

IN DIALOGUE: *THE COUPLE IN THE CAGE:* *A GUATINAUI ODYSSEY*

RUTH BEHAR AND BRUCE MANNHEIM

The Society for Visual Anthropology sponsored a screening of the video *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey*, by Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia, at the 1994 American Anthropological Association (AAA) meetings in Atlanta. The video is based upon the performance piece *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit [Washington, Chicago, Sydney, etc.]* created by the MacArthur award-winning performance artist, Guillermo Gomez-Pena and cultural critic and artist Coco Fusco. The two artists portray a man and a woman from the remote (imaginary) Caribbean island of Guatinaui. Conceived of as part of a larger counter-cultural event entitled "The Year of the White Bear" performed during the Quincentenary year of Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, the performance piece was meant to be a critical commentary on the long-standing Western practice of objectifying and distancing the Other through spectatorship, in particular, through museums' exhibitions of "primitive" peoples. As Gomez-Pena and Fusco explain in a program that describes "The Year of the White Bear": "Performance art in the West did not begin with Dadaist events. Since the early days of the Spanish conquest, 'aboriginal samples' of people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas were brought to Europe for aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis, and entertainment."

Two Undiscovered Amerindians... was seen by visitors to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, and the Whitney Museum in New York, as well as by audiences in London, Madrid, Buenos Aires, and Sydney. *The Couple in the Cage* records elements of the performance, such as visitors paying to have their photographs taken with the couple, feeding the Fusco or Gomez-Pena bananas, asking the female "Guatinaui" to dance or the male to recite a story in the Guatinaui language, but its true subject is the audience and peoples' reactions to the performance, in particular, the seeming

credulity of the visitors with regard to the "authenticity" of the two Guatinaui.

Anthropologists on the staff of the Smithsonian Institution and Field Museum concerned with raising viewer consciousness about issues of representation and the colonial legacy of displays in museums of natural history were instrumental in convincing museum administrators that it was appropriate to sponsor the performance—itsself a parody of the former museum practice of putting non-Western peoples on display as museum exhibits. But some viewers were outraged that museums allowed such an event to be performed inside the walls of institutions supposedly dedicated to "science" and "truth."

Anthropologists and others who came to view *The Couple in the Cage* at the AAA meetings had an opportunity to discuss the question of what relationship cultural critiques such as the performance of *Two Undiscovered Amerindians...* have to the contemporary practice of anthropology and the representation of the Other. Ruth Behar, the organizer of the event, had arranged for the filmmaker/performance artist, Coco Fusco, to be present at the screening. We publish here Behar's introductory remarks along with comments made after the screening by one of the discussants, anthropologist Bruce Mannheim. *NL.*

RUTH BEHAR'S INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to be here tonight to introduce Coco Fusco and the work she did with Chicano performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña on *The Couple in the Cage*. It is especially significant that we are presenting their work at the AAA, precisely this year when the general theme of our conference is the issue of human rights. *The Couple in the Cage* is for me one of the most significant cultural works produced recently dealing with the most fundamental of human rights—the right

never to be treated as an object, the right to full humanity, the right to subjecthood. With irony, humor, wit, and pathos. *The Couple in the Cage* seeks to engage the history of how the West has constructed otherness by putting a cage around "difference." By engaging that history so passionately. *The Couple in the Cage* offers an important vision of the history of what Michel Rolf-Trouillot has called "the savage slot" that anthropology inherited when it became an intellectual system, a practice, and an angst-ridden moral philosophy. It also offers us a vision of the ways new anthropologies will need to be made and performed as we move into the next century. *The Couple in the Cage* is a film that ought to be shown to students in Anthro 101 and to grad students beginning their initiation in their core Anthro courses: it is a work that we ought to discuss, debate, and reflect upon as broadly as possible within all the subfields of anthropology.

This is a moment not so much of "crisis" for anthropology, it seems to me, but of expanding anthropology's boundaries so that we can take part in, rather than hide from, the dynamics of cultural interactions as they unfold in a global context. One area in which these dynamics are unfolding is in performance art and various kinds of creative media projects involving video and film. Lourdes Arizpe noted in Thursday's panel about "Rethinking the Cultural" that just as the nineteenth-century realist novel has been superseded by new forms of documentary media and creative nonfiction writing, so too has anthropology, and we must do more than just look on, unless we want to go the way of the dinosaurs. That panel, curiously enough, was full of performers, imposters, and spirit mediums reading papers for the absent presences of Pierre Bourdieu and Marshall Sahlins. But then on Thursday night we were treated to

a real performance, a dramatic rendition of Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa*, in which this canonical text of an intercultural, inter-women encounter was brought to the stage. For me it was exciting and heartening to see how well Shostak's work could be translated into cathartic theater as another way of doing anthropology. And it made me realize: Hasn't anthropology always been about performance? Not just the classically clumsy, Woody Allensque performance art of the anthropologist in the field, or the performances we ask the natives to put on for our benefit, but the performances that we, in turn, render of native lives on our inevitable return home?

Sahlins has noted that one of the great paradoxes of contemporary anthropology is how we have escaped from dealing with "culture" just at the moment when everyone else is furiously embroiled in discussions around its meaning. Nowhere has this discussion been more intense, exciting, heart-rending, and painful than among minority creative writers and artists, for whom "discussion" is too tame a word for the experiences of their own "othering" which they bring to the concept of culture. I think it is time for anthropology to engage in discussion with those "others" here in our midst who have reclaimed the concept of culture not as a dead collection of artifacts and customs, but as a necessity of survival.

Tonight, I hope we can begin that dialogue with Coco Fusco, who graciously agreed to come to discuss *The Couple in the Cage* with us anthropologists.

ABOUT COCO FUSCO

Coco Fusco is a Los Angeles-based art critic, film critic, curator, performance artist, and media artist. She has been a visiting artist at the University of California, at the University of Illinois, and at Colgate University.

The collage consists of several elements:

- Top Left:** A photo of a woman with the text: "HOLLYWOOD WANTS EXCLUSIVE CONTRACT WITH FEMALE SPECIMEN ONLY! MALE UNHAPPY". Below it: "EXCLUSIVE PHOTOS".
- Top Right:** A photo of a scientist with the text: "HUMANE SOCIETY CLAIMS NO JURISDICTION OVER HUMANS! FAMOUS SCIENTIST EXPLAINS WHY". Below it: "AUGUST 1993".
- Center:** A large headline: "NATURAL ENQUIRER" with "LARGEST CIRCULATION OF ANY PAPER IN THE AMERICAS" below it.
- Middle:** A large headline: "GUATIMAU NEWLYWEDS FROM ISLAND IN GULF OF MEXICO EXHIBITED IN CAGE! MUSEUM VISITORS OUTRAGED!".
- Bottom Left:** A photo of a man with the text: "EXPERTS SAY HE'S A POLITICAL LEADER!".
- Bottom Center:** A photo of a person in a cage with the text: "Blood sacrifice is at the base of all their activities! ENGLISH PROFESSOR OBSERVES.".
- Bottom Right:** A photo of a person in a cage.
- Bottom:** A video advertisement for "THE COUPLE IN THE CAGE: A GUATIMAU ODYSSEY" with the text: "a video by Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia", "EDITED BY DAISY WRIGHT, PERFORMANCE BY GUILLERMO GÓMEZ PEÑA AND COCO FUSCO", and "RUNNING TIME 30 MIN".

Her articles have appeared in *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Village Voice*, *Art in America*, *The Nation*, and many other national and international publications. She has written catalogue essays for the 1994 Fotofest, the 1993 Biennial, and many other art exhibitions. Her book of essays, interviews, and scripts, titled *English is Broken Here*, will be published next spring by The New Press in New York. She has curated numerous film and art series, from *Black American Short Films and Videos* to *The Hybrid State Film Series*, and she also writes frequently on Cuban cultural and art movements. Her wonderful essay, "El Diario de Miranda/Miranda's Diary," about her return trips to Cuba is published in the special double issue of the *Michigan Quarterly Review* on "Bridges to Cuba" (Behar 1994) that just came out this year.

In recent years, the rethinking of identity has led to both a fruitful engagement with diversity, plurality, and multicultural dialogue, and an often frustrating need to put people who are still "other" into neat ethnic boxes or cages, where their difference can be made palatable and statistically chartable. Coco, from the beginning, has resisted these boxes and has used her own self-positioning to stir up trouble. In the first, absolutely brilliant, article I ever read by her, titled "Managing the Other" published in the Brazilian bilingual journal *Luistania*. in 1992, Coco introduces herself in the following way: "In the past five years, I have been asked to speak as a Cuban, as a Latina, as a Black person, and as a person of color. I have been confused for being Arab, Puerto Rican, East Indian and West Indian. I have been told that I speak English like a British person, or 'like' an educated person. I've also disappointed many because I don't speak English with a Spanish accent. What category do Americans have for someone composed of Taino, Yoruba, Catalan, Sephardic, and Neopolitan blood?"

In that same article she adds, "I don't speak Spanglish, except with bilingual friends, because before it was a fashionable object of cultural studies, using it was a good way of getting classified as mentally retarded."

ABOUT *THE COUPLE IN THE CAGE*

In "Managing the Other," Coco had posed a key question: "Where does otherness begin when the very language of authenticity and cultural purity has already been subverted?"

In *The Couple in the Cage* she and Guillermo Gómez-Peña pose this question again but in the form of

a performance, where they enact the role of recently discovered "natives" or "noble savages" or "Guatinauis" from a hitherto unknown island in the Gulf of Mexico, appearing before audiences in a cage, as exhibits, as museum-pieces on display, who speak an unknown language, and can only be apprehended through the gaze and touristic Polaroids at a dollar a shot. Coco has noted that as artists of color in the United States, she and Gómez-Peña "carry [their] bodies as markers of difference and reminders of the endlessly recycled colonial fantasies on which Western culture thrived." Indeed, the performance carries a particular intellectual and emotional power because it's done by two artists of color who've known what it is to be othered (Guillermo, for example, was not too long ago apprehended by police because two concerned women in an LA restaurant thought he had kidnapped the blond boy who was with him—his own son). But the performance of *The Couple in the Cage* also carries a particular Latino/Latina history, for it brings together a Mexicano-Chilango-Chicano for whom the cage is about the lived experience of the barbed wire that divides the U.S. and Mexico (and now with Proposition 187, California and its "aliens"), and a daughter of a Cubana and the African diaspora who's known firsthand the meaning of coming from an island isolated and caged by oceans of ideology, nationalism, and Cold War.

The Latino/Latina history embedded in *The Couple in the Cage* embeds a longer history that begins with Christopher Columbus bringing an Arawak from the Caribbean back to Spain, where he was put on display for two years until he died of sadness. *The Couple in the Cage* began as a counter-Quincentenary event, an anti-1992 discovery of the New World mania and industry, and it is rooted in the sad knowledge that, "The only progress we have made in 500 years is that today the Others have the option either of an 'authenticity' constructed by the dominant, or living on as a parody of their former selves" (a quote from Ashis Nandy and the co-authors of a recent manifesto on Western racism titled *Barbaric Others*). Guillermo and Coco play with this continuum between the authentic and the parody; in the cage, they enact the role of postmodern primitives, Guillermo in cowboy boots, Indian feathers, watching *Gilligan's Island* on TV drinking Pepto Bismol as if it were a milkshake, and strengthening his biceps on an exerciser, and Coco in a grass skirt, baseball sneakers, green face paint, dancing to Rap music and reading a children's book about Columbus's voyages; they enact a brilliant, twisted Adam and Eve in the Garden of the

Reciprocal Gaze. The amazing thing, the tragic thing, is that the audience that greets them in Natural History museums in this country and in public plazas in Spain, England, and Australia, tends to believe that they are in fact for real. The "savage slot," it turns out, is alive and well. I had the eerie pleasure of being there at the Field Museum in Chicago when the sailor noted that the female in the cage seemed to shave her legs, but of course, he quickly added, she probably rips out the hair by the roots.

We talk about doing applied anthropology, about bringing anthropological concerns to wider audiences, about bringing our ethnographies back to the people we work with, etc. etc. But we can be more creative about all this, it seems to me. *The Couple in the Cage* is an example of a form of applied anthropology: it is a form of interactive ethnography seen live by at least 200,000 people; it is a form of studying the West's construction of itself through its construction of the Other; it is a form of applied cultural critique; a reverse ethnography. It is also a form of being accountable to the history embedded in anthropology's origins and continued existence. "The task," write Ashis Nandy and his co-authors, "is to render the West's *occulis mundi*, this eye of the world, visible in all its deformation so that people everywhere can see themselves clearly once again." Or as Rolf-Trouillot has put it, "Anthropology needs to turn the apparatus elaborated in the observation of non-Western societies on itself and on the history from which it sprang... We owe it to ourselves to ask what remains of anthropology ... when we remove [the savage] slot. The time is ripe for substantive propositions that aim explicitly at the destruction of the savage slot."

It seems to me that one way to destroy the savage slot is to embrace it, satirically and yet also—and this is essential—respectfully, as Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez Peña have done. The range of responses they elicited, from the most despicable forms of paternalism, to the chest-beating of the woman who says she's ashamed to live in America, to the response of the Native American man who says he could see his own grandchildren in that cage, point to the different ways in which their performance touched a vital nerve. It is no longer possible to construe the West monolithically, because the smug white man who notes that the male in the cage seems to be interested in things he doesn't understand coexists with the Native American who can see his own grandchildren in that cage; both are located in the debris of the history of the West, in that inherited web of Columbian political consciousness known as

postcoloniality and multiculturalism.

As anthropologists working at the end of the century with new global agendas that we presume have far surpassed the popular uses of the primitive Other, our first impulse may be to feel superior, to pat ourselves on the back and say, this doesn't represent us; this is a fiction of what true anthropology does. But who among us can forget that Ishi was a man of our century, and that anthropologists knew no better than to put him in the cage of the Anthropology Museum at Berkeley so he could play native, while putting him on the payroll as a janitor? The destruction of the savage slot—that is a project easier said than done, isn't it? We need to find ways to acknowledge our complicity with the cages of otherness we've helped to create in our ethnographies and our museums, without, on the other hand, becoming so paralyzed that we give away the work of cultural interpretation to advertising, tourism, the circus, and literary criticism, realms with which we do share a common world of meaning. From Coco Fusco I've learned that we can return dignity to those who've been humiliated into otherness and in that process of recuperation move forward into new forms of subjecthood with spunk, laughter, grace, intelligence, and hope. Thank you, Coco, for being here.

Ruth Behar is the author of Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story and co-editor of Women Writing Culture, which is forthcoming with University of California Press, fall 1995. She teaches anthropology at the University of Michigan.

ON THE MARGINS OF *THE COUPLE IN THE CAGE*¹
BRUCE MANNHEIM

In *Two undiscovered Amerindians visit ...*² Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña toured museums in América and Europe as two Native Americans from an island off the coast of Mexico who had somehow avoided contact with outsiders. Led on leashes to a cage by confederates posing as museum docents, Fusco and Gómez-Peña paced around, stared at a television, worked at a laptop computer, read, and posed for the audience, all the while maintaining silence with each other. The "docents" and descriptions on the cage explained to gathered crowds that these "specimens" were representatives of the "Guatinai," from the undiscovered island of Guétinau. Their audiences responded in unexpected ways. Although the performance was conceived

as parody, many spectators responded with an earnestness that ranged from reverence to horror. In Buenos Aires, Gómez-Peña was attacked with acid. Surrounded as it was by a carefully sanitized commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the “encounter of two worlds,” *Two undiscovered Amerindians visit ...* reached the politically and emotionally charged interior of the Quincentenary.

The Couple in the Cage documents the *Two undiscovered Amerindians visit ...*, splicing performance and audience reaction with a depressing history of museum, sideshow, and world’s fair exhibits of people from Africa and América. The film moves seamlessly between the performance and newsreel, embedding *Two undiscovered Amerindians visit ...* in a pre-configured rhetorical field of human “specimens” exhibited in the name of “science.” The audiences are filmed in a range of reactions, from concern for the two exhibits to canny awareness that they might in fact be marks in a put-on. Parodic moments in the film give way to deadly serious ones; the distance from the subject that is allowed by parody collapses in the segues from documenting *Two undiscovered Amerindians* to scenes of living World’s Fair exhibits. For anthropologists, *The Couple in the Cage* presents special challenges, especially after more than a decade’s critiques of objectifying moves that are closely related to those documented in the film, both through parody and historical footage. Because the anthropological critiques of these objectifying moves have so often been constructed around issues of “representation,” it would be easy for an anthropologist to reduce the film to an allegory of the politics of representation, simplifying a complex and equivocal relationship to its subject to a univocal, moralistic one.

Here I propose to use *The Couple in the Cage* as the starting point for some reflections that really belong on the margins of both the performance and the film. Speaking personally, *The Couple in the Cage* elicited several mutually contradictory reactions: As someone who has often found ethnographic museums *painful*—the more so after several years of field research—I was pleased to see Gómez-Peña and Fusco make a point that deeply needs making, and what is more doing so with brilliance, audacity, and humor—none of which are found in oversupply in cultural criticism today. And indeed, one response that I’ve seen from anthropologist colleagues is a delight at the deflation of the rhetoric through which ethnographic work is translated for popular consumption in newspapers and on public television.

At another level, I was disturbed by the scope of the broadside. Collapsed were anthropology, museums, world’s fairs, circuses, and other cross-cultural “encounters” that were both more obviously coercive and more clearly bound up with the interests of commerce and empire. The only plausible response to an anthropology so encompassed is the familiar, self-righteous argument that anthropologists should stay home and concentrate on the ethnography of the every-day in the United States, or in another similar slogan, on the history of the present. This argument threatens the closure of one of the few venues in the North American academy in which it is respectable to talk about and listen to, study, and study with, people other than European and Euroamerican elites. Even at a time in which multiculturalism is a booming industry, it is a multiculturalism of hyphenated North Americans, not a demand that we listen to and learn about the rest of the world. In this context, the very power of parody forecloses any possibility of arguing with the image of the circus impresario trafficking in exotica.

In addition, to be lured into that particular rhetorical configuration, is to deny the complexity of anthropology’s political engagement, particularly at earlier moments in its existence in the United States, when—in contrast to its counterparts in the colonial metropolises, such as the U.K. or the Netherlands—the discipline emerged partly in response to eugenics and other racist political tendencies, and in which anthropologists took an active role in organizing coherent intellectual and political alternatives. Franz Boas both collaborated and echoed W.E.B. DuBois at the pivotal moment of founding of the NAACP (Baker 1994; cf. Stocking 1968; Hyatt 1990). To accept the terms of the parody as boundaries of discussion of the location of anthropology in the world today, it seems to me, is to respond to the film at the same level as the museum-goers who did not understand that the “temporary exhibit” was parody.

Finally, I was disturbed by the closeness of the museum-goers’ experience and my own about ten years ago at seeing a peopled ethnographic exhibit on India at the Smithsonian. The last part of the exhibit, *Aditi: A Celebration of Life*, included “forty folk artists—craftspeople and performers—who worked in specially designed spaces, illustrating their creative role in the life cycle” (Kurin 1991:318). Although that part of the exhibit was conceived as a work space for the folk artists, it was quite easy to reverse the figure and ground, and to understand the folk artists as part of a

material exhibit. The film clips in *The Couple in the Cage* show us excesses that can easily be dismissed as part of a past that we have now overcome.³ But the responses elicited by the performance undermine such smug assumptions, reminding us that making other human beings into spectacles is an ordinary enough part of our experience that many museum-goers took the premises of *Two undiscovered Amerindians* for granted, even when they found them horrifying. Indeed, as Fred Myers (1994) has observed, performances set in museum exhibits are increasingly being used to create new “interculture,” with distinct cultural claims being advanced by distinct participants.

FROM THE EXHIBITIONARY COMPLEX TO THE WORLD

Moving from the museum (or better, from the “exhibitionary complex,” as Tony Bennett [1988] calls it) to the world outside of it, sets “the couple in the cage” in an even more horrific context, but one which I think will allow us as anthropologists to engage some of the issues raised by the film. For ethnographers and our critics, the issues raised by *The Couple in the Cage* primarily engage representation, and our place in maintaining the exhibitionary complex. For our interlocutors in the field, in contrast, these issues are frequently experienced (and represented) as corporeal. The “undiscovered Amerindians” in the cages of Buenos Aires, Chicago, London, and Seville represent mimetically a history of bodies taken. My examples—of kidnappings and other appropriations of the body—will come from América, mainly from colonial Mexico and colonial and modern Peru. I mention them not to titillate with horror, but to introduce a non-representational, embodied understanding that cannot be addressed by “creating new terminology, a new cultural policy, or a multicultural festival” (Fusco 1990: 77).

Native Americans were taken by the invaders from virtually the first moment of the invasion. Although Columbus brought natives of the New World to the court of Ferdinand and Isabella, they were taken from their native lands not so much to be made spectacles of, but to be used for practical purposes, with the same brutal rationality with which slaves were brought from Africa to the coast of Peru to replace the Native labor lost to disease.

Throughout the invasion, the Spaniards relied on Native language interpreters called *lenguas*—tongues, who commonly were kidnapped and pressed into service. The most famous colonial example is Doña Ma-

rina / Malintzin/ La Malinche the translator for Cortés during his negotiations with Montezuma, now a key part of the Mexican national iconography. According to Frances Karttunen’s outstanding study, *Between worlds: Interpreters, guides, and survivors* (1994), Malintzin was bilingual in Nahuatl and Chontal Mayan, a language that she shared with a Spanish priest who had been shipwrecked and enslaved in a Mayan community. The priest translated Cortés’s Spanish to Mayan, which Malintzin then translated to Nahuatl. Throughout the invasion of Central and South America the Spaniards relied on *lenguas*, often working in chains. As the Spanish occupation hardened, the role of Native American translators shifted; in the late sixteenth century, the Jesuits sent several speakers of Southern Peruvian Quechua to Spain to use as teachers for missionary priests who were about to leave for the New World.⁴

In 1574, the Peruvian priest Cristóbal de Molina “el Cuzqueño” (1574: 79) reported that many Native Andeans believed that the Spanish invaders were “sent from Spain for Indian body fat, to cure a certain disease, for which no medicine could be found except for body fat. Because of that, in those days the Indians went around very circumspectly, and they avoided the Spaniards to such an extent that they didn’t want to carry firewood, herbs, and other things to the house of a Spaniard, so that they wouldn’t be killed for their fat once they were inside.”⁵

In order to make this idea intelligible, it should be pointed out that Native Andeans assume that fat is a basic component of the person’s life force, and circulates through the body like blood. Similar accusations to those reported by Cristóbal de Molina abound today, directed especially at rural priests and school teachers, but also at ethnographers and archeologists, particularly those who live separately from Native Andean households. There are dozens of such stories told anecdotally by scholars foreign and Peruvian, often accompanied by the lament that “they didn’t understand why I was there.” Or perhaps the Native Andeans understood all too well!

Today “slaughterers” (*ñak aq*) are said to process Native Andean fat into church candles, cosmetics, or North American machinery (Morote 1952; Solá and Cusihuamán 1967: ch. 8; Vallée and Palomino 1973; Liffman 1977; Taussig 1987: 238-241; Ansion 1984: 201-208; Ansion et al., 1989). The victim dies a terrible, lingering death. Far from a transitory rumor, the “slaughterer” (*ñak aq*) is both widespread and histori-

cally durable as an explanation for the motives of outsiders being around Native Andeans. For example, during the late 1970s a high-school-educated woman from a rural village noticed that I had a can of Nivea Cream:

“Sir. Do you know what they make that from?”
I saw it coming and could barely suppress a giggle.
“No, seriously. This is true!!!”
(How could I be so stupid as to buy Nivea cream....)

It was then that I realized that Nivea Cream, which was almost universally used at the time by the Spanish-speaking elites and middle classes was understood by peasants to have been made from the bodies of other peasants. (And here we have a distillation of class and race in highland Peru; urban elites take the very fat of Native Andean peasants to keep their skin moist.) Well, I had to come up with an excuse, no matter how lame, and said, “Well, I bought it in Bolivia.”

“Oh in that case, its not important.”

In other words, if I was applying the fat of *Bolivian* Quechuas to my skin rather than of Peruvians, it was acceptable.

According to the sociologist Henri Favre (1987), in the mining areas of Huancavelica, the harvest of human body fat is even described as an organized extractive industry, in which the Peruvian government gives out concessions to harvest human fat, always within a well-regulated harvesting season (Favre 1987). In the Southern Peruvian zones that border on coca-producing and processing areas, the slaughterers are said to take the fat to clandestine processing points, sending them off in airplanes in the middle of the night. The fear of *slaughters* tends to be strongest today in those places where there is strongly organized production for export: for example, in the Pampa of Anta in Cuzco, where white maize is produced for export; in the mining areas of Ayacucho and Huancavelica; and adjacent to coca-producing regions.

And in Fall 1994, a reporter for the French Press Agency (Agence France Presse) reported from Pampa Cangallo, the original epicenter of the Peruvian violence of the 1980s and 1990s, that fear of the “slaughterer” was once again taking precedence over fear of the army and of guerrillas:

At night he arrives and fattens himself by taking the fat of his victims. Human fat is much finer than animal fat, the peasants assure me, and greatly in

demand in the industrialized countries, where it is used to make medicines, cosmetics, and even to lubricate the engines of airplanes.

The bodies of the victims? They are never found. Chopped into bits, in order not to lose an ounce of fat, they disappear. No trace, no proof. (Chappaz 1994)⁶

This is a genuine reverse optic, although its trace through the anthropology and historiography of Andean South America has been uneven and usually anecdotal (but see Taussig 1987: 238-241, and Anson's 1989 collection). Moreover, similar accounts are found elsewhere in the so-called Third World. The historian Luise White (1993) has found that they are widespread in Africa, for example in the image of a fire engine that takes African blood; White argues that these accounts mirror local level labor relations.⁷ What is critical here is that even as a “reverse optic” neither the South American nor the African cases concern *representation*; the crisis here is wholesale bodily incorporation.

Three more examples, brief but horrifying, all from recent news reports: International organizations have condemned the enslavement of children as laborers in surface mining on the Amazonian side of the Andes. The frontier areas in which surface mining occurs are virtually unpoliced by the central government. Again in Peru, the sale of children for foreign adoption is reported, and is significant enough as problem that the government of Peru is negotiating international agreements to prevent theft of babies, such as the one concluded with the government of Italy in November 1994 (International Press Service, 21 November 1994; Scottish Daily Record, 17 November 1994). Finally, in mid November, Argentinean police closed two firms that employed 200 Peruvian and Bolivian undocumented workers, kept in virtual slavery (El Comercio (Lima), 18 November 1994). I have regaled you with these horrors not so much to numb you to the issues raised by *The Couple in the Cage* as to suggest that alongside issues of representation—even intertwined with them are matters of physical survival.

Coco Fusco's parody concentrates on a particular optic through which the North has imagined the South at the same time as it systematically looted its resources and people; that the same imagery remains part of the tacit framework with which the North apprehends the South today can be seen in the failure of the parody. The audiences/participants/victims (whatever you

want to call them—having been influenced by ethnomethodology, I prefer “victims”) took the matter very seriously. Indeed, when *The Couple in the Cage* played the rotunda of the Smithsonian Institution, someone called the Humane Society! But in a time in which issues of “representation and cultural appropriation of the Other” get a disproportionate share of theoretical attention, it is extremely important to keep a clear distinction between the aims of cultural appropriation of other people and their physical appropriation. What is at stake for us specifically is a clear-headed understanding of the engagement of anthropology and anthropologists in both the material and representational issues surrounding other peoples.

Anthropology and anthropologists have played strongly ambivalent roles—one might even say schizophrenic roles—in both projects, the ambivalence being clearest in the national anthropologies of the period between the two World Wars. While Dutch anthropologists trained explicitly for work in the colonial service in Indonesia, and British anthropologists lamented the limited extent to which their colleagues in the colonial office paid attention to them, American anthropology—then as now—was divided between several distinct projects, with widely distinct—even opposed political implications. Alongside Kroeber’s employment of Ishi as a living museum exhibit was Boas’s public prominence in the struggle against racism; alongside Mead’s argument that it wasn’t necessary to ground ethnography in prior research in the language was Sapir’s *Native accounts of Nootka ethnography*, with running text in Nootka, translated into English at the bottom of the page (Sapir and Swadesh 1955). Alongside myriad monographs on Native North American peoples, were Zora Neale Hurston’s WPA monograph on the U.S. South, *Mules and Men* (1935) and Ruth Benedict’s (1934) and Edward Sapir’s (1924) critiques of U.S. culture (embedded—as customary—in their scholarly writings). It is important for us to recognize the diversity of both material and representational politics in *our own* history in part because we cannot afford its erasure, given the issues that we face today and those that are to come, as eugenics and racism have returned to favor in U.S. public culture.

Because we *must engage those issues*, anthropologists must resist the facile finger-pointing with which politicians and English professors have recycled Kathleen Gough and Talal Asad’s critiques of the 1970s, or even Edward Said’s of the 1980s. In an almost unwitting reproduction of a famous Gary Larson car-

toon, a mass-circulation newspaper—in 1994—reported a South American tribe that hid their modern goods and trotted out their old stories when the anthropologist arrived. I don’t know how it is that the news reporter that “broke” the story was able to get the goods on this deceit, but it was convincing enough for an English professor at a prairie state university to repeat it as a pearl of wisdom of post-modern epistemology, this time unwittingly reproducing the response of many of the spectators to *The Couple in the Cage*. It is critical that we not stumble blindly into the moment’s conceit of mistaking mass produced imagery for life; images are only a part of the simulacra and circulate more freely in some environments than others. Similarly, at a conference that I attended in 1994 an anthropologist (with no research experience in Latin America) assured us—in all seriousness—that for rural Mexican peasants Zapata had been supplemented by Marlon Brando in *Viva Zapata*—that was only about two months before the rebellion in Chiapas by the Zapatista National Liberation Army!

REVERSE OPTICS

Finally, I want to raise the issue of the effectiveness (and limitations) of parody as a means of interrogating a complex, politically charged, and emotion-laden set of issues such as the nature of ethnographic research and representation.

On the margins of *The Couple in the Cage* is the idea of a reverse optic, as one of the guides is led away on a leash while the credits roll by. A reverse optic is a kind of mirror held up to the representational discourses of Northern peoples, a set of representations of ourselves by the people who we usually represent. The false democracy in the idea of a reverse optic aside, it is important to note that as in the South American and African stories of extraction of fat and of blood, respectively, the reverse optic is concerned with material conditions, not with conditions of representation.

The Couple in the Cage is manifestly not an example of a reverse optic; rather it is a politically committed parody from within; but it raises some serious questions about the ways in which the North has appropriated cultures of the South. How can we continue to do anthropology without falling into a serious version of what *Two undiscovered Amerindians visit ...* is parodying? That is a sincere question, one that has to be asked of the particulars of each of our researches, not a rhetorical question that can be answered with a sweeping condemnation or defence of anthropology. How do

you represent ethnographically without surrounding your discussion with an invented context, which like the museum exhibit magnifies the singularity of the contained object? How do you represent without framing—or caging?

As parody, *Two undiscovered Amerindians visit ...* has the linguistic characteristics that ironic discourse has more generally. In order to make an instance of talk (or here, an entire rhetoric) the object of its discourse, it uses the same talk (Sperber and Wilson 1981; 1986: 237-43), thereby conflating *use* and *mention*. To put this in a different way, parody is “double-voiced,” containing within it an instance of the very discourse that it is imitating (Bakhtin 1984 [1929]: 193-196). In order to succeed as parody, it must be cut from the same cloth as that which it parodies, so that the viewer/participant attends to the discourse being parodied in all seriousness. That is also the source of its failure: It can always be interpreted monovocally as an instance of the very stuff that it parodies. And that is exactly what happened to

The Couple in the Cage; many in the audience (or “among the victims”) discovered the *mention* side of the performance after the fact—if at all. But that creates an immediate danger for those of us who would use it as a tool to reach a broader audience—if they don’t get it, are we not simply reproducing and reinforcing the practices that we sought to undermine? Are we simply preaching to the already converted? Are we reaching out to and educating a broader audience, if they don’t get it?⁸

NOTES

¹ Thanks to Ruth Behar, Coco Fusco, Susan A. Gelman, Corinne Kratz and to the audience at the panel on Coco Fusco’s *The Couple In the Cage* for valuable discussion. Mary Pratt (1992) raised my consciousness as to what a little accent can do to América.

² The title of the performance included the name of the place in which it was being performed, as *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Chicago*, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Washington*, and so forth. I will use ellipses for the name of the city.

³ See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1990: 397-407) for a discussion of the exhibition of humans set in the context of ethnographic and folkloric exhibits more generally.

⁴ Jonathan Spence (1988) has written about a similar individual who was taken from China.

⁵ “ de España habían enviado a este Reino por unto

de los indios, para sanar cierta enfermedad, que no se hallaba para ella medicina sino el unto; a cuya causa, en aquellos tiempos, andaban los indios muy recatados, y se extrañaban de los españoles en tanto grado, que la leña, yerba, y otras cosas no las querían llevar a casa de español; por decir no las matasen, allí dentro, para sacar el unto.”

⁶ La nuit il rode et égorgé pour récupérer la graisse de ses victimes. De la graisse humaine, plus “fine” que la graisse animale, et, assurent les paysans, très demandée dans les pays industrialisés: elle entrerait dans la composition de médicaments, produits cosmétiques, voire servirait à lubrifier les moteurs d’avion.

Les cadavres ? On ne les retrouve jamais: découpés en morceaux, pour ne pas perdre une once de graisse, ils disparaissent. Pas de trace, pas de preuve.

⁷ I am grateful to Corinne Kratz for referring me to this work. Misty Bastien reports similar ideas about theft of body parts in Nigeria, but these are apparently worldwide in distribution; there are persistent stories in Central and South America that North Americans kidnap children to use their corneas and other body parts for transplants at clandestine human chop shops in northern Mexico. In the early 1980s, there were rumors in Lima, Peru of an organ stealing ring that lured teenagers and young adults to parties where they would ingest drugged alcohol and wake up several days later with a kidney missing. The latter story recently turned up in New York City, and a popular U.S. television series, *Law and order* based an episode on it.

⁸ For a similar reaction, see Pamela Sommers’s review of the performance at the Smithsonian Institution (*Washington Post*, 20 September 1992, p. E3).

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