

6. Hypothesis

About the *Hypothesis* Series

"About the *Hypothesis* Series" was written in 1992 and is previously unpublished. *Hypothesis* was written in 1969 and is previously unpublished.

I started working on the *Hypothesis* series in 1968 and continued until 1970. In earlier pieces—my "pure" conceptual work—I explored things, words, sounds, and pages of paper as concrete physical objects that referred both to themselves and also outward, to the world of abstract, symbolic meaning. In the *Hypothesis* series I was interested in connecting these investigations with the investigation of my own body as equally a concrete physical object that could refer to itself as well as to other objects, and in finding the points of similarity and difference. This series was the crucial link between the earlier conceptual work and the later, more political work I did having to do with race and gender objectification, otherness, identity, and xenophobia. In the *Hypothesis* series I was investigating myself as an object that moves through space and time just like any other object, but unlike other specific three-dimensional objects, this one has a peculiar capacity; namely, the capacity to register self-consciously the space and time I am moving through, to actually represent that consciousness symbolically—in photographs—and abstractly—in a coordinate grid, and communicate it.

So what I did was to document the contents of my consciousness at specific time intervals as the particular feature that distinguished me from other objects in the world. I held the camera up to my eyes and snapped photographs of whatever I was looking at, at a particular moment. Sometimes I used measured and predetermined time intervals, sometimes I snapped the shutter randomly, depending on what was most convenient. So, for example, in some of them I'm watching TV in my loft and snap a photo every ten seconds during a commercial, say. In another one I'm walking down Hester Street in front of my building and snap the photo at random intervals because I might bump into someone if I concentrate too much on measuring the time intervals. The photos were symbolic representations of the contents of my consciousness at a particular space-time location and moment. Then I plotted those moments on a space-time coordinate system. The horizontal graph is the time coordinate and the vertical graph is the space coordinate. The photos connect each moment with a particular space-time intersection. Each individual work is an artifact and document of my consciousness during a certain unique interval.

This is what I concluded was the difference between human objects and other kinds of objects: other objects can be referential (to other things) or self-referential, but only human objects can be conscious (of other things) or self-conscious. That is, only human objects are also *subjects*.

Hypothesis

Sensory consciousness is of essentially undifferentiated sensory information. The primary ordering of sensory information is into space and time continuums. The secondary ordering further differentiates it into segments along the continuums; specific space and time conditions (see the second part of this section). The resulting consciousness is of an indeterminate number of points or instants at which the space and time continuums intersect. Any combination of space and time conditions on the continuums may intersect to form one or a series of points or instants. Space and time conditions may be combined in any one of the following ways:

1. One definition of an instant is the case in which space and time conditions are both constant. There is variation (progression) neither in time nor in space. The scope, duration, and depth of an instant is subjectively determined; an instant in sensory consciousness may be objectively measured in hours or seconds, environments or objects, depending on the particular experience.¹
2. When the space condition remains constant while the time condition varies (progresses), the perceiver and/or spatial object of perception are motionless.
3. When the space condition varies while the time condition remains constant, the situation may be either that of a self- or environmentally induced expansion of sensory consciousness, or that of a sensory consciousness that is undifferentiated. Either would permit the registering of a number of different space conditions.
4. When the space conditions vary as the time condition varies (progression), the perceiver and/or spatial object of perception are in motion.

The points or instants connect to form a span of consciousness of the designated space-time situation. Intervals between connected instants may signify temporary intrusions by (a) external space and/or time conditions, (b) absentmindedness, (c) that state of consciousness in which neither space nor time continuums exist. These possibilities do not break the span of consciousness of the designated situation: A span is determined as the sequence formed by the points at which consciousness of the situation is experienced. The conditions discussed here refer to

1.

The possibility of perceptual hallucination is not considered here.

the most differentiated and standardized forms of sensory consciousness. They are significations of more inclusive and indefinite kinds of experience.

II

Some space conditions available as objects of sensory consciousness at a given instant:

1. Unbounded environments (such as outdoor locations)
2. Bounded environments (such as indoor locations)
3. Composite masses: independent single objects, conglomerations of dependent objects (such as a table with an ashtray, salt and pepper shakers, a newspaper, and so on)
4. Dependent single objects: parts of composite masses (such as a newspaper on a table)
5. Details of any of the above not existing independently (such as fine print in a newspaper)
6. A combination of any of the above

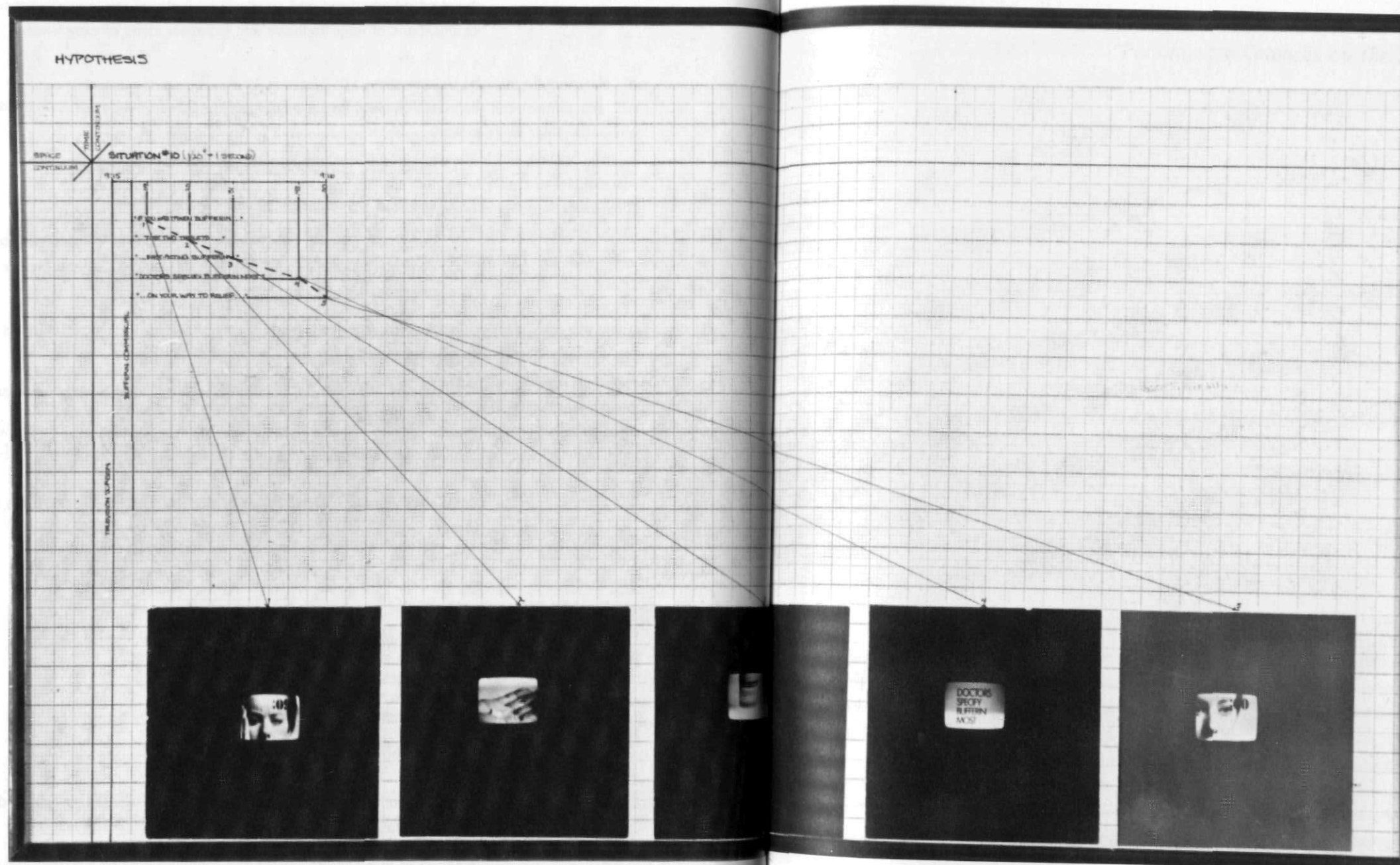
Some time conditions available as objects of sensory consciousness at a given instant:

1. Days
2. Hours
3. Half hours, quarter hours
4. Minutes
5. Seconds
6. A combination of any of the above

Both continuums are open ended. They may be indefinitely extended by adding increasingly inclusive and exclusive conditions.

When used in a specific situation, a condition may be isolated from its identifying context (location, date).

Because the space and time continuums are in constant flux, any work (sensory consciousness situation) entered under this hypothesis cannot be repeated. Charts and photographs are intrinsically able to record intersections of the space and time continuums. They are therefore used to record the occurrence of each situation.



9.
Hypothesis: Situation
#10 (1968). Courtesy
Paula Cooper Gallery,
collection of the
artist.

27. My Calling (Cards) #1 and #2

Written in 1990 and previously unpublished.

The idea behind this series of performances, which I call *reactive guerrilla performances*, is intervention in order to prevent co-optation.

My Calling (Card) #1 (for Dinners and Cocktail Parties) April 1986–1990

In this first performance, the situation is one in which I find myself in otherwise exclusively white company at a dinner or cocktail party, in which those present do not realize I am black. Thinking themselves in sympathetic company, they (or any one of them) proceed to make racist remarks (it should be emphasized that this phenomenon occurs in groups of all economic and educational levels; it would be a mistake to think of it as primarily a working-class white phenomenon). My options:

1. I say nothing. The consequence is that they think it is all right to make such remarks, and I feel both offended and compromised by my silence. I also feel guilty for being deceptive.
2. I reprimand them abstractly, that is, without identifying myself as black. The consequence is that we have an academic discussion about the propriety, meanings, and intentions of these remarks that leaves fundamental dispositions untouched and self-deceptive rationalizations inviolate, and I again feel offended, compromised, and deceptive.
3. I reprimand them concretely, that is, by informing them publicly that I am black and am offended by their remarks. This violates subtle but rigid conventions about what subjects are appropriate topics of conversation at dinners and cocktail parties and opens an abyss of silence and mortification that everyone feels. The offender is humiliated and shamed for having been caught out; everyone else is embarrassed at having witnessed this; and everyone, including me, is enraged at me for having called attention to this social gaffe instead of ignoring it and helping to smooth things over. The social network has been rent, and I (not the offender, who is beneath notice) have ruined everyone's evening.
4. I announce that I am black at the beginning of the evening. It is hard to slip this information in without seeming forced or artificial. The consequence is that they are on guard, but view me as opportunistic (that is, a "professional black") and as trying to guilt-trip them, or as socially incompetent. Everyone feels uncomfortable.
5. Someone else lets it be known in advance that there will be a black person present. Everyone feels paranoid and spends the evening looking around and trying to figure out who the black person is. Shades of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

6. Someone else lets it be known in advance that I am black. Everyone is on guard and spends the evening deploring racism and recounting their personal attempts to combat it.
7. I abdicate my black identity and "blend in." This is out of the question. Some branches of my family have tried this option, and the ones I know of have turned into really twisted people.

Dear Friend,
I am black.

I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.

I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.

Sincerely yours,
Adrian Margaret Smith Piper

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My Calling (Card) #1
(1986-1990).

Courtesy John Weber
Gallery, collection of
the artist.

8. I present the individual(s) who made the remark with my card. Some consequences: It established the possibility of dialogue between me and this individual without disrupting the group as a whole (The only evenings that are ruined are mine and the offender's). It allows me to express my anger in a semiprivate context that has already been established by the person who made the remark. This means I can assert my identity without being accused of being manipulative, etc.
- The general character of the statement and the rule-governed policy that governs its presentation convey the message that the offending individual is behaving in typical and predictably racist ways. It fights a stereotype by giving the offender a concrete experience of what it is like to be the object of one.

My Calling (Card) #2 (for Bars and Discos) June 1986–1990

This works on the same principles as #1 but is designed for occasions when I am sitting alone, reading a newspaper, and nursing a beer by myself in a bar. One major difference is that whereas in #1 my expression of anger and pain in the card is justified by the offending individual's hostility in making the racist remark, in #2 a come-on in a bar can be or can masquerade as the paradigm of friendliness; so it's up to me to deliver the message without being the first to violate that assumption. The card is distributed only after I have verbally expressed my desire to remain alone, politely at first and then with some vehemence. Typically it elicits further jokes, put-downs, attempts at flirtation, and so on, before the offender beats a sullen retreat. This card takes longer to work because it must combat the "no-matter-what-she-says-she-really-wants-it" fiction. But it ruins my evening so completely to have to use it, and I have to use it so persistently in bars and discos in the States, that in fact I rarely go into these environments unaccompanied anymore. I find restaurants and coffee houses to be much safer environments when I feel the need for the anonymity of the crowd.

Dear Friend,

I am not here to pick anyone up, or to be picked up. I am here alone because I want to be here, ALONE.

This card is not intended as part of an extended flirtation.

Thank you for respecting my privacy.

54.

My Calling (Card) #2
(1986–1990). Courtesy
John Weber Gallery,
collection of the
artist.