

Philosophical Critique and Decoding Path of Rosa's New Alienation

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Abstract. The theory of alienation occupies a very important position in Marx's theoretical system. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx criticizes classical political economy in England starting from alienated labor and puts forward four aspects of alienated labor. The Frankfurt School further developed Marx's theory of alienation and conducted comprehensive investigations on technological alienation, cultural alienation, consumer alienation, and other aspects of modern society's culture, politics, and art. In the new turn of late modern society, the fourth generation Frankfurt School scholar Hartmut Rosa, starting from time analysis, analyzes the growth logic and dynamic stability of modern society's overall crisis through the theory of social acceleration critique, and proposes the social pathologies of "acceleration" and the solution of "resonance", attempting to achieve a better life for people in the present era through the adaptive mode of resonance theory. Based on Hartmut Rosa's works and related research, this article explores the theoretical origins of Rosa's theory of social acceleration critique, the historical background and ideological elements, elaborates on Rosa's analysis of the phenomenon of social acceleration, the new forms of alienation under the background of accelerated society, and the resonant solutions to the problem of new alienation. Finally, this article examines the theoretical value and shortcomings of his theory.

Keywords: Hartmut Rosa; Critical Theory of Social Acceleration; New Alienation; Resonance.

1. Philosophical Critique and Decoding Path of Rosa's New Alienation

As a representative scholar of the fourth generation of the Frankfurt School, Hartmut Rosa, a disciple of Honneth, delves into the growth logic of modern society and the overall crisis of dynamic stability from the perspective of time analysis, providing insightful observations. Since the publication of his work *Acceleration: The Change of Time Structures in Modern Society*, Rosa's theory of social acceleration critique and the problem of new alienation have also received widespread attention.

2. The Birth of New Alienation and the Dilemma of a Good Life

2.1. The Theoretical Origin of New Alienation

The alienation and social critique of the Frankfurt School are based on Marx's theory of alienated labor. Rosa inherits the cultural critique path of the first generation core figures Horkheimer and Adorno, and continues the tradition of the Frankfurt School's theory with the theory of social acceleration critique, examining the new forms of alienation unique to modern society. Before discussing the forms of new alienation, it is necessary to grasp Rosa's special understanding of the concept of alienation: on the one hand, Rosa borrows Marx's theory of alienation to indicate the antagonistic relationship between people and the world in the context of capitalism; on the other hand, he does not think that discussing alienation requires establishing a clear non-alienated reference point first, but instead uses Rahel Jaeggi's theoretical framework on alienation to bridge the exploration of the relationship between self and the world.

Therefore, to study the theoretical origins of new alienation, we need to go back to Marx's texts firstly. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, it is written that "the object produced by labor, its product, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer... It manifests itself as alienation, as the externalization of man." [Marx, Engels. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2014, 41.] Marx believes that



"alienation" is a phenomenon, a subject with self-consciousness and agency, which produces the opposite result of controlling and enslaving oneself and the subject's power through conscious life activities and practical human activities.

The theoretical positioning of Rosa's new alienation problem comes from Rahel Jaeggi, who is also the representative of the fourth generation of the Frankfurt School. Jaeggi describes seven daily situations that make the subject feel different from the world, and emphasizes that "since the subject is inevitably an existing subject in the world, I am myself in the world, and self-relationship is world relationship, so self-alienation is also a kind of world alienation. That is, the relationship that is different from me is inevitably a relationship that is different from the world." [Hartmut Rosa. *Uncontrollable* [M]. Translated by Zheng Zuoyu and Ma Xin. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p. 20.] Combining the breaking of the unity between individuals and the world, the opposition and indifference between individuals and the world in modern society, Jaeggi ultimately defines alienation as "a relationship without relation". Rosa cites Jaeggi's concept of alienation for social analysis, and further proposes "relational relation" as resonance, viewing the world as a world where alienation and resonance dialectically transform each other.

Rosa's investigation of the new alienation problem places it in the context of social acceleration criticism. The theory of social acceleration criticism is based on Virilio's research on the racing study (dromologie), in which Virilio focuses on the visible speed (vitesse) of technology and regards speed as "a relationship between phenomena". The history of acceleration starts from the technological aspects of transportation revolution, communication and transmission channels, and biotechnology transplantation. Rosa expands on Virilio's racing study and clarifies the concept of social acceleration, which was previously separated between pre-modern and modern societies in sociology. He interprets the entire world history as a history of acceleration, aiming to reveal the new alienation dilemma brought about by the development of social acceleration and to seek an ideal vision for a better life.

2.2. New Forms of Alienation

As human society enters the late modern stage, the theory of alienation must also be constantly combined with social and historical conditions to explore new problems in modern society and expand itself. Rosa introduces the temporal dimension into the analysis of alienation, and through examining the disorder and lack of resonance in the accelerating social time structure, he puts forward new alienation relationships in modern society. "The dynamic stability pattern of modern society implies a logic of upgrading and growth, which requires continuous economic growth, technological acceleration, and cultural innovation to maintain the institutional status." [Hartmut Rosa. *Uncontrollable*. Translated by Zheng Zuoyu and Ma Xin. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p. 21.] The new alienation brought about by the social acceleration is not only manifested in human actions and objects, but also in the alienation relationship between humans and the time, space, and even themselves.

In *The Birth of New Alienation - Outline of Social Acceleration Critique Theory*, Rosa elaborates on five manifestations of new alienation. Spatial alienation: In the process of globalization, frequent changes in space have caused a lot of fluidity and disorder between people and physical space, resulting in a lack of identity between people and space; Material alienation: With the acceleration of social changes, the existing knowledge and experience about objects gradually lose value, leading to a growing gap between people and objects; Action alienation: The inability to control brings panic and the difficulty of satisfying the self-efficacy expectations in an accelerated society, causing people to voluntarily do things they don't really want to do; Temporal alienation: The pattern of short-lived experience/short-lived memory replaces other patterns, time flies by but leaves no trace in people's memory; Self-alienation: Social acceleration directly leads to the relationships' collapse and deterioration between human beings and the world. "When our relationships with time, space, action, experience, and interactive partners become alienated, it is difficult to avoid deep self-alienation".

[Hartmut Rosa. *The Birth of New Alienation - Outline of Social Acceleration Critique Theory*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2018, pp. 140-142.]

The new forms of alienation of time, action, and experience caused by the acceleration of society together constitute the forms of alienation in the relationship between human beings and the world. The alienation of contemporary society has penetrated into the existence of human beings and the world, and the existence of human beings and themselves.

2.3. The Real Dilemma of a Good Life

Just as Marx's critique of capitalist society aims to transform the world, the social critique theory of the Frankfurt School is also not simply about diagnosing society, but rather guiding people to pursue a better life. Horkheimer assumes that the goal of critical theory is to "pursue social justice and reason through criticism, rebellion, and negation of social reality, in order to achieve human liberation and happiness." [Horkheimer, A& Adorno, T.W. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by Qu Jingdong and Cao Weidong. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, p.47.] As a representative figure of the fourth generation of critical theory, Rosa inherits this tradition and his analysis of new forms of alienation in an accelerating society is not only limited to criticism, but also hopes to overcome alienation and achieve a happy and fulfilling life. However, these new forms of alienation undoubtedly bring difficulties to the happiness and well-being life of individuals as social historical subjects.

2.3.1. The Lack of Self-identity

In the new alienation forms of social expression, the alienation of the relationship between individuals and space, the material world, and interactive relationships will further lead to a crisis of subjective identity. The relationship between individuals and the material world changes with the social replacement, marking the erosion of long-term use of personal traits by accelerated production, and the loss of intimate relationships with objects will also lead to changes in self-traits. This separation and detachment between subjects and objects, and between subjects and the space they occupy, causes individuals to lose the material and relational conditions for self-identification, thereby leading to the loss of human subjective identity and a crisis of existence.

2.3.2. Compression of Free Time

"Time is actually the active existence of human beings. It is not only the scale of human life, but also the space for human development." [Marx-Engels *Collected Works* (Volume 47). Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1979, 532.] In this sense, time becomes the scale of human existence, closely related to a person's good life. The development of science and technology and productivity should improve people's work efficiency, reduce working hours, expand free time, and promote comprehensive freedom and development. However, this promise of modernity has not been realized, though the science and technology are highly developed today. The acceleration of society has not only failed to bring about an expansion of free time, but has further compressed people's free time, which further limits people's self-development. The state of a happy and good life becomes even more elusive.

2.3.3. Powerlessness in Social Life

The process of modernization is also a continuous process of social rationalization. The development of modern society hopes to incorporate science, economy, law, politics, and even individuals into the realm of rationality, making them controllable, calculable, and manageable. However, as the logic of social control expands, the lack of control over unstable and uncontrollable objects, the lack of actual control by individuals, and the silence of the relationship between human beings and the world will all bring about individual powerlessness and insecurity, leading to individuals' helplessness in social life. This existential panic undoubtedly hinders the pursuit of a better life.

3. Philosophical Analysis of "Social Acceleration Critique" and the Way of "Resonance"

In response to a series of alienation issues that have emerged in modern society, Rosa analyzed them by the theory of social acceleration critique. He identified the cause of new alienation as social acceleration, analyzed three phenomena of social acceleration, and explored the path through which social acceleration leads to new alienation. Furthermore, he proposed a solution based on resonance, providing a philosophical way out for addressing new alienation.

3.1. The Phenomenon of Social Acceleration that Brings about Alienation

In the discussion of the concept of acceleration, Rosa categorizes different domains of social time acceleration from the perspective of temporal sociology, clarifies the dimensions of social acceleration that lead to new alienation.

3.1.1. Acceleration of Technology

"The acceleration of technology is the most easily measurable and provable form in contemporary society, manifested as a Goal-oriented, technological, and especially about the craft's acceleration process." [Hartmut Rosa. *Acceleration: The Change of Time Structures in Modern Society*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2015, p. 86] The compression of the spatiotemporal structure brought about by technological acceleration leads to the spatial shrinkage commonly found in modern society, and the highly developed information transmission system further intensifies the phenomenon of time erasing space. This mobility and spatial reduction brought about by technological acceleration are also important sources of spatial alienation mentioned earlier.

3.1.2. Acceleration of Social Change

From the perspective of time structure, the acceleration of social change is manifested as the shrinking of the present, that is, the reduction of a certain stable period of time. In this accelerated structure, the past and the future are interpreted within an increasingly shorter distance. This form of acceleration leads to the loss of social stability, and consequently the alienation of individuals and society from the material world and time.

3.1.3. Acceleration of the Pace of Life

"The accelerated pace of life is objectively reflected in the compactness of behavioral events. In order to solve the reduction of time between activities, it is necessary to reduce the rest and idle time among behaviors or engage in multiple behaviors at the same time. This is manifested in the time structure as Shortage of time resources and high-density patterns of behavior." [Jiang Hua, Cui Jiasheng. *Time alienation: a new model of alienation interpretation—A review of Rosa's alienation theory*. *Theoretical Monthly*, 2022, No. 481(01):5-12.] In the accelerated society, the increase in the number of affairs actually exceeds the increase in technological speed, which leads to the poverty of people's free time. The accelerated pace of life has brought about the growth of the "to-do list" and the tension in individual behaviors, causing the emergence of behavioral alienation that people "voluntarily do things they don't really want to do."

Under the driving mechanism of social acceleration, the basic principles of profit and value enhancement in capitalist experience are further strengthened, and the logic of competition dominates various aspects of social life, further promoting social acceleration. Therefore, the new alienation generated under the mode of accelerated society will not only fail to be resolved, but also deepen further with the development of acceleration.

3.2. The Resonant Relationship between Human and the World

Resonance is a positive relationship between individuals and the world in Rosa's philosophical theory, which means the subject and the world respond to each other. This theory is an extension of Rahel Jaeggi's concept of alienation, as mentioned earlier, Jaeggi defines alienation as a "relationship lacking relationships", and Rosa believes that since there is a relationship which lacks of relationships,

there should also be a "relationship with relationships", which is "resonance". The relationship of resonance is the opposite of the control relationship between individuals and the world in modern society's growth and competition logic, and it is a reflection on Jaeggi's solution of resolving alienation through control and appropriation.

The modern social form desire everything to fall under the dominion of controllable social relations. But in fact, the relationship between human beings and the world is precisely uncontrollable. It is precisely in the desire to control the uncontrollable that the vitality of life and the touch of emotions are revealed. Rosa uses the example of unexpected snow and the process of a football match to describe the interaction between what can be controlled and what cannot be controlled. "The uncontrollable caused by the process of attempting to control has produced an extreme alienation. The modern society's attempt to expand the scope of world influence has turned the world into an object we occupy, causing the world that makes us feel fearful and making us lose the world..." [Hartmut Rosa. *Uncontrollable*. Translated by Zheng Zuoyu and Ma Xin. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2022, p. 177] Based on the foundation of uncontrollable relationships, Rosa criticizes the expanding logic of control in modern society and attempts to establish a two-way relationship of listening and interaction between humans and the world. In this relationship, the subject should open itself, respond to the world, and pursue the vitality of life and the beauty of living in the unknown and expectations, rather than manipulation and control.

3.3. Adaptation Solutions Beyond Social Crises

Although the social development of controlling and growth logic has disrupted the resonance relationship, it has indeed brought a solid foundation for a better life in all aspects of social life. Therefore, Rosa is not denying growth and acceleration, but rather aiming to establish an adaptive relationship between individuals and the accelerated growth rhythm of society. Rosa aims to establish a social paradigm of eliminating alienation and achieving a better life - a post-growth society.

3.3.1. Economic Democracy System

The transformation from a modern society to a post-growth society requires replacing the blind mechanism of capitalist exploitation with an economic democracy system. Rosa hope to overcome the domination and coercion of people by control logic through political constraints. The economic democracy system does not oppose markets and competition, but rather increases public control over the socio-economic aspects. It also does not oppose growth, but rather opposes blind and profit-oriented growth, aiming to achieve growth that meets the needs of society members for a better life.

3.3.2. Unconditional Basic Income

By introducing a social welfare system that guarantees basic income unconditionally, the anxiety of survival caused by the logic of competition can be eliminated. "The only distribution area not ruled by the principle of competition is the distribution model and measures of the welfare state." [Hartmut Rosa. *The Birth of Alienation: Outline of Social Acceleration Critique Theory*. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2018, p. 34] Unconditional guaranteed income is based on this theoretical judgment. This system can liberate people's survival from the mode of struggle, and eliminate endless competition through a supporting unconditional guaranteed basic time system. It guarantees people's free time and space for development, and deals with new forms of alienation.

3.3.3. Cultural Reform of Resonance

The cultural driving force that controls the logic in contemporary society is the commitment to happiness and the pursuit of a fulfilling life. Rosa believes that the cultural revolution of resonance is the scale to achieve a better life in the post-growth society. In Rosa's view, a better life should be a life of resonance, "It is achieved through interaction and listening to the world, facing the world with an open attitude, and establishing a resonance relationship between human beings and the world, eliminating alienation and achieving a better life". [Zhang Yan, Li Yan. *How does 'resonance' surpass*

'acceleration': The logical evolution of Rosa's critical view of a good life. Zhejiang Social Sciences, 2021, No. 302 (10): 87-95+158.]

Rosa explores the philosophical analysis and decoding path of the alienation problem in modern society through the theories of social acceleration critique and resonance. This theoretical exploration provides a possible paradigm for resolving the symptoms of late modern society, making innovation development of critical theory, but his theory also clearly showing a compromise, having certain theoretical flaws and shortcomings.

4. The Value and Limitations of Rosa's Theory of Social Acceleration Critique

Rosa discusses in depth different dimensions of social acceleration, further explains the motives behind social acceleration and reveals the many crises brought by social acceleration, and the alienation of individuals' relationship with the world under society acceleration. In terms of its theoretical significance, Rosa's comprehensive and profound theoretical system promotes the development of social acceleration theory and the development of critical theory from the Frankfurt School, injecting rich contemporary content into Marx's theory of alienation. However, this theory also has limitations, whether this post-growth society's adaptation plan can truly achieve a good life is still open to debate.

4.1. The Value and Contribution of Social Acceleration Critique Theory

As an innovative theory, Rosa's theory of social acceleration critique undoubtedly can promote the development of social acceleration theory, critical theory of the Frankfurt School and Marx's theory of alienation.

From the perspective of social acceleration theory, Rosa's theory effectively solves the problems of previous social acceleration theories. Previous social acceleration theories only focused on one or two aspects of social acceleration. This has led to the inability of previous social acceleration theories to comprehensively analyze the phenomenon of social acceleration. Rosa decomposes social acceleration into three different dimensions of social acceleration. Through different types and fields of social acceleration phenomena, he points out the inherent connections between different acceleration phenomena and further explores the internal driving forces behind social acceleration.

From the perspective of the Frankfurt School's critical theory., the Frankfurt School has always paid close attention to the accelerating tendency of capitalism and modernity. During the study with Honneth, Rosa saw the charm of critical theory - It is not about creating any universal theory, but about pointing to real life and finding a place for individual lives in the torrent of history. Rosa combined theory with the times, allowing critical theory to focus on the phenomenon of social acceleration, and developing his social criticism theory based on the problems of the lifeworld. This has enabled the critical theory of the Frankfurt School re-adapted to new social practices, rejuvenating it and enriching the theoretical achievements.

From the perspective of Marx's theory of alienation, Rosa's theory of social acceleration Critique adds new historical content to it. As mentioned earlier, although Rosa utilizes Marx's theory of alienation as a framework, the specific content has already changed. In terms of the concept of alienation, alienation has evolved from the oppositional relationship between laborers and labor under capitalist society to the alienation relationship between individuals and the world in the current era of acceleration. In Rosa's view, the two parties in the alienation relationship in modern society are individuals and the world. In the accelerated society, individuals lose their intimacy with time and space, lack identification with social life itself, the relationship between individuals and the surrounding world gradually becomes unfamiliar. This new social background and the alienation experience closely related to human beings are serious obstacles to obtaining a good life.

Just as Marx and Engels described in the preface to the German edition of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1872,"the practical application of these basic principles, as stated in the manifesto, must always be

adapted to the existing historical conditions".[Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. Complete Works of Marx and Engels: Volume 18. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1965:104.] In different historical periods, the development of theory also needs to add new content that is in line with the characteristics of the times on the basis of different socio-political and economic conditions, Rosa's theory undoubtedly achieves this point.

4.2. Limitations and Shortcomings of Social Acceleration Critique Theory

It should be noted that compared with Marx's abandonment of alienation, Rosa's abandonment plan has limitations in terms of compromise and abstraction. Rosa's proposal to abandon alienation is a reform which abandons new alienation through economic democracy, unconditionally guarantees the welfare system of income, and resonates with cultural revolution. Compared with Marx's plan of achieving human freedom and comprehensive development by means of class revolution to get rid of alienation, Rosa's plan lacks revolutionary spirit undoubtedly; at the same time, the core of Rosa's abandonment of alienation is to seek the inherent connection between social acceleration and capital logic, in order to find a resonant adaptation plan and improvement path to solve the problem of acceleration, rather than criticizing this social phenomenon from the perspective of Marx's political economy, which is weak and abstract.

From the perspective of theoretical weakness, Rosa attempts to use a resonance model to solve the problems of alienation, transcend capitalism, and achieve a better life for people. He fantasizes about entering a post-growth society through the construction of resonant social relations and the regulation of political philosophy. This capitalist reform method is non-revolutionary and a conservative solution to social problems. Although Rosa's social acceleration critique theory exposes the uncontrollable acceleration of modern society and the rupture and alienation between our bodies that are still suited to traditional mechanisms, it places the hope of overcoming alienation and achieving a better life on the self-destruction of capitalism after its high-speed development, which is undoubtedly a fantastical and a theoretical fantasy of utopia.

From the perspective of theoretical abstraction, In Rosa's theoretical system, "resonance" itself is a metaphysical pre-theoretical assumption (from the concept expansion of "relationship without relationships" to "relationship with relationships"), and its resonance scheme is abstract based on theory. From a specific form perspective, Resonance is not a true elimination of alienation in society, but rather the construction of a two-way relationship between individuals and the world by adapting to the accelerating frequency of society. This compromising and weak theory certainly cannot truly solve the problem of accelerated social alienation.

Therefore, in the exploration of a better life in modern society, we should still prioritize practice and awaken people's subjectivity. Transforming the individual's venting of pain into conscious collective resistance, exposing the alienation situation under the accelerated background of modern society, and breaking free from the state of subjectivity loss in practical reality that can transform the world [Wang Hongbo, Yan Song. How is it possible to go beyond formal freedom of rationalism - Modern interpretation of Marx's concept of freedom. *Philosophical Trends*, 2021(06):17-26.], in order to find a path to eliminate alienation and achieve a better life.

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