OPEN ACCESS

PUCRS | ESCOLA DE HUMANIDADES

CIVITAS
Revista de Ciências Sociais
Programa de Pós-graduação em Sociologia e Ciência Política

Civitas 26: 1-11, jan.-dez. 2026
e-ISSN: 1984-7289 | ISSN-L: 1519-6089

DOSSIÊ: RESSONÂNCIA E DIAGNÓSTICOS DO TEMPO PRESENTE

Prolegomena to a genealogy of world-relations

Prolegômenos para uma genealogia das relações-mundo

Prolegómenos para una genealogía de las relaciones-mundo

James William Santos[1]
orcid.org/0000-0002-9806-1172
james.santos@uni-erfurt.de

Recebido em: 02 set. 2025
Aprovado em: 22 jan. 2026
Publicado em: 10 abr. 2026.

Abstract: This essay argues that Hartmut Rosa's dual diagnosis of modernity, comprising the alienating forces of social acceleration and the emancipatory potential of resonance, serves as a prolegomenon for a genealogy of world-relations. Although Rosa advocates for a genealogical approach, he does not fully develop it. It traces how his major works lay the conceptual groundwork for an emancipatory critique that is genealogical in nature. Drawing on Martin Saar's stylistic dimension of genealogy and Michel Foucault's notion of effective history, the outline of the initial steps toward realizing a genealogy of world-relations is provided. The provisional outcome aims at an expansion of the scope of Rosa's work to substantiate the analysis of diverse social dynamics and a synthesis of his core concepts into a critical practice.

Keywords: Resonance. Alienation. Acceleration. Genealogy. World-relations.

Resumo: Este ensaio argumenta que o duplo diagnóstico de modernidade de Hartmut Rosa, que compreende as forças alienantes da aceleração social e o potencial emancipatório da ressonância, serve como um prolegômeno para uma genealogia das relações-mundo. Embora Rosa defenda uma abordagem genealógica, ele não a desenvolve plenamente. O ensaio traça como suas principais obras estabelecem as bases conceituais para uma crítica emancipatória de natureza genealógica. Baseando-se na dimensão estilística da genealogia de Martin Saar e na noção de história efetiva de Michel Foucault, é apresentado o esboço dos passos iniciais para a concretização de uma genealogia das relações-mundo. O resultado provisório visa expandir o escopo da obra de Rosa para fundamentar a análise de diversas dinâmicas sociais e uma síntese de seus conceitos centrais em uma prática crítica.

Palavras-chave: Ressonância. Alienação. Aceleração. Genealogia. Relações-mundo.

Resumen: Este ensayo argumenta que el doble diagnóstico de la modernidad de Hartmut Rosa —la comprensión de las fuerzas alienantes de la aceleración social y el potencial emancipador de la resonancia— sirve como prólogo a una genealogía de las relaciones mundiales. Si bien Rosa defiende un enfoque genealógico, no lo desarrolla plenamente. El ensayo analiza cómo sus obras principales sientan las bases conceptuales para una crítica emancipadora de naturaleza genealógica. Basándose en la dimensión estilística de la genealogía de Martin Saar y la noción de historia efectiva de Michel Foucault, el ensayo describe los pasos iniciales para concretar una genealogía de las relaciones-mundo. El resultado provisional busca ampliar el alcance de la obra de Rosa para fundamentar el análisis de diversas dinámicas sociales y una síntesis de sus conceptos centrales en una práctica crítica.

Palabras clave: Resonancia. Alienación. Aceleración. Genealogía. Relaciones-mundo.

Este é um artigo de acesso aberto distribuído sob a licença CC-BY 4.0, que permite a cópia e redistribuição do material em qualquer formato e para qualquer finalidade, desde que a autoria original e os créditos de publicação sejam mantidos.

[1] Universtiy of Erfurt, Erfurt, Thuringia, Germany.

Introduction

When Hartmut Rosa set out to develop a sociology of our relationship to the world, he consciously followed the path paved by Heidegger's concept of Dasein.[2] But, he moved decisively beyond the ontological and phenomenological confines of Being itself. Instead of remaining within Heidegger's existential framework, Rosa dived into the concrete and dynamic experience of Being-In-the-world,[3] examining how it manifests biologically, socially, and institutionally amid the unfolding of modernity. Rosa took Dasein and the worldhood of world[4] into the realm of mediation, exploring how modern institutions, technologies, and social structures shape (and often distort) our fundamental relationship with the world. In doing so, he moved away from Heidegger's existential analytics into a critical Zeitdiagnose of modernity, interrogating the ways in which the phenomena of alienation and resonance define contemporary existence.

It is precisely because of Rosa's shift toward mediation—his focus on the institutional, technological, and social structures that shape our Being-In-the-world—that his work demands a deeper interrogation of its empirical grounding. Situating Dasein within the dynamic processes of modernity, Rosa aims to move beyond the traditional subject-object dichotomy and the individual-society divide. However, this raises crucial methodological questions: How does one empirically grasp an experience of the world that is neither reducible to subjective perception nor to objective social structures? If resonance, acceleration, and alienation are not individual feelings nor systemic forces but emergent phenomena arising from mediated relations, then how should sociology capture their "essence"[5] without falling back into reductive frameworks? Rosa's approach calls for a particular mode of empirical engagement—one that traces the fluid, relational textures of the worldhood without anchoring them in either atomized subjects or abstract social totalities. The challenge, then, is to articulate a method that does justice to the in-between—the vibrating, unstable, yet constitutive space where self and world co-emerge through mediation.

Indeed, Rosa has already explored a mode of critical engagement that could be the answer: genealogical inquiry, both explicitly in his essayistic reflections and intuitively throughout his broader work. Starting with his essay on genealogy (Rosa 2012), it will be clear how Rosa's stance on the approach can be animated towards fulfilling his social criticism goals. While he does not strictly adhere to a particular mode of genealogy in a methodological sense, he proposes his own approach through a synthesis of Michel Foucault's and Charles Taylor's works. What follows is an attempt to comprehend how his contributions in *Social Acceleration* (2013) and *Resonance* (2019) fit in his own idea of what a genealogical endeavor should pursue. The final part outlines the next steps towards a genealogy of world-relations, continuing on the path of genealogical inquiry, as well as why it particularly aligns with Rosa's conceptual approach. Drawing on the stylistic dimension of Martin Saar's genealogy and the meaning of effective history for the genealogical endeavor posed by Michel Foucault, we will

---

[2] "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. […] That kind of Being towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow, we call 'existence' [Existenz]" (Heidegger 1962, 32).

[3] "World exists - that is, it is - only if Dasein exists, only if there is Dasein. Only if world is there, if Dasein exists as being-in-the-world, is there understanding of being, and only if this understanding exists are intraworldly beings unveiled as extant and handy. World-understanding as Dasein-understanding is self-understanding. Self and world belong together in the single entity, the Dasein. Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object, or like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger 1982, 297).

[4] "In its ontic sense, 'world' is the entity which is obviously not the Dasein that is in it, but rather the entity with which [wobei] the Dasein has its being, the entity toward which the Dasein is. […] To determine the worldhood of world is to lay open in its structure the how of the encounter, drawn from that encounter, of the entity in which Dasein is as in-being in accord with its basic constitution, in short to lay open the structure of the being of this entity. Phenomenological interpretation of the worldhood of the world does not mean a narrative description reporting on the outward appearance of things in the world, […] the issue is not really all that can be found in the world but rather the how of the being of such an entity and of every entity of this sort: the wherein as the possibility of being of the leeway of encounter of in-being" (Heidegger 1985, 168-169).

[5] Essence in a Heideggerian sense is not a what but a how—the way a particular entity dynamically exists, projects itself into possibilities, more on Being and time (Heidegger, 1962) and the question concerning technology (Heidegger 1977).

outline the first hint forward for a genealogy of world-relations. Thus, while Rosa may not explicitly declare his work genealogical, its critical thrust carries a genealogical sensibility.

The call for a "gray" genealogy

In the essay *'Weiße' und 'schwarze' Genealogie*, Rosa discusses two contrasting genealogical approaches that analyze how self-interpretations and worldviews shape social reality. Rosa's effort is to distill what particularly different approaches toward genealogy can share and differ. To accomplish this task, Rosa utilizes the works of two authors: Michel Foucault and Charles Taylor. For Rosa (2012, 23-24), both authors agree that self-interpretations and worldviews that shape social reality are historically contingent and form the basis of holistic forms of life. For Taylor, this involves recovering the moral maps and ideals that move modern life, aiming to affirm and rescue core values from social practices that may distort or weaken them. Taylor's "white" genealogy (Rosa 2012, 25-26) seeks to strengthen our understanding of what truly matters to us, thereby allowing us to preserve beneficial aspects of our moral identity.

In contrast, Foucault's "black" (Rosa 2012, 26-28) genealogy exposes the violence and arbitrariness inherent in the emergence of norms and values. It seeks to delegitimize these sources, show their contingency, and open paths for critique and transgression. Still, both approaches share similar socio-political aims: they critically examine the moral and ideological foundations of society and encourage a reflective stance toward social goods. Each genealogical project has a stance on modernity. Either seeking to reconstruct the moral ideals rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, in Taylor's case. Or, on the opposite end, targeting the deconstruction of these ideals, as in Foucault's case.

Ultimately, Rosa advocates for a "gray" genealogy,[6] which would emerge as a synthesis—an approach that acknowledges the legitimacy of both perspectives. Such a method would evaluate these self-understandings as an interplay of power effects and moral pursuits, helping individuals and societies to discern which moments of their history and identity are worth preserving and which could be transformed. The 'mode of operation' for such a "gray" understanding of genealogy could then be formulated as such:

> Tell me the story of the genesis of my self-understanding as a series of power effects on the one hand and as a result of the pursuit of the good on the other hand in such a way that I, when/while listening, recognize which moments of myself seem to me worth preserving and which possibilities of overcoming or transgression arise for me with regard to the other moments (Rosa 2012, 32-33).

To fully grasp how Hartmut Rosa's work engages with genealogy, it is necessary to first explore his dual diagnosis of modernity, the insight into the alienating forces of social acceleration, and the emancipatory potential of resonance.

Acceleration, alienation, and resonance as groundings for genealogical inquiry

In the following paragraphs, it will be shown how Hartmut Rosa's critical theory reflects his engagement with genealogy. The prolegomena character of the dual diagnosis of modernity unfolds through a dialogue with each of his most significant contributions so far, *Social acceleration* and *Resonance*.

Social acceleration and the dark side of modernity

Social acceleration (Rosa 2013) explores the social temporal dimensions of modernity, arguing that acceleration is a central yet overlooked feature of modern societies. It identifies three forms of acceleration that are interconnected: technological (e.g., faster communication and

[6] Rosa's gray genealogy reconfigures the meaning behind Foucault's gray aspect of genealogy that speaks towards the operative manner in which it realizes itself. Foucault in his essay Nietzsche, Genealogy and History (1977, 139) gives a sense on how genealogy works and unsurprisingly points out that the approach is nothing less than meticulous and patiently documentary: It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.

transport), social (e.g., rapid changes in values and lifestyles), and the pace of life (e.g., the subjective feeling of time scarcity). The dynamics of social acceleration are presented as a feedback loop,[7] where each component reinforces the others, creating a self-propelling process (Rosa 2013, 151-152). As societies accelerate, it results in a contraction of the present moment, there is less stability and predictability, creating a feeling of being on a 'slippery slope', where the pace of life continually speeds up. People feel compelled to keep pace with these rapid changes to avoid missing out on valuable options and connections, which in turn intensifies the acceleration of daily life (Rosa 2013, 108-117, 120-130).

Two fundamental, interrelated transformations substantiate Rosa's claim (2013, 231-232): the transition in personal identities and the decline of politics in late modernity. Rosa emphasizes that, on a personal and individual level, in late modernity, neither work nor family life can be predicted or planned for over the course of a lifetime. For Rosa, this seems to be a kind of 'new situationism', evidently incompatible with the modern ideal of individual ethical autonomy. This new form of situational identity is marked by a sense of frantic and aimless movement that compounds to a form of inertia (Rosa 2013, 243-247). In the collective or political sphere, Rosa perceives that acceleration forces are targeting the same agents and institutions that launched them: the bureaucracy, the nation-state, the factory, and democratic policies (Rosa 2013, 262-266). Politics has also become situationist: it only reacts to pressure, rather than developing its own informed views (Rosa 2013, 269-270). Individually and politically, the sense of a directed movement in history has given way to a frenetic standstill.

Rosa's contribution to a "black genealogy" reframes modernity by exposing acceleration as a social symptom and as the core of modernization. In a Heideggerian vein, social acceleration emerges as modernity's ontological condition (its essence), where the modes of encountering the world and worldhood itself are shaped by the contraction of the present; time itself is compressed into an endless cycle of innovation and obsolescence, eroding stable meaning. The analysis reintroduces contingency, treating acceleration as a process of subjectivation from a Foucauldian point of view. In the end, Rosa relocates the contradictions at the heart of modernity: the same forces that promise liberation through acceleration also produce alienation, revealing a dialectic in which progress and paralysis are inextricably linked. Thus, his prolegomenon to black genealogy critiques modernity's pathologies and unmasks acceleration as the paradoxical engine of their reproduction.

In *Social acceleration*, dynamic stabilization emerges as a crucial aspect of the continuous push towards acceleration. Built on systems theory, the argument rests on the realization that the stability of modern social systems is not found in a "return to a stable stasis," but rather in ceaseless activity and constant renewal (Rosa 2013, 187). Yet, far from a genuine reconciliation with acceleration, it functions as a resigned compromise, a way to manage what is fundamentally an inescapable and destabilizing force.

The anticlimactic ending moves towards a reconciliation of the broken promises of autonomy and a renewed critique of alienation. One could argue that the diagnosis of social acceleration's true contribution is the unveiling of different permutations of alienation: what begins as an analysis of subjective experience — the disorientation and exhaustion of living under acceleration — expands into a sweeping diagnosis of cultural, social, and political disintegration.

Resonance and the bright side of the modern human experience

In *Resonance*, Rosa (2019, 174-184) claims that alienation is a particular mode of relating to the

[7] Underlying this cycle are three "motors": the economic logic of capitalism, thriving on growth and speed; the cultural aspiration to experience as much as possible; and the structural-functionally differentiation of societies, where the rapid transformation of the system environments implies the alteration of the grounds for selection and the horizons of expectation and imposes a heightening of operational tempo (Rosa 2013, 161-190).

world of things, people, and oneself, in which there is no responsiveness; it is a relationship without genuine connection. Alienation,[8] therefore, is a relationship lacking vibrant exchange or connection. One feels like a subject with no real voice confronting a silent, grey world "out there", and both appear either "frozen" or genuinely chaotic and mutually aversive.

Resonance, as the other of alienation, is the capacity to feel affected by something and, in turn, to develop an intrinsic interest in the part of the world that affects us (Rosa 2019, 164-166). Rosa's phenomenological conceptualization of resonance can be defined by four elements: i) af<-fection as in the sense of the experience of being truly touched or moved; ii) e->motion as the experience of responsive self-efficacy; iii) its transformative quality; and iv) the intrinsic moment of uncontrollability (Rosa 2019, 174). Establishing resonance is not something that one can bring about at will — it always has an elusive character that rests beyond our control. Resonance is not an echo, nor an amplification or reassurance of one's own stance. Resonance involves a real "other" that remains beyond our will, that speaks in its own voice, and remains "alien" to us. Resonance requires difference and sometimes opposition and contradiction to enable a genuine encounter.

Rosa's critique (2019, 171-173) of modernity through resonance begins by underlining that what seems specific to the social formation of modernity is a high degree of openness through closure.[9] This means that individuals reach their sensitivity to resonance, tending to close themselves off from what they find as the world. Rosa gives a moral map for modernity when he asserts that resonance should be a core normative concept for evaluating a good life and building a social philosophy. The task posed at this point is to examine the habitual and institutionalized structures, and investigate how its fundamental structures—such as work, family, art, religion, and our relationship with nature—can either facilitate or inhibit resonance.

At this point, the *zeitdiagnosis* continues; Rosa sustains that, under late modern conditions, this opening (for relations of resonance) proves highly precarious and is constantly threatened by a predominance of alienated relationships with the world.[10] To support his position on late modernity's diagnosis, Rosa illustrates how institutional developments during modernization have transformed individuals' relationships with themselves and the world, drawing on the analyses of Norbert Elias and Michel Foucault.

However, Rosa (2019, 400-403) realizes that in today's world, disciplinary and immediately reifying institutions have lost their prominence in many contexts, prompting a double move of promise and exploitation of resonance. On the one hand, schools, companies (whether established or startups), hospitals, or nursing homes promise sensitivity and/or attention to the lives of those directly or indirectly affected by the institution's mission. On the other hand, muted ways of relating to the self and the world have become so internalized and generalized that they have become the standard way of being in the world, that institutions now seek to increase productivity through creativity and motivational energies, which always require at least a residual element of resonant relationships, even if often precisely going against institutional final logic.

In *Resonance*, we witness the convergence of Rosa's genealogical aims, building upon the critique of alienation developed in *Social Acceleration*. Here, Rosa grounds his "white genealogy" in the Heideggerian tradition, framing resonance as both an ontic experience and an ontological condition — a mode of "being-in-the-world" where the subject is affectively addressed by it. In his phenomenology of resonance, Rosa subtly reanimates the existential analytic of Dasein — not as an isolated subject confronting the world, but as the "who" always already embedded in a web

---

[8] Rosa's notes that his approach to Alienation is indebted to Jaeggi's (2014) contribution on the subject.

[9] Taylor's historical contrast between the porous self of pre-modernity and the buffered self of modernity (Taylor 2007). provides a crucial conceptual foundation for Rosa's exploration of how modern individuals experience a loss of resonance with the world.

[10] See chapters XIV and XV (Rosa 2019).

of co-constitutive relations. Where Heidegger's Being-in-the-world emphasizes the most basic aspects of existence, Rosa's resonant subject emerges through transformative encounters with people, art, nature, or even history. Unlike Heidegger's often solitary *Dasein*, resonance brings about the inter-subjective pulse of being: the self is not just "thrown" "there" but vibrates with an other, answering and being answered by the world in a dynamic interplay.

Nevertheless, it is through Charles Taylor's conception of strong evaluations and moral mapping that resonance acquires its normative force, transforming it from an existential condition into the locus of modernity's stifled emancipatory potential. Resonance as a fundamental human longing — one that shapes our deepest commitments — elevates it to a moral ideal, a counterpoint to the alienating logic of acceleration. With that move, there is not only a diagnosis of modernity's failures but also a positing of resonance as a redeemable normative value that has been systematically suppressed. Resonance thus becomes more than phenomenological; it turns into a normative demand, a call to reclaim the responsive relationships that define a good life. Through Taylor's influence, the critique transcends its own diagnosis; it offers a vision of how modernity's moral aspirations for connection might still be realized.

The critical intervention here lies in shifting the focus of his diagnosis from the structural force of social acceleration to its lived, experiential consequences — revealing late modernity's central contradiction as a clash between the reifying logic of acceleration and the human longing for resonance that it simultaneously suppresses and incites. Where earlier the critique framed progress as a broken promise, there is now a deeper tension: the very institutions that enforce the acceleration process generate an existential hunger for connection — for relationships, spaces, and temporalities where the self and the world can mutually respond. This contradiction is not incidental but constitutive. Also, the reliance on the work of Foucault and Elias signals their attunement to his critical project. The acknowledgement of late modernity's "changing tides" calls for contributions to grapple with emerging forms of relationality.

Rosa's work establishes a prolegomenon for what he called a "gray genealogy", laying the conceptual groundwork without yet delivering its synthesis. His dual diagnosis — exposing acceleration as modernity's alienating engine while identifying resonance as its repressed counterpoint — maps the terrain for this critical approach, but stops short of analyzing how this tension manifests across different institutional and cultural contexts. In this sense, it leaves open the crucial question: how might these dynamic processes operate in specific domains — economic, political, technological — and what concrete forms of analysis could trace their iterations? Rosa's project invites further development: a proper gray genealogy would need to examine not just the broad impact of acceleration, alienation, and resonance, but also the varied mechanisms through which societies (from the subject's experience to institutions) negotiate, suppress, or transform this tension in practice.

A path for a genealogy of world-relations

Beyond the attempts to acknowledge or build a case for a normative-laden genealogy (Allen 2008, 2016; Koopman 2013; May 2014; Santos e Sobottka 2023; Santos 2025), the literature is well established on the prowess of the methodology in tracing the historical development and transformations of subjects self-understanding, ideas, practices, and institutions (Evans 2001; Geuss 2002; Saar 2007; Epstein 2010; Hanemaayer 2018; Sartori 2020). It is no coincidence that Rosa (2012) himself saw the potential of the approach.

Nevertheless, his work has followed different paths, but the current emphasis on resonance as a normative criterion for diagnosing how social conditions suppress individuals' capacity for transformative, responsive world-relationships demands precisely the kind of historical-contingent analysis that genealogy provides. Positioning

resonance as both a medio-passive experience and an emancipatory force[11] situates Rosa's theory already as a "critical ontology of ourselves," akin to Foucault's thinking.[12]

If the focus is primarily on the dynamic nature of the subject's experience and the structural social formations to concretize a transformative critique, the engagement with genealogy should be prolific. As the following discussion will demonstrate, committing to a genealogical approach considering Rosa's goal of deepening critical theory's emancipatory potential not only fits with the overall diagnosis but also could provide the missing link between his macro-level insight and the situated yearnings for a more resonant life. Particularly relevant to Rosa's work is Martin Saar's approach and the idea of genealogy as effective history.

The stylistic dimension of genealogy

Overall, Martin Saar's reading of Nietzsche and Foucault (2002, 2008) is illustrative of the critical edge that the approach provides for a genealogy world-relations. "Genealogy in an interesting and constitutive way always does concern subjects or selves, i.e., something that is concerned about itself in its very being (to paraphrase Heidegger's quasi-definition of Dasein)" (Saar 2002, 232). For Saar, genealogy is never a detached, objective analysis of external historical structures; it is constitutively a practice that implicates the critic and their own conditions of possibility. The Heidegger reference is crucial, as it positions the subject of genealogy not as a stable, predefined entity (a subject *against* an object world), but as a question to itself — a being whose very nature is to be engaged. This realization demonstrates that the primary object of genealogical criticism is not the subject or the world in isolation, but the dynamic and constitutive relation between them.

Methodologically, Saar (2008, 308-309) identifies a crucial third dimension in genealogy beyond its thematic and explanatory functions:[13] its *stylistic* form. This involves a deliberate, experimental rhetoric that constructs hypothetical scenarios — "thought-images" or theoretical fictions — to narrate the emergence of values and practices within power-laden processes. Rather than offering conventional historical accounts, genealogy employs imaginative allegory and strategic metaphor to disrupt familiar perspectives and render visible the hidden connections between morality and power in unexpected domains.

Social acceleration systematically dismantles the conditions for a narratable life. The contraction of the present into a series of unrelated moments fractures temporal continuity, eroding the ability to integrate lived time into a legible whole. This loss is not subjective, it is a political and existential crisis, as agency depends on the capacity to narrate oneself within history. Through its stylistic form, which exposes contingency, revealing how the seemingly immutable rhythms of modernity are constructed through specific historical social dynamics, genealogy would allow us to "read" the processes that produced our fractured temporality, not as a natural fate but as the outcome of contested choices and institutions. The reconstruction of submerged histories of acceleration (how time was disciplined, resonance suppressed, and alienation normalized) re-empowers us to narrate our condition anew. It can transform the isolated, accelerated subject into a historical agent who can recognize their predicament as shaped and therefore changeable. In doing so, it does not just diagnose the loss of narrative; it practices a form of narrative recovery, turning alienated time back into a story we can dissent from.

In genealogical endeavor, this stylistic capacity is vital: it could transform concepts, such as acceleration and resonance, into vivid, historically situated experiences of contradiction and possibility. If one were to follow through with the adoption of genealogy's narrative tools, one

---

[11] See more at Rosa (2023).
[12] See more at Santos (2025).
[13] "First, on the level of thematic scope, it has a narrow range of objects and is only interested in tracing the histories of values, practices and institutions that relate to subjectivities and self-formation. Second, on the level of explication, its main explanatory mechanism is to relate the historical data to an account of forces and powers" (Saar 2008, 312).

could bridge, for example, the structural diagnosis and the lived texture of alienation, making the abstract violence of acceleration felt and the latent desire for resonance actionable. Genealogy's stylistic form is designed to engage and transform its audience,[14] aligning with the aim not just to analyze the world but to change how we are positioned within it, turning critique into a resonant intervention.

This audience-oriented dimension of genealogy is precisely what could sharpen a world-relations' critical project into a more transformative practice. Genealogy does not present historical analysis; it performs a confrontation, deliberately structuring its narrative to provoke a specific readerly experience — one of estrangement and acknowledgement. It makes the familiar strange, asking its audience to see themselves within power relations and social dynamics they had previously naturalized, revealing that their "present" is built on contingent, at times exclusionary, choices rather than inevitabilities (Saar 2008, 311).[15] The "strangeness effect" would allow readers not only to understand but also to feel that their hurried lives and muted relationships are not natural outcomes, but rather politically and culturally engineered results, ones that could have been (and still could be) otherwise.

Genealogy's episodic-oriented style is uniquely positioned to leverage Rosa's dual diagnosis of modernity precisely because it operates at the granular level, deploying empirically rooted "thought-images." Its stylistic approach directly engages with the human latent desire for resonance. It addresses readers not as passive recipients of theory but as implicated historical subjects. In doing so, it has world-disclosing potency.

Genealogy as effective history

Directly attuned to Saar's characterization of the style that genealogy poses is the realization Foucault had of his *oeuvre*. In an extensive 1978 interview (2001, 239-297), Foucault was prompted to reflect on the intellectual and political trajectory of his work up to that point. The interviewer begins by attempting to identify a consistent thread, a systematic approach, or a theoretical underpinning within Foucault's work. This line of questioning eventually led the French author to assert that he saw his books as deliberate experiments, interventions meant to wrench readers from their familiar selves, to see to it that the subject is no longer themselves.[16]

For Foucault, an experience is fundamentally a kind of fiction—not because it is false, but because it is something actively fabricated, a deliberate construction that did not exist beforehand and whose transformative effect will only fully emerge in its aftermath. The value of a genealogical "experience-book" lies in its creation of a shared, fictional space (a scandalous, historically charged narrative) that others can encounter, allowing the private shock of acknowledgement to escape isolation and become a public resource for critique. The "fiction" of the experience is its greatest truth, an intervention that destabilizes the given, making new forms of life thinkable:

> If I had wanted, for example, to do the history of psychiatric institutions in Europe between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, obviously I wouldn't have written a book like Madness and Civilization. But my problem is not to satisfy professional historians; my problem is to construct myself, and to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed. Which means that

[14] "The genealogical attempt to establish these connections in such an apodictic and imaginative fashion has to be called conscious, even methodical hyperbole and it should be read as an attempt to directly relate to the affective constitution of its readers" (Saar 2008, 310).

[15] "One might say that the genealogical text is meant to put the readers' identity into crisis by confronting them with descriptions about themselves that radically contradict their own selfunderstanding and thereby to encourage them to revise their judgements and practices, and this means ultimately, to revise themselves. But to describe the goal of genealogy in this way, one has indeed left the field of theory and history proper and has started to think of genealogies as "practical" texts with an existential dimension. But to claim this to be an essential feature of the genealogical text itself means once more to mark its difference from any mere historical text"(Saar 2008, 311).

[16] "The idea of a limit-experience that wrenches the subject from itself is what was important to me in my reading of Nietzsche, Bataille, and Blanchot, and what explains the fact that however boring, however erudite my books may be, I've always conceived of them as direct experiences aimed at pulling myself free of myself, at preventing me from being the same" (Foucault 2001, 241-242).

> at the end of a book we would establish new relationships with the subject at issue (Foucault 2001, 242).

This quote from Foucault not only crystallizes the transformative effect pursued by genealogy — to construct and share an experience that alters our relationship to ourselves and our present — but also reveals its inherently ambiguous, even provocative, relationship with conventional history. Methodologically, Foucault distinguishes his approach from that of professional historians. He is not concerned with reconstructing the past "as it was" or satisfying archival standards, but with using historical materials to create a critical experience of the present. Despite its transformative goals and its tendency to unsettle conventional historical narratives, genealogical work remains deeply attached to the record of events—not to affirm a linear or teleological history, but to disrupt it from within.

As Foucault (1977, 140) emphasizes in the essay *Nietzsche, genealogy, history*, genealogy turns even to the most "unpromising places," those that seem devoid of history, and depends on a meticulous accumulation of source material. It is through the assembly of "discreet and apparently insignificant truths", the fragments overlooked by grand narratives, that genealogy constructs its "cyclopean monuments". For historians committed to empirical reconstruction, the genealogical effort may seem like a misuse of the past. For genealogy, it is the only way to restore the past as a question — one that implicates us in the present and opens the possibility of becoming otherwise. Thus, genealogy's "misuse" of history is precisely what enables it to achieve what orthodox history cannot.

Where historians might seek continuity, objectivity, and comprehensive narrative, genealogy deliberately employs discontinuity, perspective, and strategic fragmentation to make history effective — that is, to force a confrontation with the contingency of our own reality. "History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being—as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself" (Foucault 1977, 154). This dissociation is not nihilistic, but liberating; it affirms that knowledge is always a perspective, a voice that refuses neutrality and instead takes a stand within the reality it describes.

Genealogy, as effective history, emerges not just as a method of critique.[17] It functions as a deliberate provocation, using the raw material of the past to construct a narrative that scandalizes the present to address its readers. It is the vehicle to a voice that is both rigorously documented and dramatically charged; genealogy becomes an "other" that meets us as embodied subjects entangled in our social dynamics. The transformation it invites is unpredictable yet possibly profound.

In the end, a genealogy of world-relations functions as a critical tool applicable across diverse contexts, but also, perhaps more importantly, as a profound disclosive practice: it illuminates how we encounter the world, both through experience and the mediating instances that shape those encounters. It can potentially answer the call for a critique that is at once diagnostic and emancipatory, revealing why the world fails to resonate and how we might begin to reassemble the fragments of our experience into a life that can once again respond to and be responded to by a world worth engaging with.

Closing remarks

If the springboard for Rosa's work is the nature of Heidegger's always-already implied others in Being-in-the-world, the underdeveloped nature of the figure of "*das Man*" that embodies social norms, or the unfinished task regarding the equiprimordiality of attunement, his work definitively moves us forward by plunging these ontological structures into the concrete, mediated processes of modernity. Rosa transcends Heidegger's existential framework with an examination of how sociality actively shapes our world relations, and the diagnosis of the pathologies of contempo-

[17] More on the bracketed impacts of Foucault's work as effective history in historical-sociological studies see Dean (1994).

rary life (alienation, temporal contraction, and inertial fatigue) without reducing them to either mere subjective experience or reified objective structure. Rosa's work provides a foundation for a critical theory of late modernity, mapping the terrain between the alienating forces of social acceleration and the transformative potential of resonance. He succeeds in identifying an ever-evolving contradiction and in revealing it as constitutive of our modern form of life: the very systems that promise liberation through growth and innovation simultaneously produce an existential hunger for connection that they systematically thwart.

However, as we have argued, while Rosa himself advocates for a genealogical endeavor, he never fully develops one; instead, his dual diagnosis of modernity is strategically set up to function as a prolegomenon for future genealogies of world-relations. His work provides the "what" and the "why" of our contemporary crisis; a proper genealogical effort must now answer: the "how." His oeuvre created the space for subsequent genealogical inquiries to trace the specific, contingent historical processes within different social contexts, institutional, technological, and cultural domains.

The conceptual pairing of social acceleration and resonance demands a kind of historical treatment and stylistically potent analysis that genealogy provides. Through "thought-images" and the goal of an effective history genealogy appears poised to transform Rosa's concepts and diagnosis into readable narratives of how our fractured temporality and muted relationships were constructed. Yet, the ultimate hint towards how this project can be found in the call for a gray genealogy (Rosa 2012): Tell me the story of the genesis of my self-understanding as a series of power effects on the one hand and as a result of the pursuit of the good (life) on the other hand in such a way that I, when/while listening, recognize which moments of myself seem to me worth preserving (primed for resonance) and which possibilities of overcoming or transgression arise for me with regard to the other moments (the ones that push towards an alienated form of life).

This call to action invites us to expand the scope of Rosa's work into a methodological tool for analyzing and critiquing various social dynamics. This genealogy has the potential to become the missing link to synthesize social acceleration, alienation, and resonance. It could, hopefully, transform Rosa's dual diagnosis into an emancipatory practice, opening avenues for new stories of world-relations.

References

Allen, Amy. 2008. *The politics of ourselves: power, autonomy, and gender in contemporary critical theory*. Columbia University Press.

Allen, Amy. 2016. *The end of progress: decolonizing the normative foundations of critical theory*. Columbia University Press.

Dean, Mitchell. 1994. *Critical and effective histories: Foucault's methods and Historical Sociology*. Routledge.

Epstein, Brian. 2010. History and the critique of social concepts. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 40(1): 3-29. https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393109350678.

Evans, Fred. 2001. Genealogy and the problem of affirmation in Nietzsche, Foucault and Bakhtin. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 27(3): 41-65. https://doi.org/10.1177/019145370102700303.

Foucault, Michel. 1977. Nietzsche, genealogy, history. In *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard. Cornell University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2001. *Power*. Translated by James D. Faubion. New Press.

Geuss, Raymond. 2002. Genealogy as critique. *European Journal of Philosophy* 10(2): 209-215. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0378.00157.

Hanemaayer, Ariane. 2018. Genealogy as a counter human science. *Canadian Review of Sociology* 55(2): 217-238. https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12197.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Blackwell Publishers.

Heidegger, Martin. 1977. *The question concerning technology and other essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. Garland Publishing, Inc.

Heidegger, Martin. 1982. *The basic problems of phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Indiana University Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1985. *History of the concept of time: prolegomena*. Translated by Theodore Kisiel. Indiana University Press.

Jaeggi, Rahel. 2014. *Alienation*. Columbia University Press.

Koopman, Colin. 2013. *Genealogy as critique: Foucault and the problems of modernity*. Indiana University Press.

May, Todd. 2014. Genealogy, problematization, and normativity in Michel Foucault. *History and Theory* 53(3): 419-427. https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10721.

Rosa, Hartmut. 2012. 'Weiße' und 'schwarze' genealogie: affirmative und pejorative Wertgeschichten bei Taylor und Foucault. In *Perspektiven der Aufklärung: zwischen Mythos und Realität*, edited by Michael Hofmann and Katja Stopka. Meidenbauer.

Rosa, Hartmut. 2013. *Social acceleration: a new theory of modernity*. Translated by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys. Columbia University Press.

Rosa, Hartmut. 2019. *Resonance: a sociology of our relationship to the world*. Translated by James C. Wagner. Polity Press.

Rosa, Hartmut. 2023. Resonance as a medio-passive, emancipatory and transformative power: a reply to my critics. *The Journal of Chinese Sociology* 10(1): 16. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40711-023-00195-4.

Saar, Martin. 2002. Genealogy and subjectivity. *European Journal of Philosophy* 10(2): 231-245. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0378.00159.

Saar, Martin. 2007. *Genealogie als Kritik: Geschichte und Theorie des Subjekts nach Nietzsche und Foucault*. Campus Verlag.

Saar, Martin. 2008. Understanding genealogy: history, power, and the Self. *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2(3): 295-314. https://doi.org/10.1163/187226308X335976.

Santos, James William. 2025. Foucault's genealogical normative stance. *Thesis Eleven*. https://doi.org/10.1177/07255136251335664.

Santos, James William, and Emil Albert Sobottka. 2023. Genealogy, immanent critique and forms of life: a path for decolonial studies. *Human Affairs* 33(1): 101-114. https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2022-2034.

Sartori, Andrew. 2020. Genealogy, critical theory, history. *Critical Historical Studies* 7(1): 63-74. https://doi.org/10.1086/707986.

Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A secular age*. Harvard University Press.

James William Santos

Pesquisador de pós-doutorado no Max-Weber-Kolleg, Universität Erfurt, Germany. Doutor e mestre em Ciências Sociais pela Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul (Pucrs), Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil.

Endereço para correspondência

Nordhäuser Str. 63, 99089

Erfurt, Alemanha

Disponibilidade de dados

Não se aplica.

Conflito de interesse

O autor declara não haver conflito de interesses.

Como citar este artigo

Santos, J.W. 2026. Prolegomena to a genealogy of world-relations. *Civitas*, *2026*(1), e-ID48808. https://doi.org/10.15448/2178-5694.2026.1.48808

Editoras da revista

Fernanda Bittencourt Ribeiro

Teresa Cristina Schneider Marques

Os textos deste artigo foram revisados pela Texto Certo Assessoria Linguística e submetidos para validação dos autores antes da publicação.