

Anthology

Clifford Owens

Roundtable

Derrick Adams, Terry Adkins, Sherman Fleming, Maren Hassinger, Steffani Jemison, Lorraine O'Grady, and Clifford Owens in conversation with Kellie Jones.

Clifford

I'd like to thank everyone for being part of this conversation. I'm so impressed and deeply moved by the presence of all of you and by your participation in the project.

Anthology is a kind of "gift economy." Writing the scores was a generous act, and I think that same spirit of generosity is what fueled the performance art that was happening in Los Angeles, when you, Maren, were working with David Hammons, Senga Nengudi, and others. Anyway, thank you. I'm also honored that Kellie Jones was generous enough to moderate this discussion.

Kellie

Thank you, Cliff. It's great to be a part of this project. I want to start by asking: What cultural work does performance do in your practice as an artist? What can you do through performance that other mediums don't allow?

Maren

What I've come to is that I'm doing my life. I'm having my experiences, and I'm doing my life. Sometimes it comes out in performance/video, and sometimes it comes out in installations, and sometimes it comes out in objects. But always, there's a sense of motion, there's a sense of a relationship to nature, and lately there's been this real interest in audience participation. It's the idea that there would no longer be a passive audience. Instead, the barriers between audience and artist/performer would dissolve and the whole *thing* would become participatory. Culturally, this becomes an ideal for life.

The thing about performance is: it's real, it's you. It's your body in front of people, or next to people, or wherever, in ways that you can't be in a photograph, installation, or object. You're there doing something, in front of, next to, behind other people in real space. I feel it is the most direct way of speaking to people. Once when we were out in LA and we were getting ready to do *Kiss*—inspired by Senga Nengudi's piece from the 1980s—my relatives came to the opening [of the 2011 exhibition *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles, 1960–1980*] and my cousin kept asking, "Well, it says you're going to do a performance. What kind of performance are you going to do? What is it? What is it going to be?" All I could say was, "Well it's gonna be very visual." The cousin who asked those questions didn't make the performance. Those that did attend were complimentary. But I'm not sure, when they got there and saw it, whether they knew anything about what they were looking at or not. Frankly, I was unsure myself. In any event, people sang along and accepted our gifts and may have felt a lift in spirit—which was our goal.

But here's the thing: because you're using your physicality as the medium, your peculiar presence becomes very important. Hopefully the audience can identify with

that presence. Generally I focus on the real. Issues like daily activities, self image, and our likeness as people, etc. So, performance can speak about unity and bringing everyone together.

Steffani

In terms of my own work and performance, I tend to advertise for performers. They tend to be amateur actors, people who aspire to careers as actors. Often they're young people of color, college age, usually men. And they have certainly absorbed ideas through popular media about what it means to perform, and who their audience might be, and how they might be perceived on camera or by an audience. Often I'm interested in engaging their ideas, and I do work a lot with improvisation. The fact that the performance doesn't happen in a specifically visual art context makes it possible to pursue the kinds of ideas that are interesting to me. In terms of how visual artists work differently with performance, my background is also in film. I was trained in narrative filmmaking and a lot of my working technique is informed by those kinds of approaches.

Lorraine

I've found that the least interesting part of performance for me right now is the use of my own body, my own presence. In fact, I actually stopped performing—not just to slow down the ideas, but to eliminate my body—because I found that since I had started performing so late in life—I mean, I entered art as a forty-five year old—I was using up the last of my youth in those early performances. Were I to have kept performing, using my own body, I would have inevitably raised issues of aging. And aging was not an interest of mine. It was not the subject matter that I was exploring. So it was an inadvertent conflict between the body that I was and the message I wanted to say in performance. But the performances that didn't necessarily involve my own body felt like a very satisfying way to create situations for others to enter into or to express themselves in, or to put other people in motion. So in effect, it's sort of like directing film, something in which you set up the situation, and others execute or elaborate the situation. That's the only way that I feel I could do performance now. I could not be the central performer ever again.

Sherman

It's interesting you're saying that. I like the body. I think that's what's always drawn me to performance. I went to a concert; I think it was when James Brown got out of jail the second time. It was at Constitution Hall [in Philadelphia], and by this time, I guess it was the early '90s, there was a lot of fanfare. He had dancers and the band was playing for like forty minutes. Everyone was asking, "Where the heck is James Brown?" Then finally James Brown comes out, and his first song is "Try Me." And he's singing and the energy was really low. He was clearly showing his age, and at a certain point he was using the old corded microphone on the stand even though this was a time when you could have a wireless microphone. I was thinking, "Man, what is this with these creaky old instruments anyway?" He comes to this crescendo, and he kicks the mic stand forward, and then he spins and he jerks it back, and he lands

on his knees, and the microphone perfectly lands in his hand. It changed the entire audience. It was this amazing, magical thing. It's that aspect of a guy who's done that all of his life, and even though he was, by this time, in his sixties, he could still recall that power and majesty with just a couple of moves. And that's what resonates with the type of work that I do, and the type of work I've always wanted to do. That the body still goes no matter what, whether in your twenties or your sixties or your seventies, like James Brown and blues and jazz musicians: they still go. They're still doing it. They're still recalling that magic.

Terry

I consider myself not to be a performance artist per se, but rather a recitalist, meaning one who attempts to create a synesthetic, installation-based experience built on various themes, where the spectacle of black music traditions are brought to bear. I'm influenced by the promotional photos and stage settings of early territory bands rethought as installations proper and the continuum of this tradition in the avant-garde as manifested by performing artists like Sun Ra and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. The Lone Wolf Recital Corps is a performance unit with revolving membership that is a laboratory for working out these ideas as they relate to installation settings and subjects.

The first performance that I saw in the true sense was by Sherman Fleming in 1980. We both were in a group show at DC Space curated by Keith Morrison called *Alternatives by Black Artists*. I came to the opening and saw this brother with bolted boots, hung upside-down from the ceiling with mirrors stuck to his body revolving like a disco ball to James Brown music, I said "WHOA! What is this?!" (*Laughs*).

Clifford

Strong image.

Terry

We started collaborating after that (*laughs*).

I'd just like to throw something out here. This is a beautiful gesture by Clifford to address our invisibility. He's taken this solo situation and made it a platform for making a statement about that. I want to quote the pianist VJ Ayer, who I think begins to address the nature of our absence from the contemporary canon. He says: "What I've found as an artist of color in America, is that we are most often called upon to represent yesterday's traditions; to be repositories of the ancient; to perform ethnicity in a way that poses no threat or challenge to modernity. It is shockingly rare that artists of color are invited to become full participants in the national conversation, to respond to today's world, and to offer a glimpse of tomorrow."

Derrick

I always consider making work to be like having a conversation with another artist of the past. One of the things I realized is this is the first time in history that a black artist of my generation can communicate with another black artist of a past generation. Artists of the previous generation may not have had an artist to refer to. They

might have been referring to Duchamp. I don't have to refer to Duchamp when I'm making work. I can think about David Hammons if I want to think about those ideas. I don't have to go that far back. Like a musician who is making hip hop, he can refer to R&B. He doesn't have to go back to jazz. Even though jazz is still attached to R&B, he doesn't have to go back that far.

Lorraine

Derrick, do you think that there is a lesser degree of self-censorship within, among black art-makers now than there was before? Do you think that's changed?

Derrick

Yes, less. If we have a lack of self-censorship, it'll help artists who are good or who are bad to distinguish themselves from other artists. The best way to know what you are is to know what you aren't. When you look at another artist's work that is not the thing that you would do, it helps to define your direction as an artist. I think this is the first time in history where there's so much out here, good and bad, that you're able to make that distinction easier.

Terry

I don't agree with your first statement at all. It's not the first time in history that transgenerational communication has ever been possible. There have always been black artists who came before any of us whose legacies have been available to converse with in any number of ways. Truly exercising the kind of freedom that you're talking about means also being free to refer to Duchamp if you want to, and to not arrest it at David Hammons, or any other artist. You have the freedom to do anything you want!

Lorraine

I brought up this issue of communal self-censorship for a reason, and that is because when I began my performance, it was with an act of criticism of the community. This was received as a reprehensible act because the community was not supposed—to use the old phrase, “not to wash your dirty linen in public”—to make criticisms public outside of the community. The first problem that I had was that we as a community learn about ourselves the same way everybody else learns about us, through white media. There really weren't many options for making effective critique within the community. I always believed that a community that cannot critique itself, even publicly, is a weak community. I certainly loved the black abstract artists, but I felt that this was 1980, this was a different moment than the one that they had been working in, and required new approaches.

Clifford

I don't think that black artists in the US enjoy that kind of freedom, especially in performance art. I think even when Sherman was hanging by his feet with mirrors attached to his body, that was radical. That was not the way black male bodies were supposed to be presented publicly in a work of art. Something I often come up

against in my own performances is: Why do so few black people attend my performances? Why are so many black people uncomfortable with my nudity or the ways in which I deal with my body? I often say, and this might be problematic, that there's no such thing as black art. I'm more interested in American art. Black art really is, in fact, a black middle-class position. Black art is driven by a black middle-class ideology and that ideology is such that the presentation of the body that might make a spectacle of the black body for white consumption is not appropriate. Some black audiences, and white audiences, are quite comfortable with a kind of, well, coonery buffoonery.

Terry

So you're talking about the performing of ethnicity as VJ Ayer stated.

Clifford

Exactly.

Terry

I think *Anthology* in every aspect displays that there is a performance to ethnicity in ways that are unfamiliar; one that is not stuck under the ceiling of possibility framed by a dominant culture for what has been branded "black entertainment" in America.

Sherman

There's an issue of commodification. Like the minstrel; minstrelsy is a commodified genre. And there are many people who do it, and there are some who do it incredibly well. For me, as much as I can determine that that's great and that's fine, I couldn't do that. I want to be able to look at something or see something or experience something that lacks a name. Like the first time I saw the Art Ensemble! Or the first music I heard by them. It's like, what is this? And spending years and years trying to figure out what that is, and by the time I figured it out, to paraphrase Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, the moment you figure out what black people are doing, they've gone on to do something else (*laughs*). Because that is what runs our culture! Whether it's R&B, whether it's dance, whether it's performance, whether it's poetry, whether it's spoken word, there's this noncommodifiable energy that runs through our society. It really can't be defined, and by the time it is defined, something else is happening that we haven't witnessed.

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Lorraine

Cliff, what made you think of *Anthology* as a score-based project? Had you been doing scores before?

Clifford

When I was artist-in-residence at the Studio Museum in Harlem in 2006 I

performed four scores by Ben Patterson, which I think was the first time the museum presented Patterson's work. So in a sense *Anthology* is greatly indebted to Ben Patterson.

Kellie

Maybe this is a way to expand upon these ideas: what are your thoughts on Cliff's performance of your score?

Clifford

Uh oh...*(laughs)*.

Sherman

Well, he didn't do it the way I would have done it *(laughs)*. But you did it and I thought, "Oh, that's great!" Your interpretation—I mean, there's a very serious work ethic. It's a lot of hard work doing that painting and all that, and I liked the way you documented it. When I first saw the show I had issues with how you installed the documentation, but I had to let that grow on me. I came back and looked at it and thought, "Oh yeah, okay that works." But I had to keep coming back to it to form a relationship to something that I thought was uniquely mine, but really was not. That was the process I had to go through. So for that, you get an A.

Clifford

Thank you.

Terry

I feel similar to Sherman. For me, there's a disconnect between the audio and the image. But the image so powerfully captures what I was thinking. It's evident in the photograph; it's just captured so well. There's a sweetness in the photograph that is Bud Powell. There is an angelic distance that is Bud Powell in that photograph, so much so that I almost don't even hear the audio part of it. But since I know that's what it brought you to, I dig the audio too.

Derrick

I was more interested in the idea of having you interpret the work in a way that I didn't think about and for me to learn a new way of seeing something, or communicating something. I was hoping that you would do something totally different than I would do.

Terry

I think there's a mutual exchange of surrender on the part of both artists. Our surrender and trust in Cliff to do it; and his surrender and distance, to surrender himself to what we wrote out for him. That's also a thing that's very beautiful about it.

Maren

Great collaboration. So you can distinctly hear the two voices.

Terry

I'm a little pissed off you didn't put that plant in, the fern—

Clifford

I know (*laughs*).

Sherman

I like the complexity of it. I read the score and tried to affix the score to the documentation. I'm doing that throughout the exhibit.

Clifford

It doesn't always match up.

Sherman

Which is great!

Maren

There are some people missing, right?

Clifford

Yes.

Terry

In the number of times that you have had public performances of the scores, how much variety has there been? What determined the frequency of performances?

Clifford

When we put the scores together—I call them performance medleys—it's important that they have some kind of connection to each other. There's a curatorial process that we go through when we decide what scores to do live. I've done some of the scores many times with different interpretations. Kara Walker's score I have probably done ten times now. Steffani's score maybe five times. Lorraine's four times. Terry's score I did three times in a single day. The audio-based performance scores, like Jennie C. Jones's score and Terry's, I needed to do them again and again. It's important that I do them multiple times, with multiple iterations and variations on the score. Sherman's score, I want to do that one again in a different context.

It took me a very long time to figure out Kara Walker's score. A very *long* time. And I'm still trying to figure it out. Even Maren's score took a long time to figure out. I've certainly absorbed everybody's score. It's in my body, and it's in my psyche. And my interpretation of Steffani's simple score, "Experience regret, do not apologize" is to have people experience regret with me and not apologize; I'm absorbing their decisions to humiliate me publicly in those performances. And some of you were there—you were there at that performance. It was quite intense.

Maren

It was quite crowded.

Clifford

Yeah! Or making my body, in your score, Maren, accessible to the audience.

Maren

These strangers' hands...

Clifford

Yes, strangers' hands all over me. Can I ask one question, before we move on? And we don't need to get into it too much, but with everybody's contribution to the project, and considering where performance art is now versus where it was thirty years ago, and thinking about the marketability of performance art, have any of you thought about or found it problematic that *Anthology* has a kind of market value placed on it? And what does that mean, say for Maren or Lorraine, who were making works since the '80s, without any consideration for where the work would end up, historically or in the marketplace?

Terry

It means you should give them a 50/50 split! (*Laughs*).

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Clifford

I'm asking the question because we started out talking about performance art, something that has historically existed outside the mainstream. And now that it has become kind of mainstream and because artists of color *rarely* enjoy commercial success—not that I'm enjoying tremendous commercial success—but that performance art is now enjoying some kind of market success, and that this project has a kind of historical dimension and meaning.

Sherman

When I got the full scope of what you were doing? It made me think about again those blues musicians whose work was ripped off, and they spent half their lifetime trying to grab some of the royalties, just saying "That is my piece," or "That's my song." The fact is that you're paying homage to the practice and to the practitioners.

Lorraine

I'm a little more cynical. I feel that, at one level, you could say that the show is mutually exploitative. Possibly you used us, and we used you, and why not? I think it benefited everybody, and the great thing about it was when I walked in and I felt, "My God, this show is so much bigger than Cliff, and each of us individually, and it's bigger in spite of us." Do you know what I mean? We gave our individual little scores to you, and you did your little performance, and you're taking your clothes off, and you're doing your little Cliff stuff! But the Cliff stuff that you did, and the stuff that we all did, somehow added up to something so much more than any of us.

Terry

I think it's important, too, to keep in mind that not only is he paying homage, he's also taking the risk of dealing with very young people. And that's also a great risk, very generous, and very strong.

Steffani

I might be the only person who had the privilege of studying with Cliff. He was a visiting professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago when I was in graduate school, and one of the things that he talked about, and that I think about a lot, was the importance of resolving the work for presentation. We thought about what it means to produce or develop or generate material for a work, and how it's presented to the public. It was something that was clearly preoccupying him as an artist, what it means to transform this practice that existed between performance and photography. The tension between performance and photography, and also the kind of question about the relationship between the production of the work and its documentation, is really present to me, even in the exhibition. What does it mean, as someone who attended many performances, that those performances can be considered "the work"? I felt as if I was in the presence of work happening, work being made. I was so surprised to see how the photographs turned out to be something completely different. That's just something that I've been thinking about in relation to this question, and in relation to how the show connects to the performances. I definitely didn't design my score for documentation. It was created as this very private, personal thing. It's not visual at all, actually.

Lorraine

You didn't think yours was visual?

Steffani

When I developed the score "Experience regret, do not apologize" I imagined Cliff taking a private moment, maybe in a room to himself, maybe in a bathroom, maybe while cooking, experiencing regret, and not even having an opportunity to apologize.

Kellie

Can we talk further about this idea of the dissonance between the actual physical performance and its documentation, whether in photographs or as a written score?

Terry

I think that the driving force behind all the pieces in the show is that dissonance and the varying degrees of it. I'm sure everybody here has different ideas about what it is that was written and how it ended up being. With every piece I feel there are varying degrees of dissonance that bring it to life!

Lorraine

For me, the score is research. I set up a situation because I want information; I want

information on how people conceive the other. And so any interpretation of it is a valid interpretation; as far as I'm concerned, it's all information about how the other is conceived.

Steffani

To clarify, the dissonance that I was talking about, it's not between the score that was written and the realization, but rather the performance as it's experienced, and the documentation as it's experienced and represented. I don't even know if it's accurate to use the word "documentation" as if it's secondary, as if those photos are secondary, because I don't think they are. They're two different things. And that's the kind of tension or relationship, that is really interesting to me.

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Kellie

Do you all think this project makes visible an African American performance history?

Lorraine

I think that the show reveals the presence of a history without being a history itself. It was not a historical show; it did not give the history of black performance art. It simply, in some ways, just revealed its existence. We hate to say that, but they didn't really know we were here, so it revealed the existence of a black performance history. We're still at this stage now, really, that all we're doing is presenting ourselves to art history for examination. We're at the debutante ball, presenting ourselves, right? Not for our potential suitors, but—yeah, okay, potential suitors! We're all here for the PhD candidates who want to come.

Derrick

As a contributor of a score, I wasn't necessarily aware of the fact that it was only African American or only black artists participating. To me it didn't make a difference. I was more interested in the conversation that was involved, and the work, and the show itself. If I had seen black-and-white Xeroxes from Kinko's on the wall, I would've been okay with that. I thought it was interesting because it was like a letter. It doesn't have to be grand or anything. That's one of the things I like a lot about looking at artists like Ben Patterson, and looking at some of the scores from the past: seeing the rawness of things and how that rawness is actually acceptable in our culture as mainstream objects.

Terry

In taking Kellie's question a little bit further, when you found out that it was an all-black show, did any of you feel uncomfortable with the prospect of a certain kind of racial cluster, ghettoization, another black show?

Maren

I knew from the beginning that's what he was doing, and I thought it was incredibly ambitious. All those voices...

Sherman

I understood from the beginning that it was going to be about black performance art; black visual artists who do performance. And I thought, "This is fantastic." So I didn't really see it as a sort of cubby hole, a categorical thing. I thought, "This was a long time coming. Maybe this is the beginning of something."

Lorraine

I was curious: were there any people that you asked who said no?

Clifford

Oh, many. And then there were some who agreed to contribute a score, and then they got busy and they couldn't do it, so there were quite a few. I reached out to a lot of people, but for whatever reason, some weren't interested—maybe for the very reasons that Terry just explained. I think that may have had something to do with it. I hate to use this word, because it's overused, and grossly misunderstood, but post-black. But I think US visual artists working in performance have always and only been post-black. In a way, to be a part of this show, it means you're functioning as an artist outside of a mainstream. It works against the grain of all those assumptions people might have. But then I think there may have been a lot of fear for some artists, to be a part of the exhibition. Which is fine too.

Lorraine

Why?

Clifford

I think that performance art is challenging. And I think the scores that you all contributed to the project are challenging. I think in some cases even more challenging to you as artists. It is also challenging to me as the interpreter, the conduit, and subsequently challenging to the public that consumes it.

Lorraine

You know it's interesting, just to unpack the phrase "post-black," slightly? I mean as you know, I always go around saying, I mean every time I give a lecture, I say, "Well I was post-black before I was black" (*Laughs*). I think there are people my age who know what I'm talking about! Any black person who grew up in the '50s in a certain social class and with a certain level of education—especially if they had achieved what was possible in the limited meritocracy that did exist in some parts of the country, particularly the Northeast—would understand. Many people of that class assumed that they had escaped from the limitations of blackness.

Kellie

As I see it, African American art history was post-black before it was black. In the

nineteenth century, black artists were not necessarily depicting the black body. They had only recently been able to work as fine artists. In the US they were still working out how to represent a black person. You think of people like Robert Scott Duncanson, who was largely a landscape painter. The one painting he does with a black figure [*Uncle Tom and Little Eva*, 1853—after Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 1852] gets horrible reviews. And that was it for Duncanson in terms of outlining a black image; he never took that further. How does a black person represent what he himself looks like, or what she herself looks like, in the face of overwhelming stereotypes or images of servility, and was there a market for anything outside that type of framing? So there was a caesura that they were working out how to fill in over the nineteenth century. African American artists of the nineteenth century didn’t show black people for the most part. If you look at the majority of their work, they’re showing landscapes, or they’re showing allegorical figures who are supposed to be black—but don’t “look black” in a phenotypical sense, as in the sculpture of Edmonia Lewis.

With the growth of a critical mass of artists and art, African Americans are able to deal with the idea of the black figure in the twentieth century. And then this ends up being something that becomes identified as “black art.” But that heavily freighted term is also very much part of the language of the 1960s and 1970s. “Post-black” pushes against such reductive thinking. However, it is a phrase that has its own limitations because I feel it doesn’t take into account the long history African American artists have in which the black figure was not a part of their production. So this is perhaps a roundabout way of saying that it makes perfect sense that Lorraine had a more expansive view of what blackness could mean creatively, in advance of these types of late-twentieth-century categories.

Terry

But it’s interesting that Duncanson, Tanner, and Bannister were also community photographers.¹ They were self-employed entrepreneurs. So, while they might not have been depicting blackness in painting, they most certainly were documenting it while providing a service to their community. It’s dicey to project from hindsight, but I wonder whether this activity also emerged out of their need to find alternatives to freely and creatively depict their people without the constraints of art-world prescriptions that Kellie has pointed out.

Steffani

Cliff, you mentioned at the beginning that you feel that many—you feel that your audiences aren’t necessarily mostly black, or that a lot of black people don’t come to see the work. And one of the things I really like about what white audiences see when they see your performances is that you refuse to suggest you’re a neutral vehicle for performance. Your performances never ignore the ways that you’re perceived socially and culturally. You also resist allowing anyone else to perceive themselves that way. When speaking about white female performance artists people never say, “This work is therefore about whiteness.” No, of course not. They never say that. But of course it is! Their work is often about whiteness. It just isn’t acknowledged.

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Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937), Edward Mitchell Bannister (1828–1901).

Derrick

The score I gave you was really based on something as simple as a TV commercial, which was Puff Daddy in a commercial for Proactiv, and he was talking about the product. He was speaking to the audience in a basic way that I like to hear. It was something that appeals to me in every way as a human, and the line he said to the audience was, "I just wanna be straight up with you: I just ain't want no bumps."

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Kellie

In critical and academic discussions of performance art there's a tension between the live act and the document, the latter being emblematic of a fixed history. In putting together *Anthology*, and having this roundtable, do you think there's danger in codifying the history of African American performance art, similar to the way "black art" seems to signal a narrow view of African American artistic practice? Is this project antithetical to preserving the freedom of the live act, as well as antithetical to preserving an uncoded blackness? Or is the need for histories of African American artists more pressing?

Sherman

I think that historically, when I think back to the '80s and the '90s and the culture wars—what did the culture wars result in? The culture wars were a win for institutions that no longer had to deal with individual artists. If performance art is an outsider practice, that meant all of a sudden that access to a venue was now stripped. You really had to have an institution to back you up to have something. And for those who do not have that, well then you're ass out. So I think it is important to be able to categorize or codify this particular type of practice. Not to mention the fact that, as far as in a Western tradition, performance is over one hundred years old. It's an old art form. It's even a tradition, but no one knows what it is. And that needs to be defined, and that needs to be shaped.

Clifford

I'm happy to run the risk of codifying history. I think it's necessary. I always wanted *Anthology* to be problematic and I think it is on a lot of levels. How is it possible that I've placed myself at the center of a broader conversation? I've placed myself at the center of this history. It's me all the time! Me me me me me. We know of course, as Lorraine mentioned, it's much bigger than me, or all of you. But it's my representation that in a sense drives the work, drives the project. So that, I think, is a problem! But I don't think it discredits or somehow devalues the individual artists who contributed to the exhibition.

Kellie

What are your thoughts in general about the concept of the score in performance? Had you ever produced one before this project?

Lorraine

I want to thank Cliff because actually I was moved to write a “score” for the first time, as opposed to a more directive “script,” the sort of thing I would do for my own work. But eliminating any and all directions that might limit interpretation was the answer to another set of questions that I had had about my own work. So in the end what I gave Cliff was not something just for Cliff. As soon as this show is down, I will put it on my website and offer it to the world! But it was Cliff’s invitation that enabled me to think about the “score” very self-consciously. So it was a first time for me, and I’m definitely very appreciative.

Maren

I’ve written scores, but I never called them scores. They were my scripts for action or interaction between people who were in the performances. So this is the first time it was “scored” and adapted. In the past, I’d given directions to people, but it was in a piece in which everybody was given directions to do things. It wasn’t like I gave a cast directions for broad interpretation. I held the reins. So this was the first time I just let the thing go. And it worked out great! What I was really shocked about was that some of the stuff that’s always going around in my head, I could see Clifford had done intuitively. In each person’s case, I saw him honoring that person. Even though his adaptations might not have seemed so, it was always very honorable, very sensitive.

Derrick

The thing I enjoyed about being asked to contribute a score is that it confirmed just the way that I think about making art. I’m excited to show in places and do projects, but I think art is just a basic practice in which I would feel just as happy if I had a piece and wanted to do it in the street. Or if I wanted to do it in an abandoned building. The communication of the art could be anywhere. And this is one thing that I talk about a lot with artists, younger artists. You don’t have to be in a fancy space or an institution to communicate an idea or do an exhibition.

I’m hoping this exhibition will influence a lot of younger artists about their ideas of the art world or the mainstream art world, and how to communicate their ideas from a very basic place. I don’t believe there’s an outside or an inside anymore.

Lorraine

Derrick, I can’t let you get away with this altogether (*laughs*). You’re dealing with a problem that we wish we could have dealt with. The thing that you’re describing is where we started. And then we got institutionalized! And now, it’s interesting that you are feeling like you have to struggle to get back to where we were before we got institutionalized. It’s great! I love it!

Terry

What I found interesting about the whole score idea—and in viewing the show—is the coexistence of a document in darkness that, if you will, is brought to light by Clifford’s interpretations. I sense a certain amount of withholding in the documents in *Anthology* and you, Cliff, act as the conduit for bringing them to light. To enable

the brilliance that exists in the luminosity of an idea as it appears on paper is the most interesting aspect about the score. It was something I'd been already thinking about. With my exposure to ideas about endurance that I've experienced through Sherman's work, I kind of had written it for him.

Sherman

Let me play my old man. Back in *my day* (*laughs*) we didn't have this. It was really about, "I'm gonna have to forge my own way. I'm going to have to build my own structure. I'm going to make my own environment, make the tickets, make the poster, get all of this together, then I have to do it all over again the next time." I understand and appreciate performance being this outsider practice. Clifford, I have to say, when I got the call from you, it had been a fantasy that if I keep doing this, somebody's going to call. There's going to be some black grad student that's going to say, "I saw your name on some little ticket there, and I just decided to hunt you down and go, 'Who are you?'" (*laughs*). I've held on to that for thirty years, and then you called. Going through this exhibit is fantastic. To see all of these people who were doing what I was doing, but we were just cut off from each other. We didn't know. I didn't know until now that it's here and it's great and it's fantastic. And now there are so many more opportunities and venues. Back there when I was your age, not having that was really, I don't know, it was kind of painful. It was kind of painful to get up and do the whole thing, get some appreciation, and then having to do it all over again, and convince people all over again that this is what I'm doing, and them believing in me enough to give me the spot to do it. And doing it again and again for thirty years. It can wear on you! I guess I'm happy that there are so many more people who think of themselves as being in this rich opportunity of creativity. But it really wasn't like that all the time, and it took a lot of work. It took a lot of hard work to do—and just sort of stick to it, believing in what you're doing is really important enough. So I thank you.