

Edward Avila (Minnesota State University, Mankato)

**The Maquila Complex:
Reification, Disposability, and Resistance in *Maquilapolis: City of Factories***

Abstract

This article considers the ways in which the documentary *Maquilapolis: City of Factories* (2006) critically represents social reification under post-NAFTA maquiladora-led industrialization in Tijuana, Mexico, particularly as it relates to the production and circulation of myths of female obsolescence, disposability, and waste under the neoliberal (b)order. Drawing from the Marxist concept of reification, I demonstrate the ways in which the film largely overcomes the limitations and dangers associated with reified narratives and images that, unwittingly in many cases, rehearse myths of female disempowerment, victimization, and patriarchal dependency in the context of neoliberal industrialization in Tijuana, Mexico. Through a skillfully rendered combination of documentary modes of representation, with particular emphasis on narratives of personhood and human sensuousness, *Maquilapolis* captures the intersecting politico-economic, social, and cultural forces underwriting the proliferation of anti-female terror. In analyzing the narrative strategies deployed in the film, this article discusses how the film engages with the limits and risks associated with reification, including the naturalizing of social inequalities and the so-called immutable and ineluctable laws of neoliberal development in the context of gendered violence occurring within that peculiar neoliberal spatiality referred to here as the “maquila complex.”

Keywords: Border industrialization, Lukács, Marx, *Maquilapolis*, reification, resistance

Thus time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature; it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable 'things' (the reified, mechanically objectified 'performance' of the worker, wholly separate from [her] total human personality).
—Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (1923)

I make objects and to the factory managers I myself am only an object, a replaceable part of the production process... I don't want to be an object. I want to be a person.
—Obrera/Promotora, *Maquilapolis: City of Factories* (2006)

Introduction

In "Body Counts on the Mexico-U.S. Border," Alicia Schmidt Camacho persuasively illustrates the ways in which popular and academic discourses of gendered violence occurring along the Mexico and U.S. borderlands often rehearse reified narratives and images of female disempowerment and disposability. Such discourses and images of feminicide, writes Schmidt Camacho, often "consign the targets of feminicide to an unchanging death-in-life in ways that come dangerously close to rationalizing the violence against them" (24). As a result, proliferating images of violated bodies displace any political recognition of female subjectivity *in life*. Similarly, in "Seeing Through the Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)order," Sandra K. Soto maintains that graphic photographs accompanied by sensationalized and fetishized accounts of the victims of feminicide tend to precondition the viewers' conception of the living as already potentially dead. [1] In light of these observations, we may ask the following questions: To what extent do progressive discourses that attempt to document and critique social injustices fail to recognize and articulate female resistance to gendered violence? How do cultural producers attempt to represent female identity in the context of the gendered order of power operating in the borderlands? How do cultural producers craft narratives of personhood that avoid rehearsing reified narratives of female disempowerment and victimization? Last, what set of narrative strategies do writers and filmmakers use in order to avoid constructing reified accounts of the victims of feminicide and anti-female terror as disempowered, disposable subjects?

I am aware of the structural limitations and risks in offering what some might refer to as another well-intended, however problematic, "globalization discourse," one that Rosa-Linda Fregoso appropriately describes as the conflation of exploited female bodies with their extermination (7-8). [2] While the "exploitation-feminicide" discourse certainly falls short of taking into account the complex political and cultural forces underwriting gendered violence in the border region, we cannot disregard or underestimate the critical insights offered by cultural producers that have drawn and continue to draw critical connections between exploited labor and anti-female terror. [3] Given the complex challenges of representing the intersecting global and local forces underwriting gendered violence in the Mexico and U.S. borderlands, cultural producers—fiction writers, visual

and performance artists, journalists, and intellectuals, among others—have developed innovative and transformative modes of representation that avoid reified, sensationalist accounts of gendered, classed violence. However, in these representations of gendered violence, including graphic images of cadavers, disfigured and exploited bodies, cultural producers often encounter what I refer to as the specter of reification: that complex, ever-present narrative threshold in which reified discourses of disempowerment and non-agency complicate even the most critical and well-intended representations of anti-female terror. Drawing from Laura Gillman’s analysis of cinematic affect, which she refers to as haptic visuality, operating in Lourdes Portillo’s *Señorita Extraviada*, we would do well to consider the ways in which the artistic medium of documentary circumvents or avoids altogether reproducing “discursive systems that are in their own right laden with hegemonic ideologies of gender, race and class that caused the violence in the first place” (“Haptic Visuality” 143). [4] The following essay examines one such innovative and transformative mode of representation that effectively incites critical viewership and empathic engagement while drawing critical connections between neoliberal industrialization and anti-female terror occurring along the Tijuana/San Diego border region—*Maquilapolis: City of Factories* (2006), produced and directed by Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre. [5]

At the risk of committing what Fregoso calls the “synoptic gaze,” a critical approach that fails to take into account multiple intersecting social and cultural forces constituting the conditions for the proliferation of violence against women, I analyze *Maquilapolis: City of Factories* in a manner that reassesses the ways in which this important documentary film engages with the ever-present specter of reification that dangerously represents women as disempowered subjects who are incapable of forging resistance to complex systems of gendered violence in both global and local contexts. While offering a reading of the film through the framework of the “globalization discourse,” it is precisely in engaging with that discourse, that is, the processes of exploited labor, commodity fetishism, and social reification that *Maquilapolis* critically represents violence against women beyond immediate social appearances. [6] In taking this approach, I highlight the subtle, yet powerful, representational modes that interrogate the historically contingent nature of reified identities, subjectivities, and social relations existing within that peculiar spatiality that I refer to in this article as the “maquila complex.” I use the term “maquila complex” to denote the ways in which the film strategically configures the social and environmental ecologies of maquiladora-led industrialization in the border region, within both the assembly plants and the surrounding *colonias*, in which many of the maquila workers reside.

Through a combination of narrative modes of storytelling, including interpersonal video diary, the performative mode of narration, and symbolic appropriation, *Maquilapolis* represents

workingwomen along Mexico's northern border as critical voices that challenge naturalized, asymmetrical gender and class relations under maquiladora-led industrialization. Furthermore, *Maquilapolis* avoids the pitfalls of producing reified accounts that rehearse and reinscribe the loss of *Mexicana* subjectivity, including disempowerment, victimization, and patriarchal dependency. To illustrate this point, I turn to the Marxist concept of reification in order to analyze the complex challenges and contradictions associated with representing feminicide and anti-female terror. Reification offers a critical lens through which to examine how *Maquilapolis* contests the naturalizing of (uneven) social relations and challenges the so-called immutable and ineluctable laws of neoliberal development along the Tijuana-San Diego border region.

1. The Specter of Reification

Though Karl Marx never explicitly articulated a working definition of reification in *Capital*, Volume 1, he provided the groundwork for what would later become a theory of reification. In the well-known section from *Capital*, Volume 1, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret," Marx illustrates the pervasive logic of the commodity form upon human consciousness and social relations. In particular, Marx draws out the ways in which the commodity form constitutes a cultural logic that extends beyond the specific confines of the production process. In relation to commodity production, Marx notes that the "mystery of the commodity form [...] consists in the fact that in it the social character of labor appears to them as an objective characteristic, a social natural quality [sic] of the labor product itself" (463). As Marx directs our attention to the way in which labor takes on a naturalized, objective character, seemingly emerging from the commodity in-and-of-itself, he also emphasizes how the objective character of labor tends to shape social relations in which the capitalist mode of production is the dominant form of social organization. Though the commodity form constitutes a historically specific definite social relation, it is precisely the way in which it takes on Marx's fantastic form of relations between things that the mediating force of the commodity form as a cultural logic comes to the fore. As Marx famously notes: "To the producers, the social relations connecting the labors of one individual with that of the rest appear not as direct social relations between individuals *at work*, but as what they really are, thinglike relations between persons and social relations between things" (463). It is this notion of the mediating force of the commodity form affecting social relations—and concomitantly social consciousness—that I put in relation to what Marx refers to as the "form of appearance," that is, the way in which the commodity form (logic) conceals larger, yet seemingly inconspicuous, uneven social relations under the inescapable laws of neoliberal development in the region. [7]

Georg Lukács' "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" remains one of the most influential discussions on reification. There, Lukács articulates the objective and subjective dimensions of reification as the structural limitation of bourgeois thinking, facilitated by the commodity form within an advanced capitalist mode of production and exchange. And while Lukács offers a provocative theory of the proletariat's privileged capacity to challenge capitalist social relations (deriving from having experienced the violent, structural constraints of the commodity form as exploited, alienated workers), it is his conceptualization of reification as the gradual immiseration of the workers' intellectual faculty, psychological interests, and libidinal investments and the way in which reification likewise, however differently, affects bourgeois consciousness and the bourgeoisie's ability to grasp social totality that warrants special attention in the present study. [8]

Under the structure of commodity relations, Lukács points to the growing trend towards the progressive reduction of the workers' qualitative human attributes. This reduction emerges from more intensified rationalization of the work process as "labor is progressively broken down into abstract, rational, specialized operations so that [...] work is reduced to mechanical repetition of a specialized set of actions" (88). In addition, Lukács offers insightful observations regarding the subjective experience of the principle of rationalization—the fragmentation of the production process that necessarily entails the abstract reduction of the worker, psychologically and intellectually. According to Lukács, the worker no longer appears as the "authentic master of the process," but rather constitutes a mechanical appendage to a seemingly autonomous production process. "As labor is progressively rationalized and mechanized," writes Lukács, "[the worker's] lack of will is reinforced by the way in which [his or her] activity becomes less and less active and more and more *contemplative*. The contemplative stance [...] transforms the basic categories of man's [*sic*] immediate attitude to the world" (89). Unlike its current normative use, Lukács' term "contemplative" refers to how the worker experiences the closed system of commodity production under the principle of rationalization, whereby the worker's creative, intellectual input potentially becomes a risk or impediment to efficient, calculable production. While the work-process appears to function autonomously and outside the control of individual workers under this process, collectively, the possibility of resistance *always already* exists for workers, a reality beautifully captured in the chapter "Somos Promotoras" in the film. Here, however, I want to emphasize the productive relationship between Lukács' notion of the reduction of the worker to an "isolated particle" and what Fredric Jameson refers to as the "reified atomization of capitalist life." Lukács writes:

[T]he objectification of the [workers'] labor-power into something opposed to their total personality [...] is now made into the permanent ineluctable reality of their daily life. Here, too, the personality can do no more than look helplessly while its own

existence is reduced to an isolated particle [...]. [M]echanization makes of them isolated abstract atoms whose work no longer brings them together directly or organically. (90)

In this passage, Lukács emphasizes the extent to which social totality, with respect to both labor and social relations, unravels under the objectification of the workers' labor-power. Contemplation here denotes the way in which human sensuousness (which consists of an array of human attributes, including feeling, thinking, wanting, loving, etc.) become increasingly devalued and closed off under rationalized, mechanized labor processes. It is in this respect that Marcial González's treatment of the Marxist concept of reification opens some intriguing methodological possibilities for analyzing the film's treatment of "reified atomization," particularly in terms of the naturalization of social inequalities and the ineluctable laws of modernization.

In an important study on the politics of form in Chicano novels, Marcial González offers a valuable reworking of the Marxist concept of reification, one that remains grounded in Marx's critique of commodity fetishism and objectification while also broadening the concept to include socio-political rationalities existing under contemporary capitalism. [9] In emphasizing the valuable contribution that reification as a critical perspective holds for helping us understand contemporary processes and forms of ossification, or thing-ification, González's reworking of the term also offers a critical framework for analyzing the various social and cultural *permutations* of reification, a reconceptualization of reification that points directly to socio-political rationalities by which and through which images and narratives of female disempowerment and disposability emerge. González writes:

[R]eification can also be understood in other related ways: the shallowness of perception; the naturalizing of social inequalities; the use of immutable or quantifiable laws to explain history; the categorizing of humans according to phenotype and anatomy; the fragmentation and compartmentalization of productive human activity—a development necessitated by the classifying and rationalizing tendencies of a capitalist mode of production; and, most importantly, the manner in which the logic of commodity fetishism has pervaded every aspect of social life under late capitalism. (10)

While *Maquilapolis* captures in graphic detail the exploitation of female labor and the destruction of the environment resulting from maquiladora export-production, the film emphasizes the ways in which cultural representations of gendered violence link with commodity fetishism and social reification. [10] González's description of reification offers a useful lens to examine how the narrative strategies deployed in the film engage with and, ultimately, resist reified accounts of female disposability, disempowerment, and dependency. In doing so, the film resists constructing reified accounts of female victimization (i.e., subjectivity only *in death*) by capturing and documenting female subjectivity as—to borrow from Schmidt Camacho—"contestation-in-struggle."

Furthermore, as discussed below, González's reworking of the Marxist concept of reification allows us to investigate the way in which the film complicates political discourses that often naturalize social inequalities and justify gender and class differences (and violence) as the inevitable outcome of neoliberal development in the region, particularly as an instance of the so-called immutable and ineluctable laws of historical development *qua* modernization.

In her critique of certain metropolitan discourses of feminicide that rehearse—unwittingly in many cases—narratives of female disempowerment, disposability, and dependency, Alicia Schmidt Camacho demonstrates the critical value that the Marxist concept of reification holds for investigating explanatory discourses of feminicide and anti-female terror. According to Schmidt Camacho, “reification [constitutes] a *technique of representation* linked to new modes of social control in which the image [or narrative] serves to make a given social order or cultural practice appear normal, inevitable, and fixed” (41; emphasis added). When we view reification as “a technique of representation,” particularly as a discursive form of cultural mediation that ascribes specific meanings to acts of gendered violence, we begin to understand the ways in which even the most well-intended representations of feminicide and anti-female terror rehearse and reinscribe narratives of female disposability and consequently justify uneven relations of power as the inevitable outcome of industrialized modernization in the border region. However, if reification constitutes a technique of representation as Schmidt Camacho suggests, then we must also consider the ways in which cultural producers appropriate the semiotics of reification toward unraveling those very reified images and narratives. Put in a different manner, we would do well to consider the ways in which *Maquilapolis* constructs images and narratives of female subjectivity (as agential, empowered activists) linked to critical, artistic modes of representation that challenge and unsettle cultural practices and the established social order as natural, inevitable, and fixed. Before turning our attention to the narrative strategies of the film, let us briefly discuss the historical contexts of maquiladora-led industrialization along Mexico's northern border.

2. Maquiladoras and Border Industrialization

During the early 1940s, U.S. interests in acquiring Mexican labor would redefine U.S.-Mexico political, economic, and cultural relations. The acquisition of Mexican labor within a rapidly emergent U.S. Southwest agri-business established a lasting impact that would not only affect U.S.-Mexico economic relations, but also profoundly shape governmental and public discourses on immigration, border enforcement, and citizenship. With the U.S. mobilizing for war in Western Europe and the Pacific, coupled with severe labor shortages affecting growers, a bi-national agreement between Mexico and the U.S. resulted in the 1942 Bracero Program that permitted U.S.

growers to legally contract Mexican male labor in order to maintain U.S. agricultural productivity during and after the conclusion of the war.

In 1964, twenty-two years after its implementation, the Bracero Program terminated, resulting in approximately 200,000 unemployed braceros. As a way of confronting high unemployment and putting into productive activity this large reserve army of labor, the Mexican government implemented in 1965 the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) (Lugo 70). While the Mexican government lauded maquiladora assembly production as a successful model of economic development, critics from both sides of the border have pointed out a number of social and environmental disruptions associated with maquiladora-led industrialization, many of which are addressed in *Maquilapolis: City of Factories*.

We should note that throughout the 1980s, economic growth in Latin America relied heavily on external borrowing as a number of countries faced difficulty balancing budgets and paying off loans. [11] Increased capital diffusion in Latin America proved devastating for peasant societies engaged in modes of production oriented toward subsistence and full employment rather than capitalist modes of efficient output and maximum profit. As David G. Gutiérrez points out, “[t]he proliferation of maquiladora industries has not only added to the skyrocketing population of Mexico’s northern tier states, but has also contributed to the uprooting of women and men from traditional occupations and attachment to the land” (65). With the development of offshore manufacturing and the concomitant destruction of peasant communities via capitalization and enclosure, large populations faced limited means of subsistence, resulting in regional and long-distance migrations.

During the 1980s, multinational corporations established a major presence along Mexico’s northern border region. The devaluation of the Mexican peso yielded lower wages for workers and, therefore, a cheaper and more flexible labor force for multinationals. Moreover, the shift in the gender dimension of labor constituted one of the more significant and unforeseen transformations associated with the maquiladora model, particularly when put in the context of BIP initiatives. In the context of feminized labor, many women working in assembly-line production encountered various forms of physical and psychological abuse, including sexual harassment, forced sterilization, exposure to toxic chemicals, and long, arduous repetitive tasks re-shaping and de-forming the body to the point of perceived obsolescence and disposability. Labor exploitation in the maquiladora industry emerges from a complex, violent interaction of local and global forces where uneven relations of power between supervisors and assembly-line workers are grounded on culturally-defined differences based on gender, race, and class (Wright 49-59). Efforts by the State

and the maquiladora industry to survey and to discipline labor and working-communities residing in proximity to the plants form a crucial aspect of the unsettling relationship between political-economic techniques of neoliberal governing and violence against workingwomen in the border region. In order to examine the ways in which *Maquilapolis* represents this violent relationship, I turn to the Marxist concept of reification, which offers insightful analytic possibilities.

3. Narratives of Personhood

Maquilapolis: City of Factories represents the complex relationship between social reification and violence against poor, racialized maquila workers in Tijuana, Mexico during the post-NAFTA era. The film documents the relations of production and environmental degradation associated with maquiladora-led industrialization along the Tijuana/San Diego border region from the perspective of the maquila workers and activists (*obreras* and *promotoras*, respectively) actively engaged in bi-national and international movements for economic, political, and social justice under so-called neoliberal development in the region.

By offering up-close and intimate video diaries of their living and working conditions, Carmen Durán and Lourdes Luján document their struggles against maquiladora-labor exploitation and social domination. In the film, Carmen and Lourdes represent millions of *obreras* working for poverty wages in transnational factories globally. The conditions of labor documented in the film represent what Marx refers to as abstract, alienated labor—characterized effectively through the trope of mechanized, reiterative production whereby the laborer is disassociated from the products of her own labor.

Carmen and Lourdes' videographic diary constitutes an effective rhetorical strategy that captures the daily instantiations of ecological damage and gender violence. Through a complex, hybrid narrative form that oscillates among the expository, observational, and performative/poetic modes of documentary filmmaking, *Maquilapolis* offers a critical and transformative approach to documenting the ecological and sociological effects of maquiladora-led industrialization in the Tijuana border region.

Rather than representing the featured *maquila* workers (*obreras*) as passive, objectified narrative subjects—in which the expository mode of narration inadvertently speaks for the *obreras*, thus framing them as voiceless, yet hyper-visible, subjects—the film strategically uses a series of interpersonal video diaries produced by the workers/activists themselves. Through this strategic narrative approach, both Carmen Durán and Lourdes Luján come to articulate in their own voices the personal and collective struggles against labor abuses, against environmental destruction, and

against the widespread class oppression and patriarchy operative within maquiladora production. In order to delineate the way in which this hybrid mode of narration effectively resists reproducing reified accounts of female disempowerment and disposability, I focus on two distinct narrative approaches: interpersonal video dairies and choreographed performances. As I demonstrate below, a skillful narrative hybrid of the performative/poetic modes of documentary representation allows for symbolic appropriation of reification. Taking our cue from Lukács, it is precisely in the “reified, mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker” that the film begins to demystify the mysterious, concealing power of reification.

In considering the film’s modes of narration, I turn to Bill Nichols’ conceptual outline of key narrative conventions of documentary filmmaking. Nichols identifies six modes of documentary narration, of which the expository, the observational, and the performative/poetic are relevant to our discussion of the film. The “voice of God” or voiceover commentary approach characterizes the *expository mode*. Other conventions associated with the expository mode include verbal commentary with visual accompaniment, which serves to provide a counterpoint to oral narration and evidentiary argumentation. This mode is most often associated with documentary film in general. The *observational mode* is characterized by the “window on the world” narration in which filmmakers observe moments of the social world as they occur. In doing so, the filmmakers attempt to capture the energy and motion of social activity. Typically this mode does not employ voiceover, non-diegetic sound, interviews, or performance for spectators for the audience. As a purely observational approach, this mode attempts to observe social action and to allow viewers to infer their own conclusions. In the *performative mode*, the filmmaker may emerge as a participant. More importantly, this mode highlights the subjective or expressive aspect of the filmmaker’s own involvement with the subject matter of the film (e.g., the subjective aspect of the filmmaker’s involvement with the narrative construction of the film, particularly Carmen’s videography in *Maquilapolis*, which offers both a personal and communitarian perspective unique to workingwomen in the region). Stressing tone and mood, this mode attempts to capture the specificities of personal experience in order to provide a more nuanced and complex articulation of more general social and historical processes at work. We should note that the performative mode may combine elements of various documentary modes—in this case the poetic mode—in order to draw connections between subjective, experiential knowledge and the more general understandings of society and the world. The *poetic mode*, like the performative, strives for subjective expression by using lyrical and rhythmic formal elements in order to capture a more experiential perspective.

While *Maquilapolis* does not resemble experimental or avant-garde film, it does emphasize symbolic association as well as tonal and rhythmic qualities, particularly when combined with the

performative mode. [12] The performative mode of documentary filmmaking “emphasizes the subjective or expressive aspect of the filmmaker’s own involvement with a subject [which] rejects notions of [objective certitude] in favor of evocation and effect” (Nichols, *Introduction* 32). Although the performative mode of documentary narration constitutes arguably the most innovative approach to addressing reification, we must also attend to the ways in which the film reconfigures the expository and observational modes of narration, a strategic approach that likewise represents the agential and empowered subjectivity of workingwomen within maquiladora production.

The opening scene from *Maquilapolis* combines the observational and participatory modes of narration, an approach that offers a window to the world of maquiladora production as it captures the sense of the social and political situation of the principle videographer, Carmen Durán. Prior to the opening credits, Carmen offers an “underground shot” of the interior of an unidentified maquila, which includes the sight and sounds of production machinery, the *obreras* at work along the assembly-line, and the well-kept yet grey, austere environs of the shop floor. Interestingly, the filmmakers deliberately and strategically construct a captivating narrative by allowing the viewer an unauthorized look into a maquila plant. While the scene lasts only several seconds, offering little indication of exploited feminized labor, it nonetheless symbolically represents an important, however subtle, act of resistance—one that we might refer to as a clandestine, videographic performance.

In capturing on film the interior space of a maquila plant, Carmen offers an insightful and poignant narrative of her arrival to Tijuana: “My name is Carmen Durán. I am a maquiladora worker. I have worked in nine assembly plants. I was 13 years old when I arrived in Tijuana. I was alone here [...] and I decided to stay” (*Maquilapolis*). Immediately, the film begins by constructing what Schmidt Camacho refers to as “narratives of personhood” that unsettle cosmopolitan discourses of disempowerment and disposability. [13] If in fact, as Schmidt Camacho suggests, “the obrera represents zero degree subjectivity tied to the undifferentiated violence and tedium of the border space, a subjectivity that can only be recuperated in death” (25), then we must consider the way in which Carmen’s videographic performance begins to articulate greater subjectivity through “contestation-in-struggle.” It is in this subtle, yet powerfully suggestive narrative that issues of dispossession, relocation, and re-settlement emerge. In offering an account of her present working condition, Carmen’s personal narrative suggests important questions related to the historical conditions that make possible dispossession, migration, and long-term resettlement, including the following: From where did she migrate—can we assume a singular point of departure? What constitutes “home” for Carmen—might we perceive Tijuana as her “home”? Does Tijuana constitute an unhomey site? [14] Under what material conditions was she compelled to migrate to

Tijuana? Why at age thirteen? To what extent do these relocations speak of labor insecurity and the devaluation of women assembly-line workers of both mass and flexible systems of production?

State and corporate discourses of socio-economic development (i.e., neoliberal modernization) often gloss over such personal accounts of proletarianized labor that speak to experiential knowledge of the limitations and dangers associated with maquiladora-led industrialization in the border region. It is precisely the way in which *Maquilapolis* constructs a highly personal yet community-oriented narrative that the film draws critical connections between local and global forces underwriting gendered, class violence within that peculiar neoliberal spatiality I refer to as the maquila complex.

Immediately following the opening credits, Carmen captures on film the intimate spaces of her home where viewers are introduced to her son, whose charming curiosity about the hand-held camera offers a momentary relief, just as it offers a personal account of everyday life at home, from the seriousness and gravity of the film's critical content. In capturing the ingenuity of making do with limited resources without falling prey to romantic idealizations of the working poor, Carmen offers a glimpse of what daily life holds for those residing within the maquila complex. In presenting herself as a working single mother of three young children, Carmen disrupts State-sponsored discourses of blame, most notably the *maqui-locas* discourse, whereby the victims of feminicide are presumed to live a "double life" or *una vida doble* characterized by a life of work during the day and of prostitution or sexual self-objectification at night. Yet, we must be careful not to project this image of mother and children in heteronormative terms, as such an image can be easily appropriated to maintain State-sponsored claims about appropriate female conduct, ones predicated upon patriarchal and heterosexual notions of domestic and public female behavior and display. In her insightful analysis of the "Tres Marías Syndrome," Alicia Gaspar de Alba informs us of the ways in which patriarchy frames the *obrero* as the very source of feminicide. The *maqui-loca* figure, as Gaspar de Alba points out, discursively transfigures or, more precisely, transmogrifies workingwomen into independent, transgressive women afflicted by "close contact with the libertine ways of *el norte*" (80). In associating so-called female independence (*qua* promiscuity) with "First World" moral depravity, the *maqui-locas* discourse insidiously maintains a culture of impunity that rehearses critiques of globalization in the service of reproducing an ethic of appropriate female conduct. While the film may initially appear to rehearse notions of heteronormative conduct with images of mother and children in domestic context, ultimately the film portrays workingwomen as agential and empowered subjects who perform multiple, complex roles as workers, activists, educators, documentarians, caretakers, and heads of household.

Seconds later, Carmen takes us on an excursion into her neighborhood, or *colonia*, where the struggles of daily life are immediately captured on film as she tracks the movement of a dented, worn pickup truck (emblazoned with the words “Policía”) struggling along a rutted, unpaved road. Shortly afterward, Carmen offers a rather stunning panoramic view of her neighborhood, *Lagunitas*, a maquila plant overlooking the makeshift houses and dirt roads of the shantytown below. From a lower angle, in closer proximity to the factory shot in the previous segment, the camera zooms in on a Sony plant, again perched high on the hilltop, securely fortified, in panoptic view. While this segment constitutes only a fraction of her entire video diary, it nonetheless provides a stunning cartography of uneven social relations associated with maquiladora-led industrialization in this particular border region. In focusing on Carmen’s documentary depiction of the social ramifications of environmental degradation, I draw critical connections between narratives of personhood and socio-political abandonment. While some viewers may too easily interpret the setting as mere background, wherein people and objects are simply contained or confined within this specific social environment, others may see the way in which Carmen’s videography brings into relief this peculiar spatial organization (or spatiality) that constitutes and sustains uneven relations of power, a subtle, yet powerful visual account that situates the buildings, homes, and people—in short, infrastructure—at the center of her narrative. As the shiny, modernized architectural structures adorned with lush green lawns and spacious parking lots (equipped, of course, with an army of well-trained guards and other security technologies) tell a story of unimpeded economic development in the region, the lived experiences of those surviving in the shantytowns below convey quite a different account.

Though Achille Mbembe’s critique of contemporary colonial occupation in “Necropolitics” may appear unrelated and therefore unsuited for an analysis of *Maquilapolis*, his discussion of vertical sovereignty and territorial fragmentation nonetheless proves instructive when thinking about the ways in which the “natural” environment (including waterways, hilltops, and valleys) are politically transformed and, more importantly, transfigured in the film into nodes or “outposts” of discipline and containment. Mbembe suggests that “high ground offers strategic assets not found in valleys (effectiveness of sight, self-protection, panoptic fortification that generates gazes to many different ends)” (28). However subtle and unassuming, I find most impressive the way in which Carmen captures on film the verticality of power and territorial fragmentation represented in the spatial juxtaposition between the maquila plants and the *colonias*. In capturing the ways in which this particular spatiality of power is expressed through mechanisms of vertical sovereignty and territorial fragmentation, the scene draws critical connections between the maquila complex (as a specific neoliberal spatiality) and political abandonment. It is in the context of political abandonment, however, that the notion of restricted sense (or sensuousness) offers insights into

the ways in which the *obreras* and *promotoras* featured in the film not only articulate narratives of resistance to neoliberal developmental policy, but, equally important, illustrate how “contestation-in-struggle” constitutes a lived process of reification and therefore the material and discursive condition upon which that very resistance emerges.

4. Human Sensuousness

In revisiting Marx’s theory of the sensuous, political economist Massimo De Angelis’ discussion of commodity fetishism offers some interesting and provocative insights for thinking about the relationship between human sensuousness, abstract labor, and reification. His analysis of Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism highlights two key concepts developed in *Capital*, Volume 1: commodity fetishism and the “form of appearance” of social relations under capitalism. In an excellent essay on the often-concealed relationship between commodity fetishism and social relations, De Angelis offers an insightful discussion on the distinctions and connections between actually existing forms of labor and the form labor appears to take. In revisiting Marx’s concept of human sensuousness, De Angelis suggests that Marx’s notion helps to distinguish real relations of production from so-called “mechanistic and economic approaches” such that it brings to the fore “the question of *praxis* and human emancipation” (7). De Angelis points out that the concept of the sensuous in Marx is a confirmation of human reality grounded in what Lukács refers as the totality of historically-determined social relations. Human sensuousness, Marx reminds us, “come[s] into being only through the existence of their *objects*, through *humanized* nature” (De Angelis 8).

The significance of human sensuousness is an important, but perhaps underappreciated, conception of social relations in Marxist scholarship. As De Angelis contends:

[T]he “sensuous” is in Marx the [...] confirmation of “human reality” and manifests itself in a plurality of ways: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, contemplating, wanting, acting, loving [...]. What makes an individual human is what makes an individual a sensuous-being, not only a being with senses, but a being able to act upon these senses, to shape them, to educate them, to refine them. (7-8)

While this notion of the sensuous human experience in the context of class struggle may appear rather commonsensical and nostalgic, by situating Marx’s concept of sensuousness in relation to social constraint and restricted sense, De Angelis offers a valuable perspective through which to discuss how the film performs restricted sense as a radical critique of the processes of reification. Material need and necessity, De Angelis argues, can impose a determining influence upon human sensuousness and the way in which social subjects come to experience the totality of their personal and collective social existence. It is in this context that De Angelis introduces the idea of

social constraint in developing a conceptual understanding of “restricted sense” or “restricted sensuousness.” If restricted sense or sensuousness emerges from social constraint, then we must attend to how reification emerges from conditions of socio-economic constraint.

From the perspective of Capital, labor is sensuous-less, external objectivity to be deployed and appropriated toward generating ever-greater surplus value and profit. Experienced through seemingly autonomous, de-personalized productive technologies and procedures, the reiterative movements of assembly-line production emerge as de-humanizing activity. Yet, from the perspective of the workers, their activity—however de-humanizing and constrained—is never entirely sensuous-less; it is an experiential contradiction, or, as De Angelis suggests, a fundamental contradiction “between an activity which carries the burden of a restricted sensuousness and the reality of sensuous needs, sensuous desires, and sensuous aspirations” (11). Yet, how is the question of commodity fetishism and reification relevant to this analysis of the film? It is relevant to the extent that it offers a critical lens for viewing capitalist social relations and the way these relations are comprehended and acted upon.

Rather than situating the abstract simply in terms of false consciousness, the abstract must be understood as constituting a sensuous activity existing within socio-economic constraint. Restricted sense under conditions of socio-economic constraint nevertheless constitutes a lived experience, a concrete experience—that is, a sensuous experience. The commodity form, in other words, is not simply an external process of objectification, but rather is a *living process* of being transformed into objectified subjectivities (13). Productive activity presents itself for the worker as a *lived process of reification* within the rationalized workspace of maquila production. From this perspective, we come to understand how the abstract (e.g. abstract labor) indicates a sensuous activity, however contemplative; to borrow from Lukács, the worker stands in relation to the principle of rationalization. Even under such conditions of constraint, sensuous activity nonetheless constitutes “a lived experience in which human sensibility is confined and restricted to one dominant character (9)—abstract labor. Despite this reductive process that makes possible images and narratives of female obsolescence and disposability, social contradiction complicates the notion of reification as “locked into a prison house” (González 12) with no possibility of moving beyond or escaping reification. [15] Put differently, it is precisely through contradiction (and the symbolic appropriation of that contradiction) that a critique of reification takes form in the film. If looking at labor from the perspective of restricted sensuousness and social contradiction entails acknowledging the lived experience of the worker as consciously experienced alienation and abstraction, then I propose looking at the ways in which the film literally takes up this lived experience through performance. To illustrate this point, let us turn to the chapter “Somos Promotoras.”

In “Somos Promotras,” directors Funari and De La Torre draw particular attention to the seemingly instrumental and mundane uniforms worn by the maquila workers, particularly the *obreras* of assembly-line production. Traveling by an industrial park in the Otay Mesa region of the border, Carmen lectures to a van full of activists about the color-coded scheme of the smocks worn by maquila workers. As a group of workers enters the factory, Carmen informs her audience that the color of the smock identifies your rank and “place” in the factory: “They see your color and they know who you are: group leader, supervisor, or just an operator” (*Maquilapolis*). As the scene highlights the significance of the color scheme by acknowledging each worker’s position and status within the maquila plant, it also appears to establish the subjectivity of the workers as abstract, reified labor. Even in its heterogeneity (i.e. group leaders, supervisors, operators) the images of workers moving in and out of the maquila plant appear to frame the workers through a kind of standardized, universal, or identical imagery. This subtle yet peculiar image of homogenous labor effectively sets up a later (and significantly related) scene in which the filmmakers appropriate the very color-coded smocks used in the factory in order to illustrate the ways in which this scheme not only demarcates and discursively encloses the subject of maquila labor as abstract, objectified “things” of maquila production, but also signals organizational efficiency and calculability. And while the film certainly engages with the commodity logic of neoliberal industrialization, arguably to the point of rehearsing and therefore reproducing that very logic, the color-coded smock scene performs a transformative function in indicating the degree to which sensuous human productivity becomes reduced to a restrictive and reductive form of being, signified in the figure of the expendable, disposable *obrero*. My objective, however, is to illustrate the ways in which the filmmakers, both the directors and *obreras/promotoras*, establish the importance of the color-coded smocks that sets up the following scene that I believe constitutes one of the most artistically rendered forms of radical critique and resistance to reification in the film.

In the following scene, Funari and De La Torre carefully position a set of individual smocks of varying colors in and around various parts of downtown Juárez and the surrounding *colonias* located in proximity to the maquila plants. For example, the filmmakers place a blue smock upon a wire hanger perched high above an overpass located near a maquila plant. As the blue smock sways to a mild breeze upon the overpass, the voice of an *obrero* interrupts this seemingly tranquil and innocent reverie: “I am from the state of Michoacán. There are no jobs there like we have here” (*Maquilapolis*). Subsequent images of different color-coded smocks run in succession as the voices—and only the voices—of *obreras* accompany each of the different smocks on display: “I am from Guadalajara, Jalisco;” “I am from Sola de Vega, Oaxaca;” “I am from Mazatlán;” “I was born in Sinaloa” (*Maquilapolis*).

In their apparent simplicity and directness, these five-second vignettes appear to offer little by way of radical critique. Some may argue that this sequence of image and voice unwittingly rehearses and reinscribes the very structure of domination that the film intends to critique. On the contrary, I suggest that the scene carefully deconstructs the processes of abstraction and reification by appropriating the very objects and symbols of abstract, reified labor. In doing so, this scene of carefully juxtaposed image and voice unmoors the mysterious power of the color-coded smocks. While the scene remarkably places the smocks in visual relief it also offers a symbolic index of the extent to which erased subjectivity is figuratively linked to the color-coded smocks. By appropriating the very symbols of abstract, reified labor, and the power that it holds in constructing and shaping discourses of female identity and subjectivity within and outside of the factory, the scene appropriately identifies workingwomen of neoliberal industrialization as agential, influential mediators of socio-economic development in the region. The essence of Capital's power lies in its ability to operate reclusively as a natural, universal organizing principle. If the commodity-form and reification directly shape individual and collective identity and subjectivity, then we would do well to investigate the ways in which the film represents such commodified, reified relations through images of subjectified commodities and objectified individuals.

In a segment from "Bienvenidos a Tijuana," which I refer to as the "flyback" scene, the film beautifully captures, through a hybrid narrative style—combining the performative and expository modes—the lived process of social constraint and reification. In analyzing this scene, I consider the ways in which the filmmakers come to represent social constraint, restricted sensuousness, and abstract, reified labor through narrative juxtaposition. For those familiar with the film, recall the use of the expository mode as the voice-over narration offers a brief history of the emergence of the maquiladora industry since the implementation of BIP. Continuing with the expository narrative mode, the camera then focuses on an overpass sign that reads: "Tijuana, la Capital Mundial de la Television" or "Tijuana, World Capital of the Television."

The narrative device of visual juxtaposition again draws our attention to the way in which this scene dramatizes the objectification of individual subjects, or what we might refer to as objectified labor, a position which assumes a contemplative stance in which the object produced and the producer of the object conflate into a singular form, i.e., the commodity. Here, the "flyback" (television part) and the worker (Carmen) are literally and figuratively put into relation with one another in such manner that the distinction melts into thin air. This performative sequence begins innocently enough with a television rotating on top of a draped circular table. However, as we view the back of the television, the internal parts of the television immediately come into focus. It is at this moment that the commodity as *product* and the commodity as *laborer* figuratively become indistinguishable. And yet, as Carmen rotates on the display turntable, the internal (and typically

concealed) parts that make up the television come into full view with the “flyback” held in Carmen’s hands. It is also at this moment that the fusion (or conflation) of the object of labor and the objectified laborer takes place, that is to say, the objects of production are revealed undifferentiated upon the rotating table display.

In “Bienvenidos a Tijuana,” the filmmakers offer an aerial view of ten *maquila obreras* in straight line performing the tasks of assembly-line production in synchronous, mechanical efficiency. The soundtrack constructs a pulsating rhythmic drone that marks a distinctive sonic hybrid between early twentieth-century, Fordist production and twenty-first century, advanced, automated production. As the camera slowly makes its way toward a frontal view of the *obreras*, close-up shots of arms and hands performing the repeating, yet fluid motion of the assembly-line process dominate the screen. The performance draws to a close as the *obreras* conclude the assembly process, drawing fistful hands to their sides, bodies upright, faces expressionless—mechanical.

This carefully constructed performance represents not only a beautifully rendered enactment of the repetitive, mechanical motion of assembly-line work, but also the ways in which abstract, reified labor extends beyond the confines of the shop floor. That the performance is carefully placed in an open valley outside and in front of the maquila plant (situated in the background) deserves greater attention in at least two ways. First, the visual and spatial organization consisting of laboring bodies, open land, and factory (*mise-en-scène*) beautifully captures that specific topography of power alluded to earlier in our discussion of vertical sovereignty and territorial fragmentation. The image of the *obreras*’ mechanical movement and posture in relation to the plant located above in the distance illustrates the uneven and violent relations of power inscribed and embedded in the visual landscape. Second, the performance illustrates what Marx refers to as human labor power revealed in the specific form of its expenditure. In this performance, the film brings to our attention the actual reifying process of abstract labor. Drawing from De Angelis’ analytic insight, human activity presents itself as a *lived process of reification* as these seemingly contemplative, mechanical appendages of capitalist production enact restricted sensuousness in “clashing opposition with the humanity of the subjects as sensuous beings” (13).

Conclusion

Though it is difficult to argue that the film offers a representational account of an alternative socio-economic totality with its own systems and institutions, it certainly offers, as Lisa Lowe might suggest, an alternative “spatial imaginary” that performs “a fiction of community” and that

effectively “comments upon the capitalist social relations that exist, defamiliarizing those social relations as artificial, as relations that could be transformed through political action” (11-12). The process of defamiliarization via the appropriation of the semiotics of reification thus becomes a vital political action in the film, one that underscores the violent artificiality of social relations under maquiladora-led industrialization along the Tijuana borderlands. Throughout the film, Carmen, Lourdes, and their compañeras-in-solidarity (*promotoras*) represent the remarkable power and efficacy of women’s struggles against local and global structures and institutions of gendered violence and class oppression operating under neoliberal restructuring along the borderlands. In documenting the struggles for fair labor practices, for greater environmental protection, and for greater dignity for all workers in the region, Carmen and Lourdes emerge as full, complex individuals-in-community whose subjectivity materializes *in life*, that is, through “contestation-in-struggle.” The *obreras* and *promotoras* fighting for socio-economic justice constitute a growing number of “non-State actors operating as a transnational advocacy network” that, as Lisa Lowe suggests, “target the governmentality—the larger set of social disciplines that includes state institutions, corporate industry, media discourse, border policing, and social norms themselves—that results in the treatment of the border[lands] as a zone of disposable rights” (18).

While the film’s critical representation of violence against women constitutes an important move toward fostering greater social awareness of gendered violence in the borderlands for English speaking audiences, filmmakers nonetheless encounter what I refer to as the specter of reification. The difficulties that arise from the apparent impossibility of transcending reified images and narratives of victimhood, disempowerment, and loss of subjectivity have motivated cultural producers to create innovative and transformative modes of representation. In deploying a set of transformative narrative strategies, including interpersonal videography, innovative approaches to modes of documentary filmmaking, and symbolic appropriation, *Maquilapolis* achieves a level of rhetorical efficacy that directs our attention to the daily instantiations of State-sponsored violence. *Maquilapolis*, like Lourdes Portillo’s *Señorita Extraviada*, a critically acclaimed and influential documentary that investigates the intersecting political, economic, and social forces reproducing violence against women in Ciudad Juárez, successfully avoids rehearsing reified narratives of disempowerment by virtue of emphasizing “radicalization rather than victimization,” forged by a skillfully rendered filmic narrative that “gives voice to women’s agency” (Fregoso 26). Last, in the midst of gendered, classed violence and grassroots contestations against patriarchy and neoliberal restructuring, the film offers a passionate and thoughtful counter-narrative that foregrounds the specificities of sensual, corporeal labor exploitation, environmental racism, and socio-political abandonment of those deemed “free” to work and reside within the maquila complex.

Endnotes

[1] See Sandra K. Soto "Seeing Through Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)order." *Latino Studies* 5 (2007). On this point, Soto writes, "the photographs of people who are (still) alive are in many ways more haunting than those of corpses; images of living people are images of people who are not yet dead" (424).

[2] "The Maquila Complex" draws from Rosa-Linda Fregoso's critique of the interpretive discourses of femicide and disappearance, in particular two dominant discourses which we may refer to as "discourses of morality" and "discourses of globalization." While the former discourse imposes a moral interpretation that blames the victims for their deaths due to the apparent violation of traditional, patriarchal gender forms of conduct and behavior, the latter constitutes a unifying trope for explaining the brutal murders that, as Fregoso reminds us, represents a gross conflation of exploited gendered bodies with their extermination. And while Fregoso's insightful critique of these two dominant narratives offers an approach that brings into critical focus the ways in which these dominant discourses rehearse and re-inscribe the very structure of power undergirding violence against women, I fear that such an approach potentially underestimates the extent to which the intersecting forces of economic globalization and state sovereignty reproduce in complex ways the conditions of possibility of violence against mostly racialized, poor women in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

[3] See Jane Caputi and Diana E. H. Russell "Femicide: Sexist Terrorism against Women," in *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Twayne, 1992) on the definition of anti-female terror. Caputi and Russell define anti-female terror as follows: "Femicide is on the extreme end of the continuum of anti-female terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse such as rape, torture, sexual slavery (particularly prostitution), incestuous and extra familial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment (on the phone, in the streets, at the office, and in the classroom), genital mutilation (clitoridectomies, excision, infibulations), unnecessary gynecological operations (gratuitous hysterectomies), forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, forced motherhood (by criminalizing contraception and abortion), psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery and other mutilations in the name of beautifications. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicide" (15).

[4] In "Haptic Visuality in Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada*: Towards an Affective Activism" published in this volume, Laura Gillman reminds us of the challenges facing cultural producers concerned with provoking empathic engagement. As Gillman astutely asks, how might cultural producers, particularly documentary filmmakers, construct representational structures capable of engendering viewer empathy? Another consideration is the extent to which cultural producers are capable of inciting critical awareness and emphatic engagement outside of entrenched hegemonic systems. On this Gillman writes, "The remote audiences in the United States and Europe would be composed of people whose everyday lives and concerns are disconnected from the atrocities [of gendered violence, whether it be femicide or anti-female terror], and additionally, whose own identity statuses as citizens of countries benefitting from a neoliberal logic might lead them to be more susceptible to believing the causes supplied by state officials within the media footage" (143).

[5] While new aspects of globalization have emerged with neoliberalism since the early 1970s, globalization and neoliberalism denote two distinct, however related, sets of political-economic mechanisms. Globalization refers to the centuries-old process of the internationalization of the world economy marked by exploitation, international expansionism, and political intrigue. Neoliberalism, in contrast, refers to new (de)regulations and rules of contemporary capitalism that pervade every aspect of socio-economic life, including an ethos of individual prudentialism captured in discourses of hyper-individualism, individual responsabilization, and, for the marginalized, discourses of personal (but certainly not collective or social) blame and punish. My use of the term "neoliberalism" denotes the political economy of the Mexico and U.S. border since the implementation of NAFTA in 1994. Earlier forms of neoliberalism along Mexico's northern border, most notably Ciudad Juárez, however, appeared in 1965 with the implementation of the Border Industrial Program (BIP).

[6] See Steven Volk and Marian Schlotterbeck "Gender, Order, and Femicide: Reading the Popular Culture of Murder in Ciudad Juárez," in *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010). As Volk and Schlotterbeck suggest, "The exploitation of gendered bodies cannot adequately explain the murder of gendered bodies. Nevertheless, the murder cannot be understood without

recognizing the specific ways that *maquila* development has shaped both the political and sexual economy of the border” (28).

[7] In *Capital*, Volume 1, Marx offers the basic elements for a theory of reification in the well-known section from Chapter 1, “The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret.” Marx highlights two related aspects of commodity fetishism relevant to our discussion of reification. First, Marx identifies the commodity-form as a mysterious social configuration or arrangement that appears in objective form severed from its historically determined and socially constructed nature. It is precisely in the form of its appearance that the commodity inverts the real social character out of which the commodity is produced and exchanged in the market. Second, Marx notes the way in which the commodity-form performs, if you will, a seemingly *a priori* ontology in which the value of the commodity appears as that which is inherent and intrinsic to the commodity itself. Consequently, emerging from this peculiar system of valuation, the commodity-form progressively mediates relations among producers, concealing those particular and unique forms of human expenditure, including “human sensuousness” that Massimo De Angelis discusses in his work on commodity fetishism, required to produce commodities for exchange and consumption on the market.

[8] See Fredric Jameson “Commodification.” *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009). Jameson suggests that “the effect of reification on the bourgeoisie [...] lies in the *constriction* of the idea and the experience of society visible in the various specializations and disciplines” (263, emphasis added). As a result of this ideological (en)closure, bourgeoisie consciousness, in general, fails to grasp the totality of social relations under advanced capitalism and “from experiencing the blinding reality of class struggle” (263). Moreover, there exists an interesting connection between the notion of “constriction” alluded to above and De Angelis’ discussion of “restricted sense,” a connection that marks the way in which the proletariat, however restricted in the sense of experiencing the totality of the production process and social relations, is endowed with the structural possibility of grasping social totality. On the structural possibility of the proletariat overcoming the limits of the commodity-form and reification, Jameson writes: “The force that was a limitation for those who merely profit from and live off social production without themselves engaging in it will be the source of truth for the exploited producers themselves. In this way Lukács rejoins the Hegel of the Master/Slave dialectic, for whom ultimately the Master is abandoned to sterile enjoyment, while the Slave’s praxis is also productive of truth itself” (263-264).

[9] Rosemary Hennessy and Moishe Postone claim that reification constitutes “a logic that binds ways of knowing and forms of identity.” And as a dominant cultural logic, reification “remain[s] bound to the forms of appearance of capitalist social relations, thereby hypostatizing or naturalizing those social relations,” which over time, according to Marx, gains an objective reality (qtd. in González, 10-11).

[10] In *Chicano Novels and the Politics of Form*, I find González’s discussion of the structural embeddedness and pervasiveness of reification especially relevant to our discussion of the film, particularly as it relates to the way in which reification operates beyond the confines of the *maquila* work floor. “Reification,” writes González, “is not a problem of poor intelligence or lack of education [...]. Rather, reification is historically, socially, and materially based; it stems from the experience of living in a social system based on commodity production and exchange” (10-11).

[11] Under increasing import-substitution industrialization crises, political and economic elites eventually turned toward neoliberal economic policies and away from Keynesian welfare-state policies designed to protect underprivileged groups and domestic producers. Arguably, since the mid-1960s, and certainly since the early 1970s, transnational corporations operating in manufacturing and agriculture have played a significant role in production processes and rationalization, not to mention global consumption patterns, of which maquiladora assembly production plays a significant role since the implementation of BIP and continuing through the post-NAFTA era.

[12] See “Documentary Modes of Representation” from *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) and “How Can We Define Documentary Film?” from *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

[13] See Alice Driver’s “Risks, Challenges and Ethics of Representing Femicide: A Comparative Analysis of Sergio Gonzalez Rodriguez’ *Huesos en el desierto* and Roberto Bolano’s *2666*” published in this volume. Driver discusses the ever-present limitations and dangers associated with representing gendered violence (what I refer to in my article as “the specter of reification”) and the ethical implications of the aesthetic

choices surrounding such representations. Drawing from Judith Butler, the practice of “framing of images” that attempts to achieve some balance between representing graphic violence and recounting the lives of the victims constitutes an approach that ultimately focuses on the humanity and full subjectivity of the victims of femicide and anti-female terror.

[14] See José David Saldívar *Border Matters: Remapping Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). While addressing the specific historical context of Central American migrations during the civil wars of the 1980s, Saldívar’s “On the Bad Edge of *La Frontera*” offers some insightful analytic possibilities for thinking about the ways in which maquiladora operators under rationalized production processes experience permanent liminality, particularly for those workers migrating from rural areas of southern and central Mexico. “Liminal” denotes, among other things, (1) a threshold or edge, (2) of, relating to, or being in an intermediate state, phase, or condition, and (3) a transitional or indeterminate state between culturally defined stages of life, e.g., in a state of ritual passage. As Pérez Firmat suggests, “liminality should be looked upon not only as a transition between states but as a state in itself, for there exist individuals, groups, or social categories for which the ‘liminal’ moment turns into a permanent condition” (qtd. in Saldívar, 98). What is taken to be simply a transitory or temporary state or condition becomes, over time, the norm.

[15] According to Marcial González, there always exists the possibility of resisting reification within the cultural imaginary, however incomplete or partial. As González suggests, “The centrality of contradiction in the social realities that inform Chicano subjectivity contributes to the impossibility of complete reification in Chicano novels. Complete reification would mean the absence of *contradiction*” (12, emphasis added). Again, I want to stress the way in which restricted sensuousness emerges as a *lived process* of reification.

Works Cited

- Caputi, Jane and Diana E. H. Russell. "Femicide: Sexist Terrorism against Women." Ed. Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992. Print.
- Coleman, Mathew. "A Geopolitics of Engagement: Neoliberalism, the War of Terrorism, and the Reconfiguration of US Immigration Enforcement." *Geopolitics* 12 (2007): 607-634. Print.
- De Angelis, Massimo. "Social Relations, Commodity-Fetishism and Marx's Critique of Political Economy." *Review of Radical Political Economics* 28.1 (1996): 1-29. Print.
- Fregoso, Rosa-Linda. *meXicana Encounters: The Making of Social Identities on the Borderlands*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2003. Print.
- Gaspar de Alba, Alicia. "Poor Brown Female: the Miller's Compensation for 'Free' Trade." Ed. Alicia Gaspar de Alba, with Georgina Guzmán. *Making a Killing: Femicide, Free Trade, and La Frontera*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2010. Print.
- González, Marcial. *Chicano Novels and the Politics of Form: Race, Class, and Reification*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2009. Print.
- Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 2009. Print.
- Lowe, Lisa. "Utopia and Modernity: Some Observations from the Border." *Rethinking Marxism* 13.2 (2001): 10-18. Print.
- Lugo, Alejandro. *Fragmented Lives, Assembled Parts: Culture, Capitalism, and Conquest at the U.S.-Mexico Border*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2008. Print.
- Lukács, George. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1971. Print.
- Maquilapolis: City of Factories*. Dir. Vicky Funari and Sergio De La Torre in collaboration with the women of Grupo Factor X, Colectivo Chilpancingo, Promotoras por los Derechos de las Mujeres. ITVS, a CineMamás film. California Newsreel, 2006. DVD.
- Martínez, Adriana. "Mujer constante mas allá de la muerte or the overpowering constructions of feminicide in Ciudad Juárez." *Tiresias* 3 (2009): 91-133. Web. 10 Jun 2011.
<<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/UMICH/rll/Home/Graduate/Tiresias%20Graduate%20Student%20Journal/Images/Tiresias%20Issue%203%20-%20April%202009.pdf>>
- Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Volume 1. Intro. Ernest Mendel. Trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Vintage Books, 1977. Print.
- Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40. Print.
- Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001. Print.
- . *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992. Print.
- Saldívar, José David. *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997. Print.

- Schmidt Camacho, Alicia. "Body Counts on the Mexico-U.S. Border: Femicidio, Reification, and the Theft of Mexicana Subjectivity." *Chicana/Latina Studies* 4.1 (2004): 22-60. Print.
- Soto, Sandra K. "Seeing Through Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)order." *Latino Studies* 5 (2007): 418-438. Print.
- Wright, Melissa W. *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Suggested Citation:

Avila, Edward. "The Maquila Complex: Reification, Disposability, and Resistance in *Maquilapolis: City of Factories*." *forum for interamerican research* 8.2 (Sep 2015): 182-205. Available at: <www.interamerica.de>