

Engagement and Resonance: Two Ways out from Disinterestedness and Alienation

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Abstract: Arnold Berleant's enlargement of the scope of aesthetics to environments and social relationships opens the way for associations with approaches from other human and social sciences. One possible term of comparison is Hartmut Rosa's theory of modernity, which applies the concept of resonance to various fields, including nature and art. At the beginning, their aims appear to be different and their alternatives slightly different: engagement stresses the continuity between the embodied self and the world, whereas resonance is primarily based upon a model of communication. Nevertheless, their relational theories converge in several respects: they focus on experience, defend participatory models against objectifying and merely contemplative relationships, and practise social criticism in their search for a meaningful and good life.

Keywords: aesthetic experience, engagement, resonance, Arnold Berleant, Hartmut Rosa.

Hartmut Rosa's latest book, *Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung* (2016), expounds on over 800 pages the results of ten years of reflection, and ambitions not only to integrate previous theories, but also to find, in the concept of resonance, the answer to all major problems of our age. Even before the publication of this book, Rosa's ideas gave rise to controversies because of their "normative monism" (Rosa 2016, p. 756), that made Rosa suspect of having proposed a "doctrine of salvation" (*ibid.*, p. 750).¹ Why should one compare, then, his sociology with Arnold Berleant's social and environmental aesthetics? Would such a comparison make sense and would it be at all possible? The present paper is an attempt to argue that, on closer scrutiny, their conceptions present several similarities.

Aesthetics and sociology

Let us start with the obvious differences between Berleant and Rosa. Not only is their disciplinary background different, but they also belong to other generations (Berleant was born in 1932, Rosa in 1965). Also the genealogy of their ideas leads back to different schools: Berleant is indebted to pragmatism and phenomenology, in particular to Dewey and Merleau-Ponty, and he appreciates phenomenology as a method of describing, free from presuppositions and prejudices, the structures of experience, mainly perception. Rosa, however, declares his continuity with the emancipatory ideas of the Frankfurt School, which he claims to overcome through a systematic approach and an optimistic attitude. Nevertheless, Rosa also extensively resorts to the phenomenology of corporality in the first part of his book, while Berleant occasionally appreciates Marcuse and Fromm for their non-egocentric ethics (Berleant 1997, p. 140). Finally, both appreciate the legacy of the *Aufklärung*.

Further on, their purposes seem to be different: Berleant aims to extend the scope of aesthetic theory beyond art and beauty and elaborates the program of a new aesthetics, which he calls – depending on the

¹ All translations from Rosa belong to me, M.D.

discussed topic – environmental, social or cultural. Rosa, at his turn, rejects the exclusion of happiness and wellbeing from sociology due to an over-simplified Aufklärung (Rosa 2016, p. 37-38). The Enlightenment had indeed committed itself to acknowledge the autonomy of the individual, but it also emphasized the limitation of this autonomy by the Vernunft, nature, or the public good. The theories in its wake preserved only autonomy; the issue of a good life was, however, hitherto considered a private matter and bound to individual choices and options, being relegated to psychological or even esoteric companions. In reaction to this historically distorted development, Rosa brings to the foreground of his sociology the subject's relationship to the world (*ibid.*, p. 56) and ambitions to establish resonance as a “metacriterion of a good life” (*ibid.*, p. 749). From this perspective, Berleant's and Rosa's final objectives actually converge, because Berleant, too, regards aesthetic values as inextricably linked to moral values and as a powerful instrument to shape a human life.²

Obviously, Rosa is not an aesthetician, let alone an exponent of environmental aesthetics. His reflections start with the subject's basic strategies to assume the world in modernity: by dominating it (*Weltbeherrschung*) and by appropriating it through transformation (*Weltanverwandlung*). While the first attitude ends in alienation, the latter implies experiences of resonance, provided that the subject would follow intrinsic interests. Against the mainstream that regards the domination of the world as the “normal,” “natural” and rational pattern of handling and is obsessed with accumulating resources, Rosa argues that an alternative – called resonance – is, well, possible. Further on, he follows its forms along three “axes of resonance:” “horizontal” (family, friendship and politics), “diagonal” (relationships to objects, at work, in education, sport, and consumption), and “vertical” (religion, nature, art, and history). However, Rosa's genuine contribution to sociology and even philosophy concerns less his considerations on art and nature, where he mostly relies upon few German philosophers like Christoph Menke or Angelika Krebs, and ignores Berleant, but in the conceptualization of resonance, in his theory of modernity and, of course, in the analyses of particular social fields. Conversely, even if Berleant defines himself as an aesthetician, his broad definition of the aesthetic, rooted in perception, enables him to also address issues of social ethics and political theory. Berleant even calls for involving other sciences in order to stress the social dimension of the person and the cultural embeddedness of aesthetic sensibility.³ In his view, the self is “*a social construct and even a social product*”, and the person is always related with others, like a “*node of intersecting connections*,” as a result, self-sufficiency turns out to be no more than a “*cultural myth*” and “*a false ideal*” (Berleant 1997, pp. 139, 146, 143). The same statements might have also been signed by Rosa.

Finally, a comparison between Berleant and Rosa may be obstructed by their distinct style. On one hand, Berleant is used to publishing collections of essays revolving around a few themes; general introductions into the “new aesthetics” alternate with analyses of fine arts, music and architecture, landscapes, other environments and social phenomena. On the other hand, Rosa's book on *Resonanz* – the only to be considered in the present paper – is composed as a symphonic work having resonance as leitmotif. Its first part describes basic elements of human relationships to the world, including the dichotomy of resonance and alienation, the second part goes into different spheres and axes of resonance, as described before, the third part reconstructs the history of modernity, finally, the fourth aims to put forward a critical theory of the relationships to the world.

² According to Berleant, “*ethical values lie at the heart of social aesthetics*” (Berleant 2010, p. 95).

³ “*Foremost in this rethinking of ethics is the recognition of the essential sociality of human life. Philosophy lags far behind what the human sciences have established here*” (Berleant 1997, p. 138).

The aforementioned complications in comparing Berleant with Rosa may be simplified if we confine the discussion to a few selected topics that connect both theories: their relational character and the primacy of experience, the role of sensibility, the nexus between person and society, and critique of dominant life models in contemporary society.

The primacy of experience

Berleant's aesthetics and Rosa's theory of resonance may both be considered "phenomenological" in the broadest sense of a theory that stresses experience as a relationship between an embodied self and the world. Under the influence of the artistic developments of the 1960s and 1970s, Berleant required very early to replace the aesthetic of objects with an aesthetic of experience, that is, to go beyond pleasing objects and social objective structures and describe the manner how these are experienced. In particular, *aesthetic* means neither an attribute of objects (works of art), nor their psychological effect, but "*a mode of experience that rests on the directness and immediacy of sensuous perception*" (Berleant 2010, p. 195).

Rosa even lifts experience to a specific relationship to the world (*Weltbeziehung*, Rosa 2016, p. 289). Resonance is only one version of this relationship, one that finds the meaning of life not in the appropriation of the world and in the extension of power, by heaping "resources" and feasible options, but in a mutual relationship and transformation of the subject and the world. This reciprocity evolves in two "steps": I let myself be affected by the world and answer to it.⁴ It goes without saying that Rosa uses the concept of resonance not primarily for a material-physical phenomenon, but in order to describe a specific relationship: Humans are "resonating bodies" (*Resonanzkörper*, *ibid.*, p. 269), in the sense that they gain identity from their relationships to others. As a matter of fact, both the subject and the world "*are formed, coined by and even constituted in and through their reciprocal relation*" (*ibid.*, p. 62). With respect to the relational conception of the self, both Berleant and Rosa occasionally quote Martin Buber. In any case, they both agree that no good life can be achieved by shutting oneself from the world, and respectively the environment.⁵ For Berleant, biological life itself would not even be possible if one would be cut off from the environment, without eating, breathing or moving. Rosa's stress, however, lies elsewhere: even the opposite of resonance, alienation, is a kind of relationship, namely – with Rahel Jaeggi's expression – the "relation of non-relatedness" (*ibid.*, p. 316). When the basic relation of resonance fails, the world is experienced as mute (*stumm*), repulsive or indifferent. Sociology would not only have to identify and describe these basic types of relationship to the world, but also their causes and consequences on a macro- and microsocial scale.

A relational approach also implies the critique of essentialism. In his early work, Berleant replaced the subject-object-dualism with the aesthetic field, in which the artistic object, the appreciator (collectively, the audience), the creator and the performer modulate each other in specific contexts and situations. The aesthetic situation is as such devoid of essence, but a "*contextual theory*" may assign various features to it (Berleant 2005, pp. 149-153): 1) Acceptance, i.e. "*openness to experience while judgment is suspended*," a kind of

⁴ Here is one of the definitions of resonance: "*Resonance is a form of relation to the world that is constituted through af←jection and e→motion, intrinsic interest and perceived self-efficacy, in which subject and world at the same time touch and transform each other*" (Rosa 2016, p. 298).

⁵ However, while Berleant often resorts to ecological knowledge in order to clarify the meaning of environment and describes the world as "*a dynamic nexus of interpenetrating forces to which we contribute and respond*" (Berleant 2005, p. 13), Rosa is tempted to ascribe a transcendental-phenomenological meaning to the world, regarded as the last horizon in which things can appear and be experienced (R, p. 65).

intentionality (“attention”) that is freed of practical interests and akin to what Kant called “*purposiveness without purpose*;⁶ 2) The central role of perception in the aesthetic appreciation, following from the redefinition of aesthetics as aisthetics; 3) Sensuousness: to accept the pleasure derived from the senses (nota bene: from all senses), against any intellectualism in aesthetics; 4) Discovery: the sense of wonder, to detect features that previously passed unnoticed; 5) Uniqueness, meaning that each experience is unrepeatable; 6) Reciprocity or the interplay of the factors that constitute the aesthetic field, as described before; 7) Continuity: the factors can be discerned in the analysis, but in the experience they “*blend into one another*;⁷ 8) Engagement: the aesthetic experience excludes psychological distance and implies an intimate, direct and “participatory involvement” with the object; and finally 9) Multiplicity: aesthetic experiences can take place everywhere and anytime and be basically unleashed by everything. The last feature derives from regaining perception as the center of aesthetics. On one hand, this deprives aesthetic theory from an own aesthetic realm, on the other hand, it extends its object to various things, activities, situations and environments which all have a sensory dimension. If Terentius stated that as a human “*humani nihil a me alienum puto*,” Berleant claims that “*nothing in the human world is excluded*” on principle from aesthetics (Berleant 2010, p. 46).

The similarities of this approach with Rosa’s concept of resonance can be identified first and foremost at the level of openness, when the subject is willing “*to enter into appreciation with an open mind*” (Berleant 2005, p. 149). Perception is, for understandable reasons, less important for Rosa than for aestheticians. One may even cautiously advance the hypothesis that affectivity and not perception is primary in resonance. To be more specific, Rosa explicitly denies resonance the character of an emotional state (which would downgrade it from the existential to the psychological level) and would probably prefer the Heideggerian understanding of *Befindlichkeit* and *Stimmung*.⁷ Yet the strongest difference to resonance can be found in the concept of engagement that Berleant described as a fading away of boundaries and an “intimate absorption” (Berleant 2005, p. 152). Although resonance certainly “*touches*” (*berührt*) the subject, and its existential “depth” implies intimacy with the world, Rosa repeatedly insists on the difference between the self and the cause of resonance: “*Resonance is no echo, but a relation of answer; it presupposes that both sides speak with [their] own voices?*” (Rosa 2016, p. 298). The subject and the world have to be at the same time “*‘closed’ or consistent enough in order to speak with their own voices, and open enough to be affected*” (*ibid.*, p. 298). Therefore, this relationship never reaches the state of a fusion, but its poles enter a kind of dialogue that transforms both of them. Put differently, resonance is a mutual, “*bidirectional vibration*” (*ibid.*, p. 279) on the levels of corporality, affectivity, evaluation and cognition. To be engaged in a relation of resonance means to feel addressed (*angesprochen*) by something valuable that affects me and to respond to it by acting adequately. The independence of the source of value implies that the resonating experience has to acknowledge a moment of unavailability (*ibid.*, p. 295): this experience can neither be forced nor induced voluntarily.

Another possible analogy between Berleant’s aesthetics and Rosa’s sociology of resonance regards the social and cultural conditioning of perception and experience in general. According to Berleant, perception is never pure, like the activity of a subject that would be *tabula rasa*, but it is a basically

⁶ However, it would be misleading to infer from Berleant’s reference to Kant in this context that openness to experience could be plainly equated with the Kantian disinterestedness. Cf. the differences between engagement and disinterestedness.

⁷ Somehow misleading is also the terminological couple used by Rosa for resonance, “*Af←fizierung*” and “*E→motion*.” Both are interpreted in the light of their Latin etymology: *af←fection* refers to affect in a broad meaning (being affected by something, including by perceiving it), *e→motion* stems from *emovere*, meaning ‘moving away,’ ‘removing’ or ‘dislodging’ (*binausbevegen*, Rosa 2016, p. 279).

“acculturated experience” (Berleant 2010, p. 28). Perception and meaning are conditioned by social, historical and cultural filters, not to mention the filters of personal experience, habits, etc. (*ibid.*, p. 110). Individuals incorporate traditions, culturally established hierarchy of values, and norms through education, media and various practices, and this multilayered conditioning implies that perception is from the very beginning imbued with meaning and value. Applied to the aesthetic realm, this explains why no universal standards of aesthetic evaluation could be set so far. Rosa, too, acknowledges that all human relations to the world are shaped by cultural and social factors. In particular, resonance can be roughly characterized from the perspective of Western modernity as “*catholic, feminine, young and, besides, rural*” (Rosa 2016, p. 659). The professor of sociology in Jena does not exclude the existence of further sociocultural patterns that would produce other forms of resonance. For that purpose, he urges social scientists to conduct historical and comparative research, in order to extend his project on a global scale (*ibid.*, pp. 654, 752-753).

If Berleant and Rosa meet in the primacy they confer to experience, their examples partly diverge. During the past few decades, Berleant has relentlessly brought into light new “case studies” for aesthetics, from urbanity to ecological catastrophes and terrorist attacks. The social aesthetics can be found, according to him, “*not only in friendship, family, and love, but even in education and employment*” (Berleant 2010, p. 95). The same phenomena listed here by Berleant were devoted specific analyses in Rosa’s book, however, without mentioning the concept of aesthetic, not even in the chapters on art and nature. Regarding the situations and practices used as examples, Berleant focuses on everyday life, following the phenomenological “*zunächst and zumeist*,” whereas Rosa also pays attention to practices of specific groups, always keen to detect what German philosophers in the 19th century used to call *Zeitgeist*.

Sensibility and its distortions

The distinctions between engagement and resonance appear attenuated if we describe them as participatory relations – a word both Berleant and Rosa use in order to delimit their model from a distanced spectatorship and from the objectification of nature and human beings in the scientific, technical and economic patterns of activity. Irrespective of the differences between their approaches, both scholars rediscover the power of sensibility. Berleant even defines aesthetics as the theory of sensibility that “*focuses on the range, qualities, and nuances of sensory experience, and on its discrimination, acuteness, and subtlety, its perceptual, experienced significance and its emotional component*” (Berleant 2017, p. 2). As a result of the equation of the aesthetic with perceptual experience, cognitive factors (e.g. knowledge of art history and painting techniques) become relevant “*only insofar as they enhance direct perceptual experience*” (Berleant 2017, p. 2). Intellectual knowledge is also secondary in Rosa’s sociology, where being able to resonate with something is opposed to indifference and alienation, and sensitivity acquires an existential dimension. In this respect, it is worth taking a look at the opposites of engagement and, respectively, resonance.

Berleant’s concept of engagement emerged from his critique of Kantian aesthetic disinterestedness, considered as typical for the strong intellectualist bias in traditional modern aesthetics. Kant’s tendency to ascribe “*universality, distance, and contemplation*” to aesthetic experience (Berleant 2004, p. 48) ends up, according to Berleant, in an attitude of indifference and apathy toward the aesthetic object. On the contrary, Berleant explicitly requires to engage oneself in an “intimate involvement” (Berleant 2010, p. 30) – one might say, “resonating” relation – with something different and extract a specific rewarding experience from the interplay of perceptual, emotional and interpretative factors. However, in his more recent work, Berleant increasingly shifted the attention to another possible opposite of the aesthetic experience, which is particularly powerful in the mass culture and consumerism of late modernity: The

engagement is namely compromised not only by cold indifference, but also by being compelled to enter a relationship, as when the sensory overkill in public and commercial spaces, let alone media, keep our senses in a permanent state of alert. “Co-optation of sensibility” calls Berleant (2017, p. 3) those practices that make profit by manipulating people’s emotions and sensory pleasures. Gastronomy, technology, and media “*undermine the free sensibility*” (Berleant 2017, p. 4), subvert the real aesthetic values, and subjugate the energy of sensibility under the interests of corporations. Advertising does not only intensify common desires, but also creates new desires and unnecessary needs in the process of the “*commodification of the human sensorium*” (Berleant 2017, p. 8). In general the practices of a “negative aesthetics”⁸ produce “*sensory intrusion, sensory manipulation, sensory alteration, and sensory numbing*” (Berleant 2017, p. 8). Sensibility takes offence for the moment and becomes distorted in the long run, “aesthetic pain” is accompanied by “moral suffering,” and deprivation goes hand in hand with depravity (Berleant 2010, p. 88; 2012, p. 198 sq.). From this process, the result is damage to humans’ health, social relationships, as well as urban and natural environments. This also explains Berleant’s reference to Marcuse in a context in which aesthetic theory are assigned both analytic and critical tasks: to study the mechanisms and agents of contemporary anesthetization, but also to become “*an incisive force in social criticism*” (Berleant 2010, p. 88) and “*an instrument of emancipation*” (Berleant 2017, p. 9).

Rosa is all the more rooted in the emancipatory tradition of the Frankfurt School. He is convinced that an alternative *In-der-Welt-Sein* to the current obsession with resources, power, and control is highly feasible, even if not merely by thinking differently, but through a “*simultaneous and concerted political, economic and cultural revolution*” (Rosa 2016, p. 56). Rosa is not particularly interested in the description of alienation (*Entfremdung*) as a negative effect of modernity, given its “career” in the Frankfurt School. At the end of the 1970s, alienation even became inflationary, and this “notorious imprecision” compromised its use for a time (*ibid.*, p. 300); more recently, alienation was brought again into circulation. Rosa confines himself to associate it with depression and burnout. Also, he invalidates the essentialist interpretations of alienation: *Entfremdung* does not imply deviation from the alleged “true nature” of human. Instead of opposing alienation to identity, authenticity, autonomy, acknowledgement or meaning, as other German scholars – from Heidegger to Rahel Jaeggi, Martin Seel, and Axel Honneth – do, Rosa prefers to contrast it to resonance and calls it the “falling silent of the world” (*das Verstummen der Welt, ibid.*, p. 75). As a matter of fact, resonance and alienation are dialectically interrelated: “[...] *resonance is experienced momentarily on the background of something Other that remains alien and mute, yet no resonance could be concretely felt without a deep trust in resonance, in the meaning of a fundamental disposition*” (*ibid.*, p. 325).

If Berleant praises engagement, Rosa recommends on principle resonant experiences. However, after his critics feared he was advocating a rather irrational attitude, he concedes that “alienation” (or objectification) underlies important cultural achievements in various fields, medicine being just one of them. Finally, Rosa admits the individual’s “*basic right to refuse resonance*” (Rosa 2016, p. 742). Still he does not agree with the objection that resonance may favor mass hysteria and fascism, because – as emphasized before – it does not reach self-oblivion in merging with the Other. Admittedly, not all his answers to the critics in the afterword of the book succeed to convince. For example, the reader is entitled to doubt that collective acts of violence can simply be put down to an emotional contagion that would be essentially different from resonance (*ibid.*, p. 758). For Rosa there simply is no such thing as negative resonance, just like Berleant would probably reject an engagement with false causes and false (aesthetic and moral) values.

⁸ See in particular Berleant’s “The Negative Aesthetics of Everyday Life” (Berleant 2010, pp. 155-174).

Continuity and dialogue

Two special fields for experiencing resonance and engagement are art and nature. To begin with art, both Berleant and Rosa emphasize the dynamics of its experience and regard it rather as a force than as a static domain of objects. For Berleant, all arts are processes that imply temporality (Berleant 2004, p. 67). From this, even in fine arts, Berleant prefers to speak of “working of art” instead of artistic objects; following Dewey and Heidegger, the ‘work’ has to be conceived “*as a verbal noun that incorporates activity in its meaning*” (Berleant 2004, p. 7). For Rosa, too, art is a form of experience and an event (*Kunstgeschehen*, Rosa 2016, p. 478) that may take place, but may fail as well. The latter happens in two cases: first, when the subject is superficially involved and projects his/her own feelings into the work⁹, instead of opening him/herself to it, and secondly when the appreciator wants to be affected and even simulates, more or less consciously, this experience, without again being deeply moved by it (*ibid.*, p. 479). Typical situations for such failures can be found in music, and Rosa’s book abounds in musical examples from all genres, with particular stress on popular music. Berleant, on the other hand, is a professional musician and composer, who dedicated several analyses to the listening of classical music. The fact that the authors’ own musical taste is very likely to differ remains, however, secondary for the structure of their theories.

More important is that even if Rosa regards art as the most important and all-pervading sphere of resonance in modernity (Rosa 2016, p. 473), he still confines it to rare experiences, while Berleant does not seem to operate with such a strong concept of art experience. Also Rosa’s book chapter on art experience (*ibid.*, pp. 472-500) is suffused with Romantic concepts: art moves, touches, makes one happy, and transforms one’s life, it has beauty as its only value, and the “*forces of what lies beyond the subjective*” are “deep” and “demonic” (*ibid.*, p. 499). On the contrary, Berleant’s approach is more appropriate to art experience, in which he includes cognitive, evaluative, affective, performative-kinaesthetic and, naturally, perceptual moments. Without going into detail on their analyses – finally, only Berleant is an aesthetician –, it strikes that for Rosa, too, the art represents a privileged experience, in the sense that it provides a field for experimenting different patterns of relation to the world (*ibid.*, p. 483).

More clearly, differences appear between engagement and resonance when it comes to natural environments. Here again Rosa can hardly leave behind the Romantic cult of nature in his examples and terminology. Cognitive processes and rational approaches are plainly excluded, resonance with nature results solely “*from practical-active and emotionally significant experiences*”, so to speak “behind the agents” (*ibid.*, p. 460-461). The author even takes into consideration an alleged correspondence between our inner nature and the outer world, i.e. the “elements.” However, as much as Rosa rejects the scientific concept of nature for its “muteness,” he still finds no relevance in the suppression of the dualism between nature and culture. Instead, he prefers – rather unconvincingly – to exemplify the “voice of nature” with media comments about natural disasters. Also modernity appears to him somehow simplistic as an oscillation between understanding nature in science, technology, economy and commodifying activities, on one hand, and a “psycho-emotional relation to nature” (i.e. resonance) in the free time, on the other (*ibid.*, p. 467).

In contrast, Berleant’s contribution to this field is for good reason unanimously acknowledged. First of all, he replaces the traditional concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘landscape’ with the broader ‘environment’, which includes beyond the natural setting complexes of artifacts, architectural works and cities. Given that the

⁹ The critique of sentimentality in art has constantly preoccupied German aestheticians, from Kant to Moritz Geiger’s “inner concentration” and the theory of kitsch.

environment bridges over the metaphysical dichotomy between nature and culture¹⁰, environmental aesthetics can serve as an umbrella term for various aesthetic domains and unify the previously distinct theories of art and beauty. Also the environment is, like art, dynamic, “a field of forces continuous with the organism, a field in which there is a reciprocal action of organism on environment and environment on organism, and in which there is no sharp demarcation between them” – what Berleant calls “*a participatory model of experience*” (Berleant 2005, p. 9). This means that environment includes humans: people move through it and live in it, they inhabit it and can neither escape it, nor find there refuge from potential enemies. In other words, the environment refers to the medium we live in and have to engage with for the very purpose of surviving and living a human life. Strictly speaking, “*there is no outside world*” (and thus no “correspondence” between an inner and an outer nature either, as Rosa supposed), but only continuity between person and environment (Berleant 2012, p. 51). It would be wrong to suspect Berleant here of wishing to suppress the borders of the body and dissolve them into a fluid continuity with the rest; the borders do exist, but are only relative, as the communication between the embodied consciousness and the world demonstrates. Even if Berleant declares his interest in the indeterminacy of boundaries and ambiguous borders (Berleant 2010, p. 74 sq.), his world never reaches the “grotesque” openness that is proper to some excessive postmodernism. At this point, Berleant meets Rosa again, and both are indebted to the contribution of phenomenology and in particular Merleau-Ponty.

The “continuity” with nature accounts for the material exchanges of body with the environment, phenomena also discussed by Rosa (2016, pp. 83-108). This continuity is both spatial – e.g. when breathing, eating, eventually reintegrating ourselves into nature after death – and temporal (in the form of memory, tradition, and history). The continuity, in any case, does not exclude differences or even contrasts, but these become features that are integrated into a more encompassing harmony, a vision that entitles Berleant to proclaim the environment (in singular or in plural) as “the true *Gesamtkunstwerk*” (Berleant 2012, p. 57). To conclude, selves are related to the environment neither externally, like separate mechanical parts, nor by being assimilated into an organic whole, but they manifest the “connectedness within a whole” (Berleant 1997, p. 148).

This continuity between the self and the environment cannot be fully transferred to the model of resonance, in spite of the fluidity of the sound. Invoking the “voice of nature” as a modern novelty, Rosa recalls that the poles of the resonant relation are supposed to be “*closed, each one speaking its own language, and therefore they can contradict each other*” (Rosa 2016, p. 455). The double structure of resonance (af←fection and e→motion) and other concepts used by Rosa (to address, respond, react, etc.) suggest a dialogue between the self and the Other; Berleant’s continuity is thus replaced by communication. Rosa even requires that the poles of relation would speak with different voices, because only then would the experience enrich both, instead of slipping into a passive, uncreative echo. In spite of such differences, both the continuity of engagement and the dialogue of resonance oppose the mystical fusion and the hypostases of dualism (“disinterested” spectatorship, neutral observation, ruthless exploitation, insensible to the Other’s “voice,” etc.).

¹⁰ The environment is “*the physical-cultural realm in which people engage*” in all their activities, which makes necessary its interdisciplinary study (Berleant 2012, pp. 53, 57).

Conclusion

To sum up, Berleant and Rosa suggest alternatives to the distanced relations to objects, persons, facts or environments, be these objectifying or contemplative. In contrast, engagement and resonance designate participatory, active, and contextual (situated) relations and are fundamentally relational: we can engage or resonate only with something different than us. The denominations of these relations, however, stress the subject's activity and integration into the whole in the case of engagement, and respectively, the reactivity or responsiveness in the resonance. In both cases, the Other is a genuine source of value, but for Rosa – presumably in Adorno's footsteps – the Other ultimately escapes our will, remaining "unavailable." The relevance of these relationships derives from their ubiquity and power, since they can (or could) be encountered in most various fields of individual and social life and touch the "existential" level, determining one's attitude to life. Given their positive dimension, they should not remain mere enclaves of contemporary life, so-called "oases of life" in the "desert" of alienation (Rosa 2016, p. 615), which are confined to recreational situations and leisure experiences. On the contrary, they deserve to be multiplied and generalized, yet not for hedonistic purposes, but in order to collectively shape a new politics and a good life for each person. At this point of argumentation, Berleant resorts to theories that find, in the aesthetic, the model for politics, beginning with Schiller's aesthetic state.¹¹

The alternative means for Berleant "to engage in openness, cooperation, connectedness, vulnerability," and to promote an ethics of profusion, care, and justice (Berleant 2010, p. 219). This statement brings him near to Rosa, who carefully advances political solutions for the widespread contemporary crises in ecology, politics and personal relationships, by confessing, at the same time, that his theory "*does not follow an own political agenda*" (Rosa 2016, p. 760). If Berleant occasionally defends himself against the objection of being idealistic and "naïve," though "noble" (Berleant 2005, p. 159), the much younger Rosa is eventually optimistic with respect to the comeback of resonance. This trust is based upon his interpretation regarding the ambivalence of modernity: on one hand, the moderns fear that the world would "lapse into silence" and they would lose their axes of resonance; on the other hand, the accumulation of resources, chances and power goes hand in hand with an increasing sensibility to resonance.¹² Apart from the general impression that engagement stands for an enlightened humanism and resonance for a romantic vision, Arnold Berleant and Hartmut Rosa are both in search of ways of making aesthetic, moral, social and political values become convergent.

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¹¹ Berleant shares Schiller's conviction that a good social order can be grounded on an aesthetic paradigm. This would imply reciprocity among the participants and reconcile the individual with the social, against the "rational" model of state and the "moral" model that either privilege the individual or dissolve it into an organic community. On the "politics of aesthetics" see: Berleant 2005, p. 147-161; 2010, p. 213-223; 2012, p.185, etc.

¹² This is the main thesis of the third part of Rosa's book, Rosa 2016, pp. 515-630.

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