

Rethinking Intellectuals in Latin America

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Mabel Moraña (Director of Latin American Studies) and Bret Gustafson (Anthropology), coordinators.

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Intellectual and cultural politics in Latin America today seems both illusorily familiar and absolutely uncharted – a crucible of transformations marked by knowledge-making projects and politics in flux. Amid neoliberalism's erosion arise new socialisms, old populisms, and rethinkings of the political that push the frontiers of nation and state imaginaries. Indigenous, Afro-Latin and other social movements are taking a vanguard role in intellectual and cultural politics across much of the region, with epistemologies that refigure plurality and decolonize dichotomies of right/left and modern/traditional. Literary, musical, and artistic experimentations are carving out new cultural spaces and rethinking old frontiers. Amid familiar violences and new technologies of extraction, ecological, utopian, and post-development thought is redefining the territories of the possible across multiple scales of culture, politics, and economics.

The 2008 South by Midwest International Conference seeks to engage this exciting historical moment through an interdisciplinary conversation on the cultural politics of knowledge. We will focus in particular on the transformative role played by intellectuals – social actors within and beyond academia who operate through movements, think tanks, NGOs, cultural, literary, political and artistic fields, and the media. We will explore how these knowledge-making actors and their practices and epistemologies articulate with processes of change across scales of cultural politics – from the transnational to the mundane of daily life. Given the South's role in new global configurations – and a shift toward South-South exchanges that disrupt familiar geocultural politics altogether – a discussion on the new Latin American intellectual and emergent cultural politics of knowledge seems to be in order.

We envision an interdisciplinary conference with participation of leading specialists in their fields who shed light on these processes of change and the particular space knowledge production therein. What are the transformative trajectories and possibilities of the region? How are Latin American intellectuals and cultural producers articulated with – or excluded from – sites and fields of power in this transformative moment? How have past and ongoing violences – from spreading militarization to the grinding violences of raced, gendered, and classed inequalities – shaped the knowledge work of peoples and movements? How do various genres and media of intellectual production, from the manifesto to the movie, shape and create publics, imaginaries, and power relations? How do transnational knowledge networks (in academics, business, or social movements) shape and facilitate the local cultural politics of knowledge? How do realms of the intimate spaces of subjectivity intersect with the ebb and flow of authoritative or counterhegemonic knowledges?