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Monitoring Sor Juana: Satire, Technology, and Appropriation in Jesusa Rodríguez's Sor Juana en Almoloya¹

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Jesusa Rodríguez's Sor Juana en Almoloya (1995), published in Debate Feminista, employs a range of high and low technologies and appropriative gestures in the construction of a biting satire of Mexican politics as well as literary arrogance. Projected forward to the year 2000, Sor Juana finds herself incarcerated by ruling Panistas who have used virtual technology to combine the 17th and 21st centuries and silence free thinkers through what she terms a "refrito" of antiquated regulations. Technical difficulties exacerbate her physical constraints. Her Apple computer is outdated and unreliable; at the touch of a button, it sends pigeons to Sarajevo rather than formatting her "Respuesta Zopilotea," and it causes her lawyer to materialize unexpectedly.

The piece is a pastiche of contemporary politics and adaptations of earlier texts. On stage, Sor Juana rewrites herself, and texts such as "Sátira filosófica" become doubly ironic as the satirical tone of the original composition makes possible Sor Juana's "virtual" critique. Hers is an impossible theater, caught between historical distortion and futuristic fantasy, and stymied by legal limitations. The subtitle, "pastorela virtual," implies that the text is itself the work prohibited at the close of the play. Multiple levels of technological manipulation are evident. Sor Juana's "physical" captivity is brought about by technological means. In addition, her writings have been repeatedly altered and misconstrued. Hypertext becomes a metaphor for the distortion of Sor Juana's work even as it describes the non-linear organization of Rodríguez's text. Sor

Juana faces the computer monitor as she composes her work, but beyond the monitor as tool, lies the monitor as supervisor. Her predicament alludes to the regulatory power of analysis, the use of interpretive force to keep potentially destabilizing figures in line. Thus, Sor Juana both cites and questions Octavio Paz's Las trampas de la fe. The reinvention (and imprisonment) of this Sor Juana suggests as well the use of the historical figure as a smoke screen to distract the general public from contemporary problems or scandals.

Actor/director/performance artist Rodríguez is co-owner, with Liliana Felipe, of the independent Teatro de la Capilla in Mexico City. Her work draws on such diverse sources as the Popol Vuh and Oskar Panizza's The Council of Love, published in Bavaria in 1894 and immediately banned.² Rodríguez's performances include ¿Cómo va la noche, Macbeth? (1980), Donna Giovanni (1984), La gira mamal de la Coatlicue (1990), Cielo de abajo (1992), and Juicio a Salinas (1996). Sor Juana en Almoloya reflects many of the concerns raised in Rodríguez's other works, in which political satire, a destabilization of gender roles, lesbian desire, and a resistant recuperation of history all figure prominently. For example, Juicio a Salinas shares with Sor Juana its mordant criticism of the former president. Like Sor Juana, Juicio targets the extravagant corruption as well as the foibles of a variety of public figures. Jesusa herself played President Salinas, wearing a rubber mask that entirely covered her head. A video of the piece shows Jesusa almost absentmindedly adjusting the mask throughout the performance, indirectly suggesting the permeability of disguise.³ La gira mamal de la Coatlicue portrays another female icon of the past who, not unlike Sor Juana, reasserts her primacy and critiques recent events. Describing herself as "la Diosa de la que brotan civilizaciones y museos" (401), Coatlicue upbraids her ungrateful children for their forgetfulness and insists, "madre sólo hay una y esa ¡¡ingratos!! soy yo, aquí y en China" (402). She alludes to the 1985

theft of antiquities from the Museo de Antropología--where Coatlicue's statue is in fact housed--and to the Pope's visit to Mexico. Insulted that the thieves overlooked her, Coatlicue's principal complaint stems from the neglect she has suffered: "jamás se me construyó un mamódromo ni se me proporcionó un humilde mamamóvil, nunca me facilitaron la maquinaria adecuada para poder besar el piso del aeropuerto, nunca he hecho una gira, ya no se diga a Chalco, ni siquiera a Chapultepec, a Tlatelolco, nunca he realizado ese hermoso sueño de realizar una gira mamal con carácter puramente evangelizador" (402). The exuberant word play is characteristic of Rodríguez's work, as is the multi-layered satire, which interlaces larger historical issues (the distortion of the pre-Columbian past, the power of the church) with subtle references that appeal to a public able to grasp the "in" jokes. At the conclusion of the piece, as Jean Franco underscores, "in her litany of place names, all of which come from Nahuatl, she changes the word endings from 'masculine' to 'feminine' and vice versa, satirizing the vagaries of translation and linguistic reappropriation" ("A Touch" 174). Issues of appropriation reappear in Sor Juana en Almoloya, with its emphasis on disguise, misreading, and the appropriation of Sor Juana "herself" in captivity.

Coatlicue also figures in a subsequent performance, Cielo de abajo. In his treatment of the piece, Johannes Birringer stresses that "since Rodríguez has built a moveable rubber replica of the stone statue, it's worth pointing out that the original bears terrifying aspects--a divided head, another centrally placed mouth that is fanged, claws, hands of flayed skin, and serpents entwined all around her body--which associate this Aztec mother of the gods with an 'origin' so horrific that it often remains concealed, rejected, unmentionable" (55). He continues: "Rodríguez's performance in Cielo de abajo followed a backward-looking but unashamedly parodic strategy of excavating precisely the distanced and silenced

'Mesoamerican aesthetics' of Coatlicue" (56). Kirsten Nigro proposes that the overall effect of Cielo de abajo is "mofarse de la seriedad del discurso histórico mexicano y de su pretensión a ser la 'verdadera verdad'" (35). Unlike that of Coatlicue, a figure literally dug up, uncovered, Sor Juana's "discovery" takes place in an atmosphere of excessive visibility, of answers supposedly already known. Yet we might see in Sor Juana en Almoloya another excavation of the unmentionable, a playful, ultimately undecided rendition of Sor Juana that insists on those elements of her persona that have been negated or obscured (the unmentionable lesbian desire) while refusing a final determination: the "real" Sor Juana never stands up.

Rodríguez's revisions of Sor Juana take shape within a postmodern questioning of representation, in which a definitive interpretation becomes not only undesirable, but impossible. According to Linda Hutcheon, "the postmodern appears to coincide with a general cultural awareness of the existence and power of systems of representation which do not reflect society so much as grant meaning and value within a particular society." Moreover, "by both using and ironically abusing general conventions and specific forms of representation, postmodern art works to de-naturalize them" (8). This process produces a double distancing of the historical Sor Juana, who wrote in a very different cultural context and who has since been appropriated as an icon by the cultural and political regimes Rodríguez sets out to critique. Although theatrical rather than narrative, Rodríguez's work in many ways corresponds to the historiographic metafiction that Hutcheon describes as "fictionalized history with a parodic twist" (53). In the case of Sor Juana, there is a temporal twist as well, for the text rewrites not only the past but the future, spinning a millennial Mexico out of past and present threads.

The structure of Sor Juana en Almoloya also reflects the organization and flexibility of hypertext. Hypertext is a graphic representation of the process of writing--or rewriting--history, in which numerous texts come into contact and are recombined or juxtaposed in often unexpected ways. As Hutcheon writes, "If the past is known to us today through its textualized traces (which, like all texts, are always open to interpretation), then the writing of both history and historiographic metafiction becomes a form of complex intertextual cross-referencing that operates within (and does not deny) its unavoidably discursive context" (81). Cross-referencing is, of course, central to the working of hypertext. George Landow defines hypertext as "an information technology consisting of individual blocks of text, or lexias, and the electronic links that join them" (1). He adds that "linking is the most important fact about hypertext, particularly as it contrasts to the world of print technology" (6). Espen Aarseth argues that "the main feature of hypertext is discontinuity--the jump--the sudden displacement of the user's position in the text" (69). The two definitions are not incompatible. Links in themselves may produce discontinuity, as the reader is able to move (jump) relatively spontaneously between blocks of text that are only superficially related. Moreover, the confrontation of linking and discontinuity shapes the reader's experience of the text. In contrast to a printed book, in which the connections between sections are seemingly transparent--and skipping to the end may be considered cheating--in hypertext, the logic of connection is disrupted. J. Hillis Miller contends that "a hypertext demands that we choose at every turn and take responsibility for our choices" (38). It bears remembering, however, that the demands of choice and responsibility extend, although sometimes less visibly, to non-electronic texts as well.

The physical manifestation of hypertext further distinguishes it from printed objects. Miller observes that his access to an electronic book "has a much more

fragile, fleeting and insubstantial existence, very different from the fixed embodiment of a printed book" (34). As he points out, the fragility of the electronic text is evident in its openness to the reader's intervention, from changing the typeface to scrambling words and chapters. Nevertheless, Aarseth notes that "the stability of paper-based documents is as much a product of our metaphysical belief in a transcendental text as an inherent quality of the physical object" (55).⁴ While Rodríguez's version of Sor Juana is not open to audience manipulation in the same manner that a hypertext presentation of the piece might be, by highlighting a permeable form of textuality, she points to Sor Juana's vulnerability on two levels. The fragility of electronic texts reflects that of all texts: both Sor Juana's texts and those of her interpreters are equally vulnerable.

The double-edged nature of such technology is evident in the appropriations to which Sor Juana is subject. In her "Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway describes an "informatics of domination" and asserts that "technologies and scientific discourses can be partially understood as formalizations, i.e., as frozen moments, of the fluid social interactions constituting them, but they should also be viewed as instruments for enforcing meanings" (164). The technologies adapted in Sor Juana en Almoloya allow for play and resistance, but are not without danger. The capacity to enforce as well as generate meanings is evident. Sor Juana is electronically imprisoned; adding insult to injury, the technology at her disposal is inadequate. Haraway's suggestive image of the cyborg--part human, part machine--might find an analog in Rodríguez's Sor Juana: ostensibly all machine, as mere projection, but nonetheless fully embodied (through Jesusa's performance) on stage. I do not wish to adopt wholesale Haraway's manifesto, but rather to draw a parallel between her argument and the exploration of possible intersections of technology, gender, and political resistance in

Rodríguez's work. Rodríguez's Sor Juana is an expression of the difficult combination of the high-tech with the "natural" and of the lingering problems inherent in attempting to forge connections among disparate elements. The unequal distribution of information technology across borders--as between the U.S. and Mexico, or between socio-economic classes in either of those countries--is but one example of the complexity and unevenness of the technologically grounded reality Haraway observes. Haraway writes of a world "subdivided by boundaries differentially permeable to information. Information is just that kind of quantifiable element (unit, basis of unity) which allows universal translation, and so unhindered instrumental power (called effective communication)" (164).⁵ It should be emphasized, however, that not all information can be translated with equal ease.

The motives behind Sor Juana's imprisonment are vague, although partially outlined in her reply to Carlos Salinas, titled "La Respuesta Zopilotea." As the play opens, Sor Juana is reading, with great amusement, the letter Salinas sent to the Mexican media in December of 1995. In the letter, Salinas protests accusations that he was involved in the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, denies responsibility for Mexico's economic crisis, and generally decries his own transformation into "el 'villano favorito'."⁶ On stage, the letter's text is projected on a large screen, together with an image of the former president dressed as Sor Filotea. Salinas's self-defense, sent to the media in much the same way Sor Juana proposes to send hers (from a distance) is therefore framed by the historical realities of Sor Juana's writing, transposed to the humorous register of involuntary cross-dressing. The costume accords Salinas the false humility of the Bishop of Puebla's pseudonym and prepares the ground for Sor Juana's far from docile letter. Her reply presents both a satirical revision of the nun's original

response and structurally important exposition. She begins, following a long list of pseudo-noble titles:

No mi voluntad, ni mi justo temor sino mi indignación han [sic] suspendido tantos años mi respuesta. ¿Qué mucho, si a primer paso encontraba para digitalizar mi torpe pluma dos imposibles? El primero (y para mí el más riguroso) es hallarme presa en la cárcel de Almoloya a donde me han traído engañada unos autodenominados Panistas, que usted apoyó para llegar al poder, y que mezclando perversamente con tecnología virtual el siglo XVII con el siglo XXI han impuesto en México un imperio de horror y persecución, refritando reglamentos muy antiguos en perjuicio de quienes, como yo, sólo pecamos de pensar libremente. (396)

Compare the original: "No mi voluntad, mi poca salud y mi justo temor han suspendido tantos días mi respuesta. ¿Qué mucho si, al primer paso, encontraba para tropezar mi pluma dos imposibles? El primero (y para mí el más riguroso) es saber responder a vuestra doctísima, discretísima, santísima y amorosísima carta" (The Answer 38). The cell occupied by Sor Juana in Almoloya reproduces her convent cell although likely in less luxurious fashion. Captured through trickery, Sor Juana stresses her captors' recourse to ancient laws coupled with the latest technical gadgetry. The Panistas, of course, are members of the right-leaning opposition Partido de Acción Nacional, evidently ensconced in power in the present of the play's action. Not insignificantly, Sor Juana's imprisonment is possible only through computer technology, a mechanism that marks its excess in the fact that the flesh and blood Sor Juana, dead for some three hundred years, requires only conceptual incarceration.

Franco writes of Sor Juana that "to write was to write within an institution. The only possible response was parody and mimicry" ("Sor Juana" 43). The virtual Juana of the twenty-first century is equally circumscribed, literally within the institution of a maximum security prison and figuratively through the institutions of criticism and interpretation--or misinterpretation. This Sor Juana,

however, abandons the pose of docility and submission: only righteous indignation has delayed her response. Rodríguez's recourse to the figure of Sor Juana, and the placement of the historical character in prison, also point to the constraints on her own writing. Although she runs an independent theater, the climate of intolerance to which Sor Juana alludes affects Rodríguez as well. In an interview with Franco, she discusses threats made against particular productions and also addresses a general climate of self-censorship: "You actually realize that unless you censor yourself you are not going to please everybody and they will put pressure on you. Also, there is the fear of taking risks, or risking one's economic position" ("A Touch" 166). Birringer underscores the "theatricalization of institutional and public space" in the performances of Rodríguez and other Mexican, Cuban, and Latino artists (51). Sor Juana en Almoloya takes the institution within which Sor Juana wrote, transposes it to the prison, and theatricalizes both. This transformation draws on the preexisting theatricality of elements such as the Bishop of Puebla's disguise.

Franco notes that in the Respuesta, "the transparent fiction of the pseudonym 'Sor Filotea' is turned into a double-edged weapon, permitting an exaggerated deference to the recipient who is supposed to be a powerless woman and thus exposing the real power relations behind the egalitarian mask" ("Sor Juana" 44). The dynamics of the exchange are highly theatrical in their deliberate use of role playing. The projected Sor Juana retains the powerlessness of her namesake--she is unable to escape--but jettisons the deference; her barbs, while often double-edged, are never humble. Costuming Salinas as Sor Filotea underscores his alleged helplessness--the tone of his letter reveals the outrage and resignation of a much-maligned public servant, attacked on all sides by enemies both open and dissembling--and suggests that Salinas's vulnerability is as much a pose as was that of the Bishop of Puebla. The "mask" in the case of Rodríguez's performance

already exposes and inverts power relations, as Salinas-as-nun becomes an object of ridicule even before Sor Juana begins her reply. The self-righteousness of Salinas's long letter establishes an implicit subtext to Sor Juana's reply and mocks the very pose of humility his visual identification with Sor Filotea is meant to evoke.

Sor Juana is surrounded by a mix of outdated equipment, including antique geometrical instruments, a quill pen, and one of the earliest Apple computers marketed. Confronted with such antiquated machinery later in the play, the cell-phone bearing Procuradora is uncertain how to proceed; Sor Juana, meanwhile, insists that she uses the Apple only as a word processor. All of this equipment plays into the text's theatricality: accidentally materializing her lawyer, Sor Juana explains that the audience will have to swallow a scene from Los empeños de una casa; meanwhile, "Yo quedaré distanciada por un efecto brechtiano que hoy llaman telepresencia y esperaré con paciencia que termine este fulano" (397). The lawyer, however, has been himself appropriated, paid by the vicereine to trade clothing with her in order to trick the prison guards. Brechtian distancing becomes telepresencia, only to be temporarily replaced by that old stand-by, the gender-bending mask.

The Licenciado's speech is largely adapted from the Tercera Jornada of Los empeños de una casa, in which Castaño describes the feminine disguise that will allow him to approach Don Rodrigo with Don Carlos's message.⁷ Both Castaño and the Licenciado emphasize the power of feminine clothing to conceal, with the result that female disguise facilitates the wearer's penetration of forbidden or fortified spaces. The Licenciado exults:

¡Válgame Dios! cuánto encubre el traje de la virreina
puedo meterme a Los Pinos sin nadie que me detenga
y guardarme en la entropierna chorizos y buenos vinos
en campaña alimenticia repartirles desayunos a los niños
y ningunear a las criadas como hace Nilda Patricia.

No hay ladrón que tanto encubra
 ni paje que tanto mienta
 ni gitano que así engañe
 soy licenciado panista
 y nunca fui Salinista. (399)

In this instance, women's dress affords mobility. It also screens an implicitly false masculinity as well as ostentatious, self-serving charity. Whose trousers hide only sausages remains unclear. While female clothing allows the Licenciado, like his predecessor Castaño, the freedom of invisibility, it is male clothing that will afford the vicereine a similar freedom. This seeming contradiction reveals that the customary association of a particular costume with a greater degree of opacity and a corresponding freedom of movement is entirely arbitrary. The rewritten speech also includes a dig at Ernesto Zedillo's wife, Nilda Patricia Velasco, known for her refusal to have a maid.⁸ The allusion to Nilda Patricia reinforces the gendered play, framing her, with her domestic eccentricities, as one more distortion of a supposedly given role. Finally, the lawyer is identified with one Licenciado Creel, evoking Santiago Creel, a member of the Instituto Federal Electoral, "the independent government agency created by Salinas to monitor the [1994] elections" (Oppenheimer 131). The implication that Salinas's confidence in Creel was misplaced supports Sor Juana's contention that Salinas assisted the PAN's rise to power.

María Luisa Manrique de Lara, Condesa de Paredes, vicereine and friend of Sor Juana, enters quietly, dressed as the Licenciado and initially mistaken for the man her costume designates. Sor Juana calls her Lysi, one of the names accorded the vicereine in her poems. The encounter between the two is dependent on another mode of "virtual" presence, that of disguise. Lysi is at once the young woman seeking greater mobility through male dress common in Golden Age drama and a necessary ally, a partner in resistance. In this, she presents a

contrast to the Licenciado, who saw in his borrowed dress an effective cover.

Lysi is also part and parcel of the computer-generated illusion: Sor Juana approves the costume saying, "te ves como corregida en Page Maker" (401).⁹

At issue in this scene, beyond the political powers imprisoning Sor Juana, are certain critical interpretations of her life and work. An off-stage voice details Octavio Paz's interpretation of the relationship between the two women, who in turn obligingly illustrate the analysis. Alternating between assertion and illustration, the scene presents a "lesson" that reproduces, for the edification of the audience, the interaction of masterful authority and docile pupil. While the disembodied voice imposes its version, the actions of the two women belie its confident assertions: "A continuación tendremos la oportunidad de entender con toda claridad el verdadero significado de los términos que utiliza el prístino erudito para explicar esta amistad. (Las dos mujeres se acercan peligrosamente.) Nótese el safismo sublimado. (Ahora se besan apasionadamente.) Vedlas entregadas a las silenciosas orgías de la meditación. Una monja, la otra casada. ¿Qué podrían hacer juntas? (Sor Juana salta encima de la virreina y ambas se repantigan a sus anchas.)" The offstage voice continues: "La de Sor Juana, una libido poderosa sin empleo, su medallón, un símbolo de virilidad sublimada" (402).¹⁰ Nothing sublimated here. Nevertheless, the revealed "truth" of the relationship is undercut by the ironic exaggeration of the women's actions.

Sor Juana complains that biographers ought to stay out of their subjects' personal lives, respecting their intimacy as sacred. She is not, however, willing to suffer indignity in silence and announces, "como respuesta a Las trampas de la fe escribí una sátira filosófica" (403). The rewritten sátira opens:

Hombres necios que acusáis a la mujer sin razón
sin ver que también las hay, que sí tenemos razón.
Si con ansia sin igual solicitáis el Nobel
¿Por qué queréis que hablen bien si seleccionáis a Paz?

and continues:

Opinión ninguna gana pues la que más se recata
si no os admira es ingrata, y si os rechaza es lesbiana. (403)

In defending women of reason--asserting their existence--Sor Juana also mocks the too-easy relegation of nonconforming or insufficiently grateful women to categories such as "lesbian." Same sex desire is stressed, but always with a playful uncertainty: is it all a joke on Paz, or is it the "true" relationship between the two women we see on stage? Far from suggesting that it "couldn't possibly be true," I want here to underline the ambiguity. Lysi and Sor Juana are openly and physically affectionate, but are at the same time clearly toying with the critic's--and the spectator's--assumptions.

As with other texts rewritten in Rodríguez's play, the new "sátira filosófica" at once partakes of the intellectual concerns of the original work and introduces fresh material for parody. The "sátira virtual" concludes, "Bien con muchas armas fundo que lidia vuestra arrogancia / pues ninguna inteligencia trata de explicar el mundo" (404). Themes of knowledge, intelligence, and ambition run throughout Sor Juana's work. For example, Franco argues that in the Primero Sueño, "Sor Juana wished to salvage the will to knowledge while recognizing the dangerous lure of secular immortality" ("Sor Juana" 37). Here the charge of overreaching ambition, the will to knowledge and fame, is leveled against Paz in his quest for the Nobel Prize (not to mention an all-encompassing understanding). The charge, however, might reach further to encompass the efforts of other scholars to pin down an absolute version of Sor Juana. The lack of a fixed posture in the play is in keeping with Rodríguez's contention that one must question everything: "Art questions and overturns patterns of feeling, all the norms that regulate political, social, and everyday life behavior" (Franco, "A Touch" 172). The questioning of norms extends to the questioning of

assessments of Sor Juana's life and work. Enrico Santí argues that "well-intentioned editors" and "legions of truly noble readers" (among whom he numbers Paz) "have aspired to render us a strong, clear image of Sor Juana. But their separate attempts at restituting her image and significance continue to fall short precisely in the same measure that Sor Juana, or at least the Sor Juana that comes through in the poetry, succeeds in not allowing this to happen--in resisting restitution" (126). Santí points to several varieties of restitution, including the restoration of Sor Juana to her "rightful place within the canon of Hispanic Golden Age literature alongside better-known male peers" (102). He proposes, however, that the critical practice of restitution "accounts for the construction of different personae--be it the 'saint' of Catholic orthodoxy, the 'martyr' and 'dissident' of nineteenth and twentieth-century Liberalism, or the 'precursor' of contemporary feminisms--that the critical canon constructs in order to domesticate the radical otherness of her work" (104). In a similar vein, Franco cites contemporary stories of Sor Juana's life that tend to represent her "as a heroine pitted against a villainous Church, depicting her as a woman fighting a male institution, an artist forced into conformity by official ideology, a woman whose talents were held in check by sexual repression." However, she insists, "the problem with such narratives is that they impose a false unity on a corpus of writing in which the 'author's' ownership of writing is always in question and in which publication was beyond the control of the individual" ("Sor Juana" 25). Jesusa's Sor Juana also belies this false unity, as scenes jump from topic to topic in a virtuoso display of verbal games and topical allusions (far too many to gloss here). More importantly, the virtual technology through which Sor Juana is revived and reappropriated is another space of publication beyond the author's control--witness Sor Juana's technical difficulties--subject to authority, exposure, and perpetual imprisonment.

Closing with a reading of Sor Juana's poem "A las inimitables plumas de la Europa," Santí concludes that "Sor Juana's discursive strategy, her precarious way of disclosing and concealing her self in the poem, is to urge us to reconcile ourselves to a sad but nevertheless poignant truth: that we may in fact never know who she really was, what she really thought, or indeed what was the 'truth' regarding her 'defeat.' By resisting restitution, she preserves her difference and otherness (129). Santí's discussion of the poem--in which the speaker maintains "No soy yo la que pensáis / [. . .] diversa de mí misma / entre vuestras plumas ando" (Obras 73)--constructs an almost prescient Sor Juana, aware of the varied readings to which her words would be subject. Sor Juana's insistence, in Rodríguez's play, on her own voice simply reproduces a concern already expressed by the historical Sor Juana. Santí contends that "be they called academic exoticism, colonial tolerance, or plain tokenism, benign forms of restitution usually have one thing in common: when unchecked, they subordinate the Other to the Self's salvational perception. Rather than recognize the Other's stubborn difference--which would lead to a further humbling recognition of the Other's equality, or perhaps, superiority--our restitutions often pigeonhole the Other within prescribed institutional roles" (128). In this way, the institutional entrapment Franco describes persists long after Sor Juana's death.

Sor Juana wrote within an institution and continues to do so, both as represented on stage by Jesusa Rodríguez and as interpreted by various scholars. Sor Juana's resistance makes her an apt subject for Jesusa's reconsideration. In her interview with Franco, Jesusa remarks, "I feel all the time that working in the theatre is something like working in the kitchen; it is here and not in the living room where the salad is mixed" (Franco, "A Touch" 168). The comparison subtly recalls Sor Juana's frequently cited assertion, "Si Artistóteles hubiera guisado, mucho más hubiera escrito" (The Answer 74). The virtual Sor Juana certainly

presents a salad, skipping nimbly from poem to poem, trading jabs with lawyers and past presidents. Rodríguez's multi-layered presentation resists an all-encompassing recreation of Sor Juana. Furthermore, the Sor Juana who appears on stage is explicitly a virtual representation, doubly, even triply distanced in that we see a performer acting the role of a computer projection of a historical person. We are not seeing the "real thing." The broader implication is that no such "real thing" exists.

Biography might be viewed as a technique of appropriation; so too might dramatic criticism, searching the play for indications of hidden meanings, signs of or calls for cultural change. The play itself, moreover, engages in a multitude of appropriations. Among these is the ventriloquizing of Paz (referred to always in the third person, in contrast to the distinctly first-person voice of Las trampas de la fe) via the off-stage voice, which appropriates key phrases in place of lengthy quotes. Other examples of appropriation include the projected image of Zedillo and the "himno panista" sung to Shostacovich's 7th Symphony. Jesusa's references are wide-ranging, from other playwrights, such as Emilio Carballido, to the popular occupation of land slated for a golf club in Tepoztlán in 1995. The projected Sor Juana has herself been appropriated, materialized in the prison against her will, although the Sor Juana manifested here is hardly subject (or is only physically subject) to the will of her captors. And the buzzard of her "Respuesta Zopilotea" represents perhaps the ultimate act of appropriation.

The hindsight afforded by setting the play in the future provides a space from which to critique particularly cynical uses of history. For example, Lysi introduces the Procuradora as Sor Margarita Lozano Gracia, a reference to Antonio Lozano Gracia, the attorney general appointed by Zedillo during the investigation of Francisco Ruiz Massieu's murder. Again, a figure of authority is disguised as a nun, with all the implications of false humility that disguise

entails. Unlike Sor Juana, the Procuradora is provided with up-to-the-minute tools: her cellular phone works perfectly. Furthermore, she insistently identifies herself with the future, rather than the past. The Procuradora attacks Sor Juana's interest in past events as irrelevant and her pastorela as "desestabilizadora" (406). At the same time, the Procuradora's belittling of the past tends to trivialize historical knowledge in general. When asked to identify Zedillo, she explains dismissively, "fue un funcionario del régimen pasado, pero murió asesinado por su esposa y como su nombre empieza con zeta, pues los archivos computarizados ya no lo registran actualmente" (407). The temporal placement of the play's action consigns present powers to future oblivion. Yet despite the irrelevance of the past, Sor Juana must remain in prison, the better to protect the public from her dangerous influence.

The cyclical history in which she is trapped is evident in the necessity that Sor Juana rewrite much of her previous work. During her lawyer's speech, for instance, she rewrites Poema 165 (to which she solicits the audience's reaction, "pues un público pasivo / no cumple con el reclamo / de un soneto interactivo" [400]). One implication of all the rewriting is that the "hombres necios" failed to get the message the first time, and Sor Juana must undertake her life's work all over again. Moreover, the present authorities remain mired in the past--hence their reliance on outdated regulations. Rewriting also reflects the character of Sor Juana's work. Stephanie Merrim, for instance, has suggested that "Sor Juana kept writing the same play--be it comedia or auto sacramental--which repeatedly enacts the drama of the divided woman" (95). Finally, the institutional entrapment already noted leaves parody (rewriting) as her only means of resistance or escape.

Sor Juana is not the only one who voices the revisions. Lysi exclaims:

¡Basta ya de hipertextos mi bien, baste!

no te atormenten más tecno tiranos
 ni en vil pantalla tu quietud contraste,
 pues ya en líquido humor viste y tecleaste,
 mi ordenador deshecho entre tus manos.
 Lo que tú necesitas es desprenderte de esa maldita computadora y
 comer algo, te traje unos sushis. (401)

Her speech recalls (save in its invitation to sushi) one of Sor Juana's sonnets,

Poema 164:

Baste ya de rigores, mi bien, baste;
 no te atormenten más celos tiranos,
 ni el vil recelo tu quietud contraste
 con sombras necias, con indicios vanos,
 pues ya en líquido humor viste y tocaste
 mi corazón deshecho entre tus manos. (The Answer 154).

The playful element here is obvious. The heart is replaced by a computer, the more sensual touch is replaced by the keyboarder's tap. Naturally, as a projection Sor Juana's heart has in essence been replaced (the projection being all that to which we have access) but here it is Lysi who speaks. With the juxtaposition of high-tech electronics and liquid humor, supposedly inimical elements--surely Sor Juana knows better than to drench her hard drive in tears or any other liquid--are combined. The more mechanical typing has replaced the lover's touch, yet the hand remains present, along with the heart that cannot be held. No less than the spiritual or emotional heart, the virtual heart slips through the lover's fingers.

But the transformation goes further. "Rigor"--not only severity or unkindness, but exact form--has been replaced by hypertext. The idea of nonlinear linkages inherent to hypertext serves as an apt description, even an organizing principle, of this "Pastorela virtual." Although each episode is connected, there is no linear plot. In addition, the connections are more often textual than interpersonal. The critical concern with "restitution" that Santi discusses reveals an awareness of the textual fragility made visible by hypertext,

and with it a need to reach a definitive version and so eradicate uncertainty. Hypertext also describes, at least to some extent, the nature of Rodríguez's theatrical presentation. Landow suggests that "collage, or collage-like effects, in fact appear inevitable in hypertext environments, and they also take various forms. Including blocks of nonfictional text or images within a hypertext fiction [. . .] provides one way that such collage occurs; it also happens when authors write with and, one might say, along with texts by others" (37-38). Collage is also found in much historiographic metafiction. Rodríguez writes "along with" Sor Juana, Octavio Paz, Carlos Salinas. Hypertext is a potent engine of appropriation, one that facilitates Sor Juana's recreation while also reinforcing--at multiple levels--her entrapment. Finally, the combination of machinery and biological organs returns us once again to the image of the cyborg, visible here as an unstable work-in-progress.

According to Birringer, "institutions and circuits of knowledge (schools, museums, etc.), like the popular culture industry, reproduce our mythic arena, our theatre of disciplines, popular desires and fantasies [. . .]. This is the arena in which the borderlines are reconfigured, and the ideologies of inside/outside, of belonging and not-belonging, can be reconceptualized" (49-51). Differentially permeable boundaries mark the confines of Sor Juana's cell. Sor Juana remains within the prison walls; her visitors move in and out of the spectator's frame of vision as well as Sor Juana's presence. Yet, as Diana Taylor recognizes in her discussion of Rodríguez's Cielo de abajo, it is "only through our technology--from computer screens to theatrical lighting and special effects--that we can in any way recuperate, transmit, and store the knowledge of our past" (144).

Paradoxically, the monitor that restrains Sor Juana also affords us our only access to her. The institution within which Sor Juana--and her critics--write remains

inescapable. The notion of an informatics of domination--of domination through information--is clearly at issue in Rodríguez's text.

Rodríguez's high-tech evocations remain insistently grounded within a Mexican context. The technological devices at her disposal, however, represent the tools of both resistance and control. The separation between the two is blurred: resistance and domination, partaking of the same equipment, evoking interchangeable icons, meld in a fast-paced parody that leaves no one free to declare unambiguous victory. Sor Juana uses the monitor (although only as a word processor), but she is also monitored, by legal officials, by prison guards, by scholars. She further serves as a potential distraction from contemporary, or in this case future, problems. As Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell observe in their introduction to the Respuesta, the first Sor Juana renounced learning in a climate of crisis, including food riots, natural disasters and popular protests, in which "punitive responses triggered panic, further rioting, penitent religious processions, and executions" (12). Jesusa's Sor Juana in turn occupies a similar context of political and economic strife. Her repeated references to the scandals and corruption of the 1990s demonstrate as well that she, too, is monitoring the situation. Restrained though she may be, she is not entirely cut off from information.

The virtual Sor Juana is not given the last word, but her final lines recall Sor Juana's late statements of self-condemnation and faith; she signs her version in blood with the hope that "toda se derramara en beneficio de la verdad. Suplico a mis amadas hermanas se apiaden de este país y no voten por el PAN ni por el PRI. Yo, la peor del mundo: Juana Inés de la Cruz" (410). Jesusa's text closes with a chorus of condemnation that includes Profesor Hank (billionaire Agriculture minister under Salinas), Carlos Salinas, his brother Raúl, and Emilio

Azcárraga, owner of the Televisa network. Sor Juana is dismissed as "corrupta," one more "pinche vieja" (411). The monitor has won.

Recall, however, that the pastorela virtual is set in the year 2000. The dual procedure of resuscitating Sor Juana and placing the action in the future allows her to take an amused, backward glance at contemporary events. It also places her in a position analogous to that of the twentieth-century scholar investigating Sor Juana's work: out of context, far from the "original." The notion of an original text, moreover, is implicitly called into question by the ever-present mechanisms of reproduction and revision. Although condemned in perpetuity, the Sor Juana we see is only a computer projection, her voice a distillation of past texts and future judgments. Through the highlighting of Sor Juana's hopelessly inadequate Apple, the combination of a futuristic setting with a perilously low-tech reality produces a sort of obsolete sci fi dystopia. Ultimately, Jesusa's multivocal text avoids neat categorization. More than a tale, it is a game of cautionary appropriation, of collage.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this study was presented at the III Conference on Latin American Theatre, University of Kansas, April 2-5, 1997. Thanks to Jacqueline Cruz, Mónica Szurmuk, Leslie Bary, and Amanda Powell for reading a prior draft.

² See Franco, "A Touch of Evil," for a more complete discussion of Jesusa's adaptation of Panizza's play.

³ I am indebted to Dante Medina for providing me with a videotape of the Guadalajara production, performed at the Cine-Foro of the Universidad de Guadalajara in early 1996.

⁴ Aarseth invites the reader to "imagine a book in which some of the pages appear to be missing, or the print is unreadable every 16 pages, or some of the papers are repeated while an equal number omitted. Even if this copy is the only one we ever see, we automatically assume that a more correct version exists. It may never have been printed; but to us, who can imagine it perfectly (except for the missing words, of course), it is still more real than the one we are holding" (56).

⁵ Haraway insists that "taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts" (181). In her commentary on an earlier version of Haraway's essay, Mary Ann Doane argues that "the specificity of the cyborg's resistance, its pleasure and potency, lies in its territorial transgression of the boundaries

between nature and culture, body and mind, the organic and the technological." Yet, "according to Haraway, these dualisms are already anachronistic. How can the collapse of oppositions represented by the cyborg be liberating or potentially productive if oppression is no longer organized through dualisms?" Doane asserts that "it will be even more necessary to understand how technology is made complicit with the dispersal of power, its invisibility. The sheer complexity of the reorganization of technologically maintained powers will require new modes of analysis and images of something other than transgression" (213). Sor Juana en Almoloya presents one rendering of the links between power, visibility, and technology. While technology is not demonized, neither does it offer an adequate response to oppression.

⁶ Salinas's widely disseminated letter was published in La Jornada on December 4, 1995. I cite La Jornada's website index of past issues.

⁷ Obras completas, 684-85.

⁸ Andres Oppenheimer notes that "Zedillo and Nilda Patricia, a stern-looking economist who had given up her career to raise their children, boasted about not having a live-in maid" (118).

⁹ I discuss theatrical cross-dressing more fully in "Playing Gender."

¹⁰ Paz writes, "En términos de economía psíquica --para emplear la expresión de Freud-- el mal de sor Juana no era la pobreza sino la riqueza: una libido poderosa sin empleo. Esa abundancia, y su carencia de objeto, se muestran en la frecuencia con que aparecen en sus poemas imágenes del cuerpo femenino y masculino, casi siempre convertidas en apariencias fantasmales: sor Juana vivió entre sombras eróticas" (286).

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