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### **TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World**

#### **Title**

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#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0103q3jk>

#### **Journal**

TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World, 6(2)

#### **ISSN**

2154-1353

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#### **Publication Date**

2016

#### **DOI**

10.5070/T462033552

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# Step out to *Shadowtime*, Hurry Like a Plant: Corporeal and Corporate Time for the Anthropocene Generation

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*“Stop the world, I want to get off”*

(slow movement)

*“Time waits for no one, so don’t take it for granted; make  
the most of it before it’s too late”*

(“Time Granted” Sweatshop Union, Album *Infinite*)

## Abstract

This essay analyzes and compares two cultures of time in various contexts of the Hispanic World (Spain, Argentina, Paraguay, Mexico), reflecting on films (*Sleep Dealer*, 2008 and *Maquilópolis*, 2006) as well as on real-world scenarios on the bases of participant ethnographies and interviews. *Corporate time* (O’Brien, 2007) is the time of a globalizing growth economy that accelerates economic processes at the expense of human and non-human bodies; its cultures lead to depletion and destruction of resources on individual and planetary levels. We discuss the induction of *corporate time* into plants when they are genetically engineered to grow faster and eliminate all so called weeds and pests, but also end up hurting humans and ecosystems, like Roundup Ready Soy in the Argentina and Paraguay. In this context, however, various weeds mutate, turn into superweeds, and initiate a hurried struggle against the genetically engineered crops. Human cultures around this ‘plant war’ become growingly aware of what they can learn from weeds in their fight to stop the Great Acceleration and the resulting Global Warming. In the second part of the essay, we discuss how a variety of these alternative cultures, importantly including indigenous ones, as well as reflective individuals, step out to *shadowtime*, that is the planetary time of bodies and ecosystems. In these movements *slow time* is regained through material closeness with the vegetal realm, which is revealed through a multiplicity of gardens in urban alternative economies and alternative agricultural projects.

## Keywords

Time, Corporate time, slow time, *shadowtime*, genetically engineered crops, Roundup Ready soy, superweeds, sweatshops, *maquiladoras*, alternative economies, agroecology, *Sleep Dealer*, *Maquilópolis*, Wichis

Time, plants, and water are connected through the first exchanges between Memo Cruz and his father: protagonists of *Sleep Dealer* (2008), directed by Alex Rivera. Since a gigantic dam was constructed, Santa Ana del Río, a small town in Oaxaca, Mexico, has lost its entire water supply.

Water access has been privatized and local farmers are reduced to using a vending machine for the sake of their crops. In the first scenes of the film, Memo and his father approach the tall grey fence surrounding the water basin while a camera synced with semi-automatic machine guns fixes its ominous gaze on the two. This opposition between fundamental human need and inhumane technologies lie at the heart of the dramatic story told by Rivera. Although the action of the film takes place on an undetermined future date, outside the boundaries of cinema, this future has already arrived. In Mexico and elsewhere, people's futures—in the sense of hope for a better life—are being destroyed in the name of progress. The same is happening on a global level. In many cases, widely heralded technologies are not making people's lives better; instead they cut them off from their resources and allow for surveillance of any incipient rebellion.

The Anthropocene is the time in Earth's history when humans became a decisive force in transforming entire ecosystems, particularly with the beginning of the industrial revolution. According to Lewis Mumford (1934), however, it is the clock and not the steam engine that marks the beginning of the industrial age. It may be also that the clock is *sensu stricto* the Anthropocenic device, whose transformations in the recent few centuries, from showing hours only to digital decimals, announce the end of human time. The history of human civilization has been a ubiquitous tale of speeding up. One of the many names of the Anthropocene is “the Great Acceleration” that, according to Steffen et al. (2015) started around 1950, when the rapidly globalizing economy began to expand at an especially heightened speed. As a result, it sent into space more CO<sub>2</sub> than ever before, uprooted more forests, liquidated more fish reservoirs and used enormous quantities of toxic pesticides. For the first time, the limits of environmental resources and the limits of growth were considered seriously by the world community in the 1970s (Meadows et al. 1972). In 1994, Peter Kafka warned that with the increasing speed of innovation, the political and economic system had gotten to the point where it does not have enough time for making value judgments about each new transformation. In these circumstances, increasing complexity with excessive speed leads to destruction that threatens systemic disintegration instead of furthering development. Per the “Great Acceleration” narrative of the Anthropocene, speed is significantly responsible for the crisis of life. It may be that hope for fulfilling future life is only accessible in a slow movement, but at the same time slow pace is only possible in marginal zones of the world.

The dialogue between Memo and his father in *Sleep Dealer* introduces a dilemma: what choices does one make in these circumstances? As they carry on their backs water-filled bags to the corn fields, Memo doubts if growing crops in this manner is sustainable. His father confronts him

saying: “¿Quieres que nuestro futuro pertenezca a nuestro pasado?”<sup>1</sup> Memo laughs that this is simply impossible, but the father explains that in the past they believed that there was a better future for them and that hope was connected to their land. If they give up their field now and let it dry out, their future that is the hope for better life would dry out as well. “Future” appears in this dialogue as the time dimension that is maintained by the *milpa*—the indigenous agro-ecological system of food production in Mexico and its plant life, which in turn is dependent upon water. Consequently, the death of their crops threatens to be the end of the time in which Mexican peasants live. In other words, they are connected so unequivocally to the *milpa* that without it they would lose their identities and any chance of fulfilling their aspirations. Nevertheless, Memo is not entirely convinced. He tells his father that “el mundo es más grande que esta milpa”<sup>2</sup> and later takes a bus to Tijuana where he employs himself in a futuristic sweat shop, called in the film a “sleep dealer,” because people working there fall into a sleep-like trance moving to a different time and space dimension.

The *Milpa* has been a culture of the field developed by pre-Columbian civilizations, and its origins associated mainly with the Mayan people of the Yucatan. Here, various plants (beans, *chiles*, squash, and others) grow together in symbiotic relationships with maize, and a complex array of bio-friendly strategies substitute for or mitigate agrochemical use. Besides being a technology of growing crops, *milpa* has been a foundation of a plant-based vision of human life. Planting is a sacred moment when soil, humans and cosmic forces all come together. Plants, especially maize, guarantee human lives that without them are in danger of demise. *Milpas* are viewed by enthusiasts of modernization as an antiquated form of subsistence agriculture that needs to be substituted by industrial methods, and in the twenty-first century, by the use of genetically modified seeds. This substitution, however, throws the baby out with the bathwater; industrial agriculture, and beginning in 1996, the biotechnology revolution, have been responsible for massive migrations from farmland to city. People unable or unwilling to substitute *milpa* agriculture with industrial monocultures that require large surfaces of land and expensive machinery left their fields and migrated to the city, becoming urban poor. They are often employed by the sweatshops (in Mexico called *maquiladoras* or *maquilas*) that require extremely long hours of work, frequently contributing to disintegration of family life, loss of health, and meaning of life: all of which had been previously connected to the biocultural cycles of crops and surrounding nature. Migrants from rural regions are drained by the pace of life in the cities that makes them into easy victims for addiction and criminal networks.

Some, however, like Memo, reconsider; they give up sweatshops and search for alternatives. Memo himself goes back to growing *milpa*, even if it must be within the city, next to the wall dividing Mexico and the USA. Going back to growing *milpa* is more than a symbolic gesture. He needs *milpa* to defend his vision of the world that literally is shown in the field. In a *milpa*, the growing together, the mutual support of the plants, and the bean climbing up on the stalk of the corn, can be viewed as a model for humans searching for ways to build the world differently. *Milpa* teaches us to share the space as needed, assist each other, and patiently wait. In this way, resistance to corporate neo-colonization transforms into what Walter Mignolo (2015) calls “re-existence,” practices of decolonization of our cultures and economies, by reincorporating indigenous visions and slower time.

More and more thinkers, artists, and activists are discovering an alternative time and way of life in the vegetal realm (Kohn 2013; Marder 2014; Myers 2015; Nealon 2016). Urban gardens become the loci of alternative visions where a different world is slowly imagined (Fainberg and Larson 2016; Beilin 2016). Constructing worlds with plants hybridizes the ideas of progress and growth. This does not mean that all the plants are “slow” and beneficial, but rather it represents a movement of attention towards generally non-predatory, non-adaptive, and non-rational levels of reflection that are foundational for thinking and which are lacking in our prevalent gain-only oriented reasoning.

This essay reflects on divergent cultures of time in the Hispanic world in the context of the fear that humanity’s future on Earth is foreclosed due to Global Warming, contamination, and exhaustion of resources. Envisioning globalized and alter-globalized connectivity of distant spaces allows us to devise a map of movements linked by cultures of plants and time. We lay down the opposition between the narrative of time that pushes full speed ahead, and the other that shows how to slow down, resynchronizing with biological rhythms of the planet.

In the first and second parts of the essay, we analyze how the preoccupation with the loss of human habitat is countervailed by neoliberal economies’ constant push to speed up. Corporate pace picks up as technologies are constantly updated to increment the efficiency of productivity. This includes productivity of various life forms, such as humans and plants. While humans are conditioned by economic discourses and structures, plants are modified for efficiency through genetic engineering; they are redesigned to grow “in a hurry” to bring more profit.<sup>3</sup> In the later parts of the essay, we focus on *Shadowtime*, the time of the corporeal cycles, imagined as an all-embracing time of the planet that is larger and more important than the corporate. We argue that *Shadowtime* is

rediscovered through intimacy with the non-human realms, and especially with plants through urban gardens, and social movements that in many parts of Hispanic world introduce agroecology as an alternative for industrial agriculture. Methodologically, this essay is transdisciplinary; it draws from different fields, sources and approaches as needed for understanding networked Hispanic cultures connected by their visions of time and plants. We are parting from Environmental Studies scholarship, but we incorporate also Software Studies, films—in particular Alex Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer* and Vicki Funari’s and Sergio de la Torre’s *Maquilopolis*—as well as brief ethnographies and interviews gathered during long research trips in search of alternatives involving intellectuals and activists in Spain (Vilanova i la Geltrú, and Cardedeu, both near Barcelona), Argentina (San Jorge, Entre Ríos, and Misión Chaqueña, Salta), Paraguay (Edelira, Itapúa), Mexico (Tehuacán, Puebla) and the US (Madison, Wisconsin).<sup>4</sup>

### **Corporate Time:<sup>5</sup> Oracle Beehive**

Corporate Time is literally produced by multinationals. For example, in 2008 the multinational technology firm Oracle issued software applications with the intriguing name of “Oracle Beehive” that contained an interactive calendar, allowing supervisors to take maximum advantage of the time of their subordinates and force optimal efficiency. Consequently, however, the subalterns’ flexibility and creativity was minimized, turning work communication into an automated network of signifiers behind which the subjects themselves disappear. Oracle Beehive included also e-mail and teleconferencing applications, as well as virtual spaces of work with mobile access. Starting in 2011, Oracle Beehive has served as the platform of Apple iPhones and iPads as well as certain other smartphones. These are high-tech time management devices that incorporate the ideology of the knowledge economy into our psychological time-space dimension. Apart from acceleration and automation, they deliver fragmentation of time and interrupt the process of thought.

The private time trackers and time managers downloadable from Apple’s iOS App Store teach how to interiorize corporate time dynamics by creating self-deadlines, attributing priorities to goals and a corresponding percentage of effort to a variety of individual tasks and duties. In this way, private life becomes an extension of the professional, and the corporate rhythm extends itself to the lacunae of the not-yet-overtaken-by-television-and-shopping remains of human time. The acceleration of both physical and mental activities is heightened not only by software, but also by the technologies of entertainment and infotainment that reduce the attention spans of consumers whose

brains are transformed by the fast motion (Nisbet 2001). All that occurs slowly, including the *slow violence* of environmental destruction (Nixon 2014), is imperceptible for an awareness transformed by the constant contact with the reality of split screens that seduce with limitless humor, pleasure, and glamor (Riechmann 2015).

Shahjahan (2014) argues that time has always been a device for the colonization of bodies, which makes them more productive and less fulfilled. Global capitalist interest in the efficient and economically profitable use of the planet's resources, including microbes, plants, animals and humans, has logically led to the emergence of a bioeconomy (Pavone 2012). Historically, the network of connections between speed, profit, and power on one side, and the suffering and destruction of vulnerable forms of life on the other, can be traced back to the first trains that facilitated faster transportation of animals to slaughterhouses and of soldiers to wars.<sup>6</sup> The acceleration was partially resisted in the parts of the world with delayed development, which, however, did not protect them from destruction. Shahjahan (2014) reminds that colonial projects were justified by the improper notions of time attributed to the colonized as Europeans saw their mission in uprooting natives' perceived laziness.<sup>7</sup> The urge to continue this mission can be observed in today's neoliberal, meritocratic economies. Marisol de la Cadena (2010) describes a contemporary campaign of punctuality in Ecuador, where Hispanic "lateness" has been targeted as responsible for the economic delay of the nation, and setting all the clocks and watches to the same minute was presented by Ecuadorean media as a betterment of the patria. During the campaign of punctuality, Ecuadorean television emitted clips of people running through the streets of towns and corridors of buildings not to be late to their classes or work assignments, with their faces stretched taut by tension.

Eli Meyerhoff and Elizabeth Johnson (2015) remind that the ancient Greeks distinguished two kinds of time: Cronos that, as Saturn from Goya's painting, devoured its own offspring, progressing unstopably towards total destruction of life, and Kairos, a time that was not linear, but circular and looped, providing opportunities to humans who ventured towards it. Corporate Time reminds us of the Cronos that consumes workers, canalizing their energy to its projects and profits. We can see a powerful allegory of a Cronos Economy in *Sleep Dealer*, where in futuristic sweatshops Mexican workers' energies are transferred to American production sites through a technology featuring "nodes" (metallic implants in the flesh of the forearm) inserted into human bodies and connected to pipe-like cables. In the future of cheap and alienated labor imagined by the film, the hardest work in the US is still done by Mexicans but without their material presence on the

American soil. When Memo begins to work in a *sleep dealer*, a sweatshop where this virtual transfer of energy to the US work sites takes place, he feels weaker and weaker with every session and loses his sense of self and of time. Oftentimes, he hallucinates.

The documentary *Maquilopolis: The City of Factories* (2006) shot, similarly as *Sleep Dealer*, in Tijuana, shows that the reality of today's sweatshops, called in Spanish *maquilas*, is not far distanced from *Sleep Dealer's* vision. The women who are the protagonists of the documentary claim to have become seriously sick after few years of work in a *maquila* due to contaminating conditions, the stress of surveillance and the non-human pace of work that was imposed on them. *Sleep Dealer* and *Maquilopolis* are connected not only by series of similar shots of the border wall and of Tijuana, by the commentaries of the border cities maquilas, in Rivera's film called "info-maquilas," but also by visual metaphors representing the exploited body in the assembly line.

In *Maquilopolis*, which, in Bill Nichols's terms (2001), falls somewhere between a participatory and performance documentary, sweatshop workers are allowed to creatively express themselves in front of the cameras and, at times, even take control of the cameras themselves. In this way, in the alternative space of the documentary, they are given back the subjectivity of which *maquilas* deprive them, turning them to a pure labor. The women are painfully aware of this. While credits are running, as well as a sort of interruption between scenes, dressed in blue uniforms, they stand outside the factories performing in the void a series of small movements that they have to repeat thousands of times during their workday. Their faces are motionless and absent as if they were automatons or in some sort of a trance.<sup>8</sup>

In *Sleep Dealer's* sci-fi convention, this absent automation of workers is taken to its extreme and represented as a sort of hallucinatory sleep in which life is literally "sucked out" of them and transferred to the project-sites where energy is consumed. Connected to the cables, resembling puppets, they move like the machines that they are connected to on the other side of the border wall. The workers are not actually producing, but rather become a part of the production process, turned into mere sources of energy for accelerating corporate profit, like bioengineered non-human organisms and water. Memo reflects: "lo que le pasó al río me está pasando a mí."<sup>9</sup> Rivera warns that as the bioeconomy develops, not only water, minerals plants and animals are going to be transformed into "factories,"<sup>10</sup> but their predicament will also be—or even already is—shared by impoverished humans.

In *Sleep Dealer* and in *Maquilopolis*, however, workers' bodies rebel. These are moments of pulling away from the task, spacing or timing out, venturing outside of the time of production by



escaping to the bathroom or falling asleep to stop performing and keep the energy in. In Rivera's film that "wasted" time is then deducted from the paycheck of the worker. At the end of the film, Memo rebels by breaking off the sweatshop's node cables, he gives up his jobs and turns against the system that created sweatshops and drones, one of which by mistake killed his father. In the last scenes of the film, we see him carrying water in plastic bins for his little *milpa* planted in the middle of the liminal countryside of abandoned shacks near the US border wall, like his father did miles away in the past. He does not merely repeat what his father did, however, but rather reapplies it in the new context and gives it a new meaning connecting it to a larger struggle for the shape of the future world. In Memo's replanting of *milpa* at the border city, resistance transforms into *re-existence*.

The concept of *re-existence*, according to Walter Mignolo (2015), means collecting the inheritance of resistance and putting it to work as an effort to construct an alternative modernity that would be truly decolonizing. In particular, *re-existence* is an attempt to re-connect with the epistemologies of the people of Abya-Yala as, following the call of Takir Mamani, indigenous movements call the Latin American continent.<sup>11</sup> The discourses and practices of re-existence establish relationships with indigenous philosophies of nature. According to Enrique Leff, "in Latin America, the idea that socio-ecological justice and emancipation are based on the cultural re-appropriation of nature is central to political ecology analysis" (53). Thus, it is intimately connected to re-building relationships with plants.

The image of sprouting corn at the end of the movie is the sign that the future can be still regained if seeds are planted and watered. The last words of Memo in the movie: "Tal vez hay un futuro para mí aquí si me conecto y lucho."<sup>12</sup> suggest a different kind of connection to the one that he was subjected in the *sleep dealer*, and that carried his energy to the system that oppressed him. The image of shacks crowded by the wall separating Mexico and the US and the following brief scene of Memo and Luz holding hands suggest a human connection in solidarity that can sprout like well-watered corn, perhaps, to uproot all walls that separate. But, these last words of Memo, accompanied with the image of sprouting corn, also evoke the interspecies alliance that has shaped Mexican rural culture for millennia.

In the context of exchanges between the US and Mexico, relations between man and corn are a subject of a dramatic debate. In 1999, a group of scientists interested in implementing transgenic seed in Mexico asked president Zedillo to legalize them. In response, the president created a Commission on Biosecurity (Cibiogem) that began to take steps towards approving genetically engineered (GE) crops. When, after years of struggle, in 2005 the Biosecurity Law was

approved, opening doors for transgenic seeds, it was strongly opposed and dubbed the “Monsanto Law”. Wide waves of protests rippled throughout the country, culminating in a cultural seminar entitled “Sin maíz no hay país.”<sup>13</sup> A long list of signatures by writers, academics, scientists and artists called *Manifiesto en defensa del maíz* (Maize Manifesto) was passed to the government and the judicial authorities suspended issuing permits for planting transgenic corn.

The metaphor of “corn children” reappears in various versions of the manifesto reworded various times through the following years, as well as on the accompanying posters and artwork exhibited during the anti-GE corn campaign at the Museo Tamayo, Museo de las Mujeres Artistas (MUMA) and Museo del Arte Moderno en Oaxaca. This metaphor’s origins are mythical; the Genesis of Maya-Quiché, *Popol-Vuh* (Goetz 2003) contains a story of the people as made of corn. After the Gods failed three times to make people out of stone, mud and wood, the mother Goddess Ixmukané formed the fourth generation out of corn mass. Only corn people survived the scrutiny of gods. Perhaps, since then, for thousands of years, in Mexico, life has revolved around corn.

In today’s Mexico, the culture of *milpa* has been jeopardized by the import of cheap US corn—mostly genetically engineered—that is entering the country free of trade barriers (Otero, 2012), as well as by “genetic drift” (Quist and Chapella 2001; Álvarez-Buylla, 2014; Álvarez-Buylla and Piñeiro-Nelson 2016). The culture of *milpa* is threatened further by the advent of GE corn plantations in Mexican fields. In the global model, corn is no longer sacred and diverse but turned into a monoculture and takes the form of the most popular cereal and various snacks that provide for fast, accessible meals. As the US corn is imported to Mexico, Mexican diet has also changed leading to highest ever rates of obesity and diabetes (Otero, Pechlaner et al. 2015). The culture of *milpa* and the culture of fast corn confront each other in Mexico.

In Teresa Camou’s documentary *Sunú* (2015), the value of the life surrounding indigenous varieties of corn, thinner and smaller than the improved hybrid varieties, is reflected upon in its capacity to keep and save the time of cultures that will disappear with the advent of transgenic monocultures. The film is a voice in the campaign to save the *milpa*, but it does not defend it just because it is a tradition, but rather because it allows people to be in control of their lives, thanks to their intimate relationship with the seeds and the field. Growing *milpa* is hard, and as one of the protagonists states, tomorrow’s meal is never guaranteed. Nevertheless, when it is served, it gives happiness and health. Mexican peasants interviewed by Camou’s team express an awareness that patented transgenic seed will take their independence, freedom, and health away. This process of loss is well under way in Paraguay, where peasants surrounded by intensely fumigated GE-soy

plantations begin to suffer health problems and feel forced to abandon their villages (Hetherington 2014; Palau 2016; Bernet and Borgeld 2014). In Argentina, most peasants have already moved away from the countryside, and agriculture has transformed into a big business.

### **Plants in a Hurry: Genetically Engineered Crops and Superweeds**

In GE plantations, Corporate Time takes over even the plants, dramatically transforming ecosystems that lose health through becoming exceptionally productive. In Argentina, Roundup Ready (RR)-soy plants, engineered to resist the herbicide glyphosate (Roundup), which accompanies them in great quantities, have enabled agribusiness firms to grow soy year-round. Prior to the arrival of the RR-soy bioeconomy, Argentine soy growers tended to rotate soy with alfalfa pastures or with a winter crop such as wheat. In a period of increasing vagaries in weather due to climate change, RR-soy technology is seen by farmers as a simple tool for ensuring yield stability that is, to some extent, immune to the temporal dynamics of biophysical features such as seasons and ambient communities of “pests” and weeds.

In this way, the inexorable ticking of RR-soy’s corporate clock atop the rubble of Argentina’s colonial and genocidal past (Gordillo 2014) becomes linked to the geological time in which Anthropocenic climate change has emerged. Crop biotechnology switches vegetal time to the Corporate Time of global economic treadmills, which drive the export-oriented markets of this “Republic of Soy,”<sup>14</sup> as well as the slaughterhouses and biofuel factories that depend on RR-soy for raw material. The temporary rental model of soy farming in Argentina encourages RR-soy farmers to utilize highly intensive chemical inputs to maximize their short-term output. In addition, the very simplicity and effectiveness of glyphosate means that farmers can put a lot of it in a short amount of time to raise not one but two soy crops within a year. Roundup Ready biotechnologies may be helping raise the macroeconomic profiles of the Republic of Soy as well as bringing fast, liquid assets to those investing in the booming soy bioeconomy. Yet, the skewing of vegetal time into the corporate time of multinational biotechnology also comes at a price (after all, time *is* money in the capitalist sense)—one that is neither trivial nor completely calculable.

The glyphosate-soaked hinterlands of Latin America have become toxic zones inhospitable for living communities. In Argentina, in San Jorge (Entre Ríos) and in Córdoba, we met community activists and clinicians who spoke in graphic terms about spikes in cancers, neurological seizures, and birth malformations they were witnessing in communities living next to RR-soy crops (Ávila Vásquez 2015a, 2015b; Manessi 2015). RR-soy’s steep expansion in Latin America is also

accelerating deforestation rates. While various governments in the Republic of Soy have responded with laws to regulate deforestation, which have helped to reduce the *rate* of deforestation in areas such as Brazilian Amazon, agribusinesses are finding loopholes and ways to circumvent these laws such that overall deforestation is nevertheless increasing, albeit at a slower rate. Along with the forests, the lives and livelihoods are threatened of already marginalized indigenous communities that are subsisting on these forests, like the Wichis in Misión Chaqueña that we visited in our 2015 trip through Northern Argentina. Furthermore, the continuous growth of soy enabled by RR biotechnology, coupled with the disappearance of trees that are either cut down or killed by Roundup applications, has created a situation where the hyper-flat plains of the Pampas and the Chacos are experiencing floods of a magnitude never seen before (Nosetto et al. 2015). In these areas, some of the flattest regions in the world, water tables that used to be deep under tree and prairie habitats have risen close to the surface after these lands were converted to intensive agricultural use. Here Corporate Time built into crop plants contributes to floods.

The biotechnological corporatization of vegetal time in the Republic of Soy is occurring without struggle, and the associated resistance has been of a mixed variety, involving human and non-human bodies. The massive application of herbicides over a large scale has led to the evolution of “superweeds” resistant to herbicides. These resistant plants represent the frontline of an emerging global battle between corporate time and accelerated vegetal time. Superweeds grow very quickly and, assisted by the wind, reproduce at very high rates. As superweeds take over, they force farmers to give up RR-soy plantations, enabling such abandoned land to re-establish itself as secondary forest or prairie land.

In the evolution of plant mutants that learn to hurry to subvert corporate biotechnology, we see a metaphorical model for human action once more. While holding on to the past may prove ineffective as a mode of resistance, the solution may be precisely transforming modes of action in response to the destructive technologies, with the vision of restoring chosen parts of the past. In other words, this is linking “future with the past” like Memo in the last scenes of *Sleep Dealer*. Hurrying like a “superweed” would also mean learning how to work and spread urgently using the new technologies to regain access to slow time. *Sleep Dealer* alternates time condensation and distention showing how to accelerate to slow down in search and in struggle for alternatives. Rivera’s film language problematizes “slow” and “fast” time through the subjective rendition of time remembered. Memory condenses the slowness of time of plants to render the beauty of the process of sprouting maize. By contrast, Corporate Time becomes torturously distended during Memo’s

work hours in a sleep dealer. The condensed time of corn sprouting appears in the beginning and at the end of the film as plant growth becomes a frame for human activities and struggles. These reversals of slow and fast do not only signal their subjective relativity, but most importantly, as the *Indignados* famously stated,<sup>15</sup> that it is necessary to move slow to get far, that is to have a future. In other words, ultimately slow plant time sustains life while the Corporate Time extracts energy out of it for the sake of profit.

When Rudy, the drone pilot who has mistaken Memo for a terrorist and killed his father instead, comes to Tijuana and asks Memo if there is any way that he can make up for what he did, Memo tells him to destroy the dam that had taken the water away from the people in Santa Ana del Río. They hack the system entering the sleep dealer where Memo worked, and Rudy flies his supersonic drone, sending missiles into the cement wall against which Memo's father had once thrown a small stone in his impotent anger. When the water returns to the village, time slows down again as if the past with the future had been given back to its people and we see Memo's mother and brother happy again. The poster accompanying *Rising Resistance* (2011), Bernet and Borgeld's documentary about resistance to GE soy in Paraguay, shows plants growing around a human fist, suggesting that there is an alliance between the superweeds beginning to take over the Paraguayan soy plantations and the peasants who are fumigated like weeds and are resisting like them. Is the superweeds' resistance, subversive transformation and destructive overgrowth of the GE plantations a nature's hacking of the bioeconomy?

### **Step Out to Shadowtime: Time of Plants**

Shadowtime is a sudden awareness that the Corporate Time that pushes us from one deadline to the next, can be abandoned for the deep time of the planet and its somatic cycles, and that the latter matters the most.<sup>16</sup> The perception that in order to save the future, we need to water our plants does not uniquely belong to peasants, who, like Memo's father, and the people portrayed in *Sunú*, resist the change by persisting in their routines even if they have to carry the water on their own backs for kilometers. Taking care of plants also comes with a philosophical reflection and as a guiding principle of several both urban and rural re-existence movements.

The new social movements already display a number of qualities of plant time. In his book on Latin American political resistance, Zibechi (2012) writes of "underground struggles" that consist of "growing roots" (14) and from that "rootedness" creating "an infinity of small, self-managed islands . . . growing settlements on the margins of large cities by occupying plots of land" (15). With

the same vocabulary, he might as well be describing the action of weeds invading monocultures. In fact, various resistance metaphors come from the vegetal realm, which suggests that human resistance is learning to think like plants. The very concept of a “grassroots” movement displays a vegetal inspiration for resistance politics. Various new social movements and alternative communities in Latin America and Spain are built by the excluded populations that “grow in the gaps that are opening in capitalism” (Zibechi 15). Similarly, reflecting upon *Indignados*, Marder (2012) writes that

What is most subversive about the recent protests, though, is not political action conventionally understood but a kind of lingering, being in a place on an ongoing basis, bodily occupying it, being physically there . . . When environmental activists chain themselves to trees that are about to be felled, they replicate, to some extent, the mode of being of these vegetal beings: confined to a place, bodily manifesting their bond . . . And when protesters pitch tents in parks or on city squares, they reinvent the strange modern rootedness in the uprooted world of the metropolis, existentially signifying their discontent by merely being there. (25-26)

In Marder’s view, a plant is not an organism but has life dispersed through its body so that some parts can live while others die. A plant model can be useful to challenge the modern dualisms of life and death as well as victory and defeat, neither of which are in the plant kingdom complete and total. Today’s new social movements’ presence in time is like that; they are transient; they come up, become visible and often disappear, without achieving (yet) the slow-building of institutions like civil rights movements before did, but they do not disappear totally either. Plants form new roots from shoot tissues that have fallen on the ground, or form adventitious roots that have divided from the stem, reappearing constantly with a surprising spontaneity. Small social initiatives that dissolve similarly are later undertaken anew by yet different human groups, the ideas of transformation disseminating like seeds or sprouting from hidden roots. New social movements are learning plants’ capacities to lie dormant, in half asleep vegetative state, and then germinate, rise, and spread fast in favorable circumstances.<sup>17</sup> In *Sleep Dealer*, when Memo begins to grow his *milpa* in Tijuana, the resistance of his father is sprouting once more on his field, hundreds of kilometers away. The time and space dynamics of new social movements offer a hope for a change in spite of the existing power disproportions between the global economy that goes full-speed-ahead and those who slow down to re-think and replant alternative worlds.

The origin of such important qualities of life as sensitivity, irritability, alterability, and

partaking in eternity through reproductive transformation is to be found precisely on the vegetal level, which is where the deepest motivation for life lies as well. Through enlivening our pre-organic heritage, we can overcome the inoperative old schemes of animal predation. While in the Modern experience, time is defined by the aggression of the stronger and the fear of the victim which are built into the function of capitalistic economic practices, a variety of post-capitalist alternatives may be characterized by sensitivity to otherness, reflexivity and slow, meditative change. The biopolitics of the alternative world that the new social movements resisting globalization promise may be no longer modeled on human animal predation, but rather on one learned from plants.

Alternative movements open ways out of the system through retreats, life changes, or alternative economies. Metaphors and practices connecting time and plants spread through shadowtime. In the words of the Madison, Wisconsin activist, Stephanie Rearick (2015), in the development of alternative economies “the photosynthesis level is time.” Alternative economies privilege plant symbols not only through metaphors but also through their love of gardens. In Vilanova i la Geltrú, the symbol of the alternative economy is a tree, whose resin is the social currency of the town: turuta. Turutas are designed in a different way than global currencies, not to bring gain, but to facilitate exchanges to sustain the members, and thus structure the human relation with time in a different way. The “time” of turutas is social; it opens and extends for human interactions and for human-plant interactions. In Vilanova, similarly to other alternative economies such as in Zarzalejo or Cardedeu, a co-operative farm with organic crops is at the heart of the association. While most of other businesses participating in Vilanova’s turuta economy, accept local currency for up to 50 percent of the value of their products and services, the vegetable farm products can be purchased solely with the local currency. Juan del Río, coordinator of the Town in Transition<sup>18</sup> Network in Spain, meets us in *Esbiosfera*, a spacious garden in the middle of the city of Cardedeu, surrounded by walls that separate it from noise and contamination. He insists that we take pictures at various angles making sure to show how big the basil leaves are and how healthy the squash looks. A restaurant connected to the garden serves an exquisite salad. Here, under a straw roof, local activists meet and talk about how to heal the bodies and the souls overstressed by the pace of today’s life and how to construct a local resilient community that could survive crises of all sorts.

While Towns in Transition constitutes mainly a middle-class, small-town movement reaching toward locals victimized by the economic crisis of 2008, getting out of Corporate Time proves to be even more urgent and no doubt more challenging for sweatshop workers in Mexico, El Salvador,

Honduras, Haiti, China, and South Asia. In *Sleep Dealer* and in *Maquilopolis*, reflecting on the realities of sweatshops, the liberations occur through synergies of human encounters mediated by art and activism. *Maquilopolis* portrays lives of single mothers who feel they must keep working in the deregulated free-trade-zone factories to feed their kids. However, by organizing to confront the abuse they experience in the work places and against environmental injustice, they find a partial way out of the dehumanizing work world. By connecting with each other to fight for their rights, they establish their own agency. Participating in the project of the documentary film where they play, perform, and film themselves provides a partial way out of their imprisonment in the sweatshop schedules through reflection, communication and acting, which give more significance to the scarce time outside of work.

In *Sleep Dealer*, the protagonists free themselves from Corporate Time in a more radical fashion, hacking the corporate cyber network and destroying the hydro-electrical dam that deprived Memo's town from water. For this to happen, Memo's story had to be told by an artist/journalist (Luz) and it had to reach and move someone with access to technologies of power (Rudy). Rivera's film suggests that alliances between individuals on both sides of all divides need to be established and that storytellers (humanities scholars could be counted here) are indispensable. As the water fills the river basin, bringing life back to the town, a feeling of freedom returns to the lives of the protagonists. Memo does not go back to his hometown, however, but stays by the wall dividing Mexico from the US, to struggle where the two worlds push against each other, on the edge of different spaces, but also different times. By planting Mexican maize on the border, Memo is restaging the past when the future was not yet lost, in his words: "un futuro con un pasado,"<sup>19</sup> immersed in the hopeful cycles of growth in the *milpa*.

The life of Pedro Vega of Edelira, Itapúa, in eastern Paraguay, has been in some ways parallel to that of Memo from Rivera's film. In his early adulthood, he employed himself to work for RR-soy plantations, but slowly began to understand that the dynamic of agro-business was deeply harmful for small farmers like himself, making them lose their health and pushing them out of their land. He saw that, in the long run, RR-soy was deadly for the environment, contaminating it with herbicides and destroying its biodiversity, even depriving people of chances for a good life. The money he was earning while working for agribusiness was considerable, but only in a short span of time. Vega wanted to think of long-term good. He joined the Paraguayan peasant movement CONAMURI (Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Rurales)<sup>20</sup> that fights against corporate takeover of the land by huge monocultures of RR-soy, and went on to study agro-ecology at the Escola



Latino Americana da Agroecologia (ELAA) in Lapa, Paraná, connected to the organization, Movimento de Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers Movement, MST), Brazil. When he returned to his farm in Edelira, he and his father regained the parts of their land that they had previously leased to grow RR-soy. In the short term that meant less income. They felt, however, that by liberating themselves from the dependence on industrial farming, they were regaining their way of life and future. They began to grow organic crops, and to protect these from pests and to fertilize them, they used hybrid methods of agroecology.<sup>21</sup>

Pedro has situated the plants on his farm in a different way than in a typical plantation; there are no rows and no geometric patterns, but in this sunny and sweetly-smelling garden, every plant has its place and its mission. This is farming with “multiple rhythms” (Tsing 24) where various crops grow together, but mature at different points in the season, as to accommodate each other and offer ample opportunity for pollinators. In these synergizing pulsations of time, diverse formations of life all together create hope for sustainable future. One plant protects from pests, another is a perfect fertilizer, while yet another attracts and traps the insects. In his plantation in Edelira, Pedro Vega knows every plant’s name, its needs and its qualities. For him, agroecology is the art of coexistence where even weeds “are friends” as they are “bio-indicators,” transmitting valuable information about the state of the soil, its mineral composition and possible deficiencies. If we know that the soil lacks nitrogen, we plant *canabalia* or *poroto gigante* that fertilizes in many ways. While Pedro’s garden is exuberant, in his house there are only items for basic needs. He does not own a car or even a scooter—which is a popular means of transportation in his village where no public bus reaches. Nevertheless, when he speaks, his enthusiasm for the future is contagious. Pedro will teach in CONAMURI’s school of agroecology that grows every year, protecting the people and the country from the threat of pesticide-filled monocultures and from the loss of livelihood.

Questions posed in Bruno Latour’s “Time of Simultaneity” (2014) describe the organizational principles in an agroecological garden: ‘Can we cohabit with you?’ ‘Is there a way for all of us to survive together while none of our contradictory claims, interests and passions can be eliminated?’ “Time of Simultaneity” has, in Latour’s view, substituted for the “Revolutionary” time equipped with past and future. Pedro’s garden can be thus viewed as a model for Latour’s expanded social assembly. Something, however, works differently here than in Latour’s vision of the world limited to the eternal present of perfect democracy based on an enlargement of the parliament. Gardens like Pedro’s, where interspecies alliances and understandings between people and plants are (re)established, accommodate contradictory claims precisely to regain the future. They are bottom-

up attempts to rebuild the hope for a good life that are perhaps as important, if not more, than the institutional reforms proposed by Latour.

The expansion of corporate agriculture has not only led to the loss of livelihoods of small growers, but even more importantly has also invaded native peoples' lands and threatened their lifestyles. In many countries, having lost their own ways of life and unwilling to adapt to the rhythms of Corporate Time, native people are suspended between different regimes of time. In their attempts to find again a time fitting their identity, they get closer to what used to be their pre-Columbian plant economies.<sup>22</sup> According to Doctor Rodolfo Franco, in Misión Chaqueña (Salta), the majority of health problems suffered by the Wichis (native people now living in northern Argentina) are caused by bad nutrition (likely fast food filled with sugars but devoid of nutrients). Once nomadic hunters and gatherers, Wichis have had a hard time adapting to their newfound sedentary life (Buliubasich and Gonzalez 2006). Not able to participate in the fast-paced economy surrounding them and unable to hunt as their dry forests cannot feed them, they live in a limbo between the past and present, feeling their history lurking beneath the surface of everyday life and the neoliberal bioeconomy pressing down on them from the surrounding RR-soy agribusinesses.

The Wichi's legend connects good life and hope for future to plant life. It is the figure of a tree that grows through layers of meaning—soil, blood, and sky—recomposing Earth after years of destruction. It points out the way to that Shadowtime, where all human conflicts become insignificant and a spiritual harmony arises from the symbiosis of all life. The Wichi's flag displays a huge tree whose roots reach the heart of the Earth, cross a river of blood, and whose branches shoot into the sky, yellow from the sun and blue and green from the air. According to the legend, after years of war between the white men and Wichis, white man and native man looked into each other's eyes and decided to forgive each other, and planted the seed of forgiveness from which a tree sprouted. The legend follows: "Ese árbol se ve de tan lejos y es tan hermoso observarlo, que nadie puede mirar para otro lado; y tan altas y tan bellas son sus ramas, que marcan el camino del que se pierde en la vida."<sup>23</sup> In the past, thousands of seeds of this tree fell into the hearts of men and women, curing them of hatred. The last part of the legend expresses a desire for a future as a time of peace. Wichi activists, such as Alberto Gómez (2015), believe that they can only find harmony in the forest; if no longer as a place to hunt, then as a space of solace, now and then supplying them with wood for the arts and crafts that they produce. The forest is where they want to open their school and where they want to hold their meetings. In the forest, they feel at ease.

### **Conclusion: The Road in the Forest**

At first I did not understand why Dr. Rodolfo Franco (2015), called by the people “the Wichí doctor,” drove us for close to an hour through a huge belt of flattened forest in the vicinity of Misión Chaqueña, while repeating and rephrasing the same simple piece of information with no end, as if he himself could not make sense out of it. *No one knows when the bulldozers came and widened this road, that used to be small and narrow, just enough for a car to get through. It was turned into a several miles long, and wide enough for two highways.* On both sides, dry, inhospitable looking forest grows. It is full of thorny bushes that come directly from the dusty earth with no grass or moss that could not survive without water. This forest is sacred for the Wichis. This is the only plant life they have. Each of the trees that were destroyed by bulldozers needed fifty years to grow. The forest and its roads are part of the Wichis’ identity. Wichí activists, Alberto and Mauro (2015), state repeatedly: “Without the forest there are no Wichis.” If the forest is gone, they will have to abandon Misión Chaqueña and become part of a world whose pace they cannot take. Misión is not really a mission, since the British missionaries left in a hurry during the Malvinas war, leaving to the Wichis the terrains as the tribe’s property. In the mornings, they go to the forest and pick up the wood of *palo santo*, which they sculpt into figures of cats and turn into key chains. In the afternoons, they sell their sculptures in the only store in town to get enough food for an evening meal. The Wichis are horrified by what happened to the road; young Alberto and Mauro, shaken by the loss, have written a manifesto about the need to protect Earth and have presented a complaint in the local court. They feel that deforestation is the means to cultural genocide. There is more to the story, however, because the Wichis know that by widening the road, agribusiness put a foot into their land, and who knows when they will find a field of RR-soy growing in the midst of their forest.

Roads are arteries of time, immersed in a human and non-human mesh of connections. They mediate the relation that humans establish between their time of going to and fro, and the shadow-time that surrounds them. Roads get us close to or further away from the real world. A narrow forest road makes us sensitive to the sound of the wind in the leaves while a four-lane highway folds us into a virtual dimension, alienated from everything that we pass by. It is only when going slowly, on a considerably narrow road, that one of the most beautiful quotes from *Don Quixote* holds true: “es preferible el camino a la posada,”<sup>24</sup> where one can also read that “la senda de la virtud es muy estrecha, y el camino del vicio, ancho y espacioso.”<sup>25</sup> The Wichis feel dramatically that which we have become oblivious to: the threat that cutting down forests to widen its roads takes everyone in the same direction, pulling them into a whirlpool of accelerated Corporate Time, automated by

invisible algorithms of destruction.

At the same time, even if we are living in the same planet, and even though all planetary times are connected as Latour claims in a “monstrous simultaneity,” time is not moving everywhere in the same way, and it takes thinking and resources—i.e., plants—to be able to choose the proper pace. To regain the time that fits their identities, the Wichis feel the need to go back to the forest. The song “Time Granted” by Sweatshop Union, takes us, in its concluding fragments, also to “the woods” whose wind opens “our third eye.” Memo needs his corn to attain his “future with a past,” and Pedro grows his agroecological garden. Activists of alternative economies believe that substituting industrial monocultures with slow time plants brings the promise of a good life back, while they ally with superweeds that subvert Corporate economies. Conill, Castells, et al. (2013) call activists who appreciate time more than money “transformatives” and remind us that the individual transformations of mindsets and lifestyles make for a bigger change. If only there is enough water and attentive regard, plants may still give us a future.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Do you want our future to belong to our past?”

<sup>2</sup> “The world is larger than this corn field.”

<sup>3</sup> Although the argument that transgenic crops are meant to “save the growing world population from hunger” is often mentioned, in the particular settings that we researched these crops are mainly produced for export and for animal feed. They are in fact decreasing local populations’ access to food and destroying nations’ food sovereignty (Otero 2008). On the other hand, various recent reports show that transgenic crops do not bring more yield over time than the conventional varieties (Gutiérrez López 2015; The National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine 2016; Hakim 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Our field research in Argentina and Paraguay was supported by an Interdisciplinary Research Award from the University of Wisconsin’s Office of the Vice Chancellor for Graduate Research & Education.

<sup>5</sup> We take the concept of Corporate Time from Susie O’Brien (2007) where she attributes it to Giroux (2003), and defines it in the following terms:

It offers a useful metaphor for a broader social experience of time, driven by the imperative of economic productivity. Infinitely flexible in its organizational capacity, theoretically democratic in its application—Corporate Time can be adapted to allow everyone, from the lowly factory worker to the CEO, access to everyone else’s schedule—it is generally deployed hierarchically, allowing those at the top to dispose of the time of those at the bottom with a few keystrokes. (87)

<sup>6</sup> Remember Clarín’s “Adiós Cordera!”

<sup>7</sup> Shahjahan writes: “Time became a trajectory against which to measure indigenous and other subaltern individuals and groups in terms of the degree to which they are out of sync, behind in development, anachronistic, and resistant to progress (Anderson 2011). Linear Eurocentric notions of time were used to sort individuals into opposing categories such as intelligent/slow, lazy/ industrious, saved/unsaved, believer/heathen, developed/undeveloped, and civilized/primitive; in the process, most of the world’s people and their knowledge came to stand outside of history (Fabian 2002). Tuhiwai Smith (2001) argues that colonizers justified their projects by portraying ‘others’ as having ‘deficit models’ of time” (490).

<sup>8</sup> This scene is vividly reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936).

<sup>9</sup> “What happened to the river is happening to me.”

<sup>10</sup> This is how Argentine soy lord Gustavo Grobocopatel calls genetically engineered soy in his TED Talk on genetic modification.

<sup>11</sup> The term Abya-Yala comes from the Kuna language from northern Colombia, which is how the ancient Kuna people called the continent before colonization. It has been recycled by the Bolivian Aymará leader Takir Mamani, who argued against usage of Spanish concepts and attempted to recycle indigenous epistemologies in order to build indigenous politics. Renaming the continent was thought as the first step in epistemological decolonization (Del Valle Escalante 2014).

<sup>12</sup> “Perhaps, there is a future for me here if I get connected and fight.”

<sup>13</sup> “Without corn there is no country” (Richard 2012).

<sup>14</sup> An illustration in Syngenta’s 2003 publicity campaign showed a map in which a large shaded area encompassing Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay was labeled the “United Soy Republic” (Turzi 2011). As the subtitle of a collective volume on transgenic agriculture in Latin America “El Retorno de Hernán Cortés” (The Return of Hernán Cortés, Cechetto, et al. 2003) suggests, “neo-colonization” of Latin America by multinationals has become a commonplace narrative in critical Hispanic discourses.

<sup>15</sup> In May 2011, thousands of Spaniards, in protest against the austerity measures, unemployment, evictions and accompanying corruption among governing elites, get into plazas of cities, most importantly to Plaza del Sol in Madrid, and stays there for weeks, forming an assembly movement that initiates an on-going political debate on how to reconstruct democracy for the benefit of people and the planet. I paraphrase here their slogan “vamos despacio porque vamos lejos” (we move slow because we go far).

<sup>16</sup> The concept may have originated from the title of the song by Siouxsie and the Banshees, from their 1991 album *Superstition*.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Anna Tsing (2015) writes about the pines:

... there are many and varied pine adaptations to fire. Some pines go through a ‘grass stage,’ spending several years looking like tufts of grass while their root system grow strong, and only then shooting up like crazy things until their buds might get above the coming flames. Some pines develop such thick bark and high crowns that everything can burn around them without giving them more than a scar. Other pines burn like matches but



have ways of ensuring that their seeds will be first to sprout on the burnt earth. Some store seeds for years in cones that open only in fire. Those seeds will be the first to hit the ashes. (169-70).

<sup>18</sup> The Transition Towns movement can be viewed as a signature of alternative economies. Founded in 2006 in Totnes town in Great Britain, the movement's goals are "to create healthy human culture and to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions." (Totnes Town in Transition). Red de Transición España (Net of Transition-Spain), announces that "la Transición es una manifestación de la idea de que la acción local puede cambiar el mundo" (Transition is a manifestation of the idea that a local action can change the world, Red de Transición). Comprised of grass-root community initiatives, it seeks to creatively transform local socio-economic structures in the face of climate change, peak oil, and on-going environmental crises, connecting the needs of environmental repair and political repair.

<sup>19</sup> "A future with a past."

<sup>20</sup> This disproportionately female organization is aiming to attract male members and as of 2016 20 percent of its members are in fact men.

<sup>21</sup> Agroecological literature suggest that increasing biodiversity in agroecosystems can reduce the impact of pests and diseases by natural mechanisms such as resource dilution, disruption of the spatial and temporal cycle, allelopathy, conservation of natural enemies and facilitation of their action against aerial pests and direct and indirect architectural effects and others. (Ratnadass 2012).

<sup>22</sup> The Oneida nation of Northern Wisconsin has preserved their native corn the way it was before European immigrants came and today the Oneidas dream of planting these ancient grains at a larger scale. (We met Oneida's chef who had studied the ancient diets of his tribe and prepared us salad with purslane (*Portulaca oleacea*) and strawberries of unbeatable taste and with medicinal properties. As he masters Oneida's original diet, he (re)learns Oneida's language that very few people in the nation still speak). O'Brien (2007) describes a similar effort of an O'odham community (native Americans from Sonoran Desert) that walks out onto the desert in protest against junk food that increased the levels of diabetes among the native Americans and Mexicans. Besides being a protest, the walk served as a time of reflection on how to recreate ancient models of food gathering and preparation that could heal their bodies: only the desert plants that reestablish blood sugar levels. The participants realize that they were victims of a particular discrepancy between the postindustrial time economy that forces them to live in ways that do not respect the bodily time of their material and historical constitution.

<sup>23</sup> "This tree can be seen from far and it is so beautiful that no one can look to the other side; its branches are so tall and so alluring that they show the way that has been lost in life" (Gómez 2015).

<sup>24</sup> "The road is more important than the destination."

<sup>25</sup> "The path of virtue is narrow while the road of vice is wide and spacious."