"Racial Off-Worlds/Suburban Borderlands:
A Case Study from Escondido, CA"

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The notion that Los Angeles now comprises a binational cosmopolitan and post-suburban sprawl that extends to Mexico is now commonplace. Theorists have variously noted how the region between L.A. and Mexico serves both as a "borderland" (that endlessly hybridizes culture), and as a "liminal" space (in which subjects act out emergent identities in what anthropologist Victor Turner has termed "subjunctive states"; something better understood as imaginary, communal, "what-if" rituals. Since 1994 (during the angry debate over California's anti-immigration intitiative Prop.187), I have traveled and researched a number of the composite suburban-rural spaces (the arroyos, migrant camps, and hybrid immigrant communities) that checker L.A.'s belt communities: Orange County and north San Diego County. This field work has both challenged and shifted the intellectual baggage of "high-theory" that I haul into cultural analysis.

The extensiveness and sanctioned perpetuation of homeless worker camps in this affluent area of gated communities, for example, mocks my own academic penchant for optimistic celebrations of "counter-semiotic resistance" and cultural empowerment. The cardboard and plywood homes of "Rancho de los Diablos," "Kelly Camp," "Loma Bonita," and "Porterville", that is, stand as regulated, racial off-worlds for exclusive designer-home enclaves like Del Mar, Carlsbad, Rancho Santa Fe, and Coto de Caza; country club worlds that employ camp residents and workers on a daily basis. The daily practices of social interaction in transitional immigrant communities, on the other hand, makes the kind of endlessly optimistic abstractions that inform my teaching on media and digital theory pale by comparison. Somewhere between the two recurrent master narratives at play in academic culture--the dystopian vision of power and subjugation that recurs in post-industrial culture, and the optimistic vision of endless, cognitive, "performativity" promised by postmodern culture--lies something far more provisional and complicated.

The pages that follow describe one of these complications: the historical emergence of a composite immigrant community in South Escondido; a cultural space in which interactive media and coalition building created new relationships not just with civic institutions, but with the the most precious and fundamental of California's resources as well: the earth. Few recognize one persistent fact: that Southern California's post-suburban borderlands is also extensively woven with rural spaces and indigenous workers that fashion those borders even as they are themselves continually bounded and regulated. "Project La Cosecha Nuestra" in Escondido provided the opportunity to test both the forms of electronic media engagement that I teach and theorize, and the nagging sense of recurrent and creative institutional recuperation that I suspect.

I. <u>Grounded Theory</u>.

Talk about digital and theories of the virtual help produce the conceptual conditions needed for an emergent technoculture. Such talk, however, has always been as much about a specific formulation of "space," as it has been about technologies or machines per se. That is, digital culture is posed in networked, space- and scale-altering terms (McLuhan 1964, Virilio 1995); virtuality is characterized as mediated engagements with imagined and alternative worlds (DeLeuze 1968, Morse 1998); and telepresence articulates an electronic metaphysic of being "here" and "there" at the same time (Hillis 1996, 1999, Sconce, forthcoming). Space, that is, has become the ghost in the machine of digital culture--even as the contemporary charting of digital geographies has emerged as a preferred, neo-enlightenment theory project.

Spatializing the digital with this kind of "reach" helps construct a vague sense of consensus, for the sheer scale of connectivity will surely elicit agency from all that are fortunate enought to fall in the shadow of the wired, telecom, entity. Yet we must not confuse the idealized mythologies that author digital space, with the actual historical and social spaces that digital and electronic media depend upon and work through. The account that follows considers both theory and production practice to examine the ways that interactive narrative and electronic media were used by a low-income immigrant neighborhood in South Escondido, California to engage systemic health and nutrition problems in the community.

Project Cosecha Nuestra set in motion a network of activities linked to the availability of land in the neighborhood and the formation of an organic gardening project. Video, audio, and digital post-production were utilized to enable improvisational theatrical scenes and participatory narratives intended to address problems, and to give the participants "ownership" over solutions to nutrition-related health problems specific to Latinos in California. These "interactive analog" processes make problematic the now celebrated textual politics of digital interactivity.

There are, then, two wrenches that I want to throw into (and include in) the digital interactivity debate: analog rather than digital narrative and imaging tools; and lived or soiled space (terra firma) rather than virtual space. Both wrenches, analog and earthly, functioned in La Cosecha Nuestra (or "Our Harvest") to perform the ideals usually attributed to digital technologies. Both phenomena, for example, facilitated interactivity, initiated forms of social agency, focused on the generation of mediated narratives; and animated networks utilizing distributed cognition. Of course, these traits in practice did not simply illustrate a set of truisms from the digital mantra. They also created a slippery and unstable social configuration that had real-world political consequences; a prospect that I will address again at the end.

These real world instabilities are worth taking seriously, for experiments in interactivity and participatory media are usually discussed in terms of theoretical design and intention rather than the kind of limited successes, contingencies and tactial failures that we experienced. Some of the earliest forms of portapak activism in the pre-Net age were decentralizing efforts intended to enable disadvantaged populations. Yet many were simultaneously naive and opportunistic forms of liberal paternalism (Boyle 1987). Orthodoxies in contemporary documentary practice, on the other hand, now favor only two modes production: autobiography (diaries, self-disclosures, meditations); or complete effacement (the give-the-camcorders to the indigenes conceit). We were well aware of the utopian traps of total producerly effacement. With a meager $1500. budget for the entire year--for media supplies and videotape for a half-hour production involving about 35-40 people--our version of participation would be less about gifts to a few from Circuit City than about the circulation of electronically-recorded personal narratives in mediated forms and community discussion formats. The real interactivity here did not just involve user-interface rituals, but arm-twisting and consensus as well. Project Cosecha Nuestra involved face-to-face

dialogue by a range of previously segregated citizens who would never otherwise have engaged in dialogue, let alone cooperative work. Electronic media facilitated this process; but access to land made it possible in the first place.

There is a now recognizable, predictable, and tired genre of theorization on new media and society; one that poses as an angry, prophetic, anti-technology call-to-arms in the name of humane values (Ellul 1994, Postman 1992, Roszak 1994). Even though my project might accurately be relegated to the level of "interactive dirt" and involves lived social spaces rather than virtual ones, I do not share the anti-tech genre's suspicion and easy denigration of all things mediated and all things digital. In fact, I hope to liberate the notion of interactive media away from an explicit linkage to specific and always immediately obsolete digital tools (pc's, CD-rom's, website, MUD's), in order to demonstrate how the principles of digital technology extend usefully far beyond mere machines. Of course this idea--that technologies are conceptual and social as well technical--stands as a common thread in media thinking after McLuhan's "deterministic" excesses in the 1960s. Raymond Williams, for example, noted how electronic media must be understood in terms of programming and "mobile, privatized consumption" (Williams 1974). French "apparatus" theory psychologized that media technologies included not just cinematic machines but the ideologies of dominant culture that "produced" viewing "subjects" as well (Commoli, Baudry 1974). More recent research similarly looks beyond the machine by embracing Bruno Latour's "actor-network" model to explain how new technologies are produced in social practices that circulate in and around the adoption and diffusion of those technologies (Comstock 1992, Silverstone 1994). Despite these traditions of extra-hardware technology assessment, digital tools are still regularly fetishized in theory as launching pads for all kinds of perceived experiential and cognitive effects. There has been, that is, a re-bracketing of the machine-and-its-effects in many discourses on digital culture.

In Escondido we took as a working tactic "thinking digitally/acting locally". By this, we intended to break open the standard model of digital that makes electronic culture "box-centric" (pc-based) or "wire-centric" (net-based). If electronic culture is actually about interactivity, multi-user narrative, mediated agency, and distributed cognition--and not about the hardware--then we gain nothing by waiting for developers at Intel or Microsoft or Macromedia to sanction interactive spaces defined by

products. Academic and artistic communities would do well to look beyond commercial products in order to explore how electronic media might inact and enable digital processes for social subjects to "act-out" in lived worlds and social communities.

II. <u>Project Background</u>.

My involvement with La Cosecha Nuestra community developed through a series of referrals. I had been working on a documentary on migrant farmworker encampments in northern San Diego County. That project detailed how meticulously the landscape--integral to local economies in rural-suburban communities--is managed as part of the racial formation in Southern California. It also suggested to me how central the contest over space and access to land had become in the region; a theme that would resurface in provocative ways in La Cosecha Nuestra in Escondido. (**fig.1, "Rancho California, [por favor]**) Through this work I came into contact with CRLA in Oceanside, a legal advocacy group engaged in rural poverty issues. Together with a coalition of non-profit social service agencies CRLA was awarded a grant from Food For All and Healthy Cities and asked to administer a community garden and "food security" education project in South Escondido. Vietnam Veterans of California and the City provided plots of land, the Escondido Clinic provided community health outreach, and a master-gardener and nutritionist from UC Extension exchanged knowledge with community members in a "teach-the-teacher" methodology. The first garden coordinator, Arturo Gonzalez, came to the project after having worked for El Frente Indigena Oaxaqueno Binational. I offered to provide media production resources, students, and myself from UCSD in order to help with the formation of the community and with educational initiatives. Media usage was seen as a way to build-in interactivity and to encourage participatory "ownership" of the project among members of the community.

For someone trained in the traditions of independent film/video the idea of doing a creative project on food and food security seemed like a sure ticket to failure. The obligatory "eat your vegetables" objective of the project seemed to guarantee that viewers--in any culture--would inevitably disengage. Yet nutrition-related illnesses were endemic to this specific community, and the need for intervention compelling. The Latino immigrant community faced a far higher incidence of diabetes and anemia than

the population as a whole; and pregnant women in particular faced medical risks due to poor diets during pregnancy (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services 1996, Squires 1996, Richardson 1996, Nguyen 1997, Schrader 1997, De Jesus 1997). Although many of the indgenous Oaxacans (Mixtecos) and Guatemalans (Mayans) in the community came from remote villages where gardening and fresh produce were commonplace, their eating habits once in California typically involved diets high in starch and cholesterol, canned goods and fast food. This fact was particularly ironic for the recent and ex-farmworkers in the community. Although imported labor of this sort helps make California a celebrated breadbasket of international proportions, the human labor force that fuels agribusiness does so on a diet directly linked to medical risk. Given this context, video art would stand in the service of the four food groups; and artistry in the service of group authorship.

Based on dialogue and focus groups with community members, the media team intended to facilitate, co-create, and videotape short "teatros" or "telenovelas" that addressed food security issues from the community's point of view. Chicano and UFW organizing in the late 1960s, set in motion a long and rich tradition for the teatro in social activism. Since telenovelas are pervasive parts of Hispanic broadcasting in California and elsewhere, we intended to use the televised genre as an updated starting point for creative participation. Taking our cue in part from changes in HIV and AIDs awareness programs, our rationale was that this kind of "bottom-up" participant origination--even on pedestrian health and nutrition issues--would stand a far better chance of success than "top down" applications of "administrative" knowledge by "experts." A lottery to give away garden plots was announced, and the coalition of non-profits and the city invited the press to cover the ground breaking of La Cosecha Nuestra on a gray winter day in January 1997. The video team began research in January and February in interviews with area master gardeners and in meetings with community members. This was followed in March and April with door-to-door interviews and surveys by garden coordinator Arturo Gonzales and my student, co-director, and "story editor" Devora Gomez. Devora's family resided in the neighborhood, and their home served as temporary residence for the video team during filming.

These dialogues and exchanges served two purposes. First, they aimed to solicit involvement in the garden from nearby residents. Many of these renters were initially rightly suspicious of any offer for

free land. Due to high rents, for example, several of the video participants--single, male, Guatemalan workers--shared one bedroom apartments and very little furniture with as many as six other workers. Second, these community dialogues served as "script-" or "story-sessions" intended to build a body of insights on eating and health issues specific to cross-cultural experiences. Additional ideas for a scripting and creative performance were elicited from the gardeners in a meeting on May 21st and in telephone conversations that followed. A schedule for the first on-camera interviews and filming was circulated and discussed at the garden meeting of June 4th and filming and interviewing began on June 9th.

Three to four of the gardeners expressed an interest and willingness to "act-out" their ideas on cross-cultural food issues. Their short scenes were dramatized and filmed in June and July. One dramatized the risk of heart-attack from a macho diet of pizza and beer. One focused on a garderner's recurrent obsession with advertising-induced binging, called "fast-food noir." A short, campy, tele-novela scene was performed entitled "The Many Loves of Chavelita." Finally, a cryptic spot was produced about the "indigenous" anti-(food)-pyramid, based on discussions of indigenous diets as they related to both FDA norms and commercial food in the United States. (**fig. 2. "binge/attack"; fig. 3, "Fast-food Noir"; fig.4, "The Many Loves of Chavelita"**). The majority of garderners, however, politely but systematically challenged the initial premise behind our methodology. "Why not simply let us appear and speak on camera as ourselves, rather than forcing us to be like someone else in a drama?" Identity was going to be important in the project as a whole. These participants did not want dramatize someone else's knowledge in third person. Speaking and disclosing directly to the camera, apparently, offered a far more compelling draw for the gardeners than any attempt to aestheticize and "virtualize" their knowledge, or to dramatize and masquerade their perceptions in the form of third-person allegories. These people wanted viewers to know who they were and where they were from. They were not afraid to assume a position of authority on either medical issues or cross-cultural analysis. (**fig. 5, "Soy de..." montage; fig. 6, "Familia..." sign montage**). I will return to the significance of this shift in the gardener's involvement (from virtuality to self-disclosure) later in this essay, for it resonates with practices in the digital world of the net.

Since the project we set out to produce was to grow out of interaction between community members, media makers, and teachers, we agreed to shift the project in format and scope to address this new concern of the gardeners. As a result, the final video was now to be less of a telenovela, than a more contemporary video "portrait" of the community--a video "magazine" that combined on-camera interviews with participants, oral histories, recipes, dramatized segments, nutrition teaching, and music video. I surmised that the mixed-mode approach--collaging documentary, fiction, music, and a garden "making-of"--also reflected the usefully contemporary look and style now common on television. While this alignment of direct subject ownership with televisual style made sense conceptually, the tactic also built multiple perspectives into the tape that would complicate distribution and end-use later on.

This new reliance on self-disclosure on-camera provided--in addition to the shift to an inordinately high (and more expensive) shooting ratio--for some surprising revelations. This included a thread of talk across numerous interviews (and ethnic groups) that linked food preparation with interpersonal romance. **(fig.7, "Amor Vegetal")**. This segment--termed "Amor Vegetal"--became the title for the piece as a whole. Talk about "vegetable love" suggested a far less utilitarian spin to the wisdom-from-the-ground nature of the project. Some gardeners talked of anxieties about raising children in American culture. Other gardeners used camera time to mimic traditional Mexican proverbs, or "dichos," intended to pass rules for life from one generation to the next. Although interviewing continued into the early fall, the major part of production concluded, after two months of filmming, with a festive "first harvest" open to the entire community and city as a whole. Traditional dishes were provided from each family garden plot. A group of kids DJ'd multi-racial hip-hop and Beck on the sound system, before another gardener's young daughter belted out a Selena hit from the stage. Adding to the collision of traditional and contemporary, an indigenous Zapoteca dance group from North County performed traditional Oaxacan dances to ceremonially bless and inaugurate the garden. Many participants came to the microphone and PA to reflect on how the La Cosecha Nuestra project had formed a community and "family" where none had existed before. The final video production uses this cycle of the land--from ground-breaking in winter, to planting in spring, to harvest in late summer--as an arc that organizes gardener meditations on food, identity, and life. (**fig.8, first harvest**)

The south Escondido garden project was successful enough that an even larger project of the same sort was started up in East Escondido the very next year. This La Cosecha Nuestra "sequel" included a larger, 4-acre community garden that would allow for higher quantity agricultural production, including small scale commercial produce. One hundred gardners now would produce food that would benefit five hundred residents (City of Escondido Project Workplan, 1996, 1). The final videotape was used locally in "platicas" or group discussions on health and food-issues in nutrution by the Escondido Clinic and Migrant Education Project. Additional public screenings took place, formally, at the Eye Empowerment Community Center, and informally at numerous weekend barbeques and meetings in the garden itself. The tape, Amor Vegetal: Our Harvest was also exhibited in festivals in Chicago and Barcelona, at the Field Museum in Chicago, and at national conferences on non-for-profit legal work and food security marketing. One hundred and twenty VHS dubs of the production (in both Spanish and English) were given to all of the video and garden participants and their families, as well as to the coalition of supporters who had either managed or donated in-kind resources.

III. Digital Tropes and Practices.

The La Cosecha Nuestra project had absolutely none of the financial or technical infrastructure needed for even a fleeting foray into the world of the Net or cyberculture. This was a instead a world of rented apartments (many without phones); a world where composting and tilling (rather than Net surfing or videogaming) served as activities for families with small children. Yet electronic media functioned in the La Cosecha Nuestra community in three important ways that mimiced the kind of "digital performativity" now celebrated at academic venues like the "Interactive Frictions Conference at Annenberg/USC." First, the project utilized interactivity far beyond purely technical interfaces, in filmed improvisational scenes and interview situations. Interactivity served as well as a working guide in door-to-door surveys, focus groups, and dialogues between workers and "story editors." Second, documentation of oral histories—involving memories of growing up, curative recipes, and gardening and horticulture wisdom--provided a foundational, "narrative network database" from which visual, sound, and scripted representations of this community emerged. Third, active involvement by 30-40 community

participants--many indigenous Oaxacan and Guatemalan workers--made the electronic production that resulted a model for "multiple user" interactivity in the social sphere. But if this characterization rings true, where was the hardwired "device" or machine that comprises the third term of a traditional multi-user device (or MUD)? La Cosecha Nuestra was not a machine, but rather a composite bit of civic engineering and coalition building by numerous participants. La Cosecha Nuestra animated a social force and coalition that appropriated the unseen--but far from unvirtual--land of vacant lots overlooked by institutional bureaucracies. La Cosecha Nuestra was very much an interactive, narrativized, multi-user, databased network--and a self-empowered community--in the fullest sense of those words.

Project Cosecha Nuestra also challenged the ways that marginalized populations are typically posed in Net talk. At the first "Information Superhighway Summit" in 1994, Vice-president Al Gore warned ot the coming split in the digital age between "information haves" and "have-nots." Such a binary stands as the worst form of conceptual reification, however, for it defines human subjects in externally-quantifiable ways. These folks are either connected to a digital technology that fills them with information; or disconnected in a way that empties them of any meaning. Considering the Escondido gardeners as "information have-nots" naively reduces human agency to data storage; to a level that insults intelligence. Cybernetic thinking--even in bastardized, liberal, policy forms like Gore's--must take as a starting point the lay theoretical competencies of media users. Neither "haves" or "have-nots," these gardeners--even without AOL accounts--were data-authors and social agents that both generated and processed networked information.

In retrospect, La Cosecha Nuestra project also questions several other truisms associated with "new media"; especially the caricatured notion that "linear" narrative involves texts that dominate spectators while non-linear digital ones, are somehow more "open" to customization and individuation. The ostensibly "non-linear" interactivity of digital CD-rom or web-site construction proves to provide the acute forms of parameter setting and constraints typical of "games." The "analog" interactivity of La Cosecha Nuestra, on the other hand, allowed participants months to more fluidly form the parameters before "lock-down" in linear, digital video form. These multi-users, that is, engaged each other in very

"non-virtual" ways; as coworkers, allies, competitors, and (sometimes) contentious colleagues. There were fights and arguments in Escondidio over directions and policies; and still are.

This field-work--and the transformations the project underwent--suggested to me a split in "agency" that evoked a classic shift in media theory. Revisionist theorists in the 1970s proposed that scholars move from the model of "spectator positioning" by texts, to the notion of social, "interpretive communities." In many ways, the virtual communities of MUD and interactive CD and web-sites offer very constrained (no matter how hyperactive) spectator positions for users. Field-work utilizing electronic media, however, can be far more unstable and volatile, even as it encourages forms of electronic agency that are community-based. La Cosecha Nuestra animated an institutional configuration that worked to challenge a number of local and regional interests. This project worked, that is, to problematize received wisdom in electronic media about "open" and "closed" texts; a wisdom that lives on in current celebrations of the digital..

IV. <u>Results/Fallout</u>.

I was most struck throughout the year in Escondido with how the project and the community became a political football for various bureaucratic factions. Social service advocates and non-profits recognized the importance of the needs of this low-income population. Official recognition of the city by the funders of Project Cosecha Nuestra gave the city the opportunity to take credit for someone else's forward thinking notion of service. La Cosecha Nuestra, after all, provided a handy mechanism whereby people--in the words of the Vice-Mayor at both the ground-breaking and first harvest celebrations--could "help themselves." But the idea of publicly promoting images of this specific community--comprised of people of color, farmworkers, and immigrants--also flew directly in the face of a newly elected city council intent on selling an image of the city as a bastion of country clubs and comfortable suburban living. At several meetings and events I was repeatedly asked if the production, once completed, could be used to promote the image of the city; both to the council and to those outside of the city. Having spent almost two months interviewing and filming in homes and garden plots, I knew that the City Council had no idea about how alienated they were from these neighborhoods. Working mothers talking about

diebetes and concerns over the childhood lures of local fast-food businesses would never serve the interests of the Escondido Chamber of Commerce. Nor would the endless images of people of color in the production comfort Council members intent on transforming Escondido--once considered a sleeply farmtown in the country--into the kind of classic elegance afforded other "North County" enclaves like La Costa, Carlsbad, and Rancho Santa Fe. Race was a particularly sensitive issue in the aftermatch of the contentious Prop 187 controversy. While protection against immigrant "hordes" animated conservative forces in the county and state, community Cosesha Nuestra showcased a Mexican and Central American population activily involved in the life of a city. The Council and the Chamber of Commerce were simply in denial.

We set about through coalition-building to help enable a community to form where there was none before. This effort mostly worked with the garden community, but largely failed with the coalition of non-profit organizations involved. The city alternately misperceived Project Cosecha Nuestra as either a timely opportunity to exploit for PR, or (once underway) as nagging evidence of the kind of city they did not want to publicly celebrate or promote. The culture of non-profits, on the other hand, exists with a very different set of perpetual needs and severe financial constraints. Because funding is always so short, competitive tensions arise and define the process by which organizations seek to perpetuate themselves. Cooperative projects like this one inevitably face the question of whose interests are most served by the "group" effort. Although the tape was exhibited, used, and distributed as planned, in some ways each contributor had reason to question the utility of the piece. Clinic workers wanted more healthcare and less process footage. Nutritionists wanted more pedagogy and less dialogue and reflection by those who needed the knowledge most. Even the dramatized responses to food security choices carried a symbolic, imaginative dimension-- something difficult to lock-down within any single NGO's mission statement. The problem at root, was that we took the opinions and insights of a large number of community members on the ground seriously. Dispersing the authority to "reflect" and teach in this way unsettles even those committed to the long fight to provide resources to the neighborhoods. But doing so seemed even more important given this contact and contestation. The city was seeing people it had never seen before. NGO's confronted other groups with overlapping objectives and ideals. And everyone was

having to deal with the sheer presence of newly empowered constituents. The arm-twisting I was feeling during the production process was probably an indication that many levels of the bureaucracy would now have to consider forces and interests beyond their own.

The media component of Project Cosecha Nuestra provided the opportunity to reconsider the nature of a set of terms central to digital thinking: user "competencies" (real-world knowledge was showcased rather than technical-textual facility); "narrative pleasures" (identity and ownership were performed rather than mapped or "gamed" discursivity); and user gratifications (ownership of expertise and "local knowledge" were claimed instead of ownership of pc technologies or internet access). The project also gave a different spin to two other notions: first, to "virtual" thinking (defined as imaginative exercises via inductive focus groups, phone, and meeting dialogues, rather than by deductive, "menued" computer parameters); and second, to the goals of interactivity (social-spatial change in Escondido animated the project rather than textual-electronic permutations). La Cosecha Nuestra media provided a tangible text-image-sound catalyst for community formation--one that continues to be used in migrant health education--as well as electronic representations that unsettled the status quo positions of elected officials and social service "experts."

Distribution of the tape Amor Vegetal: Our Harvest involved focus groups that showed that tensions over bureaucratic ownership were less important than how interactivity gave even local residents outside of the garden community the opportunity for identification.   A series of responses by teenage viewers in the Migrant Education Project repeatedly connected the opportunity to garden with memories of their villages in Oaxaca, and with how and why parents were doing this to prepare their children for acculturation in the United States (Focus Group With Migrant Ed. Youth, May 24, 1998). They also raised the spectre of day-to-day discrimination faced by Oaxaquenos--currently occupying the lowest "caste" strata in North county--in local schools. Most striking, however, was the way that harvesting became a repeated trope for ethnic identity. One discussant noted that this was the exception that proved the rule; that the video meant finally "that they are taking the Latino community into account." But others were more specific in their critiques of media representations and stereotyping. Amor Vegetal was not just about harvesting. For one, the tape offered "active, participating," and "positive image(s)." Another

noted that these are "very different from the (media) images of the Latino as fat and lazy." Although the community was multi-racial and comprised of gardeners from many different countries and states-- Guatemala, Michoacan, Sinaloa, Oaxaca, Jalisco, Argentina, Puerto Rico, the French Carribean, and Canada--it stood symbolically as both a strategic foothold, and as a world of "willed affinity"; a world where diverse ethnic groups coexisted productively. The migrant youth focus group members, for example, consistently saw the tape not as a celebration of bounded, racial essentialism, but as an ethnic indigenous strategy open to all viewers. "There is no difference--Everyone should feel like indigenous." ("No hay differencia--Que todos se sientan indigenas.")

"Thinking digitally" in these kinds of borderlands is not just about web surfing, electronic poaching, and digital performativity. It can also involve social intervention, community formation, and real-world networking. Much of South Escondido was, after all, a world without pcs or phone hookups for modems. Yet everyone had access to a VCR. Because of their competencies as television viewers, these gardeners knew how to claim tangible, on-camera, identities. It is indeed simply a waste of time to harden differences between analog and digital, "old media" and "new media," as the commercial trade press must do. Thinking digitally is not, ironically, an either/or situation. Given vast disparities in income and access in real-world communities it never will be. Analog narrative interactivity in Project Cosecha Nuestra shifted the terms—not of authorship—but of authority. Thinking digitally means ignoring the neat, and needlessly delimited, categories and boundaries defined by computer products. Thinking digitally means acting in a way that animates frozen and sedated power relationships. Thinking digitally means making the world interactive and volatile. Doing so in the borderlands can make social communities cybernetic, rather than social agents cyber-subjects.

involved in the coalition that made the garden community a reality. The opinions and perceptions included here are those of the author alone, who acknowledges that each piece of the La Cosecha Nuestra puzzle probably brings with it a specific set of predilections and bias. Any community characterized by the kind of diverse, "willed affinity" at work in South Escondido necessarily would.

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