Sarah Jane Cervenak

Dignity, the Sacred, and the Ends of Black Performance

For Megan Williams

“Thy sacred foot, planted on the ground, gives an abode to the tired soul struggling in the toils of causality”- Chidambaram Kummani Kovai

“Sacred energies would want us to relinquish the very categories constitutive of the material world, not in the requisite of a retreat but as a way to become more attuned to their ephemeral vagaries and the real limits of temporality so as to return to them with a disciplined freedom capable of renovating the collective terms of our engagement.”- M. Jacqui Alexander

Broken landscapes and black bodies, devastated desires and disrespected wills. Can dignity exist for the “crazy street person [who is also black, and perhaps, by definition] bad for business?” Performance artist-philosopher William Pope L. casts himself as the degraded, ignored, crazy black body on the ground, and makes profoundly clear how this is a scene not of scarcity and devastation, but of dignity and abundance. In 1978, in Thunderbird Immolation, Pope L. sat outside the famed New York City galleries of Sonnabend and Castelli, covered in cheap alcohol and surrounded by matches. Even though the elements of willed and willful expenditure uncomfortably suggested an impending disaster, there was no sacrifice; Pope L. remained unmoved in a cross-legged “yoga like pose”, invoking the protective powers of sacred engagement against the material desire of Black destruction.

Fellow performance artist-philosopher Adrian Piper also rewrites destruction as the occasion for transcendence, managing the oppressive formations of interior and exterior [racist, sexist, xenophobic] desire. This becomes possible through her philosophical commitment to yogic practice and what she identifies as “transpersonal rationality.” More explicitly, her Everything series, originating in 2003, is an extension of those commitments, organized as it was around the mantra “Everything Will Be Taken Away.” This mantra appeared in various contexts, from sandwich boards to foreheads to images of Hurricane Katrina, assassinated political leaders and the heartbreaking story of the “racially charged kidnapping, torture, and sexual assault of Megan Williams in Rural West Virginia.”

In the use of yogic practice and philosophy as an aesthetic and philosophical meditation on white supremacist patriarchy, violence, and loss, Pope L. and Piper enlist the energies of the sacred. What the self-conscious engagement with sacred subjectivity provides, through the yogic and Buddhist principles of non-attachment, is an understanding of the ways in which the place of nothingness, loss, lack, absence, is also, paradoxically, the site of racial and sexual dignity and freedom. Indeed, dignity is the place, following Adrian Piper and Immanuel Kant, on the other site of empirical and economic desire. It is where the wounded body is no longer reachable, not only because its very social and material identity has been determined as ‘nothing’ at all, but also because it refuses to appeal to the scarcity emergent in certain formations of a violent and violating secular.
This refusal to imagine lack as social and political deficiency is made possible by, among other philosophical performances, the “bodily idiom” of yoga.8 “Perform[ing] action with th[e] body, mind, intellect…[while] renouncing attachment to purify the self” forms one of many yogic strategies for “living under conditions of modernity.”10 The particular conditions of modernity that shape and are illuminated by Pope L. and Piper’s artistic practice can be mapped along (but, by no means, reduced by) the heartbreaking, brutal, and beautiful intersections of black life, loss and renunciation.

William Pope L.’s renunciation of material attachment in Thunderbird Immolation allows for a public recasting of black life as impossible expenditure, toeing the line between a destruction that has already happened and one that never could. Similarly, Piper draws on the yogic principle of egoic and material detachment in combination with a Kantian-inspired principle of ‘transpersonal rationality,’ to inquire into the social and ethical possibilities of having and wanting nothing. For Piper, this inquiry is mapped as a series of scenes of destruction and absence that include assassinated political leaders [Everything #6], the devastated landscape of post-Katrina New Orleans [Everything 9.1], and the incomprehensible story of Megan Williams’ “race torture”11 [Everything 19.1 and 2]. The central question of the series, Everything, asks about the meaning of self and life in the event of desire’s evacuation. If you have nothing, if everything “has been taken away,” is it only then that freedom and dignity can emerge?

This idea that freedom and dignity emerge on the other side of violent expenditure and the white supremacist patriarchal capitalist “kingdom of ends” moves between the language of loss and violation on the one hand and the inconceivability of a ‘good life’ on the other.12 Piper’s Everything series repeatedly uses the mantras “Everything” and “Everything Will Be Taken Away” alongside images that mark devastation and loss. The simultaneity of abundance—everything—and scarcity—everything will be taken away—is further complicated by the exhibit’s use of the words of the late Russian author, Alexander Solzhenitsyn: “Once you have taken everything from a man, he is no longer in your power. He is free.”13

Indeed, following art critic Amoreen Armetta, Solzhenitsyn’s words along with their use by Piper are “paradoxical”. I’m also interested in Armetta’s follow-up question, “What will emerge once everything is gone?” Might dignity be that last thing standing, the signpost right before what critic Saidiya Hartman refers to as the still unreachable “free state”?14 What role does a performativity of the sacred play in that “free state”? These are the questions that emerge, I think, as the end and at the end of Piper and Pope L.’s performances.

William Pope L.

These days the traditional black male response to identity uncertainty is to hype masculinity; become super hard; or commit suicide with a needle or a bottle…Regardless, we all get caught up in the drama of a script of a past trauma (which we re-visit almost everyday). How does the black man re-write the script? I’d like to think we could just toss it out and start all over, but how does one throw away one’s history? One’s legacy…only artificially. As for me, I’d like to recreate Zhang Huan’s To Add One Meter to An Anonymous Mountain (1995) as a great hillock of black men, stacked on the site of New York City’s Ground Zero, as tall as the now vanquished World Trade Towers. This would be my Billion Man monument. And as this monument implies, re-writing the life-script, the law-script must be done collaboratively with all the uncertainties, joys, and pitfalls it would certainly engender. To prepare for this collaboration, we black men would have to find a way to love our lack and put it to work for our self-interest.

–William Pope L.16

Performance artist William Pope L. is interested in how blackness can be embraced as a lack worth-having. In his street and duration performances, Pope L. uses and abuses himself in order to explore how the de/valued black body can free itself from the telos of white ends. He does this through performances that include threatening his own
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sacrifice in Thunderbird Immolation, covering his entire body in mayonnaise and ingesting the Wall Street Journal [Eating the Wall Street Journal], writing/sleeping/living outside on the American flag [Writing/Sleeping/Living on the Flag], attaching a pole to his groin in Schlong Journey, crawling here, there, everywhere in his crawl pieces and standing naked (save a dollar bill composed skirt) outside a Chase ATM distributing dollars and sausages to bank customers [ATM piece]. Producing works that traffic in over-cited images of Black homelessness, racial and sexual abjection and exoticism while at the same time working with everyday degradable materials, like foodstuffs, Pope L. is after the uncertain terrain where the value of Blackness is inextricable from its association with being the means for an other’s ends, be they ideological, economic, epistemic, or gastronomical. In other words, the lack in Blackness refers to its marginal relationship to a racist and sexist social order and the particular ways that Black presence in the United States is always already haunted by histories of subjection whereby “African American presence is initially premised on ruthlessly extracted labor.”

In a phrase, the New World arena of value, in both its materialist and idealist transactions, depends upon the expenditure of blackness. To expend the “humanity” of Africans in the profitable cultivation of staple crops (or other commodities) as well as the political and psychological contours of a privileged whiteness (defined foremost as Anglo or Western European) remains a fundamental element and an enduring legacy of the New World arena of value.

Further, in the postbellum era, Black identity continues to be the de/valued site of excess and expenditure, over and over again used to bolster white, civic and moral order. The late Lindon Barrett, in his brilliant literary study Blackness and Value, argues that this expenditure of blackness is demanded by white value’s dialectical force. For Barrett, value always holds a “promiscuous interest in the underprivileged and displaced” other. As a result of this endless set of promiscuous expenditures—social, political, and economic—white supremacy renders black people as the ontologically evacuated site of lack, a violent and violated condition of not-having-ness.

At this particular historical and economic moment, performance artist William Pope L. arrives on the scene to ask what it would mean if Black was something “worth” having? Pope L. shows how a Black aesthetic-political occupation of lack—through its impossible association with means—is precisely that which can occasion freedom, a rewriting of the law script through a self-conscious, promiscuous display of the “life script.” Significantly, among other iterations, the law-script can refer to the laws of a determination of will, the scene of an anti-racist moral philosophy. So too, the life-script, in its dialogue with the law-script, exposes the incursions against an exercise of free will and the particular ways that black people’s will has been obliterated by the equation of not-having with not-acting.

In a revolutionary move, however, Pope L. produces art works that articulate the possibility of acting/action from the place of lack. By creating art that associates blackness with excess, nonsense (sometimes madness), and an impossible expenditure/consumption, Pope L. illustrates how an exercise of will as the self-conscious conflation of lack with Black might radically reveal an alternative route to true freedom. If Blackness cannot be spent/ incorporated/ interpreted/ made sense of/ used/ consumed/ stolen from, it cannot serve the epistemic and economic ends of whiteness. By implication, then, lack is worth having when it means that at its end is freedom.

Still, how can not-having pave the way for “true freedom”? If Pope L. engages in practices designed to willfully expand and expend himself, he preempts a white supremacist structure of expenditure that predicates its identity on the very same process. To be a willful black subject who self-objectifies and expends himself is to exercise and ironize dignity. Philosopher Immanuel Kant defines dignity as a place beyond value when he writes,

Whatever has reference to the general inclinations and wants of mankind has a market value; whatever, without
presupposing a want, corresponds to a certain taste, that is to a satisfaction in the mere purposeless play of our faculties, has a fancy value; but that which constitutes the condition under which alone anything can be an end in itself, this has not merely a relative worth, i.e., value, but an intrinsic worth, that is, dignity.\(^{21}\)

In Kant’s “kingdom of ends”, that which “can be replaced by something else” has value and that which is “above value” and the law of equivalents has dignity. At the time of Kant’s writing, Black people were enslaved and by definition, alienable, movable, and replaceable as commodities. In essence, their humanity was governed as well as nullified by a “law of equivalents.”\(^{22}\) However, resistance to enslavement, as a set of “simple exercises of claims to the self, challenged the figuration of the captive body as devoid of will.”\(^{23}\) These exercises in will, then, occasioned illegal movements outside the principles of equivalence and replaceability. Such resistances were, by definition, about dignity.

In the spirit of postbellum dignity, Pope L. recovers the pained, black male body and seeks redress. While working within the economic and epistemic logics of blackness as expenditure and valuelessness, Pope L. asks what would happen if true exercises of will and freedom require a similar economy of expenditure and defacement of blackness that white supremacy both presumes and requires. Returning to Kant, what does dignity have to do with the essentially vulnerable occupation of lack? By self-consciously becoming the “impossible” figure whose lack constitutes the contours of his subjectivity and the very definition of non-replaceability, Pope L. at once resists the amoral desire of the city-spectator/consumer while recovering the dignity and freedom essential to being human.

Blackness at the Funeral Pyre: Defacement and Thunderbird Immolation

In 1978, sitting in repose and meditation outside of two, famed New York City galleries Castelli and Sonnabend, William Pope L. performed Thunderbird Immolation. Thunderbird Immolation consisted of Pope L.’s threatened immolation by a lethal combination of the cheap fortified wines, Thunderbird and Wild Irish Rose, and the strike of any of the several kitchen matches encircling him.\(^{24}\) Sitting in a yoga-like pose on a liquor, Coca-Cola, and match-decorated blanket, the artist, “having established for himself this atmosphere of meditative wisdom, from time to time [m]ixed the alcohol and Coke together, never drinking a drop, and poured the mixture over himself.”\(^{25}\) While the immolation was imminent, it never occurred. Pope L. was asked to leave the premises before the decision concerning his self-destruction was made.

In Thunderbird Immolation, Pope L. makes the art world look at the racist apparatus designed to consummate the equation of lack (not having-ness, absence) with Black. Lack, in the context of Thunderbird Immolation, is to be found and resolved at the bottom of Thunderbird, a cheap fortified wine that Ernest Gallo funneled into inner city neighborhoods.\(^{26}\) As Pope L. reveals in the memories of his childhood and the men with whom he shared worlds, the lack in Black was often exacerbated by strategies that only increased their lack, “violence, drugs and alcohol, crime, lies, different forms of abdication, and estrangement.”\(^{27}\) The exacerbation and extension of Black lack rendered the absence and invisibility of Black people the means for Gallo’s economic end. Here, in Thunderbird Immolation, Pope L. makes this life-script plain, but with a difference. He neither drinks nor dies. Instead, he threatens immolation.

Immolation, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is the sacrificial slaughter of a victim, often by fire. By labeling his performance an immolation, Pope L. brilliantly enlists the energies of “the negative” in making powerful the public secret of his “will.” Michael Taussig, in his important work on defacement, writes,

When the human body, a nation’s flag, money, or a public statue is defaced, a strange surplus of negative energy is likely to be aroused from within the defaced thing itself. It is now in a state of desecration, the closest many of us are going to get to the sacred in this modern world.\(^{28}\)
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What Pope L., along with Taussig, knows so well is that immolation often reveals the (public) secret, the fictions of power, value, and will inscribed into the object poised at the funeral pyre. Taussig continues:

For beauty has been waiting for this incendiary moment as the fate through which it will rise to unforeseen heights of perfection, where its inner nature shall be revealed for the first time. At the moment of its self-destruction, its illuminating power is greatest. This decidedly mystical process—which I equate with unmasking—whereby truth, as secret, is finally revealed, is hence a sacrifice, even a self-sacrifice, thanks to an inspired act of defacement, beautiful in its own right: violent, negating, and fiery. In Thunderbird Immolation, no sacrifice was required in order for the just revelation to occur. Indeed, the revelation consisted of dignity. The whole performance, despite appearances to the contrary, was dignified. By juxtaposing bodily violation with meditative transcendence, Pope L. demonstrates the recognition of his own humanity as an end in itself. Interestingly, in his identification of the set of moral and ethical principles by which humanity should govern itself, Kant elaborates upon the example of sacrifice specifically. He argues,

Firstly, under the head of necessary duty to oneself: He who contemplates suicide should ask himself whether his action can be consistent with the ideas of humanity as an end in itself. If he destroys himself in order to escape from painful circumstances, he uses a person merely as a means to maintain a tolerable condition up to the end of life. But a man is not a thing, that is to say, something, which can be used merely as a means, but must in all his actions be always considered as an end in himself.

In many ways, the scene of Thunderbird Immolation is a beautiful, willful scene. While Pope L. is surrounded by possible danger (the lethal combination of alcohol drenched clothing and skin and the strike of any match stick present), his duty to self (preservation) never wavers. In fact, this duty is articulated not only as a refusal to torch life but is more powerfully expressed in the revelation of this performance’s other secret; that is, it was never a performance about destruction. Describing the event, Pope L. reflects,

Drinking yourself to death and burning yourself to death are both modes of seeking. Seeking attention, seeking the ethereal, seeking absolution, seeking oblivion. No one ever says: he burned himself to oblivion. We do say: he drank himself into oblivion. Samadhi is not oblivion, it is a lively death that can be a kind of activism.Engaged in the Buddhist meditative practice of Samadhi, Pope L. reinvests social death with liveliness. In this way, a sacred restaging of Blackness and value in Thunderbird Immolation effectively disrupts the racist desire that imagines Black life into oblivion. Like the unlit matches, used for writing and not burning, the purpose of things and man is internally revised as the apparatus of Black (self) destruction is rewritten as a meditative scene of repose, seeking, and lively expression.
Adrian Piper’s *Everything*

The idea that a scene of destruction is simultaneously a scene of creativity and transcendence, existing as the end or limit of racism and sexism as it were, connects Pope L.’s *Immolation* with the most recent work of Adrian Piper. Piper’s *Everything* series is a collection of disparate images and objects unified by the mantra, “Everything Will Be Taken Away.” The mantra appears on *everything* from sandwich boards to foreheads to images of Hurricane Katrina, assassinated political leaders and the heartbreaking story of the “racially charged kidnapping, torture, and sexual assault of Megan Williams in Rural West Virginia.”

In its only showing at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery in New York City and from the gallery website view, *Everything* appears sparse and almost empty. Looking at the images of post-Katrina New Orleans, *Everything 9.1* on the gallery’s website, for example, one can paradoxically discern the particulars of that racialized and classed devastation as also non-particular, scrubbed down, and hard to see photographs.\(^3\) Granted, the difficulty in seeing is partially a function of experiencing an exhibit, outside of its time and immediacy, via the World Wide Web. Still, the artist’s scrubbing down of the images with “steel and foam rubber sponges” indicates the way that loss corrodes one’s relationship to everyday life. In her artist statement, Piper writes,

> The *Everything* series originated in my need to come to terms intuitively with the loss of my illusions about the United States, both personally and politically. The penetration of illusion through analysis and perceptual discrimination, and the management of desire, satisfaction, and loss through meditation form part of my yogic practice. The defining task that unites all of the work in all media that constitute this open-ended series is to situate the text, *Everything will be taken away*, in a wide variety of contexts, in a wide variety of media and in conjunction with a wide variety of images, in order to examine how these different visual contexts change its meaning.\(^4\)

In this series and as seen in the example of post-Katrina New Orleans, loss can refer to states of injury. *Everything 19.1*, for example, is about Megan Williams. Megan Williams is a twenty one year old Black woman from West Virginia who was brutally raped, tortured, and held in captivity by six white people in September 2007. Using text from the *International Herald Tribune’s* article “More charges filed in black woman’s torture case,” Piper created a sheet of wallpaper. Covering an entire gallery wall [152 x 198 inches], in grey scale with 10% saturation of text [barely legible] Piper printed out the details of Williams’ story. The wallpaper is, in many ways, a negative imprint. Even though the story of that incomprehensible crime – the set of brutalizing acts of violence driven by the criminally racist, sexist, and economic desire to ‘finish’ Williams off – stretches across a full gallery wall, the text is barely discernible. Further, in the exhibit at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery (NYC), *Everything #4* was placed on top of this wall paper. Significantly, *Everything 19.1*’s connection to the exhibit’s narrative is
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witnessed in Everything #4, a relatively small mirror with the words “Everything Will Be Taken Away” accusingly etched onto its face. Like the imprint, the mirror also complicates a full view; the undeniably ‘negative’ text cutting at the viewer’s reflection at every turn.

Interestingly, then, there are two ways that the negative moves in the piece. On one level, the negative functions at the level of imprint, the faintness of the text’s color matching the impossibly graphic violence of the crime. On another level, the secondary negativity moves through the yogic rhetoric of renunciation; the question concerning who one is after everything has been taken away moves from the hypothetical to the heartbreakingly actual. What happened to Megan Williams shifts this inquiry to the end of philosophy.

Still, Piper is interested in the plenitude of the negative, the fullness of something beyond the realms of material and moral scarcity. After what happened to Megan Williams, Piper creates a negative, an inverse, and an other side and beyond, named as nothing more and nothing less than “Everything” [19.1]. For Piper, “here is an abundance—in abundance—of the present—in abundance of affirmation in abundance of the negative, in abundance of disappearance.”

In his discussion on the im/possibly utopic audiovisuality of Emmett Till (the crime and the famous picture of his violated body), critic Fred Moten brilliantly describes the other side of loss. On the other side of what’s there—the visual, concrete fact of Emmett Till’s murder by white supremacists—is an aural domain constituted by the cries, moans, and whistles of desire and pain. The sound is before and after the photo, the “inappropriable ecstasies that goes along with this aesthetics.” This sound of Till and those that listened to the abundance of life beneath the visual fact of his violation holds utopic promise. What’s beneath the visual, the “inappropribable” domain of what cannot be harmed, is the place where Piper’s Everything too bears utopic potential. The “inappropribable,” what cannot be taken away, is where Piper’s Everything resides.

For Piper, a performative and philosophical engagement with yoga allows for the kind of detachment necessary to inquire into the ‘inappropribable’ and irreplaceable aspects of everyday living. In particular, as a Brahmachari yogi who is also, at the same time, a Kantian philosopher, Piper is deeply interested in the insight yielded by exercises in bodily and egoic transcendence. Writing about her Brahmachari (trans. Celibate) practice, Piper maintains,

In yogic meditation (samyama) our aim is to be able to regard the attributes and experiences of the ego-self from the perspective of a transpersonal (witness-consciousness or atman in Vedanta, the philosophical view that, together with yogic practice, is first described in the Upanishads). This perspective has many benefits—among them a sense of detached amusement and compassion about one’s own flaws and failures, and a keener and more pervasive sense of the tragicomic aspects of the human condition.

For Piper, “the Western standards of power, achievement, acquisition, health, beauty or personal charisma” keep the secular self bound to the world of the senses. Though such a world yields pleasure, it also carries the potential of disappointment and dissatisfaction. Instead of a worldly existence governed by the ethical protocols of the market and individuated self, Piper argues that a renunciation of such attachments allows one to “move through and beyond the world of the senses…to put that world to the use for which it is meant: to deepen our insight into the nature of ultimate reality, and prepare ourselves for final union with it.”

Piper’s interest in this “transpersonal” Vedantic ethical system—one that renders the “clarity, intricacy, and vibrational depth of each person and thing…an object of fascination, astonishment, and unique and inestimable
value” – is also deeply tied to her Kantianism. In the introduction to her massive two-volume project, *Rationality and the Structure of the Self*, Piper argues that a Kantian concept of the self is constituted by a set of principles she describes as transpersonal because they direct our tension beyond the preoccupations and interests of the ego-self, including its particular, defining set of moral and theoretical convictions; and apply in equal measure to oneself and others. Transpersonal principles thus often require us to transcend considerations—even principled considerations—of personal comfort, convenience, profit, or gratification, whether acting on our behalf or on behalf of another.

Piper’s commitment to the interanimations of Black radical, yogic and Kantian performative philosophies is that which inspired *Everything*. Along with Pope L.’s *Thunderbird Immolation*, the *Everything* series challenges its audience to consider the following: who are you after everything is gone? Who is Megan Williams after what happened to her? What is the 9th Ward in New Orleans? What if Pope L. sets himself on fire? What, then? How is that violation and loss understood and reconciled? Are the people who have suffered profound loss somehow, following Alexander Solzhenitsyn, more free? If this world can be transcended, it is only then that freedom can emerge? These are questions that have taken different forms and, for Piper, are deeply connected (though not reducible to) the dialogue between certain Indian ethical traditions and Black civil rights.

On her website, adrianpiper.com, Adrian Piper honors the relationship when she writes, 

[T]he philosophy that informed the Civil Rights Movement and is most often associated with Dr. Martin Luther King - had its origins in Mahatma Gandhi’s longstanding study of Yoga and Vedanta, two of the most ancient philosophies of India. The concepts of *abhimsa* (nonviolence), *satya* (truth), and *vairagya* (detachment from the fruits of action) provided resources and strategies that Gandhi himself used to liberate India from British colonialism. When American Civil Rights leader Bayard Rustin visited Gandhi in the 1940s, he returned to the United States with a sound knowledge of these philosophies and of their spiritual potential to empower African Americans to face down *any* threat that interfered with their own liberation from American racism. Rustin was Dr. King’s source for these ideas; and he, in turn, transmitted them to the students who put their lives and their futures on the line in the struggle against racial discrimination.

Acknowledging this history, Piper’s *Everything* series reinvigorates loss with potency (alongside devastation) and connects the politics of forced and voluntary renunciation with a long tradition of activists who imagined the place of loss and suffering as a transformative occasion for action.

Redemptive suffering, according to religion studies scholar Roger Gottlieb, describes strategies of endurance on the part of the oppressed that at once assert a level of moral superiority while undermining the force of social and politico-economic domination and injury. Sojourner Truth, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King are part of this long tradition of radicals who effectively claimed that there is an invulnerable abundance of power, value, and life on the other side of this world’s devastating material conditions.

William Pope L. and Adrian Piper’s sacred revaluation of secular devastation cites them as part of this tradition. Though I am still unsure whether and why suffering is essential for such reimaginings, there is an aesthetic refiguration of power-in-lack (or absence, or nothingness), which is important to value. By creating art on planes of “moral realit[ies] of greater value and power than anything the white power structure ha[s] at its disposal,” Adrian Piper and William Pope L. offer new ways of thinking and materializing Black power and dignity in this life and the next.
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End Notes

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5 Ibid.

6 “Transpersonal rationality” is a concept introduced by Adrian Piper in her brilliant philosophical meditations on what she calls the Kantian concept of self. The Kantian self is governed by a set of transpersonal principles, “because they direct our attention beyond the preoccupations and interests of the ego-self, including its particular, defining set of moral and theoretical convictions; and apply in equal measure to oneself and others.” (Adrian Piper, *Rationality and The Structure of the Self: A Two Volume Study in Kantian Metaethics*, 2008, http://adrianpiper.org/rss/index.shtml, 1).

7 1.) “Everything will be taken away” was written on a sandwich board and worn by curator Jacob Fabricius, in his “Sandwiched” series, sponsored by the Public Art Fund in New York City (2003). 2.) The mantra was written in henna on the foreheads of volunteers, as part of Creative Time’s ‘Six Actions for New York City’ (2007). 3.) Use of the mantra in relationship to images of Hurricane Katrina, the assassination of political leaders, and the evil events surrounding the Megan Williams case were part of the “Everything” exhibit, held at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery (NYC) from March 1st to April 19, 2008. http://www.re-title.com/exhibitions/archive_ElizabethDeeGallery1866.asp.


11 The phrase used by the Nation of Islam’s *Final Call* [the Nation’s paper] to describe the indescribably brutal attack on Megan Williams, a 20 year African American woman who in early September 2007, was held captive, raped and tortured while assailed with racist epithets by six white perpetrators. Ashahed M. Muhammad, “Race torture in West Virginia,” *FinalCall.com News*, October 14, 2007, http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_3996.shtml.


18 Ibid., 57.

19 Ibid., 28.


21 Kant, 17.

22 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 62.
29 Ibid., 2.
30 Kant, 14.
32 See citation 7.
Nine inkjet photographic prints: five wash-scrubbed with steel and foam rubber sponge, four over-printed with text 12.875 x 12.875 inches (32.7 x 32.7 cm) each [installation info courtesy of elizabethdeegallery.com].
34 Artist statement, courtesy of Dr. Constanze Von Marlin, Adrian Piper Research Archive, February 24, 2009.
35 Tim Saltarelli, Elizabeth Dee Gallery, email correspondence, March 16, 2009.
36 In an interview with The Nation of Islam’s *Final Call*, Williams recalls the following, “They didn’t feed me, didn’t give me no water, they said when they came back they were going to finish me off.” “Final Call Exclusive: One-on-One Interview with West Virginia Race Torture Victim Megan Williams,” *Final Call.com News*, October 8, 2007, http://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/article_3997.shtml.
38 Ibid., 201.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 46.
42 Ibid., 48.
44 Adrian Piper, Excerpt from the short piece titled “India’s Legacy to the African American Civil Rights Movement,” http://adrianpiper.org/yoga/yoga_indias_legacy.shtml.
46 Ibid., 112.