

Interview on **TUNING BACK TO THE WORLD** **From Alienation to Resonance**

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ABSTRACT: TUNING BACK TO THE WORLD: FROM ALIENATION TO RESONANCE

This interview with Hartmut Rosa, one of the major figures of contemporary critical theory, aims to show how his theoretical framework is particularly well suited to understanding our present time. It also seeks to clarify some of the key concepts of his work, such as alienation, and to explore the political implications of his theory. Within this framework, we examine how his thought has evolved over the years. At the same time, we focus on the specificity of critical theory, asking why it is capable of grasping and transforming reality, while also analyzing the distinctive features of the concept of resonance.

KEYWORDS: Hartmut Rosa, Critical Theory, Alienation, Contemporaneity, Resonance.

Introduction

To become a voice capable of articulating the present is the philosophical challenge par excellence, the standard by which every thinker measures himself. S&F interviewed one of these voices, Hartmut Rosa, a leading exponent of critical theory and an undisputed point of reference within the European and international intellectual landscape. The present

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interview seeks to engage Hartmut Rosa directly on the fundamental conceptual cores of his theoretical-philosophical project, to clarify its specifically philosophical dimensions, and finally to examine its relevance for contemporary society.

The discussion is structured around three main thematic areas: the tradition of critical theory and its possible contemporary articulations; the concept of resonance; and the relationship between Rosa's theoretical proposal and the contemporary world. The concluding section takes the form of a retrospective reflection, in which Rosa revisits his theoretical trajectory, initiated in the late 1990s and still unfolding today.

S&F: The concept of alienation has undergone important transformations, from its Hegelian-Marxian foundations to contemporary reinterpretations such as Rahel Jaeggi's. Your work appears, in certain respects, to move beyond the framework of alienation by developing the concepts of acceleration and resonance. How, then, do you position the concept of alienation within your own theoretical project?

HR: *Within my research, the concept of alienation continues to play a central role, so I would not say that I have moved beyond it. It was already central to my doctoral dissertation, published in 1998¹, which engaged with Charles Taylor and was situated between Hegel and Marx.*

With the concept of acceleration, I do not seek to move beyond alienation. Rather, one could say that I am attempting to provide a renewed diagnosis of alienation. Many assume that if acceleration is the problem, then the solution must be deceleration (Entschleunigung)², that we should simply slow down the world. However, I do not believe that slowness per se ought to be the goal; nor is speed as such the problem.

¹ H. Rosa, *Identität und kulturelle Praxis. Politische Philosophie nach Charles Taylor*, Campus Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1998.

² H. Rosa, *Resonance. A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (2016), tr. en. Polity Press, Cambridge 2019, p. 1.

The real issue is alienation. Acceleration becomes problematic when it produces alienation – that is, when it transforms our forms of being-in-the-world. This is why I wrote Acceleration and Alienation³: not to replace alienation with acceleration, but to argue that acceleration generates alienation insofar as it reshapes our relation to the world. This is how I understand and define alienation⁴.

In this respect, I largely agree with the broader tradition of critical theory. As Michael Theunissen has shown, in Hegel and Marx – and, one might add, already in Jean-Jacques Rousseau – alienation is interpreted as a distortion in our way of being in the world. I would formulate this more precisely as a distortion in our form of relating to the world.

Indeed, alienation names a disturbance in the structure of the self-world relation. I would strongly emphasize that all of my work – on resonance, on uncontrollability, and even in my most recent book⁵ – forms part of a sociology of self-world relations. Alienation, for me, is the core concept for articulating the sense that something has gone wrong in this relation.

It was precisely from the concept of alienation that I arrived at the idea of resonance. I began with the question: what would a non-alienated way of being in the world look like? What would a non-distorted form of being-in-the-world be? My answer was: a resonant mode of relating to the world. For this reason, at least initially, resonance and alienation functioned as clear opposites in my work.

However, I would not say that resonance moves beyond alienation. Rather, it seeks to articulate a positive concept of non-alienation.

With regard to contemporary debates, I have long worked in parallel with Rahel Jaeggi – indeed, my dissertation preceded her major work on

³ H. Rosa, *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality*, NSU Press, Malmö/Århus 2010.

⁴ See H. Rosa, *Resonance*, cit., chapter V, in particular, pp. 174-184.

⁵ H. Rosa, *Situation und Konstellation. Vom Verschwinden des Spielraums*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2026.

alienation. When she later published her book on the topic⁶, it became evident that we were engaged in an ongoing theoretical dialogue.

S&F: So acceleration becomes the *contemporary cause* of alienation.

HR: *Exactly. Not the only one, but a significant one.*

S&F: In order to understand our contemporary world, you also draw on the notion of the preconditions for resonance with the world, which seem to be increasingly undermined by what you describe as a dynamic stabilization⁷. Why and how is critical theory capable of grasping this precondition?

HR: *I believe critical theory is born out of the sense that something is wrong with our mode of being in the world, or with our form of being in the world. You can already see this in Marx – I am particularly fond of his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, where he develops his critique of capitalism from the idea of a distortion in the mode of relating to things. In these manuscripts, alienation refers above all to a distortion in our relation to work, since for Marx work is the fundamental mode of being in and toward the world.*

Human beings are, so to speak, those who must work in order to live. In working on the world, we form ourselves; we transform the world and, in doing so, continuously transform ourselves. Marx formalizes a problem in this analysis when he suggests that something has gone wrong: if you do not own the means of production, you do not own your work. The process of working – which is essential, indeed vital, to our being in the world – becomes distorted.

⁶ R. Jaeggi, *Alienation* (2016²), tr. en. Columbia University Press, New York 2014.

⁷ Dynamic stabilization describes the logic in which, in order to preserve the *status quo*, society needs to grow. Modern society can stabilize itself only dynamically, requiring constant growth. See, H. Rosa, *Resonance*, cit., pp. 404-424.

Critical theory builds on this insight. Marx goes on to argue that the distortion does not concern only our relation to work and to the products of work. Within the capitalist mode of production, there is also a distortion in the way we relate to one another, since we confront each other as competitors. Property relations imply exclusion: if something is mine, you are excluded from it. There is also a distorted mode of relating to nature, which becomes commodified and reduced to an object of use. And even our relation to ourselves is affected, since we are compelled to marketize ourselves.

Critical theory takes up and further develops this line of thought. When you read Marcuse, Fromm, Adorno, Horkheimer, or Benjamin, they are all, in different ways, elaborating the claim that something is wrong in how we relate to other human beings, to nature, to things, and to ourselves. This theme runs through all generations of critical theory, though it is especially pronounced in the first generation, which retained a strong concept of alienation.

What distinguishes critical theory is that it does not treat alienation as an inescapable feature of the human condition. Rather, it understands alienation as socially produced. Our mode of being in the world is shaped by social structures and social conditions. Critical theory, therefore, analyzes these structures and conditions with respect to our mode of being in the world – and thus with respect to alienation⁸.

For this reason, we can draw on the various analytical tools developed within critical theory: the analysis of communicative relations in Habermas, of relations of recognition in Honneth, or of exchange relations in Adorno. Yet in the end, all of these approaches concern the ways in which we relate to ourselves, to others, and to nature.

⁸ On critical theory, Rosa (with C. Henning and A. Bueno) also edited *Critical Theory and New Materialism*, Routledge, London 2021. Furthermore, Rosa establishes his affiliation with the tradition of critical theory in the Introduction of *Acceleration and Alienation*, cit.

S&F: Is it correct to say that we once had to reckon with the idea of human nature – in the sense that authors such as Rousseau and Marx, in their accounts of alienation, started from a strong conception of human nature – whereas today we can only do so in the sense articulated by Hannah Arendt as the human condition? In short, should we give up the concept of human nature and instead speak of the human condition?

HR: *I greatly appreciate Marx's idea that we reshape ourselves through the process of work – and, more broadly, through social interaction. For this reason, I agree that we must be very cautious when making anthropological assumptions about "human nature". When I wrote my dissertation, I explicitly described myself as a cultural relativist. By this I meant that forms of life are historically contingent: they emerge, develop, and transform, and in doing so they shape who we are as human subjects. In that sense, one might be tempted to conclude that there is no fixed human nature at all.*

Yet this is not entirely accurate. The claim that human beings shape themselves through interaction is itself already an anthropological claim. Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, I attempted – even in my dissertation – to formulate a minimal conception of human nature. Even if our "substance", so to speak, is historically variable, there are nevertheless certain structural features that we can attribute to human beings.

One of these is that we are self-interpreting animals. That is precisely the condition of our changeability and malleability. Another is that this self-interpretation is never monological; it unfolds within webs of interlocution – and, with Marx, one might add, within relations of production and social cooperation. We are self-interpreting beings, but this self-interpretation is not a solipsistic or purely intellectual activity, since it is socially enacted, embodied⁹, and practical.

Here we find at least two anthropological assumptions: that we are self-interpreting beings and that we are fundamentally relational –

⁹ On the importance of the body in our relation with the world, see H. Rosa, *Resonance*, cit., pp. 47-82.

embedded in shared social practices and communicative contexts. To this I added another idea drawn from Taylor: that we are strong evaluators. It is not merely that we have representations of what exists in the world; rather, whatever appears to us as existing is always imbued with significance, even with value. We orient ourselves toward what we consider worthy of pursuit and away from what we deem undesirable. My view is that what counts as “good” or “bad” is historically contingent, but that having some orientation toward the good – some sense of what we should aspire to and what we should avoid – is itself a structural feature of human life. That, too, belongs to human nature.

With the concept of resonance, I have perhaps moved even further in this direction. I would now say that human beings are resonant beings¹⁰. Indeed, perhaps not only human beings, but also animals – and maybe even plants – display forms of responsiveness. Yet the capacity to enter into resonance with the world – this particular mode of being-in-the-world – is, I would argue, constitutive of human nature. And not only the capacity, but also the need and the desire for resonance.

In this sense, resonance theory can be understood as an attempt to preserve certain fragments of an anthropological conception of the human. Here I am happy to draw on Hannah Arendt’s term: what is at stake is not a fixed human essence, but the human condition.

S&F: And in this sense, you are also on a Aristotelian way to think human.

HR: *So yeah. It’s pretty much Aristotelian.*

S&F: The concept of resonance constitutes the *pars construens* of your social-philosophical project, particularly with regard to its political realization and significance. While resonance functions as a powerful

¹⁰ On Rosa’s concept of subject as creature capable of resonance, see *ibid.*, pp. 31-38.

theoretical framework, it also explicitly aims at engaging with political practice.

In this respect, one might distinguish within your account of resonance a theoretical level and a material or institutional level. Could you clarify how these two levels should be understood, and how their interplay articulates the relationship between theory and practice in your conception of resonance? More specifically, how do you connect the theory of resonance with its practical and political enactment?

HR: *It is a very difficult question. On the one hand, I try to achieve a certain degree of theoretical clarity – conceptual precision and consistency. On the other hand, one cannot expect the same kind of clarity from practice. This is precisely what I mean when I speak of the uncontrollability of resonance¹¹: there is no set of practices that will reliably produce resonance. Resonance is not tied to any specific form of practice. Of course, it manifests itself in practice, but one cannot simply say, “Follow these rules and you will achieve resonance”. Resonance first of all connects theory with experience. It is a theoretical concept. I distinguish at least four elements of resonance – perhaps even five. But, as you know, resonance is fundamentally a form of relationship. In fact, it is a kind of dual structure. What I now call perspectival dualism attempts to connect the first-person perspective – the lived experience of resonance – with the third-person perspective, that is, resonance understood as a mode of relation. It is a relational structure.*

Before developing this further, I usually describe the four elements: (1) being affected by something; (2) experiencing self-efficacy or a sense of response; (3) a moment of transformation; and (4) a moment of transgression¹². Yet this process cannot ultimately be controlled. That is the theoretical framework, and it connects directly to lived experience. People often say, “I know exactly what you are talking about – I just did not have

¹¹ Rosa states: «Resonance is inherently uncontrollable». H. Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World* (2018), tr. en. Polity Press, Cambridge 2020, p. 37, See also, *ibid.*, pp. 36-39.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 32-39.

the words for it". In this sense, the concept provides language for an experience. These could be considered as the two levels that resonance clearly connects: theory and experience.

When it comes to practice, the interesting point is that people experience resonance in very different kinds of practices. Consider music: people know what resonance means in musical experience, but some encounter it with Beethoven, others with Metallica, and so on¹³. Therefore, one cannot determine in advance which specific practices activate resonance.

Ordinarily, then, I would not propose a fixed set of practices. However, when we turn to the political realm – which is the core of your question – the decisive point is that resonance describes a form of relationship. To say that democracy must become a sphere of resonance means that it requires a particular mode of relating among citizens. This relational form can be described through the four criteria I mentioned, together with a fifth: the existence of a space that enables resonance – a set of conditions that make it possible for resonant connections to emerge. I often refer to this as dispositional resonance¹⁴.

For me, politics is not primarily about struggle, war, or irreconcilability. Rather, politics concerns the shaping of the structures of the world we inhabit; it concerns the formation of social life. Democratic politics carries the promise that we can shape these structures together, on equal terms. For this promise to become real, relationships among citizens must be at least potentially resonant. This requires what I call dispositional resonance: a particular way of relating to others – even to those I dislike, or whose positions I reject.

I try to define this through the logic of listening, responding, and allowing oneself to be transformed. This leads me toward a republican conception of democracy, which maintains that citizens may indeed be irreconcilably different – since difference is essential to resonance. Yet

¹³ Indeed, Rosa makes this example in *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁴ See, in particular, H. Rosa, *Resonance*, cit., pp. 381-388.

resonance preserves the possibility of building bridges across differences in language, belief, forms of love, and ways of life. Such bridges, however, are possible only at the price of transformation – at the price of modifying one's identity and creating at least a temporary common ground. Here one might draw on Hannah Arendt's concept of natality, or on republican notions of a shared public space.

My hope, therefore, is that resonance can function as a concept situated between identity and difference. It allows for irreducible difference while nevertheless sustaining the possibility of connection across what remains distinct – at the cost of transformation.

For this reason, one cannot clearly specify a set of practices that are necessary to produce resonance.

S&F: Perhaps the point is that we need to rethink our relationship with what is uncontrollable. Even if one seeks to achieve resonance, it cannot be controlled. Rather, we must be able to deal with this uncontrollability instead of desperately trying to overcome it, which ultimately leads to failure.

HR: *And the interesting thing, even in politics, is that it's not just that you cannot control it. You might really want to resonate with someone, and you might completely fail. But the opposite can also happen. You might really dislike someone – or even feel extreme hostility toward them – and yet, in a glance, a smile, or a word, resonance occurs, even though you did not intend it.*

S&F: In your book on religion and democracy, you mention a Pink Floyd concert where you were so excited, and yet you didn't experience resonance.

HR: *Absolutely. That's exactly right. It even happened twice!*

S&F: The other question concerning resonance is closely related to the political dimension of your theory. From a political perspective, how is resonance meant to be realized? In other words, which forms of political action could effectively constitute the kind of political agency capable of presenting itself as a response to alienation? You define resonance as the opposite of alienation¹⁵. So if resonance is not merely a theoretical solution – and it is not – how can it be realized in practice?

Considering your previous remarks during this interview, perhaps we should replace the term *practical* with *political*. What, then, is the political dimension of resonance?

HR: *Here is a problem that often confuses people, or at least creates some difficulty. On the one hand, I claim that resonance is uncontrollable, so we cannot simply bring it about. People then say: "So how can it be the solution? If you cannot bring it about, there is nothing we can do about it. It is a completely non-political concept"*¹⁶.

What we cannot bring about is the experience of resonance itself. Nevertheless, there are two dimensions in which we can work practically to make resonance more likely. This point is very important to me. There is a set of preconditions: one is more individual, while the other is collective.

First, we can identify structures – structural conditions – that make resonance very unlikely. This is why I always refer to acceleration, which connects to what we discussed earlier. Time pressure is the number one killer of resonance. If you are pressed for time – for instance, if I have to get to the airport to catch my plane – I cannot enter into resonance with anyone, even with the person I might fall in love with. I have to ignore them; otherwise I will miss the plane. What I say about acceleration in society is that, metaphorically speaking, we are always on our way to the airport. We

¹⁵ Rosa defines resonance as the solution (*Lösung*) of alienation. See, *ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Rosa concludes *Resonance* by discussing some plausible criticisms of resonance theory; one of them is that resonance could be apolitical or lack political consequences (see *ibid.*, pp. 458–459).

are constantly short of time: we have so many things to do that we try to cut ourselves off from the world, not to get in touch, not to enter into resonance. So time pressure, for example, is one of the elements that destroy resonance.

Another factor is competition. If I compete with you and I have to be better than you – for instance, if I have to get the job so that you do not get it – then I may not enter into resonance with you. And what is even worse is fear. This can actually be shown empirically: when people are afraid, they close down; they do not want to be touched. In a situation of fear, the expectation is that whatever might touch me will hurt me, dominate me, or destroy me. So I do not want to be touched.

Neoliberal politics, which is still a powerful reality, together with capitalist competition and social acceleration, creates social conditions that make resonance very unlikely. A political strategy would therefore be to counter these dynamics, or at least to create spaces in which people can trust one another and the world they inhabit. This is the level of social conditions.

The other is the individual side, where the concept of dispositional resonance reappears. I speak of callability (Anrufbarkeit), a kind of individual condition that also depends on the social structure in which I live. Anrufbarkeit means that I am truly capable of listening. The verb aufhören is very interesting in German: it means to stop working on the to-do list and to listen to what is calling me. That is the kind of individual disposition at stake¹⁷. Of course there is also the culture of mindfulness¹⁸. I have a very ambivalent relationship to it, but nevertheless mindfulness represents an attempt to become callable – to listen and to become capable of responding. In this sense, we can indeed work on our dispositional callability, our

¹⁷ On the dynamic of being-called, see H. Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, cit., pp. 41-44.

¹⁸ A connection between Rosa's concept of resonance and mindfulness constitutes an interesting possible path, which could be based on the opening posture they share in the world.

dispositional resonance, as well as on the structural conditions that allow for resonance.

These are two things we can work on in practice. So resonance is not merely random or completely uncontrollable.

S&F: Our contemporary illness is anxiety, which is perhaps closely connected to what you said about fear. The point is that today, and especially among young people, many are constantly in a state of anxiety – a way in which our bodies respond to the world. This is a serious problem. Perhaps we could even say that anxiety is evidence supporting your point about our relationship with the world, since it represents a psychological response to that relationship. In this sense, it can be seen as a contemporary symptom of the alienation we are experiencing.

HR: *I would definitely say it's a symptom of a loss of resonance¹⁹. As a sociologist, I take this very seriously. People often talk about economic growth – growth rates in Italy or elsewhere – but honestly, I am not interested in growth rates. I am interested in the well-being of people, in mental health, you could say. And the figures are alarming worldwide, particularly among young people. Many feel depressed, burned out, and lonely. Loneliness and burnout are closely connected; we know this empirically. What do loneliness and burnout mean? Feeling isolated from the world, not feeling connected, almost out of touch²⁰.*

¹⁹ On this, Rosa has already reconducted «frustration, anger, and even despair» to the attempt to control the world. See, *ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁰ On the phenomenon of burnout, see, H. Rosa, *Resonance*, cit., Part 3. Rosa analyzes these phenomena through the lens of resonance throughout his works. For example, he interprets depression as a condition in which the world no longer “touches” the subject, in contrast to resonance, one of whose core elements is precisely the capacity to be affected by the world. See, *ibid.*, p. 34.

In my new book, I explore the connection to digitalization and screen use²¹. I do not want to say that the screen is inherently bad, or that all digital interaction is harmful. But the problem is that through screen interaction – working, playing, or communicating online – we are often positioned in opposition to the world. My claim is that resonance is a very new idea: in resonance, we are always embedded in a situation; we are connected.

Think, for example, of sitting at a concert: you are part of it, fully immersed – you smell it, hear it, feel it, along with the bodies around you. This is the kind of embedded experience I am referring to. Even in social situations, resonance requires co-presence and full engagement. With a screen, by contrast, we are not embedded in a situation; we stand apart from it. The world comes to us through a text, a game, the news, or even an interview. There is the world, and here I am. This sense of being cut off, of feeling isolated from the world, is strongly supported by digitalization. It represents a form of non-resonance.

I would agree with you: anxiety, burnout, and related phenomena are symptoms of a loss of resonance.

S&F: During an interview you mentioned the translation in English of your concept of *Unverfügbarkeit* and you said that you agree with the translation of the concept with uncontrollability. Instead, in Italian, we use *indisponibilità*, which is, we can say, unavailability. Why do you agree with uncontrollability instead of unavailability?

HR: *The German term Unverfügbarkeit is kind of in the middle²². Actually the term I preferred at first in English was non-engineerability: it meant*

²¹ Rosa already addresses this aspect of our experience of the world as mediated by screens in *ibid.*, pp. 80–95. A similar idea, although without explicit reference to screens, can be found in H. Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, cit., p. 30, where Rosa underscores modernity's capacity to distance the world and to establish a mode of access that renders it available for manipulation.

²² Rosa explains this point also in *ibid.*, pp. VII–IX.

you cannot engineer it in the sense that you cannot produce it. I didn't like so much, for example, unavailability, because I always had in mind that you try to call a number and then you get the message: "we are sorry, this service is unavailable". And I thought that that's not exactly what I mean. Then the translator suggests uncontrollability. And at first I thought that's totally bad, but then I realized in many aspects it's quite useful, it does capture an important thing of what I have in mind: that resonance means entering into a relationship which you cannot control. And this loss of control is so important in our modern world where we permanently are forced to and try to optimize. We want to have complete control over the world. I think that's really true, I want to control exactly how warm it is here, not just 22 degrees or 21, but 21.3 or 21.4. And I want to control it just with a click, as well as the brightness of the light and the smell of the air, so we try to control the world. But resonance is uncontrollable. It means entering into a process. It's uncontrollable in two respects: 1) We cannot enforce this. I cannot say: "now in the next 5 minutes, let's get in resonance"; 2) – which is probably even more important – we cannot control the outcome. If you enter into resonance, it will transform you, but you don't know in which direction exactly and what you will do after it. So I think the term of uncontrollability works well here.

In other contexts, unavailability, as indisponibilità in Italian, works just as well. In Spanish, the book has been translated as Lo indisponible, and in French as Rendre le monde indisponible. So the term is somewhat in between languages, and as long as you occasionally explain what it means, that is completely fine.

S&F: We have lost the capacity to endure the unpredictable (or perhaps we could call it *Unverfügbarkeit*) – both at the level of existence itself and, on the “political” plane, where a growing state of precarization emerges precisely through attempts to secure the real. In the effort to control the

real in order to secure it, the real slips away²³: it is like a press that, the more it tightens, the more excess emerges through its seams, exposing the intrinsic failure of every rationalizing attempt to master the real. The will to suppress the unpredictable and the unavailable, moreover, renders it terrible. Unavailable and sublime (in a Kantian sense), it both overwhelms and fascinates. How is such a state of uncertainty possible if the political principle is precisely that of control, whose task should be to secure the real? This seems to exemplify a central contradiction of our contemporary era.

HR: *Yes, I think that's a good way of describing the paradoxical situation we are in. The more unsure we become about reality and the world, the more we try to grasp and hold onto it. And the more we try to do that, the more it becomes unpredictable. I found the last chapter in the uncontrollability book a bit surprising myself²⁴. I did not initially intend to write this chapter about how our attempts to control the world create monsters of uncontrollability – or, as you might say, monstrous uncontrollability. Even financial markets have become monsters that no one can control.*

And now war has returned. War is a monster of uncontrollability. When people live in a warlike state, they cannot rely on basic guarantees of the real, such as water or electricity.

In all aspects of life, then, attempts to gain certainty generate monsters of uncontrollability – or uncertainty, however you choose to call it. This is why I want to argue for a different way of dealing with uncertainty, which is related to a sense of self-efficacy.

We need to trust the world without trying to control it, and to trust our own capacities. That is: "I know I cannot control what will happen tomorrow, or what will come, but I trust that I can respond, that I can deal with it".

²³ Rosa uses the expression of «drama of our relationship to the modern world», *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ See, *ibid.*, § 9.

What I aim for – this is both a cultural goal and, perhaps, a political goal – is to regain and restore a different sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy here does not mean having complete control over the world. A clear illustration can be seen with security devices. People try to achieve complete control over their homes: lock every door, install cameras, set up alarm systems. But then doubts arise: maybe someone breaks the lock, maybe I am not monitoring the cameras, maybe the alarm fails. Empirically, the more control devices people install, the less safe they feel.

The point is: increasing certainty does not produce confidence in the world. Instead, we must accept uncontrollability while simultaneously strengthening our sense of trust and responsibility. In doing so, we become capable of responding to the challenges of the world without trying to control them. That is basically the idea I have in mind.

S&F: Looking back at the development of your work, which elements of your theory have become more radical over time and which aspects have emerged as more urgent and which, by contrast, have you gradually set aside or revised? How would you characterize the internal continuous and ruptures within your own thinking?

HR: *That's a difficult question. I think it is probably true that we all have a kind of core problem or central question we struggle with throughout our lives. For me, that question is what I call Weltbeziehung – forms of being in the world and relating to the world.*

I find it interesting that before I wrote my dissertation, I actually tried to write a novel. It ended up being around 200 pages – perhaps one day I will publish it. It was about high school students forming a rock band, which was my own way of experiencing life. The title of that book, which I find quite romantic, was And the World, and Yet, and Yet the World is Singing. At that time, of course, I had no theoretical framework; I had not yet read Charles Taylor. But the question was already there: is the world silent and hostile, or does it respond? Does it sing – does it enchant, as Max Weber might put it?

From that early time through my dissertation, my work on acceleration, and into the present, I have always been concerned with the sociology of our relationship to the world. Now I ask, for example, how digitalization and bureaucratization are changing our relationships to others. What has changed? One thing is clear: I have largely given up the concept of identity, which I find remarkable.

In my early thinking – not only in my dissertation but also afterwards – I felt I needed an identity, a stable sense of who I am in the world, and to preserve it. With the concept of resonance, however, I realized that it is not about preserving identity. I do not have to remain the same; resonance is also about transformation. Perhaps I even yearn for transformation – but not random transformation imposed by others. It must be a transformation that I consent to. Resonance is not simply something that transforms me; it is something I respond to.

The answering entity is what I formerly thought of as identity, yet it transforms in the process. So, moving away from identity and authenticity toward resonance and transformation marks a shift in my thinking. The remaining question is: which elements of this shift have become more radical?

S&F: Perhaps it is the idea of the relationship, because it seems that the main problem lies in the relationship itself.

HR: *You could say there is a shift from a focus on identity to relationality, what I even call a relational ontology. But there is something else going on: I am working on the concept of energy²⁵. I am searching for a new concept of agency. I really think about this a lot. What is an agent? This question arises, for example, when you think about AI, artificial intelligence. Is there a difference between a human and a robot? I would rather approach the*

²⁵ The theme is discussed in particular by Hartmut Rosa in *Situation und Konstellation* (cit.), and is already anticipated in *Democracy Needs Religion* (2022), tr. en. Polity Press, Cambridge 2024.

question in a way somewhat similar to Bruno Latour²⁶, although not identically. For me, agency is connected to intentionality – a will, a desire, a force. This relates to the concept of medio-passivity²⁷. Medio-passivity fascinates me because even in a conversation, it is not simply a matter of “I do something and you do something”. The conversation itself seems to have a spirit of its own, almost a character. This is true not only of conversations, but also of dances, soccer games²⁸, or other collective practices. They seem to develop a character of their own. The conversation, the dance, or the game becomes an agent in the interspace – what Charles Taylor calls the interspace. This sense of agency is not simply “me”, but it is not simply external either. It is an agency in the interspace.

I think this is a kind of secret – an idea that inspires me – and it feels like it is becoming more radical. Let’s see where it will take us next.

²⁶ Rosa discusses Latour in *Responsive Encounters: Latour’s Modes of Being and the Sociology of World Relations*, in H. Rosa, C. Henning and A. Bueno (eds.), *Critical Theory and New Materialisms*, cit. There is also an online dialogue between Rosa and Latour:

<https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=latour+and+rosa+confrontation&mid=D40649FE194507169238D40649FE194507169238&FORM=VIRE>

²⁷ See, A. Reckwitz and H. Rosa, *Late Modernity in Crisis. Why We Need a Theory of Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2023.

²⁸ The example of game is already discussed as an example of a phenomenon which is “powerful” thanks to its own uncontrollability (see, H. Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, cit., p. 2).