



**THE
SUPPLEMENTS
NUMBER 2**

FAIRVIEW

SOHO
REP.



just the slightest glimmerings of doubt about the veracity of your opinions, then I will consider this piece a roaring success. If not, then I will just have to try again, for my own sake. For of course I am talking not just about you, but about us.

Adrian Piper, "Ideology, Confrontation, and Political Self-Awareness: An Essay," First published in *High Performance Magazine*, Spring 1981. Editors Linda Frye Burnham and Steve Durland. © Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation Berlin.

Adrian Piper (b. 1948) is a performance and conceptual artist, philosopher, writer, and educator. Her artwork centers ideas of subjecthood, agency, and identity as they manifest in political, social, and racial contexts, and can be found in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Pompidou, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Generali Foundation, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Los Angeles, among many other museums and galleries. In 1987 she became the first tenured African American woman professor in the field of philosophy and has gone on to receive many fellowships and awards for her work and research. She is currently based in Berlin, where she runs the Adrian Piper Research Archive Foundation and edits *The Berlin Journal of Philosophy*.

Self-Consciousness: an interview

The editors asked Fairview playwright Jackie Sibblies Drury to tape record a spontaneous telephone conversation between herself and former collaborator, writer, director, and performer Kaneza Schaal, who appeared in Drury's 2016 play Really. They were given a one-word prompt. This is the result.

Jackie Sibblies Drury: Oh My God!

Kaneza Schaal: I think I'm doing it.

JSD: There was a white woman that just said, "This call is now being recorded."

KS: I think it's happening. I really hope it works.

[Laughter]

KS: Let's do it. And speaking of self-consciousness—do we get to edit it?

JSD: Oh yes, definitely.

[Laughter]

KS: I wondered, should we do it over email as a series of email exchanges? Then we could all curate our consciousness and self-consciousness into our conversation.

JSD: Right. That would be... appropriate.

KS: That sounds great.

JSD: 'Cause I know that there's a million different ways to talk about self-consciousness. Branden and Ife and I had been talking about it in terms of when you're aware of being a black person in the world and how that changes depending on the space that you're in. And I don't even know what to ask you about that. But...

KS: Well, this is coming out of the piece that you're working on.

JSD: Yeah, because as the play starts off, I think it seems as weird as naturalism is. This is a relatively naturalistic play where people are performing the idea of being an upper middle class black family, and then there's a repeat that happens. It's basically like the audio of that performance gets turned off, and then you're aware that there has been this whole other cast of people having a completely different experience of what we just saw, and this other cast racialize the black family in a way we might not have.

I realized that I imagine a version of that as I move through my life. I imagine that people are seeing me in a different way than I see myself. Like, a lot. And I guess that's a black person thing. Or a black-person-that-moves-in-white-spaces-a-lot thing.

KS: For sure, I feel that bird's eye view on myself. I've been thinking about being in a theater and watching plays. That often ends up... I often end up in a context where I am one of few black people.

JSD: Yup.

KS: This thing keeps happening, this sharp left turn that I feel an audience take. All of the sudden it feels like, "We were all here having such a nice time and now you all are in a completely different world of experiencing this play." And sometimes I get resentful and feel like, "You don't have the historical analysis to be taking in this information." Sometimes I just feel isolated and maybe the opposite of self-conscious, like, conscious of everyone else.

JSD: Yeah. And that... whatever. I'm just gonna talk and we can edit it later, but I went to go see this play, [redacted]. I feel like that play was not for me in a very specific way. I felt like my presence in the audience made the enjoyment of the play more difficult for the person—for the stranger sitting next to me. In a real intense way, I felt very visible for that person and that I made them feel more self-conscious. That my presence made them consider when to laugh and when not to laugh at the things the characters were saying. And maybe that is totally my imagination. I felt like there was like a little side eye. I also got there late, so.

[Laughter]

KS: In case you weren't black enough already.

[Laughter]

JSD: Yeah, so, the being in an audience thing is real.

KS: Yeah, then sometimes it feels like the work takes a left turn and it's like, "Wait! This play made sense before." It was thoughtful and dealing with race as a material on stage, or the political material on stage. It doesn't need to be about race or be overtly political, but it felt like they were addressing the materials in the room. Then all of a sudden the work makes a turn. Like in your experience with [redacted], where it renders you in the audience visible in contrast to the majority, and makes one feel self-conscious. And then I was watching [redacted]...

JSD: Which I actually am very curious to go see.

KS: So, I went to see it and I actually think it's a well-written, really thoughtful text. And even as much as there's a kind of social analysis that it's bringing to the table, there's this moment where I felt the audience stop identifying with the black character on stage who I felt so strongly for, and I was like, "NOOO!"

[Laughter]

KS: "Stop! Come back. What's wrong with you?" And then I was mad at the playwright for not having more

historical analysis for people to fucking think better. But then, ultimately, I feel dumb for expecting that of audiences and of writers.

JSD: Why? Do you feel like it was your job to try to stay with that character because you were like, "I'm black, you're black, I need to support you?" I mean, why does that become your responsibility?

KS: No. It's that the problem he's in is really interesting, and it's the result of hundreds of years of decisions that have been made by people that puts them in this really fucked place. It's not even this feeling of defending him or anything, it's this feeling of identification and then the absence of it. Feeling like we're all on the same trip together, and then a bunch of people fell off and stopped and just started seeing a completely different play than I was seeing.

JSD: And do you feel like the play was even a different play than the play that you were seeing? That the play was written for the audience to fall off, then?

KS: Not intentionally.

JSD: Yeah.

KS: One of the things that excites me about your work is how much you think about not only the words and ideas that will happen on the stage, but the contact that will happen with an audience and how to care for

that contact. So, I'm curious how all of these questions relate to the ideas in *Fairview*. That's what it's called, right?

JSD: It is called *Fairview*, very nice, very nice. It's maybe not the best title, but whatever.

KS: Great title, great title.

JSD: Hopefully the play will segregate the audience.

[Laughter]

JSD: And it's gonna segregate the audience after sort of having all these flawed conversations about complex issues of race and identity and ethnicity.

KS: So it's almost like you're rendering visible something that you've experienced.

JSD: Yes. In the segregation, the white people in the audience are, hopefully, going to feel incredibly self-conscious, incredibly aware of themselves as white people in the room. When we've been trying it in workshops, that moment has evoked this reaction of extreme discomfort and also a bit of contempt for having their identity flattened, because characters in the play that are also white are espousing ideas that they themselves would never espouse. It's grouping them together unfairly with these people who are not them. And that's sort of the point.

That discomfort—it seems akin to feeling watched in a theatre or feeling watched on the street, where you are aware that people are attributing things to you and your behavior that aren't any part of your internal self or your actual self. To state something weirdly obvious: There are lots of different kinds of white people.

[Laughter]

JSD: And I feel like there are gonna be lots of different reactions even within that segregated group. But I think that some of those white people are going to think that the play is dumb and this moment is unfair or unearned, and those are the people who I want most to understand what's happening. Which feels kind of tragic.

[Laughter]

JSD: I could be wrong about that. I just... I don't know. Being aware of whiteness and white privilege is something that's increasingly common, but it's also done with such an eye roll a lot of the time. It's almost as though no one thinks that these concepts refer to them, that the white gaze is something that Other white people do, not me, never me, because I have good politics. It's such a complicated thing to try to point out or talk to or think about.

KS: And there's real... I wish there were a way to

use this word that isn't so condescending. Not condescending—isn't so charged in the current landscape. But there's a real 'fragility' that you are dealing with, with those audiences. That resentment and the amount of fragility, the material of the psyches that you're engaging in that moment is very real.

JSD: Yeah, I'm concerned. In some ways, I have real sympathy for that fragility. I remember going apartment hunting in my early 20s with friends, and one of them being like, "This is the first time I've been the minority in a neighborhood." That kind of thing was so crazy to me. I was like, "How have you never experienced this?" And having it all happen all at once, to suddenly be aware of race in a really embodied way, I imagine it's completely overwhelming. So I empathize with that fragility. But it is also really frustrating, because that consciousness is a huge part of the way that any black person who is in a multi-racial society lives. Any person of color who's in a multi-racial society has thought about it ad nauseam, on top of living their lives, for forever. So I empathize, but then I'm like, "I wish that I could be fragile like that." You know? I wish that I had been able to, I don't know, take biology class and just think about biology and not think about all the people in the room, and how everyone is treating everyone else. I get jealous.

[Laughter]

KS: And I get rageful, so...

[Laughter]

KS: Yes. Always that awareness. I was just thinking about all of the things we have all experienced of being followed in stores, of people locking their doors when you walk by and the amount to which... the trick of how it gets one's mind wrapped up. The amount of energy spent on, "Did that happen? Did that not happen?" And the energy output that that self-consciousness requires. And that sometimes it feels like that's a core part of the danger.

JSD: Completely. Like, the following someone in a store thing is real. Maybe they followed you because you were a teenager. Maybe they followed you because you are black. Maybe they followed you because they thought that you were somebody else who had come in and shoplifted. Maybe they followed you because you are black. Their intention doesn't make a difference in your self-consciousness, and thinking through all of the reasons why this is happening, that's exhausting. And that exhaustion is completely independent of what someone's intentions were towards you. And I don't know how to fix that, but I'm fascinated by it.

KS: Yeah. I just saw a documentary called *The Feeling of Being Watched*.

JSD: Oh my god, I can't believe. I need to watch it right now.

[Laughter]

KS: Watch it right now. It's a new documentary, it's by this journalist, and it's about the surveillance... well, the 'alleged' rumors of surveillance on the Arab-American neighborhood that she grew up in in Chicago. But then also the very concrete, real surveillance that was going on, and how that kind of shaped the community, and her psyche, and trying to unpack. It's also fascinating because of how much of it predates 9/11. And the film also connects this to the many other histories of surveilling brown bodies. There's a little moment where they talk about that, but I almost could have used a bit more. More synthesizing with histories of watching people that have deeply affected communities. Did you watch the new *Childish Gambino* video?

JSD: I did!

[Laughter]

JSD: I did. I'm obsessed with it. I don't know how I feel about it. Did you watch it?

KS: Yep.

JSD: How many times did you watch?

[Laughter]

KS: I bring it up, because it feels like if there were an opposite...

[Laughter]

KS: You know what I mean? If they were like, "No, I'm gonna drop a bomb, and turn the tables over, and turn this inside-out."

JSD: Thank you for saying that, because I felt the same. And then I was like, "No, stop it, Jackie. You're obsessed with yourself and you're at that stage where everything is your play, your play is in everything." But when I saw it I was like, "I feel like this video is our play but the opposite."

[Laughter]

KS: You should send it in the newsletter, the e-blast that people get before they come see the show.

[Laughter]

JSD: Sorry, I feel like I could talk about it for a really long time, but maybe that's like...

KS: We need to talk about your play.

JSD: But don't you wonder how... I wonder how they framed what they were making for the people in the room.

KS: I like his thing about, "I can do everything." Calm down with all of this siloing of our disciplines, that's so fucking Western. "This person does this, this person does that." And being like, "No, I do all of these things, I make all the things."

JSD: You do all of 'em.

KS: And I feel that about you as an artist too, and we've talked about that. That sense of yes, you're writing plays, but you're also building all of these worlds around how the play is going to live. Yes, you are a playwright, but that doesn't fully articulate the many artistic roles that you take on when you're making a theater piece.

JSD: Now, that's why I geek out over you as an artist in such an intense way. I just like talking to you. I think you're smart. I like thinking about your work, like thinking about some of the work that you've been doing recently in terms of the way that you're approaching the person that you're collaborating with in *JACK &*. The form of the play is dictated by your performer's whole internal mind, all of the different ways that he sees himself, all of the different references that he makes. Because normally, people take one fact of a person's life and have that one thing define him; it becomes the only thing to know about him, this whole complex human being.

KS: That's actually something that I was thinking

about recently. The amount to which the language we put out about our work creates these frames, and creates the consciousness of the audience going in. And how do we care for that framing? I feel like this thing that you're saying about working on *JACK &*, this sense of, what are the many, many languages that all of us in the room speak? These are personal, experiential languages, and they are also formal and artistic languages, and historical and cultural languages. When we can make work that has all of that going on, that work can speak to many different people.

I am opposed to that modernist idea that the audience doesn't matter, that we make what we make and we just put it on the stage and that's all that is important—especially in performance, which lives in its contact with audience. Some audiences need to be invited. And some audiences need to be checked. And I love that you are taking that on in the play you're working on. There's this story, and we've talked about this before, but there's this story that experimental work is for a certain kind of audience. For a certain small, elite audience.

JSD: Right.

KS: And that does not deal with the amount to which audiences are often disinclined to work.

JSD: Completely.

KS: It's not just the institutions that are hard to get to,

that the tickets are too expensive and all of that. The work has actively said, "This is not for you. I don't care about you. You shouldn't be here." What does it mean to shift that ground?

JSD: Right. Because the conversation is more like, how do we educate people about how to enjoy our work? Or maybe They just don't know that our work exists. And They don't know that theaters are in New York City, because They don't live in the world.

[Laughter]

JSD: I like that you're saying disinvite, because it feels very much like broadcasting a boundary to a certain group of people. I can't stop talking about gentrification. It's not exactly what we're talking about, but it's similar to when that first coffee shop opens in a neighborhood that's being gentrified, often the aesthetic of it is enough to let people that live in that neighborhood know that it is not the kind of place for them because it is the kind of place for the people that are moving in.

KS: Totally. Like, New York City is 60% people of color.

[Laughter]

KS: If you are in an art space that is all white people, that is an active, active choice. A neighborhood that is whatever percentage of brown people, and this one

small space is so clear about who it is for, and it's not only the price of the latte that makes it so.

JSD: Right. It's like people are talking about Starbucks, but it's also, it's everything.

[Laughter]

JSD: Do you feel different when you go abroad, as a Black American person?

KS: I enjoy the way that legibility shifts taking work to different parts of the world. Certain things that receded when we did *GO FORTH* in New York came so forward when we performed the piece in Rwanda. And then other things would recede. What stories come forward, what ideas shift as a piece has contact with many different kinds of audiences, that's thrilling to me. That feels like the gold of our form, you know?

JSD: Yeah, totally.

KS: The materiality of this ephemeral form.

JSD: You can't take it out of one context and put it into another. These stories and the ways that characters, either on stage or not, deal and are being dealt with; to me it makes it a more interesting play if it is made for any audience other than the audience it was passively intended for.

KS: Yes. It's this active caring for the audience. You are thinking about the people who come through those doors and how you are going to tend to them in their process of interacting with the material. We're about to do *JACK &* at On The Boards, which, as you know, thinks about re-entry to society after prison. I did a bunch of work to connect with folks in the re-entry community there. We built partnerships with different organizations, from the DA's office to grassroots organizations led by former incarcerated people to alternative sentencing programs.

We had a recent triumph. There's a really big re-entry service called Pioneer Human Services—they serve thousands of people getting out of prison. Washington State has this work release where you're still serving time but you can serve the end of your time on the outside essentially. By far the most in depth artistic conversation I have had about the work was with the woman who runs public programs for Pioneer. She was talking about costumes, she was talking about metaphors, she was like, "What is the baking about? What does cake represent? Does it represent something different in the first section than it represents in the second section?" She went in!

[Laughter]

JSD: Wow! That's amazing.

KS: It was wild. The beautiful thing about this is that she went through all the various chains of command

and we were able to get permission from the Federal Government to grant a release for the evening to 50 people to come and see the show. The Feds had never granted this kind of evening pass before.

JSD: That is awesome.

KS: It's really exciting. There's about a dozen other organizations that we've been working with. And the thing is, this isn't a separate idea, you know what I mean? In the same way that you're tending to the audience in *Fairview*, that is not a separate idea. For the work to succeed, for the artwork to function well, it requires building this world around the work. It requires thoughtfully tending to the audience that will encounter the work, because for the many languages in the piece to live, to be rendered visible, requires an audience that's bringing many different perspectives.

JSD: That's amazing, because with *Fairview*, we've been talking a lot about how an actually diverse audience is necessary for the play to function. The audience can't be a monoculture if it needs to separate. Like, actually having it be a microcosm of society, which is what you are doing. You're creating an ideal world in your audience for *JACK &*, where it's a mix of different kinds of people, including formerly incarcerated people, sharing an experience together.

KS: Is there some way that you're trying to artfully

reproduce an experience of self-consciousness that you have experienced moving through the world, within your audiences?

JSD: Yeah... I don't think white supremacists are going to come and see this show. I feel like the people that come are going to be people that live in diverse worlds. Do you know what I mean?

KS: So, part of what you are masterminding through art is sharing with audiences an awareness in public space that they may not have felt before.

JSD: Yes! I'm trying to share it and name it and not solve anything. We're not even telling people something that they don't already know. It's just trying to express it in a way that is felt rather than articulated.

KS: Is there something you imagine you want from that?

JSD: Personally?

KS: Sure. Personally, or...

JSD: Ugh. I really don't wanna say "in Trump's America," but it does feel like it's now especially important to expand our capacity for empathy. People realize that now, even though that need pre-dates the election. I think that my own understanding of identity politics has blossomed

in the last 10 years—I've learned a lot about the ways that people describe themselves, I've learned that people have the right to describe themselves. I hope that if there is any shared experience of the play for every member in the audience, I hope that it's a radicalizing one. I hope that people feel more empowered to take space and more empowered to talk about sharing space. I want a radical empathy to feel normal. And that's sort of lofty and naive sounding. I don't know how to articulate it, which is weird, but I do hope that people feel the need to take responsibility for our society in every interaction, like I do.

[Laughter]

KS: That sounds so clear and exquisite. You are masterfully calibrating an experience for that to happen. Especially in... let's say in a kind of broad, sweeping sense, "liberal spaces", there's this rhetoric around preaching to the choir. As if there is some kind of unification of beliefs, values, whatever, which is so false. There is no choir. This play that you're making is going to explode that false and deeply embedded assumption.

[Laughter]

JSD: Right. That would be nice. Wouldn't that be nice?

KS: It sounds like it's gonna happen! I can't wait!

JSD: And if it fails this time, then the next one is gonna get 'em. Mark my words!

[Laughter]

KS: But also that experiment itself is an act of destabilizing that false notion of choir. The experiment is the disruption itself. What results from the experiment, I am so excited about. But regardless of the results of the experiment, you've set the ground to achieve that goal.

JSD: This is exactly what I needed to hear at this stage of our rehearsal process.

[Laughter]

Kaneza Schaal is a New York City based artist and performer. She has worked with The Wooster Group, Elevator Repair Service, Richard Maxwell/New York City Players, New York City Opera, and National Public Radio, among others. She's brought her work to over 18 countries and venues including Centre Pompidou, Royal Lyceum Theater Edinburgh, REDCAT, The Whitney Museum, BAM, The Kitchen, St. Ann's Warehouse, and MoMA.

Schaal received a 2016 Creative Capital Award to develop her next work *JACK&*, a multimedia comedy of errors that draws on social codes and trainings: from prison re-entry programs to debutante balls. Her previous piece, *GO FORTH*, was commissioned by Performance Space 122 with support from the Jerome Foundation 50th Anniversary Grant; it was presented at PS122's COIL Festival, the Ubumuntu Arts Festival in Kigali, Rwanda, LMCC's River-to-River Festival, and her alma mater Wesleyan University, CT.

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Fairview