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Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013. 280 pp. 65 color plates, 82 halftones. ISBN 978-0-226-01312-1.

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Throughout Huey Copeland's book, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (2013), he examines four artists' approaches from the early 1990s to materialize Transatlantic Slavery and its lasting effects for contemporary audiences. With accessible and descriptive visual and aural analysis, Copeland walks his readers through installations by Fred Wilson (1992), Lorna Simpson (1991), Glenn Ligon (1993), and Renée Green (1991) in vivid detail. The author critically engages recent works by art historians Darby English and Jennifer A. Gonzalez, as well as many others, in addition to consulting his examined artists through interviews and their written work. Copeland astutely adopts Lauri Firstenberg's term "antiportrait" across each chapter of his book to explore the paradox of the artists successfully embodying the absent black enslaved body in their pieces. *Bound to Appear* becomes an artform itself over the development of Copeland's argument. Richly illustrated, the book is innovatively constructed, both through Copeland's writing and the book's physical manifestation, to mirror the structures or intents of the four artists' installations. From the removable dust jacket to the distribution of the book's illustrations, the author's hand guides his readers through what representation of blackness can be and what it can mean in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries after the abolition of slavery and the end of the Civil Rights movement. In 2015, editor of *Small Axe*, David Scott, commissioned reviews of Copeland's book, as well as

Copeland's response to Stephen Best and Hortense J. Spillers, each of whom have influenced the author's scholarly practice. As readers, we are thus able to utilize Copeland's consideration of the afterlife of the "peculiar institution" as he lays it out throughout *Bound to Appear* in conjunction with the book's critics in order to understand the successful afterlife of Copeland's work.

Importantly, Copeland initially offers his audience a familiar outlet from which to consider the black body, a posed portrait of a choreographer on a *Time* magazine cover, before challenging them to reconsider representations of blackness with the visual resonance of Transatlantic Slavery in often figureless works by black artists at the end of the twentieth century. Just as Copeland's artists, Wilson, Simpson, Ligon, and Green visually offer enslaved bodies in their artwork through the unexpectedly absent body and its material double, the author enables profundity by undermining a comfortable expectation through his introduction's first illustration. Copeland's written introduction then addresses the "economies of racialization" within the social culture of the United States, the continued commodification of the African American body and enduring racism present in how, when, and where the black body is or is not publicly displayed. (7) He structures the book by pairing artist with term—Wilson and redress, Simpson and figure, Ligon and fugitivity, Green and diaspora—to similarly set and challenge audience expectations and descriptively guide them through the installations. In chapter two, for example, Copeland starts by presenting Simpson's piece *Guarded Conditions*, providing a visual analysis of the piece before asking us to consider our role in the artwork, viewing female figures who will not return our gaze. (65) By introducing this concept of the unreturned gaze with a piece of Simpson's art that features visible bodies, Copeland convincingly establishes the possibility of the continually unreturned

gaze in Simpson's installation, *Five Rooms*, that transforms the enslaved body into the sightless materials they produced.¹ Through similar methodological analyses of each artists' works, the author ultimately comes to argue that the artists make black bodies visible, despite and through their absence and replacement with material objects, due to the "American cultural imaginary" that conflates the black body and "things" because of "slavery's deep structure... [and] perpetual return." (205-206, 202)

To support his claims, Copeland situates *Bound to Appear* amongst discussions of Fred Wilson, Glenn Ligon, and Renée Green's works by his contemporaries Darby English and Jennifer A. González,¹ as well as consistently engaging with Lauri Firstenberg's term "antiportrait" that she uses to critique Simpson's work, and regularly referencing interviews with some of the artists throughout the book. Copeland addresses an extensive number of scholars, demonstrating a rigorous research method, but truly seems to build from English's work, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (2007), and González's piece, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (2008). In Darby English's book, the scholar speaks to the perceived cultural expectation that black artists invariably represent their race, warns against the limitations such an expectation can bring to understanding a work of art, and urges readers to see differently.² English calls his audience to be "responsive to the specific artistic operations that often manifest relations and differences to which culturalist regimes of reception must remain blind."³ Copeland's argument regarding the economies of racialization that commodify the black body in American social culture recalls English's proposed expectation and develops Copeland's own insistence on considering our roles as viewers. *Bound to Appear's* main addition from English's foundation then becomes Copeland's rooting the categorical imaging of race in the

black body's enslaved past.⁴ In a similar vein, Jennifer A. González suggests contemporary black artists have “demonstrate[d] how race discourse is grounded in a visual technology of display,” which Copeland easily applies within his discussions of displaying the absent enslaved body.⁵ By emphasizing an audience's bodily interaction with and visual consumption of the examined installations however, Copeland also urges viewers to imagine and consider their role as bodies entering a space of display, surrounded by present absence. *Bound to Appear* therefore converses with contiguous scholarly literature to stress the material significance of a viewer entering and thus assuming an active role as voyeur and participant in the installations that surround them.

In the book's introduction, Copeland defines Lauri Firstenberg's “antiportraiture” as she utilizes it in response to Simpson's *Guarded Connections*, in response to the present, though resistant, black figure.⁶ Copeland then develops Firstenberg's term further by suggesting its application beyond photography and shows its suitability to reference the “host of material traces as surrogates for the black body” in each of his chosen artists' installations. (9) Beyond Copeland's engagement with his fellow scholars, he also utilizes opportunities to speak directly to the artists he discusses. Chapter three is especially rich in recounted interviews with Glenn Ligon and references to Ligon's own written examination of his productions.⁷ This direct work with the artist is tremendous in the art historical study of the visual culture of slavery due to the unfortunately consistent white lens through which the enslaved body has historically been described.⁸ The descriptions we have of enslaved bodies are provided primarily through fugitive slave advertisements, through the eyes of white owners seeking to regain their property.⁹ Copeland's choice of installations that replace enslaved black

bodies with their accessible material manifestations rather than artwork that attempts to recreate the body from an inaccessible enslaved lens demonstrates the author's dedication to consulting the voice of the represented or, in the case of his direct consultation with the artists, the voices of those representing. Copeland's mode of research and source consultation thus emphasizes his discussion of viewership and audience participation with the material appearance of the enslaved body, as he asks his readers to consider the visible objectification of the enslaved through direct consultation with the creators of the representations.

In addition to *Bound to Appear's* content, we must also consider the material construction and presentation of Copeland's argument. Copeland refers to a book's dust jacket as, "the site where an authorial framing of the book comes to an end and the reader's encounter with it begins."¹⁰ Although the author refers to his summary of the book on its back cover, I would like to extend his claim to the dust jacket as a whole, to the wrapped, removable, first encounter with *Bound to Appear*. The book holds sixty-five color illustrations between its covers and is presented in a dust jacket featuring Glenn Ligon's *To Disembark*. The cover shows four of the nine wood crates in Ligon's installation, filling the bottom half of the book's front in untreated wood with small, black packaging marks—upward pointing arrows, "FRAGILE," etc.—on seven of the boxes' visible faces. Above the crates, two of the installation's ten lithographs pick up the black from the packaging marks with their black frames and text against a stark white that fills the cover's remaining upper half. Though in a different font, the title's bold, black, uppercase letters, "BOUND TO APPEAR," seem informed by the packaging marks on Ligon's crates. Stamped just right of center in the cover's composition, the title is placed close to the only readable writing in this view of Ligon's piece ("fragile") and the

black arrow upon the foremost crate points directly to its letters. Throughout Copeland's address of Ligon's project, he argues that in the artist's work:

blackness, slavery, and its aftermaths are not simply agencies of oppression or marks of foreclosure, but expansive openings through which we might begin to see the modern, the aesthetic, and ourselves differently... [given Ligon's] attunement to and understanding of the ways in which marginalized subject positions are anticipated by the placelessness of the enslaved. (117, 114)

By employing Ligon's installation for the book's cover and through the cover's design, *Bound to Appear* is wrapped and presented with Copeland's argument for the antiportrait in the visual representation of the enslaved black body. Considering the objecthood of the dust jacket as a removable slip, the cover reflects Copeland's belief in the fragility of historical representations of blackness and the modern inevitability of the material manifestation of slavery's afterlife.

Upon entering Copeland's book, his introduction, "The Blackness of Things," opens with an image of choreographer Bill T. Jones on the front of *Time Magazine* from 1994. The image appears celebratory, happy, speaking of "Renaissance" and "free at last," "*truly* free at last;" freedom for black artists in an innovative, developing, public, respected space.¹¹ The illustration fills the book's left page with a well-lit, smiling Jones who is positioned close to the book's spine and visually leads reader-viewers' eyes toward Copeland's text with his body angle and hand gesture.¹² Copeland thus greets his audience with what had become one of the traditional representations of the black body in media and he mirrors the magazine's placement of the formerly unseen body that is literally placed on stage, on a cover by placing the portrait on page zero.¹³

Following Jones's welcoming gesture, however, the author explains that the art pieces he analyzes work against this increasingly popular production at the end of the twentieth century of the black body, African American art, and African American artists as

spectacle. (2) By opening *Bound to Appear* with a spectacularized portrait of a successful black choreographer, Copeland effectively provides an image with which to read the “antiportrait” against. Because Wilson, Simpson, Ligon, and Green’s works either lack the visible presence of black bodies all together or show figures who refuse the gaze of their viewer, the portrait-antiportrait difference is made immediately apparent. (9) Copeland then uses the remainder of his book to elucidate how the black body has been a subject of “global consumption” since it was first abducted from Africa through its present display within neoliberal capitalism, a term that is undefined by the author but is likely used to address the regular conflation of subjects and objects in modernity. (9, 19)¹⁴

Copeland provides a richly illustrated book in his examination of the visual, material culture of slavery and continually emphasizes the importance of *things* as stand-ins for absent enslaved bodies in the works of his presented artists.¹⁵ Wilson’s *Mining the Museum*, for example, features a display with shackles nuzzled amidst filigreed vessels to show two modes of metal that signified owned objects in eighteenth and nineteenth century Baltimore—kitchenware and enslaved individuals. (24) In the author’s description of the display, he brilliantly mentions (without further discussion) that the shackles were loaned by a local collector. (25) By a simple passing acknowledgement, Copeland demonstrates the persisting consideration of the enslaved as collectable.¹⁶

Because of Copeland’s emphasis on the significance of material objects throughout his book, I believe it is important to also consider the physical construction of *Bound to Appear* and our interactions with it as a visual and material object that discusses slavery and representation. The presence of illustrations within a text will

inevitably affect the pacing of a reader-viewer's experience of the written work.¹⁷

Chapters can be regularly or irregularly imaged, text can share space with illustration, or a full-page figure can interrupt the flow of a paragraph, sentence, or word entirely.

Although Copeland's text is interspersed with images of varying dimension and regularity, each chapter hosts about an equal number of illustrations. Chapters three and four both have evenly distributed images, neither chapter featuring long stretches of unillustrated pages and both presenting four full-page figures. Chapters one and two, however, appear divergent. The opening chapter maintains a stretch of ten unillustrated pages after being regularly imaged in its first twenty-six pages and the second chapter features an astounding six full-page illustrations. Within the extended stretch of unillustrated pages in chapter one, Copeland offers his social critique on museums and, specifically, the Maryland Historical Society for their propensity to bury the slave past, expounding on Fred Wilson's reference to *Mining the Museum* "as an exorcism of the historical society's ghosts." (50-59)¹⁸ By limiting the access to visual material beyond the text in this section of the chapter, Copeland emphasizes how little an audience can see without looking for blackness in institutions entrusted with accurate historical representation. Contrastingly, chapter two is punctuated with a heightened number of textless pages, full-page illustrations, to strengthen Copeland's depiction of the antiportrait through artist Lorna Simpson's command of both figurative (a body actively refusing a viewer's gaze) and object-based (an object that stands in for a body) antiportrait. (9) Beyond these varying distributions of images throughout the text, Copeland writes in a response to reviews of *Bound to Appear* that:

the book takes its formal and methodological cues from the works that it engages... Each chapter, for instance, is divided into roughly the same number of sections as the installation that it treats by a marker—stars, numbers,

quotations, or titles—meant to alternatively stage the work’s unfolding. In this way, the book manifests a nuanced mode of art writing.¹⁹

Copeland thus acknowledges the structure, organization, and presentation of his book as an artform, considering the book itself “an apparatus necessarily inseparable from its ‘objects’... that can encompass the whole of the universe in its unfolding.”²⁰ We therefore unfold Copeland’s argument and critical engagement with the material representation of slavery in modernity through our physical handling of his created object.

Bound to Appear encapsulates the importance of bodily interaction with objects and spaces, critical self-reflection, and the afterlife of slavery. In a review of Copeland’s piece, scholar Stephen Best defines this “afterlife” engagement as, “the general preoccupation with establishing the authority of the slave past in contemporary black life.”²¹ Continuing our consideration of Copeland’s book as an artform, we can look to the work’s afterlife to demonstrate Copeland’s ultimate goal of engaging his contemporaries to help build the new and growing art historical study for the Visual Culture of Slavery. In November 2015, *Small Axe* journal director and editor David Scott published consecutive reviews of *Bound to Appear* by Hortense J. Spillers and Stephen Best, followed by a commissioned response to the reviews by Huey Copeland.²² Both of the reviewing scholars praise Copeland’s work as groundbreaking, recognizing the art historian’s linguistic command and articulation as the first scholar to examine slavery’s representational afterlife in this “quartet” of contemporary artists.²³ Describing the artists as a quartet, Spillers recognizes the author’s presentation of the four artists as a unified group of voices. Throughout Copeland’s book, I find that he rather emphasizes the disparate approaches of each artist and instead shows their

shared insistence on respecting the enslaved body and its representation. Copeland argues that the artists seek not to remedy the vision of a (mis)figured diasporic fugitive, as Best suggests, but rather to accurately show the enslaved black body as it was understood and seen as through the eyes of a slave owner.²⁴ In utilizing brilliant writing and research in conjunction with the physical, handled form of Copeland's scholarship, *Bound to Appear* ultimately provides convincing insight to the inevitable (re)appearance of slavery in American culture.

¹ Kim Bobier, "Bound to Appear Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America by Huey Copeland (review)," *Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 34 (Spring 2014), p. 116. In Kim Bobier's review, she summarizes Copeland's goal to underscore "the subject-object relationships that govern contemporary art and contemporary society at large."

² Darby English, *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

³ English, *How to See a Work of Art*, p. 32.

⁴ In Steven Nelson's review of English's book, he suggests, "Understanding that vision and racialization are not mutually exclusive categories, English calls for imaging other kinds of looking that would produce other kinds of identification with the work of art," understanding beyond the artists' race. Steven Nelson, "How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness by Darby English (review)," *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 90, no. 3 (Sep. 2008), p. 497.

⁵ Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).

⁶ Copeland understands Firstenberg to explain, "The artist's frequent deployment of turned-back figures... is meant to refuse the gaze, to deny any presumed access to the sitter's personality, and to refute the classificatory drives and emotional projections typically satisfied by photographic portraiture of black subjects." Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, p. 9. See also, Lauri Firstenberg, "Autonomy and the Archive in America: Reexamining the Intersection of Photography and Stereotype," *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, eds. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: International Center for Photography and Harry N. Abrams, 2003), pp. 317-319.

⁷ For example, Ligon is quoted from an interview Copeland conducted in 2010 between himself, Ligon, and Thelma Golden. Glenn Ligon, quoted in Huey Copeland, "Post/Black/Atlantic: A Conversation with Thelma Golden and Glenn Ligon," *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, eds. Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter (Liverpool, UK: Tate, 2010). See also, Glenn Ligon, "Black Light: David Hammons and the Poetics of Emptiness," *Art Forum*, vol. 43, no. 1, (Sep. 2004), p. 242.

⁸ For further reading on historical descriptions of the enslaved body, consider consulting: Shane White and Graham White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 61, no. 1 (Feb. 1995), pp. 45-76.

⁹ For further reading on the enslaved body in fugitive slave advertisements, consider consulting: Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master... a Negroe Girl named Thursday': Examining

Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements,” Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law, eds. Joshua Nichols and Amy Swiffen (NYC: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁰ Huey Copeland, “Flow and Arrest,” Small Axe, vol. 19, no. 3 (Nov. 2015), p. 207.

¹¹ Ted Thai, *Choreographer Bill T. Jones*, from Time Magazine (10 October 1994), cover. (Emphasis mine.)

¹² Because Copeland’s book is illustrated, his audience is asked to be both reader of the text and viewer of the images. I therefore consistently refer to the consumers of illustrated texts “reader-viewers.”

¹³ I use the descriptor “well-lit” because of the extensive writing about the presentation and framing of the black figure in media, especially in regard to the male figure. For further reading, consider: Kobena Mercer, “Black Masculinity and the Sexual Politics of Race,” Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies, (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 130-170.

¹⁴ Bobier critiques Copeland’s use of the term in her review of the work, p. 118.

¹⁵ Copeland, “Flow and Arrest,” p. 208.

¹⁶ In Hortense Spillers review of Copeland’s book, she similarly acknowledges Copeland’s subtlety and writes, “The viewer does not miss that the shackles are a collector’s item and could even be the kind of object—now an objet d’art—that might well turn up at a Sotheby’s international auction.” Hortense J. Spillers, “Art Talk and the Uses of History,” Small Axe, vol. 19, no. 3 (Nov. 2015), p. 182.

¹⁷ For further reading on the interaction of image and text, consider: Brad Bucknell and Christine Wiesenthal, “Essays Into the Imagetext: An Interview with W. J. T. Mitchell,” Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature, vol. 33, no. 2 (Jun. 2000), pp. 1-23.

¹⁸ Fred Wilson, “The Silent Message of the Museum,” Global Visions: Toward a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press, 1994), p. 157.

¹⁹ Copeland, “Flow and Arrest,” p. 214.

²⁰ Copeland, “Flow and Arrest,” p. 215.

²¹ Stephen Best, “Come and Gone,” Small Axe, vol. 19, no. 3 (Nov. 2015), p. 189.

²² “david scott,” Small Axe, (date of last access 10 November 2018) <http://smallaxe.net/content/436>; “small axe project,” Small Axe, (date of last access 10 November 2018) <http://smallaxe.net/#project>.

²³ Best, “Come and Gone,” p. 189; Spillers, “Art Talk,” p. 176; Copeland, “Flow and Arrest,” pp. 207-208.

²⁴ Copeland corrects Best’s misreading that the artists pieces and *Bound to Appear*’s “framing of them are... primarily intended to act as historical recoveries that enable or even accede to what he terms the logics of ‘witnessing,’ ‘mutuality,’ or ‘compassionate resuscitation.’” See Copeland, “Flow and Arrest,” p. 210 and Best, “Come and Gone,” p. 190.