Anthology

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MoMA PS1

Clifford Owens

This book is dedicated to my beautiful sons, Inti and Joaquin.

Mal d'Anthologie: Clifford Owens and the Crises of African American Performance Art*

Huey Copeland

Clifford Owens's 2011 MoMA PS1 exhibition, *Anthology*, compiles a selection of the twenty-six performance scores that he solicited from an intergenerational cast of African American artists, ranging from the elder statesmen Terry Adkins to emerging figures such as Saya Woolfalk. As Owens recounts, *Anthology* began as a frustrated response to the inadequate representation, the near invisibility, of black practitioners within dominant accounts of performance art history in the United States.[1] His point is baldly put, but nonetheless well taken: a casual flip through the pages of RoseLee Goldberg's 1996 survey of the genre reveals an enormous black absence—only highlighted, in this instance, by the inclusion of an Adrian Piper illustration—and underlines the value of a reparative historical project.[2]

Such projects are, by definition, belated.[3] Yet in many ways, Owens's timing and that of his sponsoring institution could hardly be better: *Anthology* records the sites and aims of African American performance art at a moment when US imperialism sports a brown face and when few aesthetic postures, no matter how radical their pedigrees, seem capable of gaining much political traction. Recent art-world phenomena provide ample testament to these contradictions. In the last decade, black artists of various stripes have benefitted from increasing representation within mainstream venues, thanks, in part, to discourses around globalization and post-racial identity that have rendered "black work" both commercially viable and discursively intelligible, if no less constrained.[4] At the same time, performance art

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My title is, of course, meant to rhyme with that of Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'Archive*, published in English as *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Not so clear are the debts that this essay owes to the guidance of Christopher Y. Lew, the vision of Clifford Owens, the research assistance of Luke Fidler, and the incisive commentaries of Janet Dees, Hannah Feldman, Ramón Rivera-Servera, Lorna Simpson, and Krista Thompson. As ever, they have my thanks.

1

Clifford Owens in Nick Stillman, "Clifford Owens" *Bomb* 117 (Fall 2011): 55.

2

RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1996), 173. Of course, there have been more racially inclusive attempts to frame the history of performance art of late—subsequent editions to Goldberg's text among them—as well as vital interventions within African American art history. See, for example, John Bowles, *African American Performance Art Archive*, 2010, <http://aapaa.org/>; Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object*, 1949–1979 (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Cherise Smith, *Enacting Others: Politics of Identity in Eleanor Antin, Nikki S. Lee, Adrian Piper, and Anna Deavere Smith* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); *Radical Presence: Black Performance in Contemporary Art* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2012); and Lowery Stokes Sims, "Aspects of Performance in the Work of Black American Women Artists" in *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology*, eds. Arlene Raven, Cassandra L. Langer, and Joanna Frueh (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988), 207–25. However, a thoroughgoing scholarly examination of black contributions to performance art from an explicitly art-historical perspective has yet to appear.

3

Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora" *Public Culture* 11.1 (1999): 245–68.

4

One touchstone for these discourses, especially within discussions of the post-racial, is Thelma Golden's introduction of the term "post-black" in the exhibition catalogue *Freestyle* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2001), 14–15. I take my critical stance toward the notion of "black work" from Darby English, *Black Artists, Black Work? Regarding Difference in Three Dimensions* (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2002).

has been institutionally embraced, advanced, and spectacularized like never before, effectively roped into the high-end "experience" industry, as evidenced by the successes of Goldberg's Performa Biennial, launched in 2005, and Marina Abramović's star turns at blue-chip New York museums, first the Guggenheim in that same year and subsequently at The Museum of Modern Art in 2010.[5] These twin developments have helped open a discursive space between them in which black performative interventions and their political possibilities might be said to properly reside. Owens's project thus aims to both temporarily occupy and actively construct this long-neglected terrain, and in a format that makes a deep historical sense: as cultural theorist Brent Hayes Edwards argues, the black anthology most often serves not to confirm an existing canon but to found the very tradition that it ostensibly records.[6]

These considerations provide one basis for approaching Owens's *Anthology*, but they cannot explain the peculiar form his intervention has come to take or its multiple ramifications, which is my ultimate aim in the pages that follow. Rather than create an archive, write a history, or mount an exhibition focused on extant traces of black US performance, Owens solicited his collaborators to write brand-new scores, usually textual instructions for him and him alone. A few of these he has yet to enact; some others he has only performed; the majority, however, have been originated by Owens and compulsively documented in the photographs and videos that comprise the exhibition and make the artist their star. This framing conceit is, I think, both more coherent and less narcissistic than it might sound: in forwarding his own image as a threshold through which future histories of performance might pass, Owens aims to spectacularly undo the visual effacement of black bodies within those narratives while referring back to the work of practitioners whose contributions, both storied and forgotten, can now be freshly reckoned with on their own terms.

Of course, the exhibition's drive toward the accumulation of a totality of black artistic production risks abetting continued complacency where the subject of African American performance is concerned, satiating a taste for racial difference and quelling voices of racialized dissent. This is a particular pitfall of the anthological, which, Edwards argues, "delimits the borders of an expressive mode or field, determining its beginning and end points, its local or global resonance, its communities of participants and audiences."[7] Yet I would contend that Owens's *Anthology* also functions as a spur to further historical investigation precisely because its order and its inconsistencies internalize the status of black performance art within the archive, and because the artist offers himself up as a site of articulation that expands who and what might be encompassed within its scope.

Anthology's roster of participants begins to tell the tale. It registers the new vistas for practitioners of color that have opened up over the last twenty years, as well as a calculated orientation toward the brighter lights within the black artistic firmament

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For a valuable consideration of the conditions of performance art now, see Amelia Jones, "Introduction: Performance, Live or Dead" *Art Journal* 70.3 (Fall 2011): 33–38.

6
Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 44. Edwards's discussion and my own are informed by Theodore O. Mason, Jr., "The African-American Anthology: Mapping the Territory, Taking the National Census, Building the Museum" *American Literary History* 10.1 (Spring 1998): 185–198.

7
Edwards, 44.

circa 2011, the category "performance artist" be damned.[8] Owens's repertoire includes a diagrammatic dance score from the recently "rediscovered" Fluxus mastermind, musician, and performer Ben Patterson [pages U–V]; a "controversial" *INSTRUCTION* from the infamous Kara Walker, whose work is deeply performative even when not literally so [Fig. 1][9]; and a piece from Glenn Ligon, who is somebody, to be sure, but no performer at all: he usually eschews the visualization of the black body by introducing a host of material surrogates for it.[10]

Perhaps because of this, Ligon's script for Owens is arguably the most capacious and the most revelatory. Unlike the majority of the scores, his prompt does not enjoin the younger practitioner to perform a clearly delineated series of physical actions. Nor does it leave interpretation almost entirely up to the performer, as in the case of William Pope.L's coy yet ideologically charged imperative "Be African-American. Be very African American," which Owens could not help but render in contrary terms. Instead of picturing the black actor he hired to execute the score—who was instructed to walk through the museum while sharing personal confessions with his trailing audience—the artist presents a grid-like arrangement of photographs documenting the line of white tape running through MoMA PS1 that determined the perfomer's course [Fig. 2].[11]

Sidestepping such physical and philosophical temptations, Ligon asked Owens to "Annotate an existing performance/score" of his choosing and then to "Perform that performance annotated." These are directives that go straight to the heart of *Anthology*'s ambition to serve as a repository of black aesthetic interventions; they solicit the work's author to lay his own cards on the table, to fully disclose his particular investments within the history of black performance art, and to enter into the discursive fray around the ethics of reperformance within the museum.[12] As so often in Ligon's practice, which takes annotation as one of its central procedures, in this score, an artist is called upon to select, inhabit, and thereby revivify earlier material whose discursive coordinates enable a reckoning with the ongoing

8
Judith Butler's emphasis on notions of performativity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) has had profound ramifications across the arts and humanities, notably among interdisciplinary practitioners invested in black performance in its various guises—music, speech, photography, film—who are less bound by art-historical conventions when engaging works defined as performance art. Here, I have foremost in mind Fred Moten's radical reframing of black performativity, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) as well as texts such as Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); and Catherine Ugwu, ed., *Let's Get It On: The Politics of Black Performance* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts; Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

9
Walker's score trades in the same economies of sexualized violence pictured in the silhouettes for which she is most renowned. The text reads: "French kiss an audience member. Force them against a wall and demand Sex. The audience/viewer should be an adult. If they are willing to participate in the forced sex act abruptly turn the tables and you assume the role of victim. Accuse your attacker. Seek help from others, describe your ordeal. Repeat." For an example of the ways that Walker's participation has contributed to *Anthology*'s visibility—and sensationalization—see Rozalia Jovanovic, "'You Know You Want It, Baby': Clifford Owens Is Joined by Kara Walker, in Her First Live Performance" the *New York Observer*, March 11, 2012 <http://www.galleristny.com/2012/03/you-know-you-want-it-baby-clifford-owens-is-joined-by-kara-walker-in-her-first-live-performance/>.

10
Huey Copeland, "Glenn Ligon and Other Runaway Subjects" *Representations* 113 (Winter 2011): 78.

11
Clifford Owens, conversation with the author, December 16, 2011.

12
In regards to questions of reperformance, see Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Fig. 1 Clifford Owens, *Anthology (Kara Walker)* (detail), 2011. 5 C-prints and HD video, C-prints: 16×24 inches each; video: 3 minutes, 41 seconds, courtesy the artist.

Fig. 2 Clifford Owens, *Anthology (William Pope.L)* (detail), 2011. 20 archival pigment prints, 13½×9 or 9×13½ inches each, courtesy the artist.

Fig. 3 Dawoud Bey, documentation of *Pissed Off* by David Hammons, 1981. © Dawoud Bey

Fig. 4 Richard Serra, *P.S.1*, 1976. Steel, installation view at MoMA PS1. Photo: Matthew Septimus © 2012 Richard Serra / Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York

structural conditions of the past and the liabilities of the present for African American artists at work in the performative field.[13]

Owens's choice does not disappoint. Although he did not take on Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*, to which Ligon refers in describing what an annotation might entail, he also did not veer too far from the beaten path, selecting a work by David Hammons, who helped legitimate performance as a site of inquiry for the generations of artists who followed in his wake.[14] Owens specifically lighted upon Hammons's 1981 intervention *Pissed Off*, in which the renowned artist—photographed all the while by his friend Dawoud Bey—urinated into a trash-filled corner of Richard Serra's 1980 sculpture *T.W.U.*, a work temporarily sited at the intersection of Franklin and Broadway in then-still-gentrifying Lower Manhattan [Fig. 3].[15] For his annotation, Owens climbed from his MoMA PS1 studio to the institution's roof where, with a hired photographer primed to capture every dribble and splash, he pissed on another Serra work, a 1976 site-specific sculpture created for the inaugural exhibition, *ROOMS*, back when P.S.1 was a crumbling schoolhouse under the aegis of the pioneering alternative space the Institute for Art and Urban Resources [Fig. 4].[16]

While the basic headline remains the same—black male artist bodily defaces work of sculptor Richard Serra—the multiple registers of difference separating these actions are worth spelling out. Hammons's target was a monumental public work, always meant to be relocated, whose imposing structure created a quasi-private space that fostered graffiti, postings, and his own alternate use [Fig. 5].[17] In irreverently vandalizing the sculpture, he both contested SoHo's transformation into an art world hub and marked the presence of those "undesirable" publics soon to be absented from its streets in consequence.[18] Owens, by contrast, let loose his stream on an unobtrusive steel trough sunken into the building that both hosted Hammons's 1991 retrospective and incorporated Serra's sculpture into its very structure. In so marking this territory, Owens at once perversely honored his "Daddies" and inscribed himself within the institutional framework supporting their practices and his own.

The images depicting each performance serve to exacerbate these positional, historical, and spatial discrepancies, which highlight, to borrow Rebecca Schneider's apt

13
On the importance of annotation in Ligon's work, see Huey Copeland, "Feasting on the Scraps" *Small Axe: A Caribbean Platform for Criticism* 38 (July 2012): 198–201.

14
The relevant passage from Ligon's score is: "For example: Yvonne Rainer dancing 'Trio A' while telling the audience what she is feeling as she is doing it, what moves she can't do because she is older, etc."

15
Harriet F. Senie, *The* Tilted Arc *Controversy: Dangerous Precedent?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 14–17.

16
Alanna Heiss, *ROOMS P.S.1* (New York: Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc., 1977). The most influential account of the works in this exhibition—several of which bear a striking affinity to Owens's *Anthology (William Pope.L)*—remains Rosalind Krauss "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America, Part 2" *October* 4 (Autumn 1977): 58–67. As will become clear, Krauss's emphasis on the photographic in that text is equally pertinent here.

17
Senie, 17.

18
For an account of *Pissed Off* and Hammons's other engagements with *T.W.U.* see Tom Finkelpearl, "On the Ideology of Dirt" in *David Hammons: Rousing the Rubble* (New York: Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S.1 Museum; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 85–88. On the spatial transformation of Lower Manhattan and its attendant displacements in the 1970s and '80s, see Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

formulation, the "*theatricality* of time."[19] Bey's grainy black-and-white photographs document a clandestine action [Fig. 6]—in one shot, the tie-dyed-dashiki-wearing Hammons is seen explaining himself to a white police officer—while the images of Owens's work, carefully staged by the artist himself, expertly mime the *lingua franca* of contemporary large-format color photography [Fig. 7].[20] Unlike Hammons, he is situated safe within the confines of MoMA PS1, dressed in the artist's uniform of black shirt and jeans, openly displaying his penis and unfurling his stream [Fig. 8]. In one image his piss creates a golden arc that harks back to the S/M photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe; in another, the liquid forms a wet iridescent mark that recalls the oxidation paintings of Andy Warhol. Daddies, indeed.

At stake here is more than mere one-upmanship. Taken together, Ligon's score, Hammons's performance, and Owens's highly mediated queering of both gesture toward the questions underpinning, in the anthologist's words, the "crisis of meaning" confronted by "black U.S. artists working in the medium of performance," who "often find themselves farther at the bounds" of any notion of community, African American, aesthetic, or otherwise.[21] Where, how, and for whom should black performance unfold? What, if any, is its relationship to the art world and its economies of promotion, displacement, and canonization? Must African American performative interventions necessarily address the racialized exclusions of the public sphere to achieve sufficient critical weight and "colored" content? What is the valence of such actions when they unfold within and are in fact supported by institutions that have historically turned a blind eye to African American artists?

MoMA, which has been affiliated with P.S.1 since 2000, is well practiced in institutionalized blindness, as testified by its uneven collection and exhibition of work by African Americans.[22] According to Owens, black practitioners fare even worse in the institution's publicly offered seminars on the history of performance art, and even the anthological can only provisionally disturb the operative presumptions on which these narratives are predicated.[23] The implications are as much practical as theoretical. On the one hand, *Anthology* constitutes a response to a legacy of exclusions and holds out the rich array of performative interventions of which black artists are capable; on the other, the project carefully stage-manages a cacophony of voices whose imperatives the artist embodies, travesties, and recasts, sometimes all at once.

Hammons again provides the most telling example. Appearances to the contrary, he was not a willing participant in *Anthology*. In fact, relatively early on in the

19
Schneider, 6, emphasis in original.

20
Finkelpearl, 85–88.

21
Clifford Owens, "Notes on Critical Black U.S. Performance Art and Artists" *HZ* 3 (October 2003), <http://www.hz-journal.org/n3/owens.html>.

22
For a critique of the Museum's attitude toward black artists, specifically women, see Huey Copeland, "In the Wake of the Negress" in *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art*, eds. Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 480–97.

23
Owens in Stillman, 55.

Fig. 5 Richard Serra, *T.W.U.*, 1980, weatherproof steel, shown installed at West Broadway between Leonard and Franklin Streets, New York, 1981–1982. Now at the Deichtorhallen, Hamburg. Collection City of Hamburg. Photo: Gwen Thomas © 2012 Richard Serra / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

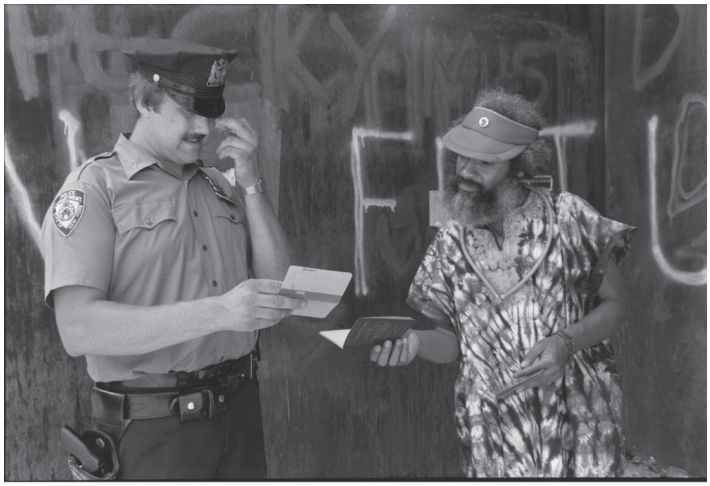

Fig. 6 Dawoud Bey, documentation of *Pissed Off* by David Hammons, 1981. © Dawoud Bey

Fig. 7 Clifford Owens, *Anthology (Glenn Ligon)* (detail), 2011. 3 C-prints, 30×40 inches each, courtesy the artist.

Fig. 8 Clifford Owens, *Anthology (Glenn Ligon)* (detail), 2011. 3 C-prints, 30×40 inches each, courtesy the artist.

project's production, Owens attempted to secure a score from the famously elusive artist to no avail. As luck would have it, Christopher Y. Lew, *Anthology*'s curator, found himself seated next to Hammons at another artist's birthday party. Lew reiterated Owens's request, which Hammons declined repeatedly over the course of the night, each time recasting the grounds of his refusal without any further prompting on the curator's part and thereby providing additional fodder for the younger artist's annotations. Hammons's first, dismissive response, "This is high school," licensed Owens's pissing contest and reframed his own; his second, more considered critique, "There's no tension," laid down a challenge for what the re-enactment should aim to produce. His final parting shot? The verbal equivalent of a pat on the back: "I'm just not feeling it."[24]

In the completed work on view at the museum, *Anthology (Glenn Ligon)*, these three lines, printed in red, surmount a blown-up black-and-white Bey photograph of Hammons's *Pissed Off,* which is sandwiched between Owens's color images of his own performance [page n]. So positioned, Hammons's refusal is both indexed and contained through a selective rendition of the work's coming into being that highlights the interpersonal dynamics so crucial to the art world's functioning yet so rarely countenanced in its histories.[25] More important to Owens's problematic appropriation of Hammons is the evidence offered by the photograph itself, which provides a clear point of visual reference and so clarifies the logic behind *Anthology* as a whole. All too aware of the lapses of memory that plague even recorded black performances, Owens has produced a series of photographs and videos, complete as artworks in and of themselves, that tend to reproduce the look and logic of canonical performance art with its singular focus on the artist's body, but with little of performance theory's worries about "live"-ness, loss, and commodification: these are market-ready objects targeted at History.[26]

To create them, Owens meticulously records each performance, enacting every score multiple times and producing a sea of documentation—never intended for public circulation—from which he carefully selects the footage or photographs that, to his mind, best capture the conceptual tension animating the work.[27] For evidence of this process and its range of outcomes, compare the dramatic stills of Owens performing Dave McKenzie's score, which begins, "Pick a corner of the room and place yourself in it and against it" [Fig. 9], with that of him enacting Senga Nengudi's *Sweep*, a piece that requires the artist to sully the floor with sand before

24
Christopher Y. Lew, conversation with the author, December 16, 2011.

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Owens is not alone in devising tactical end-runs around Hammons's resistance. I think foremost of the exhibition of the artist's work mounted without his permission by the gallery Triple Candie, a show that featured nothing but printouts and photocopies. See "David Hammons: The Unauthorized Retrospective," 2006, <http://www.triplecandie.org/Archive%202006%20Hammons.html>.

26
On the artist's body as the privileged site of performance, see Coco Fusco, "The Bodies That Were Not Ours: Black Performers, Black Performance" *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 5 (Fall/Winter 1996): 28. On the importance of live rendition to the genre, see Peggy Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction" in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 2003), 146–66.

27
Clifford Owens, conversation with the author, December 16, 2011.

completing the titular action [page p].[28] The "McKenzie" work is comprised of a suite of pictures, unframed and hung in a corner, that recapitulate the direction and sequencing of Owens's Vito Acconci-style antics in one of MoMA PS1's galleries; the "Nengudi" is a large-format diptych featuring two photographs taken in the institution's basement: one depicts the aftermath of Owens's action and the other shows the artist standing in a pool of light, emptying a sandbag, and channeling the shamanistic energy of a Joseph Beuys.

If the exhibition evokes tried and true roles from the performance-art playbook, then it also smuggles its collaborators, their sensibilities, and a whole host of formal and site-specific antecedents into the frame so that the official record might be rearticulated in light of black artistic practices. In sum, to secure a measure of visibility, the anthologist narrows the range of his own imagistic production and that of the African American performative tradition he is at pains to unearth, putting his faith in the documentary apparatus of the canon and the allure of his carefully conceived pictures. His live renditions, however, open onto other economies—of affect, desire, and bodily engagement—that can only be hinted at by the surface of an image.

Owens's December 17, 2011 performance of *Restating the Image: Construct #10, 1989, Lyle Ashton Harris* provides a case in point [page Z]. The preparatory staging of the score—set up in the interior entranceway of MoMA PS1—presented its own kind of spectacle, a ceaseless to and fro of lighting adjustments, last-minute errands, and quiet joking with the gathering crowd. Once the audience of thirty or so had settled into place and Owens had fortified himself with a beer, he called upon Lew, in his role as the organizer of the exhibition's hanging and performances, to read the score.[29]

"Requirement: Performance is to be performed by Clifford Owens. Once image is shot, Owens is to recite memorized paragraph of scholarly text on the image by Kobena Mercer in front of back drop."[30] Following the beat of his own drummer, Owens began by posing questions about Harris's work and offhandedly tossing out 11×17-inch color copies of the eponymous black-and-white photograph. In it the older artist sports a black bobbed wig, a rolled-up tank top, and a white tutu as he stares directly out at the viewer, his arms akimbo, his genitals exposed, and his legs twisted into an elegant *contrapposto* [Fig. 10].

In line with Harris's original picture, the focal point of Owens's *mise-en-scène* was a simple studio set-up comprised of tungsten lamps and a long backdrop—now deep pink rather than velvety black—hung from above and extending onto the floor. Rather than insert himself into this scenario, at the outset Owens put his audience to work: each individual who responded to one of his queries—What is this photograph about? Do you identify as a gay man?—was asked to step onto the backdrop and to assume the pose so that Owens might remake the picture. In this way, the artist contravened Harris's instructions and the conventions of his private studio

28
For the complete scores of the McKenzie and Nengudi works, see pages I and P, respectively, of the present volume.

29
Christopher Y. Lew, email to the author, April 18, 2012.

30
The Mercer excerpts were to be derived from the essays "Black Masculinity and the Sexual Politics of Race" and "Dark & Lovely: Black Gay Image-Making" in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 131, 222, 230–32.

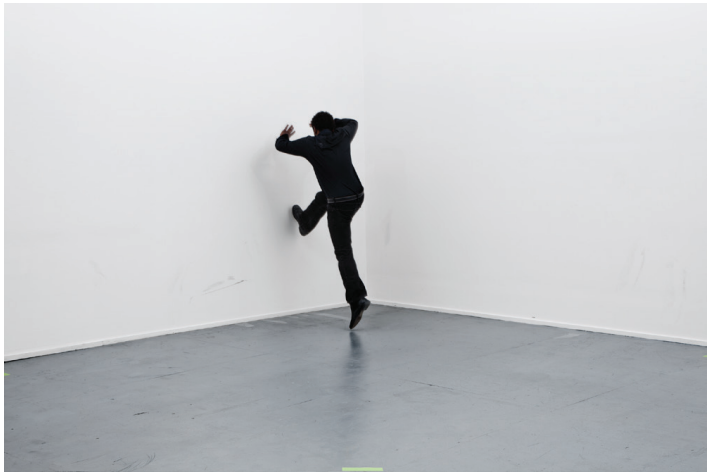

Fig. 9 Clifford Owens, *Anthology (Dave McKenzie)* (detail), 2011. 15 C-prints, 16×20 inches, courtesy the artist.

self-portrait session in order to produce a dialogic theater for the assumption of an image, the revelation and affirmation of gay male identities, and a running commentary on the public unfolding of both.

Throughout this initial phase, Owens's tone was undeniably charming and vaguely coercive. His banter became more critical as the performance wore on, leading him to question the assumptions undergirding Harris's work and his re-enactment of it. "What happened to the critical moment of the 1990s of identity politics? What's changed other than there being an asshole black President?" Soon enough, half-serious quips morphed into solicitous confessions: "I can't make images about representation anymore, it just doesn't matter.... I love to fail publicly.... Tell me what I need to do to re-stage this image."

Through such signifyin' asides, Owens at once parodied and ventriloquized a presumed art-world common sense about the limitations of Harris's art, which can read as earnestly confrontational when compared to the messy evasions of a younger black queer practitioner like Kalup Linzy.[31] While Harris has been one of a handful of black figures included in widely read volumes on performance art, his work, and that of many artists who emerged in the context of late 1980s multiculturalism, has usually been positioned in terms of "identity," rendering it vulnerable to charges of formal underdevelopment and social overdetermination despite assertions to the contrary by scholars like Mercer.[32] What the score demanded, then, and what the performance allowed was not so much Harris's inclusion within an anthology but a rescripting of the terms of his work's discursive appearance.

Enter the artist in question. Harris, seated in the audience for the duration of the performance, took the opportunity afforded by a break in Owens's monologue to vocally rearticulate his directive: "Just do the score!" Despite his apparent resistances—he never did recite those paragraphs—Owens handed over the camera to Harris and quickly got naked, joking that the audience had no need to be terrified of him, since this was one black man whose penis was neither gargantuan nor tantalizingly hidden from view. With contributions from the audience, he began to suit himself up, donning lipstick, face powder, a black bra, and an array of scarves around his waist [page z]. His props in place, Owens announced, "I feel it now," and began striking the imaged stance, which, he admitted, was far from a physically easy or emotionally neutral feat: Harris's photograph demands a measured admixture of mimicry and disarticulation, defiance and seduction.[33] As he aimed to perfect the pose with the guidance of the audience—now quite familiar with Harris and his *Construct*—Owens, holding back tears, commented on how such a bodily disposition

31
Tavia Nyong'o, "Brown Punk: Kalup Linzy's Musical Anticipations" *TDR: The Drama Review* 54.3 (Fall 2010): 71–86.

32
For the relevant discussions of Harris's work, see Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 215–220; and Tracey Warr, ed., *The Artist's Body* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 2000), 155. For a key example of the critical dissensus around so-called multicultural practices, see Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Silvia Kolbowski, Miwon Kwon, and Benjamin Buchloh, "The Politics of the Signifier: A Conversation on the Whitney Biennial" *October* 66 (Fall 1993): 3–27.

33
On the psychosexual and sociohistorical implications of the pose, see Craig Owens, "Posing" in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, eds. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillmann, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 201–17.

Fig. 10 Lyle Ashton Harris, *Construct #10*, 1989. Black-and-white mural print, 72 × 36 inches, courtesy the artist and CRG Gallery, NY.

recalled that of his own queer family members, uncles and cousins, who died of AIDS-related complications.

These reflections, in their turn, led to another affective shift and a further solicitation of the audience: having framed Harris's work as a bodily performance of black gay subjectivities under threat of extinction, Owens asked that everyone present who knew someone who had died of AIDS join him before the backdrop, creating a portrait of individuals left standing in the wake of the epidemic's first brutal wave in the US. In its participatory structure and emotional ambition, the performance resonated with Owens's ongoing series *Photographs with an Audience*—variously enacted in New York (2008); Chapel Hill, North Carolina (2009); Houston, Texas (2011); and Miami, Florida (2011)—in which the audience, at times nude along with the artist, becomes the subject of the performance and its imaging [Fig. 12].[34] In these works and in the live version of *Anthology (Lyle Ashton Harris)*, the artist enjoins his spectators in the construction of a public in a move away from what Kathy O'Dell defines as the social contract of performance and toward what Ariella Azoulay terms the "civil contract of photography," each represented body made visible as the author of claims to history, citizenship, and their mutually constitutive boundaries in the imagistic field.[35]

With my eyewitness account of this performance in view—itself a trace that might otherwise fall out of the anthologist's scope—the ends of this essay are now in sight.[36] For if Owens's differing engagements with Hammons (by way of Ligon) and Harris (by way of audience) emphasize the centrality of the image to histories of black performance art, then they also provide further insight into the particular problems faced by African American practitioners in the present, which are hyperbolized, even exacerbated, by *Anthology*'s structure. Meaning, to recall Owens's declaration, is in crisis, particularly for contemporary black artists intent on making critical interventions without a political field or a discursive framework to call their own.

Arguably, this was not always the case. Coco Fusco contends that, historically, the medium of photography and the genre of performance art, which so often privilege the nude body, have posed inherent difficulties to African American artists given the production of black subjects as the loci of the camera's often violent, criminalizing gaze and of slavery's infernal processes of corporeal objectification.[37] In *Pissed Off* and *Construct #10*, Hammons and Harris scandalously repudiate such impositions,

34
Valerie Cassel Oliver, "Clifford Owens: Some Questions" in *Perspectives 173: Clifford Owens* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, 2011), 6. For a particularly compelling account of the Houston performance, see Hank Hancock, "Getting Naked with Clifford Owens at CAMH" *Houston Press*, January 7, 2011, <http://blogs.houstonpress.com/artattack/2011/01/clifford_owens.php/>.

35
Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

36
While Owens executed a photographic work based on this performance not long before this essay went to press—see page bb—he effectively blocked any documentation of the live rendition other than his own, whether personal or institutional. According to Lew, at present, "there are no plans for the project to enter the MoMA collection," a fact which again raises the question of *Anthology*'s eventual fate within the archive, a concern anticipated by the artist Lorraine O'Grady. Her score—printed in full on page AA of the present volume—ends with the following request: "Send a (low-res, low-tech, low-value) copy of this record of interaction to Lorraine O'Grady for her archive." Christopher Y. Lew, email to the author, April 3, 2012.

37
Fusco, 28–33.

Fig. 12 Clifford Owens, *Photographs with an Audience (Houston) (Choke)*, 2011. C-print, 30×40 inches, courtesy the artist.

the former with his clandestine urination, and the latter with his confrontational stare. By contrast, when Owens stripped down at MoMA PS1, there was little of the anxiety that has long accompanied the sight of the nude black male body: this was simply an artist in an institution putting on the standard performative suit.[38]

The same might be said of the photograph that records Owens's performance—in dark shades and an actual black suit—of Rico Gatson's score *Five Minutes*, which calls for a rehearsal of the Black Power salute raised by John Carlos and Tommie Smith at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics.[39] The resulting work, however, gains its charge less from the current political relevance of the gesture and more from its restaging within the frame of James Turrell's permanent 1986 MoMA PS1 installation, *Meeting* [page t]. Like Serra's trough, this work is a cut into the building's roof, yet rather than orienting viewers toward the ground, its precisely delineated opening turns them toward the heavens, thereby allowing *Anthology (Rico Gatson)* to read as a new model of transcendence. Here and elsewhere, *Anthology* suggests that there are no longer any radical moves to be made, injunctions to be refused, or criteria to be rejected other than the poses provided by a host of antecedents, whose performances, when masterfully or half-heartedly re-staged, just might manage to make some claim on the present and its grounds of articulation. In Owens's work, these grounds can only be fleetingly located, if not secured, by the photographic image and the subjects who appear within it.

This is not, I think, merely a symptom of his art or of its emergence within a post-black, post-Obama, post-Performa world. Rather, it is an effect of a larger transformation in the Western public sphere occasioned by the expansion of the neoliberal capitalist enterprise and its attendant destabilization of meaning since the 1980s. As critical theorist Lauren Berlant has argued, in this milieu, neither citizenship nor its emotional valences are surely intelligible, leading subjects to delegate affects and ideologies to others so that their impact might be viewed, evaluated, and assimilated at a subjective remove, strategies entirely in line with the logic of outsourcing that drives the contemporary service economy.[40] This set of conditions speaks well both to *Anthology*'s rampant contradictions and its provisional achievement: nowadays, it would seem, the best bet is to photograph everything and to mount the most resonant images on the wall in the hopes that some histories will stick, some feeling will come through.

38
Fusco offers a useful genealogy of these dynamics (see p. 29)—particularly in her discussion of the furor generated by Robbie McCauley's 1990 nude performance at the Studio Museum in Harlem—which might be extended to construct a genealogy of nude African American performance that includes the work of less well known artists such as Sherman Fleming in addition to those practitioners discussed here.

39
The full score reads: "Is inspired by the 1968 Olympics medal ceremony where Tommie Smith and John Carlos accept the gold and bronze medal in the 200 meters while giving the black power salute. My score is for Cliff to interpret the scene/moment as he sees fit dressed or not also according to his desires. The desired duration of the piece would be five minutes." For a snapshot of contemporary artists' deployment of such figures, see Jeffrey D. Grove, *After 1968: Contemporary Artists and the Civil Rights Legacy* (Atlanta: High Museum of Art, 2008).

40
Lauren Berlant, "Structures of Unfeeling: *Mysterious Skin*" public lecture, George Washington University, March 30, 2012. Berlant's analysis relies on Slavoj Žižek, "The Interpassive Subject" *Traverses* 1998, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/zizek/zizek-the-interpassive-subject.html/>. For analyses of the relation between contemporary performance art and the larger service economy, see Schneider, 137, and Claire Bishop, "Outsourcing Authenticity? Delegated Performance in Contemporary Art" in *Double Agent*, eds. Claire Bishop and Silvia Tramontana (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2008), 110–25.