

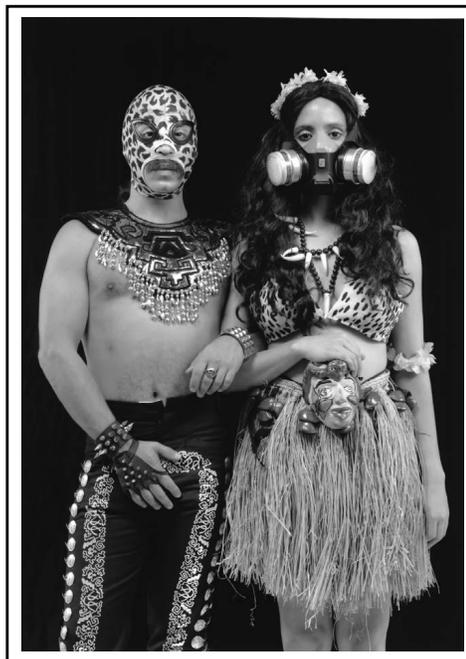
## Integrity of Authenticity and Real Presence in *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey*

**Kiewan Foxe**

*University of Toronto  
FAS Caribbean Studies*

### ABSTRACT

With performance often being used as a means of entertainment for many, audiences can sometimes be at fault for allowing their gullibility to fiction and historical inaccuracies led to dangerously self-constructed beliefs. Time and time again with regard to the colonial history of Indigeneity in the “New World,” we face the risk of falling victim to historical deceit. Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s performance, *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey*, is a masterfully produced stage play that reveals flaws in past and present historical beliefs that were strengthened by almost laughable false colonial narratives. Highlighting the ignorance to Indigeneity in Western mind, the two performers lead the viewer to question their relationship with the history of oppressed societies or “the Other.” This analysis seeks to consider the significance of *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey* in the context of the fragility and danger of colonial credence that leaves “the Other” as a victim of falsehoods.



**Keywords:** *Indigenous narratives, colonial performance, historical falsehoods, “the Other”*

### BIO

Kiewan Foxe is currently a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto with a focus on Caribbean Studies and drama. Finding the overlapping of the colonial history of the Caribbean and performance to be a fascinating subject, led to Kiewan becoming interested in the world of Caribbean academia

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## Introduction

Dating back to the discovery of the “New World” in the fifteenth century, it may be argued that terms such as ‘savage’, ‘uncivilized’, and ‘primitive’ were used in such an abundance due to no other justification than deliberate subjugation. In Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s performance, *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatınai Odyssey*, the two Latin American performers cleverly highlight colonial ignorance, prejudiced views and lies by forcing their audiences to question the validity of their Western history and knowledge of “the Other.” This process seeks to contradict “contemporary tourist industries and cultural ministries of several countries around the world [that] still perpetuate the illusion of authenticity to cater to the Western fascination with otherness”.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this remark is that the irony laden performance of *The Couple in the Cage* places its audience in a critical position which seeks to make them feel self-conscious about their Western views that forced the “Other” into “an aesthetic value”. The authenticity, or in this case unauthenticity, that Fusco and Gómez-Peña capture in their performance puts forth the idea that Western ideologies and colonial history abuses the ideal image of the Indigenous populations by highlighting the colonial practice of injecting fiction into history to fortify the fictional “aesthetic value”<sup>2</sup> of Indigeneity in the “New World.”

When watching the performance of The

*Couple in the Cage: A Guatınai Odyssey*, one cannot help<sup>3</sup> but consider that the performance is an accurate portrayal of the Indigenous falsities that Christopher Columbus would have spread upon returning to Europe. This is especially true considering the supporting narratives of scholars. For example, in considering Indigenous narratives in the Caribbean, historian Melanie Newton speaks to similar false assumptions in the Atlantic that originated in the fifteenth century. It is during this time when Columbus began the transmission of false accounts of Indigenous populations, such as their barbaric and violent nature, because he despised the colour of their skin.<sup>3</sup> However, it is essential to note that it was also during this time that Columbus’s son, Hernando Colón, wrote a logbook that captured his father’s travels. The significance of his logbook is that it contradicted the supposed truths that his father played a significant role in influencing.<sup>4</sup> The narratives of both Columbus and his son were needed to establish the substance of real presence in *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatınai Odyssey*. Fusco’s mention of one criticism of the performance not being authentic because her and Gómez-Peña’s skin were not being dark enough to look like “real primitives”<sup>5</sup> coincides with history opting to believe Columbus’s account of Indigeneity over his son’s more accurate narrative. The persistence of these beliefs may be seen as an example of the ways which Western colonial views have been corrupted by the fetishization of

<sup>1</sup> Coco Fusco, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” *TDR: Drama Review* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 147, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1146361>

<sup>2</sup> Fusco, “Intercultural Performance,” 152.

<sup>3</sup> Melanie Newton, “‘The Race Leapt at Sauteurs’: Genocide, Narrative, and Indigenous Exile from the Caribbean Archipelago,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (February 2014): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.2014.11671886>.

<sup>4</sup> Newton, “Genocide, Narrative,” 7.

<sup>5</sup> Fusco, 162

the relationship of authenticity and real presence in *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinnai Odyssey* is a relationship that makes one conscious that the “Otherness” the Western world seems to be infatuated with is based upon a historical illusion. Explained carefully by Fusco, displays and performances such as *The Couple in the Cage* are “living expressions of colonial fantasies and helped forge a special place in the European and Euro-American imagination for nonwhite peoples and their cultures.”<sup>6</sup> In many ways, one could deem Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s performance as comedically tragic in the sense that there was a time in history where their performance would have fuelled Eurocentric ideologies. The assumption one makes about *The Couple in the Cage* is that for most if not all of the audience, this is the first time that their thoughts are being associated with a visible perception, creating somewhat of a literal presence for them to experience. In other words, during the conception of false indigenous narratives, one would like to make the claim that during the fifteenth century, those who believed Columbus’s statements had no means of realizing the absurdities in his stories, which is why his words were taken for truth.

In performance studies, Professor Diane Taylor’s critical review of *The Couple in the Cage*, Taylor thought-provokingly regards the performance as a systematic representation that “parodies, produces and exposes the other, and unwittingly colludes with the ethnographic pleasures it sets out to deconstruct. So is that the

point? That there is no “other”—no noncoercive system of representation?”<sup>7</sup> Throughout this analysis, the word “Other” is continuously. The following one’s viewing of *The Couple in the Cage*, it causes one to realize that the concept of “the Other” is a product of colonialism that is arguably intrinsic present in any society. *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinnai Odyssey* is a performance that may lead the viewer to question many aspects of colonialism, and in many ways, it may be argued that Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s perception seeks to change one’s impression of performance art. The performance creates such an impactful cathartic feeling that not only leaves one with an appreciative feeling, but also serves as a reflecting piece that leaves one questioning what other aspects of history have been unfaithfully recorded.

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<sup>6</sup>Fusco, 149

<sup>7</sup>Diana Taylor, “A Savage Performance: Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco’s ‘Couple in the Cage.’” *TDR: Drama Review* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 170, <https://doi.org/10.1162/dram.1998.42.2.160>

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