that because the audience viewing Piper in this form does not realise they are

projecting their expectations onto her, make suggestion to how assumptions concerning matters of race, gender and sexuality are made natural.

Understanding how space and identity is experienced through an individual conscious has been discussed in this essay in the utilisation of an audience and landscape to inform the artist and viewer, both Holt and Piper unfold the phenomenology of lived experience which presents us with alternative perspectives to our vision and thoughts.

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