

# Excursions

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*Essays: (Re)Connecting Academia*

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Sitting in Rose's 'Broken Middle' on a North London Estate

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# Sitting in Rose's 'Broken Middle' on a North London State

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Gillian Rose, a notoriously difficult philosopher, is not only worth the effort to read but, at least in my experience, has proven to offer real insight and practical guidance in the context of conflict mediation 'on the street' outside academia. Her deployment of the Hegelian theme of recognition, with its implications for an intersubjective reading of 'Geist', and her spin on Hegel's speculative reason offer a refreshing take on mediation practice<sup>1</sup>.

Prior to arriving at Sussex, my work had focused on the field of mediation and conflict resolution: as a neighbourhood mediator, a facilitator working with young people in east London and as a workplace mediator.

Rose's inter-subjective understanding of Geist and recognition, situated in the conflictual 'broken middle', engages us with the aporia of contradictory experiences, requiring a deliberate intention to refrain from rushing to premature conclusions that reduce the aporia to right/wrong or true/false categories to produce a 'mended middle'. Rather, tensions are held between identity and difference without immediate resolution.

Her interpretation of Hegel's speculative reason, which is found in her *Hegel Contra Sociology*, includes a simultaneous experience of both identity

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<sup>1</sup> For a reading of Hegel reflecting the concept of recognition in the context of an intersubjective understanding of 'Geist' (Spirit), see Kochi (2009) and Williams (1992).

and lack of identity, which resolution is left to a future and is “understood as a result to be achieved” (Rose, 2009, p. 52).

Sitting with the difference in the un-mended middle, purposely holding in tension our differences, Rose urges on different parties both an intention to understand and be understood – i.e., mutual recognition. This is more than simple acknowledgement of the other’s claims but may also include recognition of our own complicity with the injustice suffered by the other.

I have seen this dynamic played out before with neighbours from a North London estate. Both neighbours had committed to meeting together, however uncomfortable, with the intention of finding a way forward in their broken relationship.

There were uncomfortable silences; mediators bracketed their panic and urge to push for easy solutions, allowing the space to evolve into a field of possibility for mutual recognition and acknowledgement of each other’s distinct experience of the conflict. There came a point in the mediation where tension shifted and the neighbours began talking directly to each another. Though difficulties around the conflict were not immediately dissipated by the process, possibilities for misrecognition and new levels of recognition in the future were opened. In the end, they found practical ways to resolve their conflict, came to an agreement and even shared a taxi cab home<sup>2</sup>. The relationship no doubt remains an open project, fraught with risk and promise: the risk of fresh misrecognitions and levels of conflict and the promise of new depths of recognition and relationship. But these risks and promises all bear the seeds of their ‘other’ possibilities.

It is possible, then, to distil Rose’s turgid academic prose into neighbours’ lived experiences on a north London housing estate.

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<sup>2</sup> We heard much later on, from a manager of the Housing Association overseeing the estate, that one of the parties suddenly lost their husband to a heart attack. The other party had since become her neighbour’s crucial resource for support and friendship afterwards.

## References

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