

RVP International Seminar 2026

*Self, Solidarity, and Civility**

Meeting Information

- **Date:** September 7, 2026
- **Session:** 10th session of a 5-week seminar (start of Week 4)
- **Facilitator/Host:** João J. Vila-Chã, SJ
- **Attendees:** João (Washington DC), Lidia (Poland), Oleksandr (Ukraine), Zhao Xin (China), Mohan (India), Dian (Indonesia), Maduabuchi Frank (Nigeria), Nubong (Cameroon), Shiva (Sri Lanka / UK), Michał (Poland), Ravi Vincent (India), Yeping (Washington), Franklin (Peru).
- Due to an unexpected technical Problem, this Report leaves out the Presentations and the discussion corresponding to the Second Half of today's Session.

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Key Outcomes

The session opened with participants sharing weekend experiences centered on a shared cultural and spiritual day in Washington, D.C., before transitioning to global news reports from each participant's home country or region. The second and primary portion of the session featured three structured academic presentations on Hartmut Rosa's *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, with rich interdisciplinary commentary connecting Rosa's framework to lived experiences in Africa, South Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The central intellectual tension identified was between **social acceleration as a structural, systemic force** and the need for **ontological transformation** — the question of whether speed produces genuine human development or merely intensifies alienation and instability.

Shared Weekend Experience in Washington, D.C.

- The Washington-based group attended **Mass together at the Franciscan Monastery**, commemorating the **10th anniversary of the passing of Father MacLean**; João described this as an act of gratitude and love for those no longer present.
- Following Mass, the group shared a **communal lunch**.

* Document elaborated with the Assistance of AI under the Supervision of Prof. João J. Vila-Chã. Before being distributed, the document was submitted to the revision/approval of the Participants in the Seminar.

- In the evening, the group attended a **concert by the United States National Symphony Orchestra at Constitutional Hall**, organized in connection with Labor Day in the USA.
- The concert program was notably diverse: **classical works by American composers**, Frank Sinatra songs, fragments of musicals, and segments of American cultural heritage.
- A **special guest speech by Martin Luther King's niece** was highlighted by Lidia as one of the most meaningful moments — her address connected music, American history, and the values of freedom, equality, and civil rights.
- Xin described the experience as going beyond superficial tourism, reflecting a **deep immersion in American cultural life** — comparing it favorably to abstract learning from books.
- Lidia framed the day as combining **spirituality, history, culture, and community** in a way that allowed her to experience a “different dimension of America’s culture, history, and identity.”
- Michał, based nearby in Washington, did not attend but expressed willingness to join future in-person gatherings such as picnics or birthdays, noting he is only 45 minutes away by metro.
- João reflected on the acceleration paradox: the seminar, which studies acceleration, inadvertently accelerates participants’ own schedules — an acknowledged irony.

Global News Reports by Country

Nigeria (Maduabuchi)

- Three headline-level concerns reported from Nigerian newspapers:
 - Nigeria is at risk of a **deeper poverty trap** despite the government’s stated economic recovery agenda.
 - **Domestic borrowing has surged to 90%**, indicating the government is heavily financing itself internally, including drawing on the Nigerian pension fund contributed to by lecturers and public workers.
 - The **Manufacturers Association of Nigeria** reported that **industrial growth is plunging**.
- Combined interpretation: Nigeria’s budget is being consumed by **servicing foreign bilateral and multinational loans**, leaving little productive fiscal capacity; domestic borrowing compounds this by being regressive and drawing from retirement savings.

Indonesia (Dian)

- Indonesia is experiencing **volcanic activity across seven volcanoes**, with particular concern around **Krakatau**.
- The activity has raised **aviation safety concerns** and forced some airports to close; no casualties reported.

India (Dr. John Mohan)

- Raised the issue of **13 Indian states with anti-conversion bills**, describing systemic violence and vandalism against minorities.
- Referenced **Dr. Ambedkar**, who converted to Buddhism with 500,000 people to oppose caste discrimination, as a historical precedent for the stakes involved.
- Noted that **Mohan Bhagwat (RSS Chief)** recently visited New York, Canada, and Britain, promoting the concept of **Sanadhan** (Sanskrit for “eternal” or “unchanging”) — used to argue the caste system is eternal and cannot be annihilated.
- João responded that a government implementing anti-conversion laws is committing a **blatant offense against basic human rights** and that such a government “should feel shame”; he called on the international community not to remain silent.

Cameroon (Nubong)

- The **academic year has officially resumed** from kindergarten through university level; senior ministers and delegates are touring the capital to assess impact.
- Education in Cameroon is historically viewed as a **deeply spiritual and holistic mission**, shaped by missionaries who intertwined education and evangelization.
- A **severe personnel crisis** is ongoing: due to poor economic conditions, many trained teachers emigrate; when a public teaching concours is launched expecting ~100 candidates, up to **2 million people** may apply for just 1–2 positions per subject.
- Root cause partly attributed to **UNESCO withdrawing completely from teacher training** in the Cameroonian system approximately 10 years ago.
- The Ministry of Education is fragmented across **three separate ministers** (Basic Education, Secondary Education, Higher Education), causing budget-sharing conflicts and incoherent policy execution.

Ukraine (Oleksandr)

- Trump’s representative has been active in Ukraine-related peace discussions, but there is **widespread scepticism in Ukraine** about Trump’s peace initiatives.

- Ukrainians want peace but are unwilling to **sacrifice truth and justice to Putin's desires**; the fundamental clash is between Putin's view that "the weak should submit to the strong" versus Ukraine's insistence on justice.
- Trump's envoys are seen as potentially **supporting Putin's position** in the conflict; after more than a year of conversations, **no concrete results** have been achieved.
- Political analysts forecast Trump may **lose upcoming elections**, giving him political motivation to seek a peace deal as evidence of international success — but his track record in the international arena is seen as weak.
- João characterized Trump's approach as **purely transactional** — lacking spiritual depth, driven by dollar signs — and expressed concern that without a values-based vision, international relations cannot achieve genuine peace.
- João referenced the **Fatima revelations of 1917**, in which children reportedly heard that the world would face trouble "unless Russia converts" — interpreted not as religious conversion but as a **metanoia (change of mind and outlook)**; he argued this deeper transformation is what Trump's administration fails to understand.

Sri Lanka (Shiva)

- The new government is pursuing **legal action against politicians and public figures** for alleged corruption and misuse of public resources from previous administrations.
- The **former president's son** and his colleagues were recently arrested.
- A parallel debate concerns the **extension of the retirement age for Supreme Court judges** from 62 to 65–67, driven by a shortage of judges needed to handle the surge in corruption cases; the legitimacy of extending these age limits without public debate is contested.
- Society, previously deeply divided along majority-minority and religious lines, is beginning to develop **trust in the current government** as it is seen to act for the country rather than partisan interests.
- Shiva noted he has not yet written publicly about Sri Lanka, as his priority is completing his PhD; João encouraged him to follow Mohan's example of academic engagement after completing his degree.

Venezuela (Franklin)

- The Trump administration previously removed dictator **Maduro** but is now engaging in business relations with **Maduro's successors** from the same party — described as "business as usual in the bad sense."

- The original intervention was considered **illegal under international law** (Franklin's view: only UN Security Council-mandated actions are legitimate), though some accepted it given Maduro's dictatorial nature.
- The U.S. is now negotiating **oil deals with Venezuela**, which has one of the world's largest oil reserves — raising concerns that geopolitical intervention was resource-driven rather than democracy-driven.
- João expressed hope that **Corina Machado** will be allowed to run in elections; he also reiterated the principle that international operations should be conducted **under a UN mandate**.

United Nations (João)

- João expressed deep concern about the current state of the UN: described it as a **"total debacle"** with the Secretary-General (his compatriot) failing to provide effective leadership.
- The UN's dysfunction is seen as a root cause of the inability to resolve crises in Ukraine, Venezuela, Iran, and Israel.
- One recent UN decision noted: a resolution to **redraw world maps** to reflect actual land mass proportions — making Africa roughly twice as large, Latin America larger, and Europe and the U.S. smaller.
- João questioned whether this symbolic cartographic change is sufficient for a body meant to enforce international law, calling for "facts on the ground" rather than representational gestures.

Labor Day Discussion (Ravi Vincent)

- Is organizing a **National Youth Conference in India**, facing logistical challenges including opposition and the demands for accommodation booking.
- Discussed the text with groups in India, drawing comparisons between Rosa's modernity analysis and **ancient cultures that achieved progress without technology**.
- Noted that **India celebrates Labor Day on May 1st** (May Day), shared by over 150 countries, while the U.S. and Canada celebrate in September.
- João explained the historical divergence: May Day originated in **Chicago** but became symbolically associated with international communism during the Cold War, prompting the U.S. to establish a separate September Labor Day as a summer-closing festival.
- Ravi connected the discussion to **metanoia**, noting that in India, the term is mistakenly equated with religious conversion — the same conflation João had critiqued earlier in the context of Fatima.

Presentations (First Part of the Session): Hartmut Rosa's *Social Acceleration*

Introduction — Nubong's first Intrevention

- Rosa identifies a **central paradox of modernity**: the promise of liberation from tradition and scarcity versus the reality of restlessness, instability, and time scarcity.
- Key framing question posed: *Why does modernity feel so restless, and why do we constantly feel there is never enough time?*
- **Social acceleration is not a choice but a systemic imperative** — individuals and institutions are compelled to keep pace with accelerating technology, social change, and the pace of life itself simply to avoid being left behind.
- Rosa identifies **three interlocking categories** of acceleration that form a self-reinforcing circuit:
 - **Technological acceleration** — advances in communication, transportation, and production
 - **Acceleration of social change** — faster transformation of institutions, values, and practices
 - **Acceleration of the pace of life** — subjective experience of time pressure and shrinking presence
- These three categories create a **“machine that forms a circle of speed”** — a loop that cannot be stopped without destabilizing the entire system.
- The **temporal structure of modernity** is central: Rosa draws on Reinhardt Koselleck's concepts of the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectations” — in pre-modern societies, the past guided the future; in modernity, this balance is destabilized, making the future uncertain.
- Rosa engages with **Zygmunt Bauman's “liquid modernity”** and **Anthony Giddens' “radical modernity”** as two diagnoses that emphasize contingency and instability — both converging on acceleration as the key driver.
- **Speed is not a surface phenomenon but structural** — it shapes institutional identities and causes individuals to feel more pressed for time, with leisure shrinking and the present moment “slipping away.”
- Rosa invokes philosophers — **Augustine, Kant, Bergson, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty** — on the nature of time, noting they disagree on whether time is a natural category, a construct of understanding, or a social construct.
- Barbara Adams is quoted: *“None of the writers of the social-scientific concept of time have the same focus — everyone asks different questions.”*

- Rosa’s conclusion: the collapse of temporal structures **diagnoses instability** and invites dialogue about how to sustain meaningful relationships, stable institutions, and coherent identities in a world where “time itself seems to dissolve.”

Chapters 1–2 — Mohan’s Presentation

- Rosa’s theory belongs to the **Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory**, characterized as **diagnostic, normative, integrative, and empirical** — a framework Mohan described as the “core” of chapters 1–2.
- Rosa situates social acceleration within the **broader history of modernity**, connecting it to the Industrial Revolution, capitalism’s revolutionizing of modes of production, and the elimination of traditional craftsmen and weavers.
- **Globalization** is identified as a key mechanism that “shrunk time and space,” drawing on Giddens and other economists; Marx is cited frequently for observing how capitalism transformed social and production relations.
- Rosa’s five constitutive elements of social acceleration:
 1. **Acceleration of social change** — what factors drive it?
 2. **Pace of life and paradoxes of the experience of time** — how do we theorize lived time pressure?
 3. **Speeding of society, self, and propelling processes** — how does the self relate to the other in an accelerating world?
 4. **Acceleration and growth** — both quantitative (mass production) and qualitative dimensions
 5. **Power, war, and speed** — how modern institutions relate to acceleration
- Mohan emphasized the **intersection of class and caste** within acceleration: traditional sociologists treated caste and class in isolation, but Rosa’s framework opens space to see their **interplay** — “there is a class within a caste, and castes within a class.”
- The question of **experience** is central: Rosa challenges us to articulate what constitutes experience — Dalit experience, African experience, working-class experience — as the basis for a credible phenomenological and sociological account.
- **400 million people in India** remain completely outside the acceleration of time and space, a fact Mohan offered as a critical counterpoint to any universalizing theory of modernity.

- Rosa draws on an **array of classical thinkers**: Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, Parsons, Habermas, Plato, and Polybius — weaving temporal and spatial concepts across philosophy and sociology.
- Four dimensions Rosa identifies as playing major roles in modernity: **culture, social structures, society, and the relation to nature**.
- Mohan closed by inviting African and South Asian participants to reflect on how their own experiences relate to the **“moving and revolving and speeding time and space.”**

Participant Responses and Philosophical Extensions

Franklin — The Acceleration Paradox in Personal Experience

- Described feeling personally accelerated by the seminar itself — the pressure to read quickly and perform — while the book critiques exactly that impulse.
- Referenced **St. Ignatius’ principle**: “You don’t need to know too much; you need to go deep and enjoy” — framing it as an inner call to resist superficial reading in favor of genuine depth. In reality, the reference is to St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, n° 2: “It is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but rather the intimate feeling and savoring of things.”

Lidia — Time as Experience, Not Measurement

- Articulated the distinction: “*We have watches, but we don’t have time*” — possessing instruments to measure time is not the same as having time as a lived reality.
- Rosa shows that time is **not merely an objective background** against which social life unfolds; it is strongly shaped by technology, work, communication, and social expectations.
- Called for a shift from the **mechanical vision of time** (hours, days, years) toward a **more natural, experiential vision** — noting that nature does not “know” time in the way humans construct it.

Michał — The Self Under Acceleration; Double Life Case Study

- Connected Rosa’s framework to the question of **identity under acceleration**: individuals may find themselves with “no self,” an “artificial self,” or a “deconstructed self” shaped by ideological interference.
- Referenced his own article subtitle posing the anthropological question at the heart of Rosa’s project.
- Presented a detailed **historical case study** from historian Angelina Pijus (Netherlands): **Ernst Hans Schneider**, a senior Nazi SS officer who, anticipating

the collapse of the Nazi state in 1944–45, burned his documents, assumed a stolen identity, and rebuilt an entirely new academic and cultural career in postwar West Germany.

- He rose to a rectoral position at the Technical University of Aachen) by 1970, promoting a program of “renewal of German mysticism” through liberal socialist ideology — a complete ideological inversion of his Nazi past.
- He was **unmasked in 1995**, four years before his death; his medals were revoked and his pension removed, yet he **never acknowledged guilt**.
- Michał noted that in the first democratic German government of the 1950s, **70% of members were former SS officers** — contextualizing Schneider as emblematic rather than exceptional.
- The case illustrates what Michał called the **“double self”** — not merely a psychiatric phenomenon but a historically documented identity construction under ideological and temporal pressure, directly relevant to Rosa’s analysis of the self in late modernity.

Maduabuchi — Philosophical Deepening; African and Heraclitean Time

- Proposed a **“deep diagnostic interrogation”** of social acceleration, asking whether it is analogous to **Heraclitus’ concept of flux** — everything in constant change with no stable ground.
- Raised **David Hume’s concept of “quick succession of events”** as another philosophical lens for understanding the acceleration syndrome.
- Argued that **African and other non-Western concepts of time** are recursive rather than linear — not mechanical clock-time, but time understood through memory, the connectivity of past, present, and future, and the **Aristotelian/Platonic eudaimonistic question of the good life**.
- Warned that if modernity’s pathology of acceleration is unchecked, humanity risks entering an **“abyss”** — a conceptualized state of absurdity with no exit.
- Called for a **cross-cultural anatomy of time**: Rosa in dialogue with Heraclitus, Hume, and African temporal philosophies to address the problem of mankind.
- Noted that modernity’s emphasis is on **material, temporal time** rather than **spiritual, ontological time** — a distinction he sees as crucial.

João — Theological and Ontological Synthesis

- Argued that the **Christian understanding of the “end of time”** presupposes the realization of the goal of history — the end cannot be reached until the transformation willed by the transcendent God is achieved; thus “time has been delayed, and no amount of acceleration will make up for it.”

- The crucial distinction: the gap between **observing social acceleration** and **discerning genuine ontological transformation** — what has actually changed in human interiority and self-understanding.
- The seminar’s overarching question — “*Who am I?*” — is the anthropological foundation, because “the measure of time is ultimately the measure of our own transformation.”
- The core tension: **social acceleration vs. ontological transformation** — speed does not substitute for depth; the sociological must not cover up for the philosophical. 60

Action Items

- **All participants:** Encouraged to reflect on how their own cultural experiences of time (African, South Asian, Eastern European, Latin American) map onto or resist Rosa’s framework, as a preparation for continued discussion.

Open Questions

- How does Rosa’s theory of social acceleration compare analytically to **Heraclitus’ flux** and **Hume’s quick succession of events** — do they describe the same phenomenon or fundamentally different ones?
- What is the status of **experience** as a sociological and phenomenological category — how do Dalit, African, and other non-Western experiences constitute legitimate and distinct contributions to social theory?
- Can the **caste system** be treated as eternal (Sanadhan) in the face of a theory that holds all temporal structures subject to acceleration and change?
- How can **meaningful relationships, stable institutions, and coherent identities** be sustained in a world where time itself “seems to dissolve”?

Orientations in preparation of next Session of the Seminar (9/9)

All participants read carefully Part IV of ROSA, Hartmut. *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*. Translated by Jonathan Trejo-Mathys. New Directions for Critical Theory. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 211-322. As alternative, or rather in a complementary manner, participants should also consider the following work: ROSA, Hartmut. [The Uncontrollability of the World](#). Cambridge, UK ; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2020.

The Participants are invited to prepare the upcoming Session by reading the material available under the perspective of a threefold set of interrogations:

The Self Under Acceleration

This innermost hermeneutical circle should lead the Seminar to the examination of Rosa's diagnosis of temporal acceleration reshapes the very structure of subjective experience and self-relation. In this regard, please, consider in detail at least one of the following questions:

- How does Rosa's notion of the "contraction of the present"—the shrinking span during which our knowledge, expectations, and action-orientations remain stable—alter the modern self's capacity for continuity, self-narrative, and settled identity?
- In what sense does the shift from "escalatory" self-realization (accumulating options, resources, and experiences) to a "resonant" self-relation represent a different anthropology of the person, and how does this bear on classical or theological accounts of selfhood familiar to the seminar?
- Rosa argues acceleration produces a "slippery slope" where standing still means falling behind: does this dynamic foreclose the very possibility of contemplative or dialogical self-formation that the seminar presupposes?

Solidarity, Resonance, and Relation to Others

Please, consider as well a second hermeneutical circle in order to extend the inquiry to intersubjective bonds, asking how acceleration and uncontrollability condition—or corrode—solidarity as a lived relation. Hence the importance of looking with close attention to at least one of the following questions:

- If resonance requires a world (and other persons) that can be "reached" but not "limitlessly controlled," what does this imply for solidarity as a practice that must tolerate the unpredictability of others rather than instrumentalizing them?
- How does the "acceleration of social change"—the rapid decay of shared institutions, roles, and relational patterns—undermine the durable trust and mutual reliability that solidarity traditionally presupposes?
- Can Rosa's four-fold structure of resonance (being affected, being moved, transformation, and the irreducibility of the encounter) serve as a phenomenological grammar for solidarity itself, distinct from mere cooperation or utility-based alliance?

Civility, Institutions, and the Uncontrollable World

The outermost circle we envision for our upcoming Session situates the discussion within the shared political and institutional order, asking whether civility as a public virtue can survive—or must be reimagined within—a world diagnosed as simultaneously accelerating and uncontrollable. So, please, elaborate on at least one of the following questions:

- Rosa contends that the modern drive to make the world “engineerable, disposable, and controllable” is precisely what mutes resonance and breeds alienation; how might civility, understood as a disposition of public respect and restraint, function as a counter-practice to this drive toward total control?
- Given that technical, social, and pace-of-life accelerations operate simultaneously across institutions (education, governance, media), what would a “decelerated” or resonance-oriented civic institution look like, and is this a realistic political horizon or merely a normative aspiration?
- Does the acknowledgment of a fundamentally uncontrollable world—one that resists full institutional mastery—offer a more honest and sustainable ground for civility and public reason than the modern promise of ever-greater control, and what would this mean for the seminar’s own commitments to dialogue, hope, and intercultural solidarity?

Please, remember that these hermeneutical circles are designed to replicate the structural thematic sequence of our Seminar—self, then relation, then polity—so that, at least ideally, the discussion can move organically from Rosa’s phenomenology of time and resonance toward its implications for the seminar’s overarching concern with self, solidarity, and civility.

Washington, DC

September 7, 2026