

# Social theory for an open future. An interview with Hartmut Rosa

*di Chiara Visentin*

24-01-2021

Professor Hartmut Rosa holds the Chair of Sociology and Social Theory at Friedrich Schiller University, Jena, and directs the Max-Weber-Center at Erfurt University. Among his most significant books, focusing on the social dynamics, problems and potentialities of modernity and their implications for the possibility of a good life, it is essential to mention *Alienation and Acceleration* (2007), *Social Acceleration. A New Theory of Modernity* (2013), *Resonance. A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (2019) and *The Uncontrollability of the World* (2020). Pandora Rivista's contributor Chiara Visentin met him and interviewed him in the context of the 31st Seminario di Teoria Critica organized by the Società Italiana di Teoria Critica, which took place in Pisa, on October 16th, 2020. The Italian version of this interview was published in the printed issue 3/2020 of Pandora Rivista.

In the wake of the crisis in Europe you talked about a new-found sense of political self-efficacy[1]. Do you still see it now?

Hartmut Rosa: There are actually some reasons which could push us towards a somewhat more pessimistic outlook now compared to then. For one thing, the sense of self-efficacy is weakened by the fact that we still haven't defeated the pandemic, so our hopes on that end have gone unfulfilled. And moreover, there is now a renewed or even a stronger attempt to go back to the old normal, to 'keep the engines going again'. Over the summer, we haven't seen much thinking about novel ways, but rather about how to get back into the old tracks. I always thought this was a possibility. So, for the immediate future I'm not too optimistic.

However, on the other hand, if some kind of fundamental change is to come out of this it will take its time: it's not something we will get done within two months or so. Thus, from this point of view, my opinion hasn't changed. Think of the Middle Ages: when they were struck by the plague, no one could have conceived of the long term effects and consequences. I think that this crisis might really make us rethink our relationship to nature, and I think this is important. Maybe in the long term we will come to see that something was wrong in our belief that we can completely control nature.

And I still do insist on the sense of political self-efficacy nevertheless. My colleague Armin Nassehi, who comes from a Luhmanian perspective, wrote in his last book that a modern society cannot act in a concerted way, in a coherent way[2]. At this juncture, we have had the experience that yes, we can act in this way. My optimism last Spring was rooted in the idea that we could use this insight, and this new-found power, to create positive change, and I still think that this is a lesson from the Covid crisis that could play a central role in the future. But right now, I have to admit that the situation looks a bit bleak.

Isn't it also true that the pandemic brings about a further shrinking of margins for this authentic political self-efficacy - not to speak of individual self-efficacy - , through several mechanisms such as for instance emergency ruling, and increased uncertainty and vulnerability?

Hartmut Rosa: No, I would really disagree with this. Within the given frame of a modern society,

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which operates in the mode of dynamic stabilization[3], you're certainly right - the pandemic is just an accident causing a crisis of the system, and this crisis is decreasing many people's security, their economic security especially, and it creates chaos in some segments of society. But this chaos is exactly the point where my optimism starts. I don't mean that I'm optimistic that within this framework things will turn out well, but that the crisis will make us think about moving towards another framework, about a paradigm change. So, I think your pessimism comes from taking the institutions and the logic in which they operate for granted, and then the future looks bleak, right? But my optimism is a consequence of saying "this is exactly the point where we should shift frames".

And I have another strong argument for optimism. Think of all the talk about the systemic relevance of financial institutions during the financial crises, that was widespread in Germany. Politicians said "we have to save the banks, because they are systemically relevant"; but their relevance was for the old system. Now, instead, we said "let's not focus on the economy, let's look at what is relevant for our lives, for health". So, we have gained a different understanding of what is really important - like solidarity, like a good public health system. We have gained the insight that health is truly a public good. A shift in concerns has taken place, and this might help us overcome our problematic frameworks. My case for optimism hinges on the idea that as long as a paradigm works well - I call it an operative social paradigm, a social formation as certain routines, rules, logics, long chains of interaction - if it works, it's very hard to change it. It has to be in a crisis, and then you rethink whether you want to try to rebuild the old formation or go for a new one; and there I believe in Hannah Arendt's idea of natality[4], that we have the capacity and the power to start anew.

Digital technologies are deeply integrated with what you describe as the problematic framework of late modernity, and their reach is going to be widened and intensified; thus, is mediatization a strong force against change?

Hartmut Rosa: It's very interesting to see what happens on this front. On the one hand, the pandemic has brought about something like what Virilio called a frenetic standstill[5]: we are physically isolated and in a way tied down to the place, we have slowed down, but the sense of crisis is somehow mediated by the fact that we are in a sort of 'digital rush', going from one session to the other, from one meeting to the other, and this does recreate a sense of alienation. But no one really knows the full implications of this. Even before the pandemic, we have been in a huge social experiment, because no one really knows what the logic of social media and this permanent form of connection will lead us to; and now, with the pandemic, we are in another big experiment the outcome of which we ignore. What I really want to insist on is - I cannot predict what will happen as a sociologist, and an economist cannot predict it either, and a futurologist cannot predict it either, because what we will make out of our experience and with the help of the new media is not predetermined: it's up to us, it's a matter of action, not a matter of knowledge. So I'm really opposed to the idea that we should find the right model to predict what will come out, because we're not mechanisms, and I think that the media have the power to enable change in both directions. So far, I would agree that they seem to have aggravated all the problems we already have with modernity.

But let me emphasize this once more, and I think this is all the more important given how I understand the mission of this magazine: if we, as philosophers or as sociologists, say "oh, you know, after the pandemic everything will most likely be worse than before, the poor will be poorer, and democracy and the economy will be lost anyway", then I think we're committing a kind of crime against humanity, because we are in a historical situation, in a crisis, in which no one knows what the future will look like, it's an open future. And if now sociologists say "I, as a scientist, predict that after the crisis things will be worse than before", this amounts to basically telling people, disadvantaged, struggling people, "Go home, there's nothing to be gained for you, after the crisis everything will be worse"; and in this way we pacify the social struggles, and the social forces, by

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pessimistic presumptions. I really feel like it's almost a moral crime to insist on pessimism.

If you had to choose the one single most important contribution that you can draw from your work to understand the present crisis, what would that be?

Hartmut Rosa: There are several things. I think that the most interesting thing that happened is this deceleration. Covid is really slowing us down, and what's so interesting about it is that nothing had done that so far. For the last 200 years, when you look at the amount of human movement, mobility, kinetic energy so to speak, on earth, all the figures have been going up for 250 years: the number of vehicles on the streets, and in the air, and on the water, it has permanently been going up even through wartimes, and even through recessions; the number of ships, of container ships or cruise ships, the number of cars, even the number of bikes, the number of buses, the number of everything has been going up year by year, no matter how many millions of people took part to Friday for Future protests. And the Paris climate agreement itself didn't change much, it increased a bit our energy-efficiency and this kind of stuff, or reduced a bit pollution, but the movement continued incessantly; and that led to a situation in which we felt as if we were totally powerless, as if there was nothing we could do against this logic of acceleration - nor against the logic of starkly unequal distribution of wealth. Now it was not the virus itself that has proved that all this can change: it was political action, the fact that we can act politically and concertedly together.

How do you interpret the increasingly widespread anger and frustration among citizens who protest against the precautions to limit the spread of COVID-19, and more generally question scientific and expert authority, in the light of your analyses of modernity?

Hartmut Rosa: Maybe this is the most important insight. Because, what is Covid-19 for us human beings? As I just said in the last answer, something very singular happened, something extraordinary, namely the slowing down of the world; then my question is, what did motivate it? What is behind it? And I think that behind it there is our desperate attempt - which I think is a consequence of the logic of modernity, collectively, politically as well as individually - to control life, the world, and the earth. Right now that's the most fascinating point for me, it is what I'm working on - this attempt at gaining control, and increasing the horizon of what we can command and control. And this increase in horizon has the flipside of making us feel powerless all the time. You see it when you try to control the atom from the inside through nuclear fission: then we increased our power of control over matter, but this generated our feeling totally powerless in the face of a nuclear catastrophe, be it a bomb or an exploding nuclear power station. And it's the same with nature generally: we have controlled nature, but at the price of feeling powerless with global warming, or other destructive forces. And it's even part of everyday experience, e.g. with the remote control: we have gained a sort of omnipotence, you can make the atmosphere in the room warm or cold or bright or dark or loud or soft, but if the remote control fails then you become totally powerless, you cannot even close the window or open the door. It happens in the political world as well, the political sovereign claims it can control everything, but then it turns out that we can't do anything against the financial markets, for example.

And I think Covid-19 is the paradigmatic materialization of that problem. It is an example of what I call the return of the monster of "uncontrollability" so to speak, because it is something we cannot control at all. I think that what creates the anger and the frustration is this. It's interesting that this frustration is with the experts and with the politicians - why them? Because they both promised control. The expert claims to control viruses, for example, and the politicians claim to control the political world; and then the people experience that they don't control that much. So I think that we need and we are starting to witness a collective civilizational relearning, that it's impossible to achieve complete command, that attempts at total control over the world lead to the opposite. At the

same time, we should not learn the wrong lesson: this does not mean that we should simply accept authority or history or the power of nature. This is why I hope that my conception of resonance can help, because being in resonance with the things we cannot control does not mean that we just give in and surrender to them, but that we enter in a sort of negotiation and dialogue. If we can readjust in this sense our attitude towards nature, towards history, and towards the political world, we would have learned a lot.

Your most recent book is titled *Unverfügbarkeit* (Uncontrollability); *Unverfügbarkeit* is, in a sense, the "Other" of modernity in that it serves to demarcate it, and functions as a powerful tool for critique. Why are you persuaded that it continues to be important to question the issue of modernity as such today?

Hartmut Rosa: That's an interesting question, that we discuss very often at the Max Weber Center. Some of my colleagues there, including my predecessor Hans Joas, think that we should give up the conception of modernity. On the contrary I insist on it. I don't insist on the term, but for me there is something like a certain specificity of the social formation which I call modernity, it could be called a way of life, and I would even call it a mode of existence. This mode of existence is not just individual. We live in a social setting, what I called a paradigm in the previous section, and in it everything goes together, it's a combination of certain cultural ideas and values, certain self-understandings, certain institutions, which somehow form a whole that I call the modern social formation. It is different from the way people lived in earlier times, for example the ancient Romans, or the ancient Greeks, or other past civilizations: these were different social formations, with different types of ideas, different forms of subjectivity. Maybe in this I'm also influenced by Michel Foucault, who says that certain institutions somehow go together with certain forms of knowledge and with certain forms of self-understanding, and he speaks of "power-knowledge regimes"[6]. I think that we should speak of power-institutions-knowledge regimes, and this is what I call a social formation.

I think that if we decided that we don't care about the social formation, and just want to look at individual elements of it, then we'll never understand our social formation as such, our own mode of existence; nor could we understand how it could be different, and how it was different. So I definitely think that we need an understanding of the whole in order to see the connections between the different problems we are facing, and dissolve undue naturalizations of aspects of our way of life.

There are several different types of *Unverfügbarkeit* that you write about. On the one hand, there is a "healthy" *Unverfügbarkeit*, a space of openness and potential for resonance, essential to a good life, which we should preserve from the aggressive control of modern practices and institutions; on the other, there are "pathological", radically threatening and alienating forms of *Unverfügbarkeit*, which are the by-product of the modern quest for total control itself. How do they differ, and what implications do they have for action?

Hartmut Rosa: I would hesitate to call the one form healthy, because health is a controversial concept. What I mean is - think of the difference between the uncontrollability you feel towards a person you love: I would really insist that you only love the other person if he or she remains uncontrollable, and even unpredictable. What we love when we love is the otherness of the other, that there is something in her or in him which is not totally dominated and controlled by me. If you can control or dominate someone completely, he or she stops being an object of resonance, or a subject of resonance. and So you need this form of uncontrollability. Think, for example of the relationship between kids and parents: there you see too that, of course, parents are never controllable for the kids - if they are then they raise tyrants, that is a pathological state -, but at the same time they need to be accessible: so when the kid cries out for the mother or for the father, it needs to have the sense that it is heard, but that does not mean that the mother or the father comes

immediately, and it certainly does not mean that when he or she comes she or he'll do what the child wants. It's a combination of accessibility and uncontrollability.

But that's very different from the uncontrollability you experience when you have a smartphone, or a computer, that is jammed and keeps repeating "just a moment please" forever: that's an uncontrollability which just creates frustration. The difference is that when you talk with someone you love it's a kind of answering relationship, a responsive relationship, a listening and answering, and the answer is uncontrollable; on the other hand, when you talk to your computer, you feel totally powerless, because you don't know what it does and it does not relate to you, so that's the monstrous form of Unverfügbarkeit.

Is it a phenomenological difference? Do certain objects or spheres represent privileged poles of resonance?

Hartmut Rosa: First of all, I want to add that it's not just a phenomenological difference. In the way I explained it now it was phenomenological, but I insist that resonance is not just on the level of phenomenology or of subjective experience: it's an objective form of relationship. It has four elements: (1) being touched by the other, affected by the other, (2) having an influence on the other, self-efficacy, (3) being transformed, and (4) uncontrollability.

So you can see why my relationship to the loved one is a resonant relationship, because what I do affects her or him, what he or she does affects me, and we are transformed in this relationship - in the way we think, in the way we feel, in the way we argue. Thus we can objectively say that that's a responsive, resonant relationship, which is not control. On the other hand, when I talk to my computer, it's non resonant at all. It is not in a responsive relationship with me and it doesn't transform me, it just frustrates me.

So, resonance is more than just a phenomenological relationship. On the other hand, however, the uncontrollability of resonance means that yes, I can be in resonance with the computer. That's what I call material resonance: we can get in resonance with everything, by developing a responsive experience with it (it probably will not be with a computer that is always jammed, unless you have a kind of aesthetic experience). And there can be non responsive relationships with a loved one of course. In a relationships, intimate relationships there are very often phenomena and experiences of reification or alienation, in which one feels that the other only really treats him/her as an object and is not never really affected or transformed by what he/she does, and he/she feels totally non self-efficacious. Thus, resonance is not defined in the substantive realm. I would never say, for instance, that in love we have real resonance, while in work we only have alienated resonance. That would be completely wrong, since it's not work or love or technology or whatever that which we inherently resonate or don't resonate with, but it depends on the form of relationship.

Can we speak of an ontology of relationships?

Hartmut Rosa: Yes exactly, that's what I have in mind. I call it relational ontology. But relational ontology is a bit different from an ontology of relationships, because what I mean when I say relational ontology is that it's not that the subject is given and the world is given and the two enter into a relationship, but the relationship defines what the subject is and what the world is. But as you say, we could also have an ontology of relationships in themselves.

What might a resonant public sphere look like?

Hartmut Rosa: From this point of view, I find very interesting something that is going on for example in Switzerland, Austria, and maybe also Italy: some people, mainly in a neoliberal perspective, claim that we don't need any state-funded public media anymore, because we already have a pluralism of diverse voices - isn't that a great public sphere? My argument is that this is not a public sphere at all.

It is not because what is needed is not a space where everyone can speak his mind and cry out, but processes of listening, being transformed, and thus a public sphere that favors them: something like a neutral platform, where different voices meet and transformation is possible. Right now, often our understanding of the public sphere and more generally the political realm centers on people wanting to have a voice, finding places to speak their minds; and we forget that democracy only works if you also have ears. Forgetting about ears, people are content with crying out and trying to silence and belittle their opponents. Truly listening to the other doesn't mean listening only to find a target for our anger and contempt. That's, however, what happens most of the time, as empirical research shows: we hear other voices, but communicate only among ourselves. For example, if you're liberal, you would of course listen to a Trump talk, but only in an attitude of making fun of him or getting angry about him - and the opposite is true as well. Thus, I think that we definitely need a public sphere in which we relearn the republican virtue of listening, answering and being transformed. And I think that this is more important now than it was at any time in the past. Even on the liberal left, which I count myself to be a part of, I sometimes get nervous about the fact that there are not many people left we want to talk to; so basically we only talk among ourselves. I have met people who said "yes and you know what? I don't want to ever move outside of my group". This is a catastrophic outcome. We need a public sphere in which we really listen to other voices, instead of just giving other voices a place in order to prove that they are wrong.

This brings to mind the phenomena of false resonance, of which you write as being more like mere echos, especially with reference to 20th century totalitarianisms' rituals. Are they widespread today? How can they be "exposed" for what they are?

Hartmut Rosa: Maybe that's already the wrong take: "expose" them, meaning "prove them that they are wrong". I think that people are never truly converted or convinced of something through a stance or an attitude of demasking. On the contrary, they need to have resonance. So, I think that the best way to convince what you could call totalitarians or right wings populists or authoritarians and the like is to give them a real experience of resonance instead of a fake echo. My main example for this is Donald Trump. In his acceptance speech in 2016, he actually appealed to the need for resonance. As we know, in the modern social formation or the industrial or post-industrial capitalist society, people very often have the feeling that they are not addressed by politicians and politics, that they're not heard, and hence they experience a lack of self-efficacy. And Donald Trump said, "to those in Detroit who are not heard, those in the Rust Belt who are never seen, those in the far South who were forgotten: I am your voice"[7]. I think that gives them a strong sense of finally being heard. But then, when they look exactly at what he says, he does not say "I make you heard", he doesn't say "I give you a voice", "I make your voice heard", he says "I am your voice", which basically implies "shut up". Hence I think it's a fake experience of resonance: for a moment you think your voice will be heard, but then you realize "no, I have to be silent, the only voice is Donald Trump's voice, the leader's voice". And I think the best way to kind of, as you say, "expose" this is by giving people a real sense of what it means to have a voice, to have their voice heard.

Grassroots democracy is what is needed. So many people are frustrated with grassroots democracy, because they say that it's just about talk and nothing comes out of it. I think that we should recreate smaller spheres in which self-efficacy is experienced, not in the sense of winning a competition to get one's way and defend one's views or interests, but of collectively listening, answering, being converted, and moving towards new solutions or projects, common projects. I think this should be the basis of the public sphere. And there's an easy indicator by which we can assess whether the public sphere is in good shape or not: if in the city or the community - it can be small or big -, if people say, for example if it's a town, "we build a new city center", the use of a we, an inclusive we, already presupposes the experience of the public sphere as a responsive space; but if,

on the contrary, they say "they are building something in our city center", then it means that an imposition is perceived rather than an inclusive political sphere.

Is this ideal beyond ideological divides, or does it inherently lean towards a certain end of the political spectrum?

Hartmut Rosa: That's a good question, I'm not sure what the answer is. On the one hand, I would say it's non ideological for a number of reasons. First, because ideology is exactly what closes you down to resonance, since if you're ideological, then you already know what is right, and you're closed to the other, you don't listen to it. And secondly, resonance is not defined in terms of substance, of what resonance is, of being in favor of the welfare state, democracy etc; resonance is a mode of relationship instead, i.e. it's not definable with respect to contents. On the other hand, however, the intuition that everyone should be heard and everybody should be responded to is an intuition which comes from the political left, from egalitarian political camps and movements. In this sense, I would say that this ideal is closer to leftist intuitions than to right wing ones.

But, again, from still another perspective, the right-wing intuition that there should be a strong community, the yearning for such a community, maybe contains elements of resonance too, insofar as the idea of community implies the requirement that we listen to each other and care for each other. I think that the main problem on the right is a tendency to think of resonance as fusion, the idea that there should only be one voice, and that everything that's different is a disturbance and should be done away with. That turns resonance into echo, and resonance gets lost, given that it requires that the other transform you. And the left's tradition enshrines a very strong sense of the other that transforms you. However, sometimes this risks becoming associated with the loss of a sense of real connection.

Are there historical examples that you would identify as of authentic, positive political resonance?

Hartmut Rosa: The workers' movements are an example: against an alienated form of existence in which workers were treated like objects or reified, they mobilized in order to really have a say, build a different form of relationship towards the workplace, towards each other, and towards the world, and have a political voice. I think it's the same with the Green movements all over the world, particularly in Germany. The German Greens for example, they really started with a strong sense that our whole social formation is somehow wrong, that we have to find a real sense of connection towards nature and towards each other: that was what was driving them. I think that now sadly they lost this drive a bit, by having become too politically integrated, so that they just aim at operating within the modern social formation without correcting its deep faults. My favorite example, however, is the '68 revolution. It was a worldwide revolution, it dramatically changed the way we live - not so much the political world or the industrial world, but the cultural world -, it made us "accept color" so to speak, i.e. difference, diversity, and not by chance it was a musical revolution - having so much to do with the world of rock music. The idea of voice was central to it, not in the sense of the voice of reason, but in the sense of the capacity to feel each other, hear each other, connect to each other. So I think that we do have strong examples of how there can be a resonant revolution.

You are often presented as a sociologist and philosopher. How do you combine these two perspectives?

Hartmut Rosa: I've always moved in between sociology and philosophy, but also political theory: I did my dissertation in political theory, but I did it with a philosopher, Axel Hneth, on another philosopher, Charles Taylor, and I ended up in sociology; and I would not say that I have three personalities, on the contrary basically I was always interested in the same issues. I felt that the authors who really inspired me, who almost defined me, were always in between: like Jürgen

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Habermas, he's considered to be a sociologist and a philosopher, Axel Honneth, even though he's a bit more of a philosopher, Charles Taylor, he was in political science, Theodor Adorno, Max Weber, Michel Foucault... I think that the most interesting figures were not limited to one discipline: those who want to understand the modern social formation have to move in between these fields, because it has a philosophical side but it also has a very institutionalized, political and sociological side. And of course, the whole tradition I am part of, namely Critical Theory, is really built around this intuition, that the modern world and our predicament in it cannot be understood if these disciplines are separated and their boundaries cage and stop the inquiry by telling the researcher "that's no longer a philosophical, or a sociological question". We have to combine the insights. Nevertheless there's of course a difference in perspective: sociology needs to be empirically grounded, it's an analysis of the institutional workings of society which is not in itself philosophical, while philosophy provides the concepts and the ideas of what justice or the good life could be.

So, I would really insist that we need the different perspectives, but they need to run together in the same individuals. Thus, the question never appears to me whether something is a sociological or a philosophical question: either it's an interesting question or it's not. But then when it comes to finding an answer, then of course sometimes I find that for certain aspects I need to turn to sociology to have empirical proof and evidence, and for other issues I have to turn to philosophy or to political theory. As you know, I'm directing the Max Weber college which is an interdisciplinary institution for the social sciences and the humanities, and there I always insist that it doesn't make any sense to start with perspectives and methodologies: we have to start with a question. There is a phenomenon which we seek to understand, and then we realize that we only understand the phenomenon adequately by combining different perspectives. What we call professionalization means that we acquire a sort of tunnel vision by specializing and narrowing our focus, and only a restricted scientific community comes to count. But you know what? On this too, I'm an optimist: I do find that there are many people, particularly young people and students, who don't care about professional divisions and ask for the objects, and they turn towards those who try to connect and combine.

How do you interpret the social scientist's mission today?

Hartmut Rosa: The question is what should social science, let's say sociology or social theory do: should it just present facts, or should it give an interpretation? My claim is that we should provide interpretations, but the interpretation does always need to draw on facts. I think that Charles Taylor said everything we need to know on this, and I follow his thinking that sociology or political science (at least part of it), and also philosophy and social theory, try to formulate the best account of our situation, of our social formation, given everything we know about it[8]. And for this best account we have to draw on philosophical insights and on empirical evidence, which is necessary in both quantitative and qualitative forms; and of course they have their own standards. But it is very important to keep in mind that a best account cannot be based on one single set of data. The idea of having complete methodological control is a myth and an illusion. If there is a phenomenon that you want to understand, for example one like social acceleration, there can never be a set of data from which you derive it. On the contrary, you have to draw on everything you find, data, interpretations, your own experiences, phenomenological accounts, philosophical insights, and then you try to give an account. And this best account is not knowledge, it's a kind of dialogical offer, it's a starting point. That's exactly how I do it methodologically, and I found out that for me it's very important as an empirical dimension. I formulate an account, like resonance theory, and then I talk to all types of people - I really do, it starts with students for example, teachers and high school students, but also with unemployed, mentally ill, homeless people, and also of course with people outside the European world - like for instance students in China, in India, or workers and activists in Brazil. I try to see what they have to say; of course there are also dangers in trying to do this, but thereby we



can reformulate the account. This for me should not be discredited as not being methodologically grounded, instead it is the idea that the world can be explained from a single set of data that is untenable.

It's an old insight: society is not just reproducing itself biologically, it's also reproducing itself through culture and knowledge, which are transmitted through, and require, narrative self-interpretation. That's Taylor's whole point: we are self-interpreting animals[9]. And there are always overarching self-interpretations of a society. Then the question is, to whom should we leave this kind of narration? I have some colleagues who say that that's not the task of a sociologist, that it should be left to poets, or journalists, or politicians. I disagree: politicians have a partisan view by definition, they don't aim at giving an adequate picture; journalists don't have the time, since they have to cover the day to day news; and poets' vocation is the expression of their aesthetic creativity. So who should give the best possible account as a dialogical offering? I think I can persuasively claim that the attempt to formulate our best self-interpretation is a task of the social sciences. This is what Giddens, Taylor or Habermas claim as well. It's called double hermeneutics: human societies are also self-interpretation, and we as social scientists try to give an account of these self-interpretations in light of institutional reality.

[1] Accelerazione sociale e pandemia: sulla teoria di Hartmut Rosa (Pandora Rivista, 14/07/2020) summarizes Rosa's argument that the way states reacted to the pandemic showed the resurgence of a capacity for political action that up to that point was widely considered lost, thus proving that collectively we can still take our destiny in our own hands.

[2] Das große Nein (Kursbuch, 2020).

[3] This is a central tenet of Rosa's theory of social acceleration: as if on a slipping slope, modern societies and individuals are trapped in a self-reinforcing dynamic pushing them to continuously increase their resources and advance, if only to avoid losing ground and becoming surpassed.

[4] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[5] Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia* (Sage, 2000). This metaphor plays a crucial role in Rosa's work on acceleration, capturing the (only apparently paradoxical) coexistence of the fluidization and acceleration of every aspect of life on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a widespread perception of basic social rigidity, to the effect that no substantial change of course is possible anymore - a double feeling that is the trademark of late modernity.

[6] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Pantheon Books, 1977), *The History of Sexuality 1: The Will to Knowledge* (Penguin, 1998); Joseph Rouse, "Power/knowledge" in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault 2* (1994).

[7] The quotation is from the acceptance speech of the nomination as Republican presidential candidate, delivered in Cleveland on 21/06/2016: «Every day I wake up determined to deliver a better life for the people all across this nation that have been ignored, neglected and abandoned. I have visited the laid-off factory workers, and the communities crushed by our horrible and unfair trade deals. These are the forgotten men and women of our country, and they are forgotten, but they're not going to be forgotten long. These are people who work hard but no longer have a voice. I am your voice».

[8] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Harvard University Press, 1989).

[9] Charles Taylor, "Self-interpreting animals", in *Human Agency and Language*, pp. 45-76 (Harvard University Press, 1985).