Towards a Phenomenological Critical Theory:
Hartmut Rosa's Sociology of the Relationship to the World

Hacia una teoría crítica fenomenológica:
La sociología de la relación con el mundo de Hartmut Rosa.

Para uma teoria crítica fenomenológica:
Sociologia da relação com o mundo de Hartmut Rosa

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Abstract: In this paper, I intend to systematically reconstruct the main lines of Hartmut Rosa's phenomenological approach to Critical Theory. In order to do so, I will proceed in three steps. First (1), as a preliminary, I will briefly present Axel Honneth's conception of Critical Theory of Society. Second (2), I will sketch out Rosa's account of the fundamental features of a contemporary version of Critical Theory. Finally (3), I will outline his novel "sociology of the relationship to the world", especially focusing on the phenomenological opposition between "resonance" and "alienation".

Keywords: Hartmut Rosa, Phenomenology, Critical Theory, Axel Honneth, Frankfurt School

Resumen: En este artículo, me propongo reconstruir sistemáticamente los lineamientos fundamentales de la Teoría Crítica fenomenológica de Hartmut Rosa. Para ello, procedo en tres pasos. En primer lugar (1), a modo de prolegómeno, presento brevemente la manera en que Axel Honneth entiende la Teoría Crítica de la Sociedad. En segundo término (2), bosquejo la concepción de Rosa de las tareas fundamentales de una versión contemporánea de la Teoría Crítica. Finalmente (3), esbozo su novedosa "sociología de la relación con el mundo", colocando el foco en la oposición fenomenológica entre "resonancia" y "alienación".

Palabras claves: Hartmut Rosa, Fenomenología, Teoría Crítica, Axel Honneth, Escuela de Frankfurt

Resumo: Neste artigo, me proponho a reconstruir sistemáticamente os principais traços da Teoria Crítica fenomenológica de Hartmut Rosa. Para isto, procedo em três passos. Em primeiro lugar

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(1), introdutoriamente, apresento brevemente o modo pelo qual Axel Honneth concebe a Teoria Crítica da Sociedade. Em um segundo momento (2), esboço a concepção de Rosa das tarefas fundamentais de uma versão contemporânea da Teoria Crítica. Finalmente (3), esquematizo a sua innovadora "sociología da relação com o mundo", focando a oposição fenomenológica entre "ressonância" e "alienação".

Palavras-chave: Hartmut Rosa, Fenomenologia, Teoria Crítica, Axel Honneth, Escola de Frankfurt.

Introduction[2]

In the last ten years, a new generation of critical theorists in the tradition of the Frankfurt School has arisen. Among their main representatives are Rahel Jaeggi, Robin Celikates and Hartmut Rosa. Taking up the baton from Axel Honneth –the key figure of the third generation of this German tradition of thought–, these authors elaborate new versions of Critical Theory that seek to be compatible with the latest developments in philosophy and the social sciences.

In spite of undeniable differences, Jaeggi's (cf. 2014), Celikates's (cf. 2009), and Rosa's (cf. 2016) accounts share some important features. Arguing from a hermeneutically, praxeologically, and micro-sociologically informed perspective –and also endorsing a post-metaphysical stance–, they make efforts towards developing a *non-paternalistic* form of social criticism. That is, a Critical Theory of Society that does not consider everyday experiences, social practices, and interpretations as mere ideological products, but rather attempts to take them seriously.

Unfortunately, because of the absence of translations into other languages, these new versions of critical theory are little-known outside the German-speaking context. With the aim of contributing to the diffusion of these novel approaches, in the present paper I intend to systematically reconstruct the main lines of perhaps the most innovative and influential of them.[3] I am referring to Hartmut Rosa's critical "sociology of the relationship to the world" [*Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*] as presented in his most recent books: *Unverfügbarkeit* (Rosa, 2018),

[3] The great "resonance" that Rosa's "sociology of the relationship to the world" has in the German-speaking world becomes apparent in light of the manifold publications that discuss it. See, for instance, Waldenfels (2019, p. 264 *ff.*), Peters and Schulz (2017), and Wils (2019). To my knowledge, there is only one paper on Rosa's theory of resonance in English (cf. Susen, 2019).

Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung (Rosa, 2016), and *Weltbeziehung im Zeitalter der Beschleunigung* (Rosa, 2012).[4]

As I will argue, what makes Rosa's account groundbreaking is its *phenomenological* character. Indeed, as opposed to the typical reluctance of earlier critical theorists towards phenomenology (cf. Demmerling, 2013), Hartmut Rosa's novel version of Critical Theory draws upon insights from authors such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Hans Blumenberg, Helmuth Plessner, Emmanuel Lévinas, Charles Taylor, and Bernhard Waldenfels. More specifically, Rosa's approach focuses on the analysis of the lifeworldly experience and action of (late-)modern subjects, or, to put it more specifically, on their "relationships to the world" [*Weltbeziehungen/ Weltverhältnisse*]

In order to reconstruct the main features of Hartmut Rosa's account, I will proceed in three steps. First (1), as a preliminary, I will briefly present Axel Honneth's conception of Critical Theory of Society. Second (2), I will sketch out Rosa's account of the fundamental features of a contemporary version of Critical Theory. Finally (3), I will outline his novel critical "sociology of the relationship to the world", especially focusing on the phenomenological opposition between "resonance" and "alienation".

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[4] Hartmut Rosa (born in Lörrach in 1965) is, without a doubt, one of the key figures of contemporary European social theory. He is Professor for General and Theoretical Sociology at the University of Jena and director of the *Max-Weber-Kolleg* [Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies] at the University of Erfurt. In 1997, he received his PhD at the Humboldt University of Berlin with a thesis on Charles Taylor's political philosophy –*Identität und kulturelle Praxis: Politische Philosophie nach Charles Taylor* (Rosa, 1998). After spending a one-year research and teaching stay at the New School of Social Research in New York, in 2004 he obtained his Habilitation in sociology and political science at the University of Jena with a celebrated book on social acceleration: *Beschleunigung: Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne* (2005). Thanks to this renowned work, Rosa acquired great popularity in the field of social theory and became one of the key figures of the sociology of time. In the last decade, he has been working on developing a new version of Critical Theory of Society in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. In a first attempt, crystallized in his 2010 book *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-modern Temporality* –written in English– (Rosa, 2010), he diagnoses the "social pathologies" caused by late-modern social acceleration. From 2012 on, with the publication of an anthology of papers entitled *Weltbeziehung im Zeitalter der Beschleunigung: Umrisse einer neuen Gesellschaftskritik*, he starts shifting the focus from the criticism of social temporality towards the critical analysis of the so-called "relationship to the world" [*Weltbeziehung*]. In his second major work, *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*, published in 2016, he elaborates a full-blown critical "sociology of the relationship to the world" [*Soziologie der Weltbeziehung*]. In his 2018 book *Unverfügbarkeit*, Rosa further develops this *phenomenologically* inspired approach which centers around the key concepts of "resonance" [*Resonanz*] and "alienation" [*Entfremdung*]. My Spanish translation of *Resonanz* will appear soon in Spain and Latin America (cf. Resonanz. In press). The English translation of the book, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (ROSA, 2019b), was published at the end of June 2019, that is, after I finished writing the present paper. For that reason, I do not refer to it here. All translations of Rosa's German texts into English are mine.

1. Looking for an "inner-worldly transcendence": Axel Honneth's Account of Critical Theory

1.1 What is Critical Theory?

When defining Critical Theory of Society and its contemporary tasks, Rosa draws upon the former director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* at the University of Frankfurt, Axel Honneth (ROSA, 2012, p. 269). Thus, as a preliminary step for adequately understanding Rosa's account, I will briefly present Honneth's conception of Critical Theory as set forth in three important papers: "*Die soziale Dynamik von Mißachtung: Zur Ortbestimmung einer kritischen Gesellschaftstheorie*" (HONNETH, 1994a), "*Pathologien des Sozialen: Tradition und Aktualität der Sozialphilosophie*" (HONNETH, 1994b), and "*Eine soziale Pathologie der Vernunft: Zur intellektuellen Erbschaft der Kritischen Theorie*" (HONNETH, 2007).

Broadly speaking, Honneth (1994a, 79; 1994b, pp. 41 *ff.*) considers "Critical Theory of Society" [*kritische Gesellschaftstheorie*] as a particular tradition of thought within "social philosophy". In Honneth's view, "social philosophy" [*Sozialphilosophie*] constitutes a sub-discipline of practical philosophy that originates in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and is continued by such different thinkers as G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, Georg Lukács, Helmuth Plessner, Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, and Charles Taylor (HONNETH, 1994b, 9 *ff.*). The peculiarity of this philosophical sub-discipline lays both in its subject matter and in its theoretical aim: it focuses on the analysis of *modern capitalist societies* and intends to offer a *normative-ethical criticism* of their "misdevelopments" [*Fehlentwicklungen*] (*Ibid.*, pp. 9, 49).

More precisely, resorting to medical language, Honneth claims that the "task" of social philosophy is to "diagnose" different forms of "pathologies of the social" in modern social formations, *i.e.,* societal "disorders" [*Störungen*] typical of modernity such as alienation, reification, lack of meaning, nihilism, depersonalization, commodification, etc. (*Ibid.*, pp. 9, 51). For social philosophers, these "social pathologies" systematically undermine the "social conditions" needed for individual human beings to achieve "self-realization", thereby preventing them from leading a "good life" (*Ibid.*, p. 53 f.). "[T]he identification of social pathologies in social philosophy always is carried out in view of the social conditions that can help the individual to achieve self-realization" (*Ibid.*, p. 54).

Just as medical diagnosis relies on a conception of human health –it is indeed impossible

to diagnose a disease without having a "clinical idea of healthiness" (*Ibid.*, p. 50)–, social-philosophical criticism cannot do without an –either implicit or explicit– "ethical representation of social normality" (*Ibid.*, p. 52). According to Honneth (*Ibid.*, pp. 52 *ff.*), this normative idea of what "good" social and individual life looks like –or, more precisely, of what are the social presuppositions for the individual's self-realization– constitutes the "critical yardstick [*Maßstab*]" used by social philosophy for assessing the ethical "healthiness" of modern societies.

As said, Honneth (1994b, p. 41 *ff.*) understands Critical Theory as a particular social-philosophical tradition that goes back to the "original program" of the Frankfurt School, *i.e.* the one developed by Max Horkheimer in the 1930s. Critical theorists offer a special kind of "normative criticism" of modern societies that is decisively inspired by the heritage of Left Hegelianism –especially in what concerns the close connection between theory and praxis (HONNETH, 1994a, p. 78). More precisely, in Honneth's view, this particular model of social criticism is characterized by two key features that are closely related to each other: (a) It evaluates the state of health of modern societies in light of critical yardsticks not external but *immanent* to social reality (cf. HONNETH, 1994a; HONNETH, 2007), and (b) it conceives social pathologies as being caused by *deficits in social rationality* (cf. HONNETH, 2009).

(a) In line with Left Hegelians such as Karl Marx and Georg Lukács, the representatives of Critical theory endorse a sort of social critique that can be characterized as "immanent", insofar as it is *anchored* in an "emancipatory interest" already existing in pre-scientific everyday social reality (HONNETH, 1994b, p. 80; HONNETH, 2007, p. 64). In this sense, Horkheimer *et al.* distance themselves from Kant-inspired "constructive" or "procedural" models of social critique, which judge social reality in light of *external* criteria elaborated or set by the critic herself (HONNETH, 2007, p. 64).

To use Honneth's own terms, the members of the Frankfurt School intend to link social criticism to a "*moment of inner-worldly transcendence*", that is, to subversive tendencies intrinsic to social reality (HONNETH, 1994b, p. 81. My emphasis; cf. HONNETH, 2007, p. 61). For this reason, they attempt to unearth and "reconstruct" –not only theoretically, but also by means of empirical social research– those lifeworldly experiences and practices that point at the potentiality of transcending the existing social order: moral experiences of suffering and injustice, unfulfilled normative expectations, etc. (HONNETH, 1994b, pp. 79 *ff.*; cf. HONNETH, 2007, p. 59).

Axel Honneth (1994b, pp. 79 *ff.*) considers Horkheimer as the paradigmatic figure of the original program of the Frankfurt School. In the 1930s, the then director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* was still strongly tied to Marx's philosophy of history and, therefore, saw in the proletariat the *locus* of inner-worldly transcendence on which Critical Theory must rest. In a similar vein to Marx or Lukács, Horkheimer understood his interdisciplinary project of social criticism as "the intellectual side of the historical process of social emancipation" to be carried out by the working class (HORKHEIMER in HONNETH, 1994b, p. 80).

(b) However, this is not enough to specify the distinctiveness of Critical Theory, since there are other *immanent* approaches to social criticism that are quite different from the one endorsed by Horkheimer *et al*. I am referring, for instance, to the one developed in the 1980s by so-called "communitarists" –*e.g.* Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, Alasdair Macintyre. As Honneth argues, what distinguishes Critical Theory from communitarism is the emphasis of the former on *reason and rationality*: critical theorists understand social pathologies as "pathologies of reason", *i.e.*, as societal misdevelopments caused by a "lack of social rationality" (HONNETH, 2009, p. 24, 28; cf. 2007, p. 66).

Arguing against "universalistic" and "constructive" approaches in normative oriented political philosophy –such as John Rawls's procedural ethical liberalism–, communitarists defend a "contextualist" and "hermeneutic" account of social criticism (HONNETH, 2007, p. 61; ROSA, 2012, p. 106). Universalistic models of critique operate with allegedly "universal" ethical yardsticks that the critic herself constructs or deduces by *rational* means –*e.g.* speculatively obtained conceptions of justice or of human nature. By contrast, advocates of communitarism see this procedure as being "paternalistic" and even "despotic", insofar as it neglects and underestimates the perspective of the recipients of social critique. For communitarists, one can only criticize a social formation *legitimately* in light of the *particular –i.e. socio-culturally relative–* values and criteria valid within it. On this account, thus, a society is only worthy of criticism when it does not comply with the cultural norms accepted *by its own members* (HONNETH, 2007: 58, 62; ROSA, 2012: 106).

If one follows Honneth's (cf. 2009; 1994b) characterization, Critical Theory seems to lay in between these two antagonistic approaches, insofar as it attempts to combine an immanent account of social criticism with a claim for rationality and universality. On the one hand, as said above, critical theorists obtain the normative-ethical yardstick guiding social-philosophical

critique from pre-scientific everyday social reality. But on the other hand, they assert the rational character of their critical diagnosis: "One can distinguish Critical Theory from communitarism in terms of the link between the universal and reason" (HONNETH, 2009, p. 28). This *two-faced* nature of the social-philosophical approach of Critical Theory –*i.e.* its immanent *and* rational character– is mainly due to the influence of Hegel's thought (*Ibid.*, pp. 22, 24).

When defining the standard of "the good life" or social normality, Horkheimer *et al.* draw upon a central insight of Hegelian political philosophy, namely, on the "ethical idea" of a "rational universal" (*Ibid.*). According to this notion –which ultimately goes back to Plato's *Republic*–, individual self-realization presupposes the common good, which, in turn, is only possible within a "rational arrangement" [*vernünftige Einrichtung*] of society *qua* totality (INSTITUT FÜR SOZIALFORSCHUNG, 1956, p. 10).

As Honneth (2009, pp. 21, 32, 33) rightly argues, Hegel does not understand this ethical idea of a rational social totality as an artificial theoretical construct. Rather, he conceives of it as an idea *immanent* to the inner core of social reality. More specifically, as is well-known, Hegel claims that reason progressively unfolds and actualizes itself in human history through a complex "learning process", reaching its final stage in the "ethical life" [*Sittlichkeit*] of a rationally organized State (*Ibid.*; cf. HEGEL, 2018, §155)

Inspired by Marx and his heirs, critical theorists attempt to develop a "post-idealist version" of this Hegelian conception (HONNETH, 2009, p. 31). Arguing from a materialist perspective, they take Hegel's idea of the rational universal and concretize it into certain *rational social practices* through which "subjects can achieve cooperative self-actualization" (*Ibid.*, p. 26). Take, for instance, Horkheimer's conception of "human work", Marcuse's idea of "aesthetic life", and Habermas's notion of "communicative understanding" (*Ibid.*, pp. 26, 24). In a similar vein to the Hegelian reason, these anthropologically anchored forms of social *praxis* tend to unfold and actualize themselves progressively through an historical learning process, thereby becoming more and more rational over time. Consider, for example, the progress of human work in Marx and Horkheimer or the development of communicative rationality in Habermas (*Ibid.*; cf. HONNETH, 2007, pp. 65-66).

At the same time, going beyond Hegel, critical theorists observe that certain "pathologies of reason" typical of capitalist modernity systematically undermine the "social utilization" of the "potential of rationality" latent in these cooperative practices (HONNETH,

2009, pp. 22, 35). More precisely put, drawing upon Lukács's synthesis of Marx's and Weber's *sociological* criticism of modernity, Horkheimer *et al.* understand capitalist modernization as a "historical process of *deformation of reason*". That is, as a *deficient* process of social rationalization through which a unilateral and limited form of rationality becomes prevalent in the social world, namely, instrumental rationality (*Ibid.*, pp. 33, 35).

This distorted form of rationality permeating capitalism systematically produces attitudes and forms of social action that are at odds with the rational practices named above. Among these pathological forms of *praxis* are reification, fetishism, unidimensional thought, utilitarianism, the primacy of strategic action, identity thinking, etc. (*Ibid.*, p. 34). "Critical theorists", thus, "perceive capitalism as a social form of organization in which practices and ways of thinking prevail that prevent the social utilization of rationality already made possible by history" (*Ibid*, p. 35). In this sense, inspired by Marx, Horkheimer characterizes capitalism as an "irrational organization of society" that precludes the actualization of the potential of social rationality already made available in modernity by the progress of human work (*Ibid.*, pp. 22, 24).

But this is not all. As Honneth (*Ibid.*: 38 *ff.*) argues, for critical theorists, rationality and the lack thereof also play a key role in the arising of the so-called "inner-worldly transcendence" in which social criticism is anchored. In this connection, Horkheimer *et al.* take up and reinterpret social-philosophically a fundamental presupposition of Freudian psychoanalysis, namely, that subjects necessarily suffer when their "rational capacities" are restricted by a neurosis, and therefore develop an eager interest in reinstating rationality in their lives. Indeed, according to Freud, this desire for recovering reason explains the readiness of patients to engage in a psychoanalytic treatment (*Ibid.*).

It is from Freudian psychoanalysis that "Critical Theory takes the thought that social pathologies must always express themselves in a type of suffering that keeps alive the interest in the emancipatory power of reason" (*Ibid.*, p. 38). More precisely, critical theorists argue that human beings cannot remain indifferent to the social pathologies of capitalism: since individual self-realization is only possible within a rational social totality, societal irrationalities necessarily provoke forms of "social suffering" (*Ibid.*, pp. 21, 38). These experiences of suffering, in turn, produce an emancipatory interest, that is, a desire for attaining or recovering a rational social life in the Hegelian sense.

This interest in reinstating social rationality is what ultimately warrants the "rational responsiveness" of pre-scientific subjects to the rational arguments of Critical Theory, and this in spite of the blinding and disempowering effects of false consciousness, reification, and ideology (*Ibid.*, pp. 42, 29). For, in contrast to other forms of social criticism, Critical Theory claims that the turn to social emancipation presupposes the achievement of "rational insight" among pre-scientific actors (*Ibid.*, p. 28).

1.2 What are the tasks of a contemporary version of Critical Theory?

Axel Honneth (in HONNETH & BOLTANSKI, 2009, pp. 81 *ff.*) takes a clear position on the mission and tasks of a *contemporary* version Critical Theory. As I shall show below, his view on this issue decisively influences and informs Rosa's account. Broadly speaking, the former director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* advocates for a "radicalization" of Jürgen Habermas's distancing from the late Adorno's "negativistic" approach to Critical Theory.

As Honneth (*ibid.*, p. 101) claims, the late Adorno's account of a totally administered society put in jeopardy the original program of Critical Theory, insofar as it suppresses every vestige of inner-worldly transcendence in modern social formations. The author of the *Negative Dialektik* conceives modern society as a "total context of blindness" [*totaler Verblendungszusammenhang*] pervaded by instrumental rationality; that is, as an autopoietic system of "total domination" which succeeds at suppressing *all* subversive tendencies within quotidian social reality (*Ibid.*, pp. 101, 108). According to Honneth (*Ibid.*), this radical pessimistic account entails a systematic "disregard" for the experiences, skills, and knowledge of everyday actors. Indeed, if one follows Adorno's line of thought, modern individuals are not *subjects* capable of recognizing social pathologies and subverting reality, but rather *inert objects* of administration.

For Honneth (*Ibid.*, p. 101-102), it is precisely for this reason that Habermas (cf. 1981a; 1981b) promotes a "change of paradigm" in Critical Theory in the 1980s. The author of the *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* observes that the late Adorno is not able to provide an *immanent anchorage* for social criticism. Instead, he ends up endorsing an "external" approach to critique that cannot avoid falling into the trap of paternalism (HONNETH in HONNETH & BOLTANSKI, 2009, pp. 81 *ff.*).

As Honneth (*Ibid.*, pp. 102-103) argues, Jürgen Habermas overcomes this dilemma by carving out a *non-instrumental* and *emancipatory* form of rationality that is *immanent* to pre-

scientific social reality, namely, "communicative reason". According to Habermas, this alternative form of reason is essentially *anchored* in the linguistic practices of everyday human beings and provides them not only with competencies and skills for criticizing and subverting social pathologies, but also with an intuition of the normative standard of the good life, namely, power-free communication (cf. ROSA, 2010: 55).

Honneth (HONNETH in HONNETH & BOLTANSKI, 2009, p. 103) agrees with Habermas's criticism of Adorno and with his *immanent* approach to social criticism. However, he argues for a "radicalization" and "intensification" of the Habermasian position. According to the former director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, Habermas *immanentization* of Critical Theory does not go far enough: his account of communicative reason *qua* moment of inner-worldly transcendence is *too abstract and formal* to grasp the *real* experiences, competencies, and knowledge of everyday social actors (*Ibid.*, p. 107). "The everyday experiences of actors in social life", says Honneth (*Ibid.*, p. 103), "have no place in Habermas's theory".

Indeed, with his rationalistic attempt to reconstruct communicative reason by means of linguistic pragmatics, Habermas ends up making a similar mistake than Adorno. Because of his monomaniac focus on the analysis of the abstract presuppositions of successful communication, Habermas systematically neglects the *actual* experiences of suffering and intuitions of emancipation of quotidian individuals. As a consequence, his version of Critical Theory loses its immanent anchorage in lifeworldly experience and its link to *real* social life (*Ibid.*: 103).

With the aim of overcoming Habermas's "abstractions" and of providing a more adequate and realistic account of the moment of inner-worldly, Honneth (*Ibid.:* 106) develops his Hegel-inspired theory of "recognition" [*Anerkennung*]. According to this account, intersubjective *recognition* –and not rational, power-free communication– constitutes the *immanently anchored* normative standard of social criticism, since pre-scientific individuals *actually* experience the desire of being socially recognized in different forms, and cannot avoid suffering when they are "disrespected" (cf. HONNETH, 1992).

Arguably, in contrast to classical Critical Theorists and Habermas, Honneth (cf. *Ibid.*) does not operate with a strong notion of rationality. However, without abandoning the criterion of inner-worldly transcendence, his account *also* implies a –moderate– claim for universality. This claim is based on a strong philosophical-anthropological thesis, namely, that human beings need to experience intersubjective recognition in order to develop a "positive self-relationship" and to

attain "self-realization" (*Ibid.:* 336).

2. Rosa's Account of Critical Theory

To my knowledge, Hartmut Rosa's most detailed discussion of the tasks and features of a Critical Theory of Society appears in his 2010 book *Alienation and Acceleration.* At the time, he understood this discussion as a first step towards developing a "Critical Theory of Social Acceleration" (ROSA, 2010, p. 51). Indeed, back then, both his conception of "resonance" and his project of a critical "sociology of the relationship to the world" were still in the making (cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 98 *ff.*). In spite of the substantial modifications that Rosa's thought underwent in the last nine years, I think revisiting this early discussion is worthwhile, since it still informs his current account of what Critical Theory is supposed to be.

To begin with, Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 51) claims that a contemporary version of Critical Theory has to accomplish a balance between two tasks. On the one hand, it must "be faithful" to the "original" intuitions and intentions of the most prominent representatives of this tradition of thought, namely Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin, Habermas, Honneth, etc. But, on the other hand, it should not get "overly gagged and bounded" by the theoretical and methodological ideas of these thinkers. Rather, it has to be theoretically flexible enough to adapt these key insights to the criticism of current late-modern societies.

Rosa (*Ibid.*, pp. 51 *ff.*) speaks of two main features or fundamental intuitions of social criticism in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. First (1), explicitly following Honneth, he argues that the main task of Critical Theory is to diagnose "social pathologies" in modern social formations in light of normative-ethical criteria anchored in pre-scientific social life. And second (2), he claims that critical theorists can only do so if they operate with a concept of modern capitalist "society" [*Gesellschaft*] as a "whole", that is, as a "total social formation" [*Gesamtformation*] (*Ibid.*: 54; 2012, p. 273).

(1) Drawing on the former director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, thus, Rosa (2010: 51) understands Critical Theory as a tradition of thought within social philosophy, and, therefore, sees its main objective in identifying "social pathologies" –*i.e.* disorders or misdevelopments– in modern societies. "I would like to follow Axel Honneth in the suggestion that the identification of social pathologies is an overriding goal not just of Critical Theory, but of social philosophy in general" (ROSA, 2010, p. 51).

Also in line with Honneth, Rosa (*Ibid.*, pp. 51, 67) argues that the sort of social criticism

endorsed by critical theorists is *not functionalistic*, but *normative-ethical*. As its name suggests, a functionalist critique focus on the diagnosis of systemic malfunctions or dysfunctionalities that put in jeopardy the material or symbolic "reproduction" of a society. That is, it limits itself to asserting that a societal formation "*won't work* in the long run" (*Ibid.*, p. 67). Examples of this approach to social criticism are Marx's claim that the contradictions of capitalism necessarily result in profound economic crises, and Rosa's own analysis of the "de-synchronization" among social spheres caused by social acceleration (*Ibid.*, pp. 67, 69).

Normative social criticism, by contrast, is more ambitious in philosophical terms. It claims that a social order is *wrong* or *incorrect, i.e.*, "not *good* or *justifiable*". And it does so in light of certain criteria, values or norms that must be specified and justified by the critic (*Ibid.*, p. 68). More specifically, Rosa (*Ibid.* My emphasis) differentiates two "versions" of normative critique, namely, a "*moral*" and an "*ethical*" one.

The former is the one endorsed by universalists and liberalists such as John Rawls. Based on an allegedly universal "conception of justice", *moral* criticism denounces situations of social injustice and inequality. In other terms, it criticizes the unequal or unjust "distribution of goods, rights, status and/or privileges" among the different members or groups of a society (*Ibid.*).

Interestingly enough, Hartmut Rosa (*Ibid.*, pp. 51-51, 68) suggests that the *ethical* approach to social criticism is the one endorsed by *both* communitarism and Critical Theory. This form of critique, he says, does not focus on the unequal or unjust social distribution of goods, but rather on the socio-cultural conditions that preclude human beings from achieving "happiness" (*Ibid.*, p. 68). More precisely, this approach assesses the healthiness of a social formation in light of an *ethical* account of what constitutes a "good life". In doing so, it identifies certain social practices and structures that systematically undermine the individuals' possibility of leading an intact and happy existence (*Ibid.*).

Rosa (2012, p. 270; 2010, p. 52) claims, thus, that critical theorists necessarily resort to "substantive normative yardsticks" of different kinds when performing social criticism. Drawing upon one of Honneth's key insights, he argues that these normative-ethical standards must be "immanent" to everyday social reality; *i.e.* they have to comply with the above-discussed criterion of "inner-worldly transcendence". On Rosa's account, this criterion implies that social criticism must always be "anchored" in the lifeworldly experience of everyday actors (ROSA,

2012, p. 270). In other terms, Critical Theory must link its critical diagnosis to the "sensitiveness" of pre-scientific subjects to social pathologies, to their intuitions of what constitutes a "good" life and a "good" social order, and to the everyday practices that contain an emancipatory potential.

> According to this, social actors themselves still have a sense of what a better form of life and society would be like, they reveal a sensitivity to the pathologies the Critical Theorist seeks to pinpoint and even some knowledge about the potential ways to overcome them in their everyday practice (ROSA, 2010, p. 53).

In this sense, also in line with Honneth, Rosa (*Ibid.*: 52) emphasizes the importance of taking pre-scientific "social suffering" as a solid basis for social criticism. "[R]eal 'human suffering'", he writes, "is the normative starting point for Critical Theorists". As I will show below, it is in this connection that he attempts to revive and reformulate the classic concept of "alienation" [*Entfremdung*].

When justifying his claim that a *contemporary* version of Critical Theory of Society must endorse an *immanent* approach to social criticism, Rosa (2010, pp. 52-53) radicalizes Honneth's arguments by resorting to insights from post-metaphysical thinking. Influenced by the extreme mistrust in metaphysics firmly established in philosophy since the 1970s (cf. SCAVINO, 2007), Rosa (2010: 52) maintains that nowadays it is untenable to criticize a social formation in light of metaphysical norms *external* to the everyday experience of social actors –that is, in light of essentialist ethical criteria allegedly discovered by means of philosophical reflection, speculation or deduction. A contemporary version of Critical Theory, he says, cannot have its normative foundation in metaphysically connoted principles such as the "true" or "authentic" human nature: "in the 21st century", it is not clear how to philosophically prove and justify the validity of such transcendental norms (*Ibid.*).

Combining ideas from post-metaphysical thinking and communitarism, Rosa (*Ibid.*, pp. 51 *ff.*; 2012, pp. 106 *ff.*) suggests that the use of essentialist normative yardsticks not only is unsustainable in theoretical or philosophical terms, but also has dangerous ethical and political implications. Indeed, insofar as they neglect and underestimate the normative "self-interpretation" of everyday social actors –*i.e.* the *doxa*– and assert the superiority of the elitist normative knowledge of the critic –the *episteme*–, *external* forms of social criticism harbor the danger of paternalism and authoritarianism. For Rosa, thus, the "norms which are applied for judging social institutions and structures […] cannot be taken from some a-historical, extra-social standpoint" (ROSA, 2010, p. 52; 2012, pp. 106 *ff.*).

Now, what is for Hartmut Rosa the *immanent* ethical-normative criterion on which contemporary Critical Theory must rely? Arguably, if one analyzes his work from 2010 on, one can provide two different answers to this question. (a) In a first moment, Rosa (cf. 2010, pp. 52, 53) endorses a "weak" –*i.e.* contextualist and hermeneutic– approach to normative social critique which is strongly influenced by communitarism in general and by Charles Taylor in particular. (b) With the publication of *Resonanz* in 2016, however, his position changes substantially: he develops a "stronger" conception of ethical criticism based on the opposition between two *ontologically* and *philosophical-anthropologically* founded "modes of relationship to the world", namely, "resonance" and "alienation". In a similar vein to Honneth's theory of recognition, thus, Rosa's theory of resonance provides a definition of the "good life" that makes a *moderate* claim for universality (cf. ROSA, 2016; 2018; 2019a).

(a) Following Taylor, in texts such as *Alienation and Acceleration* and *Weltbeziehung im Zeitalter der Beschleunigung*, Rosa (2010, p. 52; 2012, p. 271) argues that social actors necessarily "guide" their everyday decisions, actions, and plans by *historically and socio-culturally relative* "conception[s] of the *good life*", which are either explicit and reflective or tacit and pre-reflective. Social suffering, suggests Rosa (2010, p. 52), arises when there is an internal contradiction between the real practices and institutions of a socio-cultural formation and the ethical-normative representations valid within it. That is, when the former systematically undermine the actualization of the latter. On this account, thus, the task of social criticism is to *critically compare* the actual structures and workings of a society with the cultural conceptions of the good held by its members:

> The most promising route for a Critical Theory that does not start from an idea of human nature or essence, but from socially caused sufferings of real people, lies in a critical comparison between those conceptions of good and the actual social practices and institutions. Thus, social conditions which structurally cause subjects to pursue conceptions of the good they necessarily fail to realize under those same conditions surely need to be a prime target for social criticism (ROSA, 2010, pp. 52-53).

As Rosa argues, modern societies –*i.e.* the *particular* sort of socio-cultural formations that constitute the subject matter of Critical Theory– are guided by a very peculiar conception of happiness, namely, by the idea of an autonomous and self-determined life. More precisely put, modern subjects believe that a good life is one in which they are free to both individually and collectively –*i.e.* both biographically and politically– self-determine their existences according to their *authentic* goals, abilities, desires, and needs. However, insofar as actually existing modern

societies are governed by the blind imperatives of acceleration, capitalist growth, and innovation, they systematically preclude the realization of this ethical standard. Critical Theory, claims Rosa (2010, p. 53), must focus its social criticism on this internal contradiction peculiar to modern capitalist societies.

> Social conditions that undermine our capacity at self-determination, which undercut our potentials for individual and collective autonomy, can and should be identified and criticized because they systematically disable people to realize their conceptions of the good (*Ibid.*).

In this period of his work, thus, Rosa (*Ibid.*) argues that *autonomy* is the normative criteria on which Critical Theory must rest. And he maintains that the use of this ethical standard "need[s] not be justified on universalist normative grounds", that is, by resorting to strong philosophical-anthropological or ontological arguments. Rather, the ideas of freedom, authenticity and self-determination are essentially anchored in the everyday self-interpretations of modern subjects.

 (b) The development of the critical "sociology of the relationship to the world" implies a substantial change in Rosa's normative-ethical position. Already in a footnote of his 2012 book *Weltbeziehung im Zeitalter der Beschleunigung*, Rosa (2012, pp. 272) outlines this change, which, in my view, is twofold. First, as I will show in the next section, the theory of resonance entails the abandonment of the idea of "autonomy" as the ethical standard for criticizing modern societies. And second, and most importantly, it involves a distancing from communitarism and a move towards an approach more akin to the one developed by Honneth.

Indeed, Rosa's critical sociology of the relationship to the world constitutes a "stronger" approach to social criticism than the one endorsed by communitarism (cf. *Ibid.*). The account of critique endorsed by Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer *et al.* can be understood as "weak" (cf. Honneth, 2007, p. 57). And this for two reasons: first, because it is not a universalist but a contextualist form of criticism limited to a *particular* socio-cultural formation; and second, because it takes the normative self-interpretations of everyday actors at face value: it does not put them into question, let alone mistrust them.

By contrast, Rosa's approach developed in *Resonanz* and other recent texts makes a *moderate* claim for universality. As I shall show in detail in the next section, his critical sociology of the relationship to the world is based on the opposition between two *universal* modes of relation to the world that are essential to human life, namely, "resonance" and

"alienation" (cf. ROSA, 2016, pp. 747-748). For Rosa (*Ibid.*: 749), resonance constitutes the "meta-criterion of successful life", while alienation is the social pathology *par excellence*.

In opposition to his earlier culturally relativistic and pluralistic position on normativity, in his current writings, Rosa argues for a "normative monism" based on a strong philosophic-anthropological claim: namely, that *all* human beings in *all* possible cultural and historical contexts have an essential "desire for resonance" [*Resonanzverlangen*], and suffer from experiences of alienation when this desire remains unfulfilled (*Ibid.*, p. 748). This claim, he says, is supported by psychological, philosophical-anthropological, phenomenological, ethnological, and neurological studies of empirical and theoretical nature (*Ibid.*, p. 741).

However, in my view, the universality claim of this account of social critique is *moderate*, and this because Rosa never renounces to the criterion of inner-worldly transcendence. Indeed, he thinks that one can only legitimately base criticism on strong notions such as resonance and alienation if the latter have a correlate in the real everyday experience of social actors (cf. ROSA, 2010, p. 52). For him, thus, alienation and resonance are not artificial philosophical constructs, but *experiential* modes of relating to the world (ROSA, 2016, p. 747).

Furthermore, as I will show below, Rosa's conception of resonance has a *formal* character that makes it possible to do justice to the variability among different socio-cultural forms of life. Put differently, the concepts of resonance and alienation are understood by Rosa as formal and broad notions that can accommodate the most different cultural and biographical *contents.* In effect, Rosa's sociology of the relationship to the world claims that each society has its own culturally defined collective "spheres of resonance" [*Resonanzsphären*], within which each individual develops his particular "axes of resonance" [*Resonanzachsen*] (cf. ROSA, 2016, p. 331).

In spite of their discrepancies (cf., for instance, *Ibid.*, pp. 332 *ff.*), Rosa's current account of social criticism shares some significant commonalities with the approach adopted by Honneth. Without abandoning the criterion of inner-worldly transcendence, both authors argue for a "normative monism" supported by *formal and relatively broad* philosophical-anthropological claims (cf. ROSA, 2016, p. 749; cf. HONNETH, 2003, p. 3). In Honneth's work, this normative criterion is recognition [*Anerkennung*]; in Rosa's, resonance. Both also base their theories on a fundamental conceptual dualism: they oppose recognition and resonance to pathological forms of experience that cause social suffering, namely, to "disrespect" [*Missachtung*] and alienation,

respectively.

(2) Furthermore, drawing upon a crucial insight from Adorno and Horkheimer (INSTITUT FÜR SOZIALFORSCHUNG, 1956, pp. 16, 22, 23), Rosa (2010, p. 54; 2012, p. 273) emphasizes that Critical Theory endorses a marked *holistic* account of social reality, insofar as it understands modern society [*Gesellschaft*] as a "unified whole". Critical theorists, he says, consider capitalist society as a total and integrated social formation –*i.e.* as a "*Gesamtformation*"– which is governed by "unifying" structural laws of economic, cultural, institutional, and political character –*i.e.* all-encompassing processes of rationalization, commodification, bureaucratization, reification, etc. On this account, thus, all micro-social constellations and individual actions are always-already mediated and pre-formed by the macro-structures of society *qua* totality (cf. INSTITUT FÜR SOZIALFORSCHUNG, 1956, p. 109).

For Rosa, one of the main tasks of social criticism in the tradition of the Frankfurt School consists precisely in identifying and critically analyzing the macro-structural processes that underlie modern capitalist societies. And this because these macro-structures are ultimately responsible for causing social pathologies and human suffering.

> Critical Theory has always maintained that those structures, institutions and actions form integrated units in the sense of a social formation, and that it is precisely the task of theory to identify and critically analyze the laws and forces that govern these formations (ROSA, 2010, p. 54).

In this sense, says Rosa (2010: 54; 2012: 273), Critical Theory is sharply opposed to those approaches that deny the holistic and integrated nature of modern society. I am referring not only to liberalist and neoliberalist accounts, but also to poststructuralist and deconstructivist positions. That is, to all theories that –either willingly or unwillingly– follow Margaret Thatcher's "famous *dictum* that 'there is no such thing as society'", and conceive of social reality as consisting of a random aggregation of individuals or a myriad of incommensurable micro-cultures (ROSA, 2010: 54).

Until the publication of *Resonanz,* in 2016, Rosa claimed that "social acceleration" was the structural unifying principle governing (late-)modern social formations. (Late-)Modern societies, he argues in books such as *Beschleunigung* and *Alienation and Acceleration*, are *high-speed* societies: "the history of modernization is the history of an ongoing process of social acceleration which progressively transforms society in a multi-stage process" (ROSA, 2010: 54). As I shall show below, refining these earlier reflections, Rosa (2019a, pp. 12, 26) now maintains

that contemporary societies are structurally governed by "*dynamic stabilization*" [*dynamische Stabilisierung*], a more complex process that includes acceleration but is broader than it.

3. Hartmut Rosa's Sociology of the Relationship to the World as a Phenomenological Critical Theory

After having sketched out the main features of Rosa's account of the tasks and aims of Critical Theory, I will now move on to outline the critical "sociology of the relationship to the world" developed in his most recent writings: the books *Weltbeziehungen im Zeitalter der Beschleunigung* (ROSA, 2012)*, Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (ROSA, 2016) and *Unverfügbarkeit* (ROSA, 2018), and the article "*Resonanz als Schlüsselbegriff der Sozialtheorie*" (ROSA, 2019a). This novel version of Critical Theory has a striking peculiarity: it is *phenomenologically inspired* (ROSA, 2019a, p. 14; 2018, p. 59; 2012: 7; cf. FUCHS et al., 2018, p. 15). Indeed, drawing upon authors such as Charles Taylor, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Emannuel Lévinas, Bernhard Waldenfels, Hans Blumenberg, and Helmuth Plessner, among others, Rosa focuses his approach to social criticism on the lifeworldly experience of (late-)modern subjects; more specifically, on their quotidian "relationships to the world" [*Weltbeziehungen/ Weltverhältnisse*] (cf. ROSA, 2012, p. 379). In doing so, he starts from the thesis that the "quality" of these relationships decides about the quality of human life (cf. ROSA, 2016: 15).

Broadly speaking, Rosa defines the "relationship to the world" as a way of "being-in-the-world" [*in-der-Welt-Sein*] that is socio-culturally mediated and pre-formed. As I shall show below, in this phenomenological version of Critical Theory, the predominance of a particular mode of relationship to the world, "resonance" [*Resonanz*], operates as the normative standard of the good life, whereas the prevalence of "alienated" [*entfremdet*] relations is conceived as a social pathology. Broadly speaking, in resonant relations to the world, the latter appears to the subject as a "responsive 'Thou'" [*antwortendes 'Du'*], while in alienation it manifests itself as "voiceless, cold, and indifferent –or even as hostile" (ROSA, 2012, pp. 8, 10).

Arguing from this perspective, Rosa (2019a: 26) claims that Critical Theory has to be a "critique of the conditions of resonance" [*Resonanzverhältnisse*], that is, a criticism of those social –*i.e.* institutional, economic, cultural, etc.– circumstances that preclude the development of resonant relationships. On this account, (late-)modern social formations are worthy of criticism, insofar as their structural principle, so-called "dynamic stabilization" [*dynamische*

Stabilisierung], systematically produces experiences of alienation (cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13).

3.1. The Sociology of the Relationships to the World

According to Rosa (2012, pp. 7-8, 376-377; cf. 2016, pp. 54 *ff.*), the concept of "relationship to the world" refers to the fundamental way in which a human subject is "situated-in-the-world" [*in-die-Welt-gestellt*] –or, more precisely put, in which she "experiences" this situatedness. As Rosa emphasizes –and this is crucial for adequately understanding his position–, a *Weltbeziehung* is not merely a "mentality" or a "conception of the world" –*i.e.* an organized set of explicit ideas and convictions–, but rather something more basal and fundamental, namely, a pre-reflective and pre-cognitive "existential sensibility" (ROSA, 2016, p. 54). To be sure, a relationship to the world includes "cognitive" and "evaluative" dimensions, but their primary core is constituted by "corporeal, emotional, sensual and existential" aspects (ROSA, 2012: 11; 2016: 56).

As Rosa (2016, pp. 20, 54, 68, 70-71; 2012, p. 7) repeatedly says, the *Weltbeziehungen* are not something purely individual: they are always-already socially, culturally, economically, and historically "mediated". And this not only holds good for their *reflective* –*i.e.* cognitive and evaluative– dimensions, but also, and fundamentally, for their *pre-reflective* –*i.e.* corporeal and affective– aspects; that is, for those aspects which, at first sight, may appear to be pre-social, natural or biological. On this account, thus, the particular social conditions under which human beings live fundamentally pre-form their manner of being-in-the-world.

> As I shall show, social conditions –institutions, forms of praxis and organization, time structures and relations of power– not only shape the cognitive or conceptual aspects of the relation to the world, but *all* its moments; also and especially its corporeal and existential ones, and, of course, its intentional and evaluative ones (ROSA, 2016, p. 70).

For this reason, there are not only great variabilities in the relations to the world among different societies and cultures –one can differentiate, for instance, the *Weltbeziehung* typical of Classical Greece from the one prevalent in late modernity–, but also among *different groups within the same society*, that is, among genders, social classes, generations, ethnic groups, etc. (ROSA, 2012, pp. 377-378). As he writes on many occasions, Rosa (2019a, p. 16; 2016, p. 70) understands his theoretical project as a *sociology* of the relationships to the world precisely because it focuses on the study of the *social* nature, origin, and consequences of *Weltbeziehungen*.

Put differently, in contrast to *philosophical* approaches that intend to grasp the universal

and invariant features of the human relations to the world –for instance, phenomenology and philosophical anthropology–, Rosa's *sociological* account aims at analyzing their socio-cultural variability (ROSA, 2016, p. 70; cf. 2018, p. 12). More specifically, as a contemporary version of Critical Theory, the *Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* focuses its attention on the particular relations to the world prevalent in *capitalist (late-)modern* societies, thereby investigating not only their specific quality, but also their social causes and consequences (cf. ROSA, 2019a; 2018; 2016).

In order to adequately understand Rosa's concept of the relationship to the world, it is necessary to consider his accounts of both the "subject" [*Subjekt*] –or "self" [*Selbst*]– and the "world" [*Welt*]. Arguing from a relational ontological perspective, Rosa claims that there is no ontological primacy neither of the subject over the world nor *vice versa*. Neither of them exist as an already-constituted entity *before* the relationship. They are, as it were, "the result of relations and reciprocations; they emerge from the relation" (ROSA 2019a, p. 15; cf. 2016, p. 62; 2018, p. 11).

However, in spite of his emphasis on relationality, Rosa (2016, p. 65; 2018, p. 12) sticks to the distinction between subjectivity and world as the two constitutive "poles" of a relation to the world, and this because, "*from a phenomenological perspective*, they are ineluctable" (ROSA, 2016, p. 65. My emphasis). In line with contemporary phenomenologists such as Dan Zahavi (cf. 2009) –and as opposed to post-structuralist accounts that declare the "death of the subject"–, Rosa (2016, pp. 63 *ff.*) suggests that subjectivity cannot be reduced to an outcome of relationships. At least in a *minimal sense –i.e.* not as a fully-fledged and mature self, but as an experiencing and acting center–, individual selfhood is not a result, but a *presupposition* of the relation to the world.

Indeed, individual subjects or selves are the only "entities" capable of *experiencing* the world and of *acting* upon it. "They are, first, those entities that *have experiences* […] and they constitute, secondly, the place in which psychical energy motivationally manifests itself, that is, in which impulses of action become effective" (*Ibid.*, p. 65). Without an experiencing subject, thus, there would not be a relationship to the world at all. It is in this sense that Rosa (cf. 2019a, p. 15) argues that, at least in this minimal sense, subject and world are "equiprimordial" [*gleichursprünglich*] entities.

Of course, the subjectivity of which Rosa (*Ibid.*) speaks is not a pure ego completely detached from the world, such as the one conceived by certain versions of transcendental and

idealist philosophy. Rather, it is the *mundane or lifeworldly* human subject, who is *always-already* "*embedded in, enveloped by,* and *related to* the world as a whole" (ROSA, 2019a, p. 15: 2016, p. 66). More precisely, when depicting the self's relationship to the world –which, of course, is not *causal-mechanical* in character but *experiential and meaningful*–, Rosa resorts to fundamental concepts from the phenomenological tradition. The subject, he says following Edmund Husserl, is "intentionally" related to the world in cognitive, affective, evaluative, and corporeal terms: "Relationships to the world can be understood as concretions of 'intentionality' [*Intentionalität*]" (ROSA, 2016, p. 65). In this sense, she is "in-the-world" –Heidegger (cf. 2006: §12)– or "towards the world" –Merleau-Ponty (cf. 1945: 462) (ROSA, 2016: 65).

On the other hand, when defining the "world", Rosa also draws upon classical phenomenology. In effect, the "*Welt*" of which he speaks is not the objective and exact –*i.e.* mathematical and physicalist– world constructed by natural science, but rather the "lifeworld" [*Lebenswelt*]; that is, the world *as it is (inter)subjectively experienced* in pre-scientific quotidian life (cf. Husserl, 1954). In doing so, he understands experience not in a restricted positivistic manner –*i.e.* as sensorial experience–, but in a *broad sense*. The world, claims Rosa (2016, p. 65. My emphasis.) in a phenomenological vein, is "*everything that 'encounters'*" us [*alles, was 'begegnet'* (uns)] –or "*can encounter*" us– in quotidian experience. In this sense, it contains not only physical objects, but also cultural things, symbols, signs, ideas, self-experiences, feelings, fellow-men, animals, social institutions, etc.

Paraphrasing Husserl, Rosa claims that the world is the "ultimate horizon in which things can occur and objects can be found" (*Ibid.*, p. 65). And following Hans Blumenberg, he characterizes it as a "metaphor for the totality of experienceable" [*Metapher für das Ganze der Erfahrbarkeit*] (*Ibid.*). Further, inspired by Jürgen Habermas, he claims that, at least in modernity, the world can be divided into three regions: the "*objective world*" of material things, the "*social world*" consisting of fellow-men and institutions, and the "*subjective inner world*" entailing states of mind, feelings, sensations, desires, etc. (*Ibid.*, p. 69).

To round off this outline of Rosa's account of *Weltbeziehungen*, it is important to note that he conceives subject-world relationships as bilateral or reciprocal: "The world *approaches the experiencing subject*, and the latter *goes into the world*" (*Ibid.*, p. 211). From the subjective perspective of the individual, this means that relationships to the world have two fundamental dimensions, namely, a *passive* or "*pathic*" [*pathisch*] one, the "experience of the world"

[*Welterfahrung*], and an *active* or "*intentionalist*" [*intentionalistisch*] one, the "appropriation of the world" [*Weltaneignung*] (*Ibid.*, pp. 211-212). Whereas the *Welterfahrung* is the way in which human beings are affected or approached by the world, the *Weltaneigung* is the manner in which they come to terms with and act upon it (*Ibid.*, pp. 211; 53, 33).

3.2. Phenomenology of Resonance

In contrast to other forms of phenomenologically based sociology (cf., for instance, LUCKMANN, 2007), Rosa's *Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* does not aim at merely describing and analyzing empirical relationships to the world in terms of axiological neutrality. Rather, as a version of Critical Theory, it attempts to diagnose social pathologies in capitalist modern societies in light of an ethical-normative standard of the good life. As I suggested above, Rosa (2012, p. 7) understands the question of the good or successful life as a question about the quality of the relations to the world. "The success or failure [*Gelingen oder Misslingen*] of life", he writes, "depends on the mode of relationship to the world of human beings" (ROSA, 2016, p. 14).

Arguably, it is because of this programmatic aim that Rosa (cf. 2016, p. 56) bases all his theory on a conceptual dualism between two fundamental forms of relation to the world, namely, between *resonant* –or responsive– and *alienated* –or voiceless– relationships. The former operate as the normative yardstick of the good life, whereas the latter constitute the social pathology *par excellence*. More precisely put, from this perspective, "human life [...] succeeds when subjects have constitutive experiences of resonance, and, in contrast, it fails when the spheres of resonance are systematically pushed aside by 'voiceless' patterns of relation" (ROSA, 2012, p. 10; cf. 2016, p. 297). In this sense, Rosa (2016, p. 297) understands his Critical Theory as a critical assessment of the social "conditions of resonance" in (late-)modernity.

Broadly speaking, resonance is for Rosa (2016, p. 306, 316; cf. 2018, p. 15. My emphasis) the "*Other of alienation*", that is, its "*counter-concept*" [*Gegenbegriff*]. In this sense, this notion plays a similar role in his work to that of recognition in Honneth's. It allows Rosa to overcome the "dark pessimism" of Adorno's negativistic approach to Critical Theory, insofar as it provides a "*positive*" conception of the good life that is *immanently anchored* in pre-scientific social reality. Also in a similar vein to Honneth, Rosa argues that resonance should be the "normative criterion" of Critical Theory, supporting this claim on the basis of a strong philosophical-anthropological thesis: human beings essentially have a "desire" [*Verlangen*] for – and a "fundamental need" [*Grundbedürfnis*] of– resonant experiences (ROSA, 2016, p. 748;

2018, p. 20).

Interestingly enough, Rosa (2019a, p. 14; cf. 2016, pp. 53 *ff.*) claims that his conception of resonance is a "phenomenologically inspired attempt" that aims at articulating and making explicit the "moments and elements of an alternative mode of relationship to the world" which remain implicit in the critical diagnoses of the main representatives of the Frankfurt School. I am referring to Benjamin's conception of the "aura", Adorno's idea of a "mimetic relation to the world", Marcuse's notion of an "erotic-orphic mode of existence", etc. "The theory of resonance attempts to […] conceptually grasp in a coherent and consistent manner the vague ideas of a charismatic, erotic, auratic or mimetic form of being-in-the-world" (ROSA, 2019a, p. 14).

Now, what is exactly resonance? According to Rosa (2016, pp. 285, 288) –and this is crucial for understanding his position–, resonance is *not* merely an "emotional state". Rather, it constitutes a specific kind of relationship to the world: "Resonance", he writes, is "a mode of *being-in-the-world*, that is, a specific sort of relationship between subject and world" (*Ibid.*, p. 285). As said, generally speaking, resonance is a *responsive* and *dialogic* relation to a segment of the world in which both, self and world, are deeply and reciprocally *touched* [*berührt*] or *moved* [*bewegt*] (2016: 284, 289, 743; cf. 2019a: 18). For Rosa (cf. 2019a, p. 26), this segment of the world is not necessarily a human being: it could be an animal, an idea, a work of art, a scientific paper, a sport, etc. In this sense, the theory of resonance surpasses the anthropocentric character of Honneth's account of recognition, which only focuses on *interhuman* relationships (cf. ROSA, 2016: 332 *ff.*).

In his 2018 book *Unverfügbarkeit*, Rosa (2018: 38 *ff.*) provides a very useful systematic definition of resonance. Resonant relationships to the world, he says, are characterized by four fundamental moments –in the Hegelian sense of the term–: (1) one of "affection" [*Affizierung*], (2) one of "emotion" [*Emotion*], (3) one of "transformative assimilation" [*Anverwandlung*], and (4) one of unavailability [*Unverfügbarkeit*]. In what follows, I will briefly outline each of them in light of an example: a resonant relationship between a scholar and a philosophy book.

(1) The moment of "affection" constitutes the *passive* or *pathic* dimension of resonance –or, put differently, it is the mode of "experience of the world" characteristic of a resonant relationship. The subject feels deeply "moved" and "touched" by a segment of the world, and this, of course, not in an external –*i.e.* mechanical-causal– but in an "internal" –experiential-meaningful– sense (*Ibid.*, pp. 38-39). The world, as it were, "speaks" to her (ROSA, 2019a, p.

19). In order to emphasize this *centripetal* character of affection, Rosa (2016, p. 298) refers to it as "af←fection" [*Af←izierung*].

Rosa also characterizes affection as an "interpellation" [*Anrufung*], insofar as the segment of the world appears to the subject as being "intrinsically" important or significant (ROSA, 2018, p. 39). This is so because this segment is linked to "strong values" [*starke Wertungen*]; *i.e.* it appears as being not only significant *for her*, but rather as something important *in itself*. In other terms, the subject feels interpellated because he has an "intrinsic interest" [*intrinsisches Interesse*] –and not a merely "instrumental" one– in that particular sector of the world. "Suddenly, something interpellates us, moves us from the outside and becomes important to us for its own sake" (ROSA, 2018, p. 39; cf. 2016, p. 298).

One can speak of a resonant relationship between a scholar and a philosophy book when she feels affectively touched by its contents. She feels interpellated by the theory developed in the book because she finds it really important for her work or her life. In this sense, her interest is not instrumental: for her, studying the book is not a means for achieving a professional aim –say, getting a postdoc position–, but rather an end in itself.

(2) If "affection" belongs to the *pathic* dimension of resonant relationships, "emotion" forms part of their *active* aspect. Indeed, for Rosa (2018, p. 39-40), resonance implies always a "double movement" between subject and world: the former actively "responds" in an emotive manner to the interpellation of the latter. The concept of "emotion" indicates precisely this "answer" [*Antwort*] on the part of the subject. Insofar as it implies a "*movement* towards the outside", Rosa refers to this emotional response as "e→motion" [E→*motion*] (*Ibid.*: 40. My emphasis; cf. 2018: 18; 2016: 296). In its most basic form, he says, e→motion expresses itself in "corporeal reaction[s]" such as, for instance, having "chills" or "goose-skin" (ROSA, 2018, p. 41; 2019a, p. 18).

In order for resonance to occur, claims Rosa (2018, p. 40; 2019a, p. 18), this emotive answer has to be accompanied with a feeling of "self-efficacy" [*Selbstwirksamkeit*]. This form of resonant self-efficacy, however, should not be conflated with instrumental, economic or technical efficiency –i.e., with the "success" in achieving an intended instrumental result. Indeed, on Rosa's account, a subject is self-effective when she experiences herself as being able to "touch" or "move" the segment of the world that interpellates her. In this sense, a "genuine" relation of resonance only takes place when the response "contains an experience of the own self-efficacy,

which means that the subject herself can touch the segment of the world that encounters her" (ROSA, 2019a, p. 18).

If we apply this to our example, we can say that the scholar's resonant relationship to the philosophy book not only implies her being affected and interpellated *by it*, but also her own self-effective response *to it*. Although she cannot directly talk to the book's author, the scholar feels she is able to "touch" and "move" the philosophical theory contained in it. That is, she feels she has something important to say about the author's ideas, something that deeply "touches" and even "transform" their nature, meaning, and scope.

(3) This brings me to the third essential moment of resonance, namely, the so-called "transformative appropriation" or "*Anverwandlung*" (ROSA, 2018, p. 41). Broadly speaking, for Rosa, *Anverwandlung* is a manner of "appropriation of the world" [*Weltaneignung*], that is, it belongs to the *intentionalist* dimension of the *Weltbeziehung*. More precisely, it constitutes a "transformative" and *non-reifying* form of appropriation that must be sharply differentiated from the "mere appropriation" [*bloße Aneignung*] typical of modern capitalism (ROSA, 2019a, p. 42; cf. 2018, p. 18).

According to Rosa (2019a, p. 19), mere appropriation consists in "making available or attainable" [*Verfügbarmachen*] a certain segment of the world. It is an act of "distancing-aggressive" character, insofar as it aims at "dominating" the world or at "making it useful" for the sake of the subject's aims (ROSA, 2018, pp. 37, 21-22). In acts of "voiceless" appropriation – such as that prevalent in the spheres of modern technique, capitalist consumption, and bureaucratic administration–, the world appears as a "point of aggression" [*Aggressionspunkt*], that is, as something hostile or indifferent to be put under control or dealt with (*Ibid.*, p. 20).

In this connection, the self does not experience the world –or the particular segment thereof– as an end in itself, but rather as a means or instrumental resource for achieving strategic, economic, egoistic or technical goals. Mere appropriation is, thus, a *monological* act. The self shows no interest whatsoever in letting herself be "touched" or "moved" by the alterity of worldly things and beings, let alone in establishing an affective-emotional *dialogue* with them. Rather, she remains deaf and closed to the *voice* of the counterpart and even ends up "absorbing" it (ROSA, 2019a, p. 14; 2018, pp. 22 *ff.*).

By contrast, "transformative assimilation" or *Anverwandlung* is a non-instrumental way of approaching and processing the world that aims at establishing a "responsive relationship"

[*Antwortsbeziehung*] to it. Here the self *gets deeply involved* in a time- and effort-demanding dialogue with a segment of the world. That is, in a reciprocal conversation of "hearing and answering" in which she recognizes and respects the Otherness of the counterpart. In this dialogue, she *opens herself* towards the alterity of worldly things in a double sense: she lets herself be affected by their voice and, at the same time, attempts to "touch" and "move" them in a *self-effective* manner (cf. ROSA, 2016, p. 431; 2018, pp. 40-41).

As it follows from the above, in contrast to the monological process of mere appropriation, *Anverwandlung* entails a "*transformation*" of both the self and the world. On the one hand, the responsive dialogue produces a crucial change in our subjectivity. It is in this sense, writes Rosa (2018: 41), that we say that a relationship to someone or something "has turned us into a different person". In Rosa's own words, "whenever we enter into a resonant relationship to the world, we do not remain the same. Experiences of resonance *transform* us" (*Ibid.*).

On the other hand, the –segment of the– world also changes its shape because of the *Anverwandlung*. Arguing from a phenomenological perspective, however, Rosa (2018, p. 42; 2019a, p. 19) maintains that what is transformed are not the "thing in themselves", but rather the way in which they appear to us, that is, their *mode of giveness*. For instance, when we listen to and appropriate a song in a transformative manner, it is not the song *itself* that changes –*i.e.* its harmony, melody, and rhythm–, but the manner in which it is experientially given to us –*e.g.* it appears now as more interesting, happier, deeper, etc.

Interestingly enough, Rosa (2019a, p. 18) illustrates transformative appropriation with the process of studying and assimilating a book. When adopting a dialogical and resonant attitude, *actively* studying a text is a time- and effort-demanding process in which both the reader and the book –or more precisely put, its mode of giveness– transform themselves substantially. By contrast, says Rosa (*Ibid.*), the mere appropriation of a book by an instantaneous and effortless act of consumption does not produce this reciprocal transformation. The scholar of our example, for instance, will not be the same person after having established a transformative dialogue with a philosophical work such as, say, Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. And also the book will substantially change its manner of manifestation –at least for the scholar.

(4) The fourth essential aspect of resonance is its "constitutive *unavailability*" [*konstitutive Unverfügbarkeit*] (*Ibid.*): "All resonant experiences entail an unabrogable moment of unavailability" (ROSA, 2016, p. 295). For Rosa, this means two closely related things: not

only the –segment of the– world we relate to, but also the resonant relationship itself are essentially unavailable and unattainable.

First, as it follows from the above, Rosa (2016, p. 743) understands resonance as an "encounter with an Other as Other, not as a fusion into a unity". It is, in effect, an encounter of the subject *qua* self with the world *qua* Other. In this sense, it constitutes not a monological but a *dialogical* process in that it implies a relationship between "two more or less discrete entities" or "poles", each of which speaks with its "own voice" (*Ibid.*, pp. 285, 295).

On Rosa's account, thus, resonance is grounded on a *tense dialectic between openness and closedness* (ROSA, 2019a, p. 24; 2016, p. 298). Both poles of the relationship –self and world– must be "open enough" to be able to enter into an affective-emotional dialogue, but also "closed enough" to not lose their own respective voices in the process. "Relations of resonance presuppose that subject and world are 'closed' or consistent enough to speak with their respective own voice, and open enough to let themselves be affected or 'reached'" (ROSA, 2016, p. 298).

As Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 295) argues, insofar as the world *qua* Other vibrates in its own frequency, it is ultimately *unavailable*. Its response can always "fail to appear", since it is an obstinate voice that cannot be produced nor controlled *ad libitum* by the self. If that were the case, then the world would not be an alterity anymore but a mere part of the subject, and the dialogue would turn into a monologue.

It is precisely because of the Otherness of the world that far from being completely harmonious, resonance necessarily entails moments of "contradiction" [*Widerspruch*] and "dissonance" [*Dissonanz*] between both of its poles. "Contradiction is not only permitted but even required" (*Ibid.*, p. 743). In this sense, Rosa (*Ibid.*, pp. 743, 285) argues that resonant relationships must be sharply differentiated from social experiences of "echo", "fusion" or "consonance", such as those typical of fascism and other totalitarian regimes.

"[T]otalitarian or fascist communities", he says, "are based on the longing for *fusion*, for the dissolution of the the owness into a community" (*Ibid.*, p. 743). In these cases, the self loses her own voice –*i.e.*, what, from the perspective of the world, is her Otherness–, limiting herself to repeating the frequency of the worldly pole. However, it can also happen the other way around: in cases of "mere appropriation" –or reification–, the world loses her own voice and restrict itself to amplifying the selfness of the self.

Now, according to Rosa (2018, p. 43), not only the world, but also resonance itself is

unavailable. Put differently, it is impossible to voluntarily and instrumentally manipulate, fabricate, control, guarantee or even prevent the occurrence of a resonant relationship. "Resonance", he claims, "is constitutively unavailable; it is not predictable" (*Ibid.*, p. 43). For instance, one can try to prepare all the conditions for experiencing resonance –by inviting one's best friends for dinner, putting one's favorite music, lighting up candles, etc.–, but resonance still might fail to appear. And the opposite is also true: the possibility of the occurrence of resonance can never be *totally* discarded, even in cases in which it is highly unlikely.

When establishing a resonant relationship with her philosophy book, the scholar of our example encounters it as an alterity, that is, as an entity with an own voice and frequency. Her dialogue with it is not completely harmonic, but rather pervaded by dissonances and contradictions. In the process of reading and studying the book, she does not loses her own thoughts; that is, she does not become fused with the ideas of the author, but converses with them. The occurrence of resonance between the scholar and the philosophy book, however, cannot be planned nor controlled. It could happen that her favorite book says nothing to her.

3.3. Resonance as a social fact

As Rosa (cf. 2016, p. 295; 2019a, p. 24) himself observes, at first glance, it seems difficult to understand how resonance could serve as the normative standard guiding *social* criticism. Indeed, at least apparently, resonant relationships as described above seem to be something merely *subjective and evanescent.* In this sense, the manifestation of resonance appears to have nothing to do with socio-cultural orders and regularities. Instead, it seems to be a fugitive experience that only depends on the momentary mood of the individual subject.

A careful analysis of Rosa's writings shows that this is not the case. As a *sociologist of the relationships to the world*, he maintains that resonant relations are always-already conditioned, pre-formed, and made possible –or impossible– by socio-cultural structures. To correct this false impression of subjectivism, Rosa (cf. 2016, p. 297; 2019a, pp. 24 *ff.*) comes up with a set of *sociological* categories for analyzing resonance as a *fait social*, namely, those of "spheres of resonance" [*Resonanzsphären*], "axes of resonance" [*Resonanzachsen*], "certainty of resonance" [*Resonanzgewissheit*], and "dispositional resonance" [*dispositionale Resonanz*].

It is with the aid of these social-theoretical concepts that Rosa (2016, p. 294) develops a criticism of the socio-cultural "conditions of resonance" in (late-)modernity. Broadly speaking, his sociological critique of the conditions of resonance makes it possible to "*go beyond*

momentary experiences in order to consider a human being's *institutionalized and habitualized* relationship to the world, as well as the *quality of resonance of the overall social conditions*" (*Ibid.* My emphasis).

Just like physical resonances, human resonant relationships do not emerge *ex nihilo*. Rather, they can only arise and endure within certain "spaces of resonance", *i.e.*, within specific *milieux* capable of vibration (*Ibid*, p. 209). As Rosa argues, every socio-cultural formation defines and institutionalizes its own spaces or "spheres of resonance", such as, for instance, religion, nature, love, sports, arts, etc. Broadly speaking, these spheres constitute "experiential regions" of collective character within which certain entities –"things", "persons", "times", "actions", ideas, etc.– appear as being "loaded" not only with strong values but also with responsiveness (ROSA, 2019a, p. 25). They are, as it were, "collective spaces of production of sensitivities to resonance" (*Ibid.*, p. 26). In spite of its constitutive unavailability, in these cultural spheres, resonance is "much likely" to occur than in other regions of the world (*Ibid.*, p. 24).

According to Rosa (*Ibid.*; cf. 2016, pp. 331-500), in "modern Western societies", one can differentiate three fundamental kinds of spheres of resonance, namely, "*horizontal*", "*diagonal*", and "*vertical*" ones. *Horizontal* spheres –*i.e.* family, friendship, politics– are centered around relationships to *other human beings*. In turn, *diagonal* spheres of resonance –work, education, sports, consumption, etc.– prioritize the relation to *material things*. Finally, *vertical* spheres –Religion, Nature, Arts, and History (with capital letters)– are based on relationships to the *world qua "all-encompassing totality"*, that is, to something that manifests itself as being superior to and higher than the subject.

Only within these *socially institutionalized* spheres of resonance can individual selves "discover and develop" their own *subjective or biographical* "axes of resonance" (Ibid., p. 296). "([I]ndividual) axes of resonance constitute themselves characteristically in culturally established *spaces of resonance*" (*Ibid.*). Generally speaking, an individual axis of resonance is a *habitualized*, "established", and "stabilized" relationship between the self and a specific segment of the world which allows the former to develop a *relative* "certitude of resonance" (Ibid., pp. 296-297).

Put differently, along these biographically defined axes, subjects can experience resonance with a *certain* "regularity" and "reliability" (ROSA, 2019a, p. 26). Thus, although spheres of resonance are socio-cultural realities, at least in modernity, *each* subject develops her

own individual axes of resonance. For instance, one subject might search and find resonance in work and nature, while another may encounter it in politics and friendship. Even two individuals that find resonance in the *same* cultural sphere –*e.g.* in the arts– might have different axes of resonance: one subject might encounter responsiveness in jazz music, whereas another may experience resonance when reading classical Russian literature (*cf. Ibid.*).

In order to round off these considerations on the possibilities of a *sociological* analysis of resonant relationships, one last concept must be introduced, namely, that of "dispositional resonance". As Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 27) argues, within collective spheres and across biographical axes, the individual self develops a *habitus* of resonance, or, more precisely put, a disposition or "habitual readiness" to adopt an open "attitude" towards resonance. As above suggested, this attitude implies a "willingness" of the subject to open herself towards the world both passively and actively. Or, put differently, a readiness to be affected and even transformed by the latter, and to emotionally respond to it. Of course –and this is crucial for Rosa (*Ibid.*)–, this open attitude entails taking the "risk" of being "hurt" [*verletzt*] and transformed by the world in unpredictable ways.

In my view, with the aid of these *sociological* categories, Rosa is able to chase away the ghost of subjectivism and succeeds at developing a full-fledged Critical Theory of Society centered around the concept of resonance. When he designates resonant relationships to the world as the normative yardstick of critique, he is not reducing the idea of the good life to a set of evanescent and quasi-mystical experiences of merely subjective nature (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 24; ROSA, 2016, pp. 297, 749). His point is, rather, that a good or healthy society is one that provides its members with well-constituted *spheres of resonance* that enable them to develop *firm, steady, and secure* axes of resonance.

In this sense, if I understand Rosa (cf. 2019a, p. 26; 2016, p. 297) correctly, the most important task of a Critical Theory of resonance is to assess the quality of the institutionalized spheres of resonance of a society in light of their capability for facilitating the conformation and stabilization of solid axes of resonance. This capability, in turn, depends on multiple factors, namely, on conditions of spatial, temporal, relational, corporeal, and economical nature. All of them can be analyzed by means of a sociology of the relationship to the world.

3.4. Phenomenology of Alienation

As is well-known, since the 1970s until today, the concept of alienation [*Entfremdung*] became discredited both in philosophy and in the social sciences. According to Rosa (2016, pp. 299-300), this discredit is due to two closely related causes. First, because of the theoretical "vagueness" of the notion: it seems to be an umbrella term or an "empty formula" used to denounce different forms of "discontent" with the social conditions of modernity. And second, because of the difficulties entailed in defining its "*counter-concept*" without falling into the trap of metaphysics.

Indeed, one can only diagnose a social state of affairs as alienated if one knows or presumes what a *non-alienated* or intact human life is. Now, as said above, according to Rosa (2016, p. 301) in a post-metaphysical age like ours, it is untenable to define the standard of the good human life on the basis of essentialist ideas, such as "true" or "authentic" human nature (*Ibid.*).

The sociology of the relationship to the world, claims Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 306), offers the necessary conceptual resources for "re-establishing" alienation as an up-to-date concept for diagnosing social pathologies. In effect, Rosa's account not only makes it possible to *phenomenologically* describe and analyze the nature of alienated social conditions, but also provides a non-essentialist and experientially founded counter-concept of alienation, namely, the idea of *resonance* (*Ibid.*, p. 316).

Broadly speaking, Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 306-316) characterizes alienation as a particular mode of relationship to the world in which the latter appears as "non-responsive", "cold", "rigid" or "repellent", that is, *either as indifferent or hostile*. "Alienation indicates a specific form of relation to the world in which subject and world are opposed to each other in an indifferent or hostile (repulsive) manner" (*Ibid*., p. 316). Interestingly enough, Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 308) argues that contemporary psychopathologies such as depression and burnout can be understood as "radical form[s] of alienation", insofar as both depressive and burnout patients experience the world and themselves as pale, dead, and voiceless.

In order to depict the nature of alienation, Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 305) resorts to a paradoxical formulation by Rahel Jaeggi: an alienated relationship to the world, he says, is an "*unrelated relationship*" [*Beziehung der Beziehungslosigkeit*]. Although an alienated subject *does* have relationships to certain segments of the world –she has a family, a job, a religion, etc.–, she feels

"internally" –*i.e.* affectively and emotionally– "unrelated" [*innerlich unverbunden*] to them (*Ibid.*; cf. ROSA, 2019a, p. 17).

In many passages of his writings, Rosa (cf. 2019a, p. 17; 2016, pp. 306, 308, 316) seems to define alienation *ex negativo*, that is, as a sort of relationship to the world that *does not comply* with the four requirements of resonance presented above –namely, (1) *affection/interpellation*, (2) *emotion/self-efficacy*, (3) *transformative appropriation*, and (4) *unavailability*.

(1) In alienated relationships, there is no *pathic af←fection*. The self is not "touched", nor "interpellated" by the world. She experiences the latter as being "voiceless", "empty", "cold", "pale", "dead", and even as "repulsive" or "dangerous". That is, as something meaningless, and unimportant –*i.e.* as something not related to a "strong value"– that "says nothing" significant to her (cf. ROSA, 2016, pp. 307, 308, 316).

(2) Furthermore, on Rosa's account, alienation characterizes itself by a lack of *active* e→*motion*. Besides not being "moved" or affected by the world, the self loses her ability to emotively "respond" to it in a self-effective manner. That is, she does not experience herself as being capable of affecting or "touching" the worldy things by her action (cf. *Ibid.*).

(3) As Rosa (*Ibid.*, p. 316) claims, in alienated relationships to the world, the *Anverwandlung* or transformative appropriation of the latter "fails". Indeed, the form of *intentionalist* "appropriation of the world" prevalent in alienation is what I called above "mere appropriation". The world is not treated as a "responsive thou", but rather as a "point of aggression", that is, as a "voiceless" thing, a resource or instrument to be used, dominated or dealt with (ROSA, 2019a, p. 17).

Interestingly, Rosa (2016, p. 307) identifies "mere appropriation" with another classical concept of Critical Theory, namely, "reification" [*Verdinglichung*]. In this sense, he contributes to shed some light on the never sufficiently clarified distinction between alienation and reification. In effect, on Rosa's account, reification is the *intentionalist* moment of an alienated relationship to the world, whereas alienation, in strict terms, constitutes its *pathic* side:

> *Reification* describes, thus, the movement departing from the subject: the world is *treated* [*behandelt*] as a voiceless thing; *alienation*, in contrast, indicates the way in which the world is *encountered* or experienced. *Reification* emphasizes therefore the intentionalist side of a problematic relationship to the world, while *alienation* accentuates its pathic reverse (and consequence) (*Ibid.*, p. 307).

Because of the self's *monological, distancing, and aggressive* treatment of the world, neither the former nor the latter suffer an *internal* transformation. The subject remains *enclosed*

in her sameness: she does not open herself towards the Otherness of the world, neither actively nor passively. Put differently, instead of establishing a dialogue of *af←fection* and *e→motion* with the latter, she attempts to "absorb" its alterity for the sake of her own egoistic or instrumental aims (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 316).

(4) As it follows from the above, alienated relationships do not comply with the requirement of "constitutive unavailability". Because of her reifying and aggressive attitude, the subject does not perceive the world as an *Other* that has something of its own to say. Rather, she sees it as a mute and voiceless thing that either is *already available or must be made available*. That is, either as an already controlled thing or as something to be dominated, used or dealt with. In this sense, as said, alienation is essentially monological, for establishing a genuine dialogue implies doing justice to the alterity of the Other (cf. ROSA, 2019a, p. 13 *ff.*; 2018, p. 34).

3.5. Alienation as a Social pathology and as an Indispensable Moment of Social Life

Rosa's *sociology* of the relationships to the world understands alienation not as a mere *subjective* disorder, but as a *social* pathology (*Ibid.*, p. 309). Indeed, on this account, alienated relations are not caused by perturbations in the individual's genetic, neuronal or mental constitution. Rather, they are consequences of socio-cultural conditions and structures (*Ibid.*, p. 312). In this sense, as said above, Rosa interprets depression and burnout –*i.e.* two "radical forms of alienation" normally depicted as mere psychopathologies– as *socio-cultural* phenomena (cf. *Ibid.*, p. 308).

Alienation *qua* social pathology, he says, "is the consequence of an institutionalized (false) relationship to the world" (*Ibid.*, p. 310). More precisely, as I will show in the next section, Rosa argues that the "structural principle" of modern capitalist societies –namely, "dynamic stabilization"– undermines the spheres of resonance typical of Western societies, thereby systematically producing alienated relationships to the world (cf. ROSA, 2019a, p. 28). To be sure, as in the case of his analysis of resonance *qua* normative standard, Rosa's treatment of alienated relationships to the world does not focus on momentary and evanescent experiences of alienation. Rather, it centers around the analysis of the *social production of habitualities of alienation*, that is, on the study of "dispositional alienation" [*dispositionale Entfremdung*] (ROSA, 2019a, pp. 27-28).

Generally speaking, individuals with this socially produced disposition to alienation are not able to develop and maintain solid, firm, and secure axes of resonance; and they do not have

neither the willingness nor the ability to open themselves affectively-emotionally towards the world. This is especially clear in the extreme case of depressive and burnout patients:

> Depression/ Burnout is the name of the condition in which all axes of resonance have become voiceless and deaf. For instance, a person 'has' a family, a job, a club, a religion, etc., but they 'say' nothing to her: There is no more contact [*Berührung*] between them; the subject is not affected anymore and does not experience self-efficacy. Both world and subject appear thus as pale, dead and empty (ROSA, 2016, p. 316).

In this sense, a social formation is considered as alienated and worthy of criticism when "the socially institutionalized world systematically precludes or impede the conformation (and maintenance) of axes of resonance" (ROSA, 2019a, p. 23).

Now, in order to adequately understand Rosa's account of alienation, it is necessary to provide two important clarifications. First, it must be stressed that he does not consider alienation *per se* and *in all cases* as a social pathology. As he repeatedly claims, when restricted to specific dimensions of life, alienated relationships to the world are *also* a necessary aspect of the human condition and an indispensable moment of social existence. To some extent, alienation – understood in its *intentionalist* side, that is, as reification– constitutes a "cardinal cultural accomplishment" and an "indispensable cultural technique" (ROSA, 2019a, p. 16; 2016, p. 741).[5]

Indeed, as Rosa (2019a, p. 16) claims, the "ability of keeping the world at a distance" and of treating it as a voiceless thing to be controlled, configured, dominated, or used is essential for producing food, shelter, and clothing, and, in this sense, constitutes a necessary condition of possibility of human and social life. Alienation had made possible the great achievements of technique and the natural sciences such as modern medical science and massive production of goods, which are indispensable for ensuring a resonant life "for everybody" (cf. ROSA, 2016, p. 741).

But this is not all: acquiring the ability of "silencing" resonances –*i.e.* of not-responding to all interpellations of the world– is crucial for the development of individual subjectivity and of its aptitude for experiencing resonance, and it is an important "defensive" technique against external dangers. It is indeed thanks to this reifying ability that selves can develop their own voice and conform stable axes of resonance (*Ibid.*; ROSA, 2019a, p. 16). In this sense, Rosa (2016, p. 742; cf. 2019a, p. 16) speaks of a "*basic right to refusal of resonance*" [*Grundrecht auf*

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[5] For Rosa (cf. 2016: 294), resonance is ontogenetically prior to alienation. This topic will not be touched upon here.

Resonanzverweigerung].[6]

For this reason, Rosa seems to suggest that besides establishing collective spheres of resonance, every socio-cultural formation also institutionalizes *spheres of alienation,* that is, experiential regions in which alienation is the appropriate, acceptable, and even necessary relation to the world. Arguably, Rosa's claim that certain dimensions of social life require resonant relationships while others demand for alienating ones is very similar to Habermas's differentiation between the "lifeworld" –as the sphere of symbolic/communicative reproduction– and the "system" –the sphere of material reproduction–, and its anthropological foundation on the dualism between "work" and "communication" (cf. Habermas, 1981a; 1981b; 2018).

For Habermas, a modern society can only work properly if each of these spheres fulfills its respective function, that is, if the lifeworld –family and public sphere– warrants the *symbolic* reproduction of society, whereas the systems –politics, economy– ensure its *material* reproduction. In order for that to happen, communicative action –"communication"– must prevail in the lifeworld, while strategic and instrumental action –"work"– have to preponderate in the systems. Similarly, in the case of Rosa, modern spheres of resonance –the arts, family, work, sports, etc.– must ensure subjects a responsive being-in-the-world, while spheres of alienation –economy, technique, natural sciences, etc.– must warrant the necessary material preconditions of social life. Of course, as in the case of Habermas, this is only possible if responsive relationships to the world predominate in the spheres of resonance, and voiceless relations are prevalent in the spaces of alienation.

For Habermas, a society is worthy of criticism when the logic of the system colonizes the lifeworld, that is, when strategic and instrumental modes of action illegitimately penetrate into the sphere of symbolic communication. Arguably, in a similar way, Rosa (cf. 2016: 743; 2019a: 23) claims that a social formation should be criticized when alienating attitudes start to prevail in the culturally defined spaces of resonance. This is especially clear, for instance, in the case of the sphere of work, which for Rosa (*Ibid.*: 27) constitutes a fundamental sphere of resonance in Western societies.

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[6] It should also be noted that, for Rosa (cf. 2016: 315; 2019a: 16, 23), there is not an "opposition" but a "dialectic" between alienation and resonance. Space limitations preclude me from treating this topic here.

3.6. Dynamic Stabilization and The Social Pathologies of (Late-)Modernity

As said above, for Rosa (2010, p. 54; 2012, p. 273), Critical Theory must operate with a *holistic* macro-theory of modern society, that is, with a full-blown "*Gesellschaftstheorie*", and this because the societal macro-structures ultimately determine the pathological or intact character of human life. Refining and completing his earlier reflections on social acceleration (cf. ROSA, 2005; 2010), in his most recent texts, Rosa (2019a, pp. 12, 26; cf. 2016, pp. 13, 671-689; 2012: 14) argues that contemporary societies are governed by an immanent and unstoppable "tendency to escalation" and "increase" [*Eskalations-/ Steigerungstendenz*]. This "aimless" tendency –which has become autonomous from the intentions of individuals– is a consequence of the "structural principle" governing (late-)modern capitalist social formations, namely, the *blind compulsion* to "*dynamic stabilization*" [*dynamische Stabilisierung*]. Simply put, the latter concept indicates that (late-)modern societies "stabilize themselves dynamically", *i.e.*, that in order to "maintain and reproduce" their socio-cultural structures, they are obliged to grow, innovate, and accelerate (ROSA, 2019a, pp. 12-13).

As Rosa (2019a, p. 13) argues, this structural principle governing contemporary societies becomes apparent in the mode of operation of fundamental spheres of (late-)modern socio-cultural formations, such as economy and science. Capitalist economy operates according to the formula "M-C-M' (money-commodity-more money)": capitalists invest money in the hope of making *more* money. In turn, modern science follows a similar logic, namely "K-R-K'" (knowledge-research-more knowledge): modern scientific research is oriented towards *increasing* the available knowledge (*Ibid.*).

According to Rosa (2016, p. 14; 2019a, p. 28) –and this is perhaps the main point of his critical diagnosis of (late-)modernity–, dynamic stabilization *qua* structural principle of (late-)modern societies causes severe pathologies in our relationships to the world. More precisely, it undermines the conditions of possibility of resonance, thereby systematically producing *alienated* relations. "An aimless and interminable compulsion to escalation results in a problematic, defective or pathological relationship to the world on the part of both the subjects and the society as a whole" (ROSA, 2016, p. 14).

Indeed, on Rosa's (*Ibid.*) account, the predominance of dynamic stabilization is responsible for the most significant "critical tendencies" of the present, namely: the "ecological crisis", the "crisis of democracy", and the "psycho-crisis". These three crises can be understood

as "crises of resonance" (ROSA, 2019a, p. 26). Late-modern subjects cannot establish resonant relationships neither to the natural environment nor to the social and political institutions, and they are as well unable to have a responsive self-relation (ROSA, 2016, p. 14).

Now, why does dynamic stabilization systematically produce alienation? In the context of the present paper, I can only give a partial answer. As Rosa (cf. 2019a, p. 28) argues, this structural principle imposes severe "*imperatives*" upon late-modern subjects, namely, imperatives to optimization, competition, acceleration, and efficacy. These constraints penetrate into *all* spheres of social life –*i.e.* alienated and resonant ones–, thereby producing a *precarization* of the conditions of resonance. Within the context of an accelerated, competitive, and therefore hostile world, contemporary individuals *are afraid* of falling behind, *i.e.*, of not being good, fast or efficient enough. The fear of not being able to keep up with the demands of social life, says Rosa (2019a, p. 28; 2018, p. 15), compels them to adopt "dispositional alienation" as their "default mode" of relationship to the world. As a way of defensively dealing with this precarious situation, they tend to adopt an attitude of affective-emotional "closing" and an aggressive reifying stance (*Ibid.*).[7]

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[7] As Rosa (2016, p. 14) claims, alienation is not only the "*consequence*" of late-modern dynamic stabilization, but also its "*cause*". In this sense, late-modern subjects do not only adopt dispositional alienation because of *fear* of falling behind, but also because of their *desire* of "enlarging their range" [*Reichweitevergrößerung*]. This typical cultural desire of modernity, says Rosa (cf. 2018, p. 14), is based on the "promise" that making more world available would provide resonance. Because of space constraints, I cannot reconstruct in detail here Rosa's position on this issue.

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