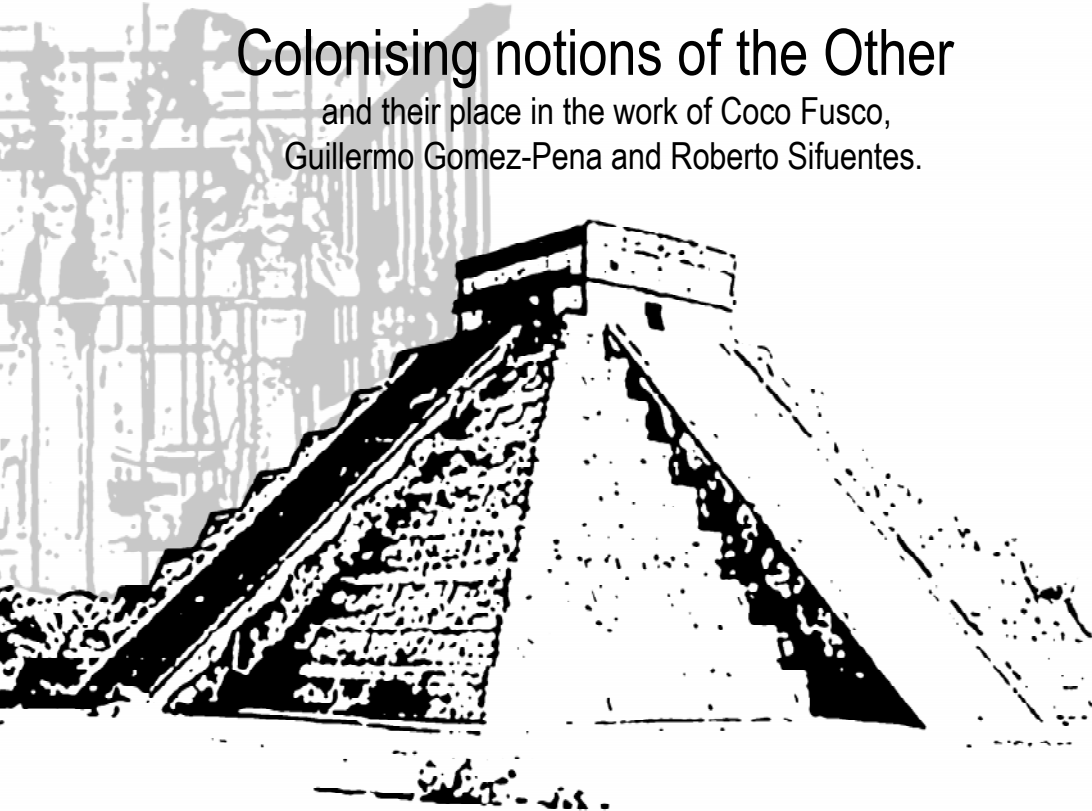


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Fear and Desire

Colonising notions of the Other

and their place in the work of Coco Fusco,
Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Roberto Sifuentes.



Between 1994 and 1996 Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Roberto Sifuentes toured a performance art work called “the Temple of Confessions”. They created a sacred space, for a “persecuted border religion”, filled with diverse and bizarre artefacts, featuring the artists themselves, displayed as living “santos”. The intention was to collect audience member’s confessions: their feelings towards foreigners and immigrants. The temple had three parts, a mortuary chamber with, on either side, two chapels where each of the artists sat. These were entitled the chapels of “Fear” and “Desire”. Gomez-Pena explains :

“In the American imagination, Mexicans are allowed to occupy two different but strangely complementary spaces: we are either unnecessarily violent, hypersexual, cannibalistic and highly infectious; or innocent, “natural”, ritualistic and shamanic. both stereotypes are equally colonializing.” (2000: 34)

The two imaginary categories he describes, one “violent” and the other “innocent”, to which Mexican’s are attributed by Americans, appear like variations on a theme, being mapped

on to who so ever is designated as the "Other" in colonial relations. By naming the chapels "fear" and "desire" Gomez-Pena and Sifuentes are directly addressing these contrasting yet complimenting stereotypes. It is this dialected of fear and desire, attraction and repulsion, as expressed in Western culture for the cultural Other, that I want to investigate in this essay. I will look at this dialectic with special reference to the work of Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gomez-Pena and Roberto Sifuentes and concenter the ways in which these artists trouble colonial concepts of the cultural Other.

Fear and desire .

Confession: "I want to be seen as a true advocate of your culture; as righteous and not as a "white liberal" and to make love to a latina with a firm body."

Frantz Fanon, the psychologist and revolutionary wrote "To us, the man who adores the negro is as sick as the man who abominates him." (1967:8)

The twin impulses of fear and desire spring from the same place: a colonising desire to categorise the Other, maintaining a safe distance whilst exerting control. Although the "adoring" impulse might seem to be sympathetic towards the Other, it projects a false set of values onto the body of the Other and it masks the colonising urge. Young writes that the colonising desire is a "dialectic of attraction and repulsion." (1995:1) It is a kind of pushing back and pulling towards in the face of something or someone recognised as "different". Neither position allows the self or other to just be as they are. Barthes equates love with war, although the grasping love he describes seems closer to desire. He writes: "In both cases it is a matter of *conquering, ravishing, capturing.*" (1977: 188) Gomez-Pena notes that the cultural other is considered to be "sexy and scary" even in contemporary culture (2000:36) . These embedded fears and desires have a long and complicated history, bound up with colonialism, with "*conquering, ravishing, capturing.*"

Confession: "I fear Mexicans getting medical services and Americans having to wait."

European conceptions of differing cultural worlds have been shaped by the myth of European superiority. This myth has a long history, being traceable to ancient Greek ideas of barbarism verses civilisation. Aristotle espoused the idea that barbarians, women and children were close to nature and therefore subordinate to civilised men, the keepers of culture. The construct was recycled by Christianity and reinforced by medieval fears of wild uncontrollable nature. In the 19th century Darwinism, and theories of hierarchical evolution became the justification for the superiority myth. All of these theories worked to perpetuate the same basic hegemonic structure, a self evident, "natural" or "rational" justification for unequal power relations. (Godzich: (xi)

Young writes that: "colonialism, in short, was not only a machine of war and administration, it was also a desiring machine" (1995: 98) As a desiring

machine the colonial process not only dominated colonised peoples but also represented them as something simultaneously abject and desirable.

A historical practice, in which this dialectic of fear and desire for the colonised Other is clearly visible is the tradition of ethnographic shows which were popular through out Europe and North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In these shows, taking place in zoos, parks, carnivals, circuses, museums and at court, non-European peoples would be presented to the public as fascinating and bizarre living exhibits of Otherness. Fusco and Gomez-Pena took their inspiration from these practices for the touring performance piece "Two Undiscovered Amerindians visit..." in which they exhibited themselves in a gilded cage, posing as undiscovered "noble savages". For Fusco this was a relevant image to re-visit since the historical fears and desires still make their mark on the present: "the stereotypes about non-white people that were continuously reinforced by the ethnographic displays are still alive in high culture and the mass media.

embedded in the unconscious, these images from the basis of the fears, desires and fantasies about the cultural other." (1995:48)

In her essay : "The other history of intercultural performance," (1996) Fusco gives many historical examples of these ethnographic "freak shows" and describes how the display of "ethnic" peoples was both a reflection of cultural constructs, as well as serving to reinforce those constructs. Colonising notions of the Other are hard to shift for this reason: like myths, these constructs transforms history into nature. (Barthes: 140) The contingency of the historical oppression of non-white people, deemed to be "Other," is given a natural pretext in the form of ethnographic displays, which present people as examples of this state of "otherness". This "otherness" underlines the unequal power distribution between colonised and colonisers. The fact that it is even possible to display these people in this way, serves to reinforce their separate, "not quite like us" subject status. Stewart notes how freak shows worked as markers of colonial power: "On

display, the freak represents the naming of the frontier and the assurance that the wilderness, the outside, is now territory." (1984: 110) This power relationship remained the same, whether the people on show were presented as something to be admired, like the "Hottontot Venus", Saartje Benjamin, or reviled, like the bushmen, described, by Charles Dickens as "horrid" (Fusco, 1995: 43-43).

Confession: "I desire that freaks like you stay in your closets!"

Ethnographic dioramas featured along side freak shows, "as part of a continuum of "outsiders"" (Fusco: 47) These outsiders did not usual speak or interact directly with the public. There would traditionally be a show man or barker, speaking about them to an audience (Stewart, 1984: 109). Fusco and Gomez-Pena, whilst exhibiting themselves in a cage, did not have a barker as such, but they did avoid speaking directly to the audience, using a display board with written information

and two “zoo guards” to mediate their presence. Fusco points out that many people in the audiences did not challenge this by trying to communicate directly with the artists, assuming that as “savages” they would not understand Spanish or English. Ethnographic displays presented the Other as something to be talked about, not listened to, and the same could be said of ethnographic study. Anthropology started off by attempting to present and interpret the culture of “tribal” or “primitive” people to a dominant, white audience. Trinh has called this kind of anthropology “gossip”, a conversation between white men about the Other. (1989:67)

Fusco and Gomez-Pena describe their projects as “reverse anthropology” (Gomez-Pena, 1996: 80) (Fusco, 1995:38) Reverse anthropology looks at the technique and idiom of anthropology itself, as cultural text, in order to shed light on dominant cultural structures. “The Undiscovered Amerindians” takes the form of ethnographic display and deconstructs it. They place themselves in the position of the objects of study, but they

turn this dynamic around. It is them who are studying the reactions of the audiences and the institutions they come into contact with, using this reverse ethnographic research to expose the Western cultural constructs of Otherness. In this way the performance works as research and practice As well as shedding light on these constructs, through performances which have been informed by previous performance experiences and research, the artists “dramatise the colonial unconscious.” (Fusco:47) Just as anthropologists are deemed to be experts whose specialist skills are necessary to decipher other people’s culture, so the artists, through performance, place themselves in a particular position of knowledge, so as to draw out and present this “colonial unconscious.” Gomez-Pena describes “the Temple of Confessions” as being the agent for opening Pandora’s box and unleashing “the colonial demons” (2000: 40) The artists become both mediators and medium for these demons.

Confession: “When I was young i feared Mexican! Not until I visited the Mayan ruins in Tikal did I come to understand the depth of the Mexican/ Mayan culture.”

Writing about Gomez-Pena and Sifuentes, Batra describes them as “Artificial Savages” (1996: 74) an ironic classification which seems to reference “noble savages”, the traditional object of anthropological study. Like the so called noble savage, the artificial savage is a construct of of Western consciousness; both are categories of fantasy, authentic only as reflections of the colonial subconscious. They do not speak about actual “savages”. Fusco expresses surprise that many people took their exhibit at face value and assumed that they were in fact undiscovered Ameridians on display in a cage. She also notes that much controversy was generated, particularly amongst the art elite over the fact that the artists chose not to shatter this illusion of “authenticity.” (1996:50) The fact that the critical focus became the artist’s supposed moral duty to be

“authentic” or honest about their “inauthenticity” shows how significant this idea of authenticity is in relation to Western concepts of the savage “other”. As objects of anthropological study, touristic fascination or as government sponsored paragons, “ethnic” people, their artefact and culture are valued for their “authenticity”. In this context, authenticity is actually a kind of fantasy, an exotic and idealised state to be measured against. Stewart writes:

“Authentic” experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the event horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictive domains are articulated.” (1984:133)

This authentic state bears little relation to the lived experience of actual native peoples. It is like the kitsch tears described by Batra, which, falling from the eyes of “American and European progressives, is an the ideal substance for embalming Indians and artificial savages.” (1996: 75)

Confession: “that indigenous people won’t survive.”

Fusco has been criticised for being too interested in history, but she argues that historic prejudices still live on. (2001: 18) Colonial prejudices that were expressed in ethnographic freak shows, where underpinned by belief in white racial superiority, based on nineteenth century theories of evolution. Since these theory’s have been disproved it could be logical to surmise that the prejudice should cease also. Fusco points out the flaws in this logic with reference to contemporary ideals of multi-culturalism: “The literalism governing American thought complements the liberal belief that we can eliminate racism through didactic correctives.” (1996: 54) Racism is founded on mythology, this mythology is not easily dispersed. Godzich makes a similar point about a different period in history when he acknowledges that medieval European perceptions of the oriental Other as something weak and easily conquered, were not modified by the political realities of battle failures during the crusades. (Godzich: xiii)

Gomez-Pena acknowledges the mythic quality of the field he is tackling by referring to “the Temple of Confessions” as “a theatre of mythos.” (1996:22) The fear/desire perception of otherness functions like a myth, and myths as Barthes says, are not easily dispelled by reason (1973: 141) Writing about how the image of a young black soldier becomes appropriated into colonial myth Barthes states that the images’ “presence is tamed, put at a distance, made almost transparent,; it recedes a little, it becomes the *accomplice* of a concept which comes to it *fully armed*, French Imperiality; once made use of, it becomes artificial.” (1973:128) Myths pervade because they serve a purpose, the mythologised soldier is being used as an emblem and justification for French Imperialism.

The myth of the Other as the object of fear and desire works to perpetuate the same basic hegemonic structure, a self evident “natural” or “rational” justification of unequal power relations; but this myth also functions to define the colonial self. In his discussion of Orientalism, Europe’s romanticising

and colonising discourse about the Oriental "Other" Said writes: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self." (1978: 3) This myth is the "colonial unconscious"; it exists at a deep level, and it is very hard to challenge. Even as old colonial power arrangements have shifted with the development and change brought by liberation movements, what Godzich sees as the Hegelian self/other dominant paradigm, survives. (1986: xi) Western conceptions of "self" are bound to conceptions of what is "other", the colonial subconscious becomes visible in the mirror of the Other as object of fear and/or desire. Fusco acknowledges this process: "the cage became a blank screen onto which audiences projected their fantasies of who or what we are." (1996:47)

Confession: "Why the voodoo in your work? Many things in your culture scare people visually. Can't you be more positive, more sensitive towards us?"

Gomez-Pena has stated that he intends the "Temple of Confessions" to be ambiguous, so that audiences can read their own personal and cultural meanings into it. He wants to draw them into this process by means of "extremely seductive yet threatening imagery" (Gomez-Pena 2000: 40) Both the "Temple of Confessions" and the "Undiscovered Amerindians" work as strong visual statements whilst still remaining ambiguous. In the temple, familiar artefacts of North America and Mexican culture, fake weapons, church candles, are combined in a way that avoids obvious readings. Writing about the Undiscovered Amerindians, Fusco also stresses the importance of giving the audience a particular, although not straightforward kind of experience: "we intended to create a surprise or "uncanny" encounter, one in which audiences had to undergo their own process of reflection as to what they were seeing" (Fusco:40)

Freud's idea of the "uncanny" is useful in understanding how notions of the "other" might work in psychological space. It is this "uncanny" experience

that Gomez-Pena, Sifuentes and Fusco are consciously seeking to manipulate in their work. Freud wrote about a category of experience which he called "unheimlich" -literally unhomely or unfamiliar. Freud thought that the uncanny was part of the sublime, and as such could be understood to be an aesthetic category. Whilst the sublime is a transcendent "light" experience, the uncanny is "darker" existing as a marginal grotesque counter point to the sublime. Contact with the unfamiliar or other could be categorised as uncanny. "That which was primitive/ feminine became understood as uncanny" (Schneider, 1997: 138) The experience of the uncanny contains an element of recognition, something appears to be familiar, but then there is the jolt, the thing is actually shockingly "other", evoking a feeling of "alienation" (Russo, 1994: 9) Bhabha concedes the "unhomely" to be "the paradigmatic colonial and post colonial condition." (Bhabha, 1994:9) Colonial identity does not feel at home in the world, it is subject to dislocation and disjunctions because its power base has been called into question and the racist logic

which supported this power base is foundering. Bhabha describes this uncanny situation as “man and his alienated image; not self and other but the otherness of the self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity.” (Bhabha, 1994: 44) In this interpretation the “other” can be seen to reside inside the psyche of the self, before being projected out into the world in a kind of false “knowing”, making the colonial psyche feel alienation even from itself.

In the uncanny experience a psychic “double” comes into play, a part of the self which is able to separate itself from the rest of the ego and reflect on it in the form of a conscience and also as the agent of fantasies about unfulfilled possible futures. (Russo, 1994: 9) In this sense, the uncanny is the source of guilty fears and impossible, “reverse nostalgic” fantasies, in other words fears and desires. The uncanny as psychic double and as colonial identity crisis are both processes of splitting and mirroring and as such reflect the confusion and disjunction that such processes evokes.

Confession: “I’m scared shitless of women from other cultures talking to me.”

Both the “Temple of Confessions” and the “Undiscovered Amerindians” play with the uncanny experience and its effect on an audience. By evoking frightening, compelling, scary and seductive images they summon this experience of alienation and radical otherness. By then manipulating and re-casting the interactions that take place in the performances where the artist is the “other”, they over turn the “binary distinctions” (Schneider, 1997: 82) of self and other, active and passive, thereby creating a deeper and more challenging experience, an kind of “uncanny”, beneath the “uncanny”. Schneider elaborates this fundamental uncanniness, which rests beneath received ideas about the world:

“Freud’s discussion of the uncanny articulates a systemic unrest at the base of the symbolic order, an instability at the base of binary distinctions where such distinctions threaten to implode as if sucked into

the voracious black hole of the vanishing point.” (Schneider, 1997: 82)

For Schneider this vanishing point can be imagined as a “secret eye”, a threat to the project of patriarchy embodied in the moment when the “passive” subject suddenly reverses the roles: the activated gaze of a previously objectified Other back at the Self. Writing about Cindy Sherman’s photographs, Jones describes a similar process where the “penetrating” gaze of the presumed white male viewer is deflected back. Jones sees this deflection as one of three possibilities for dealing with this subjectifying gaze, the other possibilities being to internalise and absorb the gaze or to “aggressively and exaggeratedly perform themselves according to the very rules it has established.” (Jones, 2002: 73) Fusco and Gomez-Pena use a mixture of these techniques to uncanny effect. They present themselves as colonial subjects, passively on display in a cage. Yet it is them who ultimately take an active role, as performance artists and theorists analysing the effects of this performance. They are both actively and passively performing the Other.

Confession: "I want to be a woman. A big robust, black woman with a ghetto accent."

Gomez-Pena, Sifuentes and Fusco stress that their work is interactive. Just as the imagined and privileged viewer is central to understanding representations of women, so the audience's reactions are the key to understanding the significance of the performances. It is the audiences reactions and responses that bring the pieces alive because "spectators became participants in the construction of "otherness"" (Jones, 1998:315) In this way the self-other boundary becomes mapped onto that of performer and audience. Part of the artist's project was to engineer a re-enactment of colonial fears and desires, so as to make those states visible. Gomez-Pena writes about the Temple of Confessions: "Since our job as artists was not to analyse or moralise, but merely to open a Pandora's box and release the colonial demons, we never expressed approval or disapproval to the confessors." (

2000: 40) This is rather like anthropology's idealised position of objective participant observer.

Confession: "I wish all Mexicans would be deported!!!... And take all this bad art with them!"

The Undiscovered Ameridians were originally conceived of as an counter-"celebration" of Colombas' arrival in the Americas 500 years previously; but this is not a simple process of historical or fantastical re-enactment. By embodying the colonial other, the artists are not only making this subconscious feared and desired entity visible, they are also questioning it's very basis. Trinh writes: "one of the rules of my game is to echo back his words to an unexpected din or simply let them bounce around to yield most of what is being and has been said through them and despite of them." (1989: 49) By presenting themselves as fictive "Amerindians" complete with fake home island and back story, Fusco and Gomez-Pena are replying to the fictive triumphalism of Columbus's

quincentenary with a different but equally fake story. This is like the mythic strategy of replying to one story with another "anti-phonal" story which might contrast or conflict with the it. (Warner, xxxx: 7)

Through the enactment of the colonial performance practice of ethnographic display, the artists could be said to be consciously claiming colonising categories of "savage". By claiming this category they also lay claim to all the fearful and desiring impulses this summons, drawing them out and using them to their own iconoclastic ends. This is a process of appropriation. Warner calls this practice "a form of well proven magic, uttering a curse in order to undo or claim it's power, pronouncing a name in order to command it's field of meaning." (xxxx:15)

The process of appropriation goes further when the fact the enactment is consciously "fake" is taken into account. The Temple of Confessions was implicitly fictive, being presented in the context of art galleries and featuring such artefacts as a pre-Columbian temple facade made of

styrofoam. With "The Undiscovered Amerindians." Fusco and Gomez-Pena did not announce themselves as artists and were surprised at how many of their audience assumed they were "genuine savages" even though they themselves intended to present "a satirical commentary on Western concepts of exotic, primitive Other" (Fusco, 1995:37). Satire and parody are techniques used by the artists to conflate received images of this exotic other. These representations can be seen as masquerading, what Jones has described as "the production of the self as exacerbatedly the most expected thing -but marking this thing as *fake*." (2002: 74) Sifuentes as "El Pre Colombian Vato" or gang member presents himself with bullet wounds, fake weapons and drug paraphernalia, as stereotypical but posed, by his presence as one of the temples saints. This masquerading character was "incarnated the fears and desires that Americans feel toward youth of colour living dangerously, who are perceived simultaneously as scary and sexy." (Gomez-Pena, 2000:36)

Confession: "What is the meaning of your culture cos I'm scared of it."

Whilst Sifuentes was in "the Chapel of Desires", Gomez-Pena occupied "the Chapel of Fears", as "San Pocho Aztlaneca", a cyber-tribal shaman, of which Gomez-Pena writes: "I literally wore my composite identity." (2000:37) This consisted of souvenirs, talismans and other objects stereotypically associated with a "medicine man" for appearing for tourists. "San Pocho Aztlaneca" is a masquerade, a skin-deep hyper-representation marked as fake, but also a stereotype. He is not masquerading a "genuine" shaman but a touristic commodified one, he is doubly fake, masquerading the obvious stereotype. Apter describes a stereotype as something which is "at once fetishised and mobilised in conceptual space" (1996: 19) Placed in their plexiglas boxes in the Temple, the two santos are fetishised and removed, yet audience members can interact with them by confessing their inter-cultural "sins" to them, and the form and content of the elicited confessions shows how

these stereotypes are "mobilised in conceptual space" (Apter,1996: 19) The confessions show how fearful and desiring conceptions of the Other are deeply embedded in popular consciousness.

Similar to masquerade, is the kind of position occupied by what Schnieder calls "dialectical images" or "objects which show the show" (Schneider, 2001:vii) This is a performative state of being where someone can simultaneously hide and expose their posed state, being simultaneously active and passive. Schnieder writes that prostitutes can be dialectical images in that they are simultaneously the commodity and the seller of that commodity. The undiscovered Ameridians could be said to be operating in a similar fashion, as both artist and exhibits simultaneously, and in their decision not to mark themselves as "artistic" fiction. Because they presented themselves as ethnography rather than art, they were hiding the actual pose in a kind of quasi-scientific naturalness, exhibiting themselves as "information", rather than artistic interpretation. Yet this position was

actually a pose, which should have become obvious to the audience the longer they interacted with the performance. Audience members were made complicit into the masquerade of “exotic other” but also there was the chance to see beyond this pose or to see it for what it was, a performance of colonial fears and fantasies, rather than a depiction of “authentic savages.”

Confession: “A large uncut hispanic cock!”

One context where the performance was obviously part of the art establishment was at the 1993 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Here the artists added another feature to the piece with audience members being given the opportunity to pay an extra five dollars to look at Gomez-Pena’s genitals, “and the well-heeled Whitney patrons really went for it.” (Gomez-Pena, 1996: 97) This provides another layer of commodification to the image, linking it firmly to Western fantasies which sexualise whilst holding this Other as something to be bought. Yet Gomez-

Pena, as dialectical image, remains in control, as the artists and orchestrator of the scenario and whilst re-telling it in his book.

In his discussion of hybridity, Bhabha talks about composite and complicated identity as a “discursive image”. (1994: 13) Fusco, Gomez-Pena and Sifuentes all work with what could be described as “hybrid” imagery. They deliberately combine diverse objects and styles, including stuffed chickens, new technology, ethnographic language, pop-spirituality, grass skirts, rap and rock music. These different artefacts and influences are combined to form a unique cultural idiom, which functions in several different ways. Most simply this hybridity is a reflection of the hybrid tendencies of the contemporary world, which trouble dominant desires for the Other to be “authentic” and defy the colonial project exemplified by America’s Imperial “New World Order”. Gomez-Pena heralds the spread of this hybridity: “the only true “others” are those who resist fusion, *mestizaje*, and cross-cultural dialogue. in this utopian cartography, hybridity is the dominant culture.” (1996: 7)

Confession: “My brother George hates white people. He’s half white.”

The notion of hybridity as explained by Bakhtin can be applied to the performance works to examine the ways in which these works reflect and challenge colonial conceptions of the “Other”. According to Young, the word hybrid was coined in the nineteenth century to describe the interbreeding of wild and tame plants or creatures. Bakhtin looked at hybridisation in language, the way that one single utterance can have more than one “voice”, differing cultural or intentional origins unified in one spoken phrase. These different voices can work against each other ironically, to unmask each other within the same utterance. This is what Bakhtin identified as “intentional hybrid” (Young, 1995:20) This understanding when applied to “the Undiscovered Amerindians” is similar to that of the dialectical or discursive image, “showing the show”, performing whilst challenging the racial conceptions at the basis of the

performance image through the very act of performing it.

Young points out that the word Hybrid has a long history, and previously, in the nineteenth century, was used in the service of racist discourses centring on fears of cultural and racial “degeneration” through interbreeding. Young warns that these colonial subtexts might not be completely divorced from the word:

“it may be used in different ways, given different inflections and apparently discrete references, but it always reiterates and reinforces the dynamics of the same conflictual economy whose tensions and divisions it re-enacts in its own antithetical structure.” (1995:27) By performing the roles of desirable and feared Other, to what extent are Fusco, Sifuentes and Gomez-Pena re-enacting and thereby strengthening, the structures they seek to expose and weaken? It is necessary to summon colonial racist discourses in order to engage with and subvert them. As Batra writes, through performance, the artists “simultaneously construct and dismantle the notion of the artificial savage.” (Batra,: 74) Through the

summoning and deconstructing processes of masquerading, satirising and reverse anthropology, the artists can unmask the colonial subconscious. Gomez-Pena has written that “know one is immune to the virus of internalised colonialism.” (1996:14) The point is that these artists are not somehow above the constructs they are working with, they are dealing with them at an embedded, embodied level, acting out subconscious stereotypes, because these stereotypes continually impact on everyone’s actual lived experience. The artists are not essentialists, appealing only to one “racial” segment of society, they seem to acknowledge that what ever our racial or cultural back ground, we are all subjected to social conditioning containing the legacy of the cultural Other as object of fear and desire. Since the myth is so universally pervasive, it is all the more difficult to deconstruct and all the more important that this should happen.

Confession: “I don’t have any fears about Mexico. I would like to travel there and eat

at the cafes and see Inca Ruins and shit.”

“The North stereotypes the South. In turn, the South internalises these stereotypes and either reflects them back, commodifies them to appeal to the consumer desire of the North, or turns them into “official culture”. meanwhile, national identity gets lost in this display of reflections and refractions. it’s like being inside a House of Mirrors.” (Gomez-Pena, 2000: 41) In the house of mirrors that is the post-colonial world, the idea of the Other exists inside the colonising self, as it’s not so secret fantasy double, but as a result of the colonialisation, people who have been classified as Other, objects of fear and desire, have absorbed this cultural/ psychological/ mythic construct . Interlocking constructed identifies become like Russian Dolls, with the Other inside the colonial Self inside the Self of people who have become classified as Other. These interpenetrating perceptions seem inescapable, like Fannon’s description of feeling the imprisoning weight of colonial stereotypes: “I was battered

down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'." (1967: 112)

It is the distancing dialectic of Self and Other, that fascinating and frightening myths serves to uphold, yet these two states interpenetrate each other in complicated ways, that reflect the complicated historical processes of colonialism, liberation and increasing cultural hybridisation. Bhabha has applied Bakhtin's concept of "intentional hybridity", two voices unmasking each other within the same utterance, to colonial processes of power. He identifies traces of the Other in the colonial voice and this trace works as an ironic counter point, undermining the colonial hegemonic authority. Since colonialisation necessarily leads to hybridisation, with different peoples and cultures mixing, this trace of the other within the colonial self is an unavoidable subversive force. Bhabha has called this "hybrid displacing space." (Young, 1995: 25) Just as hybridisation is an ongoing process of change and evolution so this

process of subverting the colonial voice is continuous, with new hybrid forms working for or against older forms, former hybrid states which they include within themselves, the other within the self. Young calls this "a radical heterogeneity, discontinuity, the permanent revolution of forms." (1995: 25) This fluid understanding of post-colonial cultural evolution seems to be a conceptual way out of the self/other dialectic hall of mirrors with out abandoning cultural struggle in favour of an a-historical total relativism.

Confession: "I want to be rich and still have identity"

In the conclusion of "Black Skin, White Masks" Fannon makes an impassioned plea for both white and black people to go beyond the history of oppression in order to put their common humanity into practice; but he is not negating the effects of history, just refusing to be bound by it. Instead he calls for self-knowledge as a way forward: It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinise the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal

conditions of existence for a human world." (I 1967: 231) Fusco, Gomez-Pena and Sifuentes, through the active and activating mode of performance are shedding light on the colonial Self, an entity which too easily slips away through the pretext of the Other, who it claims to represent. This Self is all the more slippery in the contemporary "Democratic" "Liberal" and "Multi-cultural" context, where racist misconceptions are assumed to be finished with. By performing the stereotypes, the artists place themselves squarely in the middle of this post-colonial identity struggle. Rather than just reflecting on these issues via the printed word, the artists, through interaction, are able to get closer, in order to "recapture and scrutinise" this Self, exposing the fear/desire mechanism for the strange game that it is and thereby perhaps, loosening it's grip on us all.

"Between you & me...
a twenty-mile-long poem
let's co-edit it
miento"

Gomez-Pena, from „15 ways of relating across the border" (1996)▣