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## **Critical Leverage in the Current Conjuncture: A Dialogue with Gabriel Rockhill Concerning *Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique***

An Encounter based on:

Gabriel Rockhill and Alfredo Gomez-Muller, eds. *Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique: Dialogues*. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2011. 240 pages.

GABRIEL ROCKHILL in Conversation with SUMMER RENAULT-STEELE

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*Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique* is a collection of eight interviews between editors Gabriel Rockhill, Alfredo Gomez-Muller, and a number of the leading minds in contemporary political philosophy. The collection explores some of the most recent developments in critical theory, broadly construed, and illuminates the relationship between critical theory and other political-theoretical alternatives at its horizons. All eight interviews traverse current events in politics and economics while maintaining a theoretical concern for larger questions of oppression, emancipation, recognition, culture, religion, ethics, and history. Therefore, in the original spirit of critical theory, *Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique* manages to be effectively topical as well as philosophical in scope, serving not only as a valuable collection for those already invested in critical theory, but also, as a practical introduction to some of the leading issues and intellectuals of our time. The following conversation aims to contextualize the book for readers as well as to articulate and interrogate some of the key concepts and debates at the book's core. This exchange took place over email.

*SUMMER RENAULT-STEEL: Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique begins with a substantial introduction and a preliminary dialogue by yourself and Alfredo Gomez-Muller. This is helpful because it serves to frame the following interviews and determine, among other things, precisely what you mean by “critical theory.” Drawing on Max Horkheimer’s seminal piece “Traditional and Critical Theory” you note that, “Critical theory, unlike traditional theory, comes to terms with historical inscription and denaturalizes ingrained assumptions regarding the supposed nature of theory” (9). Critical theory is, then, a kind of philosophical orientation that is always concerned with the relationship between thought and thought’s material circumstances. In other words, critical theory demands that we historicize and relativize thought, indeed, that thought reflexively perform this function, considering the social, political, economic, cultural, and technological milieu in which it endures. I’d like to mirror this orientation with my first question to you. How would you contextualize the production of this book? What is the material nexus that made this book on critical theory emerge now? Is there something about critical theory in particular, its current permutations or its future direction, that seems especially urgent or useful in our present social, political, economic, cultural, or technological landscape?*

GABRIEL ROCKHILL: For the sake of methodological clarity, let me begin by formulating a heuristic distinction between context and conjuncture. What is often perceived or labeled as a context is, in fact, a socio-historical conjuncture, meaning an infinitely complex force field of multiple actions and sites of agency that can only be grasped from leverage points on the inside. Strictly speaking, there is no context in the sense of a coordinated series of exogenous elements that orchestrate a determined field of possibility or definitively structure a particular *Zeitgeist*. The attempt to grasp or frame a specific conjuncture is always perspectival, which is not to say

individualistic or subjective. It is the effort, on the part of social agents with unique but intertwined itineraries, to make sense of their setting by producing a working topology, viz., a projected cartography of a tremendously intricate situation. Every understanding of a conjuncture, it could be said, is a topological understanding insofar as it proposes—from within—a logic of place that seeks to orient us in the conjuncture by means of a navigational map that is neither purely objective nor absolutely subjective.

With this heuristic distinction in mind, we might say that *Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique* emerged, in part, out of a shared topological understanding of the current socio-political and cultural conjuncture, as well as out of a common set of concerns with how to develop transformative leverage within this unique force field. This conjuncture includes the rise to prominence of the practice and discourse of “globalization,” i.e., the presumptuous and aggressive neoliberal funeral hymn for socialist alternatives. This incantatory death knell of historical options has seamlessly merged, in recent years, with the mumbo jumbo of the current political imaginary, in which the supposed opposition between democracy and terrorism thinly veils the pursuit of imperialist endeavors and the further evisceration of what is euphemistically called democracy. The repeated crises of neoliberalism have actually been largely recuperated by the ideological discourse of austerity and allowed for an even greater consolidation of class power. At the same time, the rise of what are called the new social movements, the emergence of new socialism in Latin America, and constant push-back on so many fronts—from imperialist resistance to cultural and ideological battles of various sorts—clearly reveal that not everyone is convinced that we are living at Fukuyama’s end of history, in which liberal democracy and capitalism have paradoxically provided the utopian endgame of which Marx had only confusedly

dreamt. In spite of what the corporate executors of the present might have us believe, it is clear that history is not at its end precisely because history is never destiny.

It is this shared topological understanding of our socio-political conjuncture, as well as a more specific concern with the status of cultural questions therein, that led us to the decision to organize a series of dialogues concerning the role of critical theory, broadly construed, in both thinking and intervening in our present situation. Indeed, one of the most general questions that animates this book is: What is the critical power of theoretical practices, and how can they gain transformative leverage on the current conjuncture? More specifically, in relationship to the critical theory tradition, this question can be formulated as follows: What is truly *critical*—in the double sense of the term—about critical theory? It is important to note, in this regard, that we are not wedded to a genealogical conception of critical theory, nor are we invested in defending the tradition of the Frankfurt School for its own sake. On the contrary, we seek to raise critical questions concerning, among other things, the retreat of radicalism in the work of many of the major representatives of this tradition. We also explicitly decided to engage with prominent contemporary intellectuals whose orientation is not directly aligned on the heritage of the Frankfurt School, including Judith Butler, Cornel West, and Immanuel Wallerstein. Finally, we thought that it was important to bring critical questions to bear on the liberal tradition by organizing dialogues with two prominent figures within this tradition, who have both sought to directly engage with the question of culture in the broad sense of the term: Michael Sandel and Will Kymlicka.

Regarding the immediate material nexus of the book, it is worth noting that these dialogues are in many ways borderline conversations situated on the horizons of different cultures, disciplines, and intellectual traditions. The majority of them took place in France with

American intellectuals who are only gradually coming into prominence in the Francophone world. The book itself was printed—with minor modifications—in Spanish and French before the release of the English edition.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Alfredo Gomez-Muller and I both work between different cultural horizons, and we share with the majority of our interlocutors an engagement with multiple disciplines as well as an interest in the historical and political constitution of the disciplines themselves. Finally, the book is generally concerned with the borders between different intellectual traditions, ranging from the Frankfurt School to what is vaguely called “contemporary theory,” and political liberalism. It is by working on and between these cultural, disciplinary, and intellectual borders that we hoped to produce a dynamic series of dialogues that might help us gain a certain amount of critical leverage on our current situation.

*SRS: You and Gomez-Muller also track the development of the terms “culture” and “multiculturalism” as central to the conceptual organization of our current political imaginary. You suggest that a moral and political preoccupation with cultural recognition gathered momentum after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and this preoccupation is linked up with the neoliberal polemic against socialist alternatives. In other words, the wake of the socialist decline in Europe has been characterized by a preoccupation with cultural recognition that has, to some degree, replaced the discussion about material redistribution. Now, it is not the case that considering recognition must necessarily occur at the expense of considering redistribution, and you note that some thinkers represented in Politics of Culture eschew this dichotomy. Nevertheless, your essential claim seems to be that prevailing scripts of cultural recognition are part of the problematic conjuncture that Politics of Culture was created to address. The present*

*political vocabulary of multiculturalism, by itself at least, is not capable of garnering the “critical leverage” you want to see develop.*

*My question has to do with the political etymology of multiculturalism that you present and the distinction between recognition and redistribution. This is of particular interest to me because I was raised in Canada, where the term multicultural is frequently invoked in popular discourse as a national hallmark. You note that the concept of multiculturalism first appeared in Canada in the early 1970s and quote the following claim from Multicultural Questions by Christian Joppke and Steven Lukes:*

*[O]fficial multiculturalism was instituted in post-colonial societies that lacked independent nation-founding myths and clear breaks with their colonial past, à l'américaine, thus conceiving of themselves as multiple cultures coexisting under the roof of a neutral state. (192)*

*I want to suggest that discourses of cultural recognition in Canada precede the 1970s, and are in fact deeply entwined with issues of distributive justice. I am thinking in particular of Bonita Lawrence's work on the production of Native identity under the Indian Act of 1876. Lawrence writes about the colonial invention of so-called “status Indians” and “non-status Indians.” Maintaining this arbitrary distinction—which in itself reduced hundreds of nations, ethnicities, and language groups to a common designation—allowed the Canadian government to justify restricting treaty rights to fewer and fewer Native inhabitants. By 1985, Lawrence contends, legislation ensconced in the Indian Act effectively rendered two-thirds of all Native people in Canada landless (Lawrence 6). In this case, the possibility and practice of recognizing “cultural identity” in Canada was directly linked to imperialist expansion. What connection do you see between modern colonial and imperial practices, and the contemporary discourse of multiculturalism that you critique? Does the moral and political preoccupation with cultural*

*recognition somehow efface its own historical entanglement with the history of capitalist expansion? And, is dissolving the false dichotomy between issues of cultural recognition and distributive justice part of obtaining the critical leverage you are interested in?*

GR: Multiculturalism as a term and concept has a specific geographic genealogy that is partially distinct from that of the category of culture. The mechanisms of evaluation that we have at our disposal suggest that it rose to prominence during the last third of the twentieth century, beginning primarily but not exclusively in the Anglophone world. What this means, historically, is that it is bound up with a unique social, political, and economic conjuncture. In many ways, this conjuncture has been characterized by the spread of a post-revolutionary political imaginary that forecloses the possibility of a radical transformation of society. One of the sister concepts of multiculturalism, then, is the notion of globalization, which has a nearly identical history and is equally bound up with the spread of neoliberal capitalism in the era in which, according to Margret Thatcher, “There Is No Alternative.”

Given this specific history and geography of the notion of multiculturalism, one of the goals of this book was to critically reflect on the relationship between the cultural politics that came to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, on the one hand, and what is perceived as the retreat of revolutionary or transformative politics, on the other. In certain instances, it has surely been the case that the investment in cultural politics corresponds to a withdrawal from a transformative agenda. In this regard, we wanted to remove the ethical halo from mainstream multiculturalism and show the ways in which it has come to serve as a monopolistic and misleading oasis of “politics” that perfectly coalesces with the maintenance—if not the intensification—of the status quo under the neoliberal system of global capitalism. In fact, the

differential logic of cultural recognition often seamlessly melds with the consumerist sacralization of difference in late capitalism. Naomi Klein has described this phenomenon in the following terms:

The need for greater diversity—the rallying cry of my university years—is now not only accepted by the culture industries, it is the mantra of global capital. And identity politics, as they were practiced in the nineties, weren't a threat, they were a gold mine. "This revolution," writes cultural critic Richard Goldstein in *The Village Voice*, "turned out to be the savior of late capitalism." (115)

However, we also sought to avoid monolithic accounts of cultural politics that systematically lambasted them as pernicious forms of neoliberal ideology. After all, the denigration or sidelining of various cultural issues by those invested in transformative politics has often unnecessarily restricted the field of transformation and perpetuated status quo forms of oppression, as Angela Davis, Cornel West, and others have shown. One may think, for instance, of Friedrich Engels' rather derogatory statements on the feminist movement in Scandinavia, which he describes as "the more or less hysterical effusions of bourgeois and petty bourgeois women careerists" ("Letter to Paul Ernst, June 5, 1890").<sup>2</sup> It is a mistake, in my opinion, to establish monocausal forms of determinism between cultural politics and economic politics. Indeed, there is much to be learned from what is generically called the cultural concern with the formation and oppression of various types of social and political identity. Overall, therefore, this book is motivated by the need for a critical reassessment of cultural politics that avoids the non-transformative tendencies of mainstream multiculturalism—as well as of its conservative counterpart, the "clash of civilizations" thesis—while also recognizing the need to entirely rethink the political *modi operandi* of the category of culture.

The modern concept of culture significantly predates the notion of multiculturalism, but it is equally a socio-historical formation specific to a unique conjuncture. In broad terms, it is a

European concept that came to function during the Enlightenment as an independent noun referring to a process of refinement or the result of such a process. It served in part, along with its sister concept of civilization, as a theoretical frame for understanding the relationship between different ethnic groups and regions of the world in terms of a historical narrative of development. We might say, in very schematic terms, that the ontological difference of kind between “the savage” and the “the civilized” was replaced by a historical difference of degree according to which the former corresponded to the “primitive” stage of the latter. It is not difficult to see, then, how the *culturally specific* categories of culture and civilization played an important role in the historical accounts used to justify colonial expansion as well as cultural, political, and economic imperialism. If they were at an earlier stage of development, it was our duty, our *mission civilizatrice*, to bring them our culture and our economy. This being said, it is equally important to avoid simply identifying the category of culture as an ideological supplement to colonial capitalism. The notion of culture is also a powerful sense-making concept that helped foreground cultural variability and resituate European civilization in relation to the plurality of other socio-cultural formations. For instance, J. G. Herder used the category of culture at the end of the eighteenth century to at least partially attack the linear narrative of universal civilizational progress toward the *telos* of European Enlightenment in the name of recognizing the sheer multiplicity and diversity of cultural practices.

I agree with you, therefore, that the concern with cultural identities and numerous forms of cultural oppression predate the rise of multiculturalism properly speaking. Regarding the current relationship between cultural politics and distributive politics, I would say that it is not so much a question of dissolving the dichotomy as overcoming the widespread social theory of quasi-autonomous spheres. It is not at all the case that the realm of culture is clearly distinct from

the domain of economics. As the brief examples above illustrate, culture and economics are intertwined and overlap in various ways. In certain instances, it may, of course, be heuristically beneficial to draw such distinctions, but we must avoid hypostasizing them.

*SRS: What is striking about the reassessment of cultural politics offered by thinkers in this collection is that, for the most part, it does not include a reflection on aesthetics. The one significant exception to this is Cornel West's compelling discussion of African American resistance that he sees manifest in blues, and the potential for a new political ontology that he sees in improvisational jazz (114-115). However, the general inattention given to aesthetics in these interviews is conspicuous given that many first generation critical theorists—namely Siegfried Kracauer,<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, and Max Horkheimer—recognized dance, film, animation, painting, architecture, and music as crucial sites for their own critical reassessments of culture. You and Gomez-Muller certainly take note of this absence, writing that since the 1990s a relatively new conception of culture has come to preoccupy critical theorists:*

Rather than culture being understood as a set of aesthetic and intellectual developments ... it is identified with collective forms of life—ranging from gender and sexual identities to membership in various ethnic, linguistic, and national groups—that play a central role in politics and morality ... In spite of their important differences, these authors have distanced themselves from critical reflection on aesthetics (15).

*You stipulate that despite this general shift in the meaning of culture, some of the authors in this collection (presumably West) still touch on aesthetic concerns. Nevertheless, this general turn away from aesthetics signifies that the relationship between the politics of culture and the spirit of critique has significantly altered in this most recent generation of critical theory (see 15).*

*What do you make of this turn away from aesthetic analysis? Is something lost in omitting the aesthetic as a site for the critical investigation of cultural politics? And, how do you*

*see this turn in relationship to the relatively recent blossoming of disciplines such as cultural studies, communication studies, or cinema and media studies, where the political analysis of culture regularly entails a serious exploration of aesthetic phenomena? The spirit of my question is not to assert some kind of fidelity to a “tradition” of aesthetic criticism in the Frankfurt School, nor is it to protest about what counts as critical theory. Rather, I am hoping to hear your thoughts about this turn away from aesthetics, how you see critical theory’s lineage next to the emergence of disciplines like cultural studies, and, if you think this means anything for philosophy?*

GR: The work of some of the major living representatives of Frankfurt School critical theory clearly attests to an abandonment of aesthetics. Authors like Seyla Benhabib, Rainer Forst, Nancy Fraser, Axel Honneth, and Thomas McCarthy are decidedly more interested in moral and political questions than in the social role of the arts. This is one of the reasons that we pointed to an overall shift in the role of the category of culture for a significant portion of third generation critical theory, as you mentioned in your question. Peter Uwe Hohendahl has also recently emphasized this fact: “In the official transition from Habermas to Axel Honneth, who was recently appointed Habermas’s successor at the University of Frankfurt, the aesthetic question, which was so prominent in the work of Adorno and Benjamin, has been moved to the background” (19). However, before exploring the reasons for such a shift, it is important to highlight the numerous exceptions to this general rule, which primarily applies to the neo- or post-Habermasians who have maintained a close link to the Frankfurt School. Among the exceptions, we could cite Peter Bürger, Martin Seel, and Christoph Menke in Germany, Jay

Bernstein and Peter Osborne in the Anglophone world, Jean-Marc Lachaud and Rainer Rochlitz in France, as well as many others.

With these important qualifications in mind, it seems to me that the abandonment of aesthetics by a certain tradition of critical theory is due in part to at least two factors, which also plague the work of some of the authors just referenced. To begin with, contemporary critical theory has become a specialized academic discourse. In the process, the interdisciplinary orientation of the first generation of the Frankfurt School has largely given way to scholarly expertise, particularly in the fields of moral, social, and political philosophy. This increasing specialization has come at a very high methodological price. In addition to the abandonment of aesthetics, the severing of psychoanalysis from the project of critical theory further contrasts the work of many of the neo- or post-Habermasians with the research agendas of figures like Benjamin and Marcuse. Instead of nostalgically bewailing the demise of the broad intellectual engagements of the early Frankfurt School, I think that it is of the utmost importance to develop new methods and to hone old tools for a critical theory of contemporary society in all of its diverse aspects, which draws on numerous traditions rather than obsessively defending a particular genealogy, lineage, or pedigree.

The other factor that has contributed to the abandonment of aesthetics has been the unraveling of the various historical accounts linking aesthetics to politics. I have in mind, more specifically, the overwhelming prominence of the “end of illusions” thesis, which consists in affirming that the avant-garde dreams of an art capable of transforming society revealed themselves to be just as illusory as those of the utopians who thought they could usher in a classless society. This thesis, which presents our era as the enlightened age of the end of aesthetic and political illusions, knows many versions, and it can be celebrated or bemoaned

without changing its fundamental structure. Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* is worth citing in this regard because it perfectly manifests what has become the standard historical thesis, which recognizes as a *fait accompli* the failure of the historical avant-garde due to its recuperation by the institution of art against which it had revolted. Following upon the supposed disappointment of the neo-avant-garde, Bürger arrives at what appears to many as the only logical conclusion: the project of an avant-garde coalescence of art and politics is the illusion of a bygone era. Whereas Bürger decided to write a requiem for this avant-garde dream, many theorists simply turned their back on aesthetics.

The disenchantment with the avant-garde—broadly construed—accompanies, in many ways, a parallel disillusionment with revolutionary politics. It is extremely revealing, in this regard, that Bürger explicitly presents his theoretical intervention, which is obviously rooted in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, in terms of a post-1968 melancholy and the sobering realization that “all revolutions have failed”: “When I conceived of *Theory of the Avant-Garde* ... the impulses that the May events had awakened had already been arrested” (700, 698).<sup>4</sup> This retreat from political radicalism, as I briefly mentioned above, is another key feature of contemporary critical theory. It is true of course, that the first generation of the Frankfurt School had a complicated relationship to revolutionary politics, and it is arguable that its major representatives were by no means as radical as it is sometimes suggested, particularly during the postwar era. However, when you compare the work of many of the authors mentioned above to the writings of Marcuse in the late 1960s and early 1970s, for instance, it is readily apparent that the reformist project of improving the systems of democratic representation in place has largely overtaken the radical critique of the status quo in the name of a revolutionary transformation of

society and the economy. Like the abandonment of aesthetics, the retreat of radicalism is, at least in part, an outgrowth of the historical thesis on the end of illusions.

In my own work, I have undertaken a critical reassessment of this historical thesis and, more generally, the logic of history that it presupposes. In fact, I am currently completing a manuscript for the same book series, provisionally entitled *Radical History and the Politics of Art*, which aims at completely rethinking the relationship between artistic practice and transformative politics. In many ways, this book seeks to redress a number of the shortcomings in the critical theory tradition, broadly construed to include the work of Anglophone and Francophone theorists interested in the issue of art and politics. In addition to a detailed criticism of the end of illusions thesis, one of the central problems that it addresses is the social *epoché*, or the bracketing of the production, distribution, and reception of aesthetic practices in favor of focusing on the autarchy of individual works and their supposed talisman-like power—or lack thereof—to directly produce political effects. These concerns are, of course, already prevalent to a certain extent in this book of interviews, which presses some of the authors on aesthetic questions and privileges the ethos of critical inquiry over the benighted entronement of existing theoretical positions.

Regarding the rise of cultural studies and other related disciplines, this is a complex question that would require extensive social and institutional analysis. It is clear that some of the most prominent figures in the postwar emergence of cultural studies in Britain, such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, strove to maintain the early Frankfurt School's interdisciplinary concern with aesthetics and transformative politics. The influence of Antonio Gramsci's work was also decisive insofar as he opened up new ways of analyzing the coercive effects of cultural apparatuses. This overall orientation has become much more diffuse in the later instantiations of

cultural studies, particularly in institutional settings—such as postwar America—bereft of a robust Marxist tradition. However, the authors mentioned above, as well as other significant figures like Edward Said, remain important reference points for rethinking the relation between art and politics.

*SRS: Your answer anticipates my concluding question, which is about the direction of critical theory presented in Politics of Culture and the Spirit of Critique. This threefold retreat you speak of—aesthetic, psychoanalytic, and radical—seems to reach its apex in the last section of the book entitled, “The Limits of Liberalism?” This section features a critical introduction to the politics of culture as conceived by liberal theorists Michael Sandel and Will Kymlicka. In view of this, we might say that the entire book follows a path that begins with critical theory and ends with liberal debate. Clearly, this arrangement is not meant to suggest something as simple as a clean line of evolution between critical theory and liberal thought; indeed the collection highlights points of discord amongst the thinkers (yourself and Gomez-Muller included) as well as continuity. That said, I am hoping you can comment a little more on the presentation of this trajectory as such, and if you think it reveals anything about the future of critical theory.*

GR: The organization of the book is, indeed, thematic and episodic rather than linear and progressive. In addition to dialogues with contemporary critical theorists, we decided to include discussions with figures at the boundaries of the critical theory tradition as well as with major representatives of contemporary liberalism in order to present at least three overlapping constellations of theoretical practices and inquire into the status of critical theory in the current conjuncture. It is true, of course, that post-Habermasian critical theory has largely become one of

the specialized interlocutors in the debates on political liberalism, and this was certainly one of our major concerns in the book. On the one hand, we sought to reactivate the revolutionary spirit of the more radical political orientation of some of the early critical theorists. This is true not only in our conversations with the representatives of the liberal tradition. It is also the case for our dialogues with those who identify with the critical theory tradition. On the other hand, and in spite of our willingness to directly engage with political liberalism, we evince throughout the book our concern for a truly *critical* theory that is not simply beholden to the liberal heritage. If there is a future for critical theory, it surely lies in this direction.

In the current political and social conjuncture, the incessant convulsive seizures of neoliberal capitalism suggest that the “liberal” centre—in both the political and the economic sense of the term—cannot hold in its current state. The massive social uprisings from Latin America to the entire Mediterranean region, including the Occupy movement in the United States and elsewhere, indicate that history—as I mentioned above—has by no means come to an end in the sense that the neoliberal apologists for pseudo-democracy would like to have us believe. If we add to this the fact that contemporary critical theory has at least partially become a specialized and more centrist discourse in moral, social, and political philosophy, then it becomes clear the extent to which it needs to reinvent itself in order to have any critical bearing on the current situation. This not only means rethinking the potential for revolutionary transformation of the current social, political, and economic order. It also means extending the purview of analysis beyond the confines of politics and morality in order to engage more directly with the fields of economics, aesthetics, history, psychoanalysis, etc.

Such an orientation, as I have noted, by no means presupposes remaining faithful to the first generation of the Frankfurt School or, for that matter, the Marxist tradition. Indeed, one of

the gestures necessary to revitalize the critical spirit found in some of the early Frankfurt School and many of its allies is precisely a critique of critical theory. To this end, an anti-sectarian engagement with other traditions and orientations is absolutely necessary. Hence our decision to include discussions with radical thinkers like Butler, West, and Wallerstein, as well as our references to the importance of Sartrean situationalism, pragmatism, liberation theology, the work of Gramsci, and so on. For critical theory to reinvent itself in the current conjuncture, it need not be concerned with intellectual pedigree, genealogical fidelity, or professional expertise in the restricted, academic sense of the term. Indeed, critical theory loses its critical edge as soon as it shirks self-criticism in the name of defending a particular history, a pantheon of ordained thinkers, or a set of enshrined commitments. In short, critical theory, in order to have a future worthy of its name, must be *nothing if not critical*.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The French and Spanish editions did not include the editors' introduction or the interview with Axel Honneth: Gabriel Rockhill and Alfredo Gomez-Muller, eds. *Critique et subversion dans la pensée contemporaine américaine: dialogues*. Paris: Éditions du Félin, 2010; Gabriel Rockhill and Alfredo Gomez Muller, eds. *La teoría crítica en Norteamérica: Política, ética y actualidad*. Medellín: La Carreta Editores, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of nuance, it is important to add that this quote is from a private letter in which Engels admits that he is not acquainted with the feminist movement in Scandinavia and is partially relying on his knowledge of Ibsen's plays. He explicitly states, moreover, that "the field covered by what is generally designated as the woman question is so vast that one cannot, within the confines of a letter, treat this subject thoroughly or say anything half-way satisfactory about it" ("Letter to Paul Ernst").

<sup>3</sup> Whether Siegfried Kracauer can be confirmed as a "first generation critical theorist" has been contested, for he was not employed by the *Institut für Sozialforschung* nor was he a student at it. He was, however, in constant professional dialogue with Benjamin, served as Adorno's teacher for a time, and wrote philosophical critiques of modern capitalist culture. For more on the nature of Kracauer's association with the Frankfurt School, see David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity* (1986) and Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience* (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Bürger does add the following qualification, which will have direct parallels in his thesis on the avant-garde: “Measured against their goals and the hopes that they carried, all revolutions have failed: this fact does not lessen their historical significance” (700).

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