



Still from Coco Fusco's *Operation Atropos*, 2006, DVD, 59 minutes; at MC.

Coco Fusco at MC

Coco Fusco's characteristically challenging but unfortunately ambiguous recent exhibition stemmed from her curiosity about one of the most repulsive cultural phenomena of the present day: brutal tactics used to coerce information from Muslim prisoners at Guantánamo Bay and other enclaves where the U.S. military detains (and has been known to abuse) individuals suspected of terrorist activities. In her investigation of the matter, Fusco discovered Team Delta, a cadre that describes itself as "an elite unit of former hardcore [American] military personnel [that] takes pride in offering realistic military experiences," and paid them \$8,000 to train her and a multiracial crew of six women for four days in "professional interrogation techniques." This becomes the subject of the show's centerpiece, a provocative, nearly unwatchable 59-minute DVD projection titled, like the show itself, *Operation Atropos*, after the most fearsome of the three Fates.

In order to impart their education in martial debriefing, Team Delta required the female trainees to be "captured" and immersed in a sick "game" in which soldiers attempted to extract a "code" from their "prisoners," on whom the burly male Deltas placed hoods and handcuffs. The women were to keep their heads down, call the men "sir," strip to their underwear and roll in the dirt, bark like dogs and hold heavy concrete blocks for protracted periods—among other inventive methods of subjugation.

The video nauseates not only because of its obviously difficult content but also due to the constant jiggling of handheld cameras, which zip about and add to a general sense of vomitous chaos. As one woman falters after having had a man shout orders and epithets in her face for hours on end, we learn from the bemused

soldier as he takes a break that the dilation of her pupils is a tell-tale sign she is on the brink of collapse. Team Delta's members take turns with the women, and on their recesses demonstrate flippancy about the fact that they're causing extreme distress. "They need to be stronger, less easily manipulated, not as naive as they are," opines one Delta, smugly confident that his wanton brutality has great merit. The video concludes as Fusco and her friends bid adieu to Team Delta. The artist laughs jovially, with more than a hint of machismo, making her stance on her hosts' heinous tactics unclear; one of her comrades appears so traumatized she can barely stand up.

"Operation Atropos" also included two non-video series of works, one of color photographs and another of color prints. In the former, Fusco herself appears in military garb, enacting a public performance in São Paulo in which she puts her newly learned Delta tactics to use by bossing around a crew of women clad in orange prison uniforms who are seen scrubbing the ground with toothbrushes, among other activities. In the prints, a group of darkly funny illustrations based on instruction manuals issued by the CIA, we see schematic figures that resemble those on airplane safety cards: in one image a woman smears menstrual blood on a male captive's face; in another, a man cowers as a woman flashes her breasts.

Fusco could hardly have chosen more timely or important issues to explore. But her recapitulation of inhumane militaristic strategies and her attempt to use humor kept in abeyance any forthright sense of critique we might have expected from an artist as politically astute as she has previously demonstrated herself to be.

—Sarah Valdez