TRAUERSPIEL OR COMEDY? MODERNITY AND VIOLENCE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GILLIAN ROSE

TRAUERSPIEL OR COMEDY? MODERNITY AND VIOLENCE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF GILLIAN ROSE

By MICAH ENNS-DYCK, B.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts

McMaster University MASTER OF ARTS (2024) Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (Religious Studies).

TITLE: *Trauerspiel* or Comedy? Modernity and Violence in the Philosophy of Gillian Rose.

AUTHOR: Micah Thomas Enns-Dyck, B.A. (Canadian Mennonite University).

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 109 pp.

COMMITTEE: Dr. P. Travis Kroeker (supervisor), Dr. Zdravko Planinc, Dr. Dana Hollander (3rd reader).

Lay Abstract

This thesis analyzes the concept of violence in the late work of the philosopher Gillian Rose (1947-1995) by examining her use of two dramatic categories: the *Trauerspiel* (or mourning-play) and comedy. Understood as contrasting accounts of the predicament of contemporary philosophy, the *Trauerspiel* and its opposite, comedy, function as a window into Rose's understanding of the relation between philosophy and violence. I show how Rose appeals to the *Trauerspiel* to illustrate a problematic link between modern melancholy and violence, which is then used to demonstrate the implication of contemporary philosophy's obsession with loss in violence. Rose's account of philosophy as a comedy, by contrast, avoids the mournful reproduction of violence by figuring violence as a necessary part of acting in, and thinking about, the modern world. This emphasis on the "comedic" aspect of Rose's conception of violence constitutes an original reading of Rose that challenges existing scholarly interpretations.

Abstract

This thesis broaches an understanding of the perplexing concept of violence in the philosophy of Gillian Rose (1947-1995) by examining her sporadic appeal to the dramatic category of the *Trauerspiel* (mourning-play) and its opposite, comedy. Understood in their context as contrasting images of philosophy's project in the aftermath of 20th century catastrophe, the dramatic categories of the *Trauerspiel* and comedy are shown to be critical conceptual resources for making sense of the function of violence in Rose's late work. I begin by contextualizing Rose's invocation of the *Trauerspiel* through an exploration of Rose's engagement with Walter Benjamin's study of 17th century German mourning-plays. In this 17th century context, the *Trauerspiel* dramatizes the melancholic aftermath of the Lutheran repudiation of "good works" and its implication in violence and political intrigue. Building on Benjamin's intimation of the enduring significance of this link between melancholy and violence, I show how Rose uses the dramatic image of the *Trauerspiel* to characterize the predicament of postmodern philosophy. Philosophy, conceived as a *Trauerspiel*, interminably mourns the losses produced by the diremptions of modernity. By refusing to complete this work of mourning, however, the dirempted conditions of violence are left intact, thereby re-enforcing and reifying what is abhorred. Against this melancholic conception of philosophy as a *Trauerspiel*, Rose gives an account of philosophy as a comedy that figures violence, when reckoned with, as a precondition of education in the law. Through a comedic double movement, violence is understood retrospectively as a representable aspect of modernity's dirempted history and prospectively as a necessary risk of thinking and acting in a dirempted world. By attending to this comedic aspect of Rose's conception of violence I am afforded an interpretive position from which to criticize two prominent interpretations of Rose that over- and underemphasize the stakes of her investment in the question of violence.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for aiding this project in the form of a Canada Graduate Scholarship, and to McMaster University for awarding me the Harry Lyman Hooker Sr. Fellowship.

Writing this thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and critical engagement of my advisory committee. I would like to thank Dr. P. Travis Kroeker, my supervisor, for his unending wisdom and keen sense of how to push me, and Dr. Zdravko Planinc for his probing questions, incisive sense of humor, and, importantly, his film recommendations. I would also like to thank Dr. Dana Hollander for her willingness to join the examining committee as a 3rd reader, and for her excellent questions during the defense. Thanks must also be offered to the administrative team in the Department of Religious Studies, and especially to Doreen Drew, for their efforts behind-the-scenes.

Thank you to the many who provided friendship and companionship along the way, both inside and outside the program. Thanks are particularly due to Kenji Dyck, who never failed to provide the most intimate support despite great geographical distance, and to Chase Padusniak, who served as an invaluable reader of my work and who offered me the solace of watching and discussing cinema. Thanks, also, to all who came from afar to visit Elaina and I in Hamilton (Myles, Nathan, Kayla, and Trevor). Your company was, and is, treasured.

I am overwhelmingly grateful for the comfort and assistance that my parents and sister provided during this process. Thanks, Mom and Dad, for lending your support and your home as I finished writing this thesis. Thanks, in addition, to my in-laws, who all played an important supportive role throughout this degree, especially during our time in Ontario. Your visits made Hamilton feel like more of a home—thank you.

Lastly, and certainly not least, I thank my wife, Elaina. You were there for me every step of the way, at the lowest of the lows and highest of the highs. I could not have done this without your relational strength and sacrifice. You are a daily reminder to me of the gift that is, to use Rose's words, the *work of love*.

INTRODUCTION

The philosophical discourse of modernity, animated at the outset by utopian aspirations of progress and gain, has become increasingly obsessed with the inversions of those aspirations. As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer paradigmatically claim in the opening of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."[1] Paradoxically, the modern preoccupation with universal freedom and progress seems to invite a renewed attention to the opposite realities of unfreedom and regression. Philosophy, so long as it is still bound up with reflectively interrogating modernity, has thus been in the business of accounting for and responding to losses of modern life: world wars, the so-called death of God, failed revolutions, environmental catastrophes provoked by global capitalism, and mass extermination. Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that in high modern culture, as Robert Pippin observes, "everywhere the figures and images had been and are again the images of death and loss and failure, and the language is the language of anxiety, unease, and mourning, or even … of melancholia, a depressive's attachment to a loss that has not been worked through, perhaps cannot be."[2]

The question then becomes to what extent philosophy's sense of responsiveness to the loss of modernity—or to modernity *as* loss—results in philosophy itself being at a loss. It is as if philosophers and all others keen to critically attend to the casualties of modernity have come to

[1] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), 3.

[2] Robert B. Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 1999), xii.

Dante's realization in the first canto of *The Divine Comedy*: "Midway in the journey of our life / I came to myself in a dark wood, / for the straight way was lost."[3] The ubiquitous philosophical and literary mood of modern melancholy, illustrated helpfully by Pippin, thus appears to necessitate aporetic conclusions, in the sense that an attunement to loss precipitates the recognition of the loss of way. But does the loss of *the* modern way, analogous to Dante's "straight way," require the loss of *a* way? Does an uncompromising willingness to face the ravages of modernity imply the stasis of a melancholy frozen in its grief?

Alongside her melancholic contemporaries, the subject of this thesis, Gillian Rose (1947-1995), comes to a similarly aporetic conclusion regarding the future of modern philosophy. Philosophy, Rose argues, must reckon with the loss of modernity, and such a reckoning requires an "acceptance of pathlessness."[4] For Rose, however, to accept pathlessness is to affirm the difficult, yet possible, prospect of essaying a way, precisely as a refusal of the assumption of any straight or singular way. As in the case of Dante's disorientation in the opening of *The Divine Comedy*, Rose figures the acknowledgement of loss, and the recognition of being at a loss, as the precondition of finding *a*—not *the*—way to go on.[5] Philosophy, as Rose will claim, requires not

[3] Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), I.1-3

[4] This, Rose argues, is one of three things needed to be a philosopher, in addition to intellectual eros—"endless curiosity about everything"—and attention—"to be rapt by what is in front of you without seizing it for yourself, the care of concentration." See Rose, *Paradiso* (London: Menard Press, 1999), 45.

[5] Here I follow Robert Harrison's argument that "it is precisely because Dante is moving in a straight line that he loses himself in the '*selva oscura*'," or dark forest. As Harrison explains further: "The first verses allude to 'life's path' as well as to the 'straight way.' We naturally assume that mortal life is being compared here to a linear path that loses its way in the forest. But perhaps that is not the case at all. The 'middle of our life's way' is not a midpoint on a linear trajectory; it is rather a turning point that calls for conversion, or turning around, in the Christian sense." See Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 82.

only the recognition of aporia but equally of *diaporia*, of "being at a loss yet exploring various routes towards the good enough justice."[6]

Gillian Rose's project may thus be framed as an attempt to probe whether the philosophical response to the loss of modernity might result in something other than melancholic fixation—the static play of a mourning that cannot work. This, I take it, is the central preoccupation of Rose's mature philosophy, and this thesis explores this theme by taking a closer look at one of its provocative yet undeveloped conceptual loci: violence. The cypher of violence plays a prevalent and provocative role in Rose's late works, but her approach to the question of violence is scattered and without a center. One of these scattered remains is the notion of the *Trauerspiel* or mourning-play, a reference to an obscure form of 17th century baroque drama famously taken up by Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. These allusions to the *Trauerspiel* and the "baroque" are thinly dispersed across Rose's last works, receiving little elaboration and development. And yet, these references play a prominent—even if cryptic and sporadic—role in Rose's discussions of the crises of contemporary philosophy, signalling the enduring significance of the category of the *Trauerspiel* for Rose's conception of modernity. To put this orientation in the form of a question: why should philosophy care about this now distant dramatic form, and what might it have to do with violence?

Outline of the Argument

Broadly put, the argument of this thesis is that Rose's utilization of the category of the *Trauerspiel* in her engagement with postmodern philosophy, and the notion of philosophy as comedy she develops in response, are conceptual keys for understanding her critique of violence

[6] Gillian Rose, *Love's Work: A Reckoning with Life* (1995; repr., New York: Review Books, 2011), 124.

in her mature or late period (from the publication of *The Broken Middle* in 1992 on). By accounting for and elaborating Rose's strewn references to the image of the *Trauerspiel* and its comedic counter-image, I contend that Rose's enigmatic conception of violence may be broached. The argument proceeds as follows.

The first chapter of this thesis provides the background for Rose's later constructive use of the dramatic category of the *Trauerspiel* in the context of contemporary social theory, as developed in *Love's Work* and *Mourning Becomes the Law*, by elaborating and contextualizing its origin in one of Rose's earlier essays on Walter Benjamin. In "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," Rose develops a critique of Benjamin by placing his study of baroque *Trauerspiel* in conversation with a tradition of philosophical reflection on the unintended consequences of the Protestant ethic, represented chiefly by Max Weber.[7] Rose claims that Benjamin lucidly attends to the Lutheran contours of the melancholic hypertrophy of inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) that characterizes the German baroque mourning-plays, while also presciently diagnosing the fascistic and violent consequences of that very melancholia. Benjamin, Rose alleges, recognizes the danger of this melancholic constellation in the incoming spectre of fascism in his own time, and attempts to counter it through the redemptive retrieval of a critical allegorical method from the ruins of the *Trauerspiel*. Instead of producing an anti-fascist *work* of mourning, however, Rose contends that Benjamin's philosophy reproduces the *play* of mourning that it purports to transcend—leaving it vulnerable to fascist appropriation.

Building on Rose's insinuation of the enduring philosophical relevance of the *Trauerspiel* in her critique of Benjamin, the second chapter elucidates the connection Rose makes between

[7] Gillian Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," in *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*, Radical Thinkers (1993; repr., London: Verso, 2017), 175-210.

the *Trauerspiel* as a historical dramatic form and the return of the *Trauerspiel* in the philosophical form of postmodernism. The chapter proceeds, therefore, by giving an account of how we get from a critique of Benjamin's study of a neglected form of baroque drama to Rose's claim, in *Love's Work*, that postmodernism "is the baroque excrescence of the Protestant ethic."[8] The development of this claim requires a reconstruction of Rose's genealogical account of modernity and, most importantly, its characteristic diremptions (separations between that which was once, but not originally, united). Put simply, the philosophical diremption or split between law and ethics, inherited from the Kantian tradition, is traced back to the political diremption between state and civil society, which is subsequently traced back to Protestant *Innerlichkeit* and its paradoxical valuation and de-valuation of the world. All modern thought inherits this dirempted history, Rose argues, but postmodern thought is charged with disowning and thus reifying these diremptions. Responding to the violence that issues from modernity's diremptions, exemplified by the fascist catastrophes of the 20th century, postmodernism renounces the corrupt institutions of law and reason, calling instead for a "new ethics" outside of the law. The attempt to bypass or stand outside the violence of modernity, however, re-enforces the very conditions of violence—the diremption of law and ethics—that it wishes to escape.

Against this conception of philosophy as a *Trauerspiel* that melancholically recoils from the failed universal gamble of law and reason, Rose develops a conception of philosophy as a comedy that presupposes violence as the precondition of education and growth *in* the law. This "comic" ability to bear the frustrations of experience is made possible by two movements: a retrospective movement that comprehends misrecognition and its dirempted history, and a

[8] Gillian Rose, *Love's Work*, 136.

prospective movement that, after repeatedly failing, risks recognition again. This conception of philosophy is comic, in the Hegelian sense, insofar as the experience of the mismatch between act and outcome—a mismatch ensured by the dirempted structure of modernity—is endured without bitterness. Whereas the *Trauerspiel* of postmodern philosophy is traumatized by a violence it disowns, Rose figures the modern experience of violence, when comprehended, as that which returns one to the difficult task of mutual recognition—what Rose calls the law.

The scholarly stakes of my account of Rose's comic re-framing of the relation between philosophy and violence become clear in the third chapter, where I engage with two prominent interpretations of Rose's critique of violence. Both Andrew Shanks and Anthony Gorman, I argue, falter in their interpretations of Rose to the extent that they miss the critical significance of the *double* movement of comedy.[9] In the case of Shanks, Rose's emphasis on the prospective movement of comedy that enables one to repeatedly risk violence and stake oneself *in* diremption is either downplayed or entirely ignored. Shanks thus bypasses Rose's insistence on the agonistic difficulty of *actively* negotiating the broken middle, resulting in what is, I argue, a false characterization of Rose as a "peace negotiator." Gorman, unlike Shanks, rightly attends to both the retrospective and prospective elements of Rose's philosophy of violence, but without holding them together. Rose's emphasis on a prospective movement that risks the universal is thus indicted for its blindness, indeterminacy, and love *of* violence, while the retrospective movement of reconstructing and comprehending history is indicted for its incapacity to enable the political transformation of social conditions. Picking up on Gorman's charge that Rose's emphasis on philosophical and cultural criticism is politically impotent, I close the chapter with a

[9] Andrew Shanks, *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 2008); Anthony Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 197 (2016): 25-35.

defense of Rosean cultural criticism, wherein the "representation of Fascism" reckons with the "fascism of representation," by way of Jonathan Glazer's 2023 film, *The Zone of Interest*. Resisting the separation of the critique of fascism as a political movement from the critique of modern culture, I suggest that Rose's analysis of contemporary Holocaust cinema, as borne out in my reading of *The Zone of Interest*, enables readers and viewers to reckon with—and thus not blindly repeat—the fascism politically presupposed in popular cultural representations of violence.

Methodological and Scholarly Orientation

The argumentative orientation of this thesis resides, first and foremost, *within* the oeuvre of Gillian Rose. My methodological approach to the study of Rose's conception of violence thus emphasizes the careful reading and interpretation of Rose's mature philosophical work on its own terms, paying particular attention to Rose's contribution to a tradition of critical reflection on the nature of modernity and its pernicious inheritance in 20th and 21st century social theory. My focus is not on the external verifiability of Rose's conception of violence, or on the veracity of her critique of postmodern philosophy, but on the importance of the notion of the *Trauerspiel* and its opposing image, comedy, for an understanding of Rose's project.

Accounting for Rose's work on its own terms presents considerable challenges, as Rose's philosophical voice is anything but univocal. Rose eschewed the assumption that one writes from the position of any stable identification: whether as a woman, Jew, or Hegelian. "If I knew who or what I were," Rose exclaims, "I would not write; I write out of those moments of anguish which are nameless and I am able to write only where the tradition can offer me a discipline, a

means, to articulate and explore that anguish."[10] Given the staggering intertextuality of Rose's philosophy, to engage with Rose on her own terms is also to engage with an equivocal collection of constructive and critical interlocutors. Joshua B. Davis gets it right when he writes that "the cornerstone of [Rose's] project is an idiosyncratic and, some might say, dubious reading of Hegel, but it is a reading that is often most instructive at the point that her voice overwhelms Hegel's."[11] Despite the fact that the retrieval of a speculative Hegel is the centerpiece of Rose's oeuvre, i.e., to narrowly identify Rose's body of work as Hegelian misses the often overwhelming breadth of her engagement with the modern philosophical tradition.

Rose, as Martin Jay puts it, had a "hedge-hog like ability to incorporate every possible position into her own worldview," which is not to suggest that she let her cherished philosophical interlocutors speak for her, but to suggest that she spoke through them.[12] But this also means that the boundaries between Rose's engagement with the authorships of Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Weber, and Adorno, to name only a handful of her prominent interlocutors, are not easily drawn. It is not always evident, to put it differently, where Hegel's influence ends and Marx or Kierkegaard or Adorno's begins. This willingness to assume different voices accounts for one aspect of Rose's self-proclaimed "facetious"—in the sense of faceted—style.[13] To avoid compromising the flexibility and singularity of Rose's philosophical *modus operandi*, I appeal to her interlocutors on their own terms only inasmuch as it is necessary to understand the contours

[10] Rose, "Preface," in *Judaism and Modernity*, v.

[11] Joshua B. Davis, "Introduction: By Way of the Valley of Roses," in *Misrecognitions: Gillian Rose and the Task of Political Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 2.

[12] Martin Jay, *Refractions of Violence* (London: Routledge, 2003), 66.

[13] Rose, "Preface," in *Judaism and Modernity*, vii.

of her project. Brief elaborations of Weber's study of Protestantism and Benjamin's study of baroque drama are necessary, for example, only insofar as they provide the background for Rose's reflections on the relation between the *Trauerspiel* of postmodern philosophy and its religious history.

As a contribution to the understanding of Rose's mature conception of violence, this thesis furthers the growing, yet limited, body of scholarship on Rose. Rose has exercised an intense influence on contemporary social theory, shaping the work of prominent scholars across multiple disciplines (such as the philosophers Slavoj Žižek and Robert Pippin, the historian Martin Jay, and the theologians John Milbank and Rowan Williams). And yet this influence has more often than not, as Vincent Lloyd narrates, flourished beneath the surface:

> Everywhere I went I kept encountering professors who loved Rose's work, who thought she was brilliant and right, but who had for one reason or another never mentioned her name in print. There were Jeffrey Stout and Cornel West at Princeton, both of whom taught Rose's books, Paul Mendes-Flohr at Chicago who knew her well, and Judith Butler and Daniel Boyarin at Berkeley.[14]

Despite the great, yet subtle, influence of Rose on prominent contemporary social theorists, her work has received very little scholarly attention in its own right. Alongside a number of book chapters, essays, and journal articles, there are only four existing monographs dedicated to Rose's work: in chronological order, Andrew Shanks's *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith* (2008),[15] Vincent Lloyd's *Law and Transcendence: On the*

[14] Vincent W. Lloyd, "The Race of the Soul: On Gillian Rose," in *Religion of the Field Negro* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 217.

[15] In *Against Innocence*, Shanks provides an overview of Rose's thought with an emphasis on the themes of innocence and faith. Argumentatively, Shanks takes Rose's deathbed conversion as a justification for "baptizing" and appropriating her thought for Christian theology. Shanks takes Rose's fierce opposition to innocence and purity as the project of a "universal mediator" that aims for the acknowledgement of sin and "genuinely unforced, cheerful accommodation between all interested

Unfinished Project of Gillian Rose (2009),[16] Kate Schick's *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice* (2012),[17] and Andrew Brower Latz's *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose* (2018).[18]

The significance of Rose's account of the dramatic category of the *Trauerspiel*, and its comedic alternative, has not received due treatment in this body of scholarship, especially as an important conceptual resource for making sense of her mature reflections on violence. To address this gap, I flesh out and contextualize Rose's references to the *Trauerspiel*, while elucidating the way these categories inform her unique conception of violence. My contribution to the body of scholarship on Rose is not merely additive, however. The understanding of Rose's conception of violence enabled by paying attention to her competing accounts of philosophy as a comedy or *Trauerspiel* illuminates, I contend, a number of problems in prominent interpretations of her approach to the question of violence. In particular, I argue that acknowledging the prospective and retrospective double movement of comedy problematizes the positioning of Rose as a

---

parties" (32). Andrew Shanks, *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 2008).

[16] Lloyd, in *Law and Transcendence*, reads Rose as a thinker who refused various transcendental enchantments of ordinary life that fantastically avoid the difficult interplay between social norms and practices. Rose, Lloyd argues, provides us with the philosophical tools to develop an "immodest jurisprudence," a form of inquiry immanent to social forms and practices (19). Vincent W. Lloyd, *Law and Transcendence: On the Unfinished Project of Gillian Rose* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[17] Schick's *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice* is, on one hand, an introduction to the essentials of Rose's thought, and on the other hand, an application of Rose's thought to contemporary debates in political theory and international relations. Rose, for Schick, offers an equivocal voice against the eschewal of political trauma, between liberal cosmopolitanism and postmodern particularity, and between tragedy and utopia. Kate Schick, *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

[18] Latz's *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose* is the most systematic existing attempt to account for Rose's thought on its own terms. Latz penetrates through the verbosity of Rose's prose and sets out a coherent structure and aim of her philosophy. Focusing on her trilogy—*Hegel Contra Sociology*, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, and *The Broken Middle*—Latz argues that Rose's project can be understood as a distinctive inheritance of, and contribution to, social theory in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. Andrew Brower Latz, *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018).

thinker that minimizes or enables violence, by Andrew Shanks and Anthony Gorman, respectively.

CHAPTER ONE | From Protestant Melancholy to the Spirit of Fascism: Rose on Benjamin's Study of the German *Trauerspiel*

In 2015, while studying Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus*—the painting popularized and formerly owned by Walter Benjamin—the American artist R. H. Quaytman made a peculiar discovery.[19] Between the watercolour paper and the cardboard it is glued to, Quaytman noticed a dark unidentified engraving. It was initially evident that the engraving was of a figure in a dark robe, but the particulars were unknown. After much archival work, however, Quaytman was able to identify the figure. Behind *Angelus Novus* lies a portrait of none other than Martin Luther, engraved by Friedrich Müller. The discovery is, of course, of no great significance in and of itself; and yet, it may not be arbitrary. At first, the relation between the engraving and the image superimposed on it appears to be one of tension and disunity: Luther, initiator of modernity and hero of German nationalism, invisibly haunts the Messianic angel that bears traumatic witness to the debris that piles up in the very name of modernity. But is this the only way to narrate the discovery of this obscured relation? Might the discovery reveal an unexpected affinity, instead?

Many years before this discovery, Gillian Rose gave an account of such an affinity. In an essay titled "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," Rose situates the enduring significance of Benjamin's work, and especially his study *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, in relation to the religious, political, and philosophical predicaments that arise in the wake of the Reformation.[20] Placing Benjamin in conversation with Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic, this chapter elaborates Rose's framing of *The Origin of German Trauerspiel* in

[19] For an account of this story and the implications for the understanding of Klee's painting and Benjamin's philosophy, see Annie Bourneuf, *Behind the Angel of History: The "Angelus Novus" and Its Interleaf* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[20] See *Judaism and Modernity*, 175-210.

terms of a continued analysis of the "unintended consequences" of Protestantism in the context of baroque drama and the German Counter Reformation. With the advent of a new sense of the emptiness of the world in the wake of Luther's repudiation of "good works," Benjamin attends to the quality of the melancholy that pervades the neglected German mourning plays of the 17th century. As Benjamin discerns, in the baroque period melancholy descends into violence, and obsession with decay pairs with political intrigue and tyrannical sovereignty. Contained in Benjamin's analysis of baroque melancholy and violence, Rose claims, is an indispensable account of the origin of the "spirit of Fascism," and yet Benjamin's excavation of an allegorical method from the ruins of the *Trauerspiel* risks the repetition of that very same violence. The principal aim of this chapter is to clarify and develop the nature of Rose's critical reading of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study, which sets the stage for Rose's subsequent critique of contemporary social theory.

The Protestant Ethic and the Relativization of Vocation

Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, narrates the inception and eventual domination of new mode of relating to and experiencing the world, ushered in under the influence of the Protestant Reformation. In the context of Weber's argument, it is Calvinism and its offspring that are emphasized as the most formative influence on the eventual development of the "capitalist spirit": "that attitude which, in the pursuit of a calling, strives systematically for profit for its own sake."[21] The precursor to this spirit of capitalism is what Weber calls "worldly asceticism," a new way of relating to the secular world that was realized in Calvinist sects but made possible by Luther's notion of the "calling" or *Beruf*. Prior to the

[21] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism: And Other Writings*, ed. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 19.

Reformation, the inertia of the true Christian life was oriented toward the transcendence of "worldly" affairs through ascetic discipline in religious institutions like the monastery. By repudiating the possibility of achieving or working for salvation by way of the doctrine of *sola fide*, however, Luther undermined the traditional direction of moral and spiritual energy towards privileged stations and positions defined precisely by their distance from, or transcendence of, the profane world. As Luther himself puts it: "Since then this faith can reign only in the inward man … it is evident that by no outward work or labour can the inward man be at all justified, made free, and saved; and that no works whatever have any relation to him."[22] One's station in life was essentially irrelevant to justification, because if no activity on earth could earn salvation then no station ought to be privileged above others.[23] Any claim to achieve such a position would hypocritically presuppose a hierarchy of vocations that does not exist.[24] Luther thus echoes the Apostle Paul's injunction to "remain in the condition in which you were called" (1 Corinthians 7: 20), encouraging followers of Christ *not* to radically alter their worldly position upon hearing the call.

But if one is saved by faith and not by works, what is the significance of one's activity in the world? If *sola fide* effectively severs the tie between faith and works, Luther's conception of *Beruf* provisionally mends that severed tie, though on different—and more precarious—grounds than in Catholic theology. Despite Luther's fundamental indifference to the nature of one's work

[22] Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty* (Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, 1999).

[23] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 29.

[24] It is worth noting that vocations are equal, in this view, so long as they are legitimate. There is, in other words, still a distinction to be made between dishonourable (i.e. sinful) and honourable work in the Lutheran view. Cf. Jane E. Strohl, "The Framework for Christian Living: Luther on the Christian's Callings," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 367.

in the world, Weber notes that Luther comes to understand labour in a calling as the dutiful "outward expression of Christian charity."[25] In Weber's words, "the concrete occupation of the individual became increasingly a special *command* of God to him to discharge the duties of *this* concrete situation, into which divine providence had directed him."[26] Thus, the salvific potentiality of works is replaced and amended by the notion of the worldly vocation, a vocation that now bears religious significance by virtue of its expression of a pre-existing inward faith. The calling is, in other words, "the link that joins faith to works."[27]

The overall thrust of Weber's account of Luther is that "fulfilment of duty within secular callings" becomes, by way of this new concept, the "*highest* level possible for moral activity."[28] Such a shift in estimation of secular work has radical practical implications for the organization and conduct of life *in* the world, and Weber is particularly interested in the Calvinist radicalization of these principles. According to Weber, Luther's skepticism regarding the salvific importance of ethical discipline and asceticism foreclosed the realization of any radical potential. Whereas the Calvinists went on to understand vocation as an outward task to secure knowledge of one's position among the elect, Luther emphasized inward acceptance of and submission to one's given lot; as such, Lutheranism remained fundamentally passive.[29]

[25] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 29.

[26] Ibid., 31.

[27] Strohl, "The Framework for Living: Luther on the Christian's Callings," 367.

[28] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 29.

[29] Ibid., 32, 78.

On the one hand, Luther's complete repudiation of "works" appears to empty the everyday world of its significance, insofar as the constitutive relation between works and redemption is severed. On the other hand, Luther's concept of *Beruf* is the condition for the possibility of an unprecedented release of moral energy into secular, everyday life. It is in the context of this paradoxical theological situation, especially as it develops in the Counter-Reformation, that Walter Benjamin situates the inception of baroque mourning-plays in *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*.[30] Instead of focusing on the practical implications of the "Protestant ethic" on the development of capitalism, as Weber does, Benjamin investigates the ramifications of Lutheranism's "antinomic" relation to the everyday as it manifests itself in the baroque period.[31]

The Empty World of the *Trauerspiel*

In *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, Benjamin is particularly invested in exploring the profound sense of melancholy and mournfulness that permeates the works of the German dramatists of the baroque period, such as Martin Opitz, Andreas Gryphius, and Daniel Caspar von Lohenstein. The melancholy that pervades the works of these dramatists, Benjamin alleges, is directly linked to their Lutheran religious inheritances. Benjamin writes:

> The rigorous morality of [Lutheran] teaching in respect of civic conduct stood in sharp contrast to its renunciation of 'good works.' By denying the latter any special miraculous spiritual effect, making the soul dependent on grace through faith, and making the secular-political sphere a testing ground for a life which was only indirectly religious,

[30] In the edition of Benjamin's text in use, the title is translated as *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. This is a misleading translation, as one of Benjamin's central arguments in the text is that German *Trauerspiel* (literally: mourning-play) is characterized precisely in its radical distinction from classical tragedy. Therefore, I either leave *Trauerspiel* untranslated or use the more literal translation.

[31] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London; Verso, 2023), 138.

> being intended for the demonstration of civic virtues, it did, it is true, instil into the people a strict sense of obedience to duty, but in its great men it produced melancholy.[32]

While the Lutheran emphasis on vocation claimed to re-establish the connection between external action and inner faith, "those who looked deeper," Benjamin argues, "saw the scene of their existence as a rubbish heap of partial, inauthentic actions."[33] Insofar as Luther practically abolishes any ground for the distinction between legitimate vocations, the specific character of a life or substance of an action becomes nearly irrelevant, especially as it relates to redemption. Calvinism partially corrects this problem by making the everyday the proving ground of faith; by insisting, in other words, that "tireless labor in a calling" was the "best possible means" of assuring oneself of one's place among the pre-destined elect.[34] Lutheranism, however, remained unable to commit to a comparable solution, and as such the paradoxical estimation of earthly life continued to hold sway. The value of human actions was severely dislocated, and thus "something new arose: an empty world."[35]

In addition to and in concert with the new sense of the emptiness of the world, Benjamin argues that the world of the baroque mourning-plays is characterized by a loss of eschatology, by the loss of hope in any redemptive arc through, or at the end of, time. "The baroque," Benjamin argues, "knows no eschatology; and for that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all the earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end."[36] In

[32] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 138.

[33] Ibid., 139.

[34] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 77.

[35] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 138-9.

[36] Ibid., 66.

Luther's time, the potential meaninglessness of action was made bearable by virtue of an inward faith in, and hope for, redemption in the consummation of time. More traditionally still, the suffering and apparent meaninglessness of finite life may be, as in the case of Christ, figured as "stations" on a linear, narrative "road to salvation."[37] Such consolation, however, was inconceivable in the *Trauerspiel*. The emptiness of the world is thus heightened, as even the deferred eschatological hope of fulfillment is denied; as such, "the German *Trauerspiel* is taken up entirely with the hopelessness of the earthly condition."[38]

The hopelessness of actions and of the world more broadly is, then, the defining context of the baroque. It is, in other words, the meaninglessness of actions and the erasure of a transcendent future that necessitate that baroque drama take the form of a mourning-play. Yet, what apparently fascinates Benjamin about the *Trauerspiel* is not how it manages to effectively describe or representatively mirror the existing hopeless world of the baroque, but how it radically accepts and "plays" with this emptiness. The German mourning-plays are obsessively preoccupied with the futility of this life, figured as some kind of cruel, incessant game. Take, for example, a passage from the dedication of Lohenstein's *Sophonisbe*, which Benjamin cites:

> As now of mortals the whole life's course begins in childhood with games, so does life end in vain games. As Rome celebrated the day of Augustus' birth with games, so too with play and splendour will the victim's body be brought to burial … The blind Samson goes playing to his grave; and our brief life is nothing but a poem. A play in which now one man enters and now another leaves; with tears it begins and with weeping it ends. Yea, after death time also plays with us, when maggot and worm burrow in our decaying bodies.[39]

[37] Ibid., 81.

[38] Ibid.

[39] As cited in Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* 82-3.

The "contemplative necessity" that arises out of the theological predicament of the baroque, Benjamin claims, "is the attempt to find, in a reversion to a bare state of creation, consolation for the renunciation of a state of grace."[40] Consolation is not found, however, in retrieving eschatological promise or the transcendent significance of worldly actions; instead, consolation is sought "within the depths of this [hopeless] destiny itself."[41] The depth of this destiny is, for the *Trauerspiel*, the transient world of things. According to Benjamin, "the decisive factor in the escapism of the baroque is not the antithesis of history and nature but the comprehensive secularization of the historical in the [graceless] state of creation."[42] The *Trauerspiel* dramas are thus characterized by an unprecedented obsession with the material, creaturely world, but particularly *as* a historical setting of decay, death, and decline.[43]

In the wake of the Counter-Reformation and the Thirty Years' War, the decay of history as nature is staged, by the baroque dramatists, in a context of new forms of secular political power. Despite the failure of the aspiration for transcendence, "religious aspirations did not lose their importance: it was just that this century denied them a religious fulfilment, demanding of them,

[40] Ibid., 81.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., 92; the secularization of history in the *Trauerspiel*, as Illit Ferber points out, results in an emphasis on the spatial, rather than temporal, dimension of history: "Instead of a structure of temporal succession, everything in the broken continuum is placed side by side, spread out to cover the ground like seeds (*TS*, 92). The site where nature and history merge is the place where redemptive linearity is absent: this is where history is grasped as spatial and not temporal." See Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Language* (Stanford, Stanford University Press: 2013), 28.

[43] Ibid., 179: "nature remained the great teacher for the writers of this period. However, nature was not seen by them in bud and bloom, but in the over-ripeness and decay of her creations. In nature they saw eternal transience, and here alone did the saturnine vision of this generation recognize history."

or imposing upon them, a secular solution instead."[44] As such, the search for the consolation of lost salvation takes place in the historical-political setting of a sovereign's court. Drawing inspiration from Carl Schmitt, Benjamin narrates the predicament of the sovereign through the vicissitudes of wielding executive power—of deciding on the "state of emergency" in which the rule of law is suspended. "The ruler," Benjamin writes, "is designated from the outset as the holder of dictatorial power if war, revolt, or other catastrophes should lead to the state of emergency."[45]

The *Trauerspiel*, however, typically portrays the sovereign as an indecisive figure unfit for the task: "Disacles, go without another word. But no, stay! I die, I tremble, I am struck with horror. Yet go! There is no time for doubt. Wait! Be Gone! Alas! Look how the tears flow and how my heart is breaking! Away, away! It cannot be altered now."[46] The predicament of rule as deciding on the state of exception results in two different faces of the sovereign: in instances where the vice of the sovereign is at stake, this crisis of indecision leads to arbitrary tyranny, and, when virtue is emphasised, the crisis results in passive contemplation and martyrdom.[47] As Howard Caygill summarizes, the sovereign "embodies the meaninglessness of absolute power, for those who claim power to control signification find themselves powerless to control the train of events, and in their brutal sincerity are plunged into a stasis of melancholy."[48] Caught between

[44] Ibid., 79.

[45] Ibid., 65.

[46] Lohenstein, as cited in ibid., 71.

[47] Howard Caygill, "Walter Benjamin's Concept of Allegory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[48] Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 59.

the absolute power of his role and the limitations of his creatureliness, the sovereign of the *Trauerspiel* is condemned to melancholy—paradigmatically illustrating the predicament of life in the empty world.

Opposed to the sovereign, in its two faces as tyrant and martyr, is the other central figure of the *Trauerspiel*: the intriguer or courtier. Disguised as a faithful counsellor to the sovereign, the intriguer is a Machiavellian opportunist—"all intellect and will-power"[49]—that exploits the sovereign's melancholy and mocks his impotence, highlighting his failure *as* sovereign. Though ostensibly a servant, the intriguer is defined by his complete lack of faithfulness to humanity; instead, Benjamin claims, the intriguer is motivated by a "hopeless loyalty" to the world of things—especially to the properties of the "crown, royal purple, and sceptre"—under no higher law.[50] If the figure of the sovereign represents, in a sense, the failure—and impossibility—of re-instating stable meaning in a empty world, the figure of the intriguer represents the active and exploitative acceptance of such a world.[51] As Rose claims, the intriguer is "the Baroque ethic par excellence," [52] insofar as Protestant "strict inner discipline" is paired with "unscrupulous external action"; the result is "an icy disillusion which is matched in intensity only by the fierce aspiration of the will to power."[53] The intriguer thus represents the devilish face of the melancholy that arises from a world, such as the baroque, in which actions are devalued and redemptive

[49] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 85.

[50] Ibid., 156.

[51] Samuel Weber, "Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt," *Diacritics* 22, no. 3/4 (1992): 16.

[52] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," *Judaism and Modernity*, 193.

[53] Benjamin, *The Origin of Tragic Drama*, 98.

eschatological arcs are lost. The predominance of the intriguer in the *Trauerspiel* accounts for the way that the aestheticization of the world, the rendering of the world as a fragmentary collection of material things separated from their meaning, results in an aestheticized politics of violence. Detached from morality and intentionality, politics in the *Trauerspiel* is depicted as the mere "corrupt energy of schemers."[54]

Allegory and Redemption

In sum, the sovereign—as tyrant or martyr—and the intriguer represent a range of responses that arise from baroque melancholy, the disposition that mourns the loss of salvation and, concurrently, the desertion of the *Dingwelt*. Despite the violent or "pernicious" expression of baroque melancholy in the form of the tyrant and the intriguer, Benjamin attends, in the second part of his study, to the redemptive potential in this new mournful way of relating to the world. Benjamin turns away from a predominantly descriptive account of the *Trauerspiel* to a constructive account of this new way of seeing, by way of the category of allegory.

First and foremost, Benjamin needs allegory as a category in order to describe the peculiarity of the baroque world and the possibilities of significance within it. If, in symbolism, the relation between the finite signification and the infinite is a matter of realization or participation, in allegory signification is cut off from its potential relation to the absolute. "Whereas in the symbol," Benjamin argues, "destruction is idealized and the transfigured face of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a petrified, primordial landscape."[55] Through the eye of

[54] Ibid., 88.

[55] Ibid., 166.

allegory, the world appears as a collection of dispersed fragments that pile up, not as a tower toward a transcendent horizon, but as a ruin. As Benjamin puts it, "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things."[56]

Alongside the destructive dimension of the experience of life and history as a fragmentary ruin, allegory remains, for the melancholic, a paradoxical source of contemplative pleasure.[57] That the meaning of things is restricted to an immanent sphere of death and decay does not, in other words, foreclose the construction of deep significance. As depicted in Albrecht Dürer's *Melancolia I*, under the gaze of allegory "the utensils of active life … [lay] around unused on the floor, as objects of contemplation."[58] Since the relation of a sign to the universal is severed, the melancholic allegorist steps in as one who bestows meaning on a pile of shards, subjectively reviving the empty world:[59]

> Any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility a destructive, but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance. But it will be unmistakably apparent, especially to anyone who is familiar with allegorical textual exegesis, that all of the things which are used to signify derive, from the very fact of their pointing to something else, a power which makes them appear no longer commensurable with profane things, which raises them onto a higher plane, and which can, indeed, sanctify them. Considered in allegorical terms, then, the profane world is both elevated and devalued.[60]

[56] Ibid., 178.

[57] As Benjamin puts it: "The only pleasure the melancholic permits himself, and it is a powerful one, is allegory" (*The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, 185).

[58] Ibid., 140.

[59] Ibid., 139.

[60] Ibid., 175.

Paradoxically, then, it is the very insignificance and interchangeability of the "pile of debris" that lend them their rich *allegorical* significance, when contemplated under the gaze of melancholy.

The allegorical antinomy of the de-valuation and re-valuation of the world is, in Benjamin's analysis, the condition for the possibility of the re-introduction of the light of redemption into the scene of baroque melancholy. In an abrupt and cryptic reversal at the very end of *The Origin of German Trauerspiel*, Benjamin contends that all of melancholy's "darkness, vainglory, and godlessness seems to be nothing but self-delusion."[61] Inverting the earlier claim that the *Trauerspiel* is defined resolutely by hopelessness and lack of salvation, Benjamin suggests that the allegorical contemplation of ruins of decay is itself an allegory of redemption:

> The bleak confusion of Golgotha, which can be recognized as the schema underlying the allegorical figures in hundreds of engravings and descriptions of the period, is not just a symbol of the desolation of human existence. In it transitoriness is not signified or allegorically represented, so much as, in its own significance, displayed as allegory. As the allegory of resurrection. Ultimately in the death-signs of the baroque the direction of allegorical reflection is reversed; on the second part of its wide arc it returns, to redeem.[62]

Benjamin thus accounts for the limitation of the allegorical obsession with decay and death, which springs forth from the melancholy of the age and results in arbitrary or playful violence. But the allegorical contemplation of the world as ruin bears the dialectical imprint of transcendence; thus, "the solution to the riddle of *Trauerspiel* is to be found in the fact that not in spite of but *because of* the utter squalor and despair of its material content, it is ultimately transformed into a theological drama of salvation."[63]

---

[61] Ibid., 232.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 69-70; this claim leads Wolin and scholars like Max Pensky to emphasize the negative Messianic theology underlying Benjamin's reading of the *Trauerspiel*. See Penksy, *Melancholy*

In this concluding movement of the text, Benjamin allegorizes baroque allegory and redeems it in the process. Allegory is, therefore, not only a descriptive category pertaining to a historical dramatic form, but a mode of criticism in its own right. As Susan Buck-Morss argues, "The *Trauerspiel* study attempts to 'redeem' allegory theoretically. … Not the allegorical object (tragic drama), but the allegorical practice is redeemed."[64] Similarly, Richard Wolin claims—echoing Benjamin's own oft-used distinction—that if hopelessness is the material content of the *Trauerspiel*, redemption is its truth content.[65] Allegory is, in one sense, the very essence of *Trauerspiel*; and yet allegory is required to redeem it.

Stepping into the role of the allegorist himself, Benjamin bestows meaning on the *Trauerspiel*—a lost and dismissed object, itself—by attending to its neglected truth-content. Benjamin's study ought not, therefore, to be understood as (or, at the least, not only as) a work concerned with the defense of the *historical* importance of a distant art-form, but instead, in Wolin's words, as a work that establishes "the validity of fragmentary or problematic art as the form of expression historico-philosophically appropriate to ages of decline."[66] As becomes evident in Benjamin's later work on Baudelaire and his *Arcades Project*, the re-vitalization of the practice of allegory is precisely bound up with the contemporary predicament of modernity and the enduring fragmentation of society.

Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 106.

[64] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), 18.

[65] Wolin, *Walter Benjamin: An Aesthetic of Redemption*, 69-70.

[66] Ibid., 76.

Baroque Melancholy and the Spirit of Fascism

Taking up the link between ages of decline and allegorical melancholy, Rose locates the significance of *The Origin of German Trauerspiel* not only in its account of a historical period riddled with the antinomies of the Protestant Reformation, but in its prescient diagnosis of predicaments that would continue to animate the development of modernity, through the growth of capitalism and the advent of fascism. Paying particular attention to the latter, Rose situates Benjamin's argument in the *Trauerspiel* (and his oeuvre more broadly) within a tradition of reflection—including Weber, Hegel, Goethe, Kierkegaard, and others—on the "unintended consequences" of Protestantism. As noted earlier in this chapter, Weber accounts for an unprecedented release of energy into the organization of worldly affairs, spawned by the new Protestant emphasis on the religious significance of secular vocations. At the same time, the significance of action in the world is devalued (by virtue of Luther's renunciation of justification through works), resulting in what Rose calls "hypertrophy of the inner life."[67] Benjamin picks up the strand of Weber's argument concerned with the growth of *Innerlichkeit*, Rose argues, but in the baroque context of the Counter-Reformation. In this context, the promise of, and hope in, salvation has withered, which results in an empty world and a profound sense of mournfulness. As Rose will put it, summarizing an aspect of Benjamin's study: "Melancholy is the logical outcome of Protestantism."[68] The loss of hope in salvation or redemption, however, does not thwart religious aspiration; instead, as Rose contends, "the inner anxiety of salvation persists and

[67] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," *Judaism and Modernity*, 180.

[68] Ibid., 194.

is combined with worldly opportunism and ruthlessness."[69] It is the analysis of this combination, as developed by Benjamin in the *Trauerspiel* study, that serves as the link between the Protestant ethic and what Rose will call "the spirit of Fascism."[70]

Stating the case strongly, Rose proposes the thesis "that Benjamin's account of the origin of Fascism is contained in his exploration of seventeenth-century Baroque drama."[71] Going a step further than her claim that Protestantism leads logically to melancholy, Rose argues that an implication of Benjamin's argument in *The Origin of German Trauerspiel* is that "our tendency to melancholy, however intellectual and passive, is violent."[72] As becomes clear throughout the course of Benjamin's study, the baroque is characterized by the subjective contemplation of an empty world, the substance of which is untouchable. Rose categorizes this mode of relation to the world as the "spirit of Fascism":

> In philosophical terms, the spirit of Fascism does not mean that spiritual value is accorded to Fascism, but that Benjamin derives the meaning of 'Fascism' from the violence of its relation to actuality—this is *spirit* in Hegel's sense of misrecognition of otherness. Fascist violence is itself derived from the change in the structure of experience—the subjectivity which issues from and responds to the atrophy of substance.[73]

---

[69] Ibid., 180.

[70] Ibid., 181.

[71] Ibid., 190. Though Rose does reflect at length on the social conditions in Benjamin's time, she is not the only one to read Benjamin's study of *Trauerspiel* in relation to the question of fascism in 20th century Germany. See, especially, Jane O. Newman, *Benjamin's Library Modernity, Nation, and the Baroque* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[72] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," *Judaism and Modernity*, 190.

[73] Ibid., 181.

The baroque loss of eschatology, in other words, instigates a melancholic flight inwards, in which the ruins of a once active life may be allegorically contemplated and redeemed. Through this allegorical movement, however, signification is turned into mere aesthetic ornamentation—meaning without truth—which is a breeding ground for brutality, as is borne out dramatically in the dialectic between the sovereign and intriguer.[74] "The independence gained from the protest against illegitimate traditional authority," Rose writes, "comes at the cost of the incessant anxiety of autonomy. Chronically beset with inner turmoil, the individual may nevertheless become roguishly adept at directing and managing the world to her own ends."[75] In a powerful turn of phrase, Rose thus announces the transformation of Luther's "priesthood of all believers" into the "Princedom of all believers," insofar as "every unscrupulous action is justified in a world where signification has been separated from salvation."[76] Conduct thus suffers the same fate of objects under the allegorical gaze: the ground of distinction is pulled out from under experience of the world, leaving behind a relativized heap of objects and actions.

The impotent sovereign and willful intriguer are but two sides of the same coin; in the baroque, violence is the other face of melancholy. The force of Rose's claim regarding this intimate relation between melancholy and violence is not made, it ought to be noted, in order to highlight Benjamin's own failure to make the same connection. Rose is clear about her indebtedness to Benjamin's discovery of this "constellation" and the danger that it poses, which endures into the twentieth century and beyond. Rose, however, maintains that Benjamin's answer

[74] Cf. Benjamin's statement that "the logical outcome of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life," in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 194-5.

[75] Rose, *Love's Work*, 40.

[76] Ibid., 190.

to the danger posed by baroque melancholy, as developed at the end of the study and in the rest of his oeuvre, is unsatisfactory. Repeating what may be the central motif of her philosophy, Rose contends that Benjamin remains overly determined by the melancholy he purports to transcend. Instead of redeeming the *Trauerspiel* through the critical appropriation of its truth-content, Benjamin "fixes what he discerns."[77] The substance of the *Trauerspiel*, and the critical allegorical method that Benjamin excavates from its ruins, both bear the mark of baroque melancholy—and, by extension, baroque violence.

Rose is suspicious, in other words, of Benjamin's retrieval of the allegorical method from the *Trauerspiel* and its supposed redemption. The ambiguity of the salvific turn at the end of the text, in which the allegorization of allegory leads to emblems of hopelessness being read as signs of redemption, leads to different critical possibilities. Susan Buck-Morss, for example, maintains, by reference to Scholem, that underneath this salvific reversal is a Kabbalistic critique of baroque Christian theology and its "antimaterial, otherworldly" conception of redemption.[78] On such a reading, Benjamin's concluding refrain that "allegory goes away empty-handed" would also apply to this manufactured flash of redemption, not only to the pernicious melancholy of the sovereign and intriguer.[79] Rose, in a manner more analogous to Wolin, reads the conclusion in such a way that the redemptive allegorical reversal is the Messianic pearl to be retrieved from the shipwreck by Benjamin.[80] In quite the opposite direction of Buck-Morss, then, Rose chides

[77] Ibid.

[78] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 230.

[79] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 233.

[80] Cf. Hannah Arendt's description of Benjamin as the "pearl diver" in the introduction to *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Mariner Books Classics, 2019), xlix.

Benjamin precisely for figuring redemption as invisible and otherworldly, in such a way that salvation is rendered as completely incommensurate with finite life. Benjamin's invocations of redemption are, for Rose, entirely divorced from the possibility of *revelation*, not in the narrow theological sense of the "Word of God" or Divine law, but as mediation or representation in human politics. In an important footnote, Rose approvingly references Scholem's claim that "when [Benjamin] had turned to historical materialism, out of those two categories of Revelation and Redemption only the latter was preserved *expressis verbis* but not the former."[81] Rose concurs with this assessment, except that she extends this evaluation to the entirety of his work. Benjamin eschews the possibility of revelation because the temperament of his philosophy and the condition of his perception remains melancholic—preoccupied, in other words, with an empty world. Instead of simply repeating baroque melancholy, however, Rose claims that Benjamin's melancholy is characterized by the Judaic image of *agunah*—"the deserted wife, who has not been sent a bill of divorce and who does not know if her husband is still alive; she may not remarry nor does she even know whether she may embark on mourning."[82] In a state of desertion, the world cannot reveal any sign of redemption, except through the negative theological provocation of allegory.

Supported by a reading of Benjamin's other early essays, especially "On Language as Such and the Language of Man" and "The Critique of Violence," Rose concludes that Benjamin's philosophy results in a form of antinomianism.[83] Because the world is empty and

[81] Gershom Scholem, as cited in *Judaism and Modernity*, 181n21.

[82] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 182.

[83] Rose appears to provide a much more charitable and nuanced reading of Benjamin in the essay "Of Derrida's Spirit," also from *Judaism and Modernity* (cf. 65-87). In this instance, Rose protects

deserted, redemption may only fleetingly flash in divine violence that abolishes law and mediation. In these early essays, the distinction between fallen life and the divine is absolute, and because any mediation between realms is foreclosed in the eschewal of revelation, there are no criteria for making distinctions or judgements.[84] "For only mythic violence, not divine violence, can be recognized as such with certainty, unless it be through incomparable effects," Benjamin writes, "for the de-expiating force [*Kraft*] of violence is not disclosed to human beings."[85] Divine violence is precisely defined as traceless and non-representable, and thus the concept may be useful only as a necessary fiction or regulative ideal that grounds the critique of finite life.[86] The catch is that, faced with the same predicament of desertion, fascism likewise "usurps divine violence in the spectacle of war which is to abolish the boundaries of the world."[87] By virtue of the mystical character of this appeal to redemption, and as a consequence of Benjamin's abandonment of revelation, Rose concludes that "there is no way to distinguish law-abolishing violence from law-making violence that *decides* in the state of emergency to usurp divinity."[88]

Benjamin on his own terms from the supposed Derridean misreading of "The Critique of Violence." To gain perspective on Rose's view of Benjamin overall, it would be instructive to compare the readings of Benjamin in these two essays. For the purpose of my discussion, however, I stick with the essay dedicated to Benjamin.

[84] Anthony Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 197 (2016): 31.

[85] Walter Benjamin, "Toward the Critique of Violence," in *Toward the Critique of Violence: A Critical Edition*, trans. Julia Ng, eds. Peter Fenves, Julia Ng (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2021), 60.

[86] Peter Fenves, "Introduction," in *Toward the Critique of Violence*, 33; *Toward the Critique of Violence*, 276n90.

[87] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," *Judaism and Modernity*, 189.

[88] Ibid., 188.

Despite the intention to articulate an alternative to the Fascist state of emergency, then, Benjamin's apocalyptic intimations of redemption issue from the same melancholic relation to substance or actuality that makes fascism possible.[89]

Ultimately, Rose identifies Benjamin himself with Klee's *Angelus Novus*,[90] the so-called angel of history: "Propelled backwards into the future by a storm from paradise, he cannot stay and he cannot dissolve, but must impotently watch in horror the single catastrophe of History, the infernal raging caused by the same paradisical storm, as it piles up its debris at his feet."[91] Rose thus contends that, like the angel of history displayed at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, Benjamin is haunted by the melancholic spectre of a Lutheranism that yearns, in times of historical catastrophe and political intrigue, for an inaccessible redemption. What might it look like, however, to acknowledge this fraught history—in which inner religious zeal becomes melancholy, which in turn becomes violence—without repeating it? Is philosophy steeped in the ruinous history of modernity bound to put on another mourning-play, or might it "replace the lost

[89] This is by no means the implication of Rose's argument, but Jane O. Newman, in the concluding chapter of *Benjamin's Library*, discusses the surprising influence of Benjamin's study of the baroque on certain Nazi-sponsored texts. Cf. "Baroque Legacies: National Socialism's Benjamin," in Newman, *Benjamin's Library*, 185-203.

[90] Josh Cohen challenges this identification and the stasis it implies, arguing that Benjamin "continually seeks ways to inhabit this [nihilistic] time actively (like the Intriguer), rather than melancholically (like the Sovereign)." Unfortunately, this claim fails to understand that the activity of the intriguer is as grounded in melancholy as the passivity of the sovereign, on Benjamin's account. See Josh Cohen, "Phenomenologies of Mourning: Gillian Rose and Walter Benjamin," *Women (Oxford, England)* 9, no. 1 (1998): 57.

[91] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," *Judaism and Modernity*, 209.

objects by fresh ones equally or still more precious" and thus produce a work of mourning (*Trauerarbeit*)?[92]

[92] Sigmund Freud, "On Transience," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1957), 307.

CHAPTER TWO | The Violence of Modernity: *Trauerspiel* or Comedy?

As may already be clear, the significance of Rose's critique of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* is not limited to a set of interpretive or exegetical claims about Benjamin's philosophical *corpus*. In this chapter I will argue that the concept of the *Trauerspiel*, and its unacknowledged religious and political history, is central to Rose's mature diagnosis of the problems that plague contemporary philosophy and social thought. Building on the essay on Benjamin and its conceptual infrastructure, in *Mourning Becomes the Law* and *Love's Work* Rose develops the notion of philosophy *as* a *Trauerspiel*, which functions as the dominant counter-image to her constructive re-conception of philosophy through the dramatic Hegelian image of "comedy." An account of these contrasting dramatic conceptions of philosophy is developed in this chapter by narrating their respective relations to Rose's genealogical account of modernity and, ultimately, to the problem of violence. The *Trauerspiel* of postmodern philosophy, Rose contends, is determined and traumatized by a dirempted history that it disowns, rendering philosophy powerless to comprehend or transform those conditions or the violence that issues from them. Rose's speculative conception of philosophy as a comedy, on the other hand, reconstructs the dirempted history of modernity without fixing it, which enables the violence of modern experience to be understood and endured—which enables philosophy, in turn, to return refreshed to the risk of universal recognition in the law.

A Dirempted Genealogy of Modernity

Before moving to the analysis of Rose's diagnosis of postmodern thought as the *play* of mourning, a more fleshed out account of Rose's mature genealogy of modernity must be given, for it is out of the gaps of modernity that the *Trauerspiel* takes its form as a feature of philosophy. In Rose's earliest works, and especially in *Hegel Contra Sociology*, the genesis and

predicament of modernity is cast in the terms of 19th and 20th century German philosophy. In that work, Rose conducts an immanent critique of modern social theory that proceeds, accordingly, from within the paradigmatic oppositions of modern theory. The methodological oppositions and limitations of contemporary social thought, Rose claims, are ubiquitously inherited from Kantian and neo-Kantian thought—namely, the opposition between the infinite and finite in theoretical reason, and the opposition between morality and legality in practical reason.[93] Of these oppositions, Rose is particularly interested in investigating the separation of morality from legality, given the eventual primacy of practical reason for Kant and his inheritors. Because, for Kant, morality belongs to the sphere of autonomy and legality belongs to the sphere of heteronomy,[94] the moral will is, according to Rose, separated by definition from the "social whole."[95] Rose alleges that this fundamental separation, which she will later call the "antinomy of law" and the "diremption" of law and ethics, has serious consequences that ripple through the fabric of post-Kantian thought.[96] In Rose's words, "These antinomies of conceiving of law in

[93] Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (1981; repr., London: Verso, 1995), 49-50; in the neo-Kantian traditions of classical sociology and Western Marxism, Rose is particularly concerned with the opposition between validity and value. This is less important, however, for the broad strokes of her genealogy of modernity.

[94] Ibid., 49; "the will is autonomous or moral when it is utterly disinterested and obeys the law out of sheer reverence for it; it is heteronomous or legal when it obeys the law out of interested motives, such as fear of punishment or hope of reward." Rose, "Ethics and Halacha," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 27.

[95] Ibid., 50.

[96] The "antinomy of law" is Rose's preferred phrase in *Dialectic of Nihilism*, but "diremption"—which implies a separation, as in marriage, between entities once, but not originally, united (cf. *The Broken Middle*, pp. 236)—becomes the concept of choice from *The Broken Middle* on.

Kant may be said—quite simply yet dramatically—to have led to the breakdown of philosophy and the development of social theory."[97] But how so?

In *Hegel Contra Sociology*, Rose rehearses and defends Hegel's original critique of Kant and Fichte's practical philosophy, which sets up Rose's broader argument that a "nonfoundational and radical Hegel" is needed as a corrective to neo-Kantian social thought.[98] Drawing on Hegel's early "On the Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law" essay, in particular, Rose shows how Kant and Fichte's development of a formal, abstract, and universal conception of freedom involves the reification of *particular* property relations.[99] In Rose's words, "Kant and Fichte's 'formal' notions of freedom, which depend on a relation between reason and its object, presuppose and 'fix' specific, bourgeois, property relations. … Hegel demonstrates that specific social institutions, above all, private property, are 'smuggled in' and affirmed by means of this 'formal' criterion."[100] To demonstrate this point, Rose refers to one of Hegel's examples:

> Kant asks whether we should increase our fortune by appropriating a deposit entrusted to us. Translated into the assertive mood, this becomes the subjective maxim of the will. When it is universalized, that is, when it is considered what would happen if everyone appropriated deposits entrusted to them, the maxim is judged immoral, because a contradiction arises: if everyone appropriated deposits, deposits would not exist. Hegel points out that this is an odd use of 'contradiction.' It is not a *logical* contradiction for no deposits to exist. In effect, reason has legislated a tautology: 'Property is property.' It has presupposed that the maintenance of a specific form of property is desirable. Hegel objects that the contradiction lies instead in the very conceit of 'universalizing' a maxim concerning private property. Hegel argues that to 'universalize' property is itself immoral,

[97] Rose, "Ethics and Halacha," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 27.

[98] See 1995 preface to *Hegel Contra Sociology*.

[99] Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 60-61; Cf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975).

[100] Ibid.

> because it involves taking something *conditioned*, that is, determined by specific social relations, and transforming it into a spurious absolute.[101]

Kant's autonomous moral subject, though constructed in disdain of heteronomous determinations, is made conceptually possible, in this case, by fixing those determinations. The universal and ahistorical character of Kant's moral philosophy is thus undermined to the extent that it masks the particular bourgeois social relations that it simultaneously presupposes.

The separation of law and ethics inherited by post-Kantian social thought is not a natural given, nor is it "invented" by Kant; it is, instead, presupposed in very the structure of the modern state, thus highlighting the political dimension of the diremptions of modernity. As Rose argues, "Kant's opposition [between morality and legality] presupposes the modern state which itself separates inner morality from the development of ethical life so that greater moral or subjective freedom invariably develops together with less objective or ethical freedom."[102] This contradictory relation between state and civil society in modernity mirrors and "reappears" philosophically as the Kantian separation of morality from legality.[103] As most famously argued by Marx in "On the Jewish Question," which builds on Hegel's analyses in *The Philosophy of Right*, the formal "political" emancipation secured by state citizenship, in which differences of class, race, religion, education, etc. are erased and equalized, is undermined by the actual inequalities in civil society, where private interest and the accumulation of capital reigns.[104] Marx writes:

---

[101] Ibid., 61.

[102] Rose, "Ethics and Halacha," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 27.

[103] Ibid., 21.

[104] Rose's analysis of the diremption of state and civil society has a clear Marxian inflection. This becomes explicit in works like *The Broken Middle*, but is already evident in *Hegel Contra Sociology*.

> The state does away with difference in birth, class, education, and profession in its own manner when it declares birth, class, education, and profession to be unpolitical differences, when it summons every member of the people to an equal participation in popular sovereignty without taking the differences into consideration, when it treats all elements of the people's real life from the point of view of the state. Nevertheless the state still allows private property, education, and profession to have an effect in their own manner, that is as private property, as education, as profession, and make their particular natures felt. Far from abolishing these factual differences, its existence rests on them as a presupposition, it only feels itself to be a political state and asserts its universality by opposition to these elements.[105]

Modern subjects are thus split between two realms: in the political realm, they participate in an imaginary universal community of ends, while in the realm of civil society they are "active as a private individual" that "treats other men as means, [and] degrades himself to a means."[106] Therefore, the freedom secured by the subjective rights of formal legal status, despite its universal claim, masks and reproduces the unfreedom it purports to transcend.

One of the predicaments of this contradiction is that subjects of the modern state are under the illusion that they act *as if* they are acting for the universal interest, when in actuality they merely act in accordance with their own particular interests. Hegel refers to this situation as the "spiritual-animal kingdom," meaning that the kingdom of modernity is "spiritual" insofar as universality is presupposed, and "animal" because "the other is really treated as a means to an interested end."[107] In such a kingdom, brutality is able to take cover under the guise of morality. But Rose also accounts for the "agapic" twin of the spiritual-animal kingdom, epitomized in the

[105] Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: University Press, 2000), 52.

[106] Ibid., 53.

[107] Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford, UK ; Blackwell, 1992), 26.

figure of the "beautiful soul."[108] Philosophically, the "beautiful soul" is understood, as in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, as that modern subject which cannot reconcile the contradiction between its autonomous morality and the heteronomous, and hence non-moral, world.[109] This contradiction can be artificially resolved by postulating God, an actuality beyond the phenomenal world or, in the case of the beautiful soul, the subject can flee this antinomy and seek refuge in its own inner purity.[110] The beautiful soul, in Hegel's words, "lives in dread of besmirching the splendour of its inner being by action and an existence; and in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact with the actual world."[111] Cast in more political terms, "the beautiful soul can be understood as a symptom of secular modernity, the subject of privatized ethics that seek[s] to separate moral thought from the aporia configured and reconfigured in political and legal institutions."[112] Despite the individualist character of this phenomenological exposition, Rose also emphasizes an analogous pattern of withdrawal in sectarian communities of "love."[113] Whether individual or communal, the negotiation of actuality is eschewed and refuge is sought outside the bounds of political life.

By the time of *The Broken Middle*, Rose extends her critique of modernity by broadening her own critical canon—by synthesizing figures such as Kierkegaard and Weber, to pick two prominent examples, with her Hegelian (and "critical Marxist") genealogy of the antinomies of

---

[108] Ibid., 174.

[109] Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 189.

[110] Ibid., 191.

[111] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), §658.

[112] Drew Milne, "The Beautiful Soul: From Hegel to Beckett," *Diacritics* 32, no. 1 (2002): 65.

[113] Cf. Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 153-183.

modern life. As the first chapter partially develops, by way of her reading of Benjamin, Rose became increasingly interested in the religious character and influence on the separation of inner and outer life *and* its political dangers. If the philosophical antinomy of law and ethics is traceable back to the political diremption of state and civil society, Rose also traces the diremption of state and civil society back to the contradictions of the Protestant Reformation.[114] Like in the essay on Benjamin in *Judaism and Modernity*, Luther's subordination of religion to politics is understood to be decisive for the development of modernity. As sketched in the first chapter, Luther delivers religion "into the hands of the Prince" by advocating the notion of a secular vocation. Work in a secular office is awarded the highest level of inner-worldly moral significance, *contra* other-worldly asceticism, but without any substantive relation to matters of justification or salvation. The secular political realm or kingdom, therefore, becomes the moral focus of *external* religious activity, even if the salvific meaning of such activity is thwarted. As Rose puts it, "This call into the world, ambiguous from the outset, effectively abandons, even as it methodically transforms, the world."[115] Rose claims that the subordination of religion to politics, however, eventually inverts dialectically into its opposite: "Religion, delivered into the hands of the Prince, delivers politics into the heart of religion."[116] In the context of the separation of state and civil society, politics is "undermined by ruthless individual inwardness and, equally,

[114] Rose argues, for example, that the "beautiful soul" is the dialectical image of "the impotence that results from excessive religious zeal, which opposes the world in the name of an inner, individual protestantism, or collectively, in the name of the brethren of the common life." See "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 178.

[115] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 177.

[116] Ibid.

by communities or sects of agapic love."[117] Politics is delivered back to religion, therefore, insofar as it becomes a spiritual-animal kingdom of intriguers and beautiful souls, a supposedly universal sphere that in actuality reproduces—a fundamentally a-political, Protestant—inwardness.

Protestant Modernity and the Spectre of Fascism

To sum up the argument so far, Rose follows Hegel in tracing the Kantian opposition between law and ethics to the modern diremption of state and civil society, which is traced, in turn, to the advent of Protestant *Innerlichkeit*. Following Hegel, Rose also contends that the danger of modernity in the wake of Protestantism is double. The first, active danger is that the contradiction between the formal equality secured by the state and the actual inequality of civil society produces a spiritual-animal kingdom, a kingdom in which agents orient their action toward an illusory *universal* end that obscures the treatment of others as a means to secure *particular* ends; the second, passive danger, is that the diremption between law and ethics provokes the withdrawal of moral subjects into an individual or communal beautiful soul, resulting in "self-willed impotence."[118] As both sides of this double danger make manifest, Rose's emphasis is that the diremption between state and civil society, or between law and ethics, reveals the extent to which modernity is characterized by "hypertrophy of subjective life" *over against* substantive relations or "actuality."[119] The expansion of inner life, in other words, appears to synchronize with the contraction of outer life.

[117] Ibid., 175.

[118] Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 191.

[119] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 74; "Actuality," in Rose's Hegelian sense, means "the totality or determinateness which is related to others and to itself" (*Hegel Contra Sociology*, 222).

The orientation of Rose's argument, however, does not only trend retrospectively, as if what is at stake is an indefinite chain of socially and historically conditioned presuppositions. The "double danger" of modernity as accounted for in this genealogy is of essential importance to Rose because of their enduring pernicious influence, and precisely to the extent that these influences are unacknowledged. Rose argues in "Walter Benjamin—Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," as briefly explored in the first chapter, that the expansion of *Innerlichkeit* characteristic of modernity, initiated by the Protestant devaluation of the world, is the condition for the possibility of fascism. "Fascist violence," Rose writes, "is itself derived from the change in the structure of experience—the subjectivity which issues from and responds to the atrophy of substance."[120] If the atrophy of substance and hypertrophy of inwardness is, as Rose claims, characteristic of modernity, then fascism is inseparable—in at least some sense—from the question of modernity itself. Rose's point is not that modernity is inherently fascist, or that fascism is the logical consequence of modernity, but that, when unacknowledged, the experience of diremption in modernity becomes the condition for the possibility of fascist violence. In other words, the dirempted character of modernity expresses a violent relation between subject and substance which, when exploited, may become fascistic.

Fascism fundamentally represents, for Rose, the violent effort to artificially mend the diremptions of modern life. Fascism fixes the opposition between civil society and state asymmetrically, enabling the usurpation of the latter in the name of the former. "Fascism," Rose suggests, "is the triumph of civil society, the triumph of enraged particular interests."[121] The

[120] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 181.

[121] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 58.

contradiction between civil society and state is collapsed insofar as (a section of) civil society takes over the state; through means of ideology and terror, citizens are molded identically in its own image or eliminated by virtue of their non-identity.[122] The mismatch between particular interests and the universal interest is thus forcibly mended in the state.[123] Fascism, to put it differently, is for Rose the violent eschatological consummation of the logic of the spiritual-animal kingdom, the illusory unity of particular and universal interest taken to its most radical conclusion; particular interests not only appear to correspond or represent the universal, but they also assert themselves *as* the universal—and, therefore, the aporia of universal and particular itself is dissolved.[124]

Rose does not provide a fully developed account of the nature of fascism, nor is she interested in teasing out the exact circumstances of its origin. On the one hand, Rose's interest in fascism is clearly animated by worries of an actual political transition from endemic fascism—the kind of fascism imbued in everyday life and culture, as analyzed by the Frankfurt School—to concrete fascist movements. Writing during the peak of neoliberal policy in Britain, Rose was attentive to the possibility that "states which combine social libertarianism with political authoritarianism, whether they have traditional class parties or not, could become susceptible to

[122] Anthony Gorman, "Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 105 (2001): 33-34.

[123] This is a reference to the introduction of *The Broken Middle*, where Rose writes: "Made anxious by such inscrutable disjunctions [between inner morality and outer legality, individual autonomy and general heteronomy], we invariably attempt to mend them, as will become evident, with *love*, forced or fantasized into the state" (xii).

[124] As Rose puts it, fascists "exploit the already partisan mediation of the instrumentalised universal - the epitome of what Hegel called 'the spiritual-animal kingdom'" (*Mourning Becomes the Law*, 60).

fascist movements."[125] To put it more in the terms of Rose's analysis of the diremption between state and civil society and law and ethics, one might conclude, as Anthony Gorman does, that "the combination of an authoritarian state with an atomized but morally righteous mass provides the ideal soil for Fascism to take root."[126] Predicting the next fascist seizure of power is not, however, Rose's main interest in the phenomenon. She remains primarily preoccupied with the persistence of the historical, political, and philosophical conditions of the possibility of fascism, which inhere in the broken structures of modern life. As Samir Gandesha has put it, "Fascism haunts us still because liberal democracy was and remains constitutionally unable to address the fundamental contradiction bequeathed to it by the bourgeois revolution in which it was born. This is the basic contradiction between a democratic polity and a liberal economy, constituting the subject as inherently divided between universal *citoyen* and particularistic *homo economicus*."[127] More specifically, Rose is concerned with the extent to which philosophical responses to the predicaments of modernity—represented paradigmatically by fascism and, in particular, the Holocaust—remain implicated in that which makes fascism possible. So long as the precondition of fascism, hypertrophy of inner life concomitant with atrophy of substance, persists, unknown collusion with its "inner tendency" remains probable.[128]

The *Trauerspiel* of (Post)Modern Philosophy

It is, therefore, the danger inherent in the shortcomings of prevalent responses to the diremptions of modernity that motivates Rose's spirited analysis of fascism. If fascism is a

[125] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 60.

[126] Gorman, "Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism," 33.

[127] Samir Gandesha, "Introduction," in *Spectres of Fascism: Historical, Theoretical, and International Perspectives* (Toronto: BTL, 2020), 2.

[128] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 41.

possibility inherent in the modern diremption of law and ethics (or state and civil society) which is inherited from Protestant hypertrophic *Innerlichkeit*, philosophical conceptions of modernity that leave this diremption intact unknowingly reify violent social conditions. To respond to the catastrophic violence of modernity without examining the dirempted source, Rose argues, risks reproducing and heightening violence. Which brings us back to Rose's reading of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study and its implications for postmodern social thought. As the first chapter outlines, the Protestant Reformation made a new relationship between human action and the secular world possible, one which permitted an unprecedented flow of moral energy into the organization of worldly affairs. At the same time, the Protestant rupture of the link between faith and works made possible an equally unprecedented devaluation of the world, a possibility expressed and exaggerated in the German mourning-plays of the 17th century. In a Counter-Reformation context of political crisis and intrigue, the *Trauerspiel* mourns the emptiness of the world—a world saturated with an excess of fragments divorced from their *symbolic* meaning and transcendent horizon. The recognition of this state of affairs elicits a kind of passive, melancholic reflection, in which the ruins of life are revived, allegorically, of meaning. It was this allegorical restitution of meaning, transformed into a mode of philosophical literary criticism, that Benjamin sought to retrieve from the shipwreck of the *Trauerspiel*—a neglected and misunderstood art form, itself. When properly conceived, the radicality of the *Trauerspiel* was understood, by Benjamin, to bear redemptive potential in the face of periods of political instability and violence.

In a move that echoes the spirit of Adorno's critique of Benjamin, Rose calls Benjamin's bluff on the redemptive and even revolutionary power of the *Trauerspiel*, choosing instead to

highlight its enduring regressive tendencies.[129] As Rose argues, though Benjamin's study is indispensable for an understanding of the "spirit" of the *Trauerspiel*—hypertrophy of inner life and atrophy of substance—and its historical, political, and theological preconditions, his excavation of the allegorical method from its ruins results in a reification of those conditions.

Rose's essay on Benjamin's study of the *Trauerspiel*, and the conceptualization of the *Trauerspiel* as a dramatic mode of doing philosophy contained in it, is the interpretive key to Rose's mature critique of "postmodern" philosophy.[130] In the final chapter of her memoir *Love's Work*, and in an essay in *Mourning Becomes the Law* titled "The Comedy of Hegel and the *Trauerspiel* of Modern Philosophy," Rose develops her account of the task of philosophy in explicit contrast to the dramatic image of the *Trauerspiel*. Re-articulating her genealogy of modernity, Rose situates the predicament of the postmodern world, and its philosophy, as an inheritance of the unintended consequences of the Protestant Reformation. The substance of the postmodern world, like the baroque, is robbed of significance and revelation, yet the inner anxiety of salvation persists. Rose writes, therefore, that the postmodern is "the baroque excrescence of the Protestant ethic."[131] In *Love's Work*, for example, Rose describes her friend Jim's apartment in a way that is strikingly reminiscent of baroque allegory and its contemplation of dead objects:

[129] The general tendency of Rose's critique of Benjamin bears a resemblance to Adorno's critique of Benjamin's aesthetics—as represented, say, by the radically different conclusions they came to regarding the revolutionary potential of cinema.

[130] The group of philosophers that have come to fall under the (often unhelpful) category of "postmodern philosophy"—especially Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, and Levinas—have often been unfairly misaligned and dismissed. Unlike many critics of postmodernism, however, Rose is clear that her critique is not an apology for "revealed religion" or "Enlightenment rationalism." See *Love's Work*, 135.

[131] Rose, *Love's Work*, 136.

> I find it impossible not to see that apartment, which is branded into my mind, as the emblem of the postmodern city. With its garish half-light provided day and night by a green and yellow Tiffany lamp, it was the veritable philosopher's cave. Crammed with the phantasmagoria of Western culture, everything, by the time we got to it, was in a more or less advanced state of decreation. The most mighty art books, multi-volume sets of the major philosophers in the original languages, Greek, German and French, a unique music collection comprising thousands of records, tapes and CDs, hundreds of American paperbacks of literature and philosophy – all were scored with dirt, infested with cockroaches, stale with dust and debris.[132]

Given the historical distance between the baroque and the postmodern, it is evident that the declaration of this affinity is not a simple matter of identity. For Rose, postmodernism represents the latest inversion in a genealogical line, beginning with the Reformation, that tours through the Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment. Postmodernism thus marks a "return of the baroque ethic" in a new, more self-consciously philosophical, form.[133]

In her earlier essay on Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* and the later essays on postmodern social thought, Rose broadens the conception of *Trauerspiel* as a historical form of drama unique to Counter-Reformation Germany to a conception of *Trauerspiel* as a particular *dramatic* conception of the task of philosophy. Such a conception of philosophy, as also becomes evident, belongs to times of great historical and political crisis. In the case of the German mourning-plays of the 17th century, the Thirty Years' War and the advent of new forms of sovereignty is the crisis that invites melancholic reflection on the meaningless nature of worldly life. Analogously, Rose situates the ubiquity of postmodern melancholy and despair in the wake of the atrocities of the 20th century. After Auschwitz or even the "perceived demise of Marxism," the rational optimism

[132] Rose, *Love's Work*, 118; I owe the observation of this connection to Anthony Gorman. See "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 28.

[133] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 27.

characteristic of the Enlightenment rings hollow.[134] The inevitable result of such atrocities is the collapse of the conviction in the notion of progress and, moreover, the capability of autonomous reason to deliver it. It is not only the world and its institutions that appear as ruins, but reason itself. Postmodernism, on Rose's account, arises from the melancholia that follows from this perception of a trauma within reason and history.

In a fashion analogous to the baroque period, Rose argues that the acknowledgement of the failure of modern reason and the devalued world results in a form of melancholic stasis that, as in Freud's account of melancholia, remains inwardly preoccupied with what is lost, unable to re-enter the world and construct new meaning.[135] Since reason and legal-political institutions have been discounted by virtue of their collusion in violence, the tools with which one might come to comprehend historical catastrophe have been rendered inaccessible. "As a result," Rose writes, "mourning *cannot work*: it remains melancholia; it remains *aberrated* not *inaugurated*; pathos of the concept in the place of its logos. Instead of producing a work, this self-inhibited mourning produces a play, the *Trauerspiel*, the interminable mourning play and lament, of post-

[134] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 64.

[135] See Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1957), 243-258. Rose primarily conceives of melancholia as an indefinite form of mourning, which accords with Freud's insistence (before his revision of this claim in *The Ego and the Id*, that is) that mourning is completed after a certain amount of time. It may not, however, accord with Freud's view that "in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (246). It is not clear, in other words, to what extent the narcissistic aspect of melancholia plays a role in Rose's reading of the postmodern. What appears to distinguish melancholia, above all else, is its indefinite temporal duration, an indefiniteness that forecloses a course back to recognizing the fullness of the world. For an account of the progression of Freud's conception of melancholia, see "Melancholy Gender / Refused Identification," in Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

modernity."[136] Paradoxically, then, the Protestant injunction to *work* to secure knowledge of one's salvation in a worldly vocation results in an anxious inwardness that precludes the possibility of work—the possibility of, in Rose's terms, working through the grief incurred by the failure of modernity's political and philosophical project. This is the condition of the *Trauerspiel*, a melancholic aspiration for salvation that can find no mediation outside itself.

The melancholic condition of the new *Trauerspiel*, an analogue of the baroque ethic, finds its philosophical expression in the broad strokes of postmodern social thought. Once reason is deemed to be the critical accomplice in an enlightened modern project that results in unbearable destruction, the philosophical task becomes a matter of cultivating an alternative outside the hitherto defined domain of philosophy.[137] To put it in Rose's terms, recognition of the violence and disquietude that inevitably arises from the broken middle of modernity—the diremption, in other words, between state and civil society or law and ethics—provokes a desire to cultivate a space for life outside the contaminated bounds of modern "law" and reason.[138] Rose refers to this tendency, and, more specifically the philosophical perspective it produces, as a "new ethics"—a gesture that Rose associates with renewed interest in the tradition of Judaism as a constructive resource for continental philosophy.[139] To utilize the terms of Rose's "tale of

---

[136] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 64.

[137] On Rose's reading, postmodern philosophy pejoratively understands traditional philosophy as "revenge for the unbridgeable distance between thought or language and concrete being" (*Love's Work*, 125).

[138] It is important to emphasize, again, that Rose's use of the concept of "law" does not correspond neatly with ordinary usage. Rose's conception of law does not exclude phenomena like rules and regulations, but it does extend beyond that to signify practices of mediation and representation, more generally. Law signifies norms but also the practice of negotiating the legitimacy or authority of norms.

[139] Rose writes from within the tradition of Judaism, and it might even be said that hers is a Jewish philosophy, but Rose was continuously preoccupied by what she perceived to be the mis-construal of the relation between Judaism and modernity (and its philosophical and ethical projects). Broadly

three cities," new ethics unilaterally opposes New Jerusalem, the imagined community dedicated "to difference, to otherness, to love," to Old Athens, the representation of the "fusion of knowledge and power."[140]

The impetus to search for a "new ethics" is rooted in the necessary recognition of what Rose calls the "crisis of representation and modern law," and thus the search is, to a certain extent, based in a proper diagnosis of *the* problem.[141] Law, which aims toward universal mutual recognition, is rightly perceived to be a site of misrecognition and violence. Rose's issue with the way new ethics responds to this problem, however, is that "investigation into the failures of modern regimes of law, into the unintended outcome of idea and act, is itself outlawed."[142] The postmodern "new ethic" is thus powerless, in Rose's view, to meaningfully contest or transform the violence that it detests. Taking this line of argument a step further, Rose alleges that, in actuality, the search for a new ethics reinforces the deplorable conditions it withdraws from. This is the case not only because new ethics passively forgoes comprehension of the abuse of law by demonizing reason, but, even more so, because the ambition to construct an ethics outside law actively repeats the diremption of law and ethics—the source of the crisis in the first place.

---

speaking, Rose was concerned with the extent to which Judaism is postured outside of, and as a refuge from, the "broken promises of modernity" (*Judaism and Modernity*, vi). This interpretation of Judaism, Rose claims, reifies the diremption of law and ethics. If Rose's philosophy is a Jewish philosophy, "it offers no consolation of philosophy, even less the soteriology of theology, but only *ein neues Unbehagen*—a new discomfort in our [dirempted] culture" (*Judaism and Modernity*, 24). See "Preface" and "Is there a Jewish Philosophy?" in *Judaism and Modernity*.

[140] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 21.

[141] Rose, "Introduction," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 6.

[142] Ibid.

Couched in Rose's typology of cities, the opposition between Old Athens and New Jerusalem presupposes what she calls the "third city":

> What if the pilgrims [to New Jerusalem], unbeknownst to themselves, carry along in their souls *the third city*—the city of capitalist private property and modern legal status? The city that separates each individual into a private, autonomous, competitive person, a bounded ego, and a phantasy life of community, a life of unbounded mutuality, a life without separation and its inevitable anxieties? A phantasy life which effectively destroys the remnant of political life?[143]

To put it differently, by actively reifying the inherited philosophical opposition between law and ethics, the social precondition of that opposition—the diremption of state and civil society—is also reified.[144] The violence of modern society, Rose alleges, is only comprehensible by reckoning with and comprehending the various configurations of the separation between law and ethics; without this *work*, these oppositions "will take their revenge all the more for being unacknowledged."[145]

As in Rose's analysis of the baroque, the melancholy disposition of the *Trauerspiel*, no matter how passive, is indicted for its unknowing reproduction of violence. Just as the beautiful soul colludes with and enables the violence of the spiritual-animal kingdom, the cultivation of a "new ethics" leaves intact the domination it desires to eschew or supersede. If fascism, on Rose's reading, is characterized by a *forced* reconciliation of the contradictions of modernity *in* the state,

---

[143] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 21-22.

[144] Andrew Brower Latz (see *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose*, 73) dubs this Rose's "double critique," insofar as the critique of philosophical oppositions includes the critique of the oppositions that are its political and historical preconditions. As Rose summarizes: "The urgency and currency of this search for a *new ethics*—for an ethics, that is, without grounds, principle, transcendence or utopia—should not be allowed to obscure the way in which the fate of modern philosophy is hereby repeated. For, since Kant, philosophy has nurtured its unease with the modern diremption of law and ethics, arising from the mismatch between the discourse of individual rights and the systematic actualities of power and domination" (*Mourning Becomes the Law*, 65).

[145] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 19.

the postmodern *Trauerspiel* is characterized by the *fantasized* reconciliation of the contradictions of the modern state *outside* rationality, law, and the state.[146] Rather than radicalizing the principle of the spiritual-animal kingdom by violently asserting the particular *as* the universal, Rose alleges that postmodernism takes the route of the beautiful soul, fleeing the difficulty of negotiating the broken middle between particular and universal as configured in the modern state. Unaware of its religious history, postmodernism thus paradoxically "completes itself as political theology, as new ecclesiology, mending the diremption of law and ethics."[147]

Violence and the Movement(s) of Philosophy as Comedy

I. Speculative Contra Neo-Kantian Theory

Rose articulates a philosophical alternative to the *Trauerspiel* of postmodern philosophy by developing her own dramatic conception of the task of philosophy. The basis for this alternative conception of philosophy is Rose's Hegelian critique of "neo-Kantian" social theory ands its dualistic reification of oppositions, a critique that originates in *Hegel Contra Sociology* but extends throughout her oeuvre. Mirroring her critique of postmodern philosophy in *Dialectic of Nihilism* and the so-called "late" works, Rose contends that neo-Kantian social theory—a catch-all categorization that includes the neo-Kantian schools (both Heidelberg and Marburg), classical sociology (Weber and Durkheim), and Marxism (from Marx through to the Frankfurt School)—inherits a "transcendental" framework from Kant that results in the reification of oppositions absorbed from society.[148] Re-iterating the Hegelian "double critique" of Kant and

[146] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, xii.

[147] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, xv.

[148] See the first chapter of *Hegel Contra Sociology*, titled "The Antinomies of Sociological Reason," 1-50.

Fichte, in which philosophical antinomies are shown to smuggle in the contradictions of bourgeois social relations, Rose argues that, insofar as neo-Kantian social theory takes up the task of transcendentally justifying oppositions inherited from Kant, it is bound to reproduce particular social relations. Even with "metacritical"[149] thinkers who are attentive to the social, historical, and political preconditions of thought, quasi-transcendental arguments are made that paradoxically raise social phenomena to the status of a transcendental presupposition, resulting in reification and circularity.[150]

While Hegel's opening up of the possibility of "double critique" is undoubtedly essential to Rose's retrieval of Hegel for social theory, it is also insufficient if separated, as in the Marxist tradition, from another essential element—the Hegelian absolute.[151] The absolute, defined in the abstract (that is, as it is thought, not as it is known by experience), is "comprehensive thinking

[149] Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 24-5; Rose explicitly names Heidegger, Mannheim, Benjamin, Gadamer, and Habermas, but the critique of metacritique can also be applied to Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and other thinkers attentive to the social or historical determination of thought. As Anthony Gorman summarizes: "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." See Gorman, "Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism," 28.

[150] To be clear, circularity is not a problem *per se*, for Rose. Circularity is unavoidable for social theory, in the Hegelian view. The problem is when circular social theories are produced from within inherited oppositions that are then justified. As will become clear in the following paragraphs, whereas "neo-Kantian sociology treats its transcendentally circular knowledge as valid, speculative sociology treats its knowledge as historically sufficient" (*The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose*, 41).

[151] Rose argues that the effectiveness of metacritique, especially as developed in the Marxist tradition, is limited because they annex the Hegelian absolute which the dialectical method they utilize depends on. Rose, in the now infamous phrase, writes that Marxism "depends on extracting [from Hegel] a 'method' whose use will reveal social contradictions. But the 'absolute' is not an optional extra, as it were. … Hegel's philosophy has *no* social import if the absolute is banished or suppressed, if the absolute cannot be thought" (*Hegel Contra Sociology*, 45). Rose's emphasis here is not just that Marxist and non-Marxist sociology have simply gotten Hegel "wrong," but that the absolute is the conceptual key for the possibility of a transformative social theory.

which transcends the dichotomies between concept and intuition, theoretical and practical reason."[152] More specifically, Hegel's absolute entails the unity of the theory and practice—of the finite and infinite (theoretical reason) and of autonomy and heteronomy (in practical reason)—as *implied* by the experience of their disunity. Rose's reading of Hegel's absolute is thus designated as "speculative," in the sense that the identity or unity between opposites is conceivable only by virtue of the experience of their non-identity and disunity.[153] Common misreadings of Hegel—from both left and right—fail to appreciate the essential difference between ordinary and speculative propositions, such that typical Hegelian propositions like "the real is the rational" and "substance is subject" are interpreted as conservative pronouncements of already existing identity.[154] "To read a proposition 'speculatively,'" Rose explains, "means that the identity which is affirmed between subject and predicate is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity between subject and predicate."[155] But Rose is also clear that the character or nature of the identity which is implied by the experience of contradiction is not pre-judged or transcendentally justified: the speculative identity of the "absolute is present, but not yet known, neither treated methodologically from the outside as an unknowable, nor 'shot from the pistol' as an immediate certainty. This 'whole' can only become known as a result of the process of the contradictory experiences of consciousness which gradually comes to realize it."[156] While this

[152] Ibid., 218.

[153] Ibid., 52.

[154] These paraphrased versions of Hegel's statements come, respectively, from the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* and the preface to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[155] Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 52.

[156] Ibid., 49; Rose also puts it this way: "This different kind of [speculative] identity cannot be pre-judged, that is, it cannot be justified in a transcendental sense, and it cannot be stated in a proposition

suggestion of gradual realization sounds like certain teleological readings of Hegel, Rose's reading is far from a confident pronouncement of present or imminent reconciliation; as Andrew Brower Latz describes, the absolute is for Rose "both necessary and impossible," and thus its realization is neither secured nor precluded.[157]

The speculative orientation towards the unrealized social totality is the necessary "positive" counterpart to the otherwise "negative" criticism of social theory's unacknowledged social and political determinations. Without disavowing the present experience of non-identity between theory and practice (or any other paradigmatic modern opposition), speculative thought elucidates the social preconditions of those oppositions *and* gestures towards the totality they imply, thus refusing the finality of any inherited dualism. This allows speculative social theory to acknowledge the reality of opposition without being confined to it. Simply put, whereas neo-Kantian social theory transcendentally justifies given social relations, speculative social thought allows "the aporia and contradictions of society to point toward some alternative."[158]

II. The Comedy of Misrecognition

Though nominally departing from the "critical Marxist" project as vaguely articulated in *Hegel Contra Sociology*, Rose never stops developing the implications of speculative thought for social theory, as is evident in the way her critique of postmodern social theory is based in a critique of the—supposedly unreflective—inheritance of dualistic opposition that results in static

---

of the kind to be eschewed. This different kind of identity must be understood as a result to be achieved" (*Hegel Contra Sociology*, 52).

[157] Andrew Brower Latz, *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 73.

[158] Ibid., 75; The nature of this absolute alternative is left necessarily but frustratingly ambiguous in *Hegel Contra Sociology*, as is the nature and possibility of the "transformative activity" which might lead us there (219).

mourning. What is required, then, is a conception of philosophy that is capable of occupying, not mending, the oppositions of modernity—and the violence that issues from the "and" of those very oppositions. Towards that end, Rose adds experiential layers to her speculative conception of social theory by developing an account of philosophy *as* comedy, which functions as a dramatic counter-image to the melancholy of the postmodern *Trauerspiel*.[159]

Despite the evident positioning of this philosophical conception of comedy *contra* the postmodern *Trauerspiel*, Rose's notion of comedy—obtained, once again, from Hegel—is rooted in the same social and experiential conditions of postmodern melancholia. Citing Hegel's *Aesthetics*, Rose notes that, "In comedy, 'the ruling principle is the contingency and caprice of subjective life' whose nullity and self-destructive folly displays the abused actuality of substantial life."[160] To put it differently, the domain of comedy is the experiential mismatch between the aims and intentions of subjective consciousness and its actual outcomes, a mismatch heightened and underscored by the hypertrophy of inner life characteristic of modern social relations. Yet, for Hegel and Rose, the discrepancy between subjective caprice and insubstantial action is not itself inherently comedic. Hegel writes that this mismatch between substance and subject may always be laughable, but that there's an important distinction to be made between the comical and the "merely" laughable.[161] The mismatch between aim and outcome may be followed by the bitter laughter of a *Trauerspiel*, "the laughter of derision, scorn, [and]

[159] For another account of Rose's use of the category of comedy, in conversation with Slavoj Žižek, see Marcus Pound, "Political Theology and Comedy: Žižek through Rose Tinted Glasses," *Crisis and Critique* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2015), 171-191.

[160] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 64; Rose is referencing Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1180.

[161] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 63.

despair,"[162] or, in the case of comedy, by "an infinite light-heartedness and confidence felt by someone raised altogether above his own inner contradiction and not bitter and miserable in it at all."[163] "This," Hegel continues, "is the bliss and ease of a man who, being sure of himself, can bear the frustration of his aims and achievements."[164]

Though Hegel is describing, with reference to Aristophanes, the character of a particular dramatic form, what is at stake in Rose's interpretation is the character of one who can withstand the vicissitudes of contradictory modern *experience*. Experience (*Erfahrung*), in the Hegelian sense, does not refer in a narrow empiricist manner to sense-impressions, but, rather, to "a long series of mostly false starts through which consciousness slowly and painfully advances to an awareness of itself."[165] The vital animating aspect of the experimental process is the "inevitable collision between concepts of self and reality" or between act and unintended outcome, which happens to be the precondition of the formation of the comic posture.[166] Comedy, in other words, is an inherent possibility in the structure of experience itself, insofar as experience is a dialectical process in which one incessantly discovers the inversions of intention in the mismatch between aim and outcome.[167] But what, precisely, is needed to continuously bear the frustrations of experience? What is it that enables this comic response?

---

[162] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, 1200.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

[165] David Carr, *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

[166] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 6-7.

[167] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 74. Experience, in the Hegelian sense, entails "the process of consciousness revising its criterion of truth." See Brian O' Connor, "Introduction," in *The Adorno*

The first thing needed to bear the mismatch between aim and outcome and transform it into a comedy, as Hegel indicates above, is a particular "sureness" of self.[168] But this sureness of self cannot mean being certain of one's conscious position, for the discrepant movement of comedy requires that the self is undone and dispossessed by its experience of the violence of its own position, of the contradiction between actuality and one's misrecognition of it.[169] Rose writes, therefore, that "no human being possesses *sureness of self*: this can only mean being bounded and unbounded, selved and unselved, 'sure' only of this untiring exercise. Then, this sureness of self, which is ready to be unsure, makes the laughter at the mismatch between aim and achievement comic, not cynical; holy, not demonic."[170] As Rose's interpretation of subjective sureness implies, in order to be able to comically recognize one's errors one must be repeatedly willing to revise—and stake again—one's position. A dispositional response to the discrepancy between aim and outcome, to put it differently, is only comedic insofar as it provokes the willingness to act again—with the awareness that renewed action entails more unintended outcomes.

This comedic posture that endures the frustrations of experience is grounded and sustained by its orientation to the law or *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life), which in its speculative or

---

Reader (Oxford, UK ; Blackwell, 2000), 11; see also Rose's definition of experience in *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (1978; repr., London: Verso, 1978), 197-8.

[168] Though Rose does not explicitly make this connection, one might call this "sureness" of self *faith*, as Gorman and Vincent Lloyd have. See Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 25, and Lloyd, *The Problem with Grace: Reconfiguring Political Theology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 50-69.

[169] As Hegel writes: "Thus consciousness suffers this violence at its own hands: it spoils its own limited satisfaction. When consciousness feels this violence, its anxiety may well make it retreat from the truth, and strive to hold on to what it is in danger of losing." See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 51.

[170] Rose, *Love's Work*, 134-5.

absolute sense "means full mutual recognition."[171] Though Rose's account of the movement of the absolute as comedy is *not* a description of the linear teleological march of reason toward its final end, the experience of the drama of misrecognition does, at the very least, negatively imply the possibility of actual recognition. Put in simple terms, the speculative sense of the law as mutual recognition is the goal of experience—the end towards which the twists and turns of this comedic drama are oriented. Law, however, is only known to us moderns "as it appears" in its dirempted form, which means that law is not experienced as universal recognition but as misrecognition—as the "falling [and failing] towards or away from mutual recognition."[172] Violence is inherent to this experiential process, in other words, as long as the gap between aim and outcome—between attempted recognition and actual misrecognition—remains. Violence is thus "*presupposed* as the call of law," for to stake oneself in the dialectic of experience is to continually take the risk of misrecognition. [173] As Rose puts it, "'violence' is inseparable from staking oneself, from experience as such — the initial yet yielding recalcitrance of action and passion. Without 'violence', which is not sacrifice but risk, language, labour, love — life — would not live."[174]

Rose's turn to comedy as an alternative to the *Trauerspiel* of postmodern philosophy is not, however, simply an affective or dispositional matter, as if the cultivation of the proper attitude was sufficient to sustain the violent vicissitudes of law. In isolation, all the dispositional willingness to risk recognition enables is a blind repetition of pre-existing forms of

[171] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 75.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 151 [emphasis mine].

[174] Ibid.

misrecognition. In order to return from the experience of violence to the task of the law, therefore, Rose argues that the effort must be made to give an account of misrecognition. Though the Hegelian conception of *Erfahrung* accounts for a general dialectical process that spreads across—but not above—history, experience must also necessarily be represented in its specific historical forms. The prospective movement of risk must also be animated, in other words, by a retrospective movement that is able to comprehend and reconstruct the contradictory configurations of modern experience. This, Rose maintains, is the work of reason. As Rose writes: "To present experience, with its unwelcome and welcome surprises *and* with its structure, is the work of reason itself, its dynamic and its actuality."[175]

Historically, the structure of experience is characterized by the mismatch between aim and outcome as it appears in modern society, which is determined by the diremption of law and ethics or state and civil society. In the retrospective movement of comedy, therefore, the dirempted history of violence is re-constructed and represented. This philosophical work of comprehending misrecognition requires, more specifically, an analysis of the mediation of contradictory experience in the law. "The discrepant outcome of idea and act," as Rose puts it, "will be traceable to meanings which transcend the boundaries of idea and act—to norm, imperative, commandment and inhibition, that is, to the law and its commotion."[176] Violence, in this retrospective sense, is thus always traceable to specific legal configurations.[177] To take up an example from modern social life, the mismatch between aim—action oriented toward the universal—and outcome—exploitation of others as means to one's own, economic end—is

[175] Rose, "Introduction," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 4.

[176] Ibid., 5.

[177] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 146.

traceable to the diremption of state and civil society, which separates objective and subjective freedom.[178] To make sense of this mismatch philosophy must see through the illusion (*Schein*) of this universal act and the consequent violence by re-constructing the mediation of this mismatch through the specific legal forms that condition it.

In the *Trauerspiel* of (post)modern philosophy, Rose claims that violence is taken out of the dirempted history of modernity and ontologized or hypostatized, such that it can then be sequestered from the purified project of a "new" ethics. [179] "Traumatized by a violence it disowns," postmodern philosophy withdraws from the agon of the law.[180] By refusing to interrogate the specific configurations of law's collusion in violence, however, this irenic conception of philosophy leaves those collusions intact. To return to Rose's tale of three cities, by figuring modern society as a clash between the violence of Old Athens and the love of New Jerusalem, postmodern new ethics obscures its own collusion in the modern legal configurations that bifurcate violence and love, or law and ethics, in the first place. As Rose will put it, "These forced reconciliations of diremption in the 'new' forms of civil immediacy and holy mediation sanctify specific violence as they seek to surpass violence in general."[181] Without comprehending the way in which apparent oppositions are implicated in a history that can be reconstructed, philosophy risks repeating and reifying those oppositions.

---

[178] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 71.

[179] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 240; As Jay Bernstein has put it: "There has been a continuous attempt in modern philosophy to isolate violence, and to find thereby a secure niche for "pure" morality or politics or knowing. So law, power, reason and love have variously been logically refined until all the violence is removed from them" See Jay Bernstein, "Philosophy among the Ruins," Prospect Magazine, March 20, 1996.

[180] Rose, "Soren Kierkegaard to Martin Buber," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 171-2.

[181] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 307.

The Janus-face of comedy, stretched between the retrospective comprehension of misrecognition and the prospective risk of recognition, re-frames the relation of violence to philosophy. Rose, by contrast, refuses to theorize violence as such by maintaining that violence is inseparable from the "and" of diremption and our stake within its broken middle. In both the retrospective and the prospective movement of comedy, violence is *presupposed* as a part of the dirempted history of modernity which continues to determine our thinking and acting—in short, our experience—in ways that cannot be pre-judged. This conception of philosophy as a comedy, therefore, takes ownership of its implication in violence, but as a precondition for growth in the law. "The comic," as Rowan William puts it, "lets us see *why loss is terrible*. To imagine a wound, you must imagine a body."[182] When held together, the retrospective representation of misrecognition and the prospective risk of recognition form a symbiotic relationship that enable the experience of violence to take on an educative character. Without the willingness to risk recognition again, the experience of misrecognition and its violence is a highway to despair; and without the understanding of misrecognition and its dirempted history, the willingness to risk recognition is bound to repeat the violence it does not know.

In *Love's Work*, Rose narrates these two movements in terms of the difference between the task of metaphysics and ethics, both of which are situated in relation to the law: "if metaphysics is the *aporia*," the recognition of the "difficult way" of the law revealed in the mismatch between universal and particular, "then ethics is the development of it, the *diaporia*, the being at a loss yet exploring various routes, different ways toward the good enough

[182] Rowan Williams, *The Tragic Imagination* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 154.

justice."[183] The experience of violence and its ensuing loss, understood in purely aporetic terms, may result in melancholic stasis, but it may also function as the precondition, on these terms, for the honest, *diaporetic* exploration of justice. Which is to say, as Rose does, that loss, when worked through, "returns the soul to the city, renewed and reinvigorated for participation"—mourning *becomes* the law.[184]

The dialectic of experience is thus not static; the aporetic gap between universal and particular and between aim and outcome may persist, but the work of attending to misrecognitions as they appear implies the revision and growth of law. Attending to violence is difficult, but it is also the comic precondition of education or *Bildung*, because the Hegelian conception of experience assumes that it is by recognizing the violence in one's initial idea or act, and its historical mediations, that one grows.[185] Violence is educative in this sense not because violent outcomes bear any direct relation to the flourishing of recognition, but because the *discovery* of our implication in violence marks the limitations and fissures in our universal pretensions. As such, we may learn how to go on. "Comedy," Rose writes, "is homeopathic: it cures folly by folly."[186] At the end of the introduction to *Judaism and Modernity*, Rose distills the comic sensibility of philosophy with reference to Paul Klee's *Angelus Dubiosus*. Against the traumatized melancholic stasis of Klee's *Angelus Novus*,

> the dubious angel, bathetic angel, suits reason: for the angel continues to try to do good, to run the risk of idealization, of abstract intentions, to stake itself for ideas and for others. Experience will only accrue if the angel discovers the violence in its initial idea, when that idea comes up against the actuality of others and the unanticipated meanings

[183] Rose, *Love's Work*, 124.

[184] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 36.

[185] Ibid., 72.

[186] Rose, *Love's Work*, 143.

between them. Now angels, of course, are not meant to gain experience – in the angelic hierarchies, idea and act at once define the angel, who is the unique instant of its species, without generation or gender. But here is the dubious angel – hybrid of hubris and humility – who makes mistakes, for whom things go wrong, who constantly discovers its own faults and failings, yet who still persists in the pain of staking itself, with the courage to initiate action and the commitment to go on and on, learning from those mistakes and risking new ventures.[187]

[187] Rose, "Introduction," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 10.

CHAPTER THREE | In Defense of Rose's Comedy of Violence

At the end of the previous chapter, I gave my account of Rose's conception of violence on its own terms, through the dramatic image of the comedy of misrecognition and in contrast to the dramatic image of the *Trauerspiel*. I have emphasized, in particular, that Rose's comedic conception of violence consists in two movements: a retrospective movement that comprehends the history of misrecognition and its mediations, and a prospective movement that willingly risks the violence in recognition again. This chapter picks up from there to discuss two (mis)characterizations of Rose's conception of violence by two prominent interpreters of Rose: Andrew Shanks and Anthony Gorman. As I will argue, these mischaracterizations of Rose's conception of violence may be accounted for according to their failure to grasp the significance of Rose's comedic double movement. Both Shanks and Gorman, I claim, separate or isolate the two comedic movements, which results in distorted interpretations of Rose's account of violence. Without the comprehension of violence and its dirempted history, the willingness to risk violence is blind, indeterminate, and dangerous. Without the willingness to risk recognition again, the comprehension of violence and its dirempted history is neutral and impotent. When held together, however, Rose's work tells a different story.

Peace Negotiation or Politics of Risk? Andrew Shanks on Rose and Violence

On one end of the interpretive spectrum lies the work of Andrew Shanks, the first author to publish a monograph dedicated to Rose's philosophy. In his book *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith*, Shanks takes Rose's deathbed conversion to Christianity as an invitation to read the entire body of her work not only through the lens of Christian theology, but *as* a kind of Christian theology. Shanks claims, for example, that Rose's death-bed baptism ought to be understood as the "natural symbolic conclusion to the whole trajectory of Rose's

thought."[188] To justify this claim, Shanks is tasked with presenting Rose's philosophy in such a way that is ultimately "consonant" with—his conception of—Christian theology.[189] This concern to read Rose in a way that is consonant with Christian theology results in considerable interpretative strain, which is especially borne out by Shanks' discussion of Rose's critique of fascism and its accompanying emphasis on *owning* violence.

Before turning to the problematic aspects of Shanks' textual analysis, it is important to question his general characterization of Rose's project, for this characterization sets up the subsequent attenuation of violence. Inverting the agonistic terminology—stake, struggle, risk, work, and even violence—that Rose was so fond of, Shanks positions Rose as "a thinker who, with unprecedented radicalism, systematically identifies the highest wisdom with *the virtues of the good, mediating peace negotiator*."[190] Acknowledging that this language of peace is not Rose's, Shanks goes on to make the case that this is simply the "best way of expressing the matter," because the position of the peace negotiator is "precisely" analogous to the position of occupying what Rose calls the "broken middle."[191] The broken middle, a concept that Rose develops in her account of the diremptions of modernity, is best described, Shanks argues, as "*the place of the peace negotiator*, seeking to mediate between disputatious others."[192] The peace that is negotiated in this position, Shanks is quick to clarify, does not simply imply the

[188] Andrew Shanks, *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 3.

[189] Shanks, *Against Innocence*, 12.

[190] Ibid., 32.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid.

"suppression of [the] violence" of the middle, but "the achievement of a genuinely unforced, cheerful accommodation between interested parties, without exception."[193]

The problem with the characterization of Rose as a peace negotiator, notwithstanding the alien language of peace, is that it positions Rose, in Shanks' words, as an outside "referee" who enforces the "law of good debate."[194] Charitably, Shanks is attending to the sense in which Rose attempts to mediate contemporary debates in social theory by uncovering the extent to which they are determined by unacknowledged oppositions. The Rosean conception of philosophy as a comedy, however, requires the representation of violence as mediated in dirempted law *and* the willingness to, in Rose's words, incessantly "stake oneself again" *in* the conflictual and contradictory drama of misrecognition.[195] Referees are, on the contrary, supposedly neutral observers that manage conflict but do not, themselves, participate in what is at stake. The reflective negotiation of oppositions that Rose advocates is unthinkable without having staked oneself first, and without being willing to risk action again—you cannot, in other words, learn to swim before entering the water.[196] Rose's philosophical resolution, as Vincent Lloyd rightly points out, was to "stay in the fray," but what does the fray have to do with negotiating peace?[197] Rose conceives of the task of philosophy not as the detached or disinterested negotiation of

[193] Shanks, *Against Innocence*, 32.

[194] Ibid., 33.

[195] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 148.

[196] Hegel, speaking of Kantian critical philosophy, writes: "The examination of knowledge can only be carried out by an act of knowledge. To examine this so-called instrument is the same thing as to know it. But to seek to know before we know is absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim." As cited in *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 46.

[197] Vincent Lloyd, "Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith," *Ars Disputandi* 11, no. 1 (2011): 42; Rose, *Love's Work*, 144.

competing claims, but as the deeply invested task of making and revising claims. By downplaying and at times outright avoiding Rose's emphasis on *staking* oneself in the broken middle, Shanks misinterprets the *stakes* of Rose's argument.

Rose's cherished concept, the broken middle, is developed precisely to refute the possibility of any position outside or above the diremptions of modernity. Shanks, to be fair, does not directly claim that Rose steps outside of prevailing oppositions, as he rightly argues that Rose invites us to occupy the "middle" spaces of modernity. Shanks' account of what it means to reside in the middle, however, flirts with a neutrality—and potentially even a passivity—alien to Rose's authorship. Shanks speaks of the one that occupies the middle being "for ever pulled forwards and backwards" by the "*representatives* of various different interests," implying that those in the middle are acted upon more than they, themselves, act.[198] In such a formulation, there is no indication of the risk and violence that necessarily accompanies the experience and active navigation of the broken middle. This may not be an innocent middle, as Shanks rightly emphasizes, but is it ultimately a neutral one?

The lack of attention paid to the precarious work of actively navigating the diremptions of modernity leads to a number of further interpretive problems,[199] which comes to the fore in

[198] Shanks, *Against Innocence*, 34.

[199] Shanks, for example, deems the Church of England a "classic instance of an ecclesiastical 'broken middle.'" See Shanks, "Gillian Rose and Theology: Salvaging Faith," *Telos*, no. 173 (2015): 160. The claim that an existing ecclesiastical institution is *a* broken middle has no basis in Rose's work and is, at worst, completely at odds with her work. The bifurcation between religious and political institutions is a characteristic aspect of the broken middle in modernity, which means that religion cannot be posited as a solution to the broken middle or understood as *the* means to negotiate it. The Church of England may be a broken institution that is situated within the broken middle of modernity, but, as an institution, it does not *represent* the broken middle. Rose does not write about the broken middle in a way that allows for specific, privileged institutions to claim it. Rose was, moreover, fiercely critical of theological attempts to re-position ecclesial institutions as "middles" in response to the separation of religious and secular spheres, as in the work of John Milbank. Shanks discusses Rose's critique of Milbank and political

Shanks' representation of Rose's critique of fascism and 20th century Holocaust cinema—a critique which I will return to later on my own terms. In the chapter titled "Against 'Holocaust Piety'," Shanks provides a sufficient, if at times idiosyncratic, reading of Rose's diagnosis of the pitfalls of "Holocaust piety" and its expression in contemporary cinematic attempts to represent fascism.[200] The chapter patiently reconstructs Rose's argument in "Beginnings of the Day—Fascism and Representation" until the surprising omission of Rose's concluding arguments.[201] Rose argues, in the essay as a whole, that the representation of fascism—in culture, philosophy, or politics—requires the recognition of the "fascism of representation": the recognition, in short, that in modern society our universal moral aspirations mask our particular interests—Hegel's spiritual-animal kingdom.[202] Cultural, philosophical, and political attempts to reckon with fascism, in other words, must enable us to reckon with our own fascism, with the inner tendency of fascism that persists in the diremptions of modern society. As Rose argues in the concluding remarks of the essay, however, that recognition of the fascistic discrepancy between particular and universal interest enables one once again "to take *the risk* of the *universal* interest" and resume the task of the political.[203] Despite the fact that modern experience is characterized by

---

theology in a chapter titled "Against 'Holy Middles' in General," but does not apply Rose's critique to his own theological turn.

[200] As in the rest of *Against Innocence*, Shanks has a tendency to import alien language to summarize Rose's arguments. The animating category of the chapter, for example, is "propaganda," which is used to define the essence of fascism and other pernicious ideologies. This is not Rose's language, however, and the conversion to this category does require significant conceptual strain.

[201] See "Beginnings of the Day – Fascism and Representation," in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 41-62.

[202] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 54.

[203] Ibid., 62; to resume the political, as Rose puts it, is to "act, *without guarantees*, for the good of all" (62).

this fascist mismatch between universal and particular, Rose concludes with an injunction to risk the universal and its inevitable violence again.

Shanks, in his reading of this essay, does not account for this concluding call to reckon with the violent structure of our subjectivity *and* to risk that violence again. This omission of Rose's conclusion, which acutely illuminates the precarious relation of her philosophy to violence, leaves a gap in Shanks' argument that must be filled. Instead of interpreting Rose's call to resume the task of politics and its violence, Shanks ends his chapter with an invocation of theology. If, in Rose's essay, the dubious practice of a "Holocaust piety" is countered with a recognition of the fascism of representation that leads to the task of politics, in Shanks' essay "Holocaust piety" is countered by the turn to religion. Departing from the specifics of Rose's analysis, Shanks generalizes Rose's critique of fascism as a critique of "propaganda," understood as the "exploitation of artistic charm" in order to present "us with the most charming possible picture of what the world might be."[204] Holocaust piety, Shanks argues, colludes in this propagandistic worldview by representing fascism in a way that forecloses the recognition of the actuality of our participation in violence—which then keeps up the illusory appearance of innocence. Fascism and all other political ideologies, Shanks claims, offer a propagandistic form of solidarity that maintains the innocence of participants,

> but Rose has no desire for a solidarity of the innocent. Instead, what she is looking for is really the absolute opposite. … For her the ideal basis for solidarity is a shared experience of having been shaken—in the sense of being rendered acutely aware of the corporate sins of one's world, not only in objective terms but also in terms of one's own personal complicity in them.[205]

[204] Shanks, *Against Innocence*, 28.

[205] Ibid.

It is this search for a solidarity of the "shaken," Shanks argues, that leads Rose to the church. Jumping from the logic of her argument in *Mourning Becomes the Law* to her deathbed conversion, Shanks suggests that Rose turns to the Christian religion because it functions as the "only real alternative to propaganda."[206] Religion is the solution to propaganda, Shanks claims, because it enables "large-scale solidarity" without the presumption of innocence, by virtue of the total recognition of sinfulness.[207]

Shanks re-orients the trajectory and aim of Rose's philosophy to align with the same kind of wide-spread solidarity that religion makes possible, which is justified on the basis of a re-orientation of the Hegelian project towards the same end of solidarity, the precondition of which is the re-definition of "Spirit" as "the multi-layered impulse towards a world of maximum equality, minimum coercion."[208] Rose, on the contrary, defines Hegelian spirit as "the drama of misrecognition … [in] which our aims and outcomes constantly mismatch each other, and provoke yet another revised aim, action, and discordant outcome."[209] This difference between spirit as solidarity and spirit as recognition is not a merely semantic manner, as the difference in emphasis allows Shanks to bypass the struggle of risking political action and its potential violence. On Shanks' terms, the political goal of solidarity is all but guaranteed in the turn to religion and its "effective" disciplines of contemplation and prayer, practices that are "designed

[206] Shanks, *Against Innocence*, 29.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Ibid., 18; the category of "solidarity" is also foreign to Rose's work, as Shanks acknowledges (Cf. *Against Innocence*, 31). But Shanks does not provide any account of how this category relates to the categories of Rose's choosing, or why this category is preferable. He does claim that these categories are "clarifying" in abstraction from discussion of the texts in question, but does not explain how.

[209] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 72.

to slow one down; to make one stop and think; to undo the mischief of over-simple messages; above all, to shake one out of one's delusions of uninvolved innocence."[210] But there is, for Rose, no institutional shortcut from misrecognition to recognition; the only passage is the *diaporetic* exploration of the *aporia* of law, which requires the staking of a new claim. The arc of Rose's critique of "Holocaust piety" is thus altered, re-routed from its orientation towards a politics willing to continually risk recognition amidst the violence of misrecognition towards a "religious ideal" that guarantees the solidarity of sinfulness.[211] What, then, of Rose's agonistic injunction to risk action, *without* guarantees? While Shanks initially acknowledges the distinctively political ambition of Rose's argument, that emphasis is superseded by the biographical significance of her baptism, which reveals the horizon of her project to be "an evangelistic form of catholicism (with a small 'c') whose whole sense of purpose would be to serve as a comprehensive *therapy against propaganda*."[212]

Overall, Shanks has confused Rose's critique of one-sided thinking and the reification of oppositions with the work of entering into conflict—whether ideal or real—and staking a position. Shanks rightly highlights Rose's spirted critique of ubiquitous "delusions of uninvolved innocence" in contemporary social thought, but by neglecting the centrality of violence Shanks risks turning Rose's critique into a different species of involvement, one that halts at the recognition of solidarity in complicity.[213] At best, then, Shanks under-emphasizes Rose's call to

[210] Shanks, *Against Innocence*, 29.

[211] Ibid.

[212] Ibid.

[213] Ibid.

link the recognition of violence with the risk of political action and, at worst, he replaces the agonistic orientation of Rose's philosophy with a posited religious end.

Anthony Gorman and Rose's "Critique of Violence"

An alternative to Shanks' characterization of Rose as a peace-negotiator is developed in the work of Anthony Gorman, one of Rose's former students. In a bundle of essays from 2000 to 2016, Gorman wrestles with the nature of Rose's philosophical project as it developed from the early period (1978-1984, including *The Melancholy Science*, *Hegel Contra Sociology,* and *Dialectic of Nihilism*) through to the late period (1992-1995, from *The Broken Middle* till her premature death), with a particular interest in evaluating the enduring significance of this project for progressive politics from a Hegelian-Marxist perspective. The common thread uniting these essays is Gorman's resolve to note, and give an account of, the substantive rift between Rose's early and late work. What is particularly unique about Gorman's approach, however, is that he consistently insists that the mature form of Rose's thought problematizes and undercuts the earlier, more strictly Hegelian, project. Paraphrasing Adorno, Gorman alleges that "Rose's work comprises two halves that do not add up."[214] The account of Hegelian phenomenology developed in *Hegel Contra Sociology* and its accompanying "critical Marxism," on Gorman's reading, is

[214] Gorman, "Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism," 35; The phrase in question is from a 1936 letter to Walter Benjamin, written by Adorno: "Both are torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up." See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2010), 133.

later superseded by a Nietzschean emphasis on genealogy,[215] a Kierkegaardian emphasis on existential singularity,[216] and a Benjaminian emphasis on violence.[217]

The legitimacy of Gorman's general claim that Rose's late work marks a radical departure from her early work will not be debated here, though there is reason to question the severity of the split as characterized in his account.[218] What is of particular importance for my project is the way in which Gorman utilizes this break between Rose's early and late work to launch a critique of her "critique of violence" as an effective interrogation of fascism—and as a meaningful political philosophy, more broadly. In contrast to Shanks' muted approach to Rose's later works, Gorman—refreshingly—takes the question of violence head-on. Gorman's reading of Rose and the critique that develops out of that reading, however, are based on a series of mischaracterizations of Rose's conception of violence.

[215] Anthony Gorman, "Whither the Broken Middle? Rose and Fackenheim on Mourning, Modernity, and the Holocaust," in *Social Theory after the Holocaust*, ed. Charles Turner and Robert Fine, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

[216] Anthony Gorman, "Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 105 (2001): 25-34.

[217] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence."

[218] What is particularly concerning about Gorman's argument is that he justifies the tension between the early and late work on the basis of oppositions that Rose not only rejects, but explicitly argues against. The stated aim of *The Broken Middle*, for example, is to eschew the dogmatic pitting of Hegel's "system" against Kierkegaardian faith and read them together constructively. Rose, in other words, does not work "between but *within* the conceptuality of Hegel *and* Kierkegaard" (*The Broken Middle*, xiv). The same goes for the supposed tension between Hegelian phenomenology and Nietzschean genealogy, which Rose repudiates in the essay "From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking" in *Judaism and Modernity*. As Rose puts it, the task is to "discern a *tertium comparationis* from which the endeavour of Hegel and Nietzsche may be comprehended and not dogmatically contrasted" (*Judaism and Modernity*, 55). Of course, one need not accept that Rose synthesizes these figures in a satisfactory or consistent manner, but to make that case one would have to engage with the case Rose makes for refusing these authorial oppositions. Gorman does not provide such an account.

I. The Charge of Divine Violence

The first of these distortions is Gorman's characterization of Rose's ambivalent inheritance of Walter Benjamin's notion of divine violence, as developed in "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence." In this essay, Gorman builds on his previous engagements with Rose by turning more exclusively to her latest works, especially *Love's Work* and *Mourning Becomes the Law*. The focus on these texts precipitate Gorman's realization that his former evaluations of Rose underestimated and overestimated the influence of Benjamin and Hegel, respectively, on her mature conception of modernity.[219] The first step of this argument is Gorman's account of Rose's inheritance of Benjamin's genealogy of modernity as developed in the study of *Trauerspiel*, which elucidates the inversion(s) of Protestant melancholy in the Counter-Reformation, the Enlightenment, and in postmodernism. As the first and second chapter of this thesis demonstrate, I share Gorman's insistence that this inheritance is central to Rose's later works, and that it provides the basis for Rose's mature critique of postmodern thought *as* a *Trauerspiel*. Beyond this analysis of Rose's genealogy of modernity, however, Gorman goes on to argue that the conception of violence that Rose develops in response to the melancholy of modernity is *also* derived from her reading of Benjamin. Gorman suggests, in other words, that Rose does not simply use Benjamin to construct a compelling image of modern melancholy which will later be discarded in favor of the comedic Hegelian alternative. To make this claim, Gorman alleges that Rose's emphasis on violence in *Love's Work* and *Mourning Becomes the Law* is based, in part, on the constructive incorporation of Benjamin's notion of "divine violence."

[219] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 25.

Commenting on Rose's only dedicated essay on Benjamin, "Walter Benjamin - Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," Gorman claims that Rose is critical of the way Benjamin *uses* the concept of divine law-abolishing violence "but not the idea itself."[220] Rose, as Gorman demonstrates, takes issue with the transcendent invisibility of Benjamin's notion of divine violence, insofar as this forecloses the possibility of representing it—and thus, also, the possibility of distinguishing it from other forms of extra-legal violence. As Gorman summarizes, "Rose takes Benjamin to task for his failure to provide any criterion of judgement by which law-abolishing and law-making violence might be distinguished. As a result, she points out that the whole notion of law-abolishing violence may be easily co-opted to justify the nihilistic violence of a revolutionary anarchism or a fascist idolatry."[221] The concept of divine violence is thus "employed" in a way that precludes *phronesis*.[222] Despite this critique, Gorman claims that Rose wants to "retain Benjamin's conception of divine violence . . . by finding a way of *mediating* it in history, both theologically and politically"—that is, by finding a different way to "employ" it.[223] But isn't the way Benjamin "employs" the notion of divine violence inherent to the notion itself? As Rose clarifies, in Benjamin's essay "it is not violence which is criticized, but any notion of the rule of law, the law of constitution or representative institutions."[224] The concept of divine violence is useful to Benjamin, on Rose's account, precisely to the extent that it destroys legal

[220] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 31.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 189.

[223] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 32.

[224] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 188.

boundaries and mediations. What could it possibly mean, then, to retain this concept by mediating it legally and historically?[225] To do so would be to violate the integrity and intelligibility of the concept. Rose commends Benjamin insofar as he is, *contra* the majority of modern Jewish thought, "consistent enough to realize that this violence in law has implications for the idea of God," but this does not result in Rose's incorporation of the idea of God that issues from this realization.[226] Rose's conception of violence, mediated and risked in law, has, by definition, little to do with Benjaminian divine violence. What, however, is the purpose of Gorman's insistence on this strained connection?

II. The Charge of Indeterminacy and Reactionary Appropriation

In effect, emphasizing the Benjaminian aspect of Rose's mature conception enables Gorman to leverage the "late" against the "early" Rose in the service of critique. The influence of Benjamin appears to mark, for Gorman, a departure from the severity of Rose's prior commitment to Hegel and, by that same token, her substantive commitment to the prospects of universal mutual recognition in absolute ethical life.[227] This departure from a Hegelian commitment to the achievement of mutual recognition becomes clear in the way in which Gorman accounts for the political dimension of Rose's project—the second mischaracterization I would like to highlight. Gorman correctly observes that the political dimension of Rose's project requires "the work of unravelling or reconstructing the antinomies of modernity so as to keep the

[225] Gorman explains that Rose retains the concept by separating it from the "messianic notion of 'now-time,'" (32) but he does not actually detail how this separation is possible or desired (according to Rose). As such, it is fundamentally unclear in what sense Rose retains the notion of divine violence.

[226] Rose, "Walter Benjamin – Out of the Sources of Modern Judaism," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 188; Rose continues: "To avoid transferring the world's violence in law to God's violence in love, Benjamin defines divine sovereignty not as *love* but as law-abolishing *violence*."

[227] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 33.

'middle' and 'ethical' open, coupled with a readiness to 'risk' political action."[228] The problem, though, is that the kind of politics implied by this emphasis on risk remains "wholly indeterminate," according to Gorman.[229] Gorman's contention is that, in her later work, Rose maintains only a nominal commitment to the universal mutual recognition *implied* in a speculative account of the diremptions of modernity. In *Hegel Contra Sociology*, by contrast, the diremptions of modernity require a critique of capitalist property relations and imply the immanent possibility of a transformed society. As Gorman summarizes, in Rose's late works the "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."[230] Rose's late politics of risk, vaguely oriented towards the universal interest, is more concerned with the "how" than the "what" of a speculative politics, which results in a political praxis insufficiently grounded in social reality.[231]

On this point, Gorman is preoccupied with Rose's claim that "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."[232] Gorman reads this refusal of guarantees as an admission that one must act without, in his words, "rational criteria by which to

[228] Ibid., 32.

[229] Ibid., 35.

[230] Gorman, "Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism," 25.

[231] Ibid., 33.

[232] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 62.

orient our judgement and action."[233] As such, the risk of the universal that Rose invites is entirely blind and arbitrary. And, if the risk of the universal is a blind shot in the dark, is it not the case that "all political movements can claim with good conscience to be acting on [the universal's] behalf, and certainly to be taking the 'risk' of so doing"?[234] Gorman thus concludes: "Her call to act licenses an agonal politics that, if given free reign, would descend into anarchy."[235] Just as Rose critiques Benjamin for being unable to provide criteria to distinguish between divine violence and the Fascist usurpation of the State, Gorman alleges that Rose's indeterminant injunction to risk violence for the universal is vulnerable to the same kind of appropriation.

Gorman's interpretation of what it means to risk the universal "without guarantees" is, however, mistaken, and this mistake leads him to rush towards relativistic conclusions that imply the danger of appropriation by Fascist movements. Rose's account of what it means to take the risk of action without guarantees does *not* entail the forgoing of "rational criteria," for Rose's account of political risk is premised on the philosophical representation and reconstruction of the experience of modernity. As developed in the second chapter of this thesis, on Rose's comedic conception of experience the risk of recognition is made possible first by the comprehension and representation of misrecognition. Rose's comedy of misrecognition is not an ultimately static struggle between warring relative perspectives, it is a dramatic movement of failure *and* growth. It is, in other words, the experience of misrecognition that educates—and thus provides the criteria for—further action. It is not the case, then, that for Rose "everything is ruled in" and that

[233] Gorman, "Whither the Broken Middle?" 65.

[234] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 33.

[235] Ibid.

"nothing is ruled out."[236] Formal legal rights, to name just one prominent example, are ruled out for Rose as an acceptable route towards universal recognition. When Rose appeals to the lack of guarantees in the risk of political action, therefore, she is referring to the inability to secure the outcomes of actions or predict the inversions of intentions. An understanding of the antinomies that determine us provides a rational, historically informed ground on which to risk further action, but we cannot predetermine or know the outcome of action because of that ground. Gorman recognizes the centrality of the work of representation to Rose's project, but he underplays the extent to which it symbiotically intersects with the forward-facing risk of universality. As I have argued with regard to Rose's emphasis on the experience of modernity as a comedy, the movement of representation and the movement of risk must be understood together.

Gorman's misunderstanding regarding the availability of rational criteria enables his worry that Rose's injunction to risk the universal is threatened by appropriation by proto-fascists and religious fundamentalists. Gorman is correct, to a certain extent, to observe that anyone can "claim with good conscience" to act in the name of the universal, but he is wrong to pose this as a possibility that undermines the legitimacy of Rose's account of politics. Gorman assumes that the possibility of appropriation or usurpation is devastating because the indeterminacy of Rose's politics supposedly precludes the ruling out of false claims to universality. It happens to be the case, however, that Rose provides the conceptual tools to recognize that—and also how and why—a claim is illusory. Of course, all claims to the universal will be false to a certain extent, insofar as misrecognition is inevitable. But this does not mean that Rose eschews the means of making distinctions between supposedly universal acts. Fascism and the legal discourse of rights,

[236] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 35.

for example, are both predicated on illusory claims to universality, but Rose gives different accounts of what makes those claims illusory. The prospective indeterminacy of Rose's sense of the political does not, in other words, paralyze her—or our—capacity to make judgements informed by rational criteria, as when Rose identifies movements like communitarianism and neo-liberalism as false-starts.[237]

There is, however, a sense in which Rose's conception of political praxis *is* indeterminate—but necessarily so. Rose may have abandoned her call at the end of *Hegel Contra Sociology* to explore diremption as "the only way to link the analysis of the economy to comprehension of the conditions for revolutionary practice," but she retains the basic contours of the Hegelianism developed in that book.[238] A central aspect of this Hegelianism, as articulated in *Hegel Contra Sociology*, is that the "absolute" cannot be pre-judged or imposed as an ought (*Sollen*). As Rose puts it, the absolute

> is not pre-judged in two senses: no autonomous justification is given of a new object, and no statement is made before it is achieved. The infinite or absolute is present, but not yet known, neither treated methodologically from the outside as an unknowable, nor 'shot from the pistol' as an immediate certainty. This 'whole' can only become known as a process of the contradictory experiences of consciousness which gradually comes to realize it.[239]

Rose puts it in analogous terms in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, when she re-affirms that the absolute meaning of the law is universal mutual recognition, but that this "can only be approached phenomenologically as it appears to us, modern legal persons, by expounding its

[237] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 2-5.

[238] Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, 235.

[239] Ibid., 39.

dualistic reductions."[240] As Andrew Brower Latz summarizes, for Rose "the Absolute remains as a form of ideology critique—current ethical life always retains some form of misrecognition—but does not provide a 'how to' for policy or a political program."[241] If desirable practical political outcomes cannot be theoretically vouchsafed or determined, what might a Rosean *praxis* look like apart from a self-reflective—that is, a speculative—politics of risk?

III. The Charge of Love-of-Violence

The third aspect of Gorman's argument worth questioning concerns his characterization of the relationship between the indeterminacy of Rose's conception of politics and the significance accorded to violence. In short, Gorman is apprehensive about the "sinister," anti-liberal quality of Rose's affirmation of violence that becomes particularly evident in her provocative turn towards Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Weber as resources for thinking about the *virtuous* relation between violence and politics. Objecting to the repression and avoidance of violence in contemporary social theory and liberal society, "Rose calls for a 'noble politics' that, drawing upon Machiavelli, Nietzsche and Weber, would make transparent the *impure* relation between violence and human association that liberalism would seek to disguise."[242] Rose turns to Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Weber because, in her words, "each renew[s] the classical tradition in ethics for the modern world. In opposition to Christian eschatology, negotiating the dilemma of power and violence becomes the precondition for configuring virtue for the modern polity."[243]

---

[240] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 75.

[241] Latz goes on to argue that, while Rose does not tend advocate for political positions in her work, it is not incompatible with substantive politics. Latz, *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose*, 89.

[242] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 34.

[243] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 140-1.

Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Weber insist together, on Rose's reading, that one must dare to reckon with and *know* "the violence at the heart of the human spirit" and modern politics without foreclosing the continued possibility of risking action.[244]

This work requires the virtue of nobility which enables one to bear frustration, loss, and violence. On this point, Rose cites *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

> To be incapable of taking one's enemies, one's accidents, even one's misdeeds seriously for very long - that is a sign of strong, full natures in whom there is an excess of the power to form, to mold, to recuperate and to forget . . . Such a man shakes off with a single shrug much vermin that eats deep into others; here alone genuine 'love of one's enemies' is possible - supposing it to be possible at all on earth. How much reverence has a noble man for his enemies! – and such reverence is a bridge to love.[245]

That violence can function as a "bridge to love" is captured in one of Rose's oft-repeated chiasmi, the violence-in-love and the love-in-violence.[246] Gorman is concerned, however, that by weaving violence and love together so intimately, Rose winds up encouraging the "love-*of*-violence."[247]

Gorman, unfortunately, does not elaborate on his observation that Rose's work devolves into the love-of-violence. More than anything else, the basis for Gorman's claim that Rose's late work implies the love of violence appears to be a matter of optics. It is the exaggerated quality of Rose's turn to controversial aspects of a controversial figure like Machiavelli that *looks* dangerous. The way that Gorman presents Rose's account of noble politics, for example, makes it appear as though her interest in Machiavelli, Nietzsche, and Weber is an aberration from the

---

[244] Ibid., 141.

[245] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, as cited in *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 144.

[246] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 148.

[247] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 34.

charted path of her principled, yet idiosyncratic, Hegelianism. Rose does not, to be fair, speak of a Machiavellian "noble politics" in any work prior to *Mourning Becomes the Law*. But the substance of Rose's engagement with these three figures is evidently an extension of themes central to her entire project and, in particular, her notion of Hegelian comedy. Gorman stays at the provocative surface of Rose's interest in "noble politics" and thus misses much of what is underneath. In Rose's hands, Machiavellian *virtu* and Nietzschean nobility are dispositional concepts that function as clear analogues to her account of the "sure" comic self ready to be unsure. In each case, what is at stake is a virtuous posture that enables one to endure loss and violence without eschewing further action—as the lengthy Nietzsche quote above demonstrates.

Just like her account of Hegelian comedy, moreover, Rose emphasizes that, in all three authorships, noble politics is developed opposite the melancholic eschatology of a Protestantism unable to withstand suffering and loss.[248] On the Nietzschean terms used above, Protestant and postmodern melancholic inactivity is premised on the inability to forget one's accidents and misdeeds. The noble and comic posture, on the other hand, is premised on a double movement that links the representation and risk of violence together; to remember violence and loss one must also forget it, and to forget one must remember. And, again, as in Rose's account of comedy, the appeal to a posture willing to endure violence is understood to be necessary in order to contest the greater violence of a melancholy that recoils from the difficulty of attending to specific configurations of violence. Weber's emphasis on "politics as the means of violence," for example, can only be understood when positioned relative to "the Protestant combination of an acosmic, world-denying ethic with the *absolute* legitimation of the state as a divine institution

[248] Machiavelli's account cannot, obviously, be a direct commentary on Protestantism—insofar as he precedes it. Rose reads his thought, nonetheless, as a "critique of Protestantism to come" (*Mourning Becomes the Law*, 142).

and violence as a means."[249] In this kind of context, it becomes clear that Rose does not appeal to a figure like Machiavelli or Nietzsche or Weber to fetishize or cherish the possibility of violence, but to—somewhat facetiously[250]—draw attention to the necessity of attending to the violence we have dubiously disowned.

For Rose, violence is first and foremost a consequence of diremption. And, insofar as engagements with the world in thought and action are indubitably bound up in those diremptions, those engagements are violent. These unavoidable experiences of misrecognition in the gesture toward recognition is the meaning of the violence-in-love and the love-in-violence. As Rowan Williams summarizes, "Love stakes a position, and so cannot help risking the displacement or damaging of another. It is never far from violence. But violence itself seeks recognition, is a rebellion against solitary withdrawal and closure; and, in appealing to otherness in that way, is obliquely connected with love's search for life in the other."[251] The only sense in which violence is recommended is as a necessary consequence of thinking and acting in a dirempted world. It is, to paraphrase Rose, the desire to supersede violence in general that sanctifies the specific violence(s) of modern life.[252] The opposition, for Rose, is thus not between peaceful and violent ways of engaging with the world, but between engagement that necessarily risks violence and dis-engagement that reinforces diremption. The love-in-violence and the violence-in-love does

[249] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 143-144.

[250] As Rose describes her philosophical style: "The speculative method of engaging with the new purifications whenever they occur, in order to yield their structuring but unacknowledged third, involves deployment of the resources of reason and of its crisis, of identity and lack of identity. This results in what I call *the facetious style* – the mix of severity and irony, with many facets and forms, which presents the discipline of the difficulty" (*Judaism and Modernity*, vii).

[251] Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2000), 178-9.

[252] Rose, *The Broken Middle*, 307.

not imply "the love of suffering, but the work, the power of love, which may curse, but abides."[253]

IV. The Charge of Impotent Cultural Criticism

The final aspect of Gorman's reading of Rose that I would like to discuss and contest is his pejorative designation of her critique of violence as an ultimately politically impotent form of cultural criticism. The work of representing violence and its dirempted modern history is, on Rose's account, what links a necessarily vague and indeterminate politics of risk to actual social conditions. Gorman, however, alleges that Rose's inquiry into the determinations of modernity remains at the level of—personal, philosophical, political, and especially cultural—consciousness, which results in a form of ideology critique unable to change social conditions.[254] Rose's late work, as Gorman puts it, "results in an anti-fascist cultural politics that is more concerned with attacking liberal and moral self-consciousness than fascism itself."[255] I want to argue, on the contrary, that Rose's critique of fascism does not, in the first place, allow for a strict separation of fascism "itself" from prevalent forms of "liberal" consciousness. By stressing this claim, I hope to make the case for the enduring political significance of Rose's critique of cultural representations of violence.

[253] Rose, *Love's Work*, 135.

[254] Peter Osborne makes a similar argument in the essay "Gillian Rose and Marxism," insofar as Rose is critiqued for assuming (like Lukacs) that a change of consciousness is sufficient for a change in social conditions. See Osborne, "Gillian Rose and Marxism," *Telos*, no. 173 (2015): 55–67.

[255] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 26. On this point, Gorman suggests that Rose risks repeating the mistake of the KPD policy of "social fascism" during the Weimar Republic, insofar as she appears to mainly direct her critique of fascism towards liberalism. By historical analogy, then, Rose's emphasis on criticizing liberalism appears to enable growth of actual fascist movements.

To make this point, it is essential that we take a closer look at Rose's analysis of aesthetic representations of violence and of the Holocaust, an interest sparked by her role as an intellectual consultant for the Polish Commission on the Future of Auschwitz in the 1990s. In "Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation," Rose argues that popular contemporary attempts to aesthetically represent fascism, especially Steven Spielberg's Oscar-winning *Schindler's List* (1993), exemplify what she calls "Holocaust piety." Holocaust piety—which is found in popular culture but also in the sophisticated analyses of sociologists, philosophers, and architects—is premised, Rose argues, on figuring the Holocaust as that which is unrepresentable and ineffable, which results in a call "for silent witness in the face of absolute horror."[256] According to this pious perspective, "'Auschwitz' or 'the Holocaust' are emblems for the breakdown in divine and/or human history. The uniqueness of this break delegitimises names and narratives as such, and hence all aesthetic or apprehensive representation."[257] The problem, for Rose, is that by rendering the Holocaust as that which cannot be represented, or as an event that heralds the end of representation, Holocaust piety forecloses any understanding of the history and mechanisms of fascism.[258] This foreclosure, Rose claims, arises from the fear that the Holocaust "may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are—human, all too human."[259] If

[256] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 27.

[257] Ibid., 43.

[258] Even when the Holocaust is analyzed as a sociologically normal feature of modernity (as opposed to an incomprehensible mystery), as in the work of Zygmunt Bauman, Rose argues that the representational tools that enable the conclusion are discarded like Wittgenstein's ladder: "critical rationality conceives and organizes the investigation and provides the causal or conditional arguments which are developed in the light of the relevant historical evidence," and then "the roles are reversed: the protagonist, reason, become the antagonist, anti-reason" (*Mourning Becomes the Law*, 27).

[259] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 43.

representation is forbidden, to what extent have we precluded the possibility of understanding the very humanity of inhumanity?[260]

It is precisely this foreclosure of understanding, Rose argues, that characterizes *Schindler's List*. In broad strokes, Rose contends that *Schindler's List* offers viewers a means in which to safely, and thus voyeuristically, witness the atrocities of the Holocaust. The view of the world offered to the spectator is safe because the crisis it represents is externalized and sequestered from the viewer. The consequence of this safety is that we are granted a position in which to perceive violence without becoming aware of our position or without disassembling our innocence. The narrative of the film is told through the perspective of Oskar Schindler, an ambitious German industrialist and Nazi party member who, at first, exploits Jews for cheap labour but who, eventually, uses his position and the cover of his business to save over a thousand Jews. We, as viewers, naturally identify with Schindler, but, as Rose argues, we are spared any confrontation with the "indecency" of his—and, by extension, our—position. In the book that Spielberg's film is an adaptation of, *Schindler's Ark*, Rose describes a scene in which Schindler is "unmanned" while he witnesses the liquidation of a Jewish ghetto from a position of safety; in the film, however, the same sequence confirms, rather than questions, the morality of Schindler's overlooking position.[261] With an indignant posture, "Schindler, a ludicrous saviour on a charger, dominates the liquidation from a promontory overlooking it."[262] Overall, as Rose points out, the film confirms and congratulates our pre-existing moral-certitude. Instead of

[260] This is reminiscent of Stanley Cavell's claim that "Nothing is more human than the wish to deny one's humanity." See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 109.

[261] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 45.

[262] Ibid.

confronting fascism and our complicity in it, our complacency is reinforced as, in the end of the film, when we piously join "the survivors putting stones on Schindler's grave in Israel."[263]

Rose's problematization of the distance that the Holocaust piety of *Schindler's List* creates between violence and the viewer is not, it must be noted, an abstract critique of passivity or voyeurism. Distance, as such, is not the issue at stake, but the extent to which this distance is manufactured in order to rule out acknowledgement of our complicity in the violence represented. This is to say that, for Rose, the relation between the viewer and what is represented in *Schindler's List* is, in actuality, a relation of intimacy. In modernity, Rose writes, "it is possible to mean well, to be caring and kind, loving one's neighbor as oneself, yet to be complicit in the corruption and violence of social institutions."[264] This diremption between ethics and law, "between inner, autonomous 'conscience', and outer, heteronomous institutions," is the corrupting precondition that defines societal conditions represented in *Schindler's List*.[265] But, as Rose insists, these fascistic social conditions subsist in the very structure of modernity, and thus the contemporary movie-goer is not ultimately at a remove from the political culture they witness.[266] "It is my own violence," Rose declares, "that I discover in this film."[267] The way in which Spielberg represents these conditions of the Holocaust, moreover, colludes with the inner tendency of fascism, itself. By inducing a sentimental "moral" perspective unaware of its own implication in what it witnesses, *Schindler's List* reproduces the diremption that makes fascism

[263] Ibid., 48.

[264] Rose, "The Future of Auschwitz," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 35.

[265] Ibid.

[266] Ibid.

[267] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 48.

possible in the first place. It is "morality itself which has corrupted and which continues to corrupt us," Rose maintains, and yet it is precisely inner conscience that *Schindler's List* trades on as refuge from the horrors of representation.[268]

To engage in the representation of fascism, Rose insists, we must reckon with the "fascism of representation," which "provokes the grief of encountering the violence normally legitimised by the individual moral will, with which we defend our particular interests."[269] A film that would truly reckon with the Holocaust, Rose argues, would force us to come to grips with our own fascism, insofar as the dirempted spiritual-animal culture that gives rise to fascism is our own. On this score, Rose recommends the Merchant-Ivory picture *The Remains of the Day* (based on the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro), released the same year as *Schindler's List*. Set in an English country house in the years before (and after) the Second World War, *The Remains of the Day* recounts the professional, political, and personal consequences of the head butler's absolute dedication to his Nazi-sympathizing Lord. Mr. Stevens' unwavering loyalty to Lord Darlington disallows the recognition of his collusion in his Lord's Nazism, which is mirrored in the film by Mr. Stevens' personal inability to express emotion and confess his love to the housekeeper, Miss Kenton. Rose claims that "the film shows that the dilemma of this inspired and blinkered service, the idealism of which permits a lifetime of total restraint and discipline, arises out of and issues in a personality which is loveless, and which wards off and refuses love."[270] To the extent that we empathize with Mr. Stevens, however, we, as viewers, are invited to confront our own collusions. "Without sentimental voyeurism," Rose contends, "[the film] induces a crisis of identification in

[268] Rose, "The Future of Auschwitz," in *Judaism and Modernity*, 35.

[269] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 54.

[270] Ibid., 52.

the viewer, who is brought up flat against equally *the representation of Fascisim*, the *honourable* tradition which could not recognise the evils of Nazism, and the corporate order of the great house, and *the fascism of representation*, a political culture which we identify as our own, and hence an emotional economy which we cannot project and disown."[271]

Rose provides a strong interpretive case for *The Remains of the Day* as an astute interrogation of what she calls the "fascism of representation," but the film is not as effective at eliciting this interrogation in the viewer as Rose suggests. It is much more likely, as Gorman argues, that viewers will "empathize with and forgive the head butler his passive fascism because we are aware that he lived in a far more repressed society than our own."[272] Despite our sympathy for Mr. Stevens, in other words, it is not difficult to distance ourselves emotionally, culturally, and politically, from his blindness. The "crisis" may then, as in *Schindler's List*, be externalized.

The limitations of *The Remains of the Day* do not, however, signal the impossibility of Rose's call to "make a film in which the representation of Fascism would engage with the fascism of representation," for this call has been successfully answered, 18 years after her death, in Jonathan Glazer's *The Zone of Interest*.

Glazer's picture, which may be understood as the latest addition to a tradition of Holocaust filmography, may also be more accurately described as an *anti*-Holocaust film. *The Zone of Interest*, which takes direct inspiration from Rose's musings on Holocaust piety, tells the—deeply fragmented—story of Rudolph Höss, one of the long-standing commandants of

[271] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 53-4.

[272] Gorman, "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence," 34.

Auschwitz, and his family.[273] The Höss family home sits outside the camp, separated by only a thin wall. We never go inside, never "see the Holocaust." Rather, we watch Hedwig Höss tend to her expansive "paradise" garden; we watch the children play in the outdoor pool next to the wall; we watch a marital dispute. And yet, we *hear* the Holocaust. A scream, a grunt, or a cry accompanies each mundane act. We witness one thing always informed by another. For this reason, Glazer has remarked that *The Zone of Interest* is really two different films: the film you see, and the film you hear.[274]

This refusal to *show* the inner workings of Auschwitz is not, I take it, another pious attempt to figure the Holocaust as the ineffable, for the representational questions that the film probes are "configurative" or relational, not quantitative.[275] The question, in other words, that motivates the concealment of the concentration camp is not whether Auschwitz is beyond representation but *how* to "show the viewer his own position vis-à-vis violence."[276] The visual absence of Auschwitz is necessary, therefore, because the quotidian life we witness is lived as if there is not, in fact, mass murder happening on the other side of the wall. In a particularly notable fragment, Hedwig, Rudolph's wife, is offering her mother a tour of their garden when a gunshot and a barking dog draws her mother's attention to what is over the wall. Pointing to the vines growing around them, Hedwig responds: "This will grow and cover everything. You'll see

[273] Jonathan Glazer, Press notes for *The Zone of Interest* (2023), Madman Films. https://www.perthfestival.com.au/media/gqrduoky/the-zone-of-interest-madman-press-kit.pdf

[274] Jonathan Glazer, comments at the New York Film Festival, October 9, 2023.

[275] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 48.

[276] Michael Haneke, "Violence and the Media," in Roy Grundmann, ed., *A Companion to Michael Haneke* (Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 579.

next time you visit."[277] Hedwig assumes futurity and stasis here, underlining that they will remain and can learn to ignore the sounds of violence and death. On Rosean terms, the withholding of direct visual representation of the horror of the Holocaust is a way of dramatizing the way that personal or familial flourishing and freedom is perfectly compatible with, and in fact dependent on, unfreedom out of view or off-screen. This is, for Rose, the modern predicament.

In order to facilitate the viewer's recognition of their position in relation to the violence on screen, *The Zone of Interest* provokes the audience to relate to what they see in two seemingly contradictory ways: by alienation *and* by identification. The movement of alienation is necessary, first, in order to shake the spectator out of their habitual cinematic passivity. One of the problems with Rose's recommendation of *The Remains of the Day* is that the film's conventionally entertaining form and structure work against the provocation of the kind of reflective crisis Rose appropriately discovers in it. In the middle of the 20th century, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer perceptively observed that films are "so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts."[278] Or, as the Austrian director Michael Haneke has put it: "the simultaneously eye- and ear-occupying intensity of the film medium, the monumental size of its images, the speed at which its images demand to be viewed, its capacity above all other art forms to render or simulate reality virtually in toto, to make it *tangible to the senses*—in short, the medium's capacity to *overwhelm*—

[277] *The Zone of Interest*, directed by Jonathan Glazer (A24, 2023).

[278] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), 126-7.

downright predestine it for a narcotized, that is, an *anti-reflexive* reception."[279] Despite the potential for reflexivity in the substance of a traditionally made film, habits of passive consumption work against the possibilities of serious thought. In what ways, then, might a film that seeks to confront us with the fascism of representation shake us out of our learned passivity and complacency?

Glazer's *The Zone of Interest* achieves this destabilization by utilizing a series of formal techniques that chafe with and undermine standard cinematic tropes. The first, and perhaps most unsettling of these techniques, is the choice to open the film with approximately three minutes of an empty black screen, with an accompanying ethereal score. Glazer, himself, suggests that they intended the blank sequence as a space to prepare for immersion, but the effect is quite the opposite.[280] Far from immediately immersing the viewer in a cinematic world, opening with this eerie abstraction forces viewers out of the rhythm of passive consumption. Those who came to the cinema for a narcotic rush are immediately stopped in their tracks and thrown back on themselves: "Why is nothing happening? Is something wrong? What does this mean?"[281] Much like a Brechtian "alienation-effect," this abnormal cinematic device compels thought and self-reflexivity by "de-familiarizing forms of representation that have become habitual and automatic and function in collusion with capitalism."[282]

[279] Haneke, "Violence and the Media," 576.

[280] Jonathan Glazer, comments at the Cannes Film Festival, May 19, 2023.

[281] In the press conference for the release of the film at the Cannes Film Festival, Chaz Ebert (the widow of the famous Roger Ebert) recounts how, during the premiere, the opening of the film made her (and others) wonder if there were technical difficulties.

[282] Phoebe von Held, *Alienation and Theatricality: Diderot after Brecht* (London: Legenda, 2011), 9.

The distancing does not stop there. In cinema, it is traditionally expected that the camera will direct the audience's attention and show them what matters—and, in some cases, why. *The Zone of Interest*, however, was not shot with a director and cinematographer orchestrating things from behind the camera. Instead, the set was rigged with at times ten cameras, which were operated remotely and run simultaneously as in reality television. The result is a collection of long-takes that offer an austere, predominately static view of the Höss residence, which gives the distinct impression of surveillance. As in all cinematic experience, we are in the position of a voyeur; in this instance, however, we are pressured to recognize it. What plays out is simply life without the typical narrative logic of cinema. One family member does this; another does that. Long takes disrupt the brain's attempt to develop logical connections made possible by jarring or quick cuts. The absence of intentionality in the cinematography is mirrored by the fragmentary structure of the story, itself. As a principle, *The Zone of Interest* explains nothing. The relation between what we see and what we hear is never elucidated, and the connections between fragments are never evident. Because the fragments of the life observed are not unified into a coherent narrative, the spectator is forced to come to their own conclusions—or, at the least, to accept that there are no conclusions to be made. This eschewal of explanation demands active engagement or passive dis-engagement, and what it disallows is the passive engagement of "immersion."

The alienating dimension of the film's form is also paired, however, with a second movement of identification. The audience, shaken out of passive consumption, is potentially prepared to recognize the extent to which "we're emotionally and politically closer to the perpetrator culture" than we think.[283] To achieve this, *The Zone of Interest* provocatively

[283] Jonathan Glazer, Press notes for *The Zone of Interest* (2023), Madman Films. https://www.perthfestival.com.au/media/gqrduoky/the-zone-of-interest-madman-press-kit.pdf

attempts to *humanize* the Höss family. This attempt at humanization may appear to be deeply inappropriate, for to humanize in cinema is often to manipulatively appeal to the audience's emotion and empathy in a potentially justificatory way. Glazer, however, simply humanizes the Höss family by unrelentingly presenting them as human beings. We are pressured to recognize that Rudolf Höss is a relatively ordinary German father. To do this, Glazer does not trick the audience by manufacturing fleeting sympathy, as could easily be achieved, for example, by showing an emotional Rudolph warmly console his children or wife. Instead, we are austerely and unsentimentally presented with the reality that Rudolf simply is an ordinary father to the extent that he does things an ordinary father does (or might do): he listens to football on the radio, he pets his dog, he celebrates a birthday, he—for a time—withholds sensitive information from his wife, he worries about his work, and so on. Eventually, after considerable repetition, it becomes clear that this family may not be so dissimilar from one's own.

To maintain the continual possibility of identification with the Höss family, it is essential that the film prevent the development of alternative possibilities of identification. Interspersed throughout the film, a young Polish girl is depicted sneaking into the work sites of the prisoners at Auschwitz, leaving behind apples and pears. These flashes of resistance, it may seem, risk relieving the spectator's crisis of identification by providing an outside, morally uncomplicated position of leverage. Crucially, however, these scenes are shot with thermal night-vision cameras, making this act of resistance foreign and difficult to associate with. In contrast to *Schindler's List*, there is no sanctuary of Manichaeanism, no positioning of a benevolent Schindler opposite a

sadistic Amon Goeth.[284] As such, we must walk what Joshua Oppenheimer calls "the tightrope between repulsion and empathy."[285]

These two movements of alienation and identification must be understood together, for it is the tension between them that prevents disassociation on the one end and passive consumption on the other. We are ultimately invited to identify with the Höss family, but in an intellectual sense first enabled by distance. As in Brechtian epic theatre, *The Zone of Interest* "appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things."[286] The effect is that, in Rose's words, "instead of emerging with sentimental tears, which leave us emotionally and politically intact, we emerge with the dry eyes of a deep grief, which belongs to the recognition of our ineluctable grounding in the norms of the emotional and political culture represented."[287] *The Zone of Interest*, following Rosean insights, succeeds at representing fascism in a way that engages with the fascism of representation. As opposed to *The Remains of the Day*, however, it does so in a way that effectively *compels* the spectator to come to that recognition. This is not to suggest that the film provokes a univocal didactic interpretation, or that it cannot, too, be unreflectively rendered into a cultural commodity. But it does take into account, more consistently than *Remains of the Day*, the extent to which the norms of cinematic structure and spectatorship insulate us from the politics of *how*

[284] As Rose notes, in *Schindler's Ark* the stark Manichaean contrast between Schindler and Goeth is problematized by the emphasis on their shared Austrian Catholic origin—a fact obscured in the film. This emphasis on shared origin, Rose thinks, invites the reader to experience the crisis within themselves. See *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 45-6.

[285] Interview with Joshua Oppenheimer, Film Comment, July 15, 2013, https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-joshua-oppenheimer-the-act-of-killing/.

[286] Bertold Brecht, "The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 23.

[287] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 54.

we relate to violence. By exposing the audience's "indecent" position, we are given a chance to know our implication in violence—both inside and outside the cinema.

Rose writes, along these lines, that "we are always staking ourselves in the representation of Fascism and the fascism of representation throughout the range of quotidian practices and cultural rituals—when we go to the cinema, for instance."[288] "We are already politically active," in other words, "whether or not we embrace programme, party, or movement."[289] Rose's analysis of the representation of fascism and the fascism of representation is thus, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, an attempt to reckon with the political character of our engagement with cultural products, with the ways in which culture maintains and produces forms of social and political consciousness.[290] There is, for Rose, no easy way to separate "fascism itself" from the ordinary ways we relate, as moderns, to each other.[291] Thus, it goes against the grain of Rose's analyses to suggest, as Gorman does, that her emphasis on the critique of culture and

[288] Ibid., 61.

[289] Ibid.

[290] Joshua B. Davis, "'A Frenzy of Self-Deceit': Commodity Fetishism, Labor, and Rose's Critical Marxism," in *Misrecognitions: Gillian Rose and the Task of Political Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018), 182.

[291] In one of the most striking passages of his master-work, *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes: "There is nothing innocuous left. The little pleasures, expressions of life that seemed exempt from the responsibility of thought, not only have an element of defiant silliness, of callous refusal to see, but directly serve their diametrical opposite. Even the blossoming tree lies the moment its bloom is seen without the shadow of terror; even the innocent 'How lovely!' becomes an excuse for an existence outrageously unlovely … Mistrust is called for in face of all spontaneity, impetuosity, all letting oneself go, for it implies pliancy towards the superior might of the existent. The malignant deeper meaning of ease, once confined to the toasts of conviviality, has long since spread to more appealing impulses. The chance conversation in the train, when, to avoid dispute, one consents to a few statements that one knows ultimately to implicate murder, is already a betrayal; no thought is immune against communication, and to utter it in the wrong place and in wrong agreement is enough to undermine its truth. Every visit to the cinema leaves me, against all my vigilance, stupider and worse." See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (1951; repr., New York: Verso, 2020), 25.

consciousness implies a movement away from politics. This critique of cultural consciousness and its implication in a fascistic spiritual-animal kingdom may not provide a political programme or a way beyond the diremption of law and ethics, but it does leave us with capacity to recognize the political implications and presuppositions of quotidian life that issue from the diremption of substance and subject—to comprehend, in other words, the "remains of the day." "If Fascism promises beginnings of the day," Rose writes, "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."[292] Only then may thought and action be risked again.

[292] Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 42.

CONCLUSION

Despite the centrality of the concept of violence to Gillian Rose's work from *The Broken Middle* on, the question of violence and its enigmatic function within Rose's later works have received little to no extended treatment in existing scholarship. My work in this thesis continues and extends the conversation regarding the "somewhat confusing" use of the notion of violence in Rose's late work by investigating and contextualizing her account of two contrasting dramatic conceptions of philosophy, that of baroque *Trauerspiel* (mourning-play) and Hegelian comedy, which I take to be central to the development of this conversation.[293] I attempt to make the case, in particular, that Rose's sporadic appeal to the dramatic categories of comedy and the *Trauerspiel* are critical resources for making sense of Rose's reflections on violence—especially as a problem of, and for, contemporary philosophy.

To make this case, I began this thesis by contextualizing and elucidating Rose's use of the category of the *Trauerspiel*, originating with her essay on Walter Benjamin's study of 17th century German mourning-plays, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. At the outset, the *Trauerspiel* refers to a historical dramatic form that takes up and exaggerates an antinomic Lutheran relation to the world in a baroque context of political crisis and historical decline. The *Trauerspiel*, in this context, dramatizes the melancholic obsession with a world of ruin induced by the Protestant ethic *and* the implication of that melancholy, whether passive or active, in violence. As I have argued, however, this notion of the *Trauerspiel* is not important to Rose primarily as a dramatic form now buried in history. Following Benjamin's own intimation of the relationship between the melancholy of the *Trauerspiel* and the spectre of fascism in the Weimar

[293] Latz, *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose*, 206n206.

Republic, I argue that Rose takes up the dramatic category of the *Trauerspiel* as an essential conceptual resource for understanding the contemporary philosophical crisis.

The significance of the category of the *Trauerspiel* rests, for Rose, on its illustration of a critical link between Protestant melancholy and violence. And yet the significance of this illustration is not limited to a 17th century political and religious context. As I have shown, Rose builds on Benjamin's suggestion of the 20th century relevance of the *Trauerspiel* by arguing that it makes a return in the form of postmodern philosophy and culture. Rose's claim that the postmodern is the "baroque excrescence of the Protestant ethic" receives little elaboration, however, and thus I have attempted to reconstruct Rose's basis for this claim. The basis of this claim, I argue, is not merely that the melancholic mood of postmodernism resembles baroque melancholy, but that it is a genealogical relative. Specifically, Rose contends that postmodernism disowns—and thus also reifies—the paradigmatic modern diremption between law and ethics, which philosophically originates with Kant but can be traced back through the political diremption of state and civil society to the hypertrophic inwardness of the Protestant Reformation. The postmodern injunction to find a purified "new ethics" in the face of 20th century devastation is thus taken to task for its one-sided reproduction of the diremption of law and ethics which, as in the *Trauerspiel*, only re-enforces the conditions of violence that it abhors.

Rose's use of the category of the *Trauerspiel* in the context of postmodern philosophy, then, highlights the enduring violent threat of a melancholy that withdraws from an interrogation of its implication in the dirempted structures of modernity. Against this conception of philosophy that functions as an analogue to the *Trauerspiel*, Rose turns to the sensibility of comedy as a dramatic philosophical alternative. Adding layers to her speculative reading of Hegel, Rose turns to the Hegelian notion of the comic as a philosophical means of bearing the vicissitudes of

modern experience without stepping outside of, or mending, diremption. As I have argued, this comedic approach to the oppositions of modernity informs and transforms Rose's conception of the relationship between philosophy and violence. Rather than figuring violence as that which undermines law and the recognition it aims towards, Rose's notion of philosophy as a comedy presupposes violence as a precondition of education (*Bildung*) in the law. This comic philosophical disposition bears the frustrations of its failure without bitterness, which is made possible by a retrospective and prospective double movement. Retrospectively, violence is presupposed as an aspect of dirempted history that can be represented, reconstructed, and known. Prospectively, violence is presupposed as a necessary risk of acting and thinking in a dirempted or contradictory world, and thus it must be endured and risked again. Violence is not theorized by Rose *per se* as that which can be sequestered, avoided, or superseded, but presupposed as persistent component of *our* history. As such, philosophy may take ownership of its implication in violence.

The importance of this comedic double movement for Rose's conception of violence has not, however, been picked up in scholarship, and, therefore, my account of Rose's alternative to the *Trauerspiel* affords me a critical lens with which to respond to two prominent interpretations of Rose on violence. In the case of Andrew Shanks, my emphasis on the prospective willingness to stake oneself and risk violence in a dirempted world challenges Shanks' characterization of Rose as a "peace negotiator" that neutrally manages conflict in the broken middle. In the case of Anthony Gorman, my emphasis on holding the prospective and retrospective movements *together* enables a defense against Gorman's charge that the forward-facing element of Rose's comedic conception of philosophy results in a blind and indeterminant love *of* violence, and that the retrospective element results in an ultimately politically impotent critique of cultural

consciousness. Dwelling on this latter point, I have argued that Rose's engagements with cultural representations of violence, and especially with Holocaust cinema, are essential to the political potency of her critique of violence. If discovering one's own implication in the violence of modernity is central to Rose's philosophical enterprise, cinema is figured as a critical locus of this discovery. The political salience of the question of violence, in other words, is inseparable for Rose from a range of quotidian activities that implicate us in the "fascism of representation" inherent to our modern spiritual-animal culture. It is precisely the recognition of our ordinary participation in violence which precipitates a politics that does not merely repeat or reify diremption.

I do not provide an exhaustive account of Rose's mature conception of violence in this study. Rose resisted the systematic theorization of violence *per se*, and the enigmatic use of the concept of violence in her later work reflects that resistance. The question of violence is, nevertheless, a critical element of Rose's mature reflections on the task of philosophy and its crises in the 20th century. I have, therefore, suggested that the dramatic image of the *Trauerspiel* and its counter-image, comedy, are crucial points from which to broach an exploration of the significance of violence in Rose's work. But if it is the case, as I have argued, that Rose's understanding of the *Trauerspiel* is central to her mature conception of violence, and that the question of violence matters because it is central to her account of the crisis of philosophy in the wake of 20th century catastrophe, then a question remains: to what extent is Rose's interpretation of the crisis of philosophy still with us? Is the future of philosophy, in other words, still bound up with the production of a play or work of mourning? To answer such questions, further studies are required that detail and evaluate Rose's account of the *Trauerspiel* as a prevalent and pernicious strand of philosophical thought. To begin that sort of analysis and evaluation, more analytical

attention must be paid to the specifics of Rose's critical interpretations of her postmodern interlocutors, and to the contemporary inheritors of those figures.

By ending the third chapter with Rose's discussion of cultural representations of violence, nevertheless, I hope to have shown that there is more at stake in Rose's reflections on violence than a refutation of postmodernism based on a series of exegetical philosophical arguments. Violence, for Rose, is not a theoretical problem for philosophers to solve or dissolve, but a persistent ordinary facet of modern life. But, as *The Zone of Interest* dramatizes so brilliantly, our quotidian lives also tend to presuppose and obscure violence that we dare not confront. Perhaps, however, Rose supplies us with the means with which to understand and discontinue that avoidance. For, in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, "if [our world] has terrors, they are our own terrors. If it has precipices, they belong to us. If dangers are present, we must try to love them."[294]

[294] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet* (Novato, Calif: New World Library, 2000), 79.

Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetics and Politics*. Radical Thinkers. London: Verso, 2010.

———. *The Adorno Reader*. Blackwell Readers. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

———. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. New York: Verso, 2020.

Adorno, Theodor W., and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso, 1997.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Mariner Books Classics, 2019.

———. *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*. Translated by Howard Eiland. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019.

———. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Translated by John Osborne. London: Verso, 2023.

———. *Toward the Critique of Violence: A Critical Edition*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2021.

Bernstein, Jay. "Philosophy among the Ruins." Prospect Magazine, March 20, 1996.

Bourneuf, Annie. *Behind the Angel of History: The "Angelus Novus" and Its Interleaf*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. [2nd ed.]. New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989.

Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Carr, David. *Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Cavell, Stanley. *The Claim of Reason Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Caygill, Howard. *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience*. London: Routledge, 1998.

———. "Walter Benjamin's Concept of Allegory." In *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, edited by Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, 1st ed., 241–53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Cohen, Josh. "Phenomenologies of Mourning: Gillian Rose and Walter Benjamin." *Women (Oxford, England)* 9, no. 1 (1998): 47–61.

Dante Alighieri. *Inferno*. Translated by Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander. 1st Anchor Books ed. New York: Anchor Books, 2002.

Davis, Joshua B. *Misrecognitions: Gillian Rose and the Task of Political Theology*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018.

Ferber, Ilit. *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Language*. 1st ed. Cultural Memory in the Present. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2013.

Freud, Sigmund. *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*. Edited by J. Strachey. Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London, 1957.

Gandesha, Samir. *Spectres of Fascism: Historical, Theoretical, and International Perspectives*. Toronto: BTL, 2020.

Jonathan Glazer. *The Zone of Interest*. A24, 2023.

Gorman, Anthony. "Gillian Rose and the Project of a Critical Marxism." *Radical Philosophy*, no. 105 (2001): 25–36.

———. "Gillian Rose's Critique of Violence." *Radical Philosophy*, no. 197 (2016): 25-35.

———. "Whither the Broken Middle? Rose and Fackenheim on Mourning, Modernity, and the Holocaust." In *Social Theory after the Holocaust*, edited by Charles Turner and Robert Fine, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000.

Grundmann, Roy, ed. *A Companion to Michael Haneke*. Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Film Directors. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Harrison, Robert Pogue. *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Vol. 2. Oxford (England): Clarendon Press, 1975.

———. *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, Its Place in Moral Philosophy, and Its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*. Translated by T.M. Knox. Works in Continental Philosophy. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975.

———. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by Arnold V. Miller. Oxford Paperbacks. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Held, Phoebe von. *Alienation and Theatricality: Diderot after Brecht*. Legenda Studies in Comparative Literature 17. London: Legenda, 2011.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Benjamin Files*. London: Verso, 2020.

Jay, Martin. *Refractions of Violence*. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 2003.

Latz, Andrew Brower. *The Social Philosophy of Gillian Rose*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2018.

Lloyd, Vincent W. *Law and Transcendence: On the Unfinished Project of Gillian Rose*. Renewing Philosophy. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

———. *Religion of the Field Negro*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018.

———. "Review of Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith." *Ars Disputandi* 11, no. 1 (2011): 40–42.

———. *The Problem with Grace: Reconfiguring Political Theology*. 1st ed. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2011.

Luther, Martin. *Concerning Christian Liberty*. Champaign, Ill: Project Gutenberg, 1999.

Marx, Karl. “On the Jewish Question.” In *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. 2nd ed. Oxford: University Press, 2000.

Milne, Drew. “The Beautiful Soul: From Hegel to Beckett.” *Diacritics* 32, no. 1 (2002): 63–82.

Newman, Jane O. *Benjamin’s Library Modernity, Nation, and the Baroque*. Signale : Modern German Letters, Cultures, and Thought. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2011.

Oppenheimer, Joshua. Interview: Joshua Oppenheimer, July 15, 2013. https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-joshua-oppenheimer-the-act-of-killing/.

Osborne, Peter. “Gillian Rose and Marxism.” *Telos (New York, N.Y.)* 2015, no. 173 (2015): 55–67.

Pensky, Max. *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning*. Critical Perspectives on Modern Culture. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.

Pippin, Robert B. *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: On the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*. 2nd ed. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 1999.

Pound, Marcus. “Political Theology and Comedy: Žižek through Rose Tinted Glasses.” *Crisis and Critique* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 171–91.

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet*. Novato, Calif: New World Library, 2000.

Rose, Gillian. *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and Law*. New York, N.Y: Basil Blackwell, 1984.

———. *Hegel Contra Sociology*. 1981. Reprint, London: Verso, 1995.

———. *Judaism and Modernity: Philosophical Essays*. Radical Thinkers. 1993. Reprint, London: Verso, 2017.

———. *Love’s Work: A Reckoning with Life*. 1995. Reprint, New York: Review Books, 2011.

———. *Marxist Modernism: Introductory Lectures on Frankfurt School Critical Theory*. Edited by Robert Lucas Scott and James Gordon Finlayson. New York: Verso, 2024.

———. *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

———. *Paradiso*. London: Menard Press, 1999.

———. *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

———. *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno*. 1978. Reprint, London: Verso, 1978.

Schick, Kate. *Gillian Rose: A Good Enough Justice*. 1st ed. Taking on the Political. Edinburgh: University Press, 2012.

Shanks, Andrew. *Against Innocence: Gillian Rose's Reception and Gift of Faith*. London: SCM Press, 2008.

———. "Gillian Rose and Theology: Salvaging Faith." *Telos (New York, N.Y.)* 2015, no. 173 (2015): 145–62.

Strohl, Jane E. "The Framework for Christian Living: Luther on the Christian's Callings." In *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*. Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism: And Other Writings*. Edited by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells. Unknown edition. New York: Penguin Classics, 2002.

Weber, Samuel. "Taking Exception to Decision: Walter Benjamin and Carl Schmitt." *Diacritics* 22, no. 3/4 (1992): 5–18.

Williams, Rowan. "Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose." *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (1995): 3–22.

———. *Lost Icons: Reflections on Cultural Bereavement*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2000.

———. *The Tragic Imagination*. First edition. The Literary Agenda. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016.

———. "'The Sadness of the King': Gillian Rose, Hegel, and the Pathos of Reason." *Telos (New York, N.Y.)* 2015, no. 173 (2015): 21–36.

Wolin, Richard. *Walter Benjamin: an Aesthetic of Redemption*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.