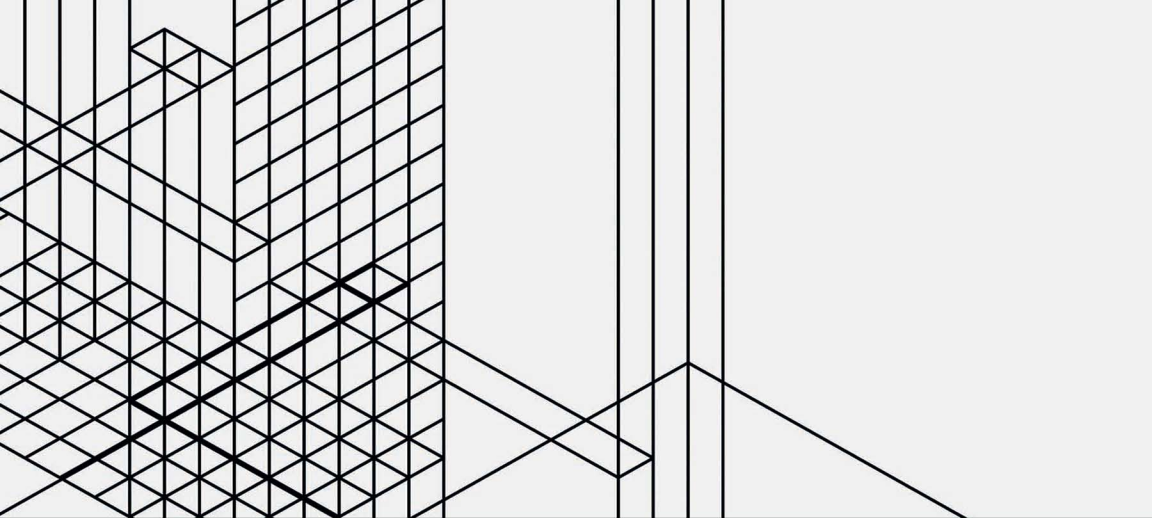




Critical Global Citizenship Education

CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY AND LATIN AMERICA

A SOUTH–NORTH DIALOGUE ON THE CRISES
OF THE PRESENT

Edited by
Alexis Gros, Agustín L. Prestifilippo,
and Santiago M. Roggerone



Contemporary Critical Theory and Latin America

This edited volume offers an up-to-date overview of the intricate relationship between the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory and Latin America.

The central intuition guiding this book is that to adequately confront the multiple crises of the present, Critical Theory must engage with Latin American realities and perspectives. The volume has two closely linked objectives: first, to offer an updated and comprehensive overview of the multifaceted relationship between the Frankfurt School and Latin America; and second, to foster a mutually enlightening dialogue between Latin American and Global Northern perspectives in Critical Theory, with a particular focus on contemporary social and political realities.

A comprehensive and timely work, this edited collection will be of particular interest to researchers working on critical theory, decoloniality, social theory, and feminism.

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A South–North Dialogue on the Crises of the Present
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Foreword

Carlos Alberto Torres

This book will be a major contribution to the scholarship of Critical Theory with its relationship to Latin America—and by implication its ‘unrelatedness’ to Europe. The structure is logical and exciting. The first part, *Critical Theory Today: Challenges and Legacies*, starts with an imposing chapter by Axel Honneth, widely considered a central figure in the third generation of Critical Theory. Its analysis of the tension’s colonialism/decolonialism in his own *oeuvre* will be quite illuminating to the questions of intellectual formations.

The second part, *Doing Critical Theory in (and from) Latin America*, synthesizes a growing tradition that may have been ignored in social theory in the region. This book sets the tone for a cordial understanding of the origins and possibilities of this tradition, which, perhaps by paradoxical ways, was initiated with funding from the extraordinary productivity of the Argentine pampas.

The third part will be, as the rest of the book, surely attractive to the reader because it focuses on *Critical Theory and the Multiple Crises of the Present*, culminating with a fascinating dialogue between the tensions of colonization/decolonization in social theory and the most urgent demands of our age, including how to understand the impact of AI on democratic governance and the resiliency of communities.

This is a very valuable volume that adds even more value to the collection and connects somehow with another book published in the collection with parallel goals: *De-centering Global Sociology: The Peripheral Turn in Social Theory and Research*, edited By Arthur Bueno, Mariana Teixeira, and David Strecker.

Edited books are more selective than comprehensive, and this volume is not an exception. While the framework of analysis is well organized, and the choice of some historical arguments helps to locate the differential engagement of a social theory that is well situated in Germany but it is now gaining force in Latin America, perhaps some vignettes to show the complexities of Latin America vis-à-vis theory may be useful.

As someone educated in social theory in Argentina, writing the Series Editor Preface, I might include an interesting vignette. My early studies of sociology took place in Argentina during the transitional context of a dictatorship and the return to democracy in 1966–1973. This democratic experience lasted only three years (1973–1976).¹ It collapsed because of a furious class struggle with political violence reaching its paroxysm in another coup d'état and the installation of a brutal Dictatorship, known as *El Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*, on March 24, 1976.²

While the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons (CONADEP) in its best-seller report *Nunca Más* (1984) identified 8,961 persons disappeared during the dictatorship period of 1976–1983, human rights organizations estimated that more than 30,000 people were disappeared and killed, and hundreds of thousands had to exile. As I have narrated elsewhere, given the political situation of the time, my life and that of my family were at risk, forcing the tough decision to exile to Mexico in October 1976.

In 1973, as a member of the youth catholic leadership upon my marriage, we went to live in a Theology of Liberation Commune that we created in Flores, City of Buenos Aires. Given the conditions of violence in Buenos Aires, in 1975, we decided dismantling the commune there and try to reorganize via an invitation in the city of Esquel in Chubut, Patagonia, to set up an agricultural school that was never implemented.

While in Esquel, in October of 1975, I received a letter from Dr. Emilio Mignone,³ who had been director of ECLA and with whom I worked in 1974 as general secretary of the organization. In this letter, he went to some detail about the arrest of his daughter Mónica Mignone, who had been taken from their Santa Fe Street Department in Buenos Aires by a group of men who identified themselves as belonging to the Armed Forces ominous 'Working Groups'.⁴

That night they took Mónica, María Marta, and César Lugones, friends with whom we talked about joining our community for some time and were hoping would travel to Esquel, 1852 km away from the City of Buenos Aires, with us to start the school. In fact, César, an Agrarian Engineer, had come with another member of the community and with me to Esquel to explore the possibility to start the community there. When it was clear that the invitation was a fraud, César Lugones returned to Buenos Aires. Mónica, Maria Marta, and César were arrested and disappeared. We never heard from them again. They were some of the first victims of a veritable orgy of madness, violence, torture, blood, and death.

Let me get back to the academic life of the time. The chaotic intellectual life of the early 1970s in Argentina could be experienced through the following vignette. In 1972, a dictatorship was ruling the country. As a student of sociology in the Jesuit Universidad del Salvador, then one of the best schools of sociology in the country, I took a semester-long core course in Sociological Theory.

The two professors in charge of the course along with their adjunct professors and teaching assistants—what is known as *la cátedra*—gave us a very elaborated and long syllabus based on Critical Theory, particularly the works of Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, as well as works by Herbert Marcuse. Given that I had a university fellowship that paid my tuition and I was living with my parents and teaching in a catholic school, I put together all my resources and bought all the books requested.

After a month or so into the course, *la cátedra* came back and told us that given the social and political conditions of Argentina, and the shifting political-ideological debates, they have changed their theoretical position. Logically, they have changed the syllabus, now focusing on Marxism and some of the key authors of the time. With my meager resources left, and being a dutiful student, I bought two or three of the books that I thought were most important and began to read them in earnest.

Two months before the semester ended, *la cátedra* informed the students that they have changed their political and theoretical position again. They felt they were now part of the *Cátedras Nacionales*,⁵ an amalgam of political positions very close to the Peronist Left, national-popular movements of national liberation, and a critical reading of neo-Marxism. This was a political and theoretical position that was gaining ground in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires. Unfortunately, I could not buy the third set of books. My budget was exhausted.

Despite this chaotic episode and the violent environment of a civil society and state in crisis, my work as Teaching Assistant of a brilliant Jesuit sociologist and political philosopher, Licenciado César Sánchez Aizcorbe, allowed me to be well educated in social theory and political philosophy. My learning of Hegel, Weber, Marx, Habermas, and Marcuse served me well to understand the work of Paulo Freire, which I was studying at the same time that I tried to build a commune and later a rural school linked to Theology of Liberation. In the social and political context of the country, this communitarian project, as I indicated above, drastically failed and three friends who were going to join our commune were disappeared and assassinated in October 1975 for practicing literacy training in the slums.

I wrote my first book on Freire in Esquel in 1975. I presented the manuscript to Freire's editor, Julio Barreiro in August of 1976. After a long conversation, he let me know that he will try to publish it in Italy. In this conversation, he provides me with advice that I shall recall all the syllabi of my courses in Esquel and replace them with structural functionalist sociologists. Otherwise, my life will be in danger.

In October 1976, I left Argentina after securing a fellowship to study a master's degree in political science at the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO) in Mexico City, not returning to Argentina until the dictatorship had ended in 1983.

The previous vignette allows me to offer indications of the importance of Paulo Freire's work. Gros et al.'s book focuses on social theory, including global social theory. Naturally, there are few analyses of pedagogy or education. While writing this Foreword, I finished a manuscript showing the connection of Freire with Frankfurt School Critical Theory in the 1960s and 1970s. The basic thesis of my book is that Paulo Freire was a silent partner of the tradition of Critical Theory à la Frankfurt, with a strong intellectual association, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, while living exiled in Chile, with the work of Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, and Antonio Gramsci.⁶

What Freire added with notable care was a model of '*Bildung*' as the struggle for Social Justice Education.⁷ Or to put in a different terminology, the Pedagogy of the Struggle. Logically, his contribution was done in the context of the Latin American heritage of Critical Pedagogy in the 1960s and 1970s with inspirations from the Frankfurt School. There is no question that this book by Gros, Prestifilippo, and Roggerone is a unique and extremely valuable contribution to understand Critical Theory and its elusive perspectives in the region. It will be a formidable bibliography for graduate courses.

Contemporary Critical Theory and Latin America: A South–North Dialogue on the Crises of the Present offers theoretical and practical implications of the importance of Critical Theory à la Frankfurt in a region disputed by multiple ideologies and theoretical perspectives. Yet also a region characterized as the *Labyrinth of Solitude*, so brilliantly outlined by Nobel Prize recipient Octavio Paz,⁸ and further perfected as “the crux of our solitude” in Gabriel García Márquez's Nobel lecture.⁹

Notes

- 1 I graduated as Licenciado in Sociology (equivalent to a BA in Sociology) with an honors diploma in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Universidad del Salvador, that was then a Jesuit university (1970–1974). I also obtained a Teaching Credential in Sociology, Faculty of Science Education and Social Communications same university (1974). After graduation, I was hired to teach political philosophy and become the Executive Secretary of the Institute of Studies in Science and Technology in Latin America (ECLA) at the Universidad del Salvador.
- 2 Repression through violent means by the Argentine Anticommunist Alliance started during Isabel Martínez de Perón's constitutional government (1974–1976). This government was overthrown by a civic-military coup d'état led by a Military Junta, initiating the self-styled 'National Reorganization Process' on 24 March 1976.
- 3 A distinguished Argentine lawyer and educator who was undersecretary of education and also a functionary of the Organization of American State (OAS). His wife Angelica was a founder of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, while Dr. Mignone worked in the Center for Legal and Social Studies that he created. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/25/world/emilio-f-mignone-76-dies-argentine-rights-campaigner.html>

- 4 Such “grupos de tareas” of the Argentine Armed Forces combined military offices, navy officers, air force officers, members of the coastguards, secret police, and federal and provincial police as well as members of the Gendarmerie.
- 5 See Argumedo, A. (2011). *Los silencios y las voces en América Latina. Notas sobre el pensamiento nacional y popular*. Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional – Ediciones Colihue.
- 6 Antonio Gramsci was translated from Italian to Spanish in the earlier 1950s by intellectuals connected in their earlier youth with the Communist Party in Argentina and many whose native language was Italian. A central player in this process was the great editor and intellectual Jose Aricó who was early on in his life introduced to the work of Gramsci by Hector Agosti, a remarkable intellectual who was Secretary of Culture of the Argentine Communist Party. https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Héctor_P._Agosti. Among the many contributions of Aricó, see his (1982). *Marx y América Latina*. Alianza Editorial Mexicana; Aricó, J. (2005). *La cola del diablo: itinerario de Gramsci en América Latina*. Siglo Veintiuno Editores Argentina. See also Cuppi, V. (2020). The Diffusion of Gramsci’s Thought in the ‘Peripheral West’ of Latin America. In F. Antonini, A. Bernstein, L. Fusaro & R. Jackson (Eds.), *Revisiting Gramsci’s Notebooks* (pp. 430–450). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004417694_025.
- 7 The German term *Bildung* has many meanings, but one of the most accepted is education as personal development and cultural or intellectual maturity.
- 8 Paz, O. (1950). *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. Fondo de Cultura Económica (Spanish); and Grove Press in English, translated by Lysander Kemp.
- 9 http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture.html

Introduction

A Relation of Unrelatedness? Critical Theory and Latin America

*Alexis Gros, Agustín L. Prestifilippo,
and Santiago M. Roggerone*

One of the key features of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, from its inception in the 1930s, lies in its *intellectual openness*. As is well known, first-generation Critical Theorists established a productive dialogue between their home theoretical tradition, Marxism, and perspectives traditionally considered incompatible with it. These include “bourgeois” philosophy—from German Idealism to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche—Freudian psychoanalysis, Weberian sociology, and developments in empirical social research. Starting with Habermas, this intellectual dialogue has been increasingly widened to include paradigms regarded with suspicion by the founders of the tradition, such as pragmatism, phenomenology, and analytic philosophy, to name only a few.

Importantly, this theoretical openness has never been a mere intellectual dalliance. Rather, it has always served as a means to better understand the so-called pathologies of modern capitalist societies, with the aim of overcoming them. As Horkheimer (1968b, p. 194) famously put it, Critical Theory “aims nowhere at the accumulation of knowledge as such, but rather at the emancipation of human beings from enslaving conditions.” In this respect, the acknowledgment of the “temporal core of truth” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2000, p. 5) plays a crucial role. Given that capitalist social formations are in permanent historical transformation, the conceptual frameworks used to address them should be revised accordingly—a task that Critical Theorists have typically approached through dialogue with various “external” perspectives.¹

The present edited volume builds on the spirit of intellectual openness that has characterized the Frankfurt School since its origins. The central intuition guiding this book is that to adequately confront the multiple crises of the present, Critical Theory must open itself to a still-pending dialogue—namely, one with *Latin American realities and perspectives*. We start from the strong thesis that the Frankfurt School tradition has *always* been deeply entangled with this region in multiple respects, yet its Eurocentric biases have prevented it from acknowledging this. Given recent attempts

to “decolonize” Critical Theory (McCarthy, 2012; Allen, 2016; García Corona, 2021; Bhambra, 2021), the need to render this implicit connection explicit and deepen it through engagement with Latin American viewpoints has become increasingly evident. Fostering such self-reflection and dialogical exchange constitutes the primary aim of this volume.

The reader might reasonably observe that neither Latin America nor the issue of colonialism seems to play a significant role in the works of the main figures of the tradition—from Adorno and Horkheimer to Jaeggi and Rosa, via Habermas and Honneth. In what sense, then, can one claim that Critical Theory has always been linked with this region so distant from Frankfurt? And why should this connection be articulated and deepened today? We argue that it is mistaken to read Critical Theorists’ silence on Latin America as expressing a total absence of relationship. Rather, it testifies to the existence of a *phantasmatic* relation—or, better, “a relation of unrelatedness” (Jaeggi, 2005, p. 19; Rosa, 2016, p. 316). As paradoxical as it may sound, Critical Theory is *constitutively* connected to Latin America in many respects, yet this relationship operates *in the mode of neglect*. The present book starts from the premise that the realization of the Frankfurt School’s intellectual-political project fundamentally depends on acknowledging, embracing, and strengthening this unattended relationship.

We claim that Critical Theory is connected to Latin America on at least *four* qualitatively distinct levels.

(1) To begin with, one can identify a *genetic*—or, better, intellectual-historical—link between them. It is not merely anecdotal that the funds used to establish the famous *Institut für Sozialforschung* in 1923 at the Goethe University Frankfurt came from agricultural extractivism in Latin America, namely, from capital derived from the Weil family’s agribusiness in Argentina (see, for instance, Lenhard, 2024, pp. 15–63). In light of this fact, Critical Theory’s radio silence regarding colonialism and imperialism can be read as a paradoxical complicity with the very conditions of social injustice it claims to criticize. This symptomatic oblivion expresses the “colonial unconsciousness” of Critical Theory (Allen, 2020b; see also Traverso, 2016, p. 175) and confronts us with the ineluctable task of problematizing it.

(2) This brings us to a second point of connection, which we might call *sociological-theoretical*. It relates to the tradition’s Hegelian-Marxist aim of developing a “theory of contemporary society [*Gesellschaft*] as a whole” (Horkheimer, 1988, p. 36; our emphasis; see also Adorno, 2003, p. 51). Arguably, if Critical Theory is to *truly* realize this sociological objective, it must stop concentrating exclusively on Western European and North American societies, as it has done since the 1930s. Instead, it should broaden its analytical focus to include peripheral realities from the Global South, like those of Latin America. As classical dependence theory (Katz, 2022) and,

more recently, world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 2004) as well as decolonial thought (Quijano, 2000) have taught us, the *actual* social totality—that is, the sum total of social relationships—is the (post)colonial *world-system* that was born with the conquest of America and consolidated with modern capitalism (Quijano & Wallerstein, 1992).²

In this sense, a genuinely holistic theory of society, such as that envisioned by Critical Theory, must be a *theory of world society* (see Torres, 2025). Interestingly, Adorno (Institut für Sozialforschung, 1971, p. 23) seemed to be partially aware of this, as he insisted that the constitution of modern society has involved a process of “total sociation [*Vergesellschaftung*]” at a global scale:

Already in the nineteenth century, this tendency toward [total] sociation had intensified to such an extent that even those countries that lagged behind high capitalism nonetheless still belonged to it, insofar as precisely their not-yet, or not-yet-fully, incorporation constituted one of the sources of capital accumulation in the dominant countries and thereby motivated political and social struggles.

(Adorno in Institut für Sozialforschung, 1971, p. 34)

Yet a Critical Theory of *world society* should do more than simply point out the existence of entanglements between the Global North and the Global South. It must bring to light the economic, political, and symbolic *asymmetries* between them, which ultimately trace back to the colonial era. Peripheral regions like Latin America constitute the “darker side of Western modernity” (Mignolo, 2011), as they have historically paid the price of “development” in the core countries through poverty, dispossession, and marginalization.

(3) In a sense, the third link between the Frankfurt School and Latin America follows from this last point and can be described as *normative* or *social-philosophical*.³ Since Horkheimer and Adorno, Critical Theory has taken “solidarity with suffering human beings” as the indisputable normative motivation of social critique (Horkheimer, 1968a, p. 64).⁴ Now, because of the global asymmetries just mentioned, one can speak of a flagrant *inequality in the international distribution of suffering* to the detriment of the Global South, in a manner analogous to the worldwide wealth distribution (see Piketty, 2014). Accordingly, to abide by its own normative standards, Critical Theory should overcome its historical tendency to concentrate critique on everyday alienation in affluent societies (see Adorno, 2018; Rosa, 2016; Jaeggi, 2005) and instead focus on the problematization of severe social suffering in peripheral world regions.

Curiously, in the 1920s, the young Horkheimer (1978, p. 64) appeared to acknowledge that the opulence of Western societies had its “actual

foundation of misery” in the suffering prevalent in the colonies—an insight that, unfortunately, plays no significant role in his mature work:

Up to now we have been talking only of the highly developed capitalist countries whose entire existence is based on the horrible exploitation apparatus at work in the partly or wholly colonial territories, i.e., in the far larger part of the world. Extended regions in the Balkans are torture chambers; the mass misery in India, China, Africa boggles the mind.

(Horkheimer, 1978, p. 64)

Today, the unequal global distribution of suffering is paradigmatically reflected in the pervasiveness of environmental injustice in Latin America, resulting from the imposition of “neo-extractivist” development models across the region (Svampa, 2019). The costs of the “imperial way of life” (Wissen & Brand, 2021), enjoyed by the middle and upper classes in the Global North, are “externalized” in Latin American territories and borne through the massive environmental suffering of their populations (see Lessenich, 2016). A contemporary Critical Theory worth its salt cannot afford to ignore this.

But this is not all. If Critical Theory wants to truly be the “intellectual side of the historical emancipatory process” (Horkheimer, 1968b, p. 164), it must acknowledge that Latin America constitutes today one of the world’s main centers of emancipatory politics. Precisely because of its unfavorable position in the world-system, the region is home to an explosion of feminist, anti-extractivist, and indigenous social movements that might harbor the oppositional energy needed to promote progressive social change—an energy that seems to have long been exhausted in the Global North.

(4) The last—and perhaps most significant—point of connection concerns the *life of its own* that Critical Theory has taken on in Latin American countries since the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, like no other world region, Latin America has developed a rich tradition of creative reception and appropriation of the Frankfurt School, which remains in full force today.⁵ It is a tradition as hybrid and baroque as the region itself, producing *Critical Theory from (and for) Latin America* (Gandler, 2021; Kozlarek & Leyva Martínez, 2025; Roggerone et al., 2024).

Far from being monolithic, *Latin American* Critical Theory exhibits multiple facets, three of which we consider especially relevant. First, there is a line of rigorous and productive exegesis of the works of key authors of the paradigm, such as Benjamin, Adorno, and Habermas (e.g., Naishtat, 2010; Schwarzböck, 2008; Leyva, 2021). Second, original theoretical productions fully or partially inspired by the Frankfurt School can be identified (e.g., Grüner, 2020; Echeverría, 2016; Schwarz, 1992). Finally, insightful

empirical studies conducted in the region draw decisively on Critical Theory (e.g., Ipar et al., 2024; Cuesta & Wegelin, 2024).

Unfortunately, Global North Critical Theorists have never paid much attention to the work of their Latin American colleagues, let alone engaged in a responsive dialogue with them. The editors and contributors of this book agree that this situation needs to be changed. If such a dialogical exchange is not established, Critical Theory risks losing touch with a *constitutive part of itself*, thereby undermining its fundamental commitment to theoretical reflexivity.

* * *

The present volume has two closely linked objectives: first, to offer an updated and comprehensive overview of the multifaceted relationship between the Frankfurt School and Latin America; and second, to foster a mutually enlightening dialogue between Latin American and Global Northern perspectives in Critical Theory, with a particular focus on the multiple crises of the present.

The book is divided into three parts, each containing five chapters.

Part I, *Critical Theory Today: Challenges and Legacies*, includes contributions from leading Critical Theorists *based in the Global North*. The first three chapters focus on the challenges that Critical Theory must confront today, with special emphasis on the issue of coloniality. The last two contributions, in turn, revisit specific theoretical legacies of the Frankfurt School tradition and show their potential to illuminate and transform contemporary societies.

The section opens with a contribution by Axel Honneth, the key figure of the third generation of Critical Theory. In “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Postcolonialism and the West,” he offers a critical revision of the self-understanding of contemporary Western societies in light of the challenges posed by (post)colonialism. Importantly, this chapter marks Honneth’s first systematic attempt to problematize the Eurocentric biases of his own perspective.

In “Frankfurt School Critical Theory in a Reparative Frame,” Gurminder K. Bhambra criticizes the systematic neglect of colonialism in the Frankfurt School’s theory of society. She argues that Critical Theory must acknowledge that colonial relations are not mere contingent factors but a constitutive dimension of capitalist social formations. This critique is part of Bhambra’s broader project of repairing epistemological and material injustices in the South-North relationship.

Daniel Loick’s contribution, “Provincializing Frankfurt: Critical Theory in Lowercase,” argues for a decentering of the Frankfurt School tradition. As he contends, if Critical Theory is to fulfill Marx’s categorical

imperative—namely, to “overthrow *all* relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being”—it must *provincialize* itself. That is, it must move beyond Frankfurt and engage in a transnational dialogue with the diverse critical theories and emancipatory movements of the present.

In his chapter, “From Socialization to Social Research: Felix Weil, Karl Korsch, and the Political Origins of Frankfurt School Critical Theory,” Jacob Blumenfeld revisits the little-known contributions of Felix Weil—the Argentine-German founder of the Institute for Social Research—and demonstrates their contemporary relevance. The chapter focuses on Weil’s neglected work *Sozialisierung: Versuch einer begrifflichen Grundlegung nebst einer Kritik der Sozialisierungspläne*, placing it in dialogue with Karl Korsch’s work and the socialization debates of the early twentieth century.

Finally, Malte Frøslee Ibsen’s chapter, “‘Whoever Is Not Willing to Talk About Capitalism . . .’: Critical Theory and the Contemporary Surge of Authoritarianism,” demonstrates the contemporary significance of the explanatory model for the rise of fascism developed in the 1930s by Pollock, Fromm, and Horkheimer, with particular focus on the latter’s account of “rockets.” The chapter updates this model to address contemporary conditions of inequality and insecurity worldwide.

Part II, *Doing Critical Theory in (and from) Latin America*, gathers contributions from prominent Critical Theorists *based in Latin America*. Its chapters showcase the manifold ways in which the Frankfurt School’s legacy has been—and continues to be—creatively appropriated in the region. The section includes historical reconstructions of the Latin American reception of the tradition, productive readings of its key figures, and applications of Critical Theoretical frameworks to analyze local realities.

In “Critical Theory and Counter-Modernity: On How a Historical Singularity Becomes a Critical Dialectic for ‘Our America,’” Eduardo Grüner outlines the main traits of a Critical Theory situated in Latin America. To this end, he revisits the Eurocentric limits of the Frankfurt School paradigm and formulates a concept of counter-modernity capable of sustaining a critical engagement with Latin America’s historical singularity. The argument begins from the intuition that such a project requires adopting a specific angle of vision, namely, that of the threshold or the border.

Stefan Gandler’s contribution, “Conceptual Elements for a Critical Theory from the Americas: Towards a Philosophical Discussion between Mexico and Germany,” lays the groundwork for a Critical Theory from the Americas. The author establishes a productive dialogue among three thinkers: the Mexican-Ecuadorian philosopher Bolívar Echeverría, the Mexican-Spanish philosopher Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, and the German philosopher Alfred Schmidt. The focus of this theoretical dialogue is the concept of praxis.

In “Bifurcations of Critical Theory: Reception and Remaking in Ibero-American Contexts of Crisis,” Mauro Basaure showcases how Critical

Theory has been productively received in Ibero-America and situationally translated into local problem spaces. Drawing on inductive analysis, this chapter reconstructs the reception of the Frankfurt School tradition in Chile. The analysis reveals a general pattern of installation, expansion, and institutionalization, together with a recurrent bifurcation of fields: an aesthetic-cultural one, linked to the first generation, and a normative one, associated with Habermas and Honneth.

Bruna Della Torre's chapter, "The New Organisation: Digital Culture Industry and Platform Neofascism," addresses the role of the digital culture industry in the context of neofascism and the extreme right, with particular focus on the Brazilian case. It argues that the digital culture industry functions as a new form of political organization that facilitates the mobilization of right-wing movements worldwide. The author analyzes how social media and platforms contributed to the spread of right-wing propaganda after the 2008 financial crisis, creating a digital mass party that enables the effective dissemination of anti-democratic content.

In "The Intercommunication System: A Conceptual Alternative for Critical Theory," Esteban Torres proposes a theoretical innovation in Critical Theory. He reconceptualizes the social communication system of world society in light of its structural transformations and technological developments. The concept of "intercommunication system" is introduced as an alternative framework to existing global perspectives within the social sciences, aiming to transcend the Eurocentric biases prevalent in Critical Theory.

Finally, in a dialogical spirit, Part III, *Critical Theory and the Multiple Crises of the Present*, includes contributions by contemporary Critical Theorists from both the Global North and Latin America. Its chapters explore Critical Theory's contributions to addressing the multiple crises of the present, including the persistence of colonialism and patriarchal violence, the global rise of far-right politics, and the decline of the democratic public sphere worldwide. The section closes with an interview with Amy Allen centered on the challenges of decolonizing Critical Theory.

In "New Authoritarianism as Counterrevolution," Verónica Gago analyzes contemporary authoritarianism as a counterrevolutionary response to the transformative effects of transfeminist, Indigenous, migrant, and antiracist struggles. As she argues, rather than preventing future alternatives, new authoritarianism reacts to an ongoing revolution that has reshaped political subjectivities, collective sensibilities, and practices of social reproduction. Writing from Argentina, the chapter offers a real-time, transnational diagnosis that connects apparently disparate authoritarian phenomena and clarifies their shared historical logic.

Stephanie Graf's contribution, "Codes and Corpses: Reading Female Bodies in the Context of Mexican Femicide," offers an original perspective on Mexican femicide from a Benjaminian viewpoint. This chapter takes as its starting point the material remains that bear witness to femicide: the dead

female bodies left in the Mexican deserts and wastelands. Adopting Benjamin's proposal to read the world like scripture, these corpses are interpreted as a form of writing.

In her chapter, "Affirmative rather than Critical: How AI is Changing the Democratic Public Sphere, and What This Means for Critical Theory," Regina Kreide examines the transformation of democratic public discourse under the new technical-material conditions of artificial intelligence. Drawing on Eduardo Grüner, she demonstrates that AI-based language models undermine the normative foundations of rational, inclusive public discourse: through affirmation, data extractivism, and digital "coloniality," they promote conformist, authoritarian forms of communication, exacerbating the crisis of democratic ways of life.

Ezequiel Ipar's chapter, "Habermas's Political Theory from the Abyss of Democracies," examines Habermas's political theory in light of contemporary democratic crises. The analysis explores how Habermas's concept of discourse can counteract exclusionary, nativist, and skeptical interpretations of the democratic political process. By focusing on the emancipatory potential embedded in critical discourse, this chapter highlights the relevance of truth claims, authenticity, and moral considerations in democratic politics. It also addresses the challenges posed by new digital communication technologies, examining their impact on the public sphere and the formation of political will.

This book culminates with an interview with Amy Allen conducted by the book editors, in which key issues concerning the contemporary relevance of the Frankfurt School paradigm are discussed. While it focuses on Allen's project of decolonizing Critical Theory, the interview also addresses other central topics in her thought, such as the contributions of psychoanalysis to critical theorizing and the Eurocentric aporias of progressive philosophies of history.

Notes

- 1 Perhaps the most illustrative example of this way of advancing theory is the turn to psychoanalysis in first-generation Critical Theory. It served as a means of revising Marxism to explain the complex psycho-social processes that prevented the emergence of proletarian class consciousness in the postwar era and instead propelled workers across Europe toward fascism. See Allen (2020a).
- 2 In this connection, of course, postcolonial theory must also be mentioned (see, e.g., Chakrabarty, 2000; Spivak, 1988; Said, 1978). While it differs significantly from Latin American dependentist and decolonial perspectives, it shares fundamental commonalities with them. For an exhaustive analysis of the relationship between postcolonialism and decolonial approaches, see Boatcă (2022).
- 3 We use here the concept of social philosophy in the sense inaugurated by Honneth (2000; see also Jaeggi & Celikates, 2017; Saar, 2025), which ultimately traces back to Horkheimer's (1988) 1931 inaugural lecture "Die gegenwärtige Lage der Sozialphilosophie und die Aufgaben eines Instituts für Sozialforschung."

- 4 According to Adorno (1966, p. 27), “The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth.”
- 5 The early and widespread availability of Spanish translations of the works of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm, and Habermas—mostly produced in Argentina and Mexico—has played a key role in the emergence and consolidation of this local tradition.

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