

From the President

by Debra Castillo | Cornell University | dac9@cornell.edu

Emergent Moments

Instagram's motto is the invitation (or the imperative) to "capture and share the world's moments." Of course, the iconic moment typically shared on that immensely popular app is the kind of manipulated and filtered images we love to hate from hashtags like #dreamvacation: the swoon-worthy cup of coffee tastefully arranged on an artisanal place mat next to a crumbly pastry, on a table overlooking the balcony of some exotic locale with misty mountains in the background. These tourist photos are beautiful but disturbingly so, devoid of people except as burnished exotica to enhance and give texture to the landscape. For most of us LASA members, however, I am willing to bet that the world moments that have most captured our attention, and that have been most widely shared among us, are the ones that highlight the defiant face of contemporary emergencies and the rich range of creative and critical responses originating from them, moments expressed in social movement hashtags like #ayotzinapa and #yamecansé, alongside other mass expressions of outrage from other parts of the globe: #hokkolorob, #occupyHK, #blacklivesmatter.

I am far from the first to comment that Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook have offered opportunities for emergent social groups, especially those fueled by the energies of our youth, to organize, both on- and off-line, to interact, and to find allies across the globe. Thus, the umbrella revolution in Hong Kong was echoed and re-presented by supporters from many other countries; that black (and Muslim and immigrant) lives matter found resonance in Africa as well as the United States; "43" continues to be a rallying force in India and Indiana as well as Iguala. Nor is it novel to point to the Zapatista rebellion of 1994 as a precursor to these movements—"the first

postmodern revolution," in the much-cited phrase from the *New York Times*, whose leaders were canny enough to recognize from the explosive days of the movement's very first public exposure the potential of contemporary technology to share their stories with the world. And in this, the Zapatistas too had their precursors, notably, canny individuals like the Kayapó leader Payakan, who, alongside other Xingu region leaders, was in the early 1990s able to develop sophisticated media strategies that appealed to international audiences by pairing control of modern technology with carefully planned, dramatic use of traditional clothing and ornaments and a message of indigenous environmental stewardship.

There have been some victories. The Zapatistas remain a thorn in the side of the Mexican government 21 years after their first emergence from the Lacandon jungle; Amazonian indigenous people generated support for their struggles that helped them (often in collaboration with international human rights and environmental organizations) gain important land rights and other concessions from the Brazilian government; Cochabambinos were able to win their struggle for water rights; the years of consistent, massive student protests in Chile have, astonishingly, recently resulted in a major overhaul of the educational system such that higher education will soon be free to all Chileans, starting next year.

All of these movements—and the examples can be multiplied, as we well know—share the characteristic that we have been trying to capture in the double meaning of "emergencias": the way complex emergent practices seem to flow from and follow upon the seemingly unending series of emergencies that afflict our societies. These innovative responses to repression and



human rights abuses did not suddenly arise with the 2007 proposal of using a hashtag to tag topics of interest on Twitter, nor the widespread adoption of inexpensive video cameras for indigenous self-documentation three decades ago in Brazil, nor even with Guamán Poma de Ayala's long letter to the king of Spain in 1615. The capturing and sharing of the world's moments for urgent political and social reasons is a human drive, endlessly renewed and reinvented.

Following upon previous dossiers focusing on *precariedades* and *exclusiones*, coordinated by myself and Rosalva Aída Hernández Castillo, program co-chair Luis Cárcamo Huechante is coordinating this final dossier on *emergencias*, the third of the three concepts that will serve as the coordinates of our upcoming May conference in Puerto Rico. We eagerly look forward to continuing our dialogues with you in San Juan. ■