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DOSSIER: SOCIOLOGIA EXISTENCIAL E TEORIA SOCIAL

## “Human beings are first and foremost resonant beings” Interview with Professor Hartmut Rosa of Universität Jena and director of Max-Weber-Kollegs

*“Os seres humanos são, antes de mais nada, seres ressonantes”*

*Entrevista com o professor Hartmut Rosa da Universität Jena e diretor da Max-Weber-Kollegs*

*“Los seres humanos son ante todo seres resonantes”*

*Entrevista con el profesor Hartmut Rosa de la Universität Jena y director de Max-Weber-Kollegs*

**Diogo Silva Corrêa<sup>1</sup>**

[orcid.org/0000-0001-5519-6985](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5519-6985)  
[dioscorrea@gmail.com](mailto:dioscorrea@gmail.com)

**Gabriel Peters<sup>2</sup>**

[orcid.org/0000-0002-0595-2663](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0595-2663)  
[gabrielpeters@hotmail.com](mailto:gabrielpeters@hotmail.com)

**João Lucas Tziminadis<sup>3</sup>**

[orcid.org/0000-0001-8181-3748](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8181-3748)  
[jltziminadis@hotmail.com](mailto:jltziminadis@hotmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Hartmut Rosa is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Jena, and one of the most original and prolific critical social theorists of our time. The connections between the theoretical and substantive concerns of Rosa's work, on the one hand, and the analytical purposes of this issue of Civitas dedicated to “existential sociology”, on the other, are manifold. Rosa's arguments on how acceleration as a social-structural trend of late modernity throws light upon intimate dilemmas of individual self-identity, for instance, could certainly be interpreted as (existential) sociological imagination at its best. The same goes for Rosa's subtlety and ingenuity in capturing human modes of relating to the world in his theory of resonance, which apprehends the intermingling of bodily, affective, evaluative and cognitive dimensions in a manner that could be deemed “existential” - in a broad and original sense of the word - as broad and original is also the conception of the “critical” element in his “critical theory” of late modernity. For these reasons, we are very pleased to include the following interview in this issue of Civitas.

**Keywords:** Resonance. Social acceleration. Critical theory. Late modernity. Hartmut Rosa.

**Resumo:** Hartmut Rosa é professor de sociologia na Universidade de Jena e um dos mais originais e prolíficos teóricos sociais críticos de nosso tempo. As conexões entre as preocupações teóricas e substantivas da obra de Rosa, por um lado, e os propósitos analíticos deste número da Civitas dedicado à “sociologia existencial”, por outro, são múltiplas. Os argumentos de Rosa sobre como a aceleração como uma tendência sócio estrutural da modernidade tardia lança luz sobre dilemas íntimos da autoidentidade individual, por exemplo, certamente poderiam ser interpretados como imaginação sociológica (existencial) no seu melhor. O mesmo vale para a sutileza e engenhosidade de Rosa em capturar os modos humanos de se relacionar com o mundo em sua teoria da ressonância, que apreende o entrelaçamento das dimensões corporal, afetiva, avaliativa e cognitiva de uma maneira que poderia ser considerada “existencial” - de uma forma ampla e o sentido original da palavra, como amplo e original - é também a concepção do elemento “crítico” em sua “teoria crítica” da modernidade tardia. Por estes motivos, é com grande satisfação que incluímos a seguinte entrevista nesta edição da Civitas.

**Palavras-chave:** Ressonância. Aceleração social. Teoria crítica. Modernidade tardia. Hartmut Rosa.



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<sup>1</sup> Universidade de Vila Velha (UVV), Vila Velha, ES, Brasil

<sup>2</sup> Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE), Recife, PE, Brasil.

<sup>3</sup> Universidade de Erfurt (UErf), Erfurt, Thuringia, TG, Alemanha.

**Resumen:** Hartmut Rosa es profesor de Sociología en la Universidad de Jena y uno de los teóricos sociales críticos más originales y prolíficos de nuestro tiempo. Las conexiones entre las preocupaciones teóricas y sustantivas de la obra de Rosa, por un lado, y los propósitos analíticos de este número de *Civitas* dedicado a la "sociología existencial", por el otro, son múltiples. Los argumentos de Rosa sobre cómo la aceleración como tendencia social-estructural de la modernidad tardía arroja luz sobre dilemas íntimos de la autoidentidad individual, por ejemplo, ciertamente podrían interpretarse como la imaginación sociológica (existencial) en su máxima expresión. Lo mismo ocurre con la sutileza e ingenio de Rosa al capturar los modos humanos de relacionarse con el mundo en su teoría de la resonancia, que aprehende la mezcla de dimensiones corporales, afectivas, evaluativas y cognitivas de una manera que podría considerarse "existencial" - en un sentido amplio, y el sentido original de la palabra, tan amplio y original - es también la concepción del elemento "crítico" en su "teoría crítica" de la modernidad tardía. Por estos motivos, nos complace mucho incluir la siguiente entrevista en este número de *Civitas*.

**Palabras clave:** Resonancia. Aceleración social. La teoría crítica. Modernidad tardía. Hartmut Rosa.

## Introduction

Hartmut Rosa is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Jena, and one of the most original and prolific critical social theorists of our time. The connections between the theoretical and substantive concerns of Rosa's work, on the one hand, and the analytical purposes of this issue of *Civitas* dedicated to "existential sociology", on the other, are manifold. Rosa's arguments on how acceleration as a social-structural trend of late modernity throws light upon intimate dilemmas of individual self-identity, for instance, could certainly be interpreted as (existential-)sociological imagination at its best. The same goes for Rosa's subtlety and ingenuity in capturing human modes of relating to the world in his theory of resonance, which apprehends the intermingling of bodily, affective, evaluative and cognitive dimensions in a manner that could be deemed "existential" - in a broad and original sense of the word, as broad and original is also the conception of the "critical" element in his "critical theory" of late modernity.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons, we are very pleased to include the following interview in this issue of *Civitas*.

**Interviewers:** First of all, thank you so much for taking the time to reply to our questions. As a symptom, perhaps, of our accelerated times, we would like to start with what seems more urgent. Even though it may be too early for a systematic analysis, we cannot help but wonder about your thoughts on how the global pandemic of Covid-19, and its multidimensional social effects, can be interpreted in the light of your previous diagnoses of late modernity. For instance, is it too optimistic to consider the consequences of the pandemic as opportunities for systemic de-acceleration? Or do you see it giving rise to new waves and forms of acceleration with pernicious consequences (e.g., the digital fatigue generated by the profusion of online meetings)? And, when it comes to resonance, do you see the results of the pandemic as leading towards more resonant, or rather more alienated, human relationships to the world?

**Hartmut Rosa:** The Covid-19 pandemic really is like a laboratory experiment to all the key issues I have dealt with in the last couple of years: Acceleration, Resonance and Uncontrollability (*Unverfügbarkeit*) of the world. First of all, it really is a historically unparalleled form of de-acceleration (de-acceleration) in modern society. If we look at the world from a global perspective, the last two hundred and fifty years really were characterized by an incessant increase in physical and material movement. The average number, mass and speed of people, goods and raw materials in motion has gone up year by year. At first, the number, size and speed of trains and steamships started to rise fast, as did the physical re-shaping of the landscape due to urbanization, industrialization and so on. Then the number and size of cars, trucks, trams, subways exploded, and we are still not at the end of this process. Finally, while we still see more and bigger cars, trucks, ships and even bikes year by year, there was an explosion of the number of planes and flights on a global scale. Even wars did not oppose this trend, as we

<sup>4</sup> Rosa's acceleration theory was thoroughly developed in *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (2005), subsequently translated in English (Rosa 2013) and, recently, in Portuguese (Rosa 2019a) as *Aceleração. A transformação das estruturas temporais na modernidade*. The concept of resonance, to which Rosa (2016) has been deploying most of his intellectual efforts in the last years, is the object of his voluminous *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (*Ressonância. Uma sociologia da relação com o mundo*). This book has been translated into French (Rosa 2018), English (Rosa 2019b) and Spanish (Rosa 2019c).

know from Paul Virilio, quite to the contrary, they were manifestations of 'total mobilization'. This mobilization and acceleration slowed down a bit in times of economic recession, but in never got to the point of inversion. Well, until the year 2020. The pandemic took down up to 90% of planes. It reduced urban traffic by up to 80%, stopped a lot of public lives and even the soccer leagues. Never before was there such a manifestation of a deliberate slowdown. It is important to see that it was not the virus itself that brought down the planes: It was purposeful political action in response to it. However, this de-celeration of course is not what I had envisioned in my books, because in a society which can only achieve stability through incessant motion and growth, such a deceleration is not a solution or a liberation, it rather resembles an accident, for it causes economic hardships and existential anxieties for many. Furthermore, what I find most interesting, the pandemic created a state of affairs which Paul Virilio had predicted in the early 1980s as a 'polar inertia', or a frenetic standstill: While the kinetic profile of the earth really showed a significant reduction of movement and speed in the material and physical realm, the number and speed of digital connections and of data sent through the internet with the speed of light significantly increased. Many people were glued to their screens: Physically fixed and locked down into an almost immobile position, all day looking into a tiny camera and a small screen, with almost no physical motion, they could circle the globe by watching news or communicating with people all around the world. Now the question is: Did this increase or decrease resonant relationships? Overall, I am a little sceptic: On the one hand, I think Covid 19 really signals a serious distortion in our relationship to the world: We can no longer trust our own perceptions, because we can't see or hear or feel the virus; but we feel that the danger can be anywhere, lurking in the air or in the stranger walking by; it might even have taken

possession of my kid or of my own body: This is a serious and classical form of alienation: We do not feel at home anymore in the world. For me, the virus is a 'monster of uncontrollability', the return of which I have discussed in the last chapter on my little book on Uncontrollability:<sup>5</sup> as we seek to understand, control and dominate the world scientifically, technologically, politically and so on, the virus is totally beyond our control on all these levels. Perhaps this situation, in the end, might help us to collectively re-think our mode of being in the world and lead us to less alienating form of life in the future.

**Interviewers:** One of the ways we conceive of an "existential sociology" in this issue is as a systematic excavation of the anthropological-philosophical presuppositions that inform theoretical perspectives and empirical investigations in the social sciences. As authors such as Charles Taylor and Axel Honneth have remarked, within social science a general conception of what it is to be a human being is both inevitable and bound to be deemed problematic in the light of what is known about the historical and cultural variety of human ways of being-in-the-world. Without underplaying this tension between the general and the particular, one could still attempt to distill the anthropological-philosophical views that underpin social theories such as those of Marx (say, a *homo faber* in a Hegelian-materialist version), Durkheim (e.g., the *homo duplex*) and Weber (e.g., a 'proto-existentialist' portrayal of the human being as thirsty for meaning). Would it be possible to proceed in this manner in the analysis of your own work? Can we derive a "philosophical anthropology" from your historical-sociological analysis of modern acceleration?

**Hartmut Rosa:** No doubt what I have done is very much in this line of thinking. Which, perhaps, is not so surprising because I have devoted my dissertational thesis, the first book I have written, to

<sup>5</sup> To the concept of Unverfügbarkeit (*indisponibilidade, inacessibilidade, inalcançabilidade etc.*), translated into English as uncontrollability (Rosa 2020), is a central aspect of resonance theory, to which Rosa dedicated an entire book (Rosa 2019d).

the reconstruction of Charles Taylor's philosophical anthropology.<sup>6</sup> And indeed, my own answer to the vexing question of how to define the most basic or elementary feature of human life is this: Human beings are first and foremost resonant beings. Before we are capable of speaking or thinking, and before we want to possess things, we need, as babies, to find resonance with the world we are thrown into: We need to be touched and held and fed, and we need to discover that with our eyes, our hands and our voices, we are capable of establishing contact. The first experience we have is one of listening and answering – of being called and responding. As George Herbert Mead, for example, made clear: We only start to develop an awareness of ourselves through the eyes and the responses of the mother, or the significant others. Hence, we are not language animals or reasonable or possessive animals, but resonant beings. And once we lose reason and language and our minds because of dementia in old age, for example, we are still resonant beings: Sensitive to touch and in search for a form of contact which gives us a minimal feeling of self-efficacy: we need to make the experience of eliciting a response from the world. However, what I find to be the most interesting and fascinating thing about resonance: It not only is our most basic need and function, it also is our ultimate and highest yearning. All art and science and philosophy, I claim, and all our loving and craving is in fact driven by this desire to find existential resonance: *to hear the call and to answer it*. But of course, the 'axes of resonance' we then seek to establish vary from person to person and from one cultural tradition to the next. Hence, I believe that 'resonance' really can serve as a concept which manages to combine the particular and the universal.

**Interviewers:** The concept of resonance was developed as a response to what you diagnosed

as a form of alienation produced by the 'totalitarian law of acceleration' that predicates modern and late-modern society. But it seems that the concept gained a life of its own and, distanced from this sociological diagnosis, is now used to analyze and interpret cultural forms and experiences as diverse as ancient Greek texts, Etruscan altars or the manipulation of emotions in ancient Roman politics. Would you say that resonance theory is also an attempt to philosophically ground an 'anthropological' *continuum* of the *conditio humana*? Or, to connect this question to the previous one, is resonance theory a heir to the tradition of philosophical anthropology?

**Hartmut Rosa:** Yes, I formulated the resonance idea indeed as a response to the experience of alienation. I had written the first book on acceleration, and a lot of people thought that I wanted to say that speed is bad and slowness is good. But this is not what I had in mind, so I restated my case in the small book on alienation and acceleration and argued that acceleration only is a problem when it causes alienation.<sup>7</sup> With this move, I re-connected my thinking to the older versions of critical theory for which 'alienation' was a central concern. But then I realized that the problem with this concept is that it is very unclear what a non-alienated form of being would look like. What is alienation's other? My answer to this question was resonance: We are non-alienated when we are in resonance with the world, i.e. with the people we live with, the place we are in, the tools we work with etc. Thus, alienation is a distortion in the way we relate to the world, and resonance is an alternative mode of relationship. And from here, I took the concept further in order to explore the multiple ways in which humans have sought and found resonance with the world – and yes, the assumption is that the Greeks, the Romans, the Babylonians, the Atztec etc all established

<sup>6</sup> Many issues further discussed in Rosa's (1998) acceleration and resonance theories were set up in his *Identität und kulturelle Praxis. Politische Philosophie nach Charles Taylor (Identidade e praxis cultural. Filosofia política de acordo com Charles Taylor)*, in particular the normative question of the "good life".

<sup>7</sup> The book *Acceleration and alienation. Towards a critical theory of late-modern temporality (Aceleração e alienação. Em direção a uma teoria crítica da temporalidade na modernidade tardia)*, in which much of the arguments elaborated in the lengthier *Beschleunigung* are presented in a more concise way, was originally published in English (Rosa 2010). This book could be read as a bridge between acceleration and resonance theories.

different axes of resonance – and consequently, experienced different forms of alienation, too!

**Interviewers:** Although we wouldn't [sic] like to elide the important differences between the versions of critical theory that appear in the works of authors such as Habermas, Honneth and yourself, you all seem to share an interest in deriving normative commitments from a concrete and existential ground to be found within lay actors' (inter)subjective experiences (for instance, in relations of human communication in Habermas or of intersubjective [mis]recognition in Honneth). In this sense, is it possible to affirm that the 'pre-theoretical', experiential starting point of your theory is to be found in the feelings of haste, urgency, stress and anxiety (in the case of acceleration) and in the need for existentially authentic and fulfilling experiences (in the case of resonance)? Considering your many suggestive references to depression in your theory of acceleration, could we say more broadly that the contemporary vocabulary of psychopathologies is apt to play an analogous role to that of experiences of disrespect in Honneth's critical theory, that is, offering the pre-theoretical resources able to ground a normative perspective from which to tackle general sociological matters?

**Hartmut Rosa:** This is an interesting observation. Yes, it is absolutely true that what I share with Habermas and Honneth is the grounding of our theories in pre-theoretical, existential experiences. Perhaps this affinity is not so surprising given that Habermas was the mentor and predecessor of Honneth and Honneth in turn was my teacher and the supervisor of my doctoral thesis. And it is also correct that I started to analyze experiences of alienation as a result of stress and time urgency. And yes, these experiences seem to be intrinsically connected to some contemporary forms of depression and burn-out. However, alienation is not necessarily and not always connected to speed: It can also result from oppression, for example, or from disrespect. So, I do not think that my account of

burn-out and Honneth's account of disrespect are on the same level: for Honneth, disrespect is the elementary experience that drives human action and struggle. For me, the yearning for resonance and the desire to avoid situations of existential alienation would be the equivalent.

**Interviewers:** It is a central argument of what you propose as a "sociology of world-relations" that all forms of subjectivity are forms of *being in the world*, or, more precisely, that 'subject' and 'world' do not exist as separate entities that eventually relate to each other, but instead that both are constituted *in the relation*. In other words, you start from a 'relational' approach to social reality. If that is indeed what you propose, could you comment a little on the meaning of 'relationality' for resonance theory and say something about the intellectual influences that led you into such a conception?

**Hartmut Rosa:** Well, for me resonance is first and foremost, by its very nature, a form of relationship. It is a relationship in which two or more entities mutually affect each other and respond to that affection. Think of two planets, for example, who start to respond to the movements of the other body: both exert gravitational effects, and both respond to such effects. Then, in turn, both gradually change their shape and their rhythms as a consequence of this interaction. These are the three basic elements of resonance: affection, self-efficacy, and transformation. And since this process cannot be brought about instrumentally, and is open ended with respect to the result, it is also unpredictable or uncontrollable (unverfügbar). So I realized, actually by an argument Charles Taylor made in direct response to resonance theory, that a lot of contemporary intellectual traditions converge in such a conception of self and world, or mind and matter: it is the idea of a co-construction of the two sides as we find it formulated in Bruno Latour's symmetrical anthropology, for example, or in Karen Barad's conception of matter and physics, and also in more recent theories of brain research

and neurology, but also in the philosophy of the romantic tradition of thinking, as Taylor has pointed out. The core idea is that neither the subject, or the mind, nor the 'world', or matter, are primordial, but they constantly create and re-create each other.<sup>8</sup> Thus, I formulated the idea of a relational ontology in which subject and world are both the effect of processes of resonant interaction. I would now slightly reformulate that idea and no longer claim that the relationship is prior to the relata – rather, I think, the two are equiprimordial or co-original (*gleichursprünglich*). However, when we think of resonance theory only in these terms, it would give an incomplete picture: I was strongly influenced by the phenomenological tradition of thinking too, first of all by the analyses of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His being to the world (*être au monde*) and Taylor's philosophical anthropology which builds on this, but to some extent also what German Philosophers from Heidegger to Bernhard Waldenfels have discovered was important for the formulation of resonance theory, too.

**Interviewers:** In the opening chapters of *Resonance*, a strong emphasis is placed on the role of embodiment, somatic experiences and cognitive processes as basal elements of our world-relations. And this emphasis seems to be in accordance to what you consider to be the approach proper to a sociology of world-relations: i.e., not the analysis of ideas and interests, but of the "historically developed *existential sensibilities*". Could you say something about what does that mean concretely for sociological and social-scientific research? How can a researcher access these existential sensibilities if not through representations, ideas, discourses etc?

**Hartmut Rosa:** Well, I guess these are two different questions. One question is this: what does it take to understand a social formation – is it sufficient to reconstruct a society's ideas and interests, its 'world views' and techno-economic reproduction, or do we need to move beyond

ideas and interests in order to understand that what we can indeed call 'existential sensibilities'. I mean by this its sense of being on the world and relating to it. Does a social form of life seek to control and dominate the world, or to adapt to it, or to overcome it, for example? What is the dominant sense of nature, or of life: is it a threat, a danger, an opportunity, a field of stimulations and so on? This elementary form of being in and relating to the world is indeed a material, embodied, somatic, affective stance – comparable to what Bourdieu calls 'habitus' and 'hexis'. Ideas and interests are secondary to this, they derive from it. When we confine our research to the 'worldviews' or techno-economic relationships, we will never understand the cultural driving forces of a form of life. However, the second question is: how do we reconstruct and examine those elementary 'existential sensibilities'? And here, of course, we might draw on discourses, ideas and representations, but we have to look beyond their manifest meanings, we need to reconstruct their hidden connections, the non-explicit. If we analyze contemporary forms of life, we can take to interviews and participant observation, too.

**Interviewers:** In an essay published in 2016, the French philosopher Tristan Garcia speaks of an imperative proper to secular Western societies: the ethical imperative of the 'intense life'. Garcia shows that a commitment to intensity, which has turned into a keyword for the modern world, is paradoxically shared by both the advocates of the capitalist system *status quo* and their opponents. Taking Garcia's proposal seriously, can we relate the idea of intensity with that of resonance? Can it be said that the counterpart to the process of social acceleration is the obsessive search for, or pursuit of, the intense (or resonant) experience or existence?

**Hartmut Rosa:** This is an important and at the same time very challenging question. I find Garcia's approach very interesting. I think he is absolutely right in pointing out that intensity has

<sup>8</sup> In Portuguese, a comprehensive introduction to such details of resonance theory can be found in Rosa's preface to the Brazilian translation of his acceleration book (Rosa 2019a).

become a core value in modern culture. And I agree that the search for intensity is connected to the culture of acceleration and speed. However, on the one hand, I am inclined to claim that the search for intensity only leads to acceleration when the promise is not 'delivered': when we fail to make 'intense' experiences, we seek to intensify the stimuli; we look for more and more radical kicks. Thus, my claim is that modern subjects, as all human beings, seek resonance relationships. In the capitalist society, the yearning for such relationships is transformed into a desire for commodities. You can randomly check any commercial you like: they always promise an intense, resonant experience with nature, with your friends, with your own body etc. But then, of course, you buy the commodity and don't find resonance/intensity, and hence you ask for a 'new drug', or a stronger drug. Thus, one way of answering Garcia would be to separate true resonance, and maybe true intensity, too, from the frantic form of superficial intensity that comes through speed. But on the other hand, I am afraid that my own account of resonance really might be too modern in the sense discovered by Garcia: most of my examples of resonant experiences are accounts of emotional 'peak experiences' – like falling in love, or being taken away by a book or a piece of music, or a beautiful sunset etc. So, it now seems to me that my own theory might be flawed here, because I am a modern subject, too: in my thinking, experiences of resonance are moments of intensity. But there might be some deeper, calmer forms of resonance that lack this sense of intensity. The group of colleagues and doctoral researchers I work with in Erfurt (and of which João Lucas is a member) therefore has started to think about such a different form of resonance which we, for the time being, fall second order resonance.<sup>9</sup>

**Interviewers:** In the French sociological field of the late 1980s and early 1990s, an

interesting movement was launched by Luc Boltanski when he broke with Pierre Bourdieu's approach, and proposed a shift from a critical sociology of domination towards a sociology of critique (that is, as a lay activity of social actors themselves, not as an exclusive prerogative of the sociologist). We would like to ask you if this kind of "epistemological delegation" to the actors, as opposed to the "epistemological break" defended by Bourdieu and others, could also be proposed in relation to the notion of resonance. In other words: not a sociology of resonance as pre-defined ideal, but above all a sociology that strives to be attentive to the multiple modalities of resonant experiences and conceptions of good life that can be experienced and/or voiced by actors and collectivities. In other words, a sociology that puts itself as a task to describe densely the resonant experiences of people and take it as an object of analysis. How does this project resonate with your views on the topic?

**Hartmut Rosa:** Yet another challenging question, honestly. I actually started to develop resonance theory as an answer to the question of the good life. What I wanted to do is to define a good life in a way that is independent of the logic of growth, increase, acceleration etc. Because I realized that even those philosophers who want to move beyond the GDP as a yardstick for the quality of life still think that having more choices, options, capabilities etc is better than having less. I am thinking of Amartya Sen in particular here. Thus, I formulated the idea that the quality of life is *not* defined by the resources at hand but by the quality of our relationships to the world. But you are right: I did not develop this idea out of the blue, or from philosophical abstraction, but on the basis of many narrative and biographical interviews with ordinary people. So I think what I try to do is exactly in between Bourdieu and Boltanski, or in between a critical sociology and a sociology of critique: I follow the conception of

<sup>9</sup> The research group Rosa refers to is the *International Graduate School "Resonant Self-World Relations in Ancient and Modern Socio-Religious Practices"*, where philosophers, philologists, archaeologists, historians, sociologists and other social scientists conduct their individual research around the concept of resonance.

what Charles Taylor once called the 'best account' principle. The idea is this: as a social theorist and philosopher, I seek to draw on all available sources of inspiration, including first and foremost social actors' accounts, but also scientific data and evidence, literature and philosophical theories, in order to give the best possible account of our current human predicament. What I do in the resonance book, really, is this: I say 'hey, look, I think what I and you are really looking for are relationships of resonance. But what we find instead is a rushed world of broken promises – forms of alienation. Does this match your experience, too?' I do not understand my preliminary 'best account' produced thus as the last word on the matter, but as a *first word*: I now discuss and confront it with the accounts and criticisms of all sorts of audiences all over the world: scientists in Yale, students in Wuhan and Delhi, waste collectors in Porto Alegre, colleagues in Europe, and so on. And through this, I hope we can collectively improve our collective 'best account' of late modern life. And implicit in this account is a deep critique of our social reality.

**Interviewers:** In your book on acceleration the critical 'yardstick' was the concept of autonomy, culturally posed as a modern norm but structurally blocked by modernity itself through acceleration. But in your recent work self-determination, or its role as an ideal regulator of what a 'good life' should be, is conceived of as also being part of the problem. The reason for that is because autonomy, as a normative horizon, presupposes a form of 'subject' that is somehow located out of the world, that sees the world as a passive, 'objective' instance, a '*Weltbild*' – and is, therefore, unable to 'listen', 'answer', and resonate to it. But, by displacing autonomy as a critical yardstick, an essential part of what was once called 'the unfinished project of modernity' (Habermas) is given up. Would you consider that in a resonant critique of modernity there's still place for the normative idea of autonomy and, if so, how would it relate to the concept of resonance itself?

**Hartmut Rosa:** Well, you are quite right in your reconstruction: I have moved away from autonomy and authenticity as the ultimate measures, or yardsticks, from which we can evaluate social conditions. But I do not want to give up the project of modernity altogether – I want to reformulate it. Look, resonance is a form of relationship that actually requires the subject to be free: repression or oppression are always and necessarily killing the possibility of resonance. If you prevent someone from loving, or believing, or doing what he or she really feels called to, if you deny them a voice of their own, you deny them the chance to develop their vital axes of resonance. I believe it is this insight that drove the emancipatory project of modernity in general and of critical theory in particular. But this 'freedom' of the subject is only one side of a resonant form of being in the world: To be self-determined is not enough. Resonance always starts with receptivity: With openness to the call of something out there. It does not start with the subject. In fact, resonance, to some extent, always involves an element of heteronomy. Think of the moment you fall in love with someone or something: you feel overwhelmed. It is an experience in which you precisely move beyond your self-given and chosen laws and rules. I have actually come to think that resonance necessarily involves an element of *transgression*: something gains a hold on you which is strong and makes you change in a way that you did not foresee and plan and define as a rule etc. Adorno has made this point quite forcefully when he states that a true experience always involves a moment of powerlessness in which you feel overwhelmed. Resonance is only possible in a disposition in which you renounce your self-chosen and given rules and aims and *listen* – in which you make yourself essentially vulnerable. You answer the call of something without knowing where it leads you to. And I think modernity and even critical theory have forgotten about this second element of resonance and focused too exclusively on self-determination – always in search of a broader range of options for the self. Because of that, the one-sided conception of autonomy

has itself become a motor of acceleration and hence alienation.

**Interviewers:** One of the aspects that characterizes our world-relations as 'resonant' is that of 'unavailability' (*Unverfügbarkeit*), i.e., the fact that resonant relations cannot be intentionally produced and that, when established, one cannot predict when and how it will end. Resonant relations are, therefore, not instrumentalizable. That said, how could resonance be conceived of as a theoretical or practical referential ideal in relation to which social relations should aim at once it is not of the nature of resonance relations to be 'produced'?

**Hartmut Rosa:** Indeed, it seems paradoxical to claim on the one hand that resonance should be the yardstick of critical theory and to insist, on the other hand, on its 'non-engineerability'. It is precisely because I insist that we cannot bring about resonant relationships instrumentally that resonance can be used for a fundamental critique of modernity. If we could 'fabricate' resonance, it would simply be the next step in modernity's social evolution. However, what we can do and should do, individually and collectively, is to focus on the conditions of possibility for resonance. Resonance is a form of relationship that has a number of preconditions. These are, for example, psychological preconditions: if you lack any sense of self-efficacy, because your parents, teachers and peers have convinced you that you are *good for nothing*, it is very hard for you to experience resonance. Unfortunately, many modern school systems do destroy some children's sense of self-efficacy in a very cruel way. Similarly, if you have made the experience that being touched is equivalent to being hurt, you will no longer want to allow anyone or anything to touch you in a non-controllable way: in other words, if you are traumatized, you will actually run away from situations that could be resonant. But beyond such individual preconditions, resonance requires favorable physical or spatial conditions: it is much more likely to experience resonance in a garden, park or forest than in a concrete cellar; and whether

or not resonance develops in a group of people also depends on their spatial configuration. And it depends on temporal conditions: time pressure is the most effective killer of resonance I know of. If you are in a hurry because you have to rush to the airport to catch your plane, you cannot allow your self to get in resonance with anyone or anything. And in late-modernity, we are always in a condition of catching-the-plane because our to-do lists are endless and the shortage of time overwhelming. Finally, there are further social conditions which favour or prevent the likelihood of resonance: if you are in a situation of fierce competition, your mindset and even your bodily dispositions are actually geared towards preventing all forms of resonance. And the neoliberal reforms we have seen all over the world in recent decades were actually devised to increase competition on all levels of existence. Thus, we cannot 'engineer' resonance, but we can work on the preconditions which make resonance more or less likely. Whether or not resonant relationships are possible depends on the institutional settings. In a laboratory for animal testing, for example, resonance between humans and animals is absolutely unwanted, detrimental and unlikely, as it is in mass industrial farming. But we can create other settings in which resonant relationships are actually conducive to the well-functioning of the institutions. Hence, what I dream of is a world which is built on institutions that enable resonance between citizens, between society and nature, between past, present and future generations, and so on.

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### Diogo Silva Correa

Doutor em Sociologia pela École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris, França e pela Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (Iesp-Uerj), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil; professor do programa de pós-graduação em Sociologia Política da Universidade de Vila Velha (UVV), Vila Velha, ES, Brasil.

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### Gabriel Peters

Doutor em Sociologia pelo Instituto de Estudos Sociais e Políticos da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (IESP/UERJ), Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil; professor adjunto do Departamento de Sociologia da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE), Recife, PE, Brasil.

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### João Lucas Tziminadis

Doutorando no programa International Graduate School Resonant Self-World Relations in Ancient and Modern Socio-Religious Practices, Universidade de Erfurt, Erfurt, Thuringia, Alemanha; pesquisador assistente no Centro Max Weber de Estudos Avançados na Universidade de Erfurt, Erfurt, Thuringia, Alemanha.