

**Adrian Piper***The Big Four Oh*, 1988

[text from notebook]

At forty I am barely visible, the ghost in the machine, thoughtfully cranking levers, turning wheels, hoisting pulleys in sync with the basic pulse, but encrusted over now with familiar, protective idioms – simplifying clichés which I have learned to invoke as prayers to help me pass through compulsively and without incident. I generate them effortlessly, as needed, from the outer surface of my armor, in order to help sustain the illusion of shared significance between us, to minimize confusion and paradox, and in order to concede a penchant for obscure references that reveal both nothing and everything at the same time. I flaunt my addiction to complexity behind a barricade of placid generalities. These familiar idioms are easily cast off but automatically self-venerating, dispensable in case we transcend our boundaries, and retrievable in case we avert to installing more securely within them. In becoming second nature, they eventually express my ordinary nature under conditions of adversity, the natural condition we all understand. I sweated blood to become myself and not someone else I didn't like. So many tears for what's been lost have been moving out of me I thought I'd drown, parched, in my own grief. Under attack my fangs appear, emitting scoring streams of piss and vinegar. I had to get hit in the stomach with a hardball many times before I learned to play the game. Nevertheless my forays into community are stymied by the concrete particularity of these artifacts. I don't understand their chemical structure, nor the stillness of their lives, and I can't see all sides of them at once. Embodiments of me, they become themselves; and in visual conjunction they mean other things I didn't intend and didn't anticipate. I am inspired by their imperturbability, and very blindly on my ghost to steer me through the second half of my life with the wisdom and grace stored in unreclected midnight dreams. I defy you to stop me from dancing.