

## **Title: Food Beyond Rights: Where Resistance Meets Cooperation**

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### **Introduction**

One distinctive characteristic of life in the Anthropocene is uncertainty, but that uncertainty is not equally felt amongst the general population. In this essay, I argue that while the new norms of life in the Anthropocene may encourage a placeless, timeless world where individuals appear to be constantly at odds against their own existence, the so-called marginals make use of uncertainty to forge revolutionary subjectivities that enable new ways of being, seeing, and interacting with each other in the search of more just and sustainable worlds. The purpose of the essay is to describe the ways in which a group of low-income and recent immigrant gardeners, those who are often more exposed and vulnerable to the uncertainty of life in the Anthropocene, cultivate new subjectivities that forge alternative pathways toward justice in order to better their quality of life.

This study began in Fall of 2012. I was invited by the members of a San José, CA based urban agriculture program called *La Mesa Verde* (LMV) to co-produce a Community-Based Research (CBR) study. I worked in collaboration with the community of urban gardeners who were co-producers in the research objectives and design and helped to forge "research from, by, and with the margins" (Brown and Strega 2005). LMV is an urban agriculture program, but differs from most urban agriculture or community garden programs because they do not have a "community garden" in the traditional sense (e.g. Kurtz 2001; Pudup 2008), rather, they cultivate home-kitchen gardens in the back, front, side, or rooftop of individual family homes. This ancient form of gardening, known as *el juerto familiar* in Mexico and Latin America, is alive and well in the South Bay. Many LMV gardeners are recent immigrants from rural Mexico, Central, and South America as well as South East Asia and the Philippines. The neoliberal restructuring

of the global South has ushered in a new era of diaspora immigrants from around the world who have tremendous traditional environmental and agroecological knowledge and the urban cores of many first world cities have become repositories for ancient self-provisioning knowledge. This multi-ethnic, multi-lingual group of gardeners balances between traditional healers (or *curanderos*) and urban homesteaders that move beyond challenging the hegemonic industrial food system, and toward fostering spaces of autonomy that allow for self- and communal-determination. This paper will highlight the transformative potential of garden subjectivities and the role of convivial labor in ushering in a new era of cooperation and resistance that is rooted not in the shared fate of others, but in the self-determination and self-constitution of communities in need. These cultivated subjectivities reveal a "revolutionary subjectivity" as a non-compliant, defiant, innovative, community oriented, subject (also see Negri 1991), which is a central part of the food-health nexus.

The gardens in this essay are "enacted spaces" (see Rojas 1991) because they send a message of cooperation and resistance that hinges on relationships of trust. This essay makes two claims, first, unlike the movements of the past that took a "rights-based" or "universal human rights" approach to address the underlying issues prohibiting social equity (e.g. Civil Rights movement), contemporary movements like *La Mesa Verde* are less about "rights" and more about "relational accountability."<sup>1</sup> In fact, Esteva and Prakash (1998) call the universal human rights approach to social justice a "Trojan horse," because such an approach to equality assumes the universalizing truths of juridical power within the modern Western nation-state to uphold rights. This systematically denies the autonomy and the "pluralversality" of juridical order in

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<sup>1</sup> Shawn Wilson (2008) explains relational accountability as being held accountable to our social relationships.

indigenous communities. Furthermore, the Anthropocene is a world of unequal risks and burdens. Those who have least contributed to climate change, are faced with much of its burdens (e.g. Adger et. al. 2006; Nixon 2011; Vidal 2013). By reframing equity as relational accountability and not a right, groups like LMV encourage a revolutionary subjectivity that produces a level of autonomy that reinvents the value of their food and labor. This essay draws upon the experiences of *La Mesa Verde* home-kitchen gardeners to demonstrate how the ability to grow food plays a vital role in constructing a garden subjectivity that moves beyond individual rights and toward collective responsibilities.

Secondly, home-kitchen gardeners engage in convivial labor as a form of cooperation and resistance to address food insecurity, environmental injustice, and economic uncertainty in their communities. In the past, environmental justice has used critiques of social justice to find new answers to old problems. However, the new conditions of life imposed on the working poor through the neoliberal restructuring of the global South urges new, and recalls ancient, forms of knowledge to improve livelihoods. In other words, rather than finding new answers to old problems, many gardeners around the world are simply redefining the problem. Moving away from "individual rights" and toward "relational accountability" is an act of cooperation that allows gardeners to enact their collective labor as a transformative practice of convivial labor. In these instances, cooperation is a form of resistance to improve the social, environmental, economic, cultural, and physical well-being of a community. Convivial labor is the celebration of life in all its manifestations, and those who can enact such labor, are retooling themselves in order to transform their worlds.

This essay is organized into three parts. First, I explain the importance of convivial labor in the Anthropocene by highlighting how it is deployed. Second, I use ethnographic data

gathered during the research to show how convivial labor challenges the alienating aspects of neoliberalism and allows gardeners pathways towards self-defined justice. Third, I demonstrate that LMV gardens open spaces of innovation where gardeners can enact their own convivial labor as a form of resistance to find a sense of autonomy and self-determination.

This study takes a turn from most anthropological research on climate change because rather than falling into the trap of the "suffering subject" (e.g. Auyero and Swistun 2009; Marino 2015), this study accepts Joel Robbins' (2013) challenge and seeks to produce an "anthropology of good." In climate justice ethnography, it is far too easy to allow the suffering subject, or those who face the brunt of climate change, to fill Trouillot's "savage slot" (2003). But that is not the intent of this study. When allowed to articulate one's own political struggle, only very rarely does one express their reality as oppressed, marginalized, or subjected to larger systems and institutions. An anthropology of good does not dismiss the fact that many people in the world are suffering from things out of their own control, nor does it romanticize people's ecological wisdom or sense of community by ignoring the lived realities of oppression and marginalization. The goal of an anthropology of good is to highlight how people imagine better worlds and *how they work to enact them*. This study seeks to do justice to the experiences of a community of urban gardeners and to "do justice to the different ways people live for the good" (Robbins 2013, 459).

### **Convivial Labor in the Anthropocene**

The Anthropocene epoch situates human and non-human existence at the convergence of both an environmental and epistemological violence (Bryant 2011; Nixon 2011). Many marginalized populations are marked for erasure, and in some cases, early death (see Pellow

2016). *La Mesa Verde* gardeners resist erasure and death through convivial labor. This resistance is complex because it is not just about the erasure or death of the human experience, but about the erasure or death of the more-than-human world they inhabit. These home-kitchen gardens help to hold together the biocultural fabric of their human and non-human communities. The continued practice of traditional agroecological knowledge ensures the continuity of cultural traditions and farming techniques that enable biological, cultural, and epistemological diversity. The inherently communal practice of convivial labor is a celebration of all our relationships, and reminds us of our responsibility and indispensability of these elusive, clandestine, and even sacred spaces and actions.

Climate change occupies an interesting position in the human imagination. It exists as a "placeless place" because it is both an unreal utopia as my actions in one place may affect others in a different place completely unknown to me, and it is also a heterotopia because climate change makes the place I occupy at the moment all the more real and connected to other places and times.<sup>2</sup> Foucault referred to our current epoch as, "the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" (1986, 1). The mythic and the real existing in juxtaposition is the Anthropocene. The current epoch situates humans as both biological and geological agents, which forces us to contemplate how to make sense of this new world, and to question what new tools or "other spaces" may emerge in the Anthropocene to enact justice.

For the past several decades, environmental justice has used critiques of social justice to forge theories and social movements (e.g. Faber, 1998; Agyeman, Bullard and Evans 2003; Agyeman 2005; Bullard 2005; Schlosber 2007). While this has generated large-scale social

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<sup>2</sup> In "Of other Places" (1986), Foucault uses the mirror as an example of something that occupies the position of both a utopia and heterotopia.

movements, policy proposals, and governmental laws that challenge environmental racism, the conditions imposed upon us today as the result of anthropogenic climate change will force different and innovative forms of resistance *and* cooperation. This is because the hyperobject<sup>3</sup> that is climate change, encourages a sense of urgency, yet because it employs various spatial and temporal positions, it creates a rift in what is present. As Morton explains, "hyperobjects themselves prevent us from being present," in fact, "there is no present" (2013, 92). The Anthropocene is more than the new geological time period, it is a new world in which placeless, timeless people must re-situate themselves to find revolutionary subjectivities that cultivate new values. As Chakrabarty (2009) has explained elsewhere, people are able to envision a future when they are able to envision the continuity of that future, but we have not been trained for the uncertainty and precarity we are to face in a future that many of us are already experiencing. We must, therefore, create new tools.

This is particularly true for recent immigrants from Mesoamerica who have been some of the hardest hit by the Anthropocene's "epoch of the dispersed." The neoliberal restructuring of the world has changed markets (Shattuck, Holt-Giménez and Patel 2009), forced migrations (Davis 2006; Stone 2009), compressed time and space (Allen and Hamnett 1995), and altered the way we think about ourselves (Berardi 2009) and our communities (Harvey 2012). Yet, perhaps most of all, neoliberalism has encouraged an "ideology of disconnection" (Taylor 2006). This dehumanizing ideology contributes to the objectification of people, places and things. But

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<sup>3</sup> As explained by Timothy Morton, hyperobjects are "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (2013, 1). They operate on such grand temporal and spatial scales that they blur the boundaries at scales considerably larger than we are able to rationalize. In many ways, they are invisible to humans and seemingly unreal because it is difficult to conceptualize the vast amount time such objects exist (e.g. the half-life of uranium is 4.5 billion years) and the vast ground they cover (e.g. deforestation in Brazil may contribute to melting glaciers in Greenland).

neoliberalism, which casts a looming shadow over much of the "modern" world, cannot come to terms with the ways in which people develop place attachments and commitments to things larger than themselves.

One answer to the ideology of disconnection is relationality. As explained by Shawn Wilson, "Rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of" (2008, 80). Rather than seeing oneself as an isolated individual who exists *in* relation to other people and places, we *are* mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, friends, neighbors and we *are* from places. This worldview puts things into orientation and explains how individuals hold these relationships together. Convivial labor, similar to Illich's "tools of conviviality" (1973), works in a very similar manner because it exists in direct opposition to ideology of disconnection of industrial capitalism and does not succumb to the same logic and norms of consumption, competition, progress, and development. Tools of conviviality, argues Illich, "are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his own vision" (1973, 21). *La Mesa Verde* gardeners provide us with the context to understand how conviviality can inform the norms of a community and enrich the environment with their own vision while also holding each other accountable to their social relationships.

LMV also shows that labor is, and always has been, what Marx referred to as life's "form giving fire" (1993, 361). This does not propose a romanticize or idealized conceptualization of labor. LMV gardeners are well aware of the biopolitical reality of life for workers in the food-chain and that growing food is often difficult and exploitative work. Rather, LMV gardeners engage in convivial labor to celebrate their relationships with the land, their food, and their communities to enact justice, in spite of, or perhaps because of, the new norms of uncertainty

imposed on them in the era of climate change. This "collective experimentation" (Latour 2004, 196) allows LMV gardeners experiment with their own attachments and detachments to discover common worlds to inhabit.

### **Cooperation: (Re)Learning How to Trust**

Traditional Environmental Knowledge (TEK) is understood as "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generation by cultural transmissions..." (Berkes et. al. 2000, 1252). When gardeners share traditional knowledge of how to cultivate a crop, especially heirloom and landrace varieties, they are ensuring both the continuity of agrobiodiversity and the ancestral knowledge of how to care for and cultivate the crop. While many in LMV are new to gardening, a large portion were raised on farms and received traditional knowledge passed down from their elders. LMV provides the spaces needed to continue to pass that knowledge on to the next generation. By sharing meals and recipes gardeners are ensuring the longevity of heritage cuisines for healthy people and cultures. The convivial labor of sharing in these home-kitchen gardens encourages the continuity of traditional environmental and agroecological knowledge in the form of cultivation techniques (e.g. crop rotation, seed saving, watering) and self-provisioning (e.g. recipes, medicinal herbs, culinary techniques).

*La Mesa Verde* began as a simple gardening program in 2009. The goal was to create as many gardeners as possible to help alleviate the stresses of living in a food desert. The organization gave seeds, seedlings, and garden workshops to participating low-income families who expressed interest in learning how to grow their own food. In 2009, most of the LMV community lived in Washington-Alma, a small, predominately Latino immigrant neighborhood



located just south of downtown San José. Without a supermarket within walking distance,<sup>4</sup> many living in the community without cars were forced to walk to nearby liquor stores and convenience marts for their daily supply of fruit and vegetables. The overpriced and nutrient deficient foods in these locations placed an amplifying burden on a community that was already seen as "expendable." Similar spaces of neoliberal neglect exist in countless cities across the world (see Davis 2006). The goal of the LMV program in 2009 was to provide a resource to the community that would improve self-sufficiency and reduce the need and reliance on convenience markets and food banks while also saving money.

Over time, the LMV community would learn to utilize pre-established workshops, cooking demonstrations, trainings, and advisory meetings to construct spaces of autonomy built on the practice of trust. In other words, the community would use the spaces provided at LMV events to resist erasure and continue the intergenerational sharing of traditional knowledge. As one gardener told me on a fall evening in 2013, "This program teaches us how to trust again." She did not mean that workshops, cooking domos, trainings, and advisory meetings were about learning to trust each other. Rather, what the woman was referring to was that the act of gardening *in collaboration with others* provides gardeners with the opportunity to learn (and relearn) how to trust. This learning and relearning is part of a garden subjectivity that arises when people recognize their relation to others. What this group understands and practices, is that autonomy is not a far right, individualist, libertarian, "don't bother me" ideology, nor is it an idealized free from state censorship utopia. For LMV gardeners, the autonomy they are able to cultivate is a delicate balance held together through relational accountability not individual

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<sup>4</sup> This recently changed as Walmart has opened a "Neighborhood Market" nearby. Many in the community are split between whether this is a good or bad addition to the community.

rights. In the gardens of LMV, this collective responsibility is carefully assembled through the practice of convivial labor.

Autonomy is something one does or preforms, not what one asks for because it is about liberation, not emancipation. This is because emancipation, which is a concept that arrived from European thought, "does not question the logic of coloniality<sup>5</sup>" (see Mignolo 2007, 455). In other words, emancipation can only reform the established order, not transform it. Groups like LMV use growing food as a tool for liberation because it allows them the ability to "de-link" from the "colonial matrix of power" ( see Mignolo 2007), whereby the production of knowledge has historically been a part of the global geopolitical structuring of a North and South relationship and can be traced back to colonialism. This unequal power/knowledge relationship that determines where knowledge is produced and where wisdom is found is constantly a site of contestation because the so-called "marginals," who exist outside of the production of knowledge, do not see themselves as marginals.

The gardeners of *La Mesa Verde* use their marginality as an inventive force (also see Peña 1997), and in rejecting their worlds as marginal and succumbing to the logics of Western epistemology (i.e. individual self-interests), they cultivate new subjectivities that allow for new alliances of cooperation. This "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2009) is a response to the imposing logics of Western modernity (also see Hart and Negri 2000). Gardeners "de-link" from the logics of Western modernity and center their lived experiences at the center of the production of knowledge. Their intent is not to romanticize indigenous wisdom or to demonize Western epistemology, but rather to move in a different direction, a direction that is determined by local

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<sup>5</sup> Anibal Quijano (2000) explains coloniality as a socio-geographic and historical process in the construction and centering of power in European thought. Coloniality is system of power that reaffirms the global hegemony of the conquest and domination of the Other.

contexts. De-linking enables groups like *La Mesa Verde* to define and articulate their own political struggle by moving from individual rights towards relational accountability.

For *La Mesa Verde* gardeners, new alliances of cooperation arise in the spaces neglected or forgotten by institutions of power. These "zones of abandonment" (Biehl 2005; also see Povinelli 2011) are very similar to what Gibson-Graham call "community economies" and are "empty" and waiting to be filled up by "collective actions in place" (2006, 166). Such spaces are perfect opportunities to envision and practice the "collective experimentation" (Latour 2004) of alternative food networks, and LMV is just one example of a trend that is occurring in places around the globe (e.g. Mougeot 2005; Wittman et. al. 2010). By cultivating home-kitchen gardens the LMV community is doing two things simultaneously. First, they are not asking for food justice and demanding more supermarkets in their communities, they are simply *doing justice*. In other words, they are not asking for recognition or saying "we exist, we matter," because they know they already exist, and they know they matter. What they are doing, however, is enacting justice by strengthening the relationships to each other. Food, seed, and labor are constantly in motion in the LMV community because the community understands that the best way to ensure a good quality of life is in their accountability to each other. Gardeners share deep traditional knowledge of self-provisioning by exchanging recipes of traditional meals, ancient agroecological knowledge of crop cultivation, and modern adaptations to urban life. Labor is the currency of exchange that is both material (i.e. helping harvest, sharing food, etc.) and intellectual (i.e. recipes, farming techniques, etc.).

Secondly, LMV gardeners utilize convivial labor to establish social norms that help to extend and strengthen the community. This garden subjectivity is not a form of "cultural capital," but rather, simply culture. The garden subjectivity enacted through convivial labor is part of a

"knowledge-practice-belief-complex" (see Berkes 1999) that is a source of right livelihoods and not "capital" (see Valle 2016). It is cultural stock not capital stock that enables such a subjectivity because this deeply profound subjectivity is a move away from the narrowly defined logics of economic prescription and rational individual rights, and a move towards a more complex and connected relationship between one's ancestral knowledge, lived experiences, and cultural values. Very similar to what Teresa Mares and Devon Peña refer to as "local, slow, and deep food systems" (2011), LMV gardens produce more than local foods because it is not enough to go "local" or "slow," one must go deep into how and where our food is grown, produced, shared, *and celebrated* to understand how it transforms our relationships with each other and with the places we live, work, play, and pray.

LMV gardeners shatter the either/or world presented to them by Western epistemology in refusing to distinguish between labor and labor-power, between production and reproduction. Their garden subjectivity enacts zones of abandonment as spaces of innovation, opportunity, and transformation to create *a world where many words are possible*. In doing so, they are not pro-capitalist nor anti-capitalist, they are not pro-development nor anti-development. They are rejecting the "analytical cul de sac" that James C. Scott (1976) discussed decades ago by making sense of their worlds through moral values rather than contemplating whether they are mystified by their marginality or simply have no other option to engage in their own exploitation.

Framing their world through moral values does two things for the LMV community. First, it allows gardeners to distance their engagements as acts of cultural capital, which is a concept informed by the logics of neoliberalism (see Spies-Butcher 2002, 2003), and root them in the cultural norms of the community. Secondly, in doing so, LMV gardeners are rejecting neoliberalism's "ideology of dis-connection" or "dis-integration," which "assumes and idealizes

a world in which a person's acts are disconnected from his or her life and people's lives are disconnected from cultural practices" (Taylor 2006, 87). By re-integrating conviviality and cooperation as the cultural practices of the community, LMV gardeners confront the uncertainty of life in the Anthropocene by operating through moral values.

A defining aspect of convivial labor is cooperation. While LMV gardeners grow food and herbs in individual family homes, they do not rationalize their efforts as individual. Their gardens are rhizomatic<sup>6</sup> because they enable the infrastructure of the commons, or are a "way of commoning" (also see Petrescu 2013, 267). In fact, as a thirty-five-year-old Chicano LMV gardener told me in the summer of 2014, "I don't like to wait on the government for anything. If I can do it myself, I will." At face value, this statement appears to represent the neoliberal ideology of self-help, whereby the government skirts accountability and places the burden of health and nutrition on individuals. But as he explained to me, "Everyone in my neighborhood grows different things, and when we can, we share... We're all just trying to survive." A closer look reveals a complex garden subjectivity that is held together through relational accountability. "Growing food doesn't complicate things, it simplifies them. It's the small things that matter... you know, water, sun, soil, space, community, [and] life." His worldview aligns far more closely with Foucault's concept of "care of the self" because it recognizes the importance and interdependence of the "small things."

While "gardening" is something people have always done throughout time and may seem inconsequential to many, what makes organizations and social movements like *La Mesa Verde*

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<sup>6</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, "the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature" (1987, 21). A rhizome is a network that is constantly morphing and adapting to given circumstances.

so important in our current world, is the diversity of ways growing food offers "escapes" (see Tezozomoc In Press) from the homogenization of industrial capitalism. When LMV gardeners plant an heirloom seed passed down from their ancestors, they are doing far more than planting a seed or "growing a garden." They are participating in the continuity of culture, knowledge, language, and even agrobiodiversity that is often marked for erasure. The care of the self is a practice of freedom because it seeks to remove all forms of slavery, but it is not simply about individual freedom. Rather, care of the self recognizes that we are the relationships we share with other human and more-than-human beings. To assert domination over others is not an expression of freedom because that occurs only by giving in to desire, leaving one a slave to his or her desire. As an act of liberation, the care of the self is inherently political and ethical, and "implies complex relation with others, in the measure where this *ethos* of freedom is also a way of caring for others" (Foucault 1984, 118). This accountability is common in indigenous communities. In fact, Maldonado Alvarado reminds us that "among original peoples, citizen rights are only for those who fulfill their obligations to the community" (2010, 371). Part of the garden subjectivity present in the LMV community is the recognition of the obligation to community.

At a recent LMV meeting, I sat with a group of English and Spanish speaking gardeners. I listened to them as they discussed why they continued to return to the LMV community year after year. While there are various reasons for members to continue in the program, the word that continued to surface was community. As one woman explained, "We could be anywhere right now, but we want grow food, heal ourselves, our families, and our communities... [and we want to] be around others how also want to... *You're not just on your own here.*" These comments resonate with a garden subjectivity that recognizes cooperation and conviviality as a social norm

that informs community (*inter*)action. Such a norm allows gardeners to define and articulate their own situation based on the reframing of something as simple as the value of food.

### **Resistance: A Labor of Change**

At a *La Mesa Verde* event in 2014, I sat with a focus group of Spanish speaking gardeners as they discussed their community. It was a small group made up of mostly females, many of whom had brought their children to the event and were seated with us at the table. The conversation began as a chat about some of the obstacles each person must confront on a day-to-day basis, but it quickly turned into passionate discussion as the women realized they all faced similar obstacles in terms of accessing culturally appropriate, healthy, and affordable foods. Many of these women were recent immigrants from rural parts of Mexico and for the first time in their lives were uncertain about their health. One woman explained the difficulty of eating healthy in the U.S. She told the group that back in Mexico while her family did not eat much meat, there was always healthy fruits and vegetables around, they never went hungry. As the conversation developed, one woman explained to the group that LMV is all about raising consciousness. Sharing their knowledge amongst each other and then spreading that knowledge on to their children, husbands, or neighbors is an essential aspect of LMV's cooperative resistance. "*Para tener una jardín es contra esta sistema,*" [to have a garden is against this system] she explained. This profound garden subjectivity resonates with the understanding that something as simple as a vegetable garden in one's backyard has tremendous transformative potential.

*La Mesa Verde* gardeners are against "this system" is because these gardens do several things stimulatingly. First, they provide people affordable access to healthy food, and in the

process, they reject overpriced processed foods. Secondly, gardens restore relationships with food and the places people inhabit by connecting gardeners to the seasons and disrupting the space-time compression of the global food system. Lastly, these gardeners restore and reinvent the cultural practices of healing (also see Peña et. al. In press). Very similar to how Shava and colleagues (2010) argue that new immigrants revive traditional knowledge in New York community gardens, new immigrants at LMV revived cultural norms of conviviality, trust, and sharing. This is an example of the past in the present, by carrying forward key elements of subjectivities rooted in Mexican social history, LMV gardeners transform existing and create new rhizomatic forms of social relations anchored by food and eating that are part of their food geographies and knowledges of their dislocations. As others have argued, traditional environmental knowledge arrives from place-based practices (Hunn 1993), but that doesn't mean that it is stagnant or that they do not move from place to place (e.g. Komarnisky 2009). The autotopographies (see Mares and Peña 2010, 2011) created by immigrants are clear examples of how knowledge is mobile and how people make practical uses of the tools and knowledge they have access to as a means to better their worlds. The sharing of traditional meals is not a simple act and should not go unnoticed because it roots one deep into the cultural and geographical history of a place. As explained by Nabhan and colleagues, "recovering these species and restoring them to their 'rightful place' in the landscape is therefore seen as a spiritual and moral imperative" (2016, 158-9). Traditional knowledge is very much alive and when a community enacts "gardens of sabotage" (Valle 2015) against "this system," they are restoring and renewing their relationships with each other and with the land. As one gardener told me on a bright San José afternoon in 2014, "My sprit lives in this garden, and I hope that I can pass it along to my neighbors and friends."



Neoliberalism's "ideology of disconnection" encourages a world of isolated individuals seeking individual self-interests. *Homo-economicus* runs wild in a world where individuals take the risks and receive the rewards alone. In such a world, cooperation is a form of resistance. *La Mesa Verde's* "resistance" against the ideology of disconnection is in the convivial labor they engage in to re-establish the social connections with each other and to restore some degree of social determination. By restoring labor's "form giving fire" LMV gardeners validate the own labor and hold the ability to transform their world through collective actions of conviviality. "Your garden is a reminder of how to life well," a gardener told me in 2013. "It is a reminder of your surroundings. Every day you greet the plants. When you share the food from your garden, you greet your family, your friends, your community. You greet life."

## **Conclusion**

The reality is that life is hard, and sure, growing food is great and can be counter hegemonic, but the reality is that most of our actions on a day-to-day basis reaffirm a food system that further disenfranchises the poor, distances us from our food, increases health disparities, exploits workers and immigrants, and destroys the planet. As Bauman reminds us, "being modern means being perpetually ahead of oneself, in a state of constant transgression" (2000, 28). With all that said, we must move forward. As one gardener passionately explained to me one afternoon in 2014, "For our kids, we won't stop, we can't stop." LMV is a proactive organization that seeks grassroots change to transform the lives of those who participate by encouraging different ways of seeing and interacting in the world. It is in these proactive positive moves of affirmation that must be cataloged and noted, without them, the food system looks too powerful, to monstrous for one individual to face alone.

And the truth is, we are not alone. In fact, there are millions of people around the world just like *La Mesa Verde* who are activity seeking proactive practices of affirmation. People around the world are finding "other spaces" to construct new tools to address the conditions of the Anthropocene. Franco "Bifo" Berardi (2011) recently asked why our collective consciousness, although global, has been unable to change the conditions that neoliberalism imposes on our bodies and communities. He believes that this answer will not be found in our current political structures because the weakness is our social fabric. In the past, industrial workers could change their social conditions (e.g. Marx 1990 chapter 17; Peña 1997, Cleaver 1989) because they maintained high levels of solidarity. But neoliberalism seeks to erode solidarity (Benner 2002; Harvey 2005). Yet, as LMV and others demonstrate, uncertainty can be the mother of innovation, and illustrate something that Foucault hinted at in *The History of Sexuality* (1978); that is, power always seeks to expand its reach, and in the process "other spaces" are revealed. These spaces are not always on the periphery, but sometimes right in the heart of empire (see Hart and Negri 2000). For the case of *La Mesa Verde*, the spaces that have opened are situated in the Silicon Valley, the epicenter of modernity and technology. The mythic and real living side by side, in juxtaposition to each other.

In this essay, I have argued that while the norms of life in the Anthropocene may encourage a world where people are "perpetually ahead of oneself," there are those who use the ability to grow food to resituate themselves, their families, and their communities. Throughout this essay, I attempted to avoid the trap of the "suffering subject" to highlight how people imagine better worlds and how they work to enact them. Through this "anthropology of good" I have explained the importance of convivial labor in the Anthropocene. As explained by Davies (2016), the birth of the Anthropocene means the death of the Holocene. This means goodbye to

the relative stability of the Holocene, and hello to unpredictability and uncertainty. But as the experiences of LMV gardeners demonstrates, this does not mean people "give up" or sit back and wait for a technological fix. Rather, this essay has shown how low-income and immigrant communities ignite labor's "form giving fire" to transform their communities for the better. Convivial labor challenges the alienating aspects of neoliberalism by celebrating our relationships we hold together with our food, communities, environments, and families. Lastly, this essay has shown that power is never all encompassing, and in the process of convivial labor people find "other spaces" to enact their own version of autonomy and self-determination.

A gardener once told me, "The garden is the carrot. Once people get hooked, they're in it for life." What she meant was that starting a garden is not an end point, but a means to an end. But where that end is, has yet to be determined. Everyday gardeners around the world are finding new opportunities to share and celebrate the act of growing food (Winne 2010). We have even seen an increase in the availability of vegetable, fruit, and grain varieties in North America in the past years all because people are beginning to understand the importance of growing food (Nabhan (2016). The interesting thing about gardening is that it always "...finds people where they are at," a gardener told me. In other words, it allows the opportunity for the gardener to enact his or her own version of liberation.

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