

Gillian Rose and the project of a Critical Marxism

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The work of Gillian Rose (1947–1995) displays a prodigious range equal to that of any British intellectual of her generation. Her output consists of eight books produced over a seventeen-year period between 1978 and her early death in 1995. The authorship falls into two distinct periods: a first phase, from 1978 to 1984, which includes *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (1978), *Hegel contra Sociology* (1981) and *Dialectic of Nihilism* (1984); and a second phase from 1990 to 1995, comprising *The Broken Middle* (1991), *Judaism and Modernity* (1993), *Love's Work* (1995), *Mourning Becomes the Law* (1996) and *Paradiso* (1999). Rose published only one article between 1984 and 1991, 'Architecture to Philosophy: The Post-modern Complicity'. A paper important for tracing the evolution of her thought, 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking: Hegel and Adorno', although not published until 1993 (in *Judaism and Modernity*), was first delivered as a public lecture in 1987.

Rose represents her oeuvre as a unified philosophical project centred around her three main texts: *Hegel contra Sociology*, *Dialectic of Nihilism* and *The Broken Middle*.¹ However, this claim does not withstand critical examination. The exposition of speculative experience in the late works diverges markedly from the mode of presentation adopted in the 'first phase' of her output. In *Hegel contra Sociology*, Rose presents a phenomenological account of the relation between 'substance' (objective ethical life) and subjectivity in which the possibilities of self-transformation are predicated upon overcoming the limitations and constraints placed on society by the continued domination of bourgeois law and private property. In the late works, this 'objective' treatment of subjectivity is displaced by a contrary emphasis on faith, inwardness

and an ethic of singularity. While this ethic continues to demand an engagement with the political, the terms of this engagement are no longer predicated upon a politics of revolutionary transformation.

This article is intended as a contribution towards the retrieval of Rose's original project of a Critical Marxism for contemporary social and political theory. In *Hegel contra Sociology*, Rose states: 'The critique of Marxism itself yields the project of a Critical Marxism.'² This project is to take the form of linking 'the presentation of the contradictory relations between Capital and culture' to 'the analysis of the economy' and thereby 'comprehend the conditions of a revolutionary practice'.³ It must be conceded that Rose's Marxist phraseology appears dated today. But the power and promise of Rose's early thought lie precisely in its capacity to comprehend the way in which Marxism has been rendered anachronistic, from a standpoint that does not admit of its historical redundancy. Rose holds to Lukács's tenet that Marxism is a 'method' of philosophizing rather than a fixed doctrine. It is guided only by the goal of achieving a fully mutual social subjectivity. Therefore each generation has to reinvent the 'method' for itself and apply it to the conditions of its own age. To demonstrate that Rose's thought is relevant to *our* age, we must, first, establish – since this is far from self-evident from the texts – that there *is* a coherent Critical Marxist project contained in her first two works; and, second, we must detail how and why she abandoned it.

The central essay of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, 'Reification and the Proletariat',⁴ provides the key to understanding Rose's original ambition. Lukács's essay is divided into three sections: (I) 'The phenomena of reification', (II) 'The antinomies of bourgeois thought', (III) 'The standpoint of the

proletariat'. Rose's first two works correspond, roughly speaking, to the first two sections of Lukács's essay. Rose's criticism of Adorno's analysis of reification in *The Melancholy Science* is based broadly on a Lukácsian theory of the economy as a cultural formation. Likewise, the criticism of the 'antinomies of the sociological tradition' in *Hegel contra Sociology* is modelled on Lukács's account of 'The antinomies of bourgeois thought'. However, Rose can provide no equivalent form for the third section of Lukács's essay. The absence of this 'third' on which the 'analysis of the economy' and the immanent critique of philosophy and social theory might converge, represents the stumbling block of Rose's thought, and explains her ambivalent relation to Adorno. Rose veers between embracing this impasse as a virtue and recoiling from the essentially negative stance that it implies.

This article is divided into three parts. The first part shows how Rose's incidental criticisms of Adorno's interpretation of Marx's theory of value in *The Melancholy Science* situate her own Critical Theory, as it were, between Lukács and Adorno. The second part presents an overview of *Hegel contra Sociology*, and shows how Rose oscillates between a positive and a negative concept of the dialectic, before coming down on the side of Adorno's negative thinking. The final part presents a reading of 'From Dialectical to Speculative Thinking: Hegel and Adorno' and a late essay 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation' in order to show that Rose is only able ultimately to distinguish 'speculative thinking' from 'negative dialectics' by departing from the Marxist goals of her first phase. I conclude by criticizing the politics of Rose's late authorship from the Marxist standpoint of her early work.

Reification without the proletariat

Rose was wont to dismiss *The Melancholy Science* as a piece of juvenilia. In fact, her first published work is central to her authorship. On the surface the text is a highly competent, if somewhat unadventurous, introduction to Adorno. Yet there is more to this text than mere exegesis.⁵ Its unstated aim is to provide an immanent critique of Adorno's social thought. Rose claims that the concept of reification is the fundamental category of Adorno's social criticism.⁶ Thus, a demonstration of the limits of Adorno's understanding of reification will serve *pari passu* to demonstrate the limits of his critique of society.

Adorno contends that Lukács's account of reification is vitiated by two fundamental idealist errors: the vision of reconciliation through return to a (pre-

capitalist) harmony and the totalizing desire of philosophical reason to incorporate the non-identical without remainder.⁷ The source of these errors lies in Lukács's conflation of objectification and reification and his misidentification of the proletariat as the subject/object unity of history. The result is that the whole process of reification is finally reduced to the subjective standpoint of class consciousness. For Adorno, by contrast, the basic mechanism of commodity exchange establishes an abstract equivalence between concretely heterogeneous particulars and thereby re-presents the intrinsically social relation of value as if it were a natural property of the commodity. Commodification is thus at once a process of mimetic identification and unintended mystification. As such, it constitutes a socially necessary form of illusion that remains entirely opaque to social agents.

Rose agrees with both Lukács and Adorno that Marx's analysis of the commodity form is the necessary point of departure for the speculative critique of culture and society, but sides with Adorno against Lukács in rejecting the latter's 'Fichtean' theory of revolutionary consciousness. By placing the notion of necessary illusion at the centre of his thought, Rose avers, Adorno is able to 'formulate the problem of ideological domination without any reference to class consciousness, alienation, hegemony or legitimation'. Adorno is further commended for eschewing the base/superstructure paradigm in favour of a dynamic exposition of the relation between commodification and the misrecognition of social relations and productive activity. In Rose's words, 'This approach has the advantage that intellectual and artistic works are conceived as real, as forms, rather than as epiphenomena, or as a reflection of social reality, and which, in turn, give *form* to experience of social reality.'⁸

Rose's endorsement of these features of Adorno's account of reification is, however, balanced by a series of critical observations, to be found interspersed throughout *The Melancholy Science*, which are advanced from a neo-Lukácsian perspective (minus the proletariat as the carrier of world history). Rose's basic objection to Adorno is that his analysis of reification is not adequately based in Marx's theory of value, from which it derives. In particular, Adorno's definition of reification in terms of Marx's analytical differentiation between use value and exchange value fails to note how these categories are grounded in Marx's more fundamental distinction between concrete and abstract labour.⁹ Rose concludes that Adorno abandons the 'unique advantage' offered by the Marxian notion of the mode of production, namely 'the derivation of

political relations from an analysis of productive and social relations'.¹⁰

Rose draws rather sweeping conclusions from Adorno's inattention to the details of Marx's analysis. In her view, it accounts for the fact that Adorno has no adequate theory of surplus value, class, society, power and the state and no concept of socio-political action or praxis. It is also responsible for Adorno's uncritical acceptance of Pollock's state-capitalist theory, which grants complete autonomy to the political organization of society, with the result that Adorno is able to provide an account of social opacity at the level of culture but not at the level of society as a whole.¹¹ In sum, Adorno fails to establish his claim that the immanent critique of philosophical reason yields a critique of society. He refuses the path adopted by Lukács, opting instead for a 'subversive "morality of method"'.¹² The latter succumbs to the Hegelian objection that it is an abstract *Sollen* – a general prescription not adequately grounded in existing social relations and therefore incapable of leading to their transformation.

Rose's critical reflections on Adorno are introduced as *obiter dicta*, with little or no supporting argument. Moreover, Rose makes no attempt to address the apparent inconsistencies in her own critical interpretation: for example, applauding Adorno for repudiating the base/superstructure paradigm while criticizing him for not grounding his critique of culture in an analysis of the mode of production. However, these inconsistencies may turn out to have their own justification when considered in the context of Rose's exposition of Adorno's style. Rose notes how in his compositions, Adorno utilizes the techniques of artistic modernism for political effect. By employing "shock", "exaggeration", "fantasy", or "provocative formulations",¹³ Adorno aims to induce his readers to re-cognize the non-identical aspect of objects (and subjects) subsumed under the reified categories of the bourgeois conspectus. In similar vein, Adorno deploys the literary device of ironic inversion to disclose the ideological function of bourgeois ideals and proletarian utopias. By juxtaposing the ideal and the real in this way, Adorno shows the inverse relation between normative concepts and the forms of domination they presuppose and reproduce, in the belief that the vitiation of the former will contribute to the dissolution of the latter. In Rose's words:

Adorno presents whatever philosophy he is discussing so as to expose its basic antinomies. He then shows that only a dialectical approach can resolve the antinomy, often by turning it into a chiasmus, and that this must involve a reference to so-

ciety. He calls this 'following the logic of aporias', or the 'immanent method', and it justifies his rough and tendentious treatment of the texts of others.¹⁴

However, this observation also serves as an indirect statement of the rationale behind Rose's own 'rough and tendentious reading of the texts of others' – beginning with Adorno's! Given Rose's endorsement of Adorno's transgressive hermeneutic, it is rather beside the point to set about assessing the validity of her criticisms of Adorno, which are patently unfair at many points.¹⁵ Rose's primary concern in *The Melancholy Science* is not to provide a scholarly assessment of Adorno but to prepare the ground for a renewal of Hegelian Marxism.

In *Hegel contra Sociology*, Rose restates her central criticism of Adorno: namely, that he did not carry through his criticism of Lukács's theory of reification by developing a philosophy of history and therefore was unable to 'underpin his analyses of cultural forms with analysis of those economic forms on which the cogency of the theory of commodity fetishism depends'.¹⁶ For Rose, *pace* Lukács, capital stands to the 'economy' as species to genus, since it denotes an entire cultural system embracing the totality of objective and subjective forms of social existence. Rose was fond of pointing out that Marx never uses the word *kapitalismus* in *Capital*, implying that since capital denotes 'culture-in-general', it cannot be identified with any particular culture or 'ism' within civil society. Rose's acceptance of Lukács analysis of the commodity form, over and against Adorno's interpretation, commits her to the thesis that capital is an immanently contradictory social formation. Given that this is the case, there is no need to follow Adorno in reducing immanent critique to a form of extended irony. The genuine form of immanent criticism is to criticize the present from the standpoint of the future immanent within it, rather than to exploit the internal disparity between bourgeois society and its own ideals.¹⁷ The former is the basis of a socio-political praxis deriving from a critique of production; the latter reduces to a form of cultural criticism that is unable to provide any basis for the determinate negation of the value-form.

Rose resists drawing the conclusions of her criticism of Adorno, on the basis that they entail Lukács's metaphysical theory of class consciousness. The problem with Lukácsian Marxism, and indeed Marxism in general, is that it remains largely blind to the way its position as a revolutionary culture in civil society deforms its vocation. First, its dependence on capital renders it particularly susceptible to assimilation and

re-formation by the social forces to which it stands opposed – the market and the state. Second, its independence from society leads it to embrace the false conception that the whole of social reality is an object which depends on itself (as subject) for its definition.¹⁸ Thus, it fails to understand how its own standpoint re-presents the divorce between substance and subject constitutive of modern society. The phenomenological reconstruction of the formation of modern subjectivity is therefore a prerequisite of determining the conditions of revolutionary agency. The political objective of this project is to ‘re-form consciousness in a way that will not be re-formed’.¹⁹ That this project was present in Rose’s mind from the beginning of her authorship is indicated by the following critical observation in *The Melancholy Science*: ‘Adorno’s discussion of Hegel’s philosophy consists of general statements of its metaphysical intent far removed from any detailed reconstruction of any one or other of Hegel’s texts’.²⁰ Rose sets out to meet this desideratum in *Hegel contra Sociology*.

Thinking the absolute

Hegel contra Sociology opens with a *tour de force* in which the ‘antinomies of sociological reason’ – the dichotomies of structure/action, meaning/social fact, system/lifeworld, and so on, are traced back to the Kantian separation of validity and value. Rose then draws on Hegel to provide a resource for comprehending the recurrence of these antinomies in modern social theory. Rose’s reading of Hegel is quite different to that of Lukács. Whereas Lukács seeks to abstract Hegel’s dialectical method from his speculative system, Rose argues for a non-metaphysical interpretation of Hegel’s texts in which system, method and speculation are rendered identical. For Lukács, the Totality is ultimately identical with the full self-consciousness of the proletariat, which contains the solution to the bourgeois antinomies. In Rose’s ‘speculative rereading’ of Hegel, the notion of the ‘Absolute’ takes the place of Lukács’s concept of Totality. The precise form this substitution takes marks the central ambiguity of the text. As I shall seek to demonstrate, Rose both advances and withdraws a positive or speculative dialectic. As a result, her account oscillates between Lukács’s positive dialectic and Adorno’s negative thinking.

On Rose’s interpretation of Hegel, phenomenological criticism is, as it were, an immanent critique of metacritique. To explain: metacritique aims to reveal the socio-historical conditions of possibility of given theoretical and social disciplines and practices (for example, philosophy, science, morality, art, etc.), on

the assumption that the latter lack either the interest or self-reflective capacity to acknowledge these wider preconditions of their own activity. In this sense, the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology – Marx, Durkheim and Weber – may be considered ‘metacritical’ theorists in so far as each in his own way tries to establish the transcendental conditions of possibility of social and cultural life, including philosophy. Unfortunately, metacritique founders upon the problem of circularity. There is, it appears, simply no non-question-begging way to validate the unobservable transcendental fact or value that is postulated to explain the observable social reality – whether it be ‘economic determinism’ (Marx), ‘social facts’ (Durkheim) or ‘meaning’ (Weber) – independently of the theory in which the stipulated postulate is inscribed. According to Rose, later metacritical attempts to break out of the transcendental circle, in thinkers as diverse as Heidegger, Gadamer, Lukács, Benjamin, Adorno, Habermas and Althusser, have only repeated the basic dichotomy by stressing methodologism over moralism, or vice versa. By contrast, phenomenological criticism attempts to comprehend the repetition of the antinomy of sociological reason without repeating it, or, more exactly, by repeating it differently.

Hegel contra Sociology is, therefore, not primarily a book *about* Hegel’s idea of phenomenology: it is a phenomenological exposition in its own right. This explains the shocking liberties that Rose takes with Hegel’s texts. For example, her contention that the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Science of Logic* are ‘phenomenologies’; that Hegel’s early *Jena* texts are written in the ‘severe style’, a subcategory taken from Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics* delivered over twenty years later; that Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* does not conclude on a note of reconciliation but commends the overthrow of bourgeois property relations; that Hegel’s philosophy of history is non-teleological; that Hegel’s system is in truth an anti-system, and so on – all of which anachronistic claims are deliberately intended, ironic distortions. It should be noted in this respect, that *Hegel contra Sociology* is dedicated to the ‘intriguer’. Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* describes the function of the figure of the intriguer within the *Trauerspiel*.²¹ This shadowy character dwells in the interstice between the stage and the stalls, the court and the commons, and under the cover of various masks and disguises actively plots to subvert the sovereign power. Rose is a philosophical intriguer. She is often referred to as a ‘Hegelian’, but this appellation is somewhat misleading. Rose’s ‘Hegel’ owes as much to Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno as it

does to the historical Hegel. And yet it would be a mistake to conclude that the hermeneutical licence Rose adopts towards Hegel's texts betokens a lack of method on her part; on the contrary, as we shall see, the philosophical style and terms of her presentation are progressively grounded in the course of the work itself.

The defining refrain of *Hegel contra Sociology* is that 'Hegel's philosophy has no social import if the absolute cannot be thought'.²² Rose grounds her interpretation of the 'Absolute' in a reading of Hegel's Jena texts. In particular, she details Hegel's transformation of Schelling's notion of 'intellectual intuition' into his own concept of 'real intuition'. For Hegel, the notion of 'real intuition' is simply Kant's productive imagination brought to philosophical completion. That is to say, whereas Kant maintains that the form and matter of intuition are prior to the synthesizing activity of the transcendental imagination, Hegel argues that the transcendental imagination is the absolute prius, which 'produces' both concepts *and* intuitions.²³ This does not amount to a restatement of the pre-critical notion of a divine intellect; rather, it represents an attempt to extend Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories, as it were, all the way down to include the forms of the intuitions themselves.²⁴ Hegel's point against Kant's successors, Fichte and Schelling, is that they reproduce new forms of the domination of concept over intuition or of intuition over concept, rather than succeed in accomplishing their genuine reconciliation. Hegel's response, however, is not to posit an alternative Ur-principle of his own but to demonstrate how the experience of the mismatch of concept and intuition implicitly contains a real unity that does not result in the subjugation of one term under the other. Rose states the point as follows:

'Recognition' refers to the lack of identity or relation which the initial dichotomy between concept and intuition, or consciousness and its objects, represents. But it also implies a unity which includes the relation or lack of identity. This unity mediates between the poles of the opposition and is hence triune. 'Recognition', 'concept', 'spirit' all have this triune structure. They all refer to lack of identity, relation, or domination. They all yield speculative propositions, and eschew the propositions of identity based on the primacy of pure practical reason. Misrecognition implies, but does not pre-judge, real recognition.²⁵

A 'speculative proposition' denotes both the identity and the lack of identity between subject and predicate. It is the experience of the lack of identity between what the subject takes the predicate term or object

to be and what the object is in-itself that enforces the re-cognition of the object. The re-cognition of the object in turn brings about the de-position of the subject, and the transition to a new subject-object configuration, or another form of relative recognition. However, this process of reconfiguration is guided by the notion of 'absolute recognition' which is implicit in the given forms of misrecognition. 'Absolute recognition' is therefore 'triune' rather than dualistic; it allows 'the "object", as it were, "to look back, *without*, in its turn, subsuming or denying the difference of that at which it looks back"', so that 'the relata are able to see each other without suppressing one another'.²⁶ Rose explains this point in the context of Hegel's critique of philosophies of reflection (i.e. Fichte and Schelling):

'Reflection' as applied to philosophies based on the dichotomy of concept and intuition means that 'a' sees itself in what is directly opposed to it, 'b', but the seeing is one-sided. 'A' sees itself in 'b', but 'b' does not see itself in 'a'. Hence 'a' sees only a distorted view of itself, the reflection of individual domination. Absolute intuition or absolute reflection means that 'a' in seeing 'b' also sees 'b' looking back at 'a', and hence 'a' sees itself fully as both 'a' and 'b'. 'A' sees that 'b' is not 'a', and that 'b' too, can see 'a' either one-sidedly or reciprocally.²⁷

In the sphere of religion, the figure of Christ is the means (*Mitte*) wherein 'the infinite and the finite are reconciled without suppression'. Yet, notwithstanding the emphasis placed on the triune nature of absolute recognition, Rose rejects the 'right-wing' Hegelian interpretation of Christ as mediator. Hegel, she insists, is presenting 'a speculative reading of Christianity which transcribes religion into philosophical terms in order to expound the concept of the absolute religion, of absolute freedom. This reading does not refer to the history of religion, of Christianity'.²⁸ On the contrary, the history of Christianity has been that of the continual separation of infinite and finite, of substantial freedom and subjectivity. It is for this reason that Rose regards Hegel's statement that religion and the state are identical as 'the fundamental speculative proposition of his thought'. The alienation of the finite from the infinite is not to be understood in (Feuerbachian) anthropological terms, but as the 'the fate or determination of absolute ethical life itself' – that is, as a necessary moment in the historical genesis of modern society.²⁹ From this perspective, religion in the modern world is over, not empirically but in the sense that it is no longer politically formative (in contrast, say, to classical Greece, where it performed a universal integrative function). The re-cognition of the histori-

cal fate of modern faith does not aim to rejuvenate an 'exhausted Christianity';³⁰ but to comprehend the necessity of its demise. The vocation of philosophy is to surmount religion. The 'historic Good Friday' is to be completed by the 'speculative Good Friday; religion



will be completed by philosophy; and philosophy will be made actual as absolute ethical life, the realization of substantial freedom without domination.

For Rose, then, the concept of absolute recognition is the essentially positive moment in speculative experience. It is not a transcendent absolute raised above history; on the contrary, it is implied by the historically specific contradictions of modern social relations as they are re-presented in the 'antinomies' of modern philosophy and social theory. It is true that the mere identification of these contradictions and antinomies leaves the form of their potential negation entirely abstract and indeterminate. Yet it is through the reconstruction of the history of their genesis that they come to *acquire* determinate content. To this effect, Rose cites with approval Hegel's statement that 'the real possibility of something is therefore the existing multiplicity of circumstances that are related to it'.³¹

However, having outlined the concept of real recognition, Rose also points out that philosophy – including speculative philosophy – is subject to the 'fate' of 'absolute ethical life'. In keeping with Rose's exposition of Hegel, 'real' or 'absolute recogni-

tion' requires a different form of law and property relation to those that prevail in bourgeois society. But in so far as we continue to live in a bourgeois society in which that alternative notion of law and property remains unrealized, the mere statement of the concept of absolute recognition must appear as a *Sollen* – an abstract prescription. As such, it cannot acknowledge prevailing forms of social illusion but only reinforce them. In Rose's words, the concept of real recognition 'is abstract, because it arises in a society where real recognition has not been achieved'. Hence even speculative philosophy, when 'shot from a pistol', reinstates the primacy of the concept, and thus 'falls into the terms of the dichotomy which it seeks to transform'.³²

Rose therefore poses the questions, 'How, in general, can the inconsistency be avoided of stating schematically and abstractly that the truth is not abstract? How can there be a methodological statement that there can be no method?' Rose finds the answer in Hegel's account in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* on 'The Symbolic Form of Art' and the 'severe style' to which it corresponds. She notes that, for Hegel, the symbolic form of art neither presents nor represents the object, as in classical or romantic art respectively, but 'refers' to it obliquely and indeterminately; while the 'severe style' 'grants domination to the topic alone' and 'nothing at all to the spectator'.³³ Speaking critically of Hegel for once rather than through him, Rose argues the case for detaching the principles of the symbolic form of art from the ancient Oriental and Judaic setting in which they are placed by Hegel and reapplying them in a modern context, with the aim of making art politically formative once again:

The case for irony as a severe style is that it is not possible to return to the classical ideal, to harmony between meaning and configuration, in a society with a long history of subjectivity and re-presentation. But it might be possible to make substance, the topic, come back into view again if the assimilation of configuration to prosaic meaning, the pseudo-integrity of pleasing art, could be broken by the use of a form of art which rests on a divorce, 'an intended severance' between meaning and configuration.³⁴

The real irony here is that *Hegel contra Sociology* in its entirety is a performative enactment of this thesis on irony. It is not Hegel but Rose who writes in the 'severe style'. In other words, Rose has provided an immanent justification of the form of her own text. The substantive implication of this is that just as a 'symbolic' form of irony is required to challenge

and disrupt the assimilation of art to the 'pleasing style' of Romanticism, then, by the same token, an ironic form of philosophical discourse is called for in order to undermine and subvert the assimilation of philosophy to methodologism and moralism. In other words, social critique can *only* take the indirect form of the immanent critique of the dominant forms of philosophy, social theory and aesthetics. In Rose's own words: 'If ethical life is abstract it can only be recognized by recognizing its abstractions. In this way actuality is recognized and another indeterminate actuality is not posited'.³⁵

Again speaking through Hegel, Rose states:

Under present social and political conditions, for the historic Good Friday to become the speculative Good Friday, philosophy must form 'a sanctuary apart', an 'isolated order of priests'. Hegel draws attention to this status of philosophy in order not to impose its concept. The priests are not to *act* as Christian priests have done; they are to remain isolated.

Isolated but not idle; there is work to be done:

It is philosophy which now has the vocation (determination) to present a notion of law to our abstract consciousness which will re-form the ethical without being re-formed by it, which will comprehend itself, its positing, as the law of substance, of absolute ethical life.

The work of philosophical comprehension, however, will not of itself accomplish freedom; for it is not sufficient to change our concepts: intuition must change too. Therefore, this work has limited practical import. In Rose's words: 'Speculative exposition demonstrates the domination of abstraction and urges us to transform ethical life by re-cognizing the law of its determination.' The recognition of the reality of unfreedom merely 'urges' or 'commends a different way of transforming that unfreedom'. Rose claims that the appearance of a *Sollen* in her own thought is consistent with her critique of abstract moralism in metacritical philosophy. Speculative thought provides an immanent justification of the abstract nature of its own prescriptivism. It may be confidently assumed that the subtlety of this position will be lost on its opponents. In Rose's lapidary formulation, 'A speculative reading of social and political contradictions anticipates and accounts for subsequent non-speculative readings of the speculative discourse'.³⁶

We see, then, that here are in fact two modes of phenomenological exposition coexisting in *Hegel contra Sociology*. On the one hand, there is the idea that the

notion of 'absolute recognition' is already implicit in the prevailing forms of societal misrecognition, namely private property and formal legal relations. The work of phenomenological reconstruction involves providing an account of the series of contradictory relations between evolving historical forms of life and the reflexive principles through which they receive their self-legitimation, and which have resulted in the antinomies and aporias of our present state. The purpose of such an account is to identify the sociological and political possibilities latent in the present that will facilitate the transformation of prevailing forms of social illusion towards the goal of 'absolute ethical life'. On the other hand, Rose also understands the work of phenomenological reconstruction in negative terms. The aim here is not to identify the basis for the determinate negation of capitalist social relations; on the contrary, it is to demonstrate the abstract and utopian nature of such hubristic ambitions, and to disclose the will to domination lurking behind them. Although the work of showing the entwinement of philosophy and legal power may 'commend' a different idea of freedom, it neither can, nor indeed should, do anything to bring it about, lest it fall back into that form of abstract *Sollen* that is the object of its critique.

It is this second, Adornian strain that prevails in *Hegel contra Sociology*.

From dialectical to speculative thinking

'From Dialectical to Speculative Thinking: Hegel and Adorno'³⁷ is Rose's attempt finally to settle her account with Adorno. Evidently dissatisfied with the essentially Adornian conclusion to *Hegel contra Sociology*, Rose once again confronts the dilemma of how to find a way beyond 'negative dialectics' without embracing a Lukácsian theory of class consciousness.

Rose accuses Adorno of merely 'judging' dialectical oppositions rather than undertaking the comprehensive reconstruction of their historical and juridical formation. Rose contends that Adorno's insistence on maintaining oppositions and antinomies in dialectical tension entails the ossification of negative dialectics into an abstract method suspended above the social and cultural life it seeks to understand and criticize, and thus precludes the comprehension of aporias in their historical specificity. Adorno's refusal to comprehend the antinomies inherited from the Kantian practical philosophy leads him to repeat them in a new form. Adorno remains at the level of the dialectic, where oppositions are fixed and held apart, and so fails to attain to the higher speculative stage where it is dem-

onstrated that ‘spirit is unity with itself in otherness’ and that all oppositions are ‘in truth one’. However, Rose is at pains to point out that this speculative truth cannot be adequately grasped in non-speculative terms: it can only be *shown* through ‘exposition of the speculative identity and non-identity of the state and religion’. The absence of such a phenomenological narrative – a ‘concept of law or law of the concept and its development’³⁸ – condemns Adorno’s ‘negative dialectics’ to the fate of Marxism as a whole – that is, to be effectively neutralized and co-opted by the prevailing bourgeois culture to which it stands opposed.

The burden of Rose’s case against Adorno would appear to rest on her claim that the reconstruction of the formation and [social] presuppositions of the Kantian antinomies, and their repetition in modern philosophy and social theory, provides an advance beyond ‘negative dialectics’. But Adorno’s metacritical practice consists in precisely such ‘speculative exposition’. After all, it is Adorno who states that ‘the only way to reach social categories philosophically is to decipher the truth-content of philosophical categories.’³⁹ To be sure, he does not overly emphasize the juridical aspect of the philosophies that he subjects to metacritical examination, but it is far from clear how Rose’s claim to meet this desideratum constitutes the difference between negative and speculative thinking. For at no point does Rose explicitly relinquish the argument of *Hegel contra Sociology*, that a mere change in concepts will not suffice in so far as intuitions – the historically given, sedimented forms of political, social and economic life – must also change. Hence there can be no speculative movement in advance of the real possibility of a structural change in these social forms; and to claim otherwise is to promulgate a *Sollen*. In short, if ‘speculative thinking’ reduces to ‘speculative exposition’, then Rose’s position remains more or less that of Adorno.

Contrary to Rose’s self-perception, the two modes of phenomenological reconstruction identified in *Hegel contra Sociology* are radically incompatible with one another. Hegel presents a phenomenology of *spirit*. Phenomenological reconstruction is by definition a form of recollection by spirit of its own formation. Yet, Rose ultimately followed Adorno in eschewing the Hegelian notion of a collective social subject or *Geist*, along with its Lukácsian scion, proletarian class consciousness. This leaves no possible form of social agency capable of providing the conditions for the determinate negation of capitalist social relations. In lieu of this, Rose follows Adorno in adopting and advancing an ironic style as a placeholder for politi-

cal praxis. Hegelian ‘recollection’, therefore, reverts to ‘reconstruction’ – the interminable and negative work of showing the necessity for the repetition of the Kantian moment in modern philosophical texts.⁴⁰ Rose’s criticism of Adorno (and postmodernism) finally rebounds on herself: ‘speculative exposition’ freezes into an abstract methodologism, imposing fixed schemata on texts in advance of their interpretation.⁴¹

Rose implicitly recognizes this implication, and seeks to block it by further redefining the nature of speculative thinking. A single passage from ‘Speculative to Dialectical Thinking’ indicates the terms of this revision. Rose distinguishes speculative from negative thinking by contrasting Adorno and Horkheimer’s thesis on the ‘dialectic of enlightenment’ with her own notion of ‘speculative exposition’. For the former:

Expressing the dilemma of enlightenment and domination has priority over speculative exposition or *Bildung* – the relation of universality and particularity as it is actually and potentially negotiated by the singular.⁴²

At first sight, Rose is here simply counterposing Hegel to Adorno, as the title of the paper would suggest. In fact, Rose’s definition of ‘speculative exposition’ as ‘the relation of universality and particularity as it is actually and potentially negotiated by the singular’ represents a fundamental reordering of the three moments of Hegel’s idea of the Concept (*Begriff*). Limitations of space permit only the briefest indication of how this is so.

For Hegel, the Concept is the Kantian principle of transcendental apperception in its full justification.⁴³ The ‘universal’ is therefore the principle that ‘contains’ the ‘particular’ and the ‘individual’. That is to say, it is the *activity* through which the categories are unified. However, as the principle of unity, it requires the forms of particularity and individuality in order to fulfil its unifying function. The Concept is thus a pure, negative self-relation that embraces the moments of universality, particularity and individuality within a single self-contained mediation. The Concept *becomes* determinate and individual when asserted in the form of speculative judgements connecting subject and predicate terms in the context of the unfolding totality of all possible forms of judgement and their interconnection. Transposed into the realm of *Realphilosophie*, the idea of the state expresses the historical concretion of the total mediating function of the universal. In fine, it is the form of unity or ‘middle’ that mediates the relation between individuals and their particular needs

at the threefold levels of the family, civil society and the external state, and through the inner mediations of particularity and the individuality specific to each of these spheres.

Even from this cursory and inevitably inadequate summary, it is clear that Rose is not simply reinstating Hegel's theory of the Concept but engaging in a wholesale revision of its constitutive terms. On Rose's reformulation, it is the 'singular' (note the Kierkegaardian inflection) that anchors the negative self-relation, not the universal. Moreover, the 'singular' does not unify or mediate the relation between universality and particularity but rather 'witnesses' and 'negotiates' the 'breaks' between them.⁴⁴ Rose is here *not* opposing a liberal Hegelianism to Adorno's 'negative dialectics'. Rather 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking' represents an attempt to read *between* Hegel and Adorno; the 'and' denoting the aporetic space of speculative critique.⁴⁵ The question is, where does this 'space' lie, and how can embracing it be said to represent a forward movement which Adorno refuses to make? Rose's answer is to identify the space of formative possibility with the 'point of view' of the singular. Rose's reading of Kierkegaard is decisive in this respect. To paraphrase the latter, for Rose, it is no longer the 'what' of speculative exposition that matters, but the 'how'. It is the preparedness of the single one to continually risk self-dispossession, while maintaining total trust in the providence of the outcome, that releases the frozen antithesis of negative dialectic into speculative motility and reconfiguration. This is the essence of Rose's complaint that Adorno does not 'surrender' himself to the dialectic but is content to judge it instead. Adornian irony must give way to facetiousness and humour. The ironic stance must itself be ironically undermined.

The clearest statement of the implications of this turn for Rose's politics is to be found in the essay 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation'.⁴⁶ The essay centres around a critical discussion of two films, Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and the Merchant-Ivory production *Remains of the Day*, and the novels on which they are based, Thomas Kenneally's *Schindler's Ark* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Remains of the Day*, respectively. Rose's essay merits consideration in its own right as an important contribution to cultural criticism; but my focus here will be on her account of the relation between Fascism and modernity underpinning her analysis of these media.

Rose's understanding of modernity takes its bearings from Marx's early essay 'On the Jewish Question'. Following Marx, Rose maintains that the modern

subject is divided between her position as a private individual in civil society pursuing her own interests, and her public status as a citizen of the commonweal. In so far as the modern state is merely the political expression of the egoism of civil society, the idea of the political community is a pure illusion. Consequently, the individual citizen is an inherently unstable construct, suspended between commitment to its own private gain and its imaginary inclusion in a non-existent political community. Rose supplements Marx's analyses with reference to Weber's definition of the modern state as a monopoly of legitimate force and Hegel's critique of the autonomous moral subject. Weber shows how the modern state centralized the means of legitimate violence, 'which, formerly, was effectively delegated and dispersed across the quasi-independent institutions of the middle'.⁴⁷ Hegel is held to have demonstrated that the idea of autonomy exculpates the moral will from its implication in the



violences of civil society. The combination of an authoritarian state with an atomized but morally righteous mass provides the ideal soil for Fascism to take root. Fascism, both as a political movement and a form of rule, represents the harnessing of the *non-legitimate violence of civil society* to the goal of seizing and maintaining power. The essential ideological device

it employs to this end is to confirm the citizen in its identity by representing its illusory self-image as real or natural. The converse of this work of identification is the fixation of the other *as* other. In the prewar period, Fascism assumes the classic form of a mass movement seizing power and establishing a totalitarian state, and in the postwar period it takes on the insidious guise of the 'endemic Fascism' analysed by the Frankfurt School; today, it is expressing itself in the reassertion of the centralized power of the state under the cover of a libertarian ideology of the individual. The privatization, dismantling and marginalization of the institutions of the middle – state monopolies, professional organizations, trade unions, and so on – and the political reconceptualization of individuals as consumers are rendering social relations volatile, unpredictable and violent.

Rose contends that much contemporary film, post-modern philosophy, and orientalism collude with the 'inner tendency' of Fascism in the very act of denouncing it. The modern subject/viewer/reader is encouraged to identify with the other as victim. In responding to this prompt, however, the subject is not shaken but confirmed in the fixity of its moral positivity and thereby spared having to confront its own actual or potential implication in the violence it is witnessing. Rose encapsulates this mutual complicity between representation and the object of representation in the form of the speculative proposition: 'the representation of Fascism and the Fascism of representation'. This slogan also serves to indicate the terms of Rose's own politics. 'The Fascism of representation' aims to precipitate a crisis of identification. Thus, it

provokes the grief of encountering the violence normally legitimised by the individual moral will, with which we defend our own particular interests, and see only the egoism of the other – these may be interests of disinterested service, race, gender, religion, class. The grief expresses the crisis of the dissolution of the particular identity and the vision of the universal. Across the unprotected exposure of our otherness to ourselves, we sense that 'we', which we otherwise so partially and carelessly assume.⁴⁸

Rose commits herself to the critique of all forms of universalism, aiming to expose the hidden interests behind their respective claims to disinterestedness. Yet this critique is nonetheless oriented by the goal of universal, mutual recognition. Crucially, however, Rose no longer identifies this goal with the realization of a future form of society. Now, the accomplishment of mutuality resides solely in its *being accomplished* in and through the work of critique and incessant

self-relinquishment. In this spirit, Rose approvingly cites Cardinal Newman's epigram that the 'Saints are ever failing from the earth and Christ is all but coming'.⁴⁹ Rose still steadfastly refuses all antinomian and irenic conceptions of community. The goal of mutual recognition is rather to be attested individually across the full 'range of quotidian practices and cultural rituals'.⁵⁰

Rose attacks Marxism for refusing action until its emancipatory outcome is theoretically vouchsafed. Repudiating this stance, Rose declares:

politics does not happen when you act on behalf of your own damaged good, but when you act *without guarantees*, for the good of all, this is to take *the risk* of the *universal* interest. Politics in this sense requires representation, the critique of representation, and the critique of the critique of representation.⁵¹

Rose is quite clear that she simply does not know whether her own efforts at undermining moral rationality will impede or advance the nihilistic forces and tendencies at work within modern society. This is the risk that must be taken: to stake oneself without knowing the outcome in advance.

The diverse strands of Rose's account of singularity add up to a form of virtue ethics founded on a unique fusion of Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean motifs.⁵² The single one is able to combine authority with irony, humility with virtue, discipline with abandon; justice with mercy, scepticism with commitment, resolution with fluidity; Agape with Eros, love with loss, obligation with transgression; humour with earnestness, and piety with facetiousness. In short, she melds the love of eternity with the love of the world. Most of all she is love-*able*; that is, able to give love from the abundant power of a strong ego; and to receive the love of an independent being. The single one is thus capable of noble friendship and selfless deeds. She does not draw attention to herself but rather passes discretely through the world, dispensing goodness on her way.

The juxtaposition of the following two references to Hegel's celebrated figure of the owl of Minerva, taken from *Hegel contra Sociology* and 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', respectively, serve to measure the full extent of Rose's distance from her early stance. In *Hegel contra Sociology*, Rose states:

Absolute ethical life is a critique of bourgeois property relations. It may be elusive but it is never dominant or pre-judged. Minerva cannot impose herself. Her owl can only spread its wings at dusk and herald the return of Athena, freedom without domination.⁵³

In 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', Rose is far more retrospective and resigned:

If Fascism promises beginnings of the day, representation exposes the interests of the middle of the day; then the owl of Minerva flying at dusk may reflect on the ruins of the day – the ruins of the morning's hope, the actuality of the broken middles.⁵⁴

In the first formulation, the *spread* of the owl's wings heralds the coming of freedom; in the second, the owl is *already* in flight: the work of reflection and ethical action is *equated* with the realization of freedom. This subtle change of emphasis marks a quite fundamental shift in the centre of gravity of Rose's politics. To be sure, Rose remains critical of liberalism, but in a way that no longer threatens the parameters of liberal society. Most significantly, the critique of property relations drops out of Rose's late work. Fear of reaction takes complete precedence over the hope for radical change. This change in political direction is a direct consequence of the usurpation of the idea of absolute ethical life by the notion of the single one. The idea that absolute ethical life is *implied* in the antinomies and contradictions of modern thought and life provides an objective basis for the phenomenological reconstruction of modernity. Without this, all that remains is a form of perspectivism. Rose contends that perspectivism may be corrected, as it were, by an overriding commitment to the universal good. But, given the anti-cognitivism informing Rose's notion of a politics of risk, it is difficult to see how the appeal to the notion of the universal good can serve to guide reflectively the 'negotiation' of the relation between singularity and particularity. Rose's injunction to risk the universal interest in ignorance of where it lies, coupled with her negative criticism of moral autonomy, appears to yield a decidedly irrational and voluntarist politics that is hard to reconcile with her claim to be a defender of reason against nihilism.

In conclusion, we may say (to paraphrase Adorno) that Rose's work comprises two halves that do not add up. Rose demands that we work with this aporia rather than seek to resolve it. But what if the aporetic stance itself precludes formative work? The challenge that Rose has left us with, then, is to find a way of integrating the two phases of her authorship. It is not sufficient to recover the lost trajectory of her thought; we must also seek to complete it.

Notes

1. Gillian Rose, Preface, *The Broken Middle*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992.
2. *Hegel contra Sociology*, Athlone Press, London, 1981, p. 220.

3. Ibid.
4. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, London, Merlin, 1971.
5. Howard Caygill writes: 'Gillian Rose enjoyed the reputation of being a difficult author. Her first book, *The Melancholy Science* (1978), masqueraded as an *introduction* to the thought of T.W. Adorno, but readers looking to be introduced were quickly dismayed. Rose relished hearing stories from defeated readers of her first work, and would crown them with the information that it began life as a *cookery* book' (Editor's Preface to Gillian Rose, *Paradiso*, Menard Press, London, 1999).
6. Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of T.W. Adorno*, Macmillan, London, 1979, p. 38.
7. Ibid., pp. 40–41.
8. Ibid., p. 140.
9. Ibid., pp. 35, 43, 47, 89.
10. Ibid., p. 141.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 148. The charge is repeated in *Hegel contra Sociology*, p. 33.
13. *The Melancholy Science*, p. 12.
14. Ibid., p. 54.
15. Simon Jarvis, *Adorno, A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 52, defends Adorno against Rose's charge that Adorno's 'morality of method' represents a return to neo-Kantianism.
16. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, presents a systematic defence of this thesis independently of Rose. See Chapter 3, 'The Limits of Traditional Marxism and the Pessimistic Turn of Critical Theory', pp. 104–21.
17. Ibid., p. 185.
18. *Hegel contra Sociology*, p. 219.
19. Ibid., p. 117.
20. *The Melancholy Science*, p. 57.
21. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, Verso, London, 1977, p. 95.
22. *Hegel contra Sociology*, p. 92. This is repeated a further two times in the text at pp. 42 and 208, or three if we count the following auxiliary formulation: 'If actuality is not thought then thinking has no social import' (p. 214).
23. Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, provides a defence of Hegel's critique of Fichte and Schelling in his Jena period. Pippin indicates that Rose's reading of Hegel is fully consistent with his own reconstruction (see p. 272, n. 49). Pippin also acknowledges Rose as a significant influence on his Hegelian treatment of the problem of modernism in *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 194.
24. See John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1994, for a contemporary restatement of this thesis.
25. *Hegel contra Sociology*, p. 71.
26. Ibid., pp. 65, 70.
27. Ibid., p. 71.
28. Ibid., pp. 107, 108.
29. Ibid., p. 112.
30. Ibid., p. 119.

31. *Hegel's Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller, Allen & Unwin, London, 1969, p. 547, cited in *Hegel contra Sociology*, p. 205.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 149.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 184, 187, 201, 209.
37. 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking: Hegel and Adorno', in *Judaism and Modernity, Philosophical Essays*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, pp. 53–64.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61, 63.
39. T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1973, p. 198, cited in Jarvis, *Adorno*, p. 153.
40. See Peter Osborne's review of *Hegel contra Sociology*, 'Hegelian Phenomenology and the Critique of Reason and Society', *Radical Philosophy* 32, August 1982, pp. 8–15. Osborne argues that Rose's idea of phenomenology can only tell us *that* ethical life is determined; it cannot explain the precise nature of its determination. For this, a theory of capitalism is required that will demonstrate how ethical life is determined and specify the modes of its determinate negations (if any). But precisely such a theory is precluded in advance by Rose as representing a neo-Kantian regression. All that remains is endless critique. Rowan Williams, in his essay 'Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose', *Modern Theology* 11, January 1995, pp. 3–22, defends Rose against Osborne, by arguing that immanent critique is itself a form of social theory in so far as it is necessarily attentive to the embroilment of thinking within a given historical context, the susceptibility of intentional action to inversion and misconstrual and the subsequent necessity of loss and self-relinquishment. However, it should be noted that Williams does not address the question of the universal nature of capital and the institutional constraints it places upon 'particular' political negotiations. He does not meet Osborne's fundamental objection, which is indeed the objection of the early Rose to Adorno, namely that immanent critique does not yield a critique of society. In order for speculative thinking to have 'social import' it is necessary to concretize just how the notion of real mutual recognition is an immanent possibility within the present. Phenomenological reconstruction is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for accomplishing this goal.
41. The potential aridity of Rose's approach is brought out, unwittingly, by Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political*, Routledge, London, 1996. Beardsworth notes how Derrida's critique of Hegel and Rose's critique of Derrida curiously mirror one another: Derrida accusing Hegel of reducing history to a 'logic' out of a desire for mastery and the avoidance of risk, contingency, and so on, and Rose charging Derrida with the exact same errors. And their respective philosophical positions yield a remarkably similar politics. In essence this is a politics of the cultural critique of representation. Beardsworth is guilty of making the same inflated claims for a 'politics of deconstruction' that Rose (and Williams) make for the politics of immanent critique, in maintaining that 'the deconstruction of the political tradition amount to an *active transformation* of the political field' (Introduction, p. xiv).
42. 'From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking' p. 59.
43. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, pp. 601–22. David Kolb, *The Critique of Pure Modernity: Hegel, Heidegger and After*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1988, ch. 4, provides a concise non-metaphysical reading of Hegel's concept of the Concept.
44. *The Broken Middle*, Preface.
45. Graham Ward, 'Allegoria: Reading as a Spiritual Exercise', *Modern Theology* 15, July 1999, pp. 271–95, defines the 'broken middle' as a 'sacred space' in the following terms: 'This is a space which is constantly transgressing its own dimensions. It is a space that cannot be located "here" or "there" because it is a space that cannot be contained, a space which deconstructs its boundaries. "[I]n speaking of 'place' he [Moses] does not limit the space by anything quantitative (for to something unquantitative there is no measure)" (II.2422). This space can neither be limited or defined. It is a space for dispossession' (p. 285). This formulation of the 'space' of the middle is so rarefied it is difficult to see how it could be considered to be incarnate in the world. As such, it goes against the grain of Rose's account.
46. 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', in *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 41–62.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Mourning Becomes the Law*, pp. 107–8, 146.
50. 'Beginnings of the Day', p. 61.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
52. See Rose's valedictory essay, 'O untimely Death./ Death!', in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, pp. 125–46, for a concise statement of Rose's late ethics.
53. *Hegel contra Sociology*, p. 91.
54. 'Beginnings of the Day', p. 42.

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