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DOSSIÊ: RESSONÂNCIA E DIAGNÓSTICOS DO TEMPO PRESENTE

Critique of "world-relations" or "forms of life"? Phenomenology and practice theory in the Frankfurt School's new social ontologies

¿Crítica de las "relaciones con el mundo" o de las "formas de vida"? Fenomenología y teoría de la práctica en las nuevas ontologías sociales de la Escuela de Frankfurt.

Crítica das "relações com o mundo" ou das "formas de vida"? Fenomenologia e teoria da prática nas novas ontologias sociais da Escola de Frankfurt

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Abstract: The present paper establishes a counterpoint between Hartmut Rosa's and Rahel Jaeggi's social ontologies – the theory of world-relations and the theory of forms of life – emphasizing the phenomenological nature of the former and the practice-theoretical orientation of the latter. The thesis is defended that, despite their differences, the theory of forms of life and the theory of world-relations are compatible and complementary, making a mutually enlightening dialogue between them potentially fruitful. The argument proceeds in four steps. First (1), the common reasons that motivate the authors to develop their social ontologies are examined. Second (2), the main traits of the theory of forms of life are outlined. Third (3), the same is done for the theory of world-relations. The conclusion (4) initiates a productive dialogue between the two approaches.

Keywords: Phenomenology. Practice theory. Critical theory. Hartmut Rosa. Rahel Jaeggi.

Resumen: El presente trabajo establece un contrapunto entre las ontologías sociales de Hartmut Rosa y Rahel Jaeggi – la teoría de las relaciones con el mundo y la teoría de las formas de vida –, destacando el carácter fenomenológico de la primera y la orientación praxeológica de la segunda. Como se mostrará, pese a sus diferencias, la teoría de las relaciones con el mundo y la teoría de las formas de vida son compatibles y complementarias, lo cual hace posible un diálogo de mutuo esclarecimiento entre ambas. El argumento se desarrolla en cuatro pasos. En primer lugar (1), se examinan las razones compartidas que motivan a Rosa y Jaeggi a desarrollar sus respectivas ontologías sociales. En segundo término (2), se delinean los rasgos principales de la teoría de las formas de vida. En tercer lugar (3), se reconstruyen los núcleos conceptuales de la teoría de las relaciones con el mundo. La conclusión (4) abre un diálogo productivo entre ambos enfoques.

Palabras clave: Fenomenología. Teoría de las prácticas sociales. Teoría crítica. Hartmut Rosa. Rahel Jaeggi.

Resumo: O presente trabalho estabelece um contraponto entre as ontologias sociais de Hartmut Rosa e Rahel Jaeggi – a teoria das relações com o mundo e a teoria das formas de vida –, destacando o caráter fenomenológico da primeira e a orientação praxeológica da segunda. Como será demonstrado, apesar de suas diferenças, a teoria das relações com o mundo e a teoria das formas de vida são compatíveis e complementares, o que torna possível um diálogo de esclarecimento mútuo entre ambas. O argumento desenvolve-se em quatro etapas. Em primeiro lugar (1), examinam-se as razões compartilhadas que motivam Rosa e Jaeggi a desenvolver suas respectivas ontologias sociais. Em segundo lugar (2), delineiam-se os principais traços da teoria das formas de vida. Em terceiro lugar (3), reconstroem-se os núcleos conceituais da teoria das relações com o mundo. A conclusão (4) abre um diálogo produtivo entre ambas as abordagens.

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Palavras-chave: Fenomenologia. Teoria das práticas sociais. Teoria crítica. Hartmut Rosa. Rahel Jaeggi.

Introduction

It is now common to speak of four generations of the Frankfurt School. The first is that of the founding fathers—Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse—; the second centers around the figure of Jürgen Habermas; and the third is prominently represented by Axel Honneth. As many commentators agree (e.g., Gödde and Zirfas 2018, 455), the fourth and current generation finds two of its main representatives in Rahel Jaeggi and Hartmut Rosa.

To be sure, Jaeggi's and Rosa's novel versions of Critical Theory, exhaustively presented in *Kritik von Lebensformen* (Jaeggi 2014) and *Resonanz* (Rosa 2016), differ markedly. However, as I will show in this paper, they share an essential trait: both are based on extensive *social-ontological* considerations, i.e., theoretical reflections on the nature and constitutive features of social reality (Gros 2023). While Jaeggi (2014) attempts to conceptualize the social *in toto* in terms of "forms of life" [*Lebensformen*], Rosa (2016; 2021) develops a multi-leveled social ontology in which the analysis of "world-relations" [*Weltbeziehungen*] plays a central role.

Rosa's and Jaeggi's *social ontologies* are of a very specific kind. Without disregarding the macro-structural dimensions of social reality, they understand it as essentially constituted and experienced within the informal sphere of *everyday life* (Jaeggi 2014, 69-70; Rosa 2016, 61-63). And, importantly, they emphasize its *materiality* and *meaningfulness*: both the theory of forms of life and that of world-relations characterize the social not only as embodied and embedded but also as structured in terms of cultural interpretations (Jaeggi 2018b, 67, 73; Rosa 2016, 214).

Interestingly, this account of social reality draws on theoretical sources usually criticized, neglected, or only partially acknowledged by Critical Theory, namely, interpretive, pragmatically oriented, and rather micro-sociological approaches, such as hermeneutics, American pragmatism, phenomenology, and contemporary practice theory (Gros 2024). While the theory of forms of life is fundamentally *practice-theoretical* in character (Gros 2021; Jaeggi 2018b, 67), the theory of world-relations can be regarded as a *phenomenology*-based approach (Gros 2024; Rosa 2016, 65).

Jaeggi's and Rosa's Critical Theories have been discussed separately in recent publications (e.g., Hollstein and Oberthür 2025; Allen and Mendieta 2018). And some partial attempts have been made to establish a relationship between them, especially regarding their accounts of alienation (Sørensen 2019). However, there are no exhaustive analyses of the compatibilities and discrepancies between the theory of forms of life and that of world-relations as *social ontologies*, let alone attempts to bring them into a productive dialogue.

In the present paper, I aim to fill this lacuna in the secondary literature by establishing a systematic counterpoint between the authors' social-ontological perspectives. The scope of my inquiry is deliberately restricted. I will focus on the *descriptive* aspects of both theories, leaving aside their controversial *normative* positions, namely, Rosa's (2016) concept of "resonance" and Jaeggi's (2023) views on the "learning" and "progress" capacities of forms of life. The key thesis I will defend is that, despite their differences, both social ontologies are compatible and complementary, making a mutually enlightening dialogue potentially fruitful.

My argument will proceed in four steps. First (1), I will analyze the common reasons that motivate both Rosa and Jaeggi to develop their social ontologies. Second (2), I will outline the main traits of Jaeggi's theory of forms of life. Third (3), I will do the same for Rosa's theory of world-relations. The conclusion (4) initiates a productive dialogue between the two approaches.

The rationale behind the Frankfurt School's new social ontologies

Why do Jaeggi and Rosa embark on painstaking social-ontological reflections? And why do they both define the social as a meaningful

and material reality constituted at the level of everyday praxis? In my view, there are two kinds of reasons that motivate them to develop their pragmatic-interpretive social ontologies. While the first (1) are of a strictly *social-theoretical* nature, the second (2) mainly relate to *critical-theoretical* issues.

(1) Rosa's and Jaeggi's new social ontologies can only be understood against the background of the deep transformations of mainstream social theory over the past decades. I am referring not only to (1.1) the "interpretive" or "cultural turn," which traces back to the 1970s (Reckwitz 2002, 244-246), but also to (1.2) the post-linguistic "material" turns of culturalist social theories since the early 2000s (Reckwitz 2016, 98-99).

(1.1) In line with the culturalist and interpretivist "revolutions" in social theory (Reckwitz 2002, 245), both Rosa (2012, 105) and Jaeggi (2015, 15) reject objectivistic-naturalistic accounts of social reality, understanding it instead as a *reality constitutively structured in terms of meaning*, i.e., as a world that can only be what it is—and operate as it does—as the correlate of cultural interpretations. Not coincidentally, both derive this view from Charles Taylor's definition of the human being as a "self-interpreting animal," whose whole existence depends on giving meaning to herself and her surroundings (Rosa 2021, 161-162; Jaeggi 2014, 338). Importantly, the theory of forms of life and that of world-relations agree that "socially constitutive self-interpretations" (Rosa 2012, 104-105) are never purely cognitive but always already *normatively laden* (Jaeggi 2014, 106-107), containing what Rosa aptly calls "socially constitutive norms" (Rosa unpublished manuscript).

(1.2) Additionally, Jaeggi (2014, 94-96) and Rosa (2016, 83-85) align with recent developments in culturalist social theory, such as the "practice," "affective," and "body" turns (Reckwitz 2016, 98-99). With these novel perspectives, both authors share the rejection of the idealistic, rationalistic, and language-centric tendencies of mainstream social theory up until recent decades, as well as the aim of rehabilitating the material and non-intellectual dimensions of the social. Jaeggi's theory of forms of life is conceived as a Marx-inspired "materialistic" approach, which takes seriously the embeddedness of *Lebensformen* in natural—i.e., biological, climatic, geographic, etc.—and artifactual conditions (Jaeggi 2014, 96, 124). In turn, Rosa's theory of world-relations offers rich phenomenological descriptions of embodiment (Rosa 2016, 83-132) and affectivity (Rosa 2016, 187-235), while also analyzing lived relations to natural phenomena, architectural settings, and material objects (Rosa 2016, 381-387).

(2) But this is only half of the story. Rather than being an end in themselves, Rosa's and Jaeggi's social ontologies are from the outset *in the service of critical-theoretical purposes*. More precisely, they constitute interventions in current debates on the nature of normative social critique both within and beyond the Frankfurt School tradition (Rosa 2016, 38-53; Jaeggi 2014, 9-18). In my view, one can distinguish two kinds of *critical-theoretical* reasons that motivate the authors to develop their pragmatic-interpretive social ontologies. While the first (2.1) are related to the contemporary *immanentization* of normative critique (Celikates 2009, 19-21), the second (2.2) concern its recent trends toward *ethicization* (Forst 2011, 12).

(2.1) By *immanentization*, I refer to the contemporary tendency in critical social thought to base critique on normative standards immanent to the viewpoints of lay social actors. This tendency constitutes a response to the crisis of the "orthodox" model of theoretical social criticism, paradigmatically represented by classical Marxist ideology critique (Celikates 2009, 19-21). In ideal-typical terms, this model, present in the work of authors as different as Adorno, Althusser, and Bourdieu, can be characterized as *externalist-paternalist*.

Either explicitly or implicitly, the "orthodox" model tends to operate with normative criteria that remain *external* to the self-interpretations of the society under critique. In a *paternalist* gesture, the critical theorist underestimates lay actors' viewpoint, imposing upon them standards derived from her alleged superior knowledge of social reality, be it philosophical or sociological

(Rosa 2012, 271). It is not difficult to see why this approach is usually depicted as "*quasi-Platonic*" (Celikates 2009, 30), as it starts from the premise of a cognitive asymmetry between *episteme* and *doxa*, which legitimizes the subordination of the latter to the former.

Toward the end of the last century, this premise came to be seen as problematic. On the one hand, the assumption of the cognitive superiority of *episteme* over *doxa* started to erode because of the post-metaphysical "decentering" and "devaluation" of philosophical and scientific reason (Habermas 1988, 36). On the other hand, hierarchical proposals for organizing political life, such as the model of the philosopher—or sociologist—king, began to look suspicious in political thought, being replaced by egalitarian-participatory views of different kinds, ranging from deliberative-democratic to populist proposals. Against this background, the need to develop new modalities of critique capable of avoiding the traps of "epistemological and ethical authoritarianism" arose (Cooke 2005, 382).

Starting in the 1980s, the crisis of the "orthodox" model of critique gave rise to *internalist-democratic* approaches to social criticism, such as those developed by communitarianism, pragmatic sociology of critique, and contemporary versions of Critical Theory. These approaches seek to base critique on normative standards *immanent* to society's self-interpretations. Accordingly, in its different versions, internalist critique depends on taking the cognitive-normative viewpoint of lay actors seriously and on developing a *meaning-adequate understanding* of it (Gros 2024). Not surprisingly, to grasp the immanent meaning structure of pre-scientific social reality, internalist critics draw on theoretical and methodological resources from intellectual traditions historically devoted to this task, such as phenomenology, ethnomethodology, pragmatism, hermeneutics, and practice theory (Gros 2024).

Crucially, one of the fundamental ways in which these resources are mobilized for social critique is through the elaboration of *interpretive-pragmatic social ontologies*, which serve as general theoretical frameworks for reconstructing social self-interpretations. In this sense, as Titus Stahl rightly argues, an essential link between the rise of internalist critique models and that of social-ontological reflection in contemporary Critical Theory can be established:

> to justify a critical judgment by reference to immanent social standards, a theory must plausibly explain the sense in which such immanent standards "exist." Providing such an explanation requires a *social ontology*. (Stahl 2013, 534)

Rosa's and Jaeggi's intensive engagement with social-ontological issues can only be understood against this background. Importantly, however, their perspectives regarding the internalist foundation of normative critique differ markedly. A reconstruction of these differences would exceed the scope of this paper.

(2.2) By the *ethicization* of critique, I mean a *turn to ethics* that can be observed since the late twentieth century in several approaches in normative political thought, as a response to the hegemony of *moral* perspectives. As is well known, there are different ways of distinguishing ethics and morality in philosophy. The specific distinction at stake here is the one that came to prominence with the debate between communitarianism and liberalism in the 1980s (Honneth 1993).

The *ethical* approach to normative issues, advocated by communitarianism (Sandel 1993), ultimately traces back to Aristotle and addresses the qualitative question of how to lead a "good life," i.e., an "authentic" or "self-realized" existence (Habermas 1991, 34-5, 62, 109). The focus here is on the conditions of possibility of a "successful individual conduct of life [*Lebensführung*]" or a "happy social form of life [*Lebensform*]," as well as on the identification of "failed" or "alienated" ones (Habermas 1991, 62). By contrast, the moral approach, championed by liberalism (Rawls 1993), goes back to Kant's practical philosophy and primarily deals with the question of "justice" [*Gerechtigkeit*] (Habermas 1991, 37). This tradition sees the question of the "good life" as a private and irrational matter, which can be answered neither philosophically nor politically (Sandel

1993, 19). For that reason, it confines normative reflection to the *rational construction* of "just," i.e., "impartial" and "fair," rules to arbitrate conflicts between people with different ethical views (Habermas 1991, 109, 113).

Importantly, the ethical approach to normativity shows a strong affinity with *interpretive-hermeneutical* perspectives. To adequately assess the *quality* of a particular *ethos*, be it individual or collective, it is first necessary to *reconstruct* its immanent meaning structure. In this sense, ethical reflection always entails a "hermeneutical clarification of the self-understanding" of the person or culture under evaluation (Habermas 1991, 109). This does not apply to the Kantian moral tradition. Quite on the contrary, the *construction* of regulatory frameworks through reason typically involves an "abstraction" from "concrete ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*]," i.e., a "break" with lifeworldly experiences, practices, and self-interpretations (Habermas 1991, 35, 113).

Jaeggi (2014) and Rosa (2016) decidedly advocate *ethical* social criticism. Arguably, their interpretive-pragmatic social ontologies offer the conceptual tools necessary to enable this form of critique. More precisely, the authors' defense of the ethics approach in Critical Theory constitutes a response to the hegemony of moral perspectives in normative social thought. Jaeggi and Rosa complain that, due to the fixation on justice issues, the central problem of ethics—namely, the question of how to lead a "good life"—has been exiled from critical-theoretical reflection. Ethical issues have become a "black box," being "privatized" and "irrationalized" as a matter of mere subjective taste (Rosa 2016, 38; Jaeggi 2014, 18, 50). Contrary to this view, both argue that everyday *ethoi* are socio-politically structured phenomena that can—and must—be rationally discussed and criticized (Jaeggi 2014, 9-10; Rosa 2012, 97-98). Against this background, their interpretive-pragmatic social ontologies can be understood as keys to "open the black box" of ethical life (Jaeggi 2014, 31).

Jaeggi's theory of forms of life as a practice-theoretical social ontology: *what are forms of life?*

Jaeggi's concept of "form of life" [*Lebensform*] refers to the socio-culturally shaped way in which a collectivity conducts, organizes, and reproduces its everyday life. In other words, it denotes the rather informal and routinized manners in which the central tasks of quotidian social existence—working, eating, loving, playing, educating children, bidding farewell to the dead, etc.—are performed by a group or society (Jaeggi 2018b, 74-75; 2014, 78). Importantly, forms of life are not individual but essentially "*collective formations*" [*kollektive Gebilde*] (Jaeggi 2014, 77). Whereas Weber's classical concept of "conduct of life" [*Lebensführung*] indicates the *ethos* of *individual* existence, the notion of "form of life" does the same with respect to the life of a collectivity (Jaeggi 2014, 71, 77).

Forms of life thus constitute "cultures of joint action" (Seel quoted in Jaeggi, 2014, 70) that govern our mundane, day-to-day business. According to Jaeggi (2014, 90-1; 2018b, 65), this definition applies both to microsocial formations, such as the "nuclear family," and to macrosocial ones like "urban life," "modernity," or "capitalism". There are *Lebensformen* of different ranges and sizes, which, of course, are not unrelated to each other: the "nuclear family," for instance, is essentially embedded in "modernity" (Jaeggi 2018b, 65, 69).

More precisely, the theory of forms of life defines forms of life as "ensembles of practices and orientations" (Wingert quoted in Jaeggi 2014, 77). This means that they are composed of two kinds of constituent elements: *practical-agential* "modes of behavior" and *cognitive-normative* "attitudes" or "orientations" (Jaeggi 2018b, 65; 2014, 77, 89). As will be shown below, according to Jaeggi (2014, 94), the notion of "social practices" [*soziale Praktiken*] encompasses both of these elements, which is why forms of life can also be defined simply as "ensembles" or "bundles of practices."

Importantly, forms of life are characterized by a semi-solid "aggregation state" (Jaeggi 2014, 74). Although they belong to what has since Hegel

been called the "objective spirit" [*objektiver Geist*] of social life, they are less coagulated and rigid than "institutions" proper—i.e., schools, organizations, the state, etc. (Jaeggi 2018b, 65; 2014, 77, 74). Like the latter, *Lebensformen* are relatively stable and routinized formations controlled by normative sanctions. Nevertheless, they possess a more "informal" nature, insofar as they are neither "strictly codified" nor regulated by law (Jaeggi 2014, 74). Thus, in a first approximation, forms of life "include attitudes and habitualized modes of conduct with a *normative character* that concern the *collective conduct of life*, although they are *neither strictly codified* nor *institutionally binding*" (Jaeggi 2018a, 50; 2014, 77).

Social practices as the "base units" of forms of life

For Jaeggi (2014, 94; 2018b, 67), the most suitable social-theoretical approach for conceptualizing the above-sketched nature of forms of life is a "practice-theoretical" one, that is, one that posits social practices as the "base unit" of social reality. In this sense, the theory of forms of life defines forms of life as "bundles of practices" (Jaeggi 2018b, 68) or, more precisely, as "inert plexuses of practices" [*träge Zusammenhänge von Praktiken*]. Jaeggi argues that only practice theory can do justice to the dual tensions constitutive of the ontology of *Lebensformen*, namely, those between agency and structure, cognition and behavior, materiality and culture, and freedom and constraint, among others (Reckwitz 2016, 100).

According to the theory of forms of life, practices are socio-culturally shaped "ways in which we do something" (Jaeggi 2018b, 67). Put differently, they constitute established everyday manners in which social actors deal with themselves, the material world, and other human beings (Jaeggi 2018b, 67). Some examples are "shopping in a grocery store," "playing hide and seek," "attending a party," "making a bank transfer," "taking an exam," "driving a car," "cooking," "reading a book," and "having a drink" (Jaeggi 2014, 95).

When defining the fundamental attributes of social practices, Jaeggi (2014, 95) draws heavily on the main representatives of the contemporary "practice turn" in social theory, namely, Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002). However, the theory of forms of life stresses the *normative* nature of practices in a way that goes beyond these two authors. In the following, I will present some of the main features of social practices according to Jaeggi's approach: (a) *sequentiality*, (b) *habituality*, (c) *meaningfulness*, (d) *socio-cultural nature*, (e) *teleology*, (f) *normativity or rule-governedness*, and (g) *belonging to a form of life*.

(a) *Sequentiality*. Practices are not single actions but "sequences" of them (Jaeggi 2014, 96). For instance, "shopping in a grocery store" involves a series of different activities, such as grabbing a shopping cart, choosing and collecting the goods one wants to buy, waiting in line to pay, paying with a credit card, and putting the purchased items in bags (Jaeggi 2014, 96).

(b) *Habituality*. Social practices like "shopping in a grocery store" or "reading a book" are not activities performed only once but rather something people do "*repeatedly*" in everyday life (Jaeggi 2014, 96). Through repetition, subjects get accustomed to them, developing practical and cognitive "habits" that both facilitate and stabilize their regular performance (Jaeggi 2014, 96). Drawing on Hume and more contemporary accounts of "*tacit knowledge*," Jaeggi (2014, 123-124) defines habit as a "quasi-automatic reaction scheme," i.e., a sedimented "propensity" to pre-reflectively repeat certain typical activities in specific typical circumstances.

(c) *Meaningfulness*. Although practices are essentially embodied and involve the use of artefacts (Reckwitz 2002, 284), their materiality is always already saturated with meaning (Jaeggi 2015, 17). Far from being "raw" modes of physical behavior, practices constitutively depend on actors' attitudes, orientations, and interpretive activities (Jaeggi 2018b, 67). Indeed, practices can only become intelligible, and exist as such, against the background of a "horizon of interpretation" [*Deutungshorizont*] (Jaeggi 2018b, 68). One can only "shop in a grocery store," or "see" that someone is doing so rather than "robbing it," if

one is capable of identifying the relevant entities, events, actions, and social roles characteristic of this practice (Jaeggi 2018b, 76).

(d) *Socio-cultural nature*. Practices are essentially "social," insofar as their interpretive horizon is socio-culturally constituted. They are not social because they are "collective," i.e., because they always entail the participation of more than one individual, but rather because they can only "exist and be understood" within the context of socially established "spaces of meaning" [*Bedeutungsräume*] (Jaeggi 2018b, 67). This means that not only cooperative practices like "playing football" or "attending a conference" are social but also essentially solitary ones such as "meditating" or "reading a book" (Jaeggi 2014, 97).

(e) *Teleology*. All social practices possess an "inherent *telos*," meaning they are intrinsically oriented toward the "fulfillment" of one or more "aims" or "goals" [*Ziele/ Zwecke*] (Jaeggi 2018b, 68; 2014, 100). For instance, people "shop in a grocery store" to get supplies and "play football" for recreational or physical training purposes. Although a single practice can pursue multiple goals simultaneously, it is possible to differentiate its "primary" from its "secondary" purposes (Jaeggi 2014, 101).

(f) *Normativity or rule-governedness*. Social practices are also structured by immanent norms intrinsically connected to their aims and goals. This means that they are not only regular [*regelmäßig*] but also rule-governed [*regelhaft*], as they involve—mostly implicit—"rules" that distinguish between "right" and "wrong" performances (Jaeggi 2014, 98). Importantly, these rules are not defined from the outside—e.g., by a philosopher or a sociologist—but are "*internal*" to the practices themselves and even warrant, in an "ethical-functional" manner, their correct functioning (Jaeggi 2014, 98, 177). For example, *correctly* performing the practice of "shopping in a grocery store" includes paying for the products one puts in the shopping cart before leaving the store.

(g) *Belonging to a form of life*. Every social practice always already belongs to a specific form of life, which in turn is nothing but an ensemble of practices (Jaeggi 2014, 102-104). According to Jaeggi (2014, 106-108) the connection between practices within a form of life is of two main kinds: "interpretive" and "functional." On the one hand, practices from the same form of life relate to each other insofar as they share a "common horizon of interpretation" (Jaeggi 2018b, 69). For example, the "schemata of interpretation" (Jaeggi 2014, 106) at work in family practices related to children, such as "taking care of them," "playing with them," or "cooking for them" derive from the worldview of the bourgeois nuclear family *qua* form of life. On the other hand, social practices depend on others in a "practical-functional" sense (Jaeggi 2014, 107), meaning they can only function correctly if other practices are also operative. One good example of this is the relationship between several economic practices within the life form of capitalism, such as the production, shipping, selling, and purchase of commodities (Jaeggi 2014, 107).

Rosa's theory of world-relations as a phenomenology-based social ontology

What are world-relations?

Rosa's (2016, 54-56) concept of "world-relation" [*Weltbeziehung*] refers to the socio-culturally molded way(s) in which a human subject is experientially connected with her everyday environment. While the theory of forms of life mainly draws on practice theory, the theory of world-relations is primarily *phenomenologically* inspired. Indeed, a world-relation can be described as an "intentional" relationship to the "lifeworld" in the Husserlian sense of both terms (Rosa 2016, 65). It is a subjectively lived "being-directed, being-related of the I toward the world" (Husserl 1954, 368), where (life)world means "*everything that 'encounters' us*" in lived experience: symbols, artifacts, ideas, feelings, animals, institutions, etc. (Rosa 2016, 65). Drawing on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Rosa (2016, 54-56; 2021, 249) also characterizes world-relations as ways of "being-in-the-world" and "being-to-the-world."

Importantly, the theory of world-relations aligns with classical and contemporary phenomenolo-

gical developments on embodied and affective intentionality. A world-relation is not merely a "mentality" or a "worldview," i.e., a set of explicit ideas and beliefs about the world, but rather something more fundamental, namely, an "existential sensibility" (Rosa 2016, 54). As I will show below, although world-relations include reflective, cognitive, and evaluative aspects, their core consists of pre-reflective, "corporeal, emotional, sensory, and existential" elements (Rosa 2012, 11; 2016, 56).

Far from being a mere individual matter, world-relations are always already socio-culturally "mediated" and "pre-figured" (Rosa 2016, 20, 54; 2012, 7). Crucially, this holds not only for their reflective and cognitive dimensions but also for their pre-reflective, corporeal, and affective moments, which are often assumed to be pre-social or purely biological (Rosa 2016, 70-71). More precisely, the theory of world-relations acknowledges three kinds of social conditioning factors of world-relations: "contextual," "cultural," and "institutional" (Rosa 2016, 644).

Against this background, Rosa (2019, 16; 2016, 70) defines his approach as a *sociology* of world-relations, insofar as it focuses on the discrepancies among world-relations prevalent in different societies—and even among those of distinct groups within the same society, such as genders, generations, and classes (Rosa 2012, 377-378; 2016, 54-55). Importantly, however, Rosa's comparison of concrete socio-historical *Weltbeziehungen* is based on a social ontology of world-relations, which aims to define the fundamental features of world-relations *as such*, operating thus in a similar way than classical phenomenology (Husserl 1954; Heidegger 2006) and philosophical anthropology (Plessner 2009).

Three fundamental dimensions of world-relations

As a social-ontological enterprise, the theory of world-relations analytically distinguishes three fundamental "phenomenal dimensions" of world-relations (Rosa 2016, 56; 2012, 380), namely, *bodily, emotional-affective*, and *cognitive-evaluative* moments.[2] Crucially, however, in concrete world-relations, these three analytical dimensions are lived as inextricably connected.

(a) *Bodily Dimension*. Drawing on phenomenology of embodiment, the theory of world-relations criticizes Cartesianism, stressing that "the body ineradicably belongs to the subject or self" (Rosa 2016, 145). According to Rosa (2016, 81-83, 146), it is absurd to speak of disembodied world-relations, as corporeality plays a constitutive role in all forms of intentionality, even in the most intellectual ones, such as thinking, calculating, or reflecting.

More specifically, Rosa's (*2016, 144)* account of embodiment draws heavily on Helmuth Plessner's phenomenology-based conception of "*eccentric positionality" [exzentrische Positionalität]. According to this view, human beings simultaneously experience their own body in two different ways: as a subjective body, or Leib, and as an objective body, or Körper. On the one hand, "I am a Leib," meaning I experience my body as a constituent part of my subjectivity; on the other hand, "I have a Körper," insofar as I can take reflective distance from myself and see it as an "object in the world" (Rosa 2016, 144).*

Building on this phenomenological account of embodiment, the theory of world-relations offers analyses of basic bodily behaviors, such as breathing, eating, walking, laughing, and crying (Rosa 2016, 83-143). For Rosa (2016, 123), in the largely pre-reflective manner in which a subject performs these corporeal operations, her socio-culturally defined world-relation "finds its expression." Among other things, this perspective allows one to *de-naturalize* gender-related differences in bodily behavior, understanding them as a product of embodied self- and world-interpretations operating implicitly (Rosa 2016, 127).

(b) *Affective-emotional dimension*. Building on phenomenological developments in affective intentionality, the theory of world-relations argues that affectivity, rather than cold cognition, cons-

[2] Rosa (2016, 56; 2012, 378, 380) does not use a consistent terminology when distinguishing the different phenomenal dimensions of world-relations. The threefold differentiation I propose follows not so much the letter but rather the spirit of what is said in *Resonanz*.

titutes the primary human access to the world. World-relations are always already affectively shaped (Rosa 2016, 187-189). In this connection, Rosa (2016, 398; 2019, 38-39) introduces a crucial distinction between "affection" and "emotion," understood as the two fundamental aspects of affective life. While the former refers to the *pathic* experience of being "touched" by the world, the latter denotes the *responsive* experience of "moving" it.

From the outset, human beings perceive their environment as something that "*concerns*" them (Rosa 2016, 187). Worldly things, events, and beings always appear as having affective "*significance*" [*Bedeutsamkeit*] for subjects. In this respect, the theory of world-relations operates with a strong contrast between negative and positive valences of world-segments: some of them appear as "attractive," being correlates of "desire" [*Begehren*], while others are experienced as "repulsive," correlating to "fear" [*Angst*]. Importantly, Rosa (2016, 188, 194-195) considers these two opposed emotions to be the primary affective drivers of human agency: we go toward what we desire and avoid what we fear.

(c) *Cognitive-evaluative dimension*. The theory of world-relations also offers an analysis of the "mentality" or "worldview" of human subjects, that is, of their explicit knowledge and beliefs about the lifeworld. Drawing on Taylor, Rosa (2012, 380) characterizes worldviews as socio-culturally constructed and distributed "cognitive-evaluative maps" [*kognitiv-evaluative Landkarten*] that help individuals find their bearings in the world.

On the one hand, these maps are *cognitive* insofar as they tell us "*what there is in the world*"—human beings, institutions, animals, symbols, etc.—and where exactly to find each "thing" (Rosa 2016, 226, 230). On the other hand, they also possess an *evaluative-normative* dimension, as they indicate "what matters" in the world (Rosa 2016, 226-7). Just like on topographic maps, each item is mapped as having a specific "elevation value": while relevant things stand out as "mountains," irrelevant ones appear as "valleys" or "depressions" (Rosa 2012, 381, 405-406).

The map's evaluative-normative dimension can in turn be separated into two sub-maps that often collide with each other, namely, the "map of ethical assessment" and that of "(affective) desire" (Rosa 2012, 382; 2016, 230). The former designates the location of "good" and "bad" things, while the latter shows the whereabouts of "desirable" and "undesirable" ones. Following Taylor (1989, 14), Rosa (2016, 228-230) argues that our map of ethical assessment is based on "strong evaluations," whereas our map of desire rests upon "weak" ones. In strong evaluations, a thing—e.g., *Adonai*, *Allah,* marriage, or the Argentinian national anthem—is assessed as *intrinsically* "worthy," regardless of our personal desire. By contrast, "weak evaluations" have the structure "I want X" (Rosa 2016, 228). Here, not the world but the subject is the source of value: the "thing," be it a beer, an ice cream, or a sexual partner, appears as an object of desire *for me*, regardless of its ethical worth (Rosa 2016, 228).

Conclusion: toward a productive dialogue between Jaeggi's and Rosa's social ontologies

I will use this brief conclusion to address the discrepancies between Rosa's and Jaeggi's social ontologies (1) and to show that, despite their differences—or perhaps precisely because of them—these approaches may be regarded as *complementary*: the former can act as a corrective to the latter (2), and vice versa (3). My argument is that a mutually enlightening dialogue between the theory of forms of life and the theory of world-relations may significantly contribute to advancing the enterprise of immanent critique by clarifying its social-ontological grounding.

(1) At least two major differences between Rosa's and Jaeggi's social ontologies can be identified. The first has not been mentioned above. While the theory of forms of life constitutes a *monistic* social ontology, the theory of world-relations is part of a *dualistic* one. In line with contemporary practice theory (Reckwitz 2016), Jaeggi conceives of practices and forms of life, *qua* bundles of practices, as the *only* constituent

elements of social reality. By contrast, drawing partly on critical realism (Archer 2017), Rosa (2021, 171-173, 182) distinguishes *two* partially autonomous "constituent elements" in social formations, namely, "structure" and "culture," apparently identifying the latter entirely with "world-relations."

Second, while both social ontologies are cultural-theoretically and therefore hermeneutically oriented, they concentrate on different dimensions of culture and meaning, which can be analytically differentiated drawing on contemporary cultural sociology (Lizardo 2017). In defining established social practices, such as "fishing," "cooking," or "dating," as its unit of analysis, the theory of forms of life focuses on the *objective* meanings of *public culture*, which are externalized and trans-subjectively shared by a social group. In contrast, taking individual world-relations as its unit of analysis, the theory of world-relations centers mostly on the *subjective* meaning of "personal culture," i.e., on lived experience and agency. Put in more classical terms, while the former operates at the level of "objective spirit," the latter works at the plane of "subjective spirit" (Gros 2021).

(2) Rosa (2021, 172-174) himself sees his option for a dualistic social ontology as a critical response to "synthetic" approaches in social theory, such as practice theory. In my view, his perspective can be helpful for revising the inconsistencies of Jaeggi's social-ontological monism. As is well known, the concept of social practice is promoted as one able to overcome the "pernicious" dualism between agency and structure—or culture and structure—in social theory. Challenging this view, Rosa (2021, 172) openly embraces ontological dualism and, drawing on Archer (2017, 286), reproaches practice theory for the error of "central conflation." As he argues, the price of overcoming dualism through synthetic concepts is to conflate two "categorically different constituent elements" of social reality into an artificial hybrid construct, thereby neglecting their respective logics and causal powers (Rosa 2021, 172).

(3) However, provided that Jaeggi's social-ontological monism is abandoned, her account of practices and forms of life as the "objective spirit" of cultural life can serve as a corrective to the subjectivistic tendencies of Rosa's phenomenological account of culture. When distinguishing culture from structure, the theory of world-relations operates with an imprecise concept of culture, which oscillates between public and personal culture, though clearly privileging the latter (Rosa 2021, 171-173). Indeed, because of its primarily phenomenological orientation, Rosa tends, on many occasions, to reduce culture to subjective meaning. This is clear in his categorical claim that culture should be studied from the "first-person perspective," while structure is analyzed from the "third-person perspective" (Rosa 2021, 173). Yet if culture is only studied from a first-person perspective, and objectivity is only attributed to institutional structures, the *semi-solid* objective meaning of practices and forms of life is lost from sight. The theory of forms of life makes it possible to analyze the objectivity of culture from a third-person perspective and suggests the possibility of a *trialist* social ontology, which distinguishes *three*, rather than two, constituent elements in social reality: public culture, personal culture, and social structure.

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