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LOPE IN MANHATTAN: HYPERREALITY, SPACE, AND VIOLENCE IN JULIÁN MESRI'S *FUENTEOVEJUNA* (2013)

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Yo denuncio la conjura
de estas desiertas oficinas
que no radian las agonías,
que borran los programas de la selva,
y me ofrezco a ser comido por las vacas estrujadas
cuando sus gritos llenan el valle
donde el Hudson se emborracha con aceite.

Federico García Lorca, «Nueva York (oficina y denuncia)»

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Resumen
Este análisis de una producción de *Fuenteovejuna* en Nueva York en el año 2013 se enfoca en los elementos de la comunicación, el espacio y la violencia. En el montaje del director Julián Mesri, la tecnología y los medios modernos de comunicación a veces sustituyen a los mensajeros humanos del texto original, lo cual produce el doble efecto de distanciar al público emocionalmente de la noticia contada y de llamar la atención al medio en sí y sus motivos ulteriores. En este mundo urbano y contemporáneo estructurado a base de las simulaciones, los espacios quedan reducidos y la violencia parece conceptual. Si bien Mesri presenta al pueblo de *Fuenteovejuna* como una hiperrealidad baudrillardiana en que la representación eclipsa la realidad, su montaje no distorsiona el original de Lope, sino que pone de relieve, con toques modernos, una dinámica ya manifiesta en la obra, el corpus de Lope y buena parte del teatro aurisecular. Por más que la visión de Mesri parezca asombrosamente contemporánea, el modo de representación que destaca es, literalmente, "de Lope".

Palabras clave: Lope de Vega; *Fuenteovejuna*; Repertorio Español; Julián Mesri; hiperrealidad; simulacro; Jean Baudrillard; Nueva York.

Abstract

This analysis of Repertorio Español's 2013 production of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* in New York City focuses on the elements of communication, space, and violence. In director Julián Mesri's staging, modern media or technology at times replace the human messengers of the original text, which has the double effect of distancing the audience emotionally from the events reported while calling attention to the mediums themselves and their agendas. In this contemporary urban world of simulacra, space seems compressed and violence appears conceptual. Mesri presents *Fuenteovejuna* as a Baudrillardian hyperreality, in which representations eclipse "reality." In doing so, however, he does not so much alter Lope's original as highlight, with modern touches, a dynamic that pervades the original play, Lope's corpus, and much of Spanish Golden Age drama. Mesri's vision may appear strikingly contemporary, yet the mode of representation it foregrounds is classic Lope.

Keywords: Lope de Vega; *Fuenteovejuna*; Repertorio Español; Julián Mesri; hyperreality; simulacra; Jean Baudrillard; New York.

It is certainly a formidable undertaking to transpose a brand of theater deeply anchored in the social, political, and religious climate of its day to modern contexts in which a director can assume little or no familiarity with the circumstances in which the original was conceived, or the performance conventions of that time. Crossing national borders is, of course, nothing new in Western theater; Athenian drama was exported to all parts of the Hellenistic world and was translated for Roman audiences (Gilula 1989), and early modern theater troupes all over Europe frequently ventured into foreign lands, creating «contact zones» of cross-cultural exchange (Henke 2006:1). Such intercultural processes, or in the words of Patrice Pavis [1996:2], «the exchange or reciprocal influence of theatrical practices (acting, *mise-en-scène*, stage adaptations of "foreign" material)», are clearly at work in the performance and production of theater all over the world today.

Scholars of contemporary performance must, in addition, account for the way Golden Age works are re-contextualized in contemporary settings. Historicized productions reject the notion of archaeological reconstruction in favor of what Pavis [2003:212] describes as an attempt «to rediscover in the narrative a (hi)story that concerns us directly, adapting situations, characters, and conflicts as required». Today's American viewer of a seventeenth century Spanish play measures his or her distance from the material both culturally and historically, and directors of course take this into account in adapting the works. A great deal of cultural intricacy, however, can complicate what Charles Ganelin [1994:15] has referred to as the «hermeneutical bridge building» that must take place between current adaptations and the original texts of *comedias* in order for the new reworking to be truly meaningful. The challenge of considering cultural exchanges in these productions both synchronically and diachronically, or as some performance theorists might say, horizontally and vertically,[1] is what makes our work both interesting and hazardous.

The modern performance history of Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* (1619) includes numerous non-traditional reinterpretations. During the Russian Revolution,

1. Jerzy Grotowski was a major proponent of vertical study of performance, seeking original performance universals in past cultural practices; Eugenio Barba promotes horizontal comparison of culturally different contemporary performances (Schechner 2002:226).

director Konstantin Mardzhanov omitted the scenes including the monarchs in his 1919 production in Kiev, presumedly to underscore that the rebellious villagers did not need or want the protection of any king (Doménech Rico 2012:173/471). Doménech Rico [2012:173/471] believes that Federico García Lorca had this adaptation in mind when he also omitted Fernando and Isabel in his production of the play performed by La Barraca in Valencia in 1933, during the Second Republic. During the Spanish Civil War, both Republicans and Nationalists attempted to appropriate classical theater to promote their own political ends (Parker 2010). Margarita Xirgu's 1938 production in Buenos Aires, Pedro Orthous's 1952 staging in Santiago de Chile, and Álvaro Custodio's 1956 version in Mexico reflected the revolutionary spirit of their times and the influence of Spanish exiles (Doménech Rico 2012). A 1947 film version of the play by Antonio Román promoted the Franco Regime's values of *patria, fe, y familia* (Bentley 2004). Director Isidora Aguirre reworked *Fuenteovejuna* to condemn the tyranny of Augusto Pinochet's regime in Chile (Weimer 2000). One critic described Adolfo Marsillach's 1993 staging, featuring a cold, metallic set, as a «carnival of terror» that foregrounds representations of torture (Fischer 1997:61). A 1999 production by the University of Utah set the play in a U.S.-Mexican border town during the Mexican Revolution, where the action is performed by members of a traveling *carpa* troupe to Mexican *corrido* music (Scharine 1999).

Despite the great variety of stagings and interpretations of *Fuenteovejuna*, we have perhaps never seen it as Julián Mesri presents it to us at New York City's Repertorio Español in 2013.[2] In his production, *Fuenteovejuna* is not a village but a modern company or corporation, and all of the action is performed in a space furnished like the floor of a contemporary office, with desks, chairs, telephones, lamps, and cell phones. Like director Michael Almereyda in his 2000 film remake of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which reimagines "Denmark" as a corporation and "Elsinore" as a

2. *Fuenteovejuna*, directed by Julián Mesri and performed by Repertorio Español, debuted February 1, 2013, and closed May 3, 2013. The production was supported by a grant from the Consulate General of Spain in New York. The cast and crew included: Anthony Álvarez (Frondoso), Zulema Clares (Pascuala), Gerardo Gudiño (Esteban), Mario Mattei (Mengo), Noelle Mauri (Jacinta, Maestre), Pep Muñoz (Comendador, Juez), Soraya Padrao (Laurencia), Alfonso Rey (Flores), Leni Méndez (set, costumes, props), Robert Weber Federico (lighting), Julián Mesri (music and sound), and Fernando Then (Assistant Director and Production Manager). Repertorio Español's executive staff included Artistic Director René Buch, Executive Director Robert Weber Federico, and Associate Producer José Antonio Cruz.

hotel that serves as the company's headquarters, Mesri also sets his adaptation of an early modern classic in the corporate world of New York City, though he focuses not on high society but on the common office worker. As Mesri explains, «Estamos en Nueva York; no tenemos el pueblo y la ciudad como en la época de Lope de Vega. Lo que existe es un mundo de cubículos, de oficinas y de gente con mucho, mucho poder. Quiero que la gente venga y vea su mundo en escena» (Martorell 2013). Soraya Padrao, who plays Laurencia, describes her character in the same spirit: «Laurencia es una simple trabajadora que quiere ganarse el pan de cada día; puede ser cualquier mujer que esté tomando un café en el Upper West Side» (Martorell 2013).

Although Mesri's version of the play is pared down such that the entire single-act performance takes just a little over an hour, it nonetheless offers much for consideration and interpretation. Three aspects of Mesri's production distinguish it from other stagings and indicate his particular New York vision and interpretation of Lope's play: the conceptualization of space, the depiction of violence, and the role played by technology and the media. These three concepts are related, particularly when considered through Jean Baudrillard's conceptions of simulacra and simulation.

Historical Drama as Simulacrum

As the ways of reproducing and communicating information, ideas, and images have evolved, society has become increasingly more susceptible to the influence of reproductions, which have come to take precedence over the original events or phenomena upon which they are based. Today's technology-driven media culture is characterized by mass reproduction of news, ideas, and images. With such a proliferation and reiteration of information, along with the simultaneous fading of the memories and voices of participants in and witnesses of the original happening, the reconstructions come to replace the original events for the greater part of the public. Complex occurrences and ideas may thus be reduced to the iconic images and sound bites that have come to represent them. «Information», writes Baudrillard [1994:80], «devours its own content […]. Rather than creating communication, *it exhausts itself in the act of staging communication*. Rather than

producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning» (emphasis in the original).

The Repertorio Español staging highlights how the constructed nature of representation renders the notion of an originary, objective "reality" obsolete not only in our time but also in Lope's work and creative process. Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality —an existence in which a hyper-proliferation of reproductions replaces the "reality" upon which they are based— provides an especially appropriate theoretical apparatus for this analysis not only since Mesri's production features a postmodern aesthetic, but also because Lope's play, like all historical dramas, is of course itself a simulacrum —a retelling of an event— and features simulation as a recurring theme.

To be clear, all creative works are, of course, simulations —representations of something. Among the most transparent forms of simulacra is theater; we go to the theater expecting to see acting, illusions, and imitations of reality. Great drama nonetheless informs us vividly and convincingly about the nature of our reality. Those plays that can continue to warn us, despite the passing of centuries, of the nature of the illusions that surround us are true masterpieces. *Fuenteovejuna* is one such piece. The current study attempts to show how in this classic, Lope repeatedly reveals, through his characters' retellings and representations of events to other characters, the constructed nature of "reality." Julian Mesri's 2013 production of Lope's play recognizes this dynamic in the text and demonstrates that this notion is more relevant today than ever.

Lope has of course taken much dramatic license in artfully weaving his dramatic retelling of a peasant uprising resulting in the murder of the town's Comendador on April 23, 1476. Scholars have recognized the work's various historical inaccuracies. Lope telescopes events, such as the war of succession, and suggests that the confrontation between the military-religious orders and the Reyes Católicos occurred significantly sooner than it actually did, therefore distorting temporal parameters and the cause-effect relationships between historical developments (Anibal 1934:663). Among the various sources that chronicle the occurrence, the one written closest in time to the event, that of Alfonso de Palencia (1423-1490), claims that a rivalry in the order of Calatrava led some of the knights to conspire and incite the uprising against the Comendador, who, according to Palencia, actually sided with Isabel and not Juana, while subsequent versions paint the protagonist as

abusive and deserving of the fate he suffered (Marín 1991:23-27). Lope may have been misled by the source he used, the chronicle written by Calatravan knight Francisco de Rades y Andrada in 1572, into presenting Fernán Gómez as a villain when he may actually have been an honorable man (Anibal 1934:718). No one disputes that Lope presented the Maestre, Rodrigo Téllez Girón, in a positive light in order to flatter his patron, Pedro Téllez Girón, Duque de Osuna and Rodrigo's descendant (Anibal 1934:666).

Despite Lope's personal interest, his inclusion of historical inaccuracies from his source, and his adaptation of events and characters for dramatic purposes, the eminently respected Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo writes, in Aristotelian fashion, that the work is «más verdadera que la historia misma».[3] Lope has so masterfully adapted history to the stage that perhaps his poetic version of the events will resonate with audiences to the extent that it eclipses the actual occurrences. The deftly crafted simulacrum, to use Baudrillard's terminology, comes to precede its original.

Not surprisingly, *Fuenteovejuna*, a simulacrum of a historical occurrence, contains numerous simulacra within its action. The most recognizable of these take the form of characters' retellings or reproductions of events or messages for the benefit of other characters. For example, in the first act, when the Comendador's servant Flores enters and tells the group of young villagers that the battle for Ciudad Real is over, Frondoso requests that he tell them about it: «Contadnos cómo passó» (*Fuenteovejuna*, v. 454).[4] Flores obliges with a lengthy and dramatic description. It is interesting to note, however, that his account does not actually relate how the Calatravans took the city; Flores does not, for example, explain what strategy or heroism was required to breach the city's defenses. Instead, of the 68 verses in which Flores ostensibly discusses the battle (vv. 457-524), Lope dedicates 32 of them to detailed descriptions of the appearance and adornment of the Maestre, the Comendador, and their horses (vv. 469-500). Of the remaining lines, 16 are expository in nature and closely follow Rades y Andrada's *Crónica de las tres órdenes y caballerías de Santiago, Calatrava y Alcántara* (1572) (Marín 1991:104, n. 130, and 106-107, n. 158), 12 of them indicating the number of troops Girón leads and 4 noting Ciudad Real's loyalty to Fernando and Isabel (vv. 501-504); 15 link the Mae-

3. Quoted in Anibal [1934:664].

4. All citations of the text of *Fuenteovejuna* refer to the edition of Juan María Marín, Cátedra, 1991. Subsequent citations indicate verse numbers only, as numbered in Marín's edition.

stre's merciless punishment of some of the prisoners to the awe in which he should now be held and his promise as a champion of the *Reconquista* (vv. 506-520); 4 refer to the great riches from the sacking of the city that the Maestre has bestowed upon the Comendador in appreciation of his services; and, perhaps most notably, only one three-word verse is directly related to the action of taking the city: «Entróla, bien resistida» (v. 505).

Flores' description of the "battle" demonstrates well the meaning of Baudrillard's assertion that in our world, «there is more and more information, and less and less meaning» because «rather than creating communication, [information] *exhausts itself in the act of staging communication*» [1994:79-80]. The "information" Frondoso requested of Flores was how the battle transpired, how the triumph came about. Flores' discourse, however, exhausts itself in the elaborate staging and crafting of vivid, idealized images which, dazzling and impressive as they may be to the villagers, fail to provide any insight regarding how the battle progressed and was won. Flores' epic sketch is a simulacrum: he presents it as a representation or simulation of the battle for Ciudad Real, but ultimately, we see that that is not its referent.

The true object and purpose of Flores' monologue is clearly the idealization and aggrandizement of Girón and Gómez. As the Comendador's lackey, it is in Flores' interest to promote his *señor* among the young Fuenteovejunans as noble, rich, and worthy of their admiration and esteem. It is in Lope's interest to flatter his patron, the Duque de Osuna, by painting his forebear, don Rodrigo, as a gallant and decisive leader in battle (Anibal 1934:666). Both ends are achieved through various textual strategies. The shift from *redondillas* in the previous scene to *romances* here gives the speech a rhythm and cadence befitting of lofty, grave matters («las relaciones piden los romances», Lope de Vega, *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias,* v. 309). The obsessive focus on the rich and gallant appearance of the two knights and their horses, supported by an assortment of colors, adjectives, metaphors, and hyperbole (Gómez's lance is «un fresno entero […] / que hasta en Granada le temen», vv. 499-500), all add to the epic tone and imagery of the description. We see how Flores, in describing Girón's executions and severe punishments of prisoners, touches precisely on one of the ideas that the Comendador emphasized in the opening scene when he lectured to the young Maestre about his obligations and leadership: that the young leader must make a show of strength in order to win respect: «Será bien que deis assombro / […] a cuantos / dizen que es grande essa cruz / para vues-

tros hombros flacos» (vv. 118-120). It is as if the Comendador had coached his henchman to be sure to stress this "talking point" in relaying news of the battle to the villagers.

Both Lope's text and historical documents, however, belie the notion that the taking of Ciudad Real evidences the greatness of the two men in question. Earlier, the Comendador himself had told the young Girón that the ill-defended city would be easy prey; he wouldn't need many troops «porque tiene por soldados / solamente sus vezinos / y algunos pocos hidalgos» (vv. 112-114). Lope's source, Rades, notes that Ciudad Real «no es pueblo de fortaleza, / ni castillo, / sino solamente cercado de una ruin cerca».[5] It seems that it could hardly have been regarded as a great feat to take a city so poorly fortified against attack. Some accounts even cast doubt as to whether Girón ever did take Ciudad Real prior to battling forces allied to the cause of Isabel and Fernando. Alonso Fernández de Palencia's chronicle, considered by Anibal [1934:692, 695, 698-700] to be less biased and more authentic than Lope's source, Rades, shows no indication that Girón was able to take the city:

> Los moradores [de Ciudad Real] que tiempo atrás habían perseguido repetidas veces a los conversos de la ciudad, acabando por saquearles sus casas y dar muerte a muchos, habían logrado rechazar al maestre de Calatrava D. Rodrigo Girón, que acudió en favor de los expulsados e intentó por fuerza de armas reinstalarlos en sus moradas. Mas para tener a raya en adelante los ataques del poderoso joven a quien obedecían todas las villas limítrofes, llamaron en su auxilio al egregio caudillo D. Rodrigo Manrique, garantía cierta de la seguridad de la población […][6]

In addition, various historians, including Palencia, coincide in relating that Fernán Gómez aided Manrique in defending Ciudad Real against Girón (Aníbal 1934:701). Thus, not only does Flores' monologue *not* reproduce the action of a battle; it is furthermore inspired by something that possibly never took place. In sum, Flores' account may ultimately refer to nothing but itself. The mechanisms of simulation and simulacra Baudrillard so perceptively describes were operative in Lope's times, long before the term "media" assumed the meanings and dimensions it possesses today.

5. Quoted in Anibal [1934:686].
6. Quoted in Anibal [1934:701].

This tension between, on the one hand, the elaborate staging and dramatic form of Flores' representation of the battle, and on the other hand, its actual information content, the meaning it conveys, is clearly evident in Mesri's rendering of this scene in the Repertorio Español production, albeit in a different sense. Mesri cuts lines from his production but does not alter Lope's language to conform to the modern setting. Therefore, throughout the performance, for the audience, there is always a certain distance between Lope's words and what they might refer to in Repertorio's altered context. When the actor playing Flores, Alfonso Rey, enters the office, announces «La guerra se acaba ya» (v. 451), and launches into his description of the adornment of the knights, the treatment of prisoners, and the riches the Maestre bestows upon the Comendador, the audience must interpret each reference within the modern business context. Thus, Flores appears to speak in a colorfully metaphorical way about a contentious business takeover or merger, out of which the company Fuenteovejuna, led by CEO Girón with the support of branch manager Gómez, emerges intact and in an advantageous position, with Gómez and his part of the company profiting particularly well. Mesri treats the scene with lighthearted irony and humor: heroic music underscores Flores' speech, and the office workers, seated at their desks, move in choreographed unison, adding sound effects and dramatic gestures to illustrate the narrative and communicate a sense of splendor and awe (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Flores (Alfonso Rey) gives a dramatic account of the takeover of Ciudad Real, embellished by the choreographed movements of the office workers of Fuenteovejuna, Inc. Photo by Michael Palma, courtesy of Repertorio Español.

Mesri even adds a layer of meaning to Flores' description of Girón's elegant battle raiment. In the first scene of the production, the Maestre, played by Noelle

Mauri, had appeared dressed hip-hop style, wearing Timberland boots, baggy camouflage sweatpants, a black hoodie emblazoned with a red *cruz de Calatrava*, and a black baseball cap worn backwards. This is clearly a nod to an important New York City subculture, as hip-hop fashion originated there before spreading to other United States cities (Kitwana 2002). The Comendador, in contrast, wears traditional Wall Street business-formal attire: a black pin-striped suit with suspenders, a blue button-down dress shirt with cufflinks, a gold tie with a red *cruz de Calatrava*, and a black, fur-collared top coat. Mesri uses the contrast between two signature New York dress styles to communicate to his Manhattan audience the generational gap that exists between the young, inexperienced Girón and the mature, wily Gómez at the outset of the action. Therefore, the fact that Flores emphasizes that Girón "dressed up" or dressed elegantly for the confrontation with Ciudad Real («con una casaca verde, / bordada de cifras de oro», vv. 470-471) may indicate, in the Repertorio Español staging, the success of the Comendador's efforts to influence the young master to assimilate his forebears and continue in their tradition.

Flores' account ends with the office workers singing a celebratory welcome as the proudly beaming Comendador, played by Pep Muñoz, returns from his business venture, coffee cup in hand. This staging of the narrative of the takeover is, in other words, pure spectacle: a visual feast and celebration of the company's business acumen and increasing profit margins. We have already seen how the scene is a simulacrum on the textual level; it is perhaps even more so on stage. A simulacrum, for Baudrillard, is a reproduction of an event whose information content is consumed in the staging of the reproduction; this is precisely what occurs in this *mise-en-scène*. The musical underscoring, choreographed movements of the "chorus" of workers, and dramatic delivery of Flores create a visual and aural spectacle which, added to the epic tone and conventions of the text, conveniently covers up not only the aforementioned vagueness and superficiality of the narrative itself, but also any hint of dissent with regard to the hostile takeover on the part of the peace-loving office workers, who, just prior to this patriotic display of support for their boss's conquest of Ciudad Real, had been passionately engaged in a philosophical debate on the nature of love. The celebratory scene creates an illusion of unity and harmony.

Since Lope's play is full of simulacra, Mesri has ample opportunity to approach the subject of representation. *Fuenteovejuna* contains at least a dozen retellings of notable occurrences, creatively presented to persuade listeners to adopt a certain

attitude or take a certain action. In addition to Flores' first act speech, other examples of such representations include Gómez's lengthy explanation to Girón urging him to follow his noble forebears and take action against Fernando and Isabel;[7] the villagers reproducing the ideas of Aristotle, Pythagoras, and Plato with respect to love; the report of the officials from Ciudad Real to the monarchs informing of Girón's taking of the city; Laurencia's famous *arenga* before the men of Fuenteovejuna after suffering the Comendador's abuse; Flores' report to the monarchs of the uprising in Fuenteovejuna; the villagers' rehearsing of their response to the torture they anticipate; the Maestre's apology to the monarchs for having attacked Ciudad Real; the judge's report to Fernando and Isabel about his unsuccessful inquiry; and the villagers' final appearance at court before the monarchs.

It is not the purpose of this study to analyze all of these examples; rather, I mean simply to point out the prevalence of this mode of discourse in Lope's text and to explain how Mesri manifests this phenomenon in his production. We have seen how Mesri adds visual spectacle to complement the epic tone of Flores' speech, with both elements combining to project idealized images of Girón and Gómez. In other instances of the relaying of information, Mesri replaces the human messengers in the original text with modern instruments of technology and media, ranging from magazines and checks to cell phones and conference calls. By doing so, he explores the theme of modern means of mediating communication and negotiations between people and the impression conveyed when we contrast these to the means used in Lope's original.[8]

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7. We may take this first example as an opportunity to demonstrate how the terms "original" and "simulation" or "simulacra" will be used in this analysis. In his opening scene exposition, the Comendador refers to the dispute over the throne left vacant by the death of Enrique IV between his sister, Isabel la Católica, and his daughter, Juana, and notes that the Maestre's *deudos*, the Girones and the Pachecos, support Juana (vv. 69-158). These are the general circumstances of the "original" historical event (many details of which are debated by historians). In order to persuade the young Maestre to take action he thinks will benefit him, the Comendador adds something to his representation or "simulation" of the situation: the notion that Téllez's *deudos* doubt his ability to lead effectively, and that therefore the young Rodrigo Téllez must prove his leadership skills in battle (vv. 117-128). Fernán Gómez embellishes his "simulacra" further by asserting that it will be an easy conquest (vv. 111-116). Téllez accepts Gómez's presentation of the circumstances as an attractive opportunity to prove himself, a decision he will later regret and blame on youthful inexperience and naiveté.

8. «Often the *mise-en-scène* of a very well-known classical text is necessarily intertextual, for it alludes to preceding productions, or at least to the major ways in which the enigma of that text has been resolved in the past» (Pavis 2003:214).

In the first act, Jacinta (Noelle Mauri) reads an incriminating "article" from a gossip magazine on the Comendador that mentions his abuses of the people of Fuentovejuna. In the original, the lines are spoken by a *regidor* from Ciudad Real as he reports the Maestre and the Comendador's taking of the city to Fernando and Isabel. The focus in the Repertorio staging is upon the verses that refer specifically to Gómez's residing in Fuenteovejuna: «Allí, con más libertad / de la que dezir podemos, / tiene a los súbditos suyos / de todo contento ajenos» (vv. 691-694). In Mesri's version, Flores, who unbeknownst to Jacinta, has overheard her, snatches the magazine, rips out the article, and tears it up, glowering at her. It is important to Lope's negative characterization of the Comendador that news of his tyrannical behavior be known publicly, beyond Fuenteovejuna; however, Mesri does not include the monarchs in his production. The gossip magazine is therefore a fine solution to this problem. Furthermore, this paper medium lends itself well to Flores' dramatic and violent act of censorship, which adds an additional sinister dimension to the Comendador's tyranny.

In the second act, Pascuala reads from her cell phone news about Jacinta's abduction and Mengo's punishment at the hands of the Comendador's henchmen. The content of what she reads are lines excerpted from the conversation in act two between Esteban and a *regidor* in which they mention, among other developments, Jacinta's rape («La pobre Jacinta es quien / pierde por su sinrazón») and the whipping Mengo suffers at the hands of Gómez's soldiers («no hay negra bayeta o tinta / como sus carnes están», vv. 1323-1324, 1336-1337). It is not clear whether Pascuala has received this information through a private email or a public medium. In either case, the cell phone in place of the two men as medium seems to magnify the distancing and objectivity already evident in their comments (one coldly judgmental of Jacinta, the other describing Mengo's wounds with black humor). The technology further depersonalizes the violence; both the victims and the comments about them seem more dehumanized.

When Esteban approves of Frondoso's proposed marriage to Laurencia and touches on the subject of the dowry in the second act, he takes out his checkbook and writes Frondoso a check for the amount right there on his office desk: «del dote, ¿qué le diremos? / Que yo bien te puedo dar / cuatro mil maravedís» (vv. 1432-1434). The check —though almost outdated today, still a modern instrument of technology to facilitate financial transactions— is a medium that here, as the dowry, serves as a financial guarantor of Frondoso and Laurencia's union. The writing of the check

makes the marriage seem more about business than love; it seems like another bill for Esteban to pay. This subversion of the sentimental by the financial or pragmatic is evident in Lope's text: Frondoso is surprised and acts slightly offended by Esteban's mention of the dowry, but Esteban dismisses his reaction and tells him, with the wisdom of experience, that he will need it (vv. 1437-1440). Thus, again, Mesri's use of a modern medium of social interaction serves to amplify and augment what appears as merely a subtle degree of cynicism in the original text.

Mesri's most impactful technological intervention occurs at the play's conclusion. After his unsuccessful interrogation of the office workers, the *juez* takes the office phone, places it symbolically on the throne-like armchair at the rear of the stage, calls the chief executive officer of the company, informs him that the investigation has been inconclusive, then presses a button to put the chief on speaker phone (see figure 2).

Figure 2. The CEO of the company pronounces judgement on the Fuenteovejuna office workers by speaker phone. Photo by Michael Palma, courtesy of Repertorio Español.

An amplified voice announces to the office workers that the CEO personally will oversee them. After the inquisitor and his henchman leave, the workers celebrate and appear to joke about how they out-maneuvered their superiors, as upbeat Latino music plays and the stage fades to black. The stage picture at the moment of the climactic pronouncement says it all: the image and aura of divine authority projected by the Reyes Católicos in the original is replaced by the utilitarian convenience and sleek styling of the Cisco 7940 G office phone with internet protocol technology. The final tableau assumes the form of an absurd, postmodern "adoration of the magi" in which the wise men and shepherds of Fuenteovejuna kneel and bow their heads in deference to the newborn king of the office. Technology will be the saving grace, the new boss, and the new god of Fuenteovejuna, Inc. We are left with the impression that the CEO will, most days, be telecommuting.

In the earlier example of Flores' battle narrative, we saw how the "staging" of the representation altered the content of the original. The original information implodes, and is replaced by the ideas the staging of the reproduction expresses. In these simulacra involving technology, the staging of the message or content is not provided by a human messenger; rather, the technological medium itself is the staging, and as we have seen, it expresses notions about how one relates to others and to oneself. In the words of Marshall McLuhan [1994:7], «the medium is the message», by which he means that the true meaning or significance of a medium or machine is not what it produces, but «the ways in which the machine alter[s] our relations to one another and to ourselves». By modernizing the mediums through which news, commentary, and important announcements are made, and having us consider these instances in comparison to their originals in Lope, where a messenger relays the news with feeling and passion, Mesri highlights how depersonalized, distant, objective, and constructed communication has become through the mediation of technology. Baudrillard [1994:170] laments the disappearance of the «charm», «poetry», and «magic» of abstraction that existed in the past, which have been superseded by the modern media's process of reduction, as today, «genetic miniaturization is the dimension of simulation». Rumors of the Comendador's mistreatment of the villagers are genetically miniaturized onto the pages of a gossip magazine; Jacinta's rape and Mengo's torture are miniaturized into a message on Pascuala's cell phone; the guarantee of Frondoso's commitment to Laurencia is miniaturized into a check written by Esteban; the "king" and his climactic pronouncement are

confined within the parameters of a conference call. The mediating instruments of twenty-first century society used here have a dehumanizing, reductive, distancing effect on the subjects they negotiate. These touches are ironic and humorous, but also remind us how the mediums through which we communicate today shape and influence that communication, both as it is conceived and interpreted.

Fuenteovejuna's Space: From Expansive and Differentiated to Compressed and Undifferentiated

Dramatic space is of course vital to an audience's understanding of *Fuenteovejuna*'s action. Laura Vidler [2012:214-215] notes how «the social division of space is repeatedly compromised» throughout the play: Fernán Gómez and his troops trespass on the villagers' land, homes, and bodies; Laurencia invades the men's space of the town meeting to condemn their cowardice; and the villagers storm the Comendador's stronghold to avenge their mistreatment. Transgression of socially and politically demarcated spaces is clearly among the fundamental themes of the work.

Lope furthermore posits as the ultimate defense against such transgressions a realignment of the spaces in question: The villagers and the places they inhabit will become co-extensive with the monarchs and their authority. David Castillo [2012:3-5] observes how director Juan Guerrero Zamora's 1980 Radiotelevisión Española film based on the play expresses this notion visually at its conclusion: the walls of Fernando and Isabel's castle open up to a luminous vision of an idyllic Castilian countryside, populated by the villagers of the story, suggesting that «the town of Fuenteovejuna, which allegorically represents all of Spain, voluntarily and heroically embraces monarchical absolutism as political desideratum and historical destiny». Crown and villagers combine into a single unified body politic, and key to expressing this unity is an idealized notion of extensive, continuous space that flows benignly out from palace to *pueblo*, from *pueblo* to countryside and beyond into a glorious golden future of expansion, conquest, and empire.

While spaces in *Fuenteovejuna* are typically understood as varied, pastoral, exterior, continuous, and socially and politically demarcated, Repertorio Español presents the drama's space, a contemporary business office, as singular, urban, interior, enclosed, and communally shared. Since there are no monarchs in Mesri's

version, there is no palace and no extension of space from court to village. We rarely see the workers exit the stage: both their professional and social lives transpire in the office space. The result is a somewhat claustrophobic sense of confinement and a reflection of the contemporary obsession with work: it provides all we need, defines us, and consumes us. Any "expansion" to which the company aspires is not primarily spatial, but financial, and is measured not by sweeping vistas, but by balance sheets and profit margins. Even if the company has a global reach, that reach will be orchestrated virtually, through the keyboard of an office computer.

The set consists of two rows of white work desks facing the audience, with a white armchair atop a raised platform at the rear of the stage. The symbolism is clearly evident; the Comendador will occupy the privileged position and higher vantage point provided by the "throne" and platform at the rear, from where he may observe the villagers, his staff, at work. The symmetry, neatness, and uniformity of the office convey, at least at the outset of the action, a sense of order, efficiency, and even purity as the tidy white desktops and armchair reflect the brilliant, clear light shining down upon them from the silver overhead lamps that hang from the catwalks. Though the desks are all perfectly matching, small details subtly bespeak the individuality and personality of each occupant: the amorous Jacinta's desk sports a red rose in a vase; chatty, boisterous Pascuala's desk lamp is covered with green sticky memos, while a stamp and pad will contribute significantly to the noise level of the office space. An adding machine rests on the cerebral Laurencia's desktop, awaiting her calculations, and in contrast to Jacinta's rose, here we find a prickly cactus, perhaps an allusion to her initial presentation as a *mujer esquiva*[9] and her resistance to the Comendador's advances; Esteban has a file organizer on his desktop, conveying his role as organizer of the office "village". A stand-up multi-feature telephone dominates the ever-loquacious Mengo's desktop. Frondoso's station features a black wire basket filled with reports, which might make one think of the bars or grates of a prison cell, perhaps alluding in a subtle manner to the Comendador's attempts to capture and confine him, and his eventual imprisonment. The rolling chairs provide interesting movement at certain moments, such as when the boys wheel across the aisle to engage the girls in flirtatious banter, only

9. Everett Hesse [1968:316] observes that Laurencia «al principio desdeña a todos los hombres» and does not trust them; an attitude that is confirmed through her exchanges with Mengo, Pascuala, and Frondoso.

to be pushed back to their side as Laurencia counters Frondoso's account of euphemisms used at court with her own string of witty dysphemisms. Finally, a cup dispenser and garbage basket at upstage right demarcate a "water cooler" area where office workers converse, gossip, and share secrets.

More than merely aesthetic, superficial, and "modern", this innovative staging manages to retain many of the spatial notions evident in Lope's text, even though it constitutes, as mentioned, a significant shift in expression. Like an early modern village, this New York workspace is governed by hierarchical structures and a kind of "feudal" system, but with different entities corresponding to the various positions of the social order. The villagers here are office workers; the feudal lords are district or branch managers of the company; the Maestre of the order is the Chief Executive Officer, the God of all is profit, and the overlord's exploitation and abuse of the villagers finds its contemporary urban parallel in the form of workplace bullying and sexual harassment.

While all of the action takes place in this office space, there is another, more conceptual sense of space created through the use of masks and a marked lighting change when the action in Lope's original transpires outside the "village" proper. The first time this occurs is during the scene at the end of the first act in which the Comendador is hunting on the outskirts of Fuenteovejuna and comes across Laurencia (vv. 779-859). The lights go down and the stage is illuminated only by a dim, red-gelled wash and the isolated light given off by two of the desk lamps, one on each side of the stage. The office workers dawn masks of animals —a pig, duck, cow, elephant, giraffe, and fox— and slink between the desks and chairs. The Comendador enters with a rifle, stalking his prey. He discovers Laurencia, now without a mask on, and attempts to rape her, but Frondoso, wearing a fox mask, takes his gun and turns it on him, allowing Laurencia to escape. He exits upstage with the gun, leaving the frustrated Comendador in a rage.

The use of masks within this conceptual space achieves three effects. First, with the exception of Frondoso as the fox, it transforms individual characters into anonymous abstractions that represent the office workers in general, as a mass. For example, when the Comendador appears later, in the second act, after his confrontation with Esteban, dancing and frolicking in this same abstract space with some of the women of Fuenteovejuna (vv.1059-1102), the three actresses in the cast wear the animal masks but we do not interpret them to be Laurencia, Pascuala, or Jacin-

ta. Second, the animal likenesses dehumanize the villagers, casting them as the game or prey of the great hunter, Fernán Gómez. Such a notion is of course amply supported in Lope's text as the villagers are described, at different times and in varying circumstances, by such animal references as «fiera» (v. 601), «carne» (vv. 624-5), «gama» (v. 781), «monstruo» (v. 790), «perro» (v. 830), «caza» (v. 836), «liebre» (v. 959), «ave» (v. 1041), «pez» (v. 1042), «ovejas» (v. 1758), and «gallinas» (v. 1770).[10] Third, when the actors don the masks, the conceptual space created is one in which the characters may indulge their baser instincts of sexuality, violence, and transgression. In the first two scenes done in animal masks, the Comendador is the transgressor; but the final time we see the masks, it is the villagers that transgress and avenge their injuries upon him (see figure 3). I will return to this third scene presently, in my discussion of violence.

Although the symbolic meaning of these hunt scenes is clear, how is the audience to interpret them spatially? Are these scenes a surreal representation of the pursuits, evasions, and transgressions that occur during breaks from work, in meetings in the boss's office, in the parking lot, or in the subtexts of verbal exchanges? Or do they represent the sociopathic "mindscape" of the predatory Comendador satisfying his lust for conquest in his own psychological-emotional happy hunting ground? However the audience decides to interpret this space, it is clear that it is not on the same plane of representation, it is not the same portrayal of reality, as the rest of the action. We are not meant to think that Gómez actually stalks his masked workers through the desks and chairs of the office space. Yet, the transgressions that occur in this space are vital to the play's action and cannot be separated from it. This contradictory space, in which both reality and subconscious id drives seem to be represented, is indeed a "hyper" (excessive, abnormal) reality; it depicts excess and strangeness, combining human and animal, reality and fantasy. It is also a hyperreality in the Baudrillardian sense, as scenes depicted as occurring in this space are simulations, akin to those previously listed and analyzed with the difference that these are enactments (mimesis) while those mentioned before are narrations (diegesis).[11]

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10. William Blue seconds Bruce Wardropper [1956:170-171] in noting the dehumanization that occurs, and that «there is a mutual descent into animal viciousness» (Blue 1991:309, n. 10).

11. Both Plato, at length, and Aristotle, briefly, distinguish between the two modes of representation in drama, diegesis and mimesis. See Plato, *Republic*, book 3, 392d-394c, and Aristotle, *Poetics*, chapter III.1.

Figure 3. The animal-masked office workers kill the Comendador. Photo by Michael Palma, courtesy of Repertorio Español.

In a hyperreal world, space thus becomes conceptual, distances shrink or become insignificant, and simulation results in spatial reduction; again, «miniaturization» is the «dimension» and byproduct of simulation (Baudrillard 1994:2). Space

here, unlike in most renderings of Lope's play, is insular: things occur in an internal landscape; we see no exterior reality. The spatial movement in the Repertorio production contrasts sharply with what occurs in the aforementioned RTVE production. The conclusion of that version seems to usher in a new age of expansion, foreshadowing the movement of Spaniards into ever broadening horizons that historically followed the events depicted in the play. In contrast, Mesri's *Fuenteovejuna* features an insular space and segments that seem to depict a retreat into an internal, psychological landscape. Castillo [2012:5] interprets the king's final declaration, «Y la villa es bien se quede / en mí» (vv. 2446-2447) to mean that the town will be absorbed into the body politic of the monarch. Since there are no monarchs in Mesri's version, these words, relayed by way of the disembodied voice of the CEO of the company, reproduced through speaker phone, might signify that the company will "remain" within the mediums of communication, the instruments and technology that reproduce messages, information, and images. It will exist, in other words, within the parameters of media technology, a compact microcosm defining itself through its own modes of self-representation.

Violence and its simulacra in Mesri's *Fuenteovejuna*

Violence and simulacra relate to each other in many different ways. Simulacra are a byproduct of violence, as violent occurrences occasion the media's reporting and interpretation of the violence, as well as the entertainment industry's profuse reproductions of violence in film, television, and video games. An act of revenge or reciprocal violence is of course a reproduction of violence one has suffered at the hands of another. A simulacrum may be considered a destructive transgression of its original if it distorts or destroys what is thought essential to the original's character. The hyperreal world created by simulacra may contribute to a sense of isolation or loss of identity that drives one to violence.[12] While it may be possible to find

12. «A hyperreality that relies on mass-reproduced images would seem to lack any sense of a solid foundation and thus perpetuate the fractured, inconsistent identity that is characteristic of postmodernism. The lack of "true" self-knowledge leads many of the young protagonists in the Gen X novels to act out in violence as a way of recognizing the very real nature of the human body» (Everly 2010:113).

examples of all of these dynamics in *Fuenteovejuna*, nearly all of the characters' reconstructions of events or information in the play are of the first sort: reports, interpretations, or representations of violence constructed to persuade someone toward a certain attitude or action. Violence either triggers or is the desired objective of most of the simulacra in the play.

With respect to violence and simulacra, Mesri's production differs from other stagings not so much in his characters' reporting of violent events as in his way of simulating violence on stage. Scenes depicting Mengo's punishment, the villagers' rebellion, and their torture at the hands of the inquisitor feature unconventional ways of representing violence that may reflect the contemporary angst of the age of information.

In the second act, Mesri's Mengo, played by Mario Mattei, attempts to defend Jacinta from the Comendador and his men not with a slingshot, but with a staple gun taken from his desktop. Mesri does not change any words; his Mengo mentions «el cáñamo» (v. 1215) and the Comendador says «¡Suelta la honda!» (v. 1233), as in Lope's original, but onstage, these refer to the staple gun the *gracioso* brandishes as a weapon. When Gómez commands, «con ella le atad las manos» (v. 1235), Flores wrests the stapler from Mengo, sits him down, and appears to staple his hands together behind his back, as he cries out in agony. They then take him away to torture him further for his rashness. In the original, the Comendador and his men humiliate Mengo by using his own rustic weapon against him. The Repertorio staging of the scene conveys the same general idea, with Flores using a tool of the office worker's trade against him. The stapler is perhaps emblematic of the dull, mechanical clerical duties a low-level office worker like Mengo must carry out: stapling reports, filing documents, answering calls. The conflict and outcome therefore seem to reinforce the office hierarchy and communicate the powerlessness and vulnerability of the worker of low rank, in addition to expressing how he is bound and tortured by the tedious, repetitious, menial element of his labor.

The murdering of the Comendador has frequently been interpreted in the light of myth and ritual. Various scholars see Gómez as the scapegoat whose sacrifice makes possible the restoration of communal harmony and order (Smith 1993:158-159, Weimer 1996:183, Camino 2004:389-390, Chemris 2010:114). This is problematic since, in the sacrifice mechanism, the *pharmakos* is a surrogate for a plurality of evils plaguing a community, a general social discord brought about by

numerous incidents of reciprocal violence (Girard 1977:94-95), whereas there has been no reciprocity of violence in the village of Fuenteovejuna: the Comendador and his men have inflicted all the violence and are the sole cause of the discord. Gómez is not a surrogate but rather the evil itself, the destructive force that terrorizes the town. Therefore, the villager's act may be interpreted as one of revenge, salvation, or self-preservation, but not ritual sacrifice. Nevertheless, there is merit to the notion that the furious violence of the villagers against Gómez has a cathartic and placating effect on Spanish audiences, thus subtly facilitating their complicity with absolutism (Fischer 1997:60, Smith 1993:158, Chemris 2010:118-119).

The violence against the Comendador is often portrayed as a frenzied Bacchanalian dismemberment, a *sparagmos*, that belies the apparent innocence and docility of the villagers (Smith 1993:150). Lope's text features rapid movement and action (entrances, exits, pursuits) and energetic dialogue dramatizing the confrontation as the characters shout orders and encouragement to one another and threaten their enemies. In Mesri's staging, in contrast, the uprising against the Comendador and his soldiers is done with minimal dialogue, in a slow, eerie, ritualistic manner. At first, we see Flores on the upstage platform holding a noose, about to hang Frondoso, while the Comendador gives him orders from center stage, looking out at the audience. All three are expressionless. The lights dim and the rest of the actors enter wearing animal masks, moving silently, slowly, ceremoniously. They take the noose from Flores, who offers no resistance and exits quietly upstage. They gradually converge on the Comendador at center stage, who turns to see them. Trance-like, they raise their arms and "weapons" — pens, adding machines, staplers, and fists (see figure 3). As they strike the Comendador, the stage goes suddenly to black, and we hear the sounds of animals devouring their prey.

This stylized representation marks a significant departure from the impassioned, chaotic, unbridled rage and wrath that we see in Lope's text and typical performances of this scene. Various factors cause this representation of the murder to have a less visceral and more cerebral effect on the viewer relative to conventional stagings. Mesri cuts out all dialogue after the Comendador orders Frondoso's execution; the scene transpires in unnerving silence. The animal masks give the characters a disquieting, monstrous appearance, and conceal any semblance of emotion on the part of the characters. The movement is mechanical, methodical,

and solemn; there is a sense of order, synchronicity, anonymity, and inevitability in the villagers' movement here that is not evident in Lope's text. The masks and the use of office supplies as weapons provide an element of absurdity, which, while not humorous, causes reflection on the viewer's part. In sum, there is a dispassionate, distancing effect; an estrangement, akin to Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect, which, in contrast to violent stagings that evoke feelings of rage, fear, or catharsis, gives the viewer pause and invites interpretation.[13]

What takes precedence here is not the fact of the killing itself or the blood-thirsty madness of the villagers; rather, the odd imagery of the staging leaves the viewer with both an uneasy feeling and a need to process and evaluate the expression. Numerous elements in the Repertorio dramatization call to mind the imagery and sentiments that Federico García Lorca expresses in his poem "Nueva York (oficina y denuncia)". Lorca writes:

> Todos los días se matan en New York
> cuatro millones de patos,
> cinco millones de cerdos,
> dos mil palomas para el gusto de los agonizantes,
> un millón de vacas,
> un millón de corderos
> y dos millones de gallos
> que dejan los cielos hechos añicos. (pp. 203-204)

He mentions the blood that flows beneath the multiplications, divisions, and sums. He contrasts all that must be slaughtered, sacrificed, and exploited in the name of urban capitalism and consumerism. He denounces, in the concluding segment included at the beginning of this essay, the conspiracy of offices that has wiped out nature, paying no heed to what has been killed or lost.

In Mesri's production, the final stage pictures before the lights go down on the Comendador forever feature images and express ideas similar to those in Lorca's poem. The two expressions share images of animals (among them, duck, pig,

13. Keir Elam [2002:15] notes that Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* was inspired by the Russian formalist notion of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization), and explains: «When theatrical semiosis is alienated, made "strange" rather than automatic, the spectator is encouraged to take note of the semiotic *means*, to become aware of the sign-vehicle and its operations» (emphasis in the original).

and cow), the urban office setting, and the themes of foundational violence, exploitation, and the selfish pursuit of gain. Repertorio's climactic scene shows how the aristocracy's disregard and dehumanization of common workers pushes them to unite and wield the tools of their humble trades as symbols of empowerment.[14] What was used against the workers —stapler, noose, violence— will now be turned upon their abusive, narcissistic overlord. The exploited and overworked, upon whose backs the city has been built and sustained, denounce their abuse and push for a new order.

When the lights come up moments later on the office, the characters no longer wear their masks as they slowly and quietly wipe blood from the floor and their hands. No one speaks, and the mood is somber as the workers begin to feel the gravity of the act they have committed. Again, this contrasts sharply with the celebration, songs, and poems that ensue after the villagers' triumph over Gómez in Lope's text. Here, slowly, the workers start to plan for the investigation that will inevitably take place. They rehearse their evasive response to the interrogation. The inquisitor (Pep Muñoz) appears wearing a tan military uniform, looking like a Latin American dictator. He barks orders through a megaphone to a menacing henchman (Alfonso Rey) dressed in a black trench coat, who goes to the villagers, seated at center stage, spins each around to face the audience and pulls a black blindfold over their eyes in a gesture of torture. Each villager cries out in pain as the torturer tightens the blindfold, but no one implicates any individuals.

Lope's original suggests that this torture is inflicted on the villagers' bodies using racks, wheels, and other instruments of the period. The resulting pain and the death it threatens and prefigures are signs of the real, a concept linked to «the body in its brute physicality» but residing beyond the symbolic and representation (Evans 1996:159-160). Mesri, in contrast, re-conceptualizes torture in a way that is appropriate for a hyperreal setting, where the real is obscured behind a veil of simulations. The binding of the eyes and strangling of the head/brain is fitting in his production because in a world shaped by and dependent upon reproductions of ideas and images, it is, Mesri appears to suggest, particularly agonizing to have one's access to simulacra cut off. The organs of perception, eyes and mind, suffer

14. In his analysis of this scene, Alan Smith [1993:147-148] notes that agrarian tools were often used as weapons in harvest rites that mimicked ritual sacrifice: «Vemos que los mismos instrumentos cortantes con que se hiere el cereal se usarían para cortar al hombre que representa al antiguo dios».

asphyxiation here, resulting in a painful disorientation as characters are blocked from the constructed "reality" they have always inhabited. Mesri again reconfigures the violence in a way that foregrounds notions of representation and interpretation, ideas that are ever-present in the hyperreality he depicts.

Conclusion: Baroque Problems of Representation

William Egginton [2009:144] uses *Fuenteovejuna* to illustrate what he identifies as the «major strategy of the baroque», which «assumes the existence of a veil of appearances and then suggests the possibility of a space opening just beyond those appearances where truth resides». The play does this, he explains, by posing a challenge to commoners regarding whether or not they have honor, then showing them rising to that challenge in order to create a new and more justly governed community for themselves. Egginton [2009:146] adds that there is a «minor strategy» to the baroque as well, which «takes the major strategy at its word, nestling into the representation and affirming it, albeit ironically, not as a reference to a reality but as reality itself». This ironic subversion of the major strategy, he proposes, is exemplified in Cervantes' *Retablo de las maravillas*, which many have seen as critiquing ideal notions of honor and faith that Lope foregrounds in both his religious and secular plays (Gerli 1989, Childers 2004, Nelson 2004).

This minor strategy, which maintains «that we are always, at any level, involved with mediation» (Egginton 2009:146), is, in essence, Baudrillard's notion of hyperreality. As this analysis has shown, close reading shows that *Fuenteovejuna* is constituted by a parade of representations, many of which, in the action of the play, come to take precedence over their "originals". In other words, Egginton's «major strategy» correctly describes Lope's idealization of history and peasant values; but the play deconstructs, revealing the notion Egginton describes in his «minor strategy» by way of a proliferation of dramatized retellings that become the play's "reality". Most notably, at the conclusion, the king (the CEO in Mesri's version), having considered both Flores' and the Fuenteovejunans' competing simulacra of the events, one presenting the villagers as «bárbaros delincuentes» (v. 2011), the other insisting on their «inocencia» (v. 2441), decides to pardon them because no truth, no reality, can be confirmed: «pues no puede averiguarse el suceso por escrito» (vv.

2442-2443). We are left with, in Egginton's own words, a «veil of appearances», behind which no truth resides; in place of any definitive "reality" are the contradicting representations, neither entirely true nor wholly false.

Whether consciously or intuitively, Julián Mesri seems to have picked up on this revelatory aspect of the play's numerous simulations and representations, and foregrounds in his production the same ironic acknowledgement of the mediated nature of our reality that Egginton describes in his «minor strategy».

In his study of Cervantes as a transnational phenomenon, William Childers [2006:IX] relates the author's texts to «pressing concerns of the twenty-first century» and to «contexts beyond Spain and ultimately beyond Europe as well». It is in this same spirit that Mesri sets Lope's *Fuenteovejuna* in 2013 New York. Clearly Mesri's vision for Spanish Golden Age theater involves finding ways in which the works communicate to contemporary audiences, as for him, the classics «no son cosas de museo» (Martorell 2013).

Critics and scholars remain divided with regard to the merit of modernized productions. One director favors a traditional staging, arguing that although "revolutionary" interpretations may be attractive to modern audiences, «Lope's ideas would be warped in the process, particularly the meaning of the Crown» (Hodge 1963:209). As we have seen, however, much scholarship and competing historical chronicles suggest the possibility that Lope's ideas are already "warped": his reproduction of history may have idealized and altered numerous details, above all the actions and motives of the Maestre, the Comendador, and the Reyes Católicos. Perhaps we can deal with both Lope and Mesri most fairly by embracing the notion of adaptation: just as *Fuenteovejuna* is an adaptation based on historical events, so too is Mesri's production an adaptation of Lope's play. In defense of adaptation, Joaquín Casalduero [1959:84] writes:

> The play is there, and the reader or spectator interprets it according to the preoccupations, anxieties and emotions of his own times. This is permissible, especially when we are dealing with the theatre. Actors and audience, critics and readers, do not deform the work of the past: what they do is give it timeliness.

Mesri's timely production successfully adapts elements of Lope's text to a contemporary urban setting, colorfully recasting the conflicts and dilemmas of the original

while wryly commenting on the dehumanizing potential and constructed reality that modern business, media, and technology have created. Mesri is only able to make *Fuenteovejuna* speak to today's audiences, however, because of its timelessness, its ability to express the universal through characters firmly grounded and engaged in their particular moment and place in history.

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