



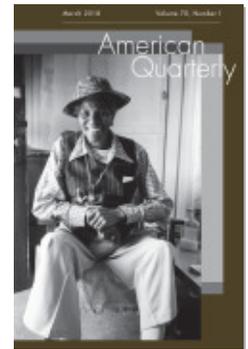
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Indigenismo, and Zapatista Solidarity in *Raiders of the Lost  
Crown*

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# Through an Anticolonial Looking Glass: On Restitution, Indigenismo, and Zapatista Solidarity in *Raiders of the Lost Crown*

*Jennifer Ponce de León*

Vienna's World Museum (Weltmuseum Wien) holds in its collection a rare and storied *quetzalapanecáyotl*—an adornment made of quetzal feathers—known as the Ancient Mexican Feather Headdress, the *Penacho de Moctezuma* (Moctezuma's Headdress), and the *Kopilli Ketzalli* (precious crown). Though its exact provenance is disputed, it is said to have belonged to Moctezuma the Younger, the penultimate ruler of the Triple Alliance, commonly known as the Mexica or Aztec Empire. The headdress was part of the war booty Hernán Cortés brought back to Spain after leading the invasion and conquest of Tenochtitlán in the sixteenth century, and it has remained in European collections ever since. A facsimile of it is exhibited in Mexico's National Museum of Anthropology, where it forms part of a monumental display of ancient Mexica artifacts in the museum's central hall. Mexican state officials have appealed to Austria for the return of the headdress, and Mexican activists have led petition campaigns and protests demanding its restitution. An employee of the World Museum even suggested that the international controversy surrounding the ownership and display of the “notorious *penacho* of Moctezuma” is more well known than the museum itself.<sup>1</sup>

In 2013 the Diego de la Vega Cooperative Media Conglomerate disseminated a letter and petition online, in Spanish and English, asking for support in its efforts to repatriate the headdress. These were authored by Diego de la Vega's founder and CEO, Fran Ilich. Born in 1975 in Tijuana, Ilich is now a New York-based artist, writer, and activist who works in narrative media, social art, and long-term collective projects that experiment with alternative forms of economic organization and autonomous cultural production. Diego de la Vega is both a collective entity and a meta-artwork by Ilich that functions as a platform for activist and artistic endeavors. Ilich's letter announced that the cooperative was gathering signatures to petition for the “[repatriation] of

Moctezuma's feather crown to Mexico-Tenochtitlán." His letter summarized the history behind the headdress's presence in Europe and concluded with an appeal to the moral reputation of the Austrian people and state:

We believe that the Austrian people and their democratic government don't want to stain their name and reputation more by keeping a war booty, which obviously was obtained in the midst of the American holocaust, a colonial process that exterminated people, languages, religions, and cultures at a scale unknown to history ever since. For this and other reasons we think that the feather crown must come to the Americas.<sup>2</sup>

Ilich's letter provided a link to the online petition, which was addressed to the presidents of the Austrian and Mexican Republics, as well as the director of the World Museum. Its laconic text concluded: "It has been almost 500 years since the quetzalapanecáyotl became a prisoner of war. It is time to return home." Over six hundred people signed the petition during the next few months. Yet, when I asked Ilich in an interview if he ever delivered the petition to its addressees, he replied, "Of course not. I don't believe in petitions. Especially not when they are addressed to Europeans."<sup>3</sup>

### **Stereoscopic Critique and the Anticolonial Politicization of ARGs**

The petition Ilich penned and distributed online was not the activist instrument it appeared to be. Rather, it was anticolonial critique as literature and one component in his transmedial artwork *Raiders of the Lost Crown*. *Raiders* is an avant-garde and especially literary rendition of an alternate reality game (ARG). As Brian Schrank succinctly describes them, "ARGs are collective, participatory narratives played by scalable, networked communities across new and old media platforms."<sup>4</sup> While the genre emerged in the 2000s, it draws on long genealogies of avant-garde literature and visual art, as well as of gaming.<sup>5</sup> ARGs are characterized by their use of transmedial narratives—that is, narratives composed across multiple mediums and platforms.<sup>6</sup> The narratives of ARGs are interactive; typically, players form networks online and work together to solve mysteries or puzzles designed by the ARG's creator(s). While ARGs use computer networks to facilitate collective gameplay, they differ from video or computer games insofar as they are played out in both real-world and virtual spaces. As Schrank writes, ARGs "frame the entire world as their media platform."<sup>7</sup> Importantly, they are characterized by the erasure of metalanguage that would frame them as a representational space apart from the real world. According to Patrick Jagoda, this integrates ARGs into players' everyday lives and suggests to them "that the shared experience into which they are enter-

ing is not a designed ludic fiction but instead an aspect of the real world.<sup>8</sup> In keeping with this convention of the genre, *Raiders* did not represent itself as a game; nor did it have any rules to follow.

*Raiders's* use of the conventions of ARGs blurs the boundaries between the real world and its own narrative, as well as the market and aesthetic demarcations between the popular art form of ARGs and avant-garde art and literature. *Raiders* is a highly politicized and literary intervention within the genre of ARGs, and it is interlaced with Ilich's transdisciplinary and experimental artistic praxis as a writer and as a visual artist working in media art and social art. It can be situated within a history of artistic practice Mary Flanagan has identified in which artists use games "as a means for creative expression, as instruments for conceptual thinking, or as tools to help examine or work through social issues."<sup>9</sup> While ARGs are typically associated with collective puzzle solving and scavenger hunts, *Raiders* centered on online epistolary exchanges, artworks, and protest actions that directly addressed historical and ongoing colonial and imperial relations, as well as actual and possible resistance to these.

*Raiders* deploys the aesthetic affordances of ARGs to compose a multidimensional anticolonial critique and engage players and audiences in a collective exercise of speculative decolonial imagination. In particular, *Raiders* uses ARGs' capacity to produce a "layered" or "alternate" reality through the way their gameplay is integrated into the real world and the everyday lives of their players. Jane McGonigal argues that this form of immersion encourages participants to develop "a kind of stereoscopic vision" wherein they perceive reality and the game structure in "a single, but layered and dynamic world view."<sup>10</sup> Whereas typical ARGs integrate a fictional narrative into real-world settings, *Raiders's* story is, at base, organized around actual histories, material practices, and institutions (though it does have fictionalized elements). Its representation of reality as multilayered, and the stereoscopic vision this invites, forms an aesthetic dialectic that accounts for the historical persistence of colonial domination buttressed in every way by hegemonic ideologies and representational practices that attempt to render this domination invisible. *Raiders's* anticolonial critique takes the form of a stereoscopic apprehension that holds together in a single field of vision the materiality of colonial practices *and* their systemic disavowal. It thereby puts into relief the ways in which coloniality functions as an epistemic project, enabling the proliferation of universalist ideologies and moral economies organized around systemic effacements. In the remainder of this essay, I examine the stereoptics that *Raiders* marshals against the imperial-colonial-capital Hydra as it reimagines the protocols of museums, gaming, and petitions to advance an internationalist, anticolonial, and anti-imperialist political imaginary and solidarity with indigenous liberation struggle.

*Raiders's* anticolonial critique emerges most forcefully through its capacity to make visible the heterotemporality of colonial forms of domination and anticolonial resistance in the Americas. Dipesh Chakrabarty has theorized heterotemporality as the “entangled times” or “timeknot” in which social reality is lived. It is obfuscated by modes of viewing the past (e.g., historicist and developmentalist conceptions of history) that deploy “a sense of anachronism in order to convert objects, institutions, and practices with which we have lived relationships into relics of other times.”<sup>11</sup> Chakrabarty’s conceptualization of temporal heterogeneity is further illuminated by Jacqui Alexander’s conceptualization of “palimpsestic time” as grounds for understanding relations among modern state forms within a stratified global field. Working against a developmentalist conception of state forms with its implicit hierarchies, Alexander posits colonial, neocolonial, and neo-imperial social formations as contemporaneous if not coterminous, arguing for the methodological importance of tracing traffic and proximity among these formations. She asserts that it is “our task . . . to move practices of neocolonialism within the ambit of modernity, and to move those of colonialism into neo-imperialism, reckoning, in other words, with palimpsestic time.”<sup>12</sup> *Raiders's* narrative does precisely this. It mobilizes representations of colonial-era plunder and genocide to highlight the imperial and colonial character of current modes of capitalist accumulation as this is evidenced in dispossession exercised through neoliberalization, relations of debt and credit, and intellectual property regimes. As it traces out continuities of colonial processes in those social formations that constitute modernity within a transnational scope, *Raiders* also highlights the ideological traffic among neocolonial and neo-imperial social formations of Europe and the Americas.

Just as it traces iterations of colonial processes throughout global modernity, Ilich’s ARG also underscores the continuity and urgency of anticolonial struggles in the present. Its cultural politics and representation of history are fundamentally enabled by contemporary indigenous liberation struggle rooted in Mexico. Specifically, the Zapatista movement and its anticapitalist, anticolonial, and internationalist vision serves as a prioritized historical example and praxeological lesson for *Raiders's* representation of practices and worldviews that operate in resistance to contemporary forms of colonial domination. Moreover, its analysis of the colonial character of contemporary regimes of accumulation, as well as its critique of the Mexican state and its nationalist ideologies, is especially indebted to the history of the Zapatista movement and the knowledge produced therein. In its stereoscopic apprehension of contemporary coloniality, *Raiders* juxtaposes state representations of

indigeneity that work to both manage and efface the social realities of living Indians with knowledge produced by this, and other, indigenous liberation struggles that belie such representations and radically reconfigure ideas about the nation and modernity.

As an intellectual influenced by, and aligned with, the social movement constellated around the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN), Ilich has been engaging Zapatista political thought for over two decades with his artistic and theoretical production. He argues that an “Other culture” is needed to support the political ambitions of the Zapatistas’ Other Campaign, which include fomenting a left politics autonomous of state institutions, organizing for a new national constitution for Mexico, and creating international alliances to strengthen the global struggle against neoliberalism.<sup>13</sup> Ilich believes that contemporary cultural production can be effectively counterideological (call for and found an “Other way of seeing”) in the service of Zapatismo’s political project, as well as work to reorganize social relations in ways that align with the movement’s ideals.<sup>14</sup> I see *Raiders* as an attempt to produce counternarratives of this Other cultural sort. By this, I do not mean that it was made to circulate in social movement contexts. Rather, it transmits and translates an anticapitalist and anticolonial worldview, which articulates as its source Zapatista struggle and knowledge production, to the networked, urban communities of Latin America and the global North in which Ilich lives and works. As we explore the multiple dimensions of *Raiders*, I also discuss how Ilich used the conditions of its production and reception to make material his solidarity with Zapatismo.

*Raiders* took place as an ARG over the first five months of 2013. While this was a live and ephemeral phenomenon, *Raiders* also exists as an artwork in the archive its composition produced. Ilich first introduced this project into the public sphere in 2013 through the aforementioned letter and petition, which he e-mailed to thousands of people. These e-mails, as well as a website Ilich created for the game, invited readers to contact Ilich if they wanted to join the “Penacho Support Network” to help Diego de la Vega in its efforts to bring the Penacho de Moctezuma back to Mexico. Joining the Network effectively meant taking up a role within the game. Over five months, as the game unfolded, Network members received e-mail and postal mail from Ilich, debated positions and strategies in relation to the game’s mission, and produced media, art, and protest actions related to it. Support Network members were rewarded for these efforts with payments in a virtual currency of Ilich’s design, and these financial operations were managed by Spacebank, a virtual community investment bank and social artwork Ilich created in 2005 and has since integrated

into his other projects. Ilich and Network members principally communicated via the Penacho e-mail list, which connected players across the Americas and Europe in a virtual community and provided the narrative through-line for the game. The Penacho e-mail list also organized a readership for *Raiders*, as the e-mails sent among Ilich and Support Network members were also received by hundreds of other individuals Ilich added to the e-mail list.

In its final two weeks *Raiders* took on a centralized physical setting, in addition to its virtual networked dimension, when Ilich and other network members gathered in Austria at the Donau Festival of music and performance, which had commissioned the creation of *Raiders*. Ilich created a pop-up coffee shop within the festival called Café Penacho, which served as the meeting place for Network members. While *Raiders* had a home base at the Donau Festival, Ilich regularly sent e-mails to the Penacho e-mail list that narrated the Support Network's activities. With these texts, which often inhabit the form of meeting minutes as a literary device, Ilich disseminated semifictionalized or wholly fictional accounts of the Network's activities, thus introducing new characters, conflicts, and plot twists into *Raiders's* narrative. These quickly complicated and questioned what had appeared to be the game's original mission of repatriating the feathered crown.

### **An Anticolonial Treasure Hunt**

Although Ilich initially framed *Raiders's* gameplay as a campaign to restitute the feathered crown, this "mission" was never the true subject of its story. Rather, Ilich used the history of the headdress and the controversy surrounding its ownership as a plot device within a narrative he modeled after the well-known fantasy and adventure subgenre of treasure hunt narratives. In an interview he told me that doing so allowed him to introduce *Raiders* with a familiar narrative and inviting tenor in order to draw readers and potential players into its story: "I needed people to suspend disbelief and enter this with a sort of playful mind," because it is so difficult to bring the American Holocaust into discussions, he explained. "That's why I used all the fantasy literary tropes I could think of, so they would relate it to their *Zelda* games or *Indiana Jones* games—not that Mesoamerican culture is lacking in far more interesting forms."<sup>15</sup>

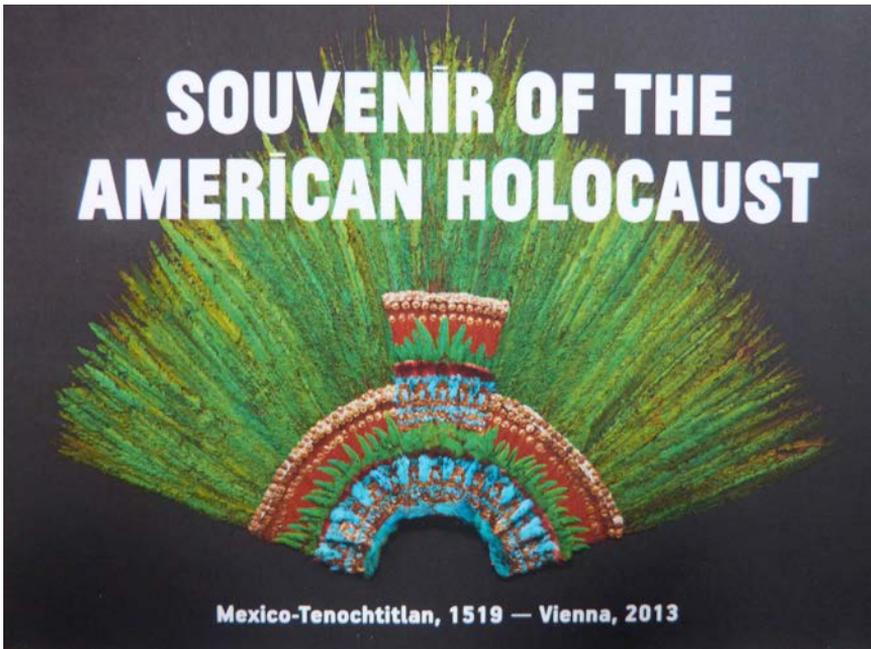
Ilich deploys the conventions of treasure hunt narratives in order to subvert them and thus refute long-held beliefs in the moral good of museums, cultural preservation, and the cultured supremacy of Europe. As they appear in countless Hollywood films, video games, television shows, novels, and comics, treasure hunt narratives usually consist of colonialist fantasia that follow



**Figure 1.**  
 Fran Ilich, *Raiders of the Lost Crown Archive*, 2017,  
 installation, Philadelphia, Slought Foundation.  
 Photograph courtesy of the Slought Foundation

Western protagonists as they travel to exotic Third World locales to seek and gain possession of storied artifacts and other treasure (the myriad products of the Indiana Jones franchise, to which *Raiders of the Lost Crown* alludes with its title, are a prime example of this).<sup>16</sup> By organizing a plot to capture the feathered crown *from* a European museum, *Raiders* defamiliarizes the imperialist ideologies that suffuse the treasure hunt subgenre, revealing their plots as apologies for colonial plunder.

For Ilich, Moctezuma's Headdress served as a particularly compelling "treasure" within a game he created to be presented in Europe because it could be easily assimilated to a Eurocentric worldview. When I asked him why he chose to use that particular artifact, he answered: "Because my dialogue was with the Austrians or with the Europeans, and they value Merlin's sword, Perseus's Shield, no? They value those kinds of things." He added, "If we tell them that each *penacho* is actually a connection to the heavens, will they understand it? Or will they think we are stupid? They think in terms of a crown."<sup>17</sup> Ilich was counting on the misrecognition of the headdress, a mistranslation of its meaning and purpose, to engage the Eurocentric imagination of his European audience. *Raiders* never purports to offer its audiences veridical or authentic representations of Mesoamerican Indian culture. Rather, it reframes colonialist representations of indigenous culture to slyly defamiliarize, provincialize, and even mock Eurocolonial presumptions.



**Figure 2.**  
Fran Ilich, *Raiders of the Lost Crown Archive*, detail

## A Holocaust Souvenir

In the spirit of tactical media, culture jamming, and Situationist *détournement*, Ilich hijacked the World Museum’s proprietary photograph of the headdress and used it in a postcard that reframes the display (as well as the photograph itself) as an object lesson in the ways modern cultural institutions reproduce colonial ideologies and practices. Ilich’s postcard featured the official photograph of the headdress that appears in the World Museum’s publicity materials and gift shop offerings. However, it is differentiated from the museum’s souvenirs by the caption overlaid atop the image: “SOUVENIR OF THE AMERICAN HOLOCAUST Mexico-Tenochtitlan, 1519-Vienna 2013” (fig. 2). Official logos of Vienna’s World Museum and Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia) appeared on the back of the postcard, thus creating the impression that it was produced by these institutions. Ilich planted postcards at the World Museum and distributed others at the Donau Festival. The World Museum’s anxious and aggressive response to this intervention led to threats that both he and the curator who selected his project might be kicked out of the festival.

Ilich's controversial postcard, *Souvenir of the American Holocaust*, exemplifies how the precise deployment of language in *Raiders's* texts is crucial to the game's anticolonial critique. The photo's caption startles and resituates the headdress from its terminal museumization while ironizing Eurocentric morality as it pertains to the recognition and representation of genocide. By invoking the Nazi Holocaust to Austrian audiences to frame the genocide of indigenous people of the Americas, the phrase asserts the world historical and moral significance of the American Holocaust, which is made invisible as material reality and historical record.<sup>18</sup> The invocation of the Nazi Holocaust, which has been decisively memorialized, throws light on the continued effacement of the American Holocaust and indigenous Americans' history. This gesture evokes Aimé Césaire's assertion that representations of Nazism as an exceptional barbarism exemplify racist pseudo-humanism in their implicit disavowal of the genocides and violence Europeans unleashed on those they colonized.<sup>19</sup> *Raiders's* critique is given additional heft and texture by the fact that its gameplay and audiences span Europe and the Americas. By invoking the "American Holocaust" in postfascist Austria and creating the impression, through the use of official logos and images, that this is being done by national institutions, the postcard mimics and inverts a rhetorical strategy of US nationalist discourse that uses representations of the Nazi Holocaust to shore up representations of US American history and culture as radically opposed to, and unsullied by, ideologies and practices associated with fascism and genocidal violence.<sup>20</sup> Thus *Raiders* uses Austria's museum and haunting cultural associations with twentieth-century fascism to frame its indictment of the barbaric practices of American colonial states, their conspicuous impunity, and the hypocrisy of the very delimited cultural politics of holocaust memorialization.

The phrase "souvenir of the American Holocaust" posits a concept that immediately strikes one as obscene: the very proposition of a holocaust souvenir is clearly a calculated affront to a contemporary European moral sensibility. Yet, insofar as the phrase signifies in tandem with the image of the headdress over which it is printed, it also refers to an actual object obtained in the Conquest, a famous museum display, and even the copyrighted image Ilich hijacked. Far from being seen as obscene, the headdress's display is, in fact, exemplary of broadly naturalized practices of Western ethnological and anthropological museums. Thus the juxtaposition the postcard stages (i.e., between the obscene concept and reference to a typical practice) pinpoints the blindness that colonialist ideologies produce and the hypocrisy of a Eurocentric moral sensibility that is offended by a concept, once delivered in sufficiently relatable

language, yet tacitly accepts the existence of the practice to which it refers. The museum's function as colonial space and its reduction of the headdress to artifactual objecthood are handily undone by Ilich's postcard, whose shocking juxtaposition of language suggests that discursive systems must be violently undone to examine colonial violence and to instantiate another worldview.

The layered meanings produced by *Souvenir* work to disarticulate the mythos of historical time that would put colonial formations in a past distant from the present. In the phrase "souvenir of the American Holocaust," *souvenir* can be understood as referring to the headdress itself, thus underscoring the history of genocide that inheres in the object's provenance and implicitly questioning the ethics of its display on these terms. But *souvenir* can also refer to the postcard itself, which mimics a souvenir produced by the World Museum. The latter reading suggests that ways Western museums use indigenous peoples' material culture are morally analogous to peddling "holocaust souvenirs." Thus the postcard not only calls attention to the sixteenth-century colonial violence that was the condition for the headdress's transfer to European institutions; it also critiques how the museum, as state apparatus and legitimating institution of Euro-colonial modernity, reproduces imperialist relations and ideologies in the present.

Ilich produced his decoy museum souvenir by making unauthorized use of a photograph whose copyright is owned by the Austrian World Museum. Moreover, he explicitly appropriated the photograph *as* intellectual property by printing "Copyright Diego de la Vega, 2013" on the postcard's back. With it, the postcard and its maker disavow the colonial property regime in which the image participates: one that includes the museum's illegitimate claim to the headdress and, moreover, its use of the artifact to generate and commercialize intellectual property. By specifically challenging intellectual property claims, the postcard makes visible the heterotemporality of colonial plundering, as it uses the headdress's association with the Conquest to highlight the colonial and neo-imperial character of intellectual property regimes as they function in contemporary modes of accumulation.<sup>21</sup>

### **On Antihumanist Theater and Speculative Economics**

The pop-up coffee shop Ilich created at the Donau Festival in Austria served as a gathering place for the Penacho Support Network, thus playing on the transnational history and cultural imagination of coffee shops as spaces for dissident political plotting.<sup>22</sup> Yet Café Penacho was most crucial to *Raiders's* nar-

rative in its actual function as a coffee shop open to festival visitors. With part of the production budget the Donau Festival accorded *Raiders*, Ilich purchased 100 kilograms of coffee produced by cooperatives in Chiapas whose members are part of the support base of the EZLN and used this to brew the espressos he served at the café. Because the history of the cooperatives illuminates the significance they have within *Raiders*'s narrative and economy, I begin by adumbrating the historical context in which they emerged.

Zapatista coffee cooperatives were created in the wake of Mexico's coffee crisis of the late 1980s and 1990s, when privatization and deregulation of the coffee industry in Mexico and liberalization of the international coffee market allowed for an oligopoly of transnational corporations to dominate coffee production in Mexico and push out small producers.<sup>23</sup> The transformation of Mexico's coffee industry was but one example of the ways that the liberalization of trade and counterreform of Mexico's agricultural system carried out in these decades constituted an engineered assault on peasant, collective, and small-scale agricultural production.<sup>24</sup> Neoliberal development policies implemented through NAFTA, along with earlier reforms spurred by structural adjustment, created conditions that trapped peasants in cycles of debt and poverty, forcing them to leave their land to join a growing reserve army of labor, as Mexico fashioned itself into a supplier of cheap labor for transnational capital.<sup>25</sup> Counterreforms ended redistribution of land to peasants, encouraged the privatization of indigenous peasants' communal land, and paved the way for massive transfers of land from indigenous communities to multinational food corporations.<sup>26</sup> The brutal effects these neoliberal development policies had on indigenous peasants in Chiapas were a key factor in precipitating the January 1, 1994, Zapatista uprising in the wake of NAFTA's ratification.<sup>27</sup> The EZLN has promulgated an incisive critique of the colonial character of these forms of accumulation by dispossession led by globalized finance capital and enabled by state force. While Subcomandante Marcos has theorized neoliberalization, in its global scope, as a "Fourth World War," he also conceptualizes it as the "New Conquest" to underscore continuities with earlier iterations of pillage inflicted on indigenous people.<sup>28</sup> Within the context of this New Conquest, the Zapatista coffee cooperatives and their solidarity economy are a form of economic resistance to forms of agricultural production mandated by transnational capital and a way to maintain Zapatista communities' autonomy. They function in resistance to the engineered displacement of indigenous farmers from their land and produce surplus that is invested in autonomous municipalities' infrastructure and institutions.<sup>29</sup>

*Raiders* enacts solidarity with Zapatismo in both symbolic and material registers by articulating its own narrative and gameplay with the solidarity market for Zapatista coffee. By incorporating the purchase and consumption of coffee into the game, Ilich explicitly treats the material conditions of *Raiders's* production, including its institutional sponsorship, as well as the social relations it organizes through its reception, as elements intrinsic to the work and its politics. The representation of Zapatista coffee production also has an important place within *Raiders's* narrative. Ilich's communiqués assert that purchasing the coffee supports the EZLN in anticolonial resistance, noting that they “[fight] within the logic of the 500 years.”<sup>30</sup> In contraposition to folkloric representations of indigenous Mexicans, *Raiders's* framing of the Zapatista cooperatives represents indigenous peasants as modern and progressive economic agents who produce a commodity that circulates transnationally but that is not reduced to its total commodification. Moreover, the game's narrative brings into view what Alexander theorizes as palimpsestic time and, specifically, the heterotemporal character of coloniality suggested by Subcomandante Marcos's conceptualization of the New Conquest. It does so by discursively commingling a representation of living indigenous peasants' resistance to neoliberal forms of dispossession with the earlier history of colonial plunder that is condensed around the story of the headdress. As I show, Ilich also used the sale and consumption of Zapatista coffee within *Raiders* as a performance that decentered yet another iteration of the performance of colonial whiteness as the pinnacle of moral consciousness.

Visitors to Café Penacho could either buy an espresso made with Zapatista coffee for one euro or obtain it at no monetary charge if they signed the aforementioned petition that demanded the repatriation of the headdress. Yet Ilich and the Support Network never actually cashed in on the moral capital represented by the more than six hundred signatures they gathered. Just days after launching the petition, Ilich announced in a communiqué to the Penacho e-mail list that the Network would abandon the petition as a political strategy and instead explore other ways to obtain the crown.<sup>31</sup> The petition actually functioned as a kind of decoy. Its mimicry of an activist instrument served to insert its signatories into a performance of which they were unaware. I read this performance as a kind of antihumanist invisible theater played out through the acts of exchange Ilich orchestrated at Café Penacho.<sup>32</sup> In comparison to the technique of invisible theater as theorized by Augusto Boal, which serves as a method of consciousness raising for its unwitting spectators-cum-participants, the antihumanist invisible theater Ilich staged in Café Penacho pointedly assigned a marginal position to the consciousness of its participants.

As a speech act, a petition attempts to leverage the moral authority and indignation of its signatories to issue an entreaty to a person or institution with power. The signatories of Ilich's petition, who were members of a European art audience, were thus enacting their own imagined authority as moral subjects (and likely, as European citizens) by signing the petition addressed to the Austrian president and World Museum. Ilich assigns an exchange value to these signatures by trading them for an espresso. Through this exchange the signatories are inserted into a different set of relations: they become secondary consumers within a solidarity economy that materially supports Zapatista coffee producers and their communities' autonomy. The fact that this material relation is indifferent to the beliefs or moral authority of the coffee drinkers is underscored by the fact that their thoughts concerning the Zapatistas or their cooperatives are not solicited. The marginalization of their role as moral subjects vis-à-vis the anticolonial politics represented in the performance is completed when Ilich declares the petition defunct, thus annulling the use value that their signatures supposedly had and symbolically "crashing" the conceptual market that had initially accorded exchange value to the act of signing the petition.

Creating and then discarding the petition decenters and, indeed, negates the drama of moral consciousness represented by the petition's appeal to the moral authority of its potential signatories and to the morality of the Austrian nation and its institutions. This gesture marks a refusal of the political subjectivity the petition convokes, which appeals to the moral sensibility of the powerful, and it specifically negates an appeal to the moral consciousness and political authority of beneficiaries of imperialism to right the wrongs of colonial plundering. Such an appeal could appear paradoxical when viewed through *Raiders's* anticolonial optic, which continually shows how colonial ideologies are overdetermined by conceptions of morality exercised within the framework of the European colonial-humanist episteme. Moreover, the performance negates the kind of politics of representation in which the petition traffics, wherein a largely symbolic gesture poses as an anticolonial politics without reckoning with the continuation of colonial processes in the present and their profound material affects. These negations clear the stage so that the solidarity economy of Zapatista coffee can emerge in the scene as a distinct form of anticolonial politics entailing a labor practice protagonized by indigenous collectivities and a labor practice of transnational solidarity materially useful to such efforts. The latter is made all the more visible as labor because Ilich intermingles his role as a worker for the Donau festival with his performance as a barista and waiter within the café. While the conceptual marketplace-cum-performance of Café Penacho initially appeared to propose an analogy between the value of

symbolic solidarity with the petition and the value of an espresso brewed with Zapatista coffee, it then dismantles these linkages to reveal the dissimilarity and nonequivalence in value of the liberal representational politics exemplified by the petition and the material politics expressed by the coffee economy.

The way Café Penacho's market-as-performance decenters European moral consciousness within anticolonial struggle is one example of Ilich's calculated negotiation of *Raiders's* presentation at a curated, state-sponsored Austrian music and art festival. In such a context, the presentation of an explicitly Zapatista-aligned art project, authored by a Latin American artist and activist, could easily be consumed as a spectacle of a radical politics imported from a distant locale to offer multicultural literacy or even moral self-satisfaction to its metropolitan audiences (via an illusion of solidarity forged by the consumption of art), while shoring up a self-image of the metropole's cosmopolitanism or progressivism. As Ilich suggested in a 2016 interview, the critical mimicry and deception he deploys throughout *Raiders* allow him to deflect such interpellations and interpretations that would falsify and diminish his work:

The Austrian activists, of course, hoped that I would be an autonomist and that I'd bring the Molotov cocktail and wear a ski mask and scream in Náhuatl or something, no? But, on the contrary, I came speaking their hypocritical European language of human rights, of "we want to make a petition," speaking all of their humanist languages of diversity and the French and Austrian universalist languages they use. Thus, that way I wasn't like a "simple Indian" with no future who came to make art, but rather, they realized that I was a Latino disguised as an Indian who is like them, but who is making fun of them and saying, "I'm not making fun of you, I'm in character."

Here, Ilich describes his desire to deflect the colonial gaze that would fix his person and work into the image of Latin American agitation imagined and desired by Austrian audiences, which includes a folklorizing fetishization of the mestizo's indigenous roots and the casting of ethnic reclamation as political subjectivity. His solution was to use *Raiders* as a kind of decolonial looking glass that he could turn on his metropolitan audience to provincialize and critique their foundational ideologies.

After Ilich told the Support Network to "forget the petition," thus marginalizing the moral consciousness of the Austrian people and the authority of their institutions to which the petition appealed, he instead proposed that the Network collect money and attempt to buy the headdress. When a player objected to this proposal on the grounds that it would legitimize the "original criminal act" of looting, Ilich responded, "While I understand and agree with the idea, I think the whole system is more than validated and perhaps we have

to start to speak not with humanist ideas but actually discuss money. . . . So as CEO of Diego de la Vega I suggest let's talk business."<sup>33</sup> In another missive, he relays a proposal to this end: "Let's try to buy the Penacho in the amount originally valued by the museum. We don't adjust to today's prices, but pay in gold, but also don't charge them for interest or commercial use of 150 years."

Ilich's proposal to buy the Penacho is an allegory about uneven geographies of accumulation and an exercise in speculative imagination that exposes the asymmetrical character of hegemonic conceptualizations of value and debt. His suggestion that the Network calculate the exchange value of the headdress vis-à-vis the value of gold signifies on different aspects of gold's history as a commodity within the capitalist world system, and juxtaposes hegemonic and anti-imperialist representations of accumulation, debt, and credit. As European colonists massively plundered gold from their American colonies, Ilich's mention of the metal metonymically highlights the enormous wealth Europeans extracted from the continent in earlier iterations of accumulation by dispossession. His proposal to determine the original value of the headdress in gold also makes use of gold's modern function of commensuration (its ability to represent exchange value as such), which was historically used to anchor a global money system. On one register, the absurdity of the suggestion that the "original value" of the headdress could be expressed in monetary terms (how would one calculate the value of a sacred object as exchange value?) points to the particularity of capitalist conceptualizations of value and wealth and their limitations for reckoning with the scope of colonialism's effects. On another register, Ilich's proposal can be read as an assertion of the rationality, justness, and plausibility of colonial reparations. As the headdress functions as a metonym for wealth taken from the Americas and its inhabitants, then the proposal that this could be represented as exchange value is also a call to account, as it asserts that the transfer of wealth enabled by colonialism should be legible—and payable—within the ledgers and logics of today's financialized global economy.

The financialist framing Ilich gives to his speculative valuations of the headdress adds additional texture (and greater irony) to his counterhegemonic representation of imperialist accumulation and its systematic disavowal. His suggestion that Austria be charged interest for its "commercial use" of the headdress-turned-property can be read as a metonym for an even more comprehensive accounting of imperialist accumulation: one that reckons with the *totality* of capitalist accumulation that has been enabled by colonial and imperial dispossession—that is, not only what has been taken through plundering and enclosure but also wealth generated by the "commercial uses"

to which this wealth is put, such as through expanded reproduction, rents, and interest. As an exercise in speculative economics, his proposal leads us to imagine an alternate global economic reality wherein colonial property regimes are rejected, imperialist accumulation is conceptualized as outstanding debt, and imperialized peoples become creditors poised to collect. Set against this utopian financial calculus, Ilich's suggestion that the Network must resort to paying a historically imperialist European state *even more* gold for looted cultural patrimony can be read as a brutally realist send-up of the way the *actual* global economy operates. Whereas Ilich envisages financial instruments being used for an anti-imperialist balancing of accounts, in reality, they are among the most powerful forces that late global capital uses to extend the domination, dispossession, and exploitation of colonized and imperialized peoples.<sup>34</sup> This is illustrated by the history of the neoliberalization and financialization of Mexico's economy, which has entailed an increase in the power that foreign capital exercises over the country, the immiseration of millions, and sweeping privatizations and land grabs that exemplify the conquest of new territories to which Subcomandante Marcos refers in his indictment of neoliberal accumulation.<sup>35</sup> By bringing this historical reality into the same discursive frame as the narrative about the Penacho (which, we are told, cannot be restituted, but perhaps only purchased), *Raiders* highlights the ways that forms of dispossession are continually redeployed through the traffic between colonial, neocolonial, and neo-imperial relations.

*Raiders's* ability to bring into view the heterotemporality of colonial and imperialist plundering militates against what Peter Hitchcock describes as the "complex and highly developed amnesia" enabled by the temporality of accumulation under finance capital.<sup>36</sup> But it also shows how this amnesia is inextricable from a more fundamental effacement: the disavowal of colonial and imperialist forms of dispossession that both enable and operate through finance capital's predations. This is not only a matter of historical representation; also at stake is the constitution of the modern economy as an epistemological object. By bringing into one field of apprehension competing representations of accumulation, value, and debt, *Raiders's* alternate reality frames representations of the global economy as a space of struggle, in which coloniality overdetermines foundational concepts, relations, and spatiotemporal coordinates. This is another example of how the stereoscopic vision *Raiders* affords further deepens its critique of coloniality as both an epistemological and a material endeavor, as Ilich's project brings into view practices of dispossession *and* the systems of representation that allow for their systemic disavowal.

## Dismantling Indigenismo

I have shown how Ilich's multifaceted project uses Moctezuma's Headdress as material record and symbol of colonial conquest to articulate a critique of ongoing processes of colonial and imperialist dispossession. *Raiders* pointedly critiques the Mexican state's role in these processes by engaging a symbolic valence the headdress has in the context of Mexican political culture: that is, the way the state's representations of the artifact exemplify ideologies and practices of indigenismo, which have long been used to enable and naturalize the domination and ethnocide of Indians.

As summarized by Héctor Díaz Polanco, Latin American indigenismo entails practices and theories formulated by nonindigenous people to address what is defined by the ruling class as the "indigenous problem."<sup>37</sup> Representations of the headdress specifically exemplify the nationalist and integrationist indigenismo of the postrevolutionary Mexican state, which celebrates *ancient* indigenous culture as a source and tradition for the Mexican nation while pursuing the acculturation—or more precisely, the de-Indianization—of living Indians.<sup>38</sup> As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo has shown, in postrevolutionary Mexican nationalist thought, Indians are represented as a "beginning point of development," while the urban mestizo proletarian, imagined as the felicitous outcome of the intermixing of European and indigenous cultures, is the paradigmatic subject of the modern nation. This casting of cultural heterogeneity into an evolutionary schema ideologically justifies the targeting of Indians as the object of reform.<sup>39</sup> Representations of the headdress by Mexican state institutions, including the National Anthropology Museum, and the Mexican press, clearly bear the imprint of this ideological schema in their representation of Indian difference (and particularly, ancient Mexica culture) as a source of Mexican identity delimited to a nonmodern past.<sup>40</sup> The way that indigenismo allows for the delimited incorporation of indigenous culture into representations of the Mexican nation, while also justifying the domination of Indians, is perfectly exemplified in the fact that state functionaries and intellectuals who publicly clamored for the headdress's repatriation and claimed it to be a symbol of Mexican national identity were also fiercely antagonistic to the political struggles of living indigenous communities.<sup>41</sup> Thus, *Raiders's* use of the discourse surrounding the Penacho as the material for its anticolonial narrative specifically works to expose the strategic uses of indigenous culture by the Mexican state as evidence of its colonial character.

*Raiders's* critique of indigenismo as a tool of governance complicit with colonial domination is all the more timely in light of the revitalization of

indigenismo that accompanied Mexico's neoliberalization. The same regime that, through NAFTA and other reforms, assaulted peasant agrarianism and destroyed possibilities for indigenous peasants to reproduce their forms of life *also* revitalized and updated indigenismo policy. In light of indigenous movements' highly visible critiques of the state's assimilationist policies, the neoliberal Mexican state has deployed indigenismo as a form of multiculturalist politics that vaunts the recognition of cultural pluralism.<sup>42</sup> As scholars have argued, this has amounted to a solely culturalist approach to indigenous rights that is indifferent to Indians' material needs, and, even more insidiously, it "[lends] the neoliberal state an aura of multicultural tolerance . . . as that state continues to build up its military presence around indigenous communities."<sup>43</sup>

*Raiders* dismantles the nationalist cathexis of the headdress and pointedly questions the claim made on an indigenous artifact by the neocolonial Mexican state. In the initial missive with which Ilich initiated the game and disseminated his petition to repatriate the crown, he also drew his readers' attention to the quandary at the center of this campaign: to whom would the crown be returned? He writes:

It is true that the Aztec Triple Alliance no longer exists, and that most Nahua people were converted to christianism with the help of the sword, and also that a nation state was born which extended itself all the way past Chichimeca lands to the Pacific Ocean (and whose idea of a Triple Alliance is the North American Free Trade Agreement, together with Canada and the USA).<sup>44</sup>

The text succinctly reads the paradox of repatriating the headdress to Mexico, given that the headdress originated in an indigenous civilization fundamentally different from the Mexican state that would claim ownership of it as national patrimony. By calling NAFTA the Mexican state's "idea of a Triple Alliance," Ilich comments on the neocolonial character of the Mexican state and also ironizes the distance and antagonism between Mexico's state policies and its indigenous populations. Within indigenist ideologies, the Mexica Triple Alliance is revered as a source of Mexican national identity. As a paradigmatic example of the neoliberal economic restructuring that has subordinated Mexico's working classes to the needs of transnational capital and constituted an especially brutal assault on rural Indians, NAFTA is evidence and symbol of the neocolonial character of contemporary Mexico's ruling class. By comparing the Triple Alliance to the neoliberal Mexican state's alliances via NAFTA, Ilich ironically deploys the nationalist mythification of the Triple Alliance to unmask the incongruity between the ideals of Mexican nationalism and the machinations of Mexico's neocolonial ruling class. Moreover, as this passage of

Ilich's letter braids references to colonial conquest with references to Mexico's economic neoliberalization, it thus calls attention to the colonial character of neoliberalism, as it facilitates the further dispossession of indigenous peoples.

As *Raiders's* narrative unfolds, Ilich marks ever more emphatically and dramatically the antagonism between the Mexican state's use of signifiers of Indian identity and the liberation struggle of Indians in Mexico. When he warns of "the bad things which could happen" if the headdress were returned to Mexico, "like falling in the wrong hands or being instrumentalized for things unrelated to giving sovereignty and cultural freedoms to the indigenous people," Ilich implicitly critiques the Mexican state's indigenismo for its strategic use of indigenous culture that is indifferent to the political demands of indigenous people. In another missive he asks, "What if on the boat home we were to cut all the feathers and blow it away one by one into the wind and the sea . . . ?," suggesting, perhaps, that dismembering the headdress and casting it into the sea would be preferable to delivering it to the Mexican state and its museums.

In clear contraposition to nationalist uses of ancient indigenous culture, in *Raiders* the headdress becomes a symbol of a contradiction at the heart of Mexican nationalist ideologies: a disavowed genocide and ongoing ethnocide directed at a civilization that is the base of Mexican society but whose domination is the condition for modern Mexican identity. The Mexican state has attempted to ideologically resolve this contradiction with an integrationist indigenismo that accords a place to indigenous civilization in the foundational myth of the Mexican nation in order to jettison indigeneity into a past cordoned off from modernity. *Raiders* foils such ideological maneuvers while making use of a symbol paradigmatically deployed by state indigenismo: a glorious ancient Aztec artifact. Rather than depict the headdress as a vestige of a premodern past or symbol of biologized origins of the Mexican nation, as is typically done in nationalist uses of indigenous culture, *Raiders* uses the headdress to tell a story about the heterotemporality of colonial formations and organized resistance to them, which it not only situates within globalized modernity but also represents as *the* urgent struggle of the present. While the game exploits the mythos associated with the headdress, bestowed on it in no small part by its use in nationalist discourses, it promulgates representations of Indians unassimilable to state indigenist ideologies. The Indians in *Raiders's* narrative world are protagonists and theorists of anticolonial struggle against the Mexican state and of globalized struggle against capitalism, as well as progressive economic agents who exercise control over their forms of production and their participation in transnational markets.

*Raiders* evinces, if not quite a Zapatista aesthetic, a Zapatista tactic of discursive intervention that manifests itself in aesthetic registers. I noted above how Indian difference is deployed within Mexican nationalist ideologies as an abstraction. Saldaña-Portillo theorizes this as the deployment of Indian difference as an empty signifier that is unmoored from its reference to actual indigenous people. Through her analysis of the Zapatistas' discourse and performances of participatory democracy, she argues that "the Zapatistas seize this empty signifier, that is, the abstraction of Indian difference, and they fill its 'empty' content with Indian specificity." This is not a pre-Hispanic Indian specificity, she says, but one that offers the vision of an alternate modernity for Mexico.<sup>45</sup> As suggested above, official nationalist representations of the headdress perfectly exemplify the symbolic deployment of Indian difference as an empty signifier unmoored from any referent to actual indigenous people in Mexico. *Raiders's* narrative resignifies the headdress within an anticolonial narrative wherein the Zapatistas serve as leaders and theorists of indigenous resistance to capital and coloniality. What I want to point out is that the cultural politics of *Raiders* is not only aligned with Zapatista political thought; the ways it operates as an ideological intervention through its narrative and its performative unfolding express the unmistakable influence of Zapatista discourse and performance. The Zapatistas' reworking of signifiers of Mexican revolutionary nationalist discourse has enabled their articulation of a new politics for the Mexican nation-state.<sup>46</sup> Since launching the Other Campaign, they have also convoked an international network of collectivities defined below or beyond the modern colonial nation-state and joined by resistance to globalized capital and its attendant structures of (racialized, patriarchal, colonial) oppression. This latter conception of a political collectivity is echoed by the figure of the Penacho Support Network as a translocal network conjoined in solidarity with anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles of a global scope.

### **An Aztec Chapel in Vienna**

The final e-mail Ilich sent to the Penacho e-mail list tells us that the Network members entered into a crisis and did not know what do about the headdress. Finally, one member offers an altogether different proposal as to what is to be done:

How about asking Austria to continue taking care of Moctezuma's Feathercrown in a special space outside of the museum, where it is currently surrounded by dead objects. Perhaps instead Vienna could create a chapel like the one the Mexicans built in Querétaro for the

Emperors Maximilian and Carlota. But in this one, they could give the Aztec religion an opportunity to restart and co-exist alongside Catholicism. Of course, not only the Aztec religion, all indigenous religions deserve respect. Half a millennium has passed, Catholicism can't possibly still be in that phase where it either converts or kills, right? . . . why not allow an almost destroyed religion like the Aztec one to bloom out of the Vienna World Museum? This would certainly demonstrate that the word "world" in its name is much more than just a marketing scheme.<sup>47</sup>

Suggesting that the World Museum could do justice to its name only by creating space for a living Nahua cultural practice is a cheeky way of calling the bluff on the institution's humanist discourse and claims to knowledge on a global scale. Yet the proposal this text makes goes beyond irony and negation, as it conceives of a radically different function for the ideological apparatus that is an ethnographic museum. Suggesting that the World Museum remove the headdress from the abstraction and privatization to which it has long been consigned and instead use it to foment indigenous American cultural practice in Vienna implies dismantling the very structure of representation that characterizes ethnographic displays, including the ideologies of distance and anachronism this representational structure reproduces. *Raiders* reimagines the museum as an apparatus that could assail the universalist claims of Christian ideology and organize material conditions for the exercise of practices and the assertion of worldviews this ideology has long dominated—in the middle of the European metropole, no less. Through this proposition, *Raiders* ultimately asserts a utopian vision of a world in which such radical reconfigurations could be possible.

Read literally, the proposal to try to "re-start" the "Aztec religion" may evoke the folkloric fetishization of pre-Columbian religious practice and the obfuscation of the continuity of Nahua religious practices, including in altered forms, as well as an anticolonial politics that calls for a return to an idealized past. But I suggest that the text be read as utopic speculation that signifies on a figurative register. Doing so allows us to recognize its decolonial vision, which is, in fact, far more capacious than a literal reading of this passage might suggest. The utopic scenario the text invokes, wherein the European museum's function is fundamentally transformed and Nahua religious practice lays claim to space in Vienna, is a metonym for a far-reaching transformation of social and cognitive orders. By proposing an alternate worlding of the headdress, *Raiders* imagines indigenous American culture, worldviews, and practices coexisting on equal footing alongside modern Christian European culture, *including* within the geographic and cultural heart of European modernity. The fact that this utopian vision finds expression in *Raiders* as a proposal to create a new architectural

space in Vienna suggests that the pluricultural future it envisions intrinsically requires material, spatial, and cultural transformation of the European metropole. Carrying forward a crucial insight of anticolonial and decolonial thought, *Raiders* underscores the mutual constitution of European humanism and European colonialism throughout its narrative. Thus it is fitting that the utopian decolonial proposal with which its narrative closes entails a radical resituating and reconceptualization of institutions and ideologies exemplary of humanist universalism and Eurocentric conceptions of modernity.

*Raiders's* final insistence on transforming the European city and institution is especially notable, given how official narratives about the feathered crown, as well as the beginning of the game's own narrative, focused on returning the crown to Mexico. The conclusion of *Raiders's* narrative suggests that the decolonial imaginary that drives its narrative goes beyond demands for the restitution of cultural heritage and even beyond colonial reparations; it also entails an epistemic shift—that is, a movement beyond the ordering of knowledge in Western modernity that structures discourses, perceptions, and behaviors at individual and collective levels.<sup>48</sup> I have addressed the possibility that political art, especially in its use of narrative, can bring about an “Other way of seeing,” as Ilich describes it, and which is understood as a necessary component to contemporary anticolonial and anticapitalist struggle. The utopian and speculative tendency in *Raiders* suggests that this ideological and imaginative labor can also bring into view an alternate futurity, as *Raiders* gives aesthetic expression to a collective desire for a world beyond European colonial modernity and begins to evoke the contours of this other possible world.

## Notes

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1. Milady Nazir, “A Symbol of Mexico's Pre-colonial Grandeur Fades out of Sight,” *Fox News Latino*, November 14, 2014, [latino.foxnews.com/latino/lifestyle/2014/11/14/symbol-mexicos-pre-colonial-grandeur-fades-out-sight](http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/lifestyle/2014/11/14/symbol-mexicos-pre-colonial-grandeur-fades-out-sight).
2. Fran Ilich, e-mail to Penacho e-mail list, March 23, 2013.
3. Fran Ilich, interview with author, June 8, 2015.
4. Brian Schrank, *Avant-garde Videogames* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 24.
5. For a discussion of ARGs' formal properties and roots in network art, literature, and games, see Patrick Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 182–96.

6. In her writing on transmedia narrative, Marie-Laure Ryan suggests that we can understand how narrative scripts are composed in and across various media, which need not be exclusively verbal media, by conceiving of narrative in cognitive terms—that is, as “a mental image,” rather than strictly as a linguistic object (introduction to *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004], 9).
7. Schrank, *Avant-garde Videogames*, 115.
8. Jagoda, *Network Aesthetics*, 191. Here, Jagoda builds on Jane McGonigal’s writing on ARGs’ immersive aesthetics in “This Is Not a Game: Immersive Aesthetics and Collective Play,” Melbourne Digital Arts Conference, May 2003, [www.avantgame.com/writings.htm](http://www.avantgame.com/writings.htm).
9. Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 2–4, 226, 247.
10. McGonigal, “This Is Not a Game.”
11. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 243. See also María Josefa Saldaña-Portillo’s elaboration of Chakrabarty’s theory of heterotemporality in *Indian Given: Racial Geographies across Mexico and the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 24–25.
12. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 195.
13. See Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena Comandancia General del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, “Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacondona,” June 2005, Enlace Zapatista, [enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/sds/es](http://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/sds/es).
14. Fran Ilich, “Otra Cultura es posible: no imposible,” *Sab0t*, no. 1 (May 2007); and Ilich, paper presented at “La Otra comunicación, la Otra cultura,” El Primer Festival Mundial de la Digna Rabia, Centro Indígena de Capacitación Integral-UniTierra, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Mexico, January 3, 2009.
15. Fran Ilich, interview with author, June 8, 2015.
16. See, e.g., David Kunzle, “Dispossession by Ducks: The Imperialist Treasure Hunt in Southeast Asia,” *Art Journal* 49.2 (1990): 159–66.
17. Fran Ilich, interview with author, May 31, 2016.
18. Ward Churchill argues that the denial of the American holocaust is so pervasive “that it has assumed the posture of Truth, transcending all ideological boundaries defining Left and Right within the presently dominant society” (*A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* [San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2001], 119). For a critique of the ways discourses of competing genocides may reify the oppressor’s control or position native peoples as “logical” victims of modernization, see Jodi Byrd, “‘Living My Native Life Deadly’: Red Lake, Ward Churchill, and the Discourses of Competing Genocides,” *American Indian Quarterly* 31.2 (2007): 310–32.
19. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 14.
20. Norman Finkelstein identifies this nationalist rhetorical strategy at work in the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, arguing, “The Museum’s overarching message is that ‘we’ [the United States] couldn’t even conceive, let alone commit, such evil deeds” (*The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* [New York: Verso, 2005], 63).
21. On the imperial and colonial character of intellectual property regimes, see Vandana Shiva, *Protect or Plunder? Understanding Intellectual Property Rights* (New York: Zed Books, 2001).
22. See Steven Topik, “Coffee as Social Drug,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 71 (Winter 2009): 81–106.
23. Marie-Christine Renard and Mariana Ortega Breña, “The Mexican Coffee Crisis,” *Latin American Perspectives* 37.2 (2010): 21–33.
24. María Josefa Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 213–23.
25. *Ibid.* For further discussion of the effects of NAFTA within this neoliberal reform project, see David Bacon, “Displaced People: NAFTA’s Most Important Product,” *NACLA Report on the Americas* 41.5 (2008): 23–27; and William Robinson, *Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 88–90. For additional discussion of the effects of neoliberalism on indigenous peasants in Chiapas, see also Mercedes de Olivera and Carlos Pérez, “From Integrationist ‘Indigenismo’ to Neoliberal De-Ethnification in Chiapas: Reminiscences,” *Latin American Perspectives* 39.5 (2012): 107–10.
26. James J. Kelly, “Article 27 and Mexican Land Reform: The Legacy of Zapata’s Dream,” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 25.2 (1994): 544.

27. Neil Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas: Rural Reforms, Campesino Radicalism, and the Limits to Salinismo* (La Jolla: University of California at San Diego, 1994), 1–43.
28. Subcomandante Marcos, “La Cuarta Guerra Mundial” (transcript of talk delivered in La Realidad, Chiapas, in November 1999), *In Motion Magazine*, October 26, 2001, [www.inmotionmagazine.com/autocuarta.html](http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/autocuarta.html).
29. Sergio Rodríguez, “Las cooperatives son el pilar económico del Zapatismo,” interview by La Coperacha, 2014, [www.lacoperacha.org.mx/sergio-rodriguez-zapatistas.php](http://www.lacoperacha.org.mx/sergio-rodriguez-zapatistas.php).
30. Fran Ilich, e-mail to Penacho e-mail list, April 16, 2013.
31. Fran Ilich, e-mail to Penacho e-mail list, March 29, 2013.
32. Invisible theater is a technique that involves creating a performance in an everyday setting, such that the spectators do not realize it is a performance. See Augusto Boal, *Theater of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer (London: Pluto, 2008), 122–26.
33. Fran Ilich, e-mails to Penacho e-mail list, April 16, 2013.
34. See Paula Chakravarty and Denise Ferreira da Silva, “Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—an Introduction,” *American Quarterly* 64.3 (2012): 368–71. On the effects of financialization in Latin America, see William Robinson, *Latin America and Global Capitalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 259–68.
35. For a thorough discussion of the financialization of the Mexican economy from a Keynesian perspective, see Eugenia Correa, Gregorio Vidal, and Wesley Marshall, “Financialization in Mexico: Trajectory and Limits,” *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 35.2 (2012): 255–75.
36. Peter Hitchcock, “Accumulating Fictions,” *Representations* 126.1 (2014): 144.
37. Héctor Díaz Polanco, *Elogía a la Diversidad* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2006), 183n18. For an overview of forms indigenismo has taken in Mexico since the Conquest, as well of populist and Marxist critiques of integrationist indigenismo, see Díaz Polanco, “La teoría indigenista y la integración,” in *Indigenismo, Modernización y Marginalidad* (Mexico City: Centro de Investigación para la Integración Social, 1979), 9–46. Rebecca Overmyer-Velásquez’s discussion of the history of Mexican indigenismo also addresses its deployment within a neoliberal multiculturalist politics beginning in the 1990s in *Folkloric Poverty: Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 63–88, 142–54.
38. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla theorizes de-Indianization as a social and historical process that occurs as the result of the pressures of ethnocide; it involves Indians’ separation from their cultural patrimony, changes to their social organization, and renouncing of a distinctive identity (quoted in *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization*, trans. Philip A. Dennis [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996], xvi).
39. Saldaña-Portillo, *Revolutionary Imagination*, 212.
40. Néstor García Canclini argues that the display of indigenous culture in Mexico’s National Anthropology Museum presents pre-Conquest indigenous culture as a source of Mexican national culture, but also delimits and separates it from contemporary culture (quoted in *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Sílvia L. López [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001], 120).
41. For example, the Mexican press has reported former president Vicente Fox’s appeal to the president of Austria for the headdress’s repatriation, as well as Octavio Paz’s comments on the object’s symbolic importance to Mexican identity. See Claudia Herrera and Carlos Paul, “No hay solicitud formal ante el gobierno austriaco por el penacho de Moctezuma,” *La Jornada*, June 1, 2005, [www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/06/01/index.php?section=cultura&article=a07n1cul](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2005/06/01/index.php?section=cultura&article=a07n1cul); “Emociona a especialistas ‘regreso’ de penacho,” *El Universal*, January 19, 2011, culture section, online edition, [archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/738473.html](http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/738473.html).
42. Analisa Taylor, “The Ends of Indigenismo in Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 14.1 (2005): 75–86; Overmyer-Velásquez, *Folkloric Poverty*, 142–54.
43. Taylor, “Ends of Indigenismo,” 77.
44. Fran Ilich, e-mail to Penacho e-mail list, March 23, 2013.
45. Saldaña-Portillo, *Revolutionary Imagination*, 253.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Fran Ilich, e-mail sent to Penacho e-mail list, April 24, 2013.
48. My thinking on epistemic transformation as an anticolonial or decolonial undertaking is especially indebted to Sylvia Wynter’s work, e.g., “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism,” *boundary 2* 12.3–13.1 (1964): 19–70.