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John Mason Hart Award

Established in 2015, the prestigious John Mason Hart Award honors an author whose contribution to the journal is deemed as the outstanding submission for each edition of *The SCOLAS Journal*. The award is presented at the yearly SCOLAS Conference and is accompanied by a \$500 honorarium. The award was named after one of the most respected SCOLAS members. In honor of this new award, *The SCOLAS Journal* features Dr. Hart as the lead author of this edition.

John Mason Hart, the John and Rebecca Moores Professor of History, has taught at the University of Houston since 1973 and is considered one of the nation's foremost authorities on Mexican history. Hart's research centers on the Mexican Revolution, the rural and urban working classes, and the influence of the United States in Mexico. He is the author of six books and 60 articles published in the United States and Mexico. At present he is working on the Mexican Labyrinth: The Origins and Development of Villista and Zapatista Populism.

In addition to teaching graduate and undergraduate courses at the University of Houston, Hart has served as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the National School of Anthropology and History and as a Magisterial Lecturer at the Autonomous National University of Mexico. In addition to many other awards for his publications, he has won two national prizes from the American Historical Association and recognition for "the best book on Mexican History during the last five years" from the largest division of the Latin American Studies Association.

A Faculty Excellence Award recipient, Hart received a doctorate in Latin American History from the University of California at Los Angeles and recently served four years as President of the Association of Canadian, United States and Mexican Historians.

Some Imagined Victory: The Specter of Reification in Caridad Svich's *Guapa*

Edward A. Avila, Minnesota State University, Mankato

Jon Barr, Eastern New Mexico University

Introduction

Caridad Svich is an OBIE-award winning playwright and the founder of NoPassport, a "grass-roots theatre alliance" dedicated to promoting Latina/o voices in theatre. In the fall of 2013, I had the honor of directing Ms. Svich's 2012 play, *Guapa*, at Eastern New Mexico University, located in the high plains desert town of Portales, New Mexico. As our theatre program is part of a Hispanic-serving institution, we felt that *Guapa* (2013) would be a refreshing and timely opportunity to engage our students and our surrounding community with characters and social and familial situations with which they could identify.

Guapa tells the story of a Latino family working to pull themselves out of poverty and to maintain their cultural identity and sense of dignity in the face of socio-economic hardship and racialized marginalization. Svich offers a set of complex, dynamic characters that challenge and resist racialized stereotypes of working-class Latina/os struggling to better their lives in this seemingly unhomely Texas border town. The protagonist, Roly, is a single-mother whose pessimistic point of view is challenged when Guapa, a young and idealistic soccer hopeful of Peruvian descent comes into her life. Relationships and attitudes are revealed as Roly interacts with her two college-student children, her nephew, and her distant relative, Guapa. The makeshift family engages in heated discussions about culture and history, including humorous debates about the greatest professional soccer player to ever play the game. Despite the celebratory conclusion of the play's eponymous heroine, *Guapa* offers a communal-oriented mode of resistance to racialized, classed domination that emphasizes the importance of collective kinship and agency vis-à-vis privileged notions of (hyper)individual achievement and success. The development of the collective subject as protagonist and heroine/hero to our story represents a serious attempt to bring into critical purview social and historical totality, a key representational strategy that avoids decontextualized immediacy, a form of de-historicized presentism resulting in what Fredric Jameson identifies as the "unique tendential effect of late capitalism" in which culturally specific articulations of collective belonging and identity "fragment or atomize . . . into agglomerations of isolated and equivalent private individuals," thus resulting in the progressive "reified atomization . . . of capitalist social life" (15, 24).¹ In this article, we analyze the complex and ambivalent process of symbolic resistance to racial exclusion, socio-economic marginalization, and cultural stigmatization experienced by working-class Latina/os in Caridad Svich's *Guapa*. While the play represents a form of symbolic resolution to seemingly insurmountable social problems of racial discrimination and socio-economic injustice experienced by

working-class Chicana/os and Latina/os in the Texas borderlands, in addition to being an important and timely border story that dramatically attempts to challenge stereotypical portrayals of Latina/o and Chicana/o characters, it ultimately encounters certain representational challenges in which the play's symbolic resolution also dangerously appears to rehearse reified discourses of cultural identity and historical abstraction.

The proliferation of discourses of disempowerment, loss of subjectivity, victimization, and dependency constitute some of the unintended yet enduring effects of popular representations of violence against marginalized groups.² Given the ever-present danger of reproducing such debilitating discourses that complicate and obfuscate even the most well intended written and visual representations of gendered, classed violence in the U.S. and Mexico borderlands, it is perhaps better to speak of the ways in which *Guapa* treads carefully over the dangerous and often concealed precipice of reification. While the play undoubtedly attempts to move beyond the immediate circumstances of each of the characters, in which present struggles and resistance to racialized, gendered, and classed oppression are framed within the complex, manifold of historical forces that have and continue to shape and determine social relations across the U.S. and Mexico borderlands, the play appears to rehearse as set of overly-romanticized and nostalgic accounts of ancestral affiliation that dangerously rehearses and ascribes to a latent biological identity (or biologically determined identity) through the ruse of cultural lineage or genealogy.

The Marxist concept of reification, we believe, offers theoretical and analytic possibilities towards understanding the complex ideological tensions and contradictions enacted in the play. Furthermore, while we applaud the way in which the play expresses and performs what is undoubtedly an indispensable and much needed set of counter-narratives to racialized, classed, and gender systems of domination constituting the continuing legacy of colonial power relations in contemporary borderlands context, we also identify potential limitations in which the recourse to Quechua history and language within a contemporary borderlands context appeals to nostalgic, romanticized accounts of resistance.

While the Marxist concept of reification offers insightful analytic possibilities for analyzing the complexities of articulating historical totality in the play, we also turn to Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence in order to better understand the ways in which discursive negotiations of power among Anglo-American, mainstream society and Chicano and Latino communities are often marked by appropriation, indeterminacy, and contradiction. If, as Bhabha suggests, the racialized "Other" is knowable and capable of being represented from the standpoint of dominant culture, then we must attend to the ways in which the "Other" is often portrayed through the stereotype of the racialized "Other." However, it is precisely in the deployment of such stereotypes that cultural texts appear to both install and disavow cultural difference.³ It is for this reason that we think that the intersection (and, perhaps, momentary

reconciliation) between the postcolonial concept of ambivalence and the Marxist concept of reification offers critical insights to the ways in which the play negotiates with and attempts to overcome dominant ideologies of “cultural otherness,” a form of cultural resistance that attempts to restore historical totality while articulating such resistance near the end of the play through a nostalgic, romanticized narrative.

Reification: Concealed Totality, Naturalized Inequality

Although Karl Marx never explicitly articulated a definition of reification in *Capital*, Volume 1, he did, nevertheless, offer provocative theoretical insights for the development of a theory of reification.⁴ The notion of the mediating force of the commodity form affecting social relations points to the ways in which the commodity form (logic) conceals larger, yet seemingly inconspicuous, uneven social relations under capitalist development in the border region.⁵ However, we turn to Georg Lukács’ seminal essay “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” (1923) in order to grasp one of several related concepts developed in Lukács’ theory of reification—loss of totality.

In his analysis of the relations of production emerging from commodity production, Lukács offers insightful observations regarding the subjective experience of the principle of rationalization, that is, the fragmented, specialized orientation of the production process that constitutes one of the more important conditions of possibility for the proliferation of atomized social relations and hyper-individualized conceptions of social activity and relations. Drawing from Lukács, as the principle of rationalization gains normative status and becomes an integral part of the collective consciousness of productive human activity, the practice, exercise, and/or cognitive apprehension of social and historical totality gradually fades into the margins of collective knowledge. The notion of the loss of totality, however, is inextricably related to the concept of visibility in which reification conditions the degree to which social and historical visibility or consciousness becomes practiced under late-capitalism. In her analysis of commodifying sexual identities, Rosemary Hennessey argues that the abstraction of material history is itself a “way of seeing” that is consistent with the logic of commodity production and exchange. In discussing the importance of reconsidering Marx’s analysis of commodity fetishism from *Capital*, Volume 1, Hennessey emphasizes the critical yet overlooked relationship between capital and culture: “[Marx] shows us that under capitalism we are invited to know the value of commodities as if it were lodged in things themselves . . . [which] eclipses the fact that material value is produced through human labor and its organization into particular historical relationships” (95). It is precisely in the obfuscation or erasure of “particular historical relationships” that “delinks one component of social life from the conditions that make it possible” (95) that reification constitutes an important theoretical framework through which to analyze the play’s articulation of Latina/o resistance to hegemonic structures

of racial and gendered domination and violence.⁶ Thus, visibility, or, more precisely, reified visibility (and knowing) speaks of the ways in which historical and social totality become obscured under the influence of commodity fetishism (or commodity logic), manifested in that concomitant myopic social practice called presentism. Yet, we must attend to the ways in which socially conditioned visibility intersects with Jameson's concept of social reification as the "reified atomization . . . of capitalist social life." On this relationship, Hennessey writes, "The atomizing perspective comprises the very scaffolding of bourgeois visibility and is played out in a host of strategies that fragment components of social life: in the separation of consumption from production, private from public life, market from household, individual from collective, and culture from political economy" (95).

In a provocative study on the class-based construction of racial identity through reification in Chicana/o novels, Marcial González likewise offers an insightful reworking of the Marxist concept of reification, one that remains grounded in Marx's critique of commodity fetishism and processes of objectification while also broadening the concept to include social and political rationalities maintaining violent social relations under contemporary capitalism along the U.S. and Mexico borderlands. González informs our analysis of the play in several related that go beyond the well-known concept of reification as the processes and forms of ossification and thing-ification, that continue to inform our understanding of abstract labor and commodity fetishism under late capitalism. Put differently, González's reworking of the concept reification offers a useful lens for analyzing the various social and cultural permutations of reification operating in the diegetic world of the play. According to González,

[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, including literary works and consciousness itself. (10)

In considering the modes of perception related to the reproduction of social inequalities and essentialized notions of identity and subjectivity grounded on racial discrimination and patriarchal gender pre/proscriptions, the concept reification offers a useful way of analyzing a broader and more comprehensive set of uneven power relations performed in the play.⁷ Because the texts examined in this chapter emerge from and engage symbolically with social problems existing at the borderlands through a dynamic combination of dramatic realism and

magical realism, we must address some issues concerning representation. First, if we are to assert that reification imposes certain limitations on perception, particularly in the context of uneven social relations, then to what extent might *Guapa* overcome or disrupt these limitations? Given that reification constitutes a process whereby the historically contingent nature of social inequalities becomes concealed, how might the play's engagement with social contradiction open up greater access to historical totality?" Third, to what extent, if at all, can these texts effectively contest social reification in which matter political agency and empowerment are historically grounded and collectively articulated? And, lastly, to what extent does *Guapa* unwittingly collaborate with dominant ideologies of race, class, and gender that dangerously rehearse, re-enact, and therefore, reproduce romanticized, nostalgic accounts of cultural resistance?

(Con)textualizing Reification

Rhetorically, the play begins by having us consider the notion of longing. The term "longing" signifies an unfulfilled yearning desire. In the transitive form, "to long" means "to wish earnestly" or "to be restless or impatient till something is attained," (OED 2014) which, by association, can register emotional weariness, exhaustion, and, ultimately, apathy, if, indeed, that longing appears infinitely deferred, slowly yet tirelessly fading into that vanishing horizon called resignation. And yet, Guapa, our eponymous heroine, refuses, even in the face of unimaginable odds, to still and calm her restless desire for recognition, dignity, and respect. And while this desire seemingly gestures toward individual or personal praise, that is, recognition and respect grounded on the fulfillment of individualistic desire and success, her imagined victory captures what Fredric Jameson refers to as a socially symbolic act in which political resistance emerges in narrative form as the imagined resolution to an irresolvable social contradiction (*The Political Unconscious* 79).⁸ In longing for social and political recognition and individual and collective dignity, *Guapa* brings into larger play an imagined victory for a community beset by dominant ideologies of race, gender, class, and nationality, even if that victory rises from the caldron of an imagined or fictive community.

Made of "dirt, feathers, and futbol," Guapa longs for recognition from the "host of angels and saints calling out her name" in that dusty patch of dirt and wildflowers. "Guapa! Guapa!" they yell. And she? She just smiles. And in that brief moment, only she could have recognized them, "not that anyone [else] could see....No one was really lookin' [here] in this dusty earth" (20). In the Prologue, Svich carefully begins to develop one of the central thematic topics of the play: *social invisibility*. And yet, this invisibility extends beyond that "scraggly patch" of dust and wildflower and into those other areas of invisibility where those lacking papers to earn a living wage, whether *recién llegados* or the "long-standing," wait anxiously for work in and around the many depots whose exploited labor provides affordability, comfort, and leisure to those authorized

to pursuit the so-called American Dream. "Not that anyone could see" (20). And of the dispossessed, the exiled, those racialized "others, those "strangers" in that even stranger place called the *El Norte*? "[Not that] anyone was really lookin'" (20). And what of their histories, those conditions of possibility, or should we say impossibility, that constitute the dialectic of migration and empire, of economic inclusion and socio-political exclusion? What of those political and economic conditions and histories that set in motion such migrations and relocation? "To them all: it was just wildflowers" (20). To Guapa, and to all that she symbolizes, it was more than simply wildflowers, but rather wildflowers "shootin' up through the cracks," (20) through the fissures and gaps of memory and history, of invasion and dispossession since at least 1848, through what Gonzalez identifies as primitive accumulation, that is, the systematic dispossession and proletarianization of people of Mexican descent, heritage, and culture characterized by the "blatant seizure of productive resources, especially land, often by brutal force and other means of state-endorsed coercion [and terror] . . . subordinating that social group that Mario Barrera refers to as a Mexican 'colonial labor force'" (63-64).

Then, suddenly, "she lets go a cry" (20). "A cry?" you ask. A deep, profound, and unfathomable cry? Certainly. A proclamation? Absolutely. El pronunciamiento? Absolutamente. Not just a cry but rather a "*grito*." El Grito!⁹ A call to personal and collective revolution (how's it possible to separate the two under such context?). El Grito de Guapa! The opening salvo to that long, painful, and protracted war against the legacy of colonial power and domination in the Southwest borderlands. But the Saints, what would they say? "Shss, not so loud" my young revolutionary. You don't want the whole world to hear you...just yet" (20). In accumulating her forces of resistance, Guapa and her family, through trial after trail, slowly, yet unflinching, reveal that decolonial imaginary, that intellectual/cultural weapon against the forces of silence, against the colonizer's epistemological assumptions of the "Other." From the outset, the play draws critical attention to the symbolic importance of "el grito" and how this historically situates the "dispossessed" and "exiled" of the dramatic world by attempting to achieve some sense of socio-historical totality and, in the process, restoring a sense of social and political inclusion and belonging.

And so, she waves to all the Migrants and Saints as she runs off the dirt field "aglow in *some imagined victory*" waiting to be born, like them all (20; emphasis added). "Some imagined victory," an imagined victory constituting the cognitive precondition toward the material realization of collective freedom against the historically determining forces shaping and reproducing social and political abandonment and exclusion in the borderlands. Again, let us not forget about cultural resistance, for it is precisely in reading *Guapa* that the importance of cultural resistance comes to the fore. And even if only an imagined victory, what strikes us is that Some imagined victory. What is imagined and the ways in which it materially unfolds, however, is always a complicated matter, a complex and often perilous enterprise potentially sullied by cultural appropriation,

romanticism, and nostalgia, even exoticism. For it is here that the “specter of reification” keeps in ghostly company, peripherally visible, never direct, yet always present.

Director’s Analysis: The Problem of Reification in Dramatic Representation

As a director, I looked to the text for symbols and metaphors that would indicate creative ways to address the problems of reification. In the body of the play, Svich continues to explore the motifs of crying out, feathers, and preparing to be born. When Guapa gets involved in some mischief with Roly’s children, Lebon and Pepe, she falls off a wall and sustains a traumatic head injury that leaves her unable to speak. This is the lowest point for the character that has a fundamental desire to express herself and to be recognized. As a director, I interpreted this scene as if Guapa had regressed to a childish state in response to this setback. Until this point, world-weary Roly has been condescending towards the younger characters’ idealistic ambitions. At one point she even revealed to them, “Listen, listen. I went through all that pre-Columbian, back to Aztlan phase way back when” (42). Reeling over the unfulfilled promises of the “movimiento,” and now alone with a dispirited and mute Guapa, Roly is forced to be the voice of hope.

Roly is able to rekindle Guapa’s spark for life through storytelling. Holding up a small peacock feather, she invokes the memory of her Abuela, who she says kept a large collection of feathers in a small wooden box. Already Svich has hinted at the importance of feathers. Guapa herself was “of dirt and feathers made” (19). Dirt suggests Guapa’s material nature: rough, earthy, and connected to the land. Feathers suggest her spiritual nature: light, lifting-up and part of a greater historical totality. Both are intertwined through her being and connect Guapa to her heritage through the Mesoamerican plumed serpent. Here the feathers also connect Guapa to Roly, and even to Roly’s Abuela. (See attached picture #2, L to R: Veronica Ayala and Jazmin Juárez. Photo Courtesy of Bryan Hahn)

With almost hypnotic language, Roly draws in Guapa telling the story of the feathers. She confides that her Abuela would say that “each feather represented a different place she wanted to go.” Feathers can transport and they also represent an unrealized potential. Roly recounts that she would complain “Abuela, that’s too many places!” and her Abuela would scold her, “there are so many places in the world. Wonderous, strange, beautiful places. How can you say it’s too much, nina?” With this, Roly endorses an open-minded, limit-less attitude towards what is possible, and by doing so, Svich suggests that we should not restrict our thinking when trying to solve the overwhelming social problems depicted in the play. In fact, Roly shares that some of the feathers were connected to places that were just made up, which made her wonder, “how can you go someplace that’s only in your dreams?” Svich now explodes all limitations and proposes that the set of possibilities can now include the imagined; the symbolic resolution. Now

holding Guapa's full attention, Roly finishes by describing how she would toss her Abuela's feathers in the air and they would fall in a canopy of colors, "That felt as if it'd come from nothing: Like we all come into this world" (88). Again Svich references birth and the moments before birth, alluding to the anticipation of impending birth and the plural, communal nature of the process for which we are longing. As Roly finishes her story, Guapa reaches out and touches the feather, full of wonder and transformed through the telling of the story. By dramatizing the performative and transformative power of storytelling within the play, Svich subtly provides a model for effective resistance and engagement: the socially symbolic act.

The climax of the play takes place when Guapa, still mute but with an improved outlook, begins to practice soccer again with her family and while overextending herself, she collapses. Concerned, her family gathers around her and comforts her. Haltingly, she begins to speak again, but in Quechua. Although it is the native language of Guapa's Incan ancestors, she herself has never spoken Quechua, so this seems to be a supernatural moment that may be understood as intervention by the Saints or as a deeply unconscious racial memory that has finally come to the surface. Fortunately, the message she has longed to share is finally received, through the interpretation of Lebon, who has been teaching himself Quechua by watching tutorials on Youtube.

Even Guapa seems confused as she finds herself saying, "Yawarchay, ruphachiy" which Lebon translates for the family and, by extension, the audience, meaning, "To bleed, to burn" and "Manchakuy:" "To be afraid." Through increasingly complex language which evolves into a mixture of Quechua, Spanish, and English, Guapa finally shares what she could never say before: that she had been verbally and physically abused by her step-father as a six-year old girl. That he would call her "dirtandmudgirlstupidbitch" until she that was her "Qhallu" (tongue). It became her "pachamuyu" (world). Her "taslara" (map). When she begins to reveal that the abuse had also been sexual, cousin Hakim tells her "Don't" and she pleads with him, "Allichu" (please) (96-100). (See attached picture #3, L to R: Janzen Baldwin, Gig Guajardo, Gigi Guajardo, Veronica Ayala, Robert John García, and Jazmin Juárez. Photo Courtesy of Bryan Hahn)

Even though it is painful to say and painful to hear, this act of self-expression is exactly what Guapa has been longing for. Yet this may also be the moment where the play nears perilously close to the specter of reification. Finally able to express herself, what Guapa expresses is victimhood. One could argue that this performance of victimhood entertains the possibility of romanticism and spectacle. The conceit that Guapa is able to speak Quechua through some racial memory could lend credence to the concept of biological essentialism. However, the resolution of this climactic revelation is that the family decides that they will all together drive to Dallas to support Guapa as she competes to participate in an important street soccer final where she may have a chance to be scouted by a professional team. They have accepted that Guapa's chances for real

success in soccer are slim, but recognize the importance of trying and showing “them how futbol is really played!” (111) Svich here reinforces that resistance best expresses itself not individually but communally and change does not need to begin with a clear and defined path to an obvious solution, but can be initiated with an intentional gesture towards resolution: the socially symbolic act. However, before I could effectively dramatize that resolution, I was forced to confront a challenging form of reification: the stereotype.

To create characters that can resist the pitfalls of reification, Svich must first overcome the difficulties of racial and class stereotypes. She verbalizes this intention in strong language when Guapa re-enters the opening scene saying, “Fuck everyone who thinks we’re just wetbacks and freeloaders!” (31) Clearly, the audience is meant to discard their preconceived notions about this poor, Latino family. The complexity of the family’s ethnicity is further illustrated by cousin Hakim’s Spanish and Arab descent. Wishing to avoid stereotyping, he laments that his classmates call him “towelhead” (30). Moreover, we are told that people don’t want to believe that Pepi is smart enough to earn her good grades. Lebon riles up Guapa by telling her that the “racist ass-wipes that hang out by the Sip n’ Dip” call her a “backward chippy chola” (36). By drawing attention to the each characters’ struggle with stereotyping, Svich is cautioning the audience not to make assumptions about the characters. This point is reinforced later when the family holds an impromptu soccer practice and Roly demonstrates some flashy ball handling, much to the surprise of her children. She coyly tells them, “I know some things” (90). These previously unrevealed “things” that she knows carry symbolic value, which constitutes an important aspect of dynamic characterization and appeal. For example, we learn that Roly once participated in the *movimiento*, or Chicano Movement of the late 1960s and early 70s. This important historical reference situates Roly within the fold of the extended civil rights movements of the 1960s and 70s.

Svich’s challenge to stereotyping includes questioning how we think about race and ethnicity among Latinos. When discussing their ancestry, Roly reminds Pepi that they are part Irish. This does not seem unusual until a few moments later when Roly casually mentions the family surname: O’Perez. The joke reinforces both the diverse mixing of ethnicities in Hispanic people, and the desire these characters have to reinvent themselves on their own terms. When Roly tells Lebon that the family history he has just recounted cannot be on Google, because it hasn’t been written yet, he replies, “Precisely. That’s what I’m doin’.” The family background is further enriched by Hakim’s Spanish-Arab blood and the Incan blood that Guapa gets from her mother. Svich reminds us that popular assumptions of Latino/as as a homogeneous ethnolinguistic group or culture are often inaccurate and neglect the rich and diverse backgrounds that make individual Latina/os not simply reducible to the undifferentiated “melting pot” nationalized subject, but rather complex, heterogeneous cultural subjects formed through distinct historical forces and interactions.

As the director of this play, I could not ignore the problems of reification and, specifically, stereotyping, when casting the actors. A playwright can create diverse and interesting characters for an audience, but the director ultimately chooses the people who will become the embodiment of those characters and plays a critical role in the way the audience perceives those characters. Although we are a Hispanic Serving Institution, the students in our small theatre department are mostly Non-Hispanic whites and I knew that the ability to act and to portray these characters as real, believable people was my top priority. I was able to cast the roles of Hakim and Pepi using two talented theatre majors, both New Mexicans of Hispanic descent. The actress I cast to play Roly is a talented and experienced local alumna of Eastern New Mexico University who is also a New Mexican of Hispanic descent. I cast a young, light-skinned African-American to play Lebon. Although a non-major with very little theatre training, he had the passion and charisma to play the part offering a convincing and stirring performance. The actress who I cast as Guapa was a blond haired, white skinned Hispanic theatre minor. I chose to cast her based on her acting ability, her language and accent ability, and her soccer playing ability. This was the most difficult role to cast, since the character Guapa, whose mother was full-blooded Incan, would likely have darker skin and black hair. I worried that having the character named "Beautiful" be the lightest skin blonde woman could send a message of white supremacy, which would be contrary to my intentions. Despite my concerns, I decided that ability had to be the deciding factor in casting and I believe that the presence of a wider palate of skin tones on the stage helped to reinforce the concepts of diversity that Svich had written into the play.

In addition to casting the actors, I had similar concerns about reification in the design of the sets and costumes of the play. Any of the choices that I made could and likely would be read as either an overt comment on Hispanic families or, even more troubling, unconsciously feed into pre-existing stereotypes in the minds of the audience. My concerns were compounded by the fact that my backdrop would be recorded and projected onto a blank screen behind the actors. Adding the element of indexicality can cause audiences to unconsciously assume that what they are seeing is real. Faced with these concerns and unsure how to effectively address them, I chose to design the play in a way that was very recognizable with as much verisimilitude as possible. The backdrop movies were recorded in our immediate area and the stage was sparsely set with elements one might easily see the yards in Portales. I believe this was an effective strategy, because many audience members remarked how believable and relatable they felt the play was. One of the design choices I was most concerned about was my decision to put yard debris (such as old car parts, lumber, wheel barrow, etc) in the side aprons, lit with a string of old Christmas lights. Interestingly, an informal survey of audience members revealed that this was seen as indicative of the family's class as opposed to the family's ethnicity. Although I was pleased with the appropriateness and perceived common bond across ethnic divisions, it is concerning that the pitfalls of reification could not be avoided.

Realizing that despite our best intentions, reification seems to be an inevitable consequence of staging a drama, how can playwrights and directors who hope to critique social injustice and inspire progress proceed? Clearly, Svich proposes through this play that we must strive to initiate change through the socially symbolic act. In the Epilogue of the play, Guapa sits on a bench, putting on her new cleats while surrounded by her assembled family. Through voiceover narration, Guapa tells the audience, "You've seen her. She lives on this little strip between school and church" Svich is trying to humanize those individual "Guapas" that exist in the world while creating a framework for a symbolic Guapa who has been performed in the play. Guapa continues to say that she is surrounded by saints, "whose names aren't in any book... and their names are Roly, Pepi, Lebon, and Hakim." (See attached picture #4, L to R: Jazmin Juárez, Janzen Baldwin, Veronica Ayala, Robert John García, and Gigi Guajardo. Photo Courtesy of Bryan Hahn.) Svich announces that these characters are no longer real people, they are more like mythological archetypes, as if we have just seen a liturgical drama from a tradition that is still emerging. ("between school and church") Svich concedes that the task of resisting reification may seem futile. Like the possibility of Guapa becoming a professional futbol player, "... it's kind of crazy... And she probably doesn't have a real chance at it anyway." However, like Guapa, Svich refuses to give up trying. The socially symbolic act of writing and staging plays like Guapa are the only chance that we have to succeed in inspiring progress. And "It's a beautiful game." For Svich, for me, "... and for Guapa, that's enough" (112-113). While certainly the specter of reification potentially complicates our best intentions, we must also acknowledge that cultural producers are not trapped into a prison-house of reification, for, as Marcial González correctly points out, "[t]he centrality of contradiction in the social realities that inform Chicano [and Latina/o] subjectivities contributes to the impossibility of complete reification . . . [as] complete reification would mean the absence of contradiction" (12). Put differently, contradictions of identity and resistance articulated in the play reveal the operations or processes of reification that open a space for critique.

Conclusion

In having to face the complex, unrelenting forces of social, political, and economic power, the impulse of resistance could easily succumb to a wretched state of personal and collective resignation. Yet, Svich offers a an equally complex, unrelenting counter-narrative that performs a fiction of community that, as Lisa Lowe suggests, "comments upon the capitalist social relations that exist, de-familiarizing those social relations as artificial, as relations that could be transformed through political action" (11-12). The process of de-familiarization, thus, becomes a vital political operation captured in the socially symbolic act. As such, the play presents resistance as a community project as

opposed to an individualistic one, an approach that gestures towards social and historical totality rather than merely privileging the immediately given.

While *Guapa* represents an important and timely dramatic counter-narrative to racial, class, and gender violence, particularly for Chicana/os and Latina/os facing social exclusion and political abandonment along the U.S. and Mexico borderlands, it nonetheless potentially runs into the limits and dangers of unintended collaboration with processes of reification that complicate such strategies of resistance. The difficulties that arise from the apparent impossibility of transcending nostalgic or romanticized narratives of cultural resistance to dominant power (in what we refer to in this article as the “specter of reification”) have inspired cultural producers to create innovative and transformative modes of representation. And while *Guapa* certainly represents one such innovative and transformative mode of representation, an important contemporary text that genuinely attempts to recapture social and historical totality of present Chicana/o and Latina/o life in the borderlands, we must, nonetheless, remain mindful of the ways in which symbolic reconstructions of historical or genealogical relationships, ancestral ties, and cultural identity can likewise serve to reproduce and maintain abstracted, reified notions of collective identity and resistance to dominant power that dangerously appears to rehearse similar representational strategies by the very power that these texts intend to complicate and overturn. The issue of representation or, more precisely, representational strategy, as we have attempted to demonstrate, becomes one of the more pressing questions that inform any analysis of cultural representations of Chicana/o and Latina/o struggles of social, political, and economic equality. As a final note, it has been interesting for us to consider how one can stage a play like *Guapa* while avoiding the specter of reification and in the process perhaps making our production of *Guapa* itself a socially symbolic, self-reflective act.

NOTES

1. See Fredric Jameson, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture.” In “Reification and Utopia,” Jameson offers a compelling argument for approaching aesthetic production and critique that considers the “objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena” (14) of cultural production under late capitalism. Suggesting a reconsideration of the term “mass culture” vis-à-vis high culture, particularly with respect to aesthetic criticism, Jameson writes, “the commercial products of [mass culture] can surely not without intellectual dishonesty be assimilated to so-called popular; let alone folk, art of the past, which reflected and were dependent for their production on quite different social realities, and were in fact the ‘organic’ expression of so many distinct social communities or castes, such as the peasant village, the court, the medieval town, the polis, and even the classical bourgeoisie when it was still a unified social group with its own cultural specificity” (15). It is in the context of the developing and ever dominating capitalist mode of production that the notion of atomized social relations signifies social reification under late capitalism.

2. See Alicia Schmidt Camacho, “Body Counts on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Femicidio, Reification, and the Theft of Mexicana Subjectivity” *Latina/Chicana Studies* 4.1 (Fall 2014);

See Sandra K. Soto, "Seeing Through Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)order" *Latino Studies* 5 (2007); See Adriana Martínez, "Mujer constante mas allá de la muerte or, the overpowering constructions of femicide in Ciudad Juárez." *Tiresias* 3 (2009).

3. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, specifically Chapter 3: "The other question: Stereotype, discrimination, and the discourse of colonialism" and Chapter 4: "Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonialism."

4. 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. As Marx reminds us, 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 of the labor product itself" (463). While this paper does not focus on the form of labor and its abstraction through commodity exchange, any discussion of reification must begin by acknowledging the extent to which Marx identifies how the commodity form constitutes a cultural logic in which the commodity form conditions social practices and relations.

5. As a way of confronting high unemployment and putting into productive activity a large reserve army of labor resulting from the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964, the Mexican government implemented the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in 1965 (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. Furthermore, David G. Gutierrez notes that "[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 off-shore manufacturing and concomitant destruction of peasant communities via capitalization and enclosure in much of Central and South Mexico, large populations faced limited means of subsistence, resulting in regional and long distance northward migrations, particularly to the United States and, to a lesser degree, Canada.

6. See Rosemary Hennessey, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 2000). In the chapter titled "Cultural Study, Commodity Logic, Sexual Subjects," Hennessey offers a provocative and insightful example of the ways in which the logic of commodity fetishism operates within the so-called mundane, every-day social life. She writes, "When commodity fetishism erases the material basis of value, it does so by attaching itself to the products of labor as soon as they are produced. . . . What seems the empirical reality of a commodity like a sneaker is not seeable in itself: it only becomes seeable because of the historically available ways of seeing we bring to knowing this thing" (95). Feminist scholar Sandra K. Soto offers a related way of thinking about socially constructed visibility in "Seeing Through Photographs of Borderlands (Dis)order" (2007). In the context of photographic and documentary realism, Soto reminds us, drawing from Pierre Bourdieu, that "vision is socially constructed (we see what we have learned to see), rather than a pure and unmediated tool for accessing objective truth. . . [such that] 'objective truth' is itself a representation of socially conditioned vision" (425). The concept of socially conditioned vision echoes Hennessey's analysis of the capitalist form of consciousness as "the historically available ways of seeing we bring to knowing" (95).

7. Timothy Bewes' insightful discussion on reified social relations and consciousness offers a useful critical framework for present study: "In the broader socio-political sphere, reification is what happens in every instance of racism and sexism, where the objects of prejudice

are perceived not as human beings but as things or 'types' . . . [R]eification is the process in which 'thing-hood' becomes the standard of objective reality; the 'given world', in other world is taken to the truth of the world" (4).

8. On discussing the specific relationship between ideology and cultural texts in "On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act" from the *Political Unconscious*, Jameson writes, "ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (79).

9. The *pronunciamiento* uttered by the Roman Catholic Priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, marks the beginning of the Mexican War of Independence, September 16, 1810.