

## Introduction

The occupation of Oaxaca de Juárez (Oaxaca City) in 2006 quickly garnered attention among North American activists sympathetic to the Zapatistas in neighboring Chiapas and opposed to the capitalist global economics pushed by the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. On June 14, the governor of this mostly indigenous state had violently broken up the *plantón* (encampment) of the Oaxacan chapter of the Mexican National Teachers Union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE, Sección 22). Sección 22 was again, like every year, striking for better wages and working conditions. In response to the unprecedented repression, a broad social movement reoccupied the city and created a Peoples' Assembly, the APPO (Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca), as it is known by its Spanish acronym. Famous for its street performances and protest art, the occupation of Oaxaca was also one of the first widely video recorded social uprisings of the twenty-first century. As news of the events spread online, activists from abroad and from elsewhere in Mexico traveled to Oaxaca to join what appeared to signal a new kind of revolution in process. They added to an already vibrant community of artists and activists who lived in or had settled more recently in Oaxaca in the preceding years. During that time, Mexican author and journalist Luis Hernández Navarro enthusiastically commented that “the movement has ceased to be a traditional struggle or protest and begun to transform itself into an embryo of an alternative government. The governmental institutions are increasingly empty shells without authority or public confidence, while the people’s assemblies have become the site of construction of a new political mandate.” He added that “the establishment of forms of self-government is reminiscent of the Paris Commune of 1871. The way things are going, the example set by the nascent Oaxaca Commune is far from being limited to that state.”<sup>1</sup> Addressing both national and transnational

readers, Hernández Navarro's hopeful enthusiasm about the possibility of an emerging antiauthoritarian revolution at the outset of the twenty-first century is almost palpable.

Video shorts and feature-length activist documentaries about the Oaxaca uprising tend to project similarly optimistic feelings, even when produced after the movement's bloody repression in November 2006. *Un poquito de tanta verdad* (*A Little Bit of So Much Truth*) (2007), for example, chronicles the appropriation of radio and television stations, the formation of the APPO, and the violent reaction of state and paramilitary forces who destroy independent and occupied media installations, kill with impunity, imprison, and torture. Yet this documentary ends with the teachers' Radio Plantón back on the air in February 2007, hosts and guests applauding.<sup>2</sup> This optimism is surprising in the face of bloody repression, but also because such an expression of joy is quite rare in earlier militant cinema, where social struggles appear to be fueled by rage at injustice and films often end with a call to arms or tragically deploring defeat. *The Open Invitation* grapples with the apparent shift in revolutionary affect that activist videos make apprehensible. Taking an interdisciplinary approach that attends to debates over the nature of the political and to the aesthetics of audiovisual media, I ask: can the joy that today's activist videos transmit be explained politically?

In the chapters that make up this book, I study the narratives, stylistic choices, and moods of activist videos from the 2006 Oaxaca uprising and the contemporaneous Zapatistas' Other Campaign. Although focused on southern Mexico, I place these works into the larger context of militant filmmaking from the 1960s and 1970s, a cinematic tradition that finds intertextual references in activist videos, and the more recent vibrant community and collaborative video movement in indigenous languages throughout the hemisphere. As a committed political practice that is critical of globalized capitalism and colonialism, activist video resonates with earlier militant cinema but also differs from these precursors in mood, technology, genre, and style. With their focus on documenting protests, media occupations, and alliances among diverse social actors, they are also distinct from the audiovisual meditations on daily life that characterize many collaborative videos in indigenous languages. Yet there is much contact among video activists participating in the events in Oaxaca, in the Other Campaign, and those involved in collaborative

and community video in indigenous languages. They often share a sense of optimism and a critique of authoritarian, racialized regimes of dispossession.

The works considered in *The Open Invitation*, then, are parallel but also distinct from recent art house and more mainstream Latin American films that have captivated large and sometimes global audiences. The videos at the center of this book are not raw footage, but, with one exception—Bruno Varela's Super 8 video short *Raspas (Ice Shavings)* (2006)—also not primarily a form of video art. Some activist videos are well-crafted documentaries that include material recorded by multiple activists in the street as well as additional interviews—*Compromiso cumplido (True to my Pledge)* (2007); *Morena (Brown Woman)* (2007); *La rebelión de las oaxaqueñas (The Rebellion of the Women of Oaxaca)* (2007); and the already mentioned *Un poquito*—but do not lend themselves easily to commodification. Others, like *Ya cayó (He Has Already Fallen)* (2006) and *Resolutivos del Foro Indígena (Resolutions from the Indigenous Forum)* (2006) were edited more quickly and distributed during the occupation. The short animations *El ratón vaquero (The Cowboy Mouse)* (2006) and *Figuras célebres (Famous Figures)* (2006) served as spots during the occupation of COR-TV in Oaxaca. The feature-length *¡Viva México! (Long Live Mexico)* (2010) was directed by Nicolas Défossé, an accomplished independent filmmaker from France who had already collaborated with Promedios (known in the United States as the Chiapas Media Project) for many years when he began documenting the Zapatistas' Other Campaign. The late, California-based, accomplished filmmaker and professor Saul Landau directed *The Sixth Sun* (1996), one of the first compelling documentaries about the Zapatista rebellion in 1994. *Caracoles: New Paths of Resistance* (2003) and *Un tren muy grande que se llama la Otra Campaña (A Very Big Train Called the Other Campaign)* (2007) are collaborative videos made by Zapatista youth in Chiapas. Several of these activist videos are crowdsourced; that is, they draw on the same material recorded by multiple individuals on different kinds of devices (VHS and digital video cameras, cell phones, photo cameras). They range from half a minute to ninety minutes in length. Mixing older with newer production and delivery platforms, these videos have been screened in community centers; broadcast on terrestrial television; or streamed on YouTube, Vimeo, Indymedia, or other internet sites. Some, like *Un poquito*, and *¡Viva México!*, are licensed as creative commons, and many can be purchased

from independent media producers or from vendors in the streets of Oaxaca and Mexico City.

*The Open Invitation* ends with a view on humor and the broader context of collaborative and community video in indigenous languages in Mexico and beyond. Some of these works were made during video training workshops; others by accomplished indigenous filmmakers. *Bicis en carrerita* (*The Bicycle Race*) (2004) and *El chan comandante chico* (*The Little Chan Commander*) (2003) are collaborative videos made by the Turix Collective in the Yucatán; *Xanini/Mazorcas* (*Corncobs*) (1999) is directed by the P'urhépecha filmmaker Dante Cerano Bautista from Michoacán. Carlos Pérez Rojas's *Mëjk* (2014) and Yolanda Cruz's *2501 migrantes* (*2501 Migrants*) (2010) are about Oaxaca, but both filmmakers live abroad, in France and the United States, respectively. *Video nas Aldeias se apresenta* (*Video in the Villages Presents Itself*) (2002) was made by the Brazilian Vídeo Nas Aldeias (Video in the Villages, or VNA); and *Llanthupi munakuy/Quererse en las sombras* (*Loving Each Other in the Shadows*) (2001) is a fiction from the Bolivian Andes. There are films I only mention in passing—Ana Rosa Duarte Duarte's experimental feature-length work *Arroz con leche. K óol uti'al k kuxtal* (*Rice Pudding: Our Desire for Life*) (2009); Carlos Pérez Rojas's *Y el río sigue corriendo* (*And the River Flows On*) (2010); and Dante Cerano Bautista's *Dia dos* (*The Second Day*) (2009) are certainly deserving of a more careful analysis and might be read in relation to *Atempa. Sueños en las orillas del río* (*Atempa: Dreams by the River*) (2013); *La pequeña semilla en el asfalto* (*The Small Grain in the Asphalt*) (2009); or *Dulce convivencia* (*Sweet Gathering*) (2005), among others.<sup>3</sup> Mine is not an exhaustive selection but my hope is that *The Open Invitation* may provide one, though certainly not the only, path for reading the plethora of activist and collaborative videos made at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup>

Cinema and collaborative activist media are usually studied by scholars in separate fields and with different methodologies. Since the New Latin American Cinema of the 1960s and early 1970s compelled critical film studies, film scholars have tended to focus on art house productions, international collaborations, and unprecedented international box-office successes, but rarely on independent radio or activist videos (or mainstream telenovelas and news reporting).<sup>5</sup> Video and radio activism has more readily been studied in media anthropology and communication studies, where scholars tend to invoke the

concept of the public sphere, theorized most influentially by Jürgen Habermas and critically revised by Nancy Fraser, in order to account for the function of alternative printing presses, independent radio and television, and collaborative independent video production.<sup>6</sup> The theoretical frameworks commonly brought to bear on these alternative media, however, only allow shedding partial light on video activism in southern Mexico.

In the face of the growing concentration of global media ownership where ever-fewer global corporations almost exclusively control media production and dissemination across the world,<sup>7</sup> increasing media diversity is frequently equated with improving democracy and global citizenship. Critical analyses of alternative media hence tend to be concerned with media practice—for instance, the lingering patriarchal or caste forms of exclusionary access—with the goal of promoting collective participation and consensual decision making in media programming.<sup>8</sup> When focusing on the Independent Media Centers (IMC) movement, some have teased out more radical antecedents to current media activism recalling the history of independent publishing.<sup>9</sup> John Downing, for instance, argues that IMCs draw on anarchist traditions, but he barely notes the centrality of the Zapatista rebellion in the creation of an alternative global “network of independent media,” as Subcomandante Marcos put it.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on Hamilton’s work, Scott Uzelman argues that the IMCs differ from many other alternative media projects because they do not sever the “critique of capitalism from the struggle for democratic communications.”<sup>11</sup> As Uzelman’s words illustrate, there is a tendency even in these more radical analyses to slip back into the liberal democratic language associated with the public sphere concept.<sup>12</sup> In other words, research on the global diversity of grassroots media addresses the relevance of community media for democracy and the democratic practices at work within media collectives, yet the public sphere ideal and its relation to the slippery concept of democracy are usually seen as a given and scholars rarely grapple with the importance of the indigenous struggle for autonomy in these processes or discuss art and activist video claims on refigurative politics in relation to audiovisual style.

Scholarship and reports by media activists on collaborative and community media in indigenous languages often highlight their potential as linked to sovereignty. The introduction to *Global Indigenous Media* states, “Contemporary Indigenous media demonstrate the extent to which the hallmarks of

an earlier regime of empire—colonization, forced assimilation, genocide, and diaspora—are being challenged and displaced by new constellations of global power. Indigenous media often directly address the politics of identity and representation by engaging and challenging the dominant political forms at both the national and international level. In this landscape, control of media representation and of cultural self-definition asserts and signifies cultural and political sovereignty itself.<sup>13</sup> Independent, collaborative, and community media in indigenous languages are here appreciated in relation to other indigenous appropriations of media in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, etc. Cultural and political sovereignty, however, is not discussed in relation to street protests against the World Trade Organization or other rebellions like those in Oaxaca that have drawn transnational video activists. In Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, indigenous media scholars have tended to equate cultural and political sovereignty with either the state's or indigenous media collectives' own proclaimed efforts to use video as a means of *rescate cultural* (cultural rescue).<sup>14</sup> Although I also engage with collective and collaborative video in indigenous languages in Mexico, I am interested in their connection to activist video more broadly, and in how a critical textual reading of video might help understand prefigurative politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century. *The Open Invitation* thus builds on and deepens lines of inquiry opened up in *Adjusting the Lens*, a volume I coedited with the Mérida-based scholar, artist, and founding director of Yoochel Kaaj, Byrt Wammack Weber.

Carl Boggs once proposed that Marxism is confronted by the dilemma of how to combine the struggle for political power, “the instrumental,” as he puts it, with “the prefigurative.” Such a prefigurative politics “expresses the ultimate ends of the revolutionary process itself: popular self-emancipation, collective social and authority relations, socialist democracy.”<sup>15</sup> Coined in relation to the US New Left in 1977, the term “prefigurative politics” more recently has become a common descriptor for demonstrations against the World Trade Organization and for the Occupy movement, for moments when protestors seek to enact horizontal social relations rather than postpone radical equality into a utopian future after revolution.<sup>16</sup> The sociologist Hernán Oviña has urged resituating prefigurative politics for the study of Latin American social movements, including the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Brazilian Landless Move-

ment, the Argentine *piqueteros*, and neighborhood assemblies throughout the region.<sup>17</sup> The unprecedented coalition of diverse social actors in Oaxaca can certainly be added to this list.

The APPO insisted that democracy be grounded in forms of self-governance inspired not only by Marxism and anarchism but also by feminism and *comunalidad* (communality), a form of consensus governance evolving in the indigenous autonomous municipalities in Oaxaca. Prefigurative politics, in this context, entails that new political subjects become visible through audiovisual media. Like in the administration of autonomous Zapatista territories in neighboring Chiapas, Oaxaca's prefigurative politics signaled an open-ended process of experimenting with the enactment of horizontality, subject to periodic evaluation and adjustment rather than the creation of a fixed set of institutions, an effort at performing equality in view of a future that has not yet arrived. In the context of lasting colonial and contemporary forms of violence and dispossession, prefigurative politics are also an investment in futurity, or future as such.

The Zapatista insurrection has spawned an extensive library on almost all aspects of its historical, political, and cultural politics. As is well known, the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rebelled against the neoliberal trade agreements and the Mexican state in 1994 and has since held on to autonomous territories in Chiapas. In 2005–2006, its Other Campaign advocated for boycotting the national elections and instead traveled throughout Mexico in order to link multiple leftist social movement organizations. Gareth Williams holds that “the EZLN's Sixth Declaration is an appeal ‘for a democratic political practice that does not yet exist or, more precisely, has not yet been recognized—and cannot yet be ‘named.’”<sup>18</sup> The Oaxaca Commune and the almost contemporaneous Other Campaign, nevertheless, have rarely been seen as overlapping with each other or as intimately related to transnational activist and collaborative and community media in indigenous languages. Lynn Stephen's ethnography *We Are the Face of Oaxaca* focuses on women's protagonism during the events in Oaxaca, but does not engage with activist video in detail. Similarly, the cultural ethnographies highlighting the stunning work of Oaxaca's graffiti artists offer hardly any analyses of video activism and video aesthetics.<sup>19</sup> *The Open Invitation* shifts focus from graffiti to video and from ethnography about the practices of collective protest

to the political understandings of rebellion that can be teased out from critical readings of activist videos about both Oaxaca and the Zapatistas' Other Campaign. I am not suggesting that formal analysis could be substituted for interrogating media as a social practice or as an intervention into the political economy of the media, but rather that activist videos also warrant careful textual analysis; however spontaneously or thoughtfully their footage may have been recorded, compiled, and edited. My book thus also complements and differs from Marco Estrada Saavedra's sociological analysis of the APPO's media politics and from Jeffrey Juris's ethnographic work on global protests against the World Trade Organization.<sup>20</sup> With *The Open Invitation*, I hope to further advance understanding of how affect and prefigurative decolonial politics inform each other in the encounter among leftist activists and indigenous struggles for autonomy and how activist video audiovisually configures the relation between aesthetics, affect, and radical politics.

*The Open Invitation* builds on my prior research about indigenous media and decolonization, but shifts attention to the politics of affect and the plethora of videos made by local and transnational media activists in southern Mexico. I continue to conceptualize video as a social, economic, and aesthetic practice that can shed light on how decolonial thinking articulates itself at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although not an ethnographic study, this book involved field research in Oaxaca in the summer of 2010 and the selection of videos I discuss here has in part been determined by the generosity of the filmmakers who shared their work with me. I have greatly benefited from discussions and collaborations with video artists, activists, and scholars in Oaxaca, Mérida, Puebla, Mexico City, Germany, and the United States. *The Open Invitation* could not have been written without these conversations or in the absence of the rich and insightful publications by practitioners and media ethnographers.

Similar to Chris Robé's *Breaking the Spell*, in this book I look at video activism in light of an encounter among transnational and locally based activists; some inspired by Marxism, some more readily identifying as anarchists, and others not aligning readily with either tradition. Robé's historical overview of film and video activism focuses on the United States and draws linkages to Patricio Guzmán (filming in Chile in the early 1970s), the militant cinema of Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in the late 1960s, and



the political philosophy of Italian autonomists. My study of video activism in southern Mexico traces connections among Marxist-Leninists, anarchists, feminists, and indigenous struggles for autonomy; engaging instead with Jacques Rancière's theory of politics and aesthetics as well as with Floriberto Díaz Gómez's (Ayujk) and Jaime Martínez Luna's (Zapotec) conceptualizations of *comunalidad*. I also gain insights from Mexican scholars Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar and Gustavo Esteva, as well as from US-based cultural theorist Bruno Bosteels. In the third chapter I grapple with audiovisual indexicality, and in the last two chapters I turn to theories of cinematic affect and emotion, including Linda William's thoughts on melodrama, Laura Podalsky's understanding of the politics of affect and emotion in Latin American cinema, and Brian Massumi's reflections inspired by Spinoza, as well as a range of scholarship on humor. *The Open Invitation* centers, then, on a conceptual question: how, if at all, can the political be apprehended through activist video?

*The Open Invitation* takes its cue from a snapshot, a brief moment at the beginning of the twenty-first century when *La Comuna de Oaxaca* and *La Otra Campaña* converged and each presented radical alternatives to electoral democracy. With the blatant corruption of Oaxaca's governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and the fraudulent national elections that cost Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) his first bid on the presidency in 2006, liberal democracy was yet again proving rather frustrating for many in Mexico. While thousands became involved in López Obrador's Mexico City-based movement challenging the federal election results in July 2006,<sup>21</sup> the APPO in Oaxaca brought together over three hundred social movement organizations united in their demand for the governor's resignation. This "movement of movements," as Gustavo Esteva called the APPO,<sup>22</sup> came to question the entire system of electoral democracy and overlapped with the Other Campaign, which, in the EZLN's widely read "Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona (Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Forest)," advocated abstaining from the federal election process altogether.<sup>23</sup>

The events in Oaxaca—the teachers' strike, repression, and massive occupation of Oaxaca's city center; the media misrepresentations of the protests; the takeover of local media outlets in June; and the formation of the APPO—followed on the heels of what Liv Stone called a "perfect storm of media."<sup>24</sup> In May 2006, in San Salvador Atenco on the outskirts of Mexico City, ac-

tivists and delegates from the Other Campaign had joined informal street vendors protesting their forced removal from public space. TV Azteca and Televisa called on local and federal forces to “reestablish order”<sup>25</sup> and the state responded with fierce repression. Two groups covering the Zapatistas’ Other Campaign—the Zapatista media organization Promedios and the Mexico City-based CanalseisdeJulio—swiftly created a collaborative documentary about the collusion of mainstream media and state, *Romper el cerco (Breaking the Siege)* (2006), that was distributed almost immediately through activist networks in Mexico and in the United States.<sup>26</sup> Just before the Oaxaca uprising took on massive proportions, Promedios and many others involved in collaborative and community video were also present in Oaxaca later that month on occasion of CLACPI’s (Coordinadora Latinoamericana del Cine y Video de los Pueblos Indígenas) Eighth International Indigenous Film and Video Festival, Raíz de la Imagen.

In light of this political and media constellation, I ask what video can tell us about the particular notion of prefigurative politics arising from the APPO’s gathering of movements and its connections with *Zapatismo*. I am not proposing that activist videos offer windows onto the events in Oaxaca and during the Other Campaign. Like cinema, these audiovisual works derive their meaning from a relation between screen, the profilmic, and spectators. Activist videos tend to give preference to recognizable, familiar documentary formats that communicate as clearly as possible; many work hard at limiting ambiguity. Voiceover narration and interviews seek to secure clear communication rather than free association or poetic lines of flight; the activist-recorded image tends to serve as “proof” of a reality, an image more “true” than the one shown on television. Yet, the activist videos discussed here also reference the creative performativity of street protest and street art; they consistently extend the filmic space from what we see onscreen to activism offscreen. Sometimes they also include experimental sequences. Activist videos thus invite viewers to see in concrete ways, ways that are informed by the historical becoming of modern/colonial vision. Their impact arises at the moment when narrative and style encode audiovisual practice and meet sympathetic or unsympathetic audiences. *The Open Invitation* thus also reckons with a tension: If activist video is a medium committed to reflecting what occurs before the lens, how can it make apprehensible what has not yet arrived?

In trying to find answers to these questions, chapter one begins with an analysis of the US–Mexican coproduced documentary *Un poquito* and the scholarly discussion of media activism. While public and counterpublic sphere concepts seek to account for claims made by an informed public on state (or transnational) institutions so that these institutions may effectively regulate economic power (private interests), *Un poquito* posits that economic, state, and media power in Mexico cannot be separated. The current state (and transnational) institutions are entangled in colonial history and incapable or unwilling to enforce meaningful limits on capitalist interests. Even more, representative democracy and its media appear fully corrupted and at odds with ensuring livable life on this planet. If the arena for political struggle is then not to be found in pressuring the existing political institutions and parties, where can change take place? The video *Un poquito* incites the viewer to glimpse where liberal democracy is reworked: a space configured by the continuity of streets and barricades, Mal de Ojo TV acting as an Indymedia Center, Radio Plantón and occupied COR-TV, community centers, homes, websites, and informal vendors who have guaranteed the movement’s afterlife. Said differently, the (media) activists credited in *Un poquito* attest to the scope and places of radical politics in the early twenty-first century: at once local, national, and transnational; both mediated and embodied. *Un poquito* invites us to see these occupations as political acts rather than liberal democratic appeals to recognition.

If “the EZLN’s proposed withdrawal from the current state form signals a potentially expansive and constitutive process of political-theoretical redefinition in which the word ‘democracy’ is both the adversary and the unconditional promise of a new foundation for social life,”<sup>27</sup> in *Un poquito* Oaxaca likewise comes into view as a social force that cannot not be named or captured with the categories and terms available to thinking democratic, PRI, or Marxist revolutionary politics. The video creates a house of mirrors asking viewers to see their reflection in the presence of formerly unthinkable subjects of political revolt. It configures a complex, interlinked, transnational space for new political subjects to become visible as such. Rancière’s work on politics, however, cannot help explain *Un poquito*’s persistent audiovisual references to the historically particular where testimony and footage highlight women’s protagonism and link the uprising to the longstanding indigenous struggle for autonomy.

In chapter two, I further complicate Rancière's notion of political irruption and ask if the notion of the commune, with its focus on the event—the invocation of historical antecedents—and the coming together of formerly disparate revolutionary traditions, can offer an alternative critical framework for reading activist video. I address the problem of consensus, which seems to presuppose an already given count, a unified subject that would necessarily impose limits upon the APPO's and the Other Campaign's open-ended potentiality and ask, Who are the people(s) convoked in what Bosteels calls “the positive anticipation of a future”?<sup>28</sup> The Oaxacan activist video *Resolutivos* and the Zapatista production *Caracoles* allow tracing tensions and differences among video activists' revolutionary visions as they foreground women's rights activists, Marxists, anarchists, and indigenous organizations seeking commonality. Despite their differences, the videos considered in this chapter encourage us to think prefigurative politics from the perspective of indigenous struggles for autonomy, rather than in relation to the Paris Commune. They attest to an effort to transpose self-governance from smaller communities, often contexts where all members of a community know each other and share cultural and linguistic backgrounds, to the diverse and broader Comuna de Oaxaca. Zapatismo here becomes an important additional vector, as self-governance, in Chiapas called *mandar obedeciendo* (governing by obeying), follows similar guidelines but aspires to regional, multiethnic rather than local autonomy. *Resolutivos* and *Caracoles* invoke spaces of encounter informed by *comunalidad*'s occupation of symbolic territory and its settling in on a conceptual terrain, a traveling theory and practice that we can understand as diasporic. Diasporic, in Wammack Weber's sense, signals a colonial history and neocolonial present of displacement that is “physical, cultural and linguistic” and occurs across and within the borders of nation states. Diasporic experience is collective, often visceral, and affectively experienced as shared likes, dislikes, and ethical convictions. Collective diasporic experience is strengthened in the face of discourses and experiences of discrimination but is equally shaped by “transcultural hybridity as diasporas intermingle with the hegemonic culture and with other diaspora communities.”<sup>29</sup> Such diaspora is experienced not only as a physical displacement and adaptation but also as a symbolic or epistemic displacement.<sup>30</sup>

As activist videos have political theories of communality and good governance travel, they raise additional questions that I address in this chapter.

If consensus governance, according to Díaz Gómez, arises from *cuchicheo*, a disorderly whispering, what changes when we understand governance not as a noun but as a verb? How open is the open invitation to join in these processes? Theories of comunalidad (as elaborated by Jaime Martínez Luna and Floriberto Díaz Gómez) hold the promise of being sufficiently pliable to compel participation and allow for evolution. *Resolutivos* and *Caracoles*, in turn, construct two different visions of the collective subject—one allowing for multiple and conflicting voices, the other projecting a diverse but unified political actor—but both films also guard a threshold. This is an open invitation, but it is not unlimited.

## APPREHENSIONS

In practice, leftist and indigenous media activists certainly also enact social and economic relations that fall short of horizontal ideals.<sup>31</sup> In critically evaluating the potential of media activism, Uzelman writes therefore that “we should focus on the manner in which movement practices, structures and subjectivities articulate with specific relations of power. That is, we should focus on the manner in which relations of power are undermined or even reinforced by the struggles that interest us.”<sup>32</sup> Media activism in Oaxaca and Chiapas is certainly no exception to these contradictions, but *The Open Invitation* shifts emphasis from the ethnographic study of interactions among media practitioners to video’s aesthetic practice, thus contributing to the growing recognition that collaborative video warrants serious inquiry not only at the levels of “the social relations of production, distribution, and reception” but also with respect to “the textual effects produced by different styles and their various receptions.”<sup>33</sup> As an aesthetic practice, activist videos act as mirrors, tinted with the hopes of those providing the footage and still photography, those editing and compiling the material into particular narratives, and those viewing the films in search of information or inspiration. They create a space for ideas, experiences, and reflections to occur. The majority of the videos studied in *The Open Invitation* rehearse well-known documentary styles (observational footage, testimonies, interviews, voiceover narration). They engage in a politics of truth, employing an evidentiary mode, to counter mass media misrepresentation. At the same time, they also appeal to an evolving political process or

a desired world not quite yet here. Chapters three and four grapple with this apparent contradiction.

In chapter three, “Thresholds of the Visible,” I discuss *Un poquito, Morena, La rebelión de las oaxaqueñas, Compromiso cumplido*, and *Ya cayó* in light of the tensions embedded in our relation to indexicality. If we understand indexicality as a pact between spectators and the image, it is possible to argue that the effort to inscribe a profilmic event without drawing attention to the distance between image (signifier) and the profilmic (referent) facilitates our investment not in the future but in the past, in freezing the past as we imaginatively supplement what was recorded.<sup>34</sup> Yet our relation to indexicality also holds the promise of contingency, of glimpsing the undetermined moment that, as Mary Ann Doane puts it, “holds out the promise of newness itself.”<sup>35</sup> If this seems to lead toward privileging audiovisual experimentalism, we must remember that the desire for newness is part of the history of capitalist modernity/coloniality and that chance is fundamental to finance capitalism. Newness itself holds no guarantee of prefigurative politics or futurity. If Rancière is right, art—or video in our case—becomes political instead when it initiates a change in the perception of what constitutes art, not an innovative style or form or representation, but rather a new function for creativity, or a profound disturbance in what constitutes art.<sup>36</sup> This is not solely or perhaps at all a change inherent to form, but rather intimately dependent on discourse, the (art) critical discourse that surrounds and supplements creative activity. The activist videos I am intrigued by appear as a largely “disinterested activity,”<sup>37</sup> approximating a radical collapse of the barrier between art and work and the identity of creative art/work and sociopolitical change. They predominantly gesture toward transparency, embracing an easily accessible documentary form that requires little aesthetic education. Their evidentiary realism can then be understood as a struggle over representation that is waged on the terrain of the visible. Yet because they balance on the threshold of truth, the visible, and the unexpected, some activist videos, nevertheless, gesture toward a future that has already arrived yet never fully solidifies.

What is most striking about activist video and much of the critical commentary about the Oaxaca Commune and the Zapatistas’ Other Campaign, however, is their optimism in the face of bloody repression. According to Juris, the protests against the World Trade Organization in Prague similarly “gen-

erated alternative identities and emotional tones that range from militant rage to carnivalesque exuberance.”<sup>38</sup> Juris noted that the protest movement split into three camps—one was dominated by unions that focused on marches and articulated clear demands; the second camp embraced an angry anarchic mode of violent protest that included the targeted destruction of the symbols of capitalism (such as banks, etc.); and the third camp offered adaptable, celebratory, street performances. While antiglobalization protests mobilize along different affective registers, Juris implies that the bodily experience of participating in jubilant protest in particular can help sustain the commitment to ongoing, long-term social struggle.<sup>39</sup> Activist video can function in similar ways. Viewers tend to find themselves infected by the street performances captured for the screen and the optimistic tone of celebratory protest and video narrative. Video itself becomes a performative event that entralls the spectator. Activist video can hence help sustain commitment and expand the spaces and timeframes of struggle affectively. And yet such audiovisual joy is surprising also, as I noted at the outset, because it runs counter to the sixties and seventies’ politically committed cinema and video, a cinematic tradition that is subtly invoked in many of the works I study here. In chapter four, “Rage, Joy, and Decolonial Affect,” I seek to understand this joyfulness in contrast with melodramatic political mimesis (the desire to right a wrong) by comparing the Zapatista video *Un tren muy grande* with Défossé’s *¡Viva México!*, which both take the Other Campaign as their subject matter. I suggest that joy functions as a decolonial affect, a third affective mode in revolutionary cinema next to the melodramatic and modernist impulses that Laura Podalsky has identified.<sup>40</sup>

“Decolonial” is distinct from anticolonial and from postcolonial. Putting it rather too succinctly, we might say that anticolonial struggle strives to throw off the yoke of an external oppressor—a colonial force held in place by discourses and practices of racism, economic power, and military might—in order to establish independent nation states. In Latin America, as is well known, anticolonial struggle was not realized in this sense. Since nominal independence mostly in the early nineteenth century, local elites with Spanish ancestry, as well as descendants of more recent central European immigrants, have continued a neocolonial and neoimperial politics of racism, exploitation, and dispossession. The Left, in turn, has wrestled since then with

how to theoretically conceptualize and practically address US neoimperialism and internal colonialism, even as, especially in the sixties and seventies, the Left also identified with anticolonial struggles in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. Arguably, *postcolonial* is a term more readily employed to denote economic power and epistemological legacies and their contestations in the context of nation states formed in Africa, Asia, the so-called Middle East, and the non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean after the anticolonial wars of the mid-twentieth century. *Decolonial*, in my understanding, is a term that has evolved in the relation between indigenous peoples and settler colonial states (such as Mexico) in the Americas and in Oceania, where national independence did not displace the governing and economic elites that descend from colonial rulers. For the indigenous peoples in settler colonial states, colonialism has not ended.<sup>41</sup>

The decolonial labors in the face of intimate entanglements among capitalism, dispossession, racial, heteronormative, and anthropocentric constructions of subjectivity; and the uneven, geopolitical, and disciplinary weight given to discursive and epistemic regimes that shape our knowledge and understanding. Decolonial practice can center on the personal and collective decolonization of the soul, or “the coloniality of being,” as Nelson Maldonado Torres puts it,<sup>42</sup> which entails questioning and unsettling “the effects of coloniality in lived experience” where racist discourse builds on the rape of Native women and often couples with gendered and heteronormative assumptions.<sup>43</sup> The structures of racial, heteropatriarchal privilege in Latin America may sometimes appear more subtle to outsiders than white supremacy in the United States, but they similarly produce ruined lands, exploited and disposable people, and secure privilege for the wealthy who often, like the elites in Chiapas and Oaxaca, pride themselves on their European rather than indigenous or African ancestry.<sup>44</sup> Decolonization can entail the creation of autonomous zones through occupation (land, public spaces, media outlets, etc.), the building of alliances, and self-governance, as has occurred in Chiapas and Oaxaca. Decolonial practice shares in what Michelle Raheja calls “visual sovereignty,” which in the audiovisual realm involves “the space between resistance and compliance where indigenous filmmakers and actors revisit, contribute to, borrow from, critique, and reconfigure ethnographic film conventions, at the same time operating within and stretching the boundaries created



by these conventions.<sup>345</sup> Sovereignty, in this sense, is “a creative act of self-representation that has the potential to both undermine stereotypes of indigenous people and strengthen what Robert Warrior has called the ‘intellectual health’ of communities in the wake of genocide and colonialism.”<sup>346</sup> For Maldonado Torres, “decolonization, the whole discourse around it, is a gift itself, an invitation to engage in dialogue. For decolonization concepts need to be conceived as invitations to dialogue and not as impositions. They are expressions of the availability of the subject to engage in dialogue and the desire for exchange.”<sup>347</sup> Activist video, in its joyful inflections, issues such an invitation not only to open dialogue (from an informed, experiential, and evolving position, if you like) but collaboration. Yet this invitation has its limits: it does not include those holding on to the structures of racial privilege.

If the political can be understood as a moment of radical irruption and assertion of equality in the face of hardened structures of power—not a mere revolt, but an assertion that leads to the diasporic reconfiguration of the terrain of political thinking about revolutionary change—joy can similarly be considered an affect that is spontaneous, open-ended, and contagious. In other words, joy is not so much tied to objects and ideologies but akin to the incipient stimulus that Brian Massumi calls *affect*, a nanosecond of intensity felt before feeling is named?<sup>348</sup> Decolonial affect would then not quite give way to narrativization or attach to fixed objectives but rather constitute an energy that commits to the creative undoing of coloniality while remaining open to noticing newly apparent or evolving vectors and complexities in the web of capitalist accumulation and dispossession, racism, heteropatriarchy, and anthropocentrism. Joy reconfigures a melodramatic, object-centered politics of rage into an open-ended optimism that balances precariously on the threshold of temporary victories, but looks back on a much longer political memory.

## PRECURSORS

Against the forgetfulness of the present, the activist videos at the center of this book extend the temporal horizon of street protest. In their orientation toward futurity (the assumption of “future as such”)<sup>349</sup> they reference indigenous survival and harness audiovisual political memories of protest and revolution in Latin America, especially in Mexico, Cuba, and Chile. Films like

the Uruguayan Mario Handler's short *Me gustan los estudiantes* (*I Like Students*) (1968); the epic *La batalla de Chile* (*The Battle of Chile*) (1975, 1976, and 1979)—its footage recycled and popularized in *Chile, la memoria obstinada* (*Chile, Obstinate Memory*) (1997); and *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*) (1968), the flagship film of third cinema, already featured ample imagery of protesting crowds. UNAM's (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) film student brigades in 1968 captured students and supporters marching in the streets, moments of revolt, protest art, and repression. Sourced for *Mural efímero* (*The Ephemeral Mural*) (1973);<sup>50</sup> *Testimonio de una agresión* (*Testimony of an Aggression*) (1968); *El grito* (*The Cry*) (1970); and the Argentine Raymundo Gleyzer's *México, La revolución congelada* (*Mexico, the Frozen Revolution*) (1970), such footage has contributed to the student protests' iconic afterlife in and beyond Mexico. To adequately summarize the political ideologies and aesthetic inclinations of filmmakers associated with the cinema of hunger, third cinema, imperfect cinema, independent cinema, marginal cinema, the cinema of liberation, and cinema with the people (as well as Mexico's particular history of student movement, art, and radical film activism) is a formidable task that I cannot undertake here. Others have written about these movements in rich detail, sometimes with a comparative eye, other times focused on local, or national articulations.<sup>51</sup> A short, necessarily superficial recapitulation might be helpful, however, in view of Mexico's rather particular and perhaps still less well-known articulation with New Latin American Cinema, activist video's audiovisual intertextuality, and the links between community video in indigenous languages and militant cinema.

The "New Latin American Cinema" is a term coined in 1967 at the international film festival in Viña del Mar, Chile, where filmmakers "from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Cuba, Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela" (but not Mexico), discovered their shared concern with representing the lived realities of the poor in Latin America, many meeting there "for the first time."<sup>52</sup> Some of these filmmakers had studied at the Centro Sperimentale in Italy and embraced the possibilities of neorealism and its melodramatic mode, as well as more experimental quests for a revolutionary aesthetics that would allow for spectator dislocations from which new imaginaries might arise.<sup>53</sup> Generally speaking, the filmmakers associated with New Latin American Cinema sought to create at once counterinformation, collective filmmaking practices, and to subvert

the dominant film language associated with industrial cinema, particularly Hollywood's for-profit model that was understood to seduce viewers into the capitalist consumer lifestyle of US neoimperialism, an unsustainable and illusory way of life that masks its own foundational violence. Filmmakers eschewed not only industrial entertainment films (the Hollywood productions flooding cinemas worldwide as well as the shallow, increasingly rote Mexican industrial melodramas and comedies). They also distanced themselves from the experimental European *Nouvelle Vague*. Many deemed the latter rather frivolous bourgeois introspections, fueled by existentialist angst that did not address the overarching system and devastating effects of global capitalism in its neocolonial dimensions. Even when filmmakers embraced elements of montage and produced cinematic jolts, they experimented with aesthetics in function of furthering revolutionary struggle, whether conceived as armed insurrection or as a more open-ended process. Authorial cinema was decidedly downplayed even as much New Latin American Cinema was still appreciated in those terms by cinephiles in Europe and elsewhere. As Zuzana Pick put it succinctly, "The definition of a revolutionary cinema—conceived as always open, never complete—was linked to oppositional strategies capable of challenging mainstream modes of cinematographic production and consumption. Filmmakers assumed consciously their role as initiators of change. Through critical writings and manifestos, they proposed modes suitable to distinct forms of creative and political militancy."<sup>54</sup>

According to the Cuban critic Ambrosio Fornet, the movement "shared an ideological commitment to three basic principles [. . .]: '1. To contribute to the development and reinforcement of national culture and, at the same time, challenge the penetration of imperialist ideology and any other manifestation of cultural imperialism; 2. to assume a continental perspective towards common problems and objectives, struggling for the future integration of a Great Latin American Nation; and 3. to deal critically with the individual and social conflicts of our peoples as a means of raising the consciousness of the popular masses.'"<sup>55</sup> We might also be able to analytically distinguish three different ideologically driven inflections in New Latin American Cinema: a militant one that supports an armed struggle; a second focused on raising consciousness about the causes and complexities of social injustice; and a third that seeks to advance social equality within the revolutionary state. Octavio Geti-

no and Fernando Solanas (from a radicalized Peronist perspective), Jorge Sanjinés and some of the other members of the Ukamau Group, as well as Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva (from an Andean Marxist standpoint) increasingly conceived of cinema as a weapon akin to the guerilla struggle, a cinema that needed to provide political analysis and encouragement for armed struggle but also required close collaboration with profilmic subjects. Getino and Solanas famously likened the camera to a rifle and the projector to a gun that could be employed in the struggle against neocolonialism.<sup>56</sup> Documentaries and docudramas like *La hora*, *Yawar mallku/La sangre del cóndor* (*Blood of the Condor*) (1969), *El coraje del pueblo* (*Courage of the People*) (1971), and *Chircales* (*The Brickmakers*) (1972) became expressions of revolutionary commitment in form, argument, and production process and distribution. The Argentine Cine Liberación (Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas) and the Bolivian Grupo Ukamau (Jorge Sanjinés, Beatriz Palacios) filmed in 16 and 35 mm analog formats, screened the finished versions at union meetings, student gatherings, and, in the case of Grupo Ukamau, also in Andean Quechua and Aymara communities.<sup>57</sup> Militant cinema was also shown, usually late at night, on European television networks.<sup>58</sup>

Others denounced injustice without prescribing solutions. Filmmakers like Fernando Birri and Raymundo Gleyzer in Argentina, those associated with *cinema novo* in Brazil (including Glauber Rocha and Nelson Pereira dos Santos), as well as Chilean filmmaker Miguel Littín sought to elaborate experimental film techniques in view of raising awareness among middle-class audiences, advocating nevertheless the need for profound changes. Patricio Guzmán sought to give voice to the Chilean Unidad Popular and its democratic path to socialism. While these committed filmmakers made films inspired by the Cuban Revolution, Cuban cinema was made from within the revolutionary process. This “imperfect cinema,” as Julio García Espinosa called it, included rousing calls to action, but also adapted the language of fiction for gentle and constructive self-criticism of the revolution and its efforts to generate a new human being who would be more generous and collaborative than the capitalist individual.<sup>59</sup>

Collaborative filmmaking in Bolivia and Colombia is directly linked to indigenous media and communication there and, as I explain more below, to the work of CLACPI,<sup>60</sup> who together with Ojo de Agua Comunicación had

organized the International Indigenous Film and Video Festival in Oaxaca in 2006. The video collective TV Serrana (founded by Daniel Diez Castrillo in 1993 in the eastern mountain range in Cuba) would become influential for indigenous media throughout Abya Yala; the Cuban film school at San Antonio de los Baños regularly awards indigenous filmmakers with scholarships.

Mexico is rarely mentioned in the critical scholarship on New Latin American Cinema and its named variants: *cinema novo* and its *estética da fome* (aesthetics of hunger); *tercer cine*, *el cine imperfecto*, and *el cine junto al pueblo*. Although Óscar Menéndez had sent his film *Todos somos hermanos* (*We Are All Brothers*) (1965)—the only Mexican contribution—to Viña in 1967, he did not himself attend.<sup>61</sup> Few Mexican filmmakers participated in the subsequent foundational festivals in 1968 (Mérida, Venezuela), and 1969 (Viña del Mar, Chile).<sup>62</sup> A tightly controlled medium in the Mexican Revolutionary State, Mexican filmmakers sought independence from state censorship. They were inspired by the Nouvelle Vague and the irreverence of Luis Buñuel but did not take to the militant filmmaking in South America.<sup>63</sup> In other words, before 1968, filmmakers in Mexico sought a new auteur cinema, independent of the country's declining film industry, to explore experimentally and existentially, to be critical, but not revolutionary.<sup>64</sup>

Things may have begun to shift already at the 1968 Film Festival in Mérida, Venezuela when Paul Leduc's 1965 *Que se callen* (*Let Them Shut Up*) and Leobardo López Arretche's 1967 *Catarsis* (*Catharsis*) were screened; and when the students' Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH) sent *Testimonios de una agresión*, a compilation of four documentary shorts based on footage recorded by the student brigades and edited by Rafael Castanedo and Paul Leduc. For the students radicalized by the local and global events of 1968, 16 mm allowed for ad hoc filming in the streets.<sup>65</sup> At the UNAM the CUEC's (Centro Universitario de Educación Cinematográfica) film student brigades accompanied the street protests in Mexico, recording the growing scope of countercultural and militant interventions as well as police repression. Their footage countered the silence the Mexican state tried to impose. Similar to Oaxaca in 2006, the film students were connected with a broader cultural movement that included visual artists and intellectuals. The art students of San Carlos and Esmeraldas, for example, "created a large number of signs, banners, flyers, and posters . . . in order to fill Mexico City with propaganda that would have otherwise

not been able to reach the mass media,<sup>66</sup> and thus transformed the way the plastic arts would be understood later on.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, Mexico City's *cine-clubes* (film clubs) screened *La hora* and other militant films from Cuba and South America, contributing to a new awareness about the possibilities of militant cinema. As Álvaro Vázquez Mantecón writes, "1968 created the conditions for establishing a link between Mexican cinematography and the New Latin American Cinemas that had practically not existed before."<sup>68</sup> Before the massacre of students at Tlatelolco the student movement still appealed to the state for reform rather than questioning the system as a whole. The Mexican student movement, "in contrast with the one that preceded it in Paris in May, had specific political demands that were pinned on a written petition and an organization structured around the [students'] National Strike Council (CNH)."<sup>69</sup> According to Vázquez Mantecón, all that changed with Tlatelolco.

After the repression—over three hundred protestors died on October 2, 1968, at the hands of the military in the Plaza de Tlatelolco—the reckoning with the student movement's failure led to an indictment of its middle-class insularity, its distance from "el pueblo."<sup>70</sup> While artists and cinematographers had been familiar with Cuban film, now they discovered a shared reality with countries to the south of Mexico. *La hora de los hornos* and the manifestos of third and imperfect cinema became "materia habitual."<sup>71</sup> It was only at the beginning of the 1970s, a year and a half later, however, that Mexican filmmakers—both the older generation who had stood in solidarity with the student movement and a younger generation of film students—began to see Mexico not merely as a more authoritarian counterpart to Cuba but as sharing in the same conditions of what was then called "underdevelopment" and "internal colonialism" as the rest of the hemisphere.<sup>72</sup>

Radicalized filmmakers were, however, quickly contained under the presidency of Luis Echeverría, beginning in 1970.<sup>73</sup> Luis Alcoriza, Rubén Gámez, Paul Leduc, Felipe Cazals, and Arturo Ripstein chose to cooperate with the state at the end of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz's tenure as president because funding for expensive 35 mm productions was otherwise nearly impossible to obtain.<sup>74</sup> As Draper puts it, "under the pretense of quality in cinema, the supposedly independent cinema continued to depend on patterns imposed by the State."<sup>75</sup> Not so surprisingly, then, President Luis Echeverría Álvarez proudly introduced a screening of Paul Leduc's *Reed: México insurgente* (*Reed: Insurgent*

*Mexico*) (1973) during a state visit to Chile.<sup>76</sup> With palpable disappointment, the critic Emilio García Riera stated that “in the last analysis, the new Mexican cinema has served the official ideology, and its supposedly militant character, the political commitment claimed for it, its revolution from within were never more than an imposture. It is more exact to give it the label that suits it: that of an auteur cinema. Not a stylistic revolution, a collective project, a group social commitment, not even a movement.”<sup>77</sup> Accomplished filmmakers created soft audiovisual critiques from within the regime, and among the majority of the historical and political films of this period, “there is not one revolutionary who hasn’t been defeated or at least annihilated.”<sup>78</sup>

Working in lightweight Super 8 video format, a younger generation of film students at the CUEC, however, formed two video collectives, *Cooperativa de Cine Marginal* and *Taller de Cine Octubre*. Some *superocheros* documented countercultural events, such as the rock music festival in Avándaro, while others sought connection to the unions struggling for independence from the state—particularly the Mexican *Sindicato de Trabajadores Electricistas*—or supported the proliferating guerrillas in Mexico. Sergio García advocated for the creation of a “Fourth Cinema,” highlighting the possibilities of Super 8 as a participatory medium and advocating for short, concise, and impacting films opposed to both art films and to what he saw as an increasingly formulaic “political cinema.”<sup>79</sup>

Like the New Latin American Cinema, *Cooperativa Cine Marginal*’s and *Taller de Cine Octubre*’s Super 8 videos speak to a concern with audiovisual form.<sup>80</sup> *Cooperativa de Cine Marginal* visualized “fragments of everyday political life—material not usually treated as filmable—while at the same time comprising a singular experience amid other forms of political action,” where, as Susana Draper writes, “the creative dimension becomes a constitutive component of the political experience, and vice versa.”<sup>81</sup> Óscar Menéndez’s *Historia de un documento* (*History of a Document*) (1971) includes footage recorded clandestinely by inmates—many of them students—of the Lecumberri prison. The experimental sequence filmed inside Lecumberri “takes us from the prison to an open carceral society,” but this continuity “is also problematized by the image itself in its constitution, given that the scenes produced inside the cells are fissured and fragmented in a way that the images from the outside are not.”<sup>82</sup> *Historia de un documento*, Draper concludes, “refers to a double ges-

ture. On the one hand, it visualizes what official language left clandestine, that is, the existence of political prisoners who had been erased from the sphere of the public after the Tlatelolco massacre and Díaz Ordaz's official declaration that there were no political prisoners in Mexico. On the other hand, it creates a film-document that intervenes or interrupts the official realm of the visible, visualizing that which had been denied."<sup>83</sup>

Draper suggests that the Super 8 video movement created "a change of and in the image as a place of transformation of aesthetic habits . . . a shift not only in the type of cinema that begins to be prioritized within the political movement but also, and fundamentally, in the type of subjects that become its agents and mobilizers: anyone could use the Super 8 without much training."<sup>84</sup> Anticipating activist video, Super 8 video became a pivotal technology in this shift toward militancy because it was much more accessible than larger-gauge cameras. And with that occurred, Draper argues, "a totally different type of production, use, and circulation of the images, which also modifies the meaning of the artistic work."<sup>85</sup> With echoes of Rancière's take on aesthetics, she holds that "the emergence of the political in these visual experiments is linked to the possibility of destabilizing and influencing the naturalized and hierarchical distribution of roles and functions . . . not only the logic of bodies and words but also the rules established by artistic practice itself, by its producers and spectators."<sup>86</sup>

Most of Cooperativa de Cine Marginal's audiovisual communiqués (*Comunicados de insurgencia obrera/Comunicués of Worker Insurgency*), nevertheless, did not reach working class and rural audiences; they were screened primarily for other students and the urban middle class.<sup>87</sup> The movement itself was short-lived. In Lerner's estimation, the superocheros certainly did not imitate Hollywood or other industrial models of filmmaking, but rather followed Cuban and Brazilian imperfect cinema.<sup>88</sup> Super 8, "in contrast with the *nuevo cine mexicano* . . . sought to create through collective effort a counter-cinema that was radical in content and in form."<sup>89</sup> And yet, as Lerner adds, it "functioned [only] for a brief interlude as a grassroots, politically engaged uncensored alternative cinema."<sup>90</sup> Although, as Draper argues, the videos by Cooperativa de Cine Marginal "function as afterlives or modes of continuing the movement by other means and outside the university," around 1973, this movement too would fracture.<sup>91</sup>



Recalling the immediate aftermath of 1968, José Carlos Méndez, one of the members of *Cooperativa de Cine Marginal*, assessed the cinematic reaction as reflecting “the old discussion about politically and artistically committed cinema, about the bourgeois nature of festival competitions, of skills that promote an individualistic rather than social vision, about integrationism and leftism, reactionariness and dogmatism, etc.” All of this led to the formation of two opposed and irreconcilable positions: “those who were in favor of cinema as creative personal expression, and those who supported cinema as a social product, a cinema that would be a political instrument.”<sup>92</sup> Some gave up Super 8 in favor of organizing strikes and protest in the streets, while others followed Mexico’s older generation of independent filmmakers, now working with state financing, and opted for cinema.<sup>93</sup> Although the Super 8 movement was rather short-lived, it was influential for the video art movement in the 1980 and 1990s, and for community and collaborative video in indigenous languages in Mexico.<sup>94</sup>

## ENTANGLEMENTS

Wammack Weber and I have privileged the term “collaborative and community video in indigenous languages,” rather than the shorthand “indigenous video” as a way of drawing attention to multiple parallel traditions informing the collective work of indigenous and nonindigenous social communicators, community members, and independent filmmakers, some of whom were present in Oaxaca, in San Salvador Atenco, or involved in documenting the Other Campaign. In light of the history of video art and home video in Mexico, we have sought to unsettle a long predominant Mexican narrative about video in indigenous languages as emerging primarily from the state’s audiovisual technology transfer program, or TMA (*Transferencia de Medios Audiovisuales*), which was launched in 1989 in order to begin cinematic training and video production in states with high numbers of indigenous peoples. The state handed out equipment and created regional support centers, the *Centros de Video Indígena* (CVI) but, as Zamorano and Weber write, “the strong influence that the National Indigenous Institute (INI) had as a national and international producer and promoter of indigenous cinema and video, created the impression of a certain homogeneity with regards to Mexican in-

digenous audiovisual creations. Its advisors and training workshops promoted documentaries that sought to valorize and celebrate in realist language, certain aspects of community life, including solidarity, collective labor, political consensus, and local knowledge.<sup>95</sup> Although some of those participating in the INI's workshops would take their newly acquired skills and begin to experiment, indigenous videos created in the context of the TMA thus offer dignified, serious, and "quality" images of indigenous traditions.<sup>96</sup>

Both preceding the TMA and generating parallel to it, the Mexican video art movement has promoted a much more experimental and low-tech use of video, sometimes building the young video artist's familiarity with home video as well as the overwhelming televisual literacy of rural people throughout Mexico.<sup>97</sup> Video art and activism begins to proliferate at a moment when audiovisual recording itself becomes an increasingly common, widely accessible practice.<sup>98</sup> In Mexico, the delayed and inadequate response of the state to the 1985 earthquake and what Sarah Minter characterized as the "cynical role that the media played, especially television" caused a social awakening and "the need to attest to the problems of social marginalization."<sup>99</sup> While Minter's video art stretches from intimate concerns to documentaries on punk youth groups from Mexico City's urban margins, tying experimental approaches to sociopolitical concerns, in Oaxaca the Zapotec video artists Martha Colmenares y Álvaro Vázquez began searching for a cinematic language that would allow portraying "our own issues and how we see ourselves."<sup>100</sup> Already in 1982 they began projecting their audiovisual interventions on basketball courts in various Zapotec communities, where audiences found themselves greatly entertained. As Martha Colmenares explains, "this was how we won the battle with television because even before commercial television arrived, the people had already seen themselves on screen."<sup>101</sup> These screenings allowed different Zapotec groups to become familiar with each other, reaching even those who had emigrated to the United States. Noting the origin of fiesta videos in this transnational exchange, Colmenares says that "later on they returned with their video cameras to record the fiestas and important events in the communities. The use of video became widespread in the Sierra Norte Zapoteca and in the exchange with other communities."<sup>102</sup>

In 1986 Colmenares and Álvaro Vázquez participated in the Primera Muestra de Videofilme where *Danza Azteca* was awarded the prize for first

video made *por indígenas* (by indigenous people). Their videos were also shown in the Second Indigenous Film Festival in Rio de Janeiro and after that in festivals in the United States. At the Primera Bienal de Vídeo in Mexico in 1990 they won a prize for *Nuestro Tequio*.<sup>103</sup> Growing from the collaboration between Duarte Duarte and Wammack Weber, who founded the Turix Collective in Mérida, Yucatec Mayan collaborative and community video art has been proliferating since the 1990s, including Duarte Duarte and Wammack Weber's own experimental film *Arroz con leche*. Turix has also collaborated with Ojo de Agua Comunicación and the Oaxaca-based video artist Bruno Varela. A discussion of video activism in Oaxaca and Chiapas must take the video art movement into account, starting with the Primera Muestra de Videofilme organized by Rafael Corkidi (Alejandro Jodorovsky's director of photography) in 1986, where video artists, independent filmmakers, and community-based video makers became aware of each other's work and established new connections.<sup>104</sup>

Ojo de Agua Comunicación (whose official name is Comunicación Indígena S.A.) became an important participant in the Oaxaca uprising and embodied the complex history of collaborative media in indigenous languages in Mexico.<sup>105</sup> When it was formed in 1998, several initiatives converged: Guillermo Monteforte—head of the CVI in Oaxaca (founded in 1994) and the most successful of the state-sponsored video centers in Mexico—became increasingly disillusioned with the state's tutelage and renounced his directorship in 1997. Sergio Julián Caballero, who had become the CVI's chief video editor, left the center in 1998. They joined a second group from Guelatao, a Zapotec community in the Sierra de Juárez, composed of Juan José García Ortiz, Clara Morales Rodríguez, and Ceberino Hipólito Morales. Tonatiuh Díaz González-Rodríguez, who received his Licenciatura in Communication from the Universidad Autónoma in Xochimilco (near Mexico City), had also worked for Comunalidad A.C. in Guelatao, and had participated in the training of video makers in Zapatista communities in Chiapas before joining Ojo de Agua in 1998. García Ortiz had been part of the musical group Trova Serrana, led by Jaime Martínez Luna and the community radio station XEGLO—La voz de la sierra, formed in 1990 with support from the Mexican state's National Indigenous Institute. The group had begun documenting its radio workshops through video in 1992. Trova Serrana became a nongovern-

mental institution in 1993 (Comunalidad A.C.) and García Ortiz was instrumental in creating a series of videos, *Revista de la sierra* for Oaxaca's Canal 9 (COR-TV) with postproduction in the CVI in Oaxaca City. Roberto Olivares, director of the activist video *Compromiso cumplido*, like Tonatiuh Díaz, studied communication in Mexico City. Olivares worked for Canal 9 in his home state of Oaxaca, then for a commercial producer, and finally founded his own production company, Azul Producciones, where he created a series for educational television. He became part of Ojo de Agua in 1999. Héctor García Sandoval and Eva Melina Ruíz González from indigenous communities in Oaxaca joined the group after they had gained experience working with the CVI and local radio. Bruno Varela was an accomplished practicing video artist, who contributed to Ojo de Agua Comunicación for a number of years and has also worked closely with the Turix Collective in Mérida.

Since becoming independent of the CVI, the collaborative media center Ojo de Agua Comunicación has been dedicated to promoting indigenous and collaborative communication through radio and video, working with communities in Oaxaca, other regions in Mexico, and elsewhere in Abya Yala. It straddles the need to find financial support, producing commissioned television series about the indigenous peoples of Mexico, with the passionately committed work of its founding members and the dozens more recent allies and collaborators who have joined the group and “with whom we share an ethical commitment and the desire to transform the reality of our surroundings and create a better world,” as Ojo de Agua puts it.<sup>106</sup> In 2006, Ojo de Agua organized CLACPI's Eighth International Indigenous Film and Video Festival, just before the teachers' encampment was destroyed on June 14. With the formation of the APPO and as the protests acquired massive proportions, Ojo de Agua Comunicación renamed itself Mal de Ojo Televisión (EyeSore TV) and began serving as an Indymedia Center. Ojo de Agua Comunicación suspended its work for almost three years (2006–2008). While acting as a media repository, archive, and editing center, Mal de Ojo TV also gave technical assistance to the women occupying COR-TV and provided some of the films for broadcast.

The independent US filmmaker Alexandra Halkin, founding director of the Chiapas Media Project (CMP)/Promedios and for some time a member of CLACPI, worked as an editor at Mal de Ojo TV and helped to distribute the DVD collection *Imágenes de la Represión* in the United States.<sup>107</sup> Halkin's

involvement again draws attention to the transnational dimensions of video activism and to the contacts between Oaxaca and Chiapas. Founded in 1998, Promedios also has a long and complex history that similarly attests to an encounter among transnational filmmakers, activists, and students from Mexico City as well as those from rural indigenous communities.<sup>108</sup> This Zapatista video production group grew from a request. In view of the intense media interest in the EZLN, young Zapatistas approached Halkin, who was visiting base communities in 1995, asking her to help them access communication technology directly.<sup>109</sup> For nearly two decades the organization provided Zapatista youth with audiovisual training and equipment, including editing and postproduction centers, as well as computer skills and satellite internet access. Through Promedios, the Zapatistas created a local network of independent video production and distribution, mostly in indigenous languages. While Promedios videos have also been distributed throughout Mexico and internationally through the CMP—shown in community centers and universities and at international indigenous film and video festivals—much additional raw footage recorded over the last twenty years remains in Chiapas.<sup>110</sup>

CLACPI has undoubtedly played an enormously important role in connecting video makers from indigenous communities and independent filmmakers from across the Americas and beyond, whether they identify more with social communication or as individual artists. Since its creation in 1985, CLACPI has organized biannual international indigenous film and video festivals, “as well as innumerable training workshops and communication seminars devoted to strengthening the development of indigenous media in Latin America.” As Amalia Córdova summarizes succinctly, “the organization has played a pivotal role for indigenous media production . . . across Abya Yala.”<sup>111</sup> The organization, and the networks it has helped to craft, is “transnational in more than one sense: it is a hemispheric, inter-indigenous exchange between indigenous nations, confederations, or collectives, as well as an example of North-South partnerships beyond nation-state frameworks.”<sup>112</sup> As Córdova explains, it is also a prime and not always conflict-free site where indigenous filmmakers, visual anthropologists, and independent filmmakers have collaborated and sought to create more horizontal relationships.<sup>113</sup>

Collaborative and community video in indigenous languages thus transcends Mexico; it is a global phenomenon, connecting people and collectives

through workshops, short-term collaborations, and film and video art festivals. International indigenous film and video festivals in North America (Canada and the United States) and Latin America have been fostering the mutual awareness and exchange of Native filmmakers for almost three decades, often also including works from New Zealand, Australia, and beyond. Throughout Abya Yala, collaborative and community media in indigenous languages also build on experiences with radio and sometimes with militant cinema. They form part of the broad mobilization of indigenous peoples in the hemisphere and the global struggle for indigenous human and cultural rights.

Although we might distinguish among collaborative and community film and video makers in indigenous languages who define themselves primarily as social communicators and those who see themselves rather as filmmakers or video artists, these are not hard lines. Some video makers work in collectives, take part in video training, and seek to promote or engage in communication among indigenous communities and ethnic groups; others have attended film schools, work more independently, may no longer reside in their communities of origin, and/or may be more closely aligned with the video art movement. Some indigenous filmmakers live in rural communities; others form part of internal or international diasporas or have studied at film schools abroad. Collaborative and community video in indigenous languages in Mexico is certainly linked variously to the video art movement, to home video, the transnational traffic in patron saints fiesta videos, and to Native and Aboriginal filmmaking globally.<sup>114</sup> Oaxaca's video art and activism, as well as the films associated with the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, must be understood in this broader context. While activist video about street protests and political assemblies in Mexico are not the same as collaborative and community video in indigenous languages, there is considerable overlap.

The last chapter in this book serves as a coda, or alternate ending. It gathers the threads and then opens our view from southern Mexico onto the hemispheric context of collaborative and community video in indigenous languages. Many of these films, too, issue invitations to their audiences, invitations to laugh on the terms offered by indigenous media makers and their collaborators. Some present a soft-spoken meditation on daily life that almost invariably includes comedic moments: situational humor or the video makers' self-reflexive

smiles. Others project comedic subversions of profilmic authority that create community through teasing. Such a politics of humor constitutes a particular dimension of decolonial affect that complements the open-ended exuberance arising from performative street protests that is amplified in some of the activist videos discussed throughout this book. These works also allow us to reconfigure the scene of prefigurative politics from uprising and assembly to the quotidian. At the same time, these videos drive home an understanding of decolonization as a long-term process, not won overnight, or even in a decade or two, or really ever permanently. Such a decolonial perspective shifts revolutionary emphasis from what Boggs called “the instrumental” (the Marxist-Leninist quest for the state as a means of securing political power) to the way we govern and sustain ourselves, to our forms of labor and exchange, and to the way we conceive of life. Although there is no guarantee that joyous rebellion will lead to a different world, much of video activism invites a politics of affect and constitutive creativity that is inspired by the wit, irreverence, and resilience, based on centuries of indigenous survival. One of the lessons that both activist videos and collaborative videos in indigenous languages can teach us is that short-term action can feed on rage, but long-term processes cannot. If revolution is a form of continuous social experimentation, adaptation, and reevaluation (practicing the change you want to see), such a process would exhaust itself without the pleasure of doing.