

Laudatory speech for Felix Oberst

After completing a Bachelor's degree at the Protestant University of Applied Sciences in Nuremberg, Felix Oberst completed his Master's thesis as part of the Master's degree programme in Applied Educational Sciences at the same university in the winter semester of 2022/23 with very good results.

With this research, he has done exactly what the Scientific Advisory Board of RCI International is also committed to, namely demonstrating the connectivity of theme-centred interaction to scientific discourse.

Felix's work is based on the resonance theory of Hartmut Rosa, a sociologist who teaches in Jena, and traces its links to the theoretical and practical approaches of theme-centred interaction.

In the three main chapters of his work, Felix begins by taking a closer look at the work of Hartmut Rosa, in particular his book "Resonanz. A Sociology of World Relations." Before explaining the core concepts of Rosa's theory, namely the concepts of alienation and its positive counterpart - **resonance** - in more detail, he describes Rosa's social analysis, as developed by the sociologist in his earlier works. Rosa posits the thesis that our modern society is characterised by "dynamic stability", which means that it keeps itself alive through constant **acceleration**. According to Rosa, it is virtually dependent on growth, innovation and acceleration in order to maintain the socio-economic and institutional status quo. Rosa uses the image of a person on an escalator who is travelling in the opposite direction, i.e. who is trying hard to keep up to date in order to maintain their position. In view of this stabilising dynamic, however, the "good life", or even the question of what the good life actually is, falls by the wayside.

Building on this analysis, Rosa develops the idea that the quality of our relationship to the world, to ourselves and to others, is crucial for a successful life. He contrasts the lack of relationship and the reification of the world, in which people experience the world as mute and dead and themselves as "alienated", with the possibility of a relationship of listening and responding, namely resonance, a term that already etymologically and metaphorically contains sound and resonance.

At this point in his work, Felix originally introduces a short text by the Austrian band "Ja, Panik", which uses a completely different medium than a sociological theory to describe this way of being alienated in an increasingly accelerated world: "Full to the brim with strategies, you run through the world as a stranger and that you do nothing about it is one of these

strategies." (Quote from the song DMD KIU LIDT - The manifestation of capitalism in our lives is sadness)

So if acceleration is the problem, then resonance could be the solution - and following in Rosa's footsteps, Felix Oberst now describes the decisive criteria that can enable resonant relationships, whereby for Rosa the attitude of **unavailability** is probably the most decisive criterion. Just as resonance itself cannot be forced, the appropriation of the world cannot consist of making it "available", as is the basic attitude in capitalist societies. At this point, Felix includes Erich Fromm, who made a similar distinction between the modes of having and being as two fundamentally different forms of human experience. It is precisely through the making available, or in Erich Fromm's words, the mode of wanting to have, that vitality and thus the possibility of resonance in world relations is withdrawn.

From here, it is only a logical step to ask about a possible resonance pedagogy as an applied resonance theory, as Rosa herself has developed to some extent in collaboration with the pedagogue Wolfgang Endres. Felix Oberst places their approach in the context of both current and more far-reaching discussions of educational theory: Rosa's answer to what education should achieve culminates in the concept of "Anverwandlung", i.e. "making a thing one's own in such a way that it not only belongs to me, but that it touches me existentially or even changes me". Education is therefore also understood here in the sense of forming a relationship with the world. The concept of competence, which is held in such high esteem in today's education debate and which for Rosa is closely linked to the concept of availability, is also criticised. Thus, school can be experienced both as a space of resonance and as a space of alienation. However, Rosa has not yet developed practical instructions or a pedagogical system, even though he repeatedly calls in his books for educational processes to be rethought in such a way that they open up resonance spaces and develop resonance axes in the relationship between educational content, teachers and pupils.

The thoroughness with which Felix deals with Rosa's world of thought in this chapter, relates him to other sociological thinkers and finally examines the possible applications of Rosa's resonance theory to pedagogy and educational processes is impressive. It speaks not only for an enormous intellectual appropriation achievement, but also of its "resonant" penetration with regard to his own presentation, whose argumentation can be understood in a coherent and well-formulated way.

The next main chapter is dedicated to theme-centred interaction. I will be brief here because the most important topics in this chapter are well known in our group. Nevertheless, it should

be noted that Felix Oberst has also worked through a large amount of literature on TCI, especially Ruth Cohn's own writings. His bibliography comprises an impressive total of 13 pages.

After a brief insight into the life and work of Ruth C. Cohn, he first presents the three axioms under the aspect of "living together humanely", then the two postulates under the aspect of "ethical behaviour", thirdly the four-factor model of TCI under the title "Circling the triangle" and finally participatory guidance under the keyword: "TCI methodology".

To conclude, Felix addresses TCI's understanding of education by distinguishing - following his supervisor Margit Ostertag - between education and learning. "Living learning", one of the central concerns of TCI, can, from this perspective, only be *a* building block in a much broader understanding of education that includes its social and ethical dimensions. While learning is about the *how* and *what* of learning, the much broader concept of education includes the *why* and *wherefore* of education. Similar to Rosa's question about the "good life", TCI is also concerned with the quality of relationships between people and with the world in general, i.e. also with quality of life and personal development. TCI as a pedagogy of understanding, as Ostertag puts it, can thus make a decisive contribution to the humanisation of society.

However, Felix Oberst's most important research achievement is his third main chapter, in which he brings together the two approaches of resonance theory and TCI under the term "theme-centred resonance pedagogy".

The similarities between the two approaches are evident to him and are possibly due to the fact that both are ultimately orientated towards the non-negotiable "fundamentals of being a human being in the world".

However, Rosa also criticises the humanistic educational ideal of personal development - this can also be understood as an improved exhaustion of options in an accelerated society.

Friedemann Schulz von Thun, one of Ruth Cohn's most prominent students, also warns against a technical-pragmatic reading of TCI that does not include its ethical and socio-political dimension. Otherwise it could itself become a child of acceleration in Rosa's sense. Conversely, Felix Rosa recommends a broader understanding of education in the sense of what TCI can achieve in adult education in particular, as Rosa's concept of education has so far largely focussed on schools and teaching.

Felix sees a medio-passive relationship to the world, which Rosa locates in resonance relationships, in the sense that not only the listener meets the world, but also the world meets him, in a similar way in Ruth Cohn's three axioms. For him, however, it is crucial that the

postulate of the chairperson can only be properly utilised in close connection with the anthropological axiom of "autonomy and interdependence". Only then can it prevent autonomy from being lived in the mode of availability. Rosa's and Cohn's approaches are specifically related to each other here. The integration of the two: autonomy *and* interdependence are a decisive conditional factor of resonance.

The two approaches are also linked by a basic ethical position, namely Rosa's attitude of unavailability and Ruth Cohn's "reverence for all living things". Both therefore also require a willingness to make judgemental decisions. Where Cohn sees the humane as valuable and the inhumane as threatening, Rosa demands respect for the uniqueness and unavailability of the other and acceptance of what is unavailable. On this basis, Felix reformulates the second axiom in Rosa's and Cohn's words: affirmation is due to all parts of the living world and their unavailability. Respect for unavailability requires judgemental decisions. Resonance is valuable, alienation is value-threatening.

Felix takes a closer look at the question of the relationship between power and resonance by examining the so-called political axiom. Here, too, he demonstrates his great erudition by approaching the complex topic from a wide variety of angles, while modestly recognising that he has to leave it at a few allusions. When Rosa says that a "relationship of domination is always a silent relationship to the world", Ruth Cohn reminds us that we are neither omnipotent nor powerless in our relationships, but that we are partially powerful. In this way, Felix's new formulation reads: "Self-efficacy always occurs within affecting inner and outer semi-available boundaries. It is possible to transform this unavailability."

Finally, the two postulates and the four-factor model are also linked to resonance theory: Felix believes that he and Rosa recognise a path to "transformative resonance" in the disturbance postulate, and he also sees the relationship with the four-factor model of TCI embodied in the resonance triangle developed by Rosa in purely visual terms: According to him, Rosa's resonance axes merge into the four-factor model, which is also convincingly illustrated graphically in the work.

Felix devotes another four sub-chapters to resonant leadership and the different use of the term dynamics by Rosa and Cohn - Rosa speaks of the stabilising dynamics of acceleration in modern societies, whereas Cohn speaks of the dynamic balance that should exist between the four factors. However, due to time constraints, I will not go into this any further (the work is also available online).

In his introduction "Resonance and TCI in dialogue", Felix Oberst poses the following research question, which guided him in his work: To what extent can Theme-Centred

Interaction contribute to the systematic expansion of resonance pedagogy? In his concise "Conclusion and Outlook", he states that TCI could provide a useful system for the strong content of resonance theory, as the fundamental attitudes of both approaches have proven to be closely related. Their combination could be described as theme-centred resonance pedagogy, even if Felix sees his work more as an intermediate stage and the result of a search movement, perhaps as "straying forwards" in the sense of Karl Popper. Although this modesty honours him, I would like to state with conviction that Felix Oberst's work has made an important contribution not only to a deeper understanding of TCI, but also to its connectivity with other scientific discourses.

And it wouldn't be Felix if he didn't have the group "Ja,Panik" perform again at the end, apparently singing along to his tune: "Beware, beware, beware of the all-too-quick cure. Because that which destroys us is already trying to repair us ... "

Felix, congratulations on your well-deserved Ruth Cohn Foundation Award!