

Keynote Address by Jesusa Rodriguez

Jesusa Rodriguez, prominent director, performance artist and political activist from Mexico City, speaks to her experiences as an artist in radical performance, and as a leader and organizer of mass mobilizations, particularly in Mexico's 2006 resistance to election fraud.

Introductions:

Andrea: I'm Andrea Assaf, the Artistic Director at New WORLD Theater. I'm about to introduce someone who's going to help me introduce our keynote speaker. I would like to introduce to you Professor Harley Erdman, who is a translator, a dramaturg, an artist who has worked with us on several projects, and who will be helping me to introduce Jesusa Rodríguez. Please give a hand for Harley Erdman.

Harley Erdman: *Bienvenida a todos.* This is really a great thrill for me to be here introducing someone who is very special to me at this great conference. Thank you once again Andrea, congratulations to Andrea and all the NWT staff, and everybody who's participating in this great event. The weather is turning nicer as the weekend goes by. That reminds me a little bit. I moved here to Amherst to the cold, fourteen years ago, the years have really flown by, and I moved here from a wonderful place, Mexico City. I was living in Mexico City, and I was really lucky that I was able to live in this wonderful neighborhood that some of you may know called Coyoacán. While I was there I went to see a lot of theater and performance in Mexico City. I saw everything from opera and ballet right down to street theater and guerrilla theater and everything in between. But there was no question that the most memorable shows, these most memorable performances that I was able to see when I was living in Mexico before I came here, were located in this really funky interesting little house that was actually in my neighborhood. This house had been converted into a theater/night club. It was a cabaret space called El Hábito. And pretty much every weekend at El Hábito there was some kind of show going on, usually a comedy revue filled with songs and satire and usually these revues featured one of the women who ran El Hábito, she was the director, actress, singer, star of many of these performances. And this place, El Hábito, was *the* place to be in Mexico City fourteen years ago. It was always packed, it was always lively, it was always friendly, it was always welcoming, and it was the place to get the truth about what was going on in Mexico, in Mexico City, and in Mexican politics at the time. Truth was

sometimes scathing, it was sometimes controversial, but it was the place to go to for the truth, more than any newspaper or anything else at the time. So this cabaret, it wasn't just a cabaret, actually, it was almost like an alternative community, an alternative newspaper, an alternative cultural space, a counter-cultural gathering point.

And the woman behind this cabaret was at that time becoming a major cultural figure, a cultural icon in Mexico. And now, fourteen years later, I'm here in UMass, but this woman is even more so a cultural figure in Mexico. She is a national figure. She has reshaped what theater and performance can be in Mexico. She has opened the way for the irreverent, the transgressive, for the wildly imaginative, for the profound, the marvelous, and the resistant in theater. She's found new ways, some of which we'll talk about, to inject theater into politics and politics into theater, that can be an example and a model for everybody in this room, and that is an inspiration for me as well. This is in your program mostly, but I want to acknowledge some of the accomplishments of who we're introducing. I'm going to get a little more formal here.

Mexican director, actress, playwright, performance artist, scenographer, entrepreneur, and social activist Jesusa Rodríguez has been called the most important woman of Mexico. *Espectáculos* challenged traditional classification, crossing with ease generic boundaries from elite to popular to mass, from Greek tragedy to cabaret, from pre-Columbian indigenous work to opera, from revue, sketch and *carpa* to performative acts within political projects. She and her partner, Argentine singer/actor Liliana Filipe, own and operate El Hábito and Teatro de la Capilla, alternative performance spaces in Mexico City. They have won an Obie for best actor in *Las horas de Belén* – in English called *The Book of Hours* – in 1999, with the famed Ruth Maleczek and New York-based Mabou Mines. Jesusa Rodríguez has won a Guggenheim grant and a Rockefeller Foundation grant. She has adapted and staged her own version of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. It's called *Donna Giovanni*. She's also done a version of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in 2000 that's very acclaimed, and has also directed a version for chamber opera of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's *First Dream*. I could go on and on, the list of achievements is very long, but I think Andrea wanted to just kind of segue into the guest presentation with a few observations about the latest political work that Jesusa Rodríguez has been doing in Mexico City. So I'm going to turn this back over to Andrea.

Andrea: Harley will be joining us for the question and answer after the keynote and will facilitate that process. But I just wanted to say, to contextualize a little bit, Ngugi's keynote yesterday gave us a historical perspective of some grassroots theater movements in East Africa and what I really

wanted and was very excited about in bringing Jesusa for today's keynote is her recent work and the profound and quite enormous impact that it's had in the Mexican political landscape just recently. In the 2006 political elections in Mexico, Jesusa was a key figure in protests around election fraud. Many of you may know that the popular vote, that the people really wanted – I'm sure she'll talk much more about it – went to Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who was the leftist candidate. However, the right won the election and there were many, many protests against election fraud that she was a key figure in, a leader, and that notion of political performance literally entered into the theater politics as well as – or far beyond in some cases – political theater that we do here in the United States. And so that's what I really wanted to share and to bring Jesusa Rodríguez for. I was very inspired and moved by the work, and I think it represents hope and possibility, and also challenges, that will influence the rest of our conversations throughout the weekend. So without further ado, we will welcome to the stage Jesusa Rodríguez.

Opening Remarks:

Jesusa Rodríguez: Thank you for inviting me to UMass. Thank you, Antonia, who is going to do the interpreting. Thank you foremost for allowing me to denounce what's currently happening in Mexico and helping me spread it out. I was planning an introduction of the present work. There is a popular saying: "There's no evil that lasts a hundred years and no country that can bear it." In 1810 in Mexico we fought our independence war. A hundred years later in 1910 the Mexican revolution exploded. It's been almost a hundred years, since we are close to 2010, and Mexico is again at the brink of explosion. We know that a revolution is not possible for several reasons. First and foremost, this proportion with U.S. war potential. Also because violence just reproduces violence. Those of us who believe in a [pacifist] revolution, we are slowly but continuously working in a civil mobilization movement. For some this is just utopia or in many cases [...] For those of us who are part of the creative resistance, this is the best way to live and to create art and science.

The prodigious woman that was Sor Juan Inés de la Cruz says in her famous response to [...]: "The only bad worth fighting for is that with no legend, and we know we have lost that ahead of time." Today, at this dark time that Mexico is facing and the dominance of the ultra-right and anti-democratic regime, it is millions of us who think it's worth starting this revolution in our country, through an organized movement of [pacifist] resistance. This might be our last chance to

be a sovereign country or become slaves within our own lands and fall into the [...] of violence. As most of you know, Bush's government is mostly responsible for this situation. The unsatisfied oil thirst has led the United States to a very big moral debacle. And just as [David Toro] said in his moment, each citizen who was rightfully born in this country has the right to know what the government is doing with their taxes. I propose this new North American invasion this time on oil. As our legitimate president says, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, "If it is hard, we have already achieved it; if it is impossible, we will try."

If the U.S. was capable of bringing human intelligence to an authentic development, maybe the rest of the world will be willing to sacrifice for this United States enterprise. But following my experience from this morning, not only could I not get a name from the internet, but I also could not make a phone call to Mexico. It shows me that this country works just as badly or even worse than the rest of the countries. Maybe it is time now that the U.S. sacrifice itself for the rest of the world. What is happening now in Mexico cannot be transmitted through words. So we've prepared this video, which is about fifteen minutes long. At some point, because this is a work in progress and we couldn't get the [new] video, you might have to suffer a little bit, the first couple of subtitles, because they are so fast, but they will slow down. I hope that this video helps you understand what's going on in Mexico and help diffuse the information. We will have time for questions and comments. Thank you very much.

****VIDEO****

Jesusa: I hope this gives you even a small idea of what is happening in Mexico. We are three weeks away from knowing if this looting government will pass the resolution to privatize oil. And if we prevent this from happening, the civil movement of resistance will have achieved its first great victory. It is very important for us that this is known outside of Mexico because we are constantly [giving media terrorism]. And our movement has the [lines of communication council].

Q & A followed.

Further Written Remarks by Jesusa Rodriguez:

MEXICO: ¿PAIS O COLONIA?

México lleva 500 años de conquista, colonización, saqueo, corrupción, injusticia e impunidad.

En México nunca ha habido democracia, tuvimos 3 siglos de dominación colonial española, el siglo XIX transcurrió bajo dos dictaduras la de Santa Ana que vendió la mitad del territorio y Porfirio Díaz durante la cual se robaron la riqueza minera y petrolera mexicana empresas Inglesas y norteamericanas. Después la revolución pugnó por justicia y democracia y caemos en 70 años de dictablanda, como se conoció al régimen del PRI, en los años 30's el presidente Lázaro Cárdenas realiza la expropiación y el petróleo vuelve a ser de los mexicanos, sin embargo México sigue siendo botín del colonialismo español y norteamericano.

Hace 25 años además se impone un régimen neoliberal y se inserta en el poder un grupo de delincuencia organizada dedicado a saquear la riqueza de nuestro país en contubernio con las grandes trasnacionales.

En México existen en este momento una gran variedad de movimientos de resistencia a esta violencia de Estado.

Los hay armados como el EZLN, un gran movimiento indígena que seguramente ustedes conocen y que lleva ya 14 años en resistencia.

Hay movimientos de origen gremial y popular como la APPO en Oaxaca, que son netamente pacíficos pero que han sido orillados a la violencia y reprimidos fuertemente.

En el año 2006 la mafia insertada en el poder en México comete el gran fraude electoral que le arrebató la presidencia al candidato ganador de la izquierda: Andrés Manuel López Obrador este golpe de estado de facto, da inicio al gran movimiento de resistencia civil pacífica, el mas grande en la historia moderna de México.

Este movimiento organizado ha logrado oponerse a la mafia gobernante sin un solo acto de violencia, hasta el momento no se ha roto un solo vidrio y esto gracias al carácter pacífico y eminentemente creativo del movimiento y al liderazgo sereno pero firme de López Obrador. Actualmente nuestro movimiento se enfrenta al reto mas difícil que es impedir la privatización del petróleo mexicano objetivo que dio origen al partido de ultraderecha golpista y que en este momento está decidido a dar el zarpazo definitivo.

Como ven regresamos a la disyuntiva original: País o Colonia

Los Mexicanos estamos cansados de tantos años de simulación y entreguismo.

Esto es lo que hace que Liliana Felipe y yo decidamos dedicar todo nuestro esfuerzo a luchar en la resistencia especialmente ahora que México atraviesa por un momento crucial de su historia y que existe un movimiento pacífico, organizado y con un liderazgo brillante que puede ser el inicio de una transformación profunda del País.

Por supuesto que deseamos que todos los otros movimientos de resistencia que luchamos básicamente por lo mismo encontremos un cause común, por lo pronto nosotras somos representantes del Gobierno Legítimo de México que es una acción extrema de resistencia civil pacífica y aplicamos ahí lo que sabemos hacer en el teatro y en la música para utilizar la creatividad, la originalidad, el humor, la poesía, la armonía, la estética y todo lo que el arte puede aportar en el camino de la no violencia activa.

Lo que llamamos cabaret de masas es nuestra participación en la dirección escénica de las grandes concentraciones, en la conducción de estos encuentros, en la elaboración de canciones para la resistencia y en la aplicación del humor, la música y el teatro al servicio de la que consideramos la lucha mas importante que nos ha tocado dar a los mexicanos de este nuevo siglo.

A finales de 2004 dejamos de trabajar en El Hábito, que era un cabaret para 200 personas y funcionó durante 15 años. Con el el fraude de 2006 ingresamos de lleno en la resistencia civil y en estos dos años hemos participado en

Julio de 2006

1era. concentración masiva. 500 mil personas en protesta por el fraude y reclamando el recuento de los votos (Construimos un Caballito de Troya)

15 días de resistencia civil. toma de edificios de empresas que pagaron el fraude.

(organización y conducción de las acciones de resistencia)

2ª concentración masiva 1 200 000 personas (Dirección y conducción del escenario en el Zócalo)

3ª. concentración masiva 2 000 000 de personas (Dirección y conducción del escenario en el Zócalo)

Agosto y septiembre del 2006

50 días de Plantón en el Paseo de la Reforma (organización y conducción de mas de 3000 espectáculos en el escenario del Zócalo y formación del coro monumental de la resistencia pacífica)

Septiembre-Octubre 2006 a marzo de 2007

Comisión Organizadora de la Convención Nacional Democrática (organización)

Comisión coordinadora de la resistencia civil pacífica (múltiples acciones de resistencia y reuniones todos los domingos en el Hemiciclo a Juárez)

16 de septiembre 2006 primera gran Convención Nacional Democrática (Conducción de la votación)

20 de noviembre de 2006 Toma de posesión del Presidente Legítimo de México

Enero de 2007 Programas de televisión para la resistencia “La verdad sea dicha”

21 de marzo de 2007 2ª. gran Convención Nacional Democrática (Conducción del acto)

15 de sep. de 2008 “El grito de los libres”la batalla del audioConducción del acto)

20 de noviembre de 2007 Aniversario de la Revolución y primer año del Gobierno Legítimo (Conducción del acto)

Se inicia el Movimiento Nacional en defensa del petróleo.

Enero de 2008 defensa del Maíz. Intervención al muro fronterizo en Tijuana con artistas estencileros de Oaxaca

Participación en el Foro Social Mundial (Diseño del escenario y distribución de carpas para el Foro, y organización y conducción de la Marcha del Maíz)

18 de Marzo de 2008. 3ª. Gran Convención Nacional Democrática en defensa del Petróleo. (Conducción del acto)

25 de Marzo de 2008 Gran asamblea de las mujeres (Conducción del acto)

Ahora debería desmayarme solo de recordar todo esto, pero entiendo mejor el significado de resistir y de ser resistente.

Nuestra vida ha cambiado desde que dejamos el Hábito y comenzamos la resistencia, señalaré las diferencias:

la diferencia entre hacer cabaret político y llevar el cabaret a la acción política es que en el primer caso la vida propia y la de los demás no corre peligro y en el segundo caso una decisión equivocada puede ser de consecuencias- fatales para muchísimas personas.

Otra diferencia es que en el cabaret político se trabaja muy intensamente y se gana poco dinero, mientras que en el cabaret de masas se trabaja muchísimo mas y se paga por hacerlo.

La tercera diferencia es que en el cabaret político se vive con la zozobra de cada estreno, mientras que en el cabaret de masas la zozobra es permanente.

Antes vivíamos de noche. ahora ya no sabemos si es de noche o de día.

La resistencia exige mucho más que el teatro pero también nutre mucho mas.

Los viajes también cambian, ayer mismo tenía la duda de tomar el avión o tomar el aeropuerto

Vivo en el país que mas amo, el país donde nació Además esta resistencia civil es lo único que me permite seguir respirando en México. Ustedes saben mejor que nadie lo asfixiante que es padecer dos fraudes seguidos y tener en el gobierno a una mafia confesional y asesina, así que tampoco podríamos pedir asilo en este país bananero.

Por eso estamos orgullosas de tener un gobierno legítimo, encabezado por un líder incorruptible que es nuestro presidente López Obrador y poner nuestro trabajo al servicio de un movimiento social organizado y pacífico, que en este momento involucra a 2 millones y medio de personas dispuestas a rescatar a nuestro país secuestrado por una mafia asociada a las grandes trasnacionales.

Y como dijo el Presidente Benito Juárez, lo haremos como se pueda, con lo que se pueda y hasta donde se pueda.