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**On How to Make Adorno Scream:
Some Notes on John Holloway's *Change the
World without Taking Power***

John Holloway's book is an essentially orthodox intervention – that is, a revision of the tradition by loyalty to its founding texts – concerned with transmitting an unredeemed theoretical achievement of the past into a contemporary 'political scene'. Readers who bought the book because of the 'today' in its subtitle, *The Meaning of Revolution Today* (and perhaps were also misled by the abseiling activist on the cover) must have been disappointed not to find a restatement of revolutionary theory that takes an analysis of contemporary movements as its empirical starting point. Holloway refers to contemporary movements only for illustration; what he provides is theory in a strict (others may say, narrow) sense, the working through of concepts whose historical background is implied rather than developed.

Holloway's book showcases the relevant essentials of Marx's critical theory by way of emphasising why and in what respect they are superior to alternative (non-Marxian) and currently more fashionable ways of thinking. He recovers Marx's revolutionary insight that an exploration of the possibility of revolution

194 • Marcel Stoetzler

needs to be a critique not of politics (let alone other 'superstructural' partialities such as 'consciousness' or 'culture') but of society in its totality, including the simultaneous critique of state, individual and community.

This basic intention is reflected in the structure of the book: the first three chapters form an exposition of the problem, with Chapter 1 grounding methodological-epistemological considerations in an argument for the urgency of revolutionary theory, Chapter 2 making the point that state-centred concepts of revolution (let alone reform) have had their historical chance and failed, and Chapter 3 exploring the meaning of the phrase 'change the world without taking power'. The latter is clearly the most extravagant and *risqué* chapter. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 discuss the concept of fetishism from different angles, forming the theoretical backbone of the argument. Chapter 7 provides a historical perspective on the extent to which the centrality of the concept of fetishism has been acknowledged in Marxist theory (a chapter that feels almost like a digression as it is the only one that is written in the mould of intellectual history). Chapters 8 and 9 aim to locate Holloway's anti-fetishistic concept of subjectivity in Marx's understanding of class and revolutionary agency. Chapter 10 relates the former to the concept of crisis as inherent in the capitalist mode of production and negotiates a space for revolutionary hope. Holloway emphasises that it is one of the specific characteristics of Marx's thought (as opposed to other socialist traditions) that this hope is neither 'utopian' (in a bad, 'romantic' sense) nor 'scientific' (in a bad, positivist sense). Chapter 11 draws all this together under the title 'Revolution?'

Holloway's conception pivots on his view of class struggle as the central societal conflict between 'classification' and 'non-subordination'. The former implies the 'fracturing' of the 'social flow of doing' and the 'defining' of 'identities' (for which the duality of modern state and global market provides crucial tools). The many ways of 'non-subordination' – sometimes mere 'screaming', sometimes leading to open 'insubordination' – contain implicit elements of utopian hope. They are the movement of communism and the basis for a future communist society. Crisis, in which the intrinsic impossibility of capitalist society becomes manifest, is understood as merely an intensified form of class struggle (whereby capital's 'flight from labour' can temporarily serve as a powerful but precarious weapon). Holloway's characterisation of communism (and the practices that are its manifestations) vacillates between the notion of a 'reconstitution' of the 'social flow of doing' and that of 'blowing open' the limitless and unprecedented possibilities of a humane future.

Classification, class struggle and non-subordination

The logical starting point of Holloway's book is his understanding of the concept of class. Holloway rejects a positive definition of the working class in the sense of its 'identification' as 'a particular group of people', which he depicts as the basis of 'endless discussions about class and non-class movements, class and "other forms" of struggle, "alliances" between the working class and other groups, and so on'.¹ Getting beyond the stale rhetoric of 'identity' and coalition politics is clearly one of the motivations behind Holloway's approach. He argues that classes 'exist' only in the sense that they are permanently 'in the process of being constituted'² by capitalist production, 'the daily snatching of the object-creation-product from the subject-creator-producer'.

Class struggle, then, is the struggle to classify and against being classified at the same time as it is, indistinguishably, the struggle between constituted classes. . . . All social practice is an unceasing antagonism between the subjection of practice to the fetishized, perverted, defining forms of capitalism and the attempt to live against-and-beyond those forms. There can thus be no question of the existence of non-class forms of struggle. Class struggle, then, is the unceasing daily antagonism (whether it be perceived or not) between . . . fetishization and de-fetishization. . . . Working class identity should be seen as a non-identity: the communion of struggle to be not working class.³

Working-class identity, in this sense, is the struggle not to be classified, not to be reduced to 'being' a 'worker'.

'Humanity, as it exists, is schizoid' as 'everybody is torn apart by the class antagonism',⁴ that is by being and not being (subsumed to) some 'identity'. Those who do not benefit from capitalist appropriation, however, can be expected to be more strongly against it – although nobody can be *purely* 'against-and-beyond' it.⁵ Only insofar as we *are not* the working class, 'the question of emancipation can even be posed', but only insofar as we *are* the working class we have the *need* to pose it.

¹ Holloway 2002, p. 141.

² Holloway 2002, p. 143.

³ Holloway 2002, p. 143ff.

⁴ Holloway 2002, p. 144.

⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 145.

Although capital imposes identity, 'the identity (is-ness) of capitalism is a real illusion . . . capitalism never "is", it is always a struggle to constitute itself';⁶ '[c]apital presents itself as stable: class struggle, they say, and we accept, comes from us'.⁷ We might find it flattering to be told that we are the ones who wage the class struggle but, Holloway writes, it is they who start the struggle by subjecting us to classification.⁸ Class struggle's principal form is insubordination.⁹ Holloway names as examples 'the disobedience of children', 'the cursing of the alarm clock' in the morning, 'absenteeism, sabotage and malingering at work', all the way to 'open rebellion': all seem part of, or based in, a 'hidden culture of resistance'. More often than not, 'the scream of insubordination' is heard as 'a low mumble of discontent':¹⁰ it might simply be the assertion that we are more than the definition that we are said to come under.

Holloway's rejection of a narrowly political (in the sense of state-centred) concept of revolution follows from his definition of class in terms of classification. 'The movement of the state . . . is a movement to impose patterns on a refractory reality'.¹¹ 'The imposition of state definitions of nationality' or 'citizenization' is 'a process of redefinition of the movement of power-to'. Our 'claim to exert control over our own lives is redefined as democracy, democracy being understood as a state-defined process of electorally influenced decision making'. This 'redefining' is a form of containment.

Holloway gives two main reasons why we should not rely on state-centred strategies: firstly, there is a danger of overestimating what can be gained from 'conquering' state-power because 'what the state does is limited and shaped by the fact that it exists as just one node in a web of social relations. Crucially, this web of social relations centres on the way in which work is organized'.¹² Secondly, the state-political perspective is too short as the idea 'that the state can be the centre point of social transformation . . . presupposes . . . a conceptual snipping of social relations at the frontiers of the state'.¹³ Holloway recalls that the 'non-territoriality' of the 'capitalist constitution of social relations' is

⁶ Holloway 2002, p. 100.

⁷ Holloway 2002, p. 99.

⁸ Holloway 2002, p. 100.

⁹ Holloway 2002, p. 150.

¹⁰ Holloway 2002, p. 151.

¹¹ Holloway 2002, p. 97.

¹² Holloway 2002, p. 13.

¹³ Holloway 2002, p. 14.

'not just the product of the current phase of "globalisation"'.¹⁴ The critique of the state leads to that of the party as the latter 'presupposes an orientation towards the state and makes little sense without it'.¹⁵ The party 'is in fact a form of disciplining . . . the myriad forms of class struggle'. In the context of party politics and the conquering of state power, 'the negative of refusal is converted into the positive of power-building';¹⁶ party building, army building, institution building, nation building, state building all mean the streamlining, instrumentalising, hierarchisation and impoverishment of class struggle.

Subjectivity, negativity and the 'social flow of doing'

Three difficult aspects of Holloway's argument need to be addressed first of all:

(i) Holloway bases the concept of 'subjectivity' on that of 'negativity', but negativity is defined in three different ways, as human doing in general, as 'screaming' against domination and as effective resistance to domination. Domination by 'power-over', however, is said to destroy subjectivity, while 'dignity' is defined as the reassertion of 'doing'.

(ii) He discusses present society on the one hand as one in which 'community' has been broken up and has given place to 'identity', while, on the other hand, it is implied that there is nevertheless a 'community of doing' or a 'social flow of doing' that is being 'invaded' or 'fragmented' by capitalist relations of production.

(iii) He explicitly rejects the notion that there might have been a precapitalist communal form of society that we could simply revert to, but it implicitly reappears at several points in the argument.

In a characteristic statement, Holloway formulates his position as follows:

For bourgeois theory, subjectivity is identity, whereas in our argument, subjectivity is the negation of identity. . . . To identify the bourgeois subject with subjectivity as a whole, however, is a most murderous throwing of the baby out with the bathwater . . . since subjectivity, as movement, as negation of is-ness, is the only possible basis for going beyond identity, and therefore beyond the bourgeois subject.¹⁷

¹⁴ Holloway 2002, p. 95.

¹⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Holloway 2002, p. 70ff.

Holloway rightly identifies 'identity' as a core characteristic of bourgeois subjectivity, forgetting, though, that it is not its *only* characteristic. His reverse argument – that non-bourgeois subjectivity means 'negation of is-ness' – is, therefore, shaky to the extent that such a negation is not totally alien to the bourgeois subject either.¹⁸ This becomes a problem in Holloway's discussion of 'negativity'. He quotes Marx's remark (from *Capital*, Volume I, 'The Labour Process') that 'the architect' is different from a bee in that he (Holloway adds: or she) 'raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality',¹⁹ and presents this observation as a quasi-anthropological statement. Holloway writes that 'the doing of the architect is negative' as 'it begins and ends with the negation of what exists'.²⁰ On this level of the argument, the 'negativity' consists simply in the fact that human beings transform nature by projecting what they find into what they imagine it could be. However, this 'negativity' is not at all in itself negative in the much more specific sense that 'the scream' is negative. Holloway glosses over this crucial difference by continuing: 'Bees, to the best of our knowledge, do not scream. They do not say "No! Enough of queens . . ." . . . their doing is not a doing that negates: it simply reproduces'. In this second step of the argument, the criteria for what constitutes 'negativity' are much stricter and include a normative judgement ('enough of queens'), different from the generic concept used in the first half of this paragraph. Most creative acts that are 'negative' in the first sense (a negativity of transforming and creating that is actually pivotal to the *bourgeois* concept of subjectivity) are not at all 'negative' in the Marxian, critical sense. Holloway raises the stakes even higher when he continues that a proper scream 'must involve a projected doing'.²¹ Here, in the third concept of negativity, the argument culminates: to be human includes a capacity for imaginative purposeful projection in a general sense (difference from the bee); secondly, to be human in the form of society we have to deal with demands being negative in the sense of screaming 'No, stop it!' (difference from bees and

¹⁸ The preceding passage – 'the subject of bourgeois theory is an innocent, healthy, freely self-determining individual. . . . The more thoroughly identification is established . . . the freer the society appears' (Holloway 2002, p. 70) – is overstated; bourgeois theory has much more awareness of non-identity than that. Just think of Freud.

¹⁹ Marx 1990, p. 284; Holloway quotes from the older translation (Marx 1965, p. 178) that translates the German *Vorstellung* (Marx 1993, p. 193) correctly with 'imagination' (Marx 1990 has 'mind').

²⁰ Holloway 2002, p. 24ff.

²¹ Holloway 2002, p. 25.

also from all those among our fellow human beings who, for various reasons, tend to emulate bees); third, the screaming must come with some 'projected doing' attached (different from all those posers who do not get out of their armchairs to change the world).

In these paragraphs, Holloway is wavering between a stronger and a weaker notion of 'human nature'. One moment, he writes that humans differ from animals 'not because going beyond is part of our human nature, but simply because we scream'; because humanity is not yet, 'doing-as-going-beyond' is a necessity. The next, he falls back into a pre-critical notion of negativity, when he writes that 'subjectivity refers to the conscious projection beyond that which exists . . .',²² equating subjectivity with doing and with the transcendence of 'is-ness'. This way of putting things collapses the three forms of subjectivity that Holloway otherwise is at pains to distinguish: the architect, the *faux* screamer and the revolutionary screamer/doer. Then again, Holloway turns against defining subjectivity at all and argues that 'any definition of the subject is . . . the attempt to pin down that which is a movement against being pinned down'.²³

In what I find is the most ideological statement in the whole book, Holloway extends the notion of a 'liberation' of 'power-to' to the concept of 'dignity': 'Dignity is the self-assertion of those who are repressed . . . the affirmation of power-to in all its multiplicity'. The 'huge diversity' of dignity's struggles 'is a single struggle to emancipate power-to, to liberate human doing from capital'.²⁴ A rich selection of keywords from the context of bourgeois revolution is assembled here – self-assertion, affirmation, emancipation, liberation. If 'dignity' means the indiscriminate 'affirmation of power-to in all its multiplicity' I cannot see any place for it within critical theory.

²² Holloway 2002, p. 25ff.

²³ Holloway 2002, p. 26. However, Holloway's argument that 'definition' is a form of reification that goes together with the fragmentation of the 'flow of doing' and the appearance of society as a mass of discrete phenomena, must be complemented with Adorno's point (in *Negative Dialectics*; actually referred to by Holloway in another context [Holloway 2002, p. 102]) that all thinking is dependent upon concepts and some degree of identification and definition: if this should be called 'reification', then it must be admitted that some amount of it is unavoidable. There is a fine line between the necessary and the specifically capitalist (i.e. historically contingent) forms of objectifications and abstractions. 'The table is a table' and 'Mexico is Mexico' (Holloway 2002, p. 62) are statements that only superficially look the same: the fragmentation of the world into nation-states is not of the same order as the fragmentation of the world into tables, chairs and sofas. Furthermore, Holloway's important point that the 'we-who-want-to-change-the-world cannot be defined' (ibid.) means that 'the working class' or 'women' cannot be defined in the same way that tables indeed *can*.

²⁴ Holloway 2002, p. 212ff.

The unresolved contradiction between the concepts of the doer/creator/projector and the screamer/subverter/insurgent also structure Holloway's discussion of the concept of 'power'. 'Power, in the first place, is . . . capacity-to-do'.²⁵ It is 'transformed into . . . power-over' when 'the social flow of doing is fractured'. Holloway points to two forms the fracturing takes: division of labour and exploitation.

Holloway's notion of the 'social flow of doing' that capital is fracturing is central to his rejection of the methodological individualism of liberal sociology. He writes that all those who designed, built, packed and transported the computer he was using at the very moment of his writing, as well as those who produced and provided the electricity, John's breakfast, and so on, partake in the writing of this book: 'there is a community of doing, a collective of doers, a flow of doing through time and space'.²⁶ Holloway's point – 'doing is inherently social'²⁷ – needs, however, qualification. He describes the 'social flow of doing' as if it were an original condition into which capitalist production intervenes, although the 'community' or 'collective' Holloway describes is actually the 'flow' of the capitalist process itself. The important points, *what kind of flow of what kind of doings and within what kind of sociality*, are obfuscated by reference to 'the' social flow of doing.

Holloway uses what he presents here as the positive facticity of the 'social flow of doing' as a (quasi-ontological) point of reference for a possible transformation of the formless multiplicity of 'the scream' into the movement of communism. He describes this as a process of gaining consciousness: we need to understand that the 'we' is constituted by 'the conscious and unconscious, the planned and unplanned braiding of our lives through time'. This involves, 'if the collective flow of doing is recognized, a mutual recognition of one another as doers, as active subjects. Our individual doing receives its social validation from its recognition as part of the social flow'. Holloway seems to conflate here the 'we' that is simply society – more specifically: capitalist society – with the 'we' that does the screaming: society, especially capitalist society, *does* ground subjectivity in the recognition of productivity and creativity; mutual recognition as 'doers' (producers) is, in itself, not a basis for insubordination.

²⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 28.

²⁶ Holloway 2002, p. 26.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Holloway tends to identify 'screaming' with 'doing' (with 'negativity' as their common essence).²⁸ He combines here two very different arguments: the one is the traditional one that the (productive, creative) workers need to understand that it is they who build the world in order to claim its ownership. The other is the more specifically Marxian point that the 'we' that collectively creates all the goods is at the same time the 'we' that screams because it does not want to be the former. The difference is the affirmation (sometimes: pride) of being a (bourgeois) producer-creator-subject,²⁹ or its rejection. The most powerful side of Holloway's argument is his insistence that 'we-ness' gains force by understanding its groundedness not in being-so (producers, doers) but in the contingent acts of 'screaming-doing', that is in trying to getting *beyond* being-so and doing-so;³⁰ this means that the real question is not that of 'recognition' (as the liberal-Hegelian, for example, Habermasian or Taylorian discourse goes) but *what kind of* recognition of *what kind of* 'collectivity'. Our theory ought to make it clear why we are not after the forms of recognition provided by capitalist society; after all, the pre-eminent medium in which bourgeois producer-subjects recognise each other's subjectivity is the gentle flow of money.

Objectivity and the paradox of revolution

One of the difficult preconditions of revolutionary theory is the question, 'how can maimed, dehumanized, alienated people possibly create a liberated human society?'.³¹ The 'specific contribution of Marx' that 'takes Marxism beyond other forms of radical thought' is the discovery 'that capital depends absolutely upon labour for its existence, that is, upon the transformation of human doing into value-producing labour'.³² Holloway writes that 'it is clear that the rich oppress us, that we hate them and fight against them' but the us-against-them approach 'tells us nothing of our power or their vulnerability' and 'the fragility of that oppression'. The fact that Marxism is formulated

²⁸ Holloway 2002, p. 27.

²⁹ In contexts where women are not – or are to a lesser extent, or under significantly worse conditions – included into the productive workforce (that is, into the community of 'subjects') this 'pride' is likely to take the form of a re-articulation of traditional patriarchal attitudes.

³⁰ This aspect of Holloway's argument resembles parallel discussions in feminist theory, such as Judith Butler's 1990 re-formulation of the feminist 'we' in *Gender Trouble*.

³¹ Holloway 2002, p. 46.

³² Holloway 2002, p. 176.

from the standpoint of negation manifests itself exactly in this aspect: it is less interested in stating the obvious fact that there is oppression but much more in the less obvious fact that the basis of this oppression is vulnerable: 'we are not victims but subjects, the only subjects'.³³ 'The essential claim of Marxism' is that 'they' are 'continually created by us. We, the powerless, are all-powerful'. Nevertheless, the 'increasing closure of existence under capitalism'³⁴ means that 'the more urgent revolutionary change is shown to be, the more impossible it seems'. The 'revolutionary dilemma' or paradox is, however, an objective fact, not a problem of false versus proper thinking. The increasingly total character of capitalist 'power-over' means that 'every breath of our lives' becomes 'a moment of class struggle'.³⁵ Inversely, the ubiquity of capitalism is also its weakness, as it opens so many points for attack.

Amongst the theorists that Holloway acknowledges as the greatest influences on his argument are Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Holloway claims that what distinguishes his own arguments from theirs is that – their differences notwithstanding – they fetishised the concept of fetishism: for them, 'the only possible source of anti-fetishism lies outside the ordinary',³⁶ incorporated in 'the Party' for Lukács, in 'privileged' intellectuals and artists for Horkheimer and Adorno and in outcasts and social outsiders for Marcuse: 'fetishism rules normal, everyday life, while anti-fetishism resides elsewhere, on the margins'. As Bolshevik faith in 'the Party' is now 'historically irrelevant at best', any theory based on fetishising fetishism 'tends to lead to a deep pessimism'. Avoiding the latter without reviving some version of a *deus ex machina* such as 'the Party' is what Holloway defines as the main concern of his book. 'To break with this pessimism, we need a concept in which fetishism and anti-fetishism are not separated'. His antidote is to stress the processual and unfinished character of fetishisation, that is, to re-emphasise the dialectical nature and origin of this concept.³⁷ Holloway's insistence on 'fetishisation-as-process' implies likewise that 'there is nothing special about our criticism of capitalism, that our scream and our criticism are perfectly ordinary'.

³³ Holloway 2002, p. viii.

³⁴ Holloway 2002, p. 54.

³⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 56.

³⁶ Holloway 2002, p. 88.

³⁷ Although this cannot be discussed here, I feel that Holloway's emphasis on the dialectical nature of analysis based on the concept of fetishism is much more in continuity than discontinuity with Horkheimer and especially Adorno (from Horkheimer's essay on 'Traditional and Critical Theory' to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*).

Holloway's category of 'the scream' is so generic, of course, that it is true but also somewhat banal to say that screaming is ordinary. The more difficult question is that of the differences between different people's screams, and the fact that most screamers 'don't allow themselves' (to use Adorno's words) to hear all the other screams. Are not John himself and his most referred-to insurgent, Marcos, just the type of intellectuals Adorno had in mind when he wrote that 'criticizing privilege' (not: screaming) 'becomes a privilege'?³⁸ Furthermore, are not the *indigenos* from Chiapas a perfectly Marcusean marginalised group? Would not rejecting the bad news – that of the increasing closure in capitalist society – be the denial of a reality?

The intention behind Holloway's rejection of the idea of the extraordinariness of (whatever leads to) revolution is, of course, correct:

[T]he movement of communism is anti-heroic. . . . The aim of revolution is the transformation of ordinary, everyday life and it is surely from ordinary, everyday life that revolution must arise. . . . [T]he weaving of friendship, of love, of comradeship, of communality in the face of the reduction of social relations to commodity exchange: that is the material movement of communism. . . . [O]ur struggle is . . . to intensify anti-identity. The crisis of identity is a liberation from certainties . . . the crisis of the revolutionary subject is the liberation of the subject from knowing.³⁹

More precisely, we need to look at the liberation from being governed by positive knowledge alone. In order to achieve such liberation, we clearly must know a lot, but it is a different kind of knowledge.

There is 'no innocence, and that is true with an increasing intensity'.⁴⁰ This evidently implies that what Holloway calls 'power-to' can exist only in what is its now predominant form, 'power-over'. Holloway formulates this with hesitation but still rather optimistically:

Intellectuals, artists and marginalised groups are considered by Horkheimer, Adorno or Marcuse not as outside the social reality of capitalist society. For Adorno certainly, the artist is particularly able merely to give powerful *expression* to societal contradictions, which does not mean being particularly able to resolve them. Immanence and self-reflexivity have defined critical theory since the term was coined by Horkheimer in 1937 (Horkheimer 1972); Holloway's criticism holds against Lukács (and against Habermas; see Postone 1996, Chapter 6) but not against Horkheimer and Adorno. Holloway is actually paraphrasing Horkheimer (1972) when he writes that bourgeois theory discards the fact that the 'what ought' is grounded in the 'what is', and separates the study of 'empirical' reality from 'normative' theory (Holloway 2002, p. 7).

³⁸ Quoted by Holloway, *ibid.*

³⁹ Holloway 2002, pp. 210–12.

⁴⁰ Holloway 2002, p. 37.

204 • Marcel Stoetzler

The exercise of power-to in a way that does not focus on value creation can exist only in antagonism to power-over, as struggle. . . . Power-to . . . can exist . . . only . . . as anti-power.⁴¹

This formulation, however, is misleading: power-to actually exists mostly *as* power-over, or as the complement and object of power-over. Anti-power is always infested with power-over. 'Under capitalism, subjectivity can only exist antagonistically, in opposition to its own objectification'. However, the 'revolutionary dilemma' that Holloway describes means that even opposition can mean affirmation: not every activity that 'does not focus on value-creation' or that appears to oppose 'its own objectification' is *ipso facto* 'anti-power'. The concept of 'anti-power' is dangerous as long as it remains under-determined. Not every force that opposes the currently predominant form of 'power' works in the service of communism, and the concept of 'anti-power' needs to be subjected to the test of reversal: do, for example, fascist anti-statism and anti-Semitic anticapitalism also fit under the category of 'anti-power'? If they do, then the concept is too broad and thus uncritical. We have to take more seriously Adorno's suspicion that what looks like opposition might really be a form of affirmation.

Crisis as intensified class struggle

In his comments on crisis theory, Holloway holds that the 'falling apart of the social relations of capitalism' is intensified class struggle (while revolution is nothing other than intensified crisis, that is, doubly intensified class struggle).⁴²

As 'the tendency to crisis' is 'embedded in the form of the class antagonism',⁴³ 'our struggle is clearly a constant struggle to get away from capital . . . a struggle to lengthen the leash' (such as in arriving late for work or struggles over wages).⁴⁴ Capital struggles by trying to contain our flight from capital, and, paradoxically, it uses – amongst others – means that could be described

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Holloway 2002, p. 204. Revolution is 'the development of the anti-power which already exists as the substance of crisis'. The objectivity of capitalist crisis has its roots in the *fragility* of the objectivity of fetishism and its dependence on our subjectivity (or rather, the *anti-identitarian*, *insurgent* subjectivity that is our rejection of our *identitarian*, being-so and doing-so subjectivity), and it is in this sense that revolution comes (if it comes) out of the same source as capitalism and its crises: our doing, its (incomplete and ongoing) alienation (as labour) and our discontent with the latter.

⁴³ Holloway 2002, p. 188.

⁴⁴ Holloway 2002, p. 189.

as forms of 'actual or threatened flight from labour':⁴⁵ withdrawal of capital, especially after the conversion of capital into its money-form. However, capital can never go beyond the fact that it is 'nothing but objectivized labour'.⁴⁶ To the extent that the 'flight from labour' means introduction of more (or more sophisticated) machinery, it paradoxically intensifies capital's dependence on labour: relatively fewer workers need to be exploited at relatively higher intensity in the effort to counterbalance the tendency of the rate of profit to fall.⁴⁷ Capital must retain its ability to keep this relatively smaller number of workers relatively happier. This permanent struggle

does not in itself constitute a crisis. Hippies can opt out, workers can turn up late for work, students can fritter away their time in the study of Marx, capital can turn to financial speculation or handling drugs: all that does not matter too much as long as the production of capital (that is the objectivization of doing) itself is not threatened . . . [i.e.] the production of surplus value. . . . Crisis is no more than the expression of the unsustainability of fetishism.⁴⁸

Holloway asserts that this crucial piece of Marx's theory is an explanation of crisis 'in terms of the force of the scream', the force of the flight of doing from its fetishisation, from being reduced to labour.⁴⁹ He correctly rejects the traditional explanation of crisis in terms of a conflict between 'forces and relations of production' as a piece of positivism/idealism: the 'forces of production' – dubbed by Holloway 'human power-to' to avoid mechanistic overtones – exist 'in-and-against' their capitalist form, 'power-over' (like use-value exists 'in-and-against' value), and do not simply grow, grow, grow, while *en passant* exploding one social form and creating another. The increase of 'human power-to' (forces of production) may be a necessary, but is not a sufficient condition of revolution; the decisive conflict is internal to the mode of production, and it is entirely negative: the capital relation destroying itself.

However, Holloway does point to a positivity *in* the negation that does, for him, provide positive elements for the construction of a self-determining, communist society: 'The worker who phones in to say she is sick because she wants to spend the day with her children is struggling to give priority to one

⁴⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 189.

⁴⁶ Holloway 2002, p. 190.

⁴⁷ Holloway 2002, p. 191.

⁴⁸ Holloway 2002, p. 190.

⁴⁹ Holloway 2002, p. 192.

206 • Marcel Stoetzler

form of doing over another',⁵⁰ and 'even' people who 'simply try to do their jobs well, as in teachers trying to teach their students' are fighting 'for the emancipation of the sociality of doing'.⁵¹ Holloway has a point here but wastes it on hyperbole when he concludes: 'From the point of view of capital, the focus on use value rather than value is just as much a form of insubordination as absenteeism or sabotage'. The notion that use-value could or should be emancipated is a red herring, as use-value is the *embodiment* of value, that is, the opposite and complement, but not the negation of exchange-value. Holloway tries to wring the identification of something positive out of the totality but the totality is stronger.

A crisis can be said to exist when the insubordination or non-subordination of doing hinders the intensification of exploitation required for capitalist reproduction to such an extent that the profitability of capital is seriously affected.⁵²

In this situation, 'capital seeks to reorganize its relation with labour in such a way as to restore profitability' by means that affect all the conditions of exploitation, in other words, 'the whole of society';⁵³ in the long list of all these means, Holloway also includes changes in the relations 'between women and men, children and parents' and also 'between different aspects of ourselves'. Capital is forced to seek confrontations, which it would otherwise rather avoid as too risky. To postpone confrontation, companies as well as states may choose to 'make believe that there is a greater production of surplus value than is actually the case' (by borrowing money), 'a greater subordination of life to capital than is really so'.⁵⁴ In order to alleviate risky confrontations with non-subordination, credit was expanded in the twentieth century, which meant a loosening of social discipline as imposed by the law of value. Its historical side-effect, the domination of politics by debt, means a tightening of social discipline and the general loss – from the point of view of capital – of the option to postpone and avoid conflict. The historical compromise negated itself. The logical implication is that, in the immediate future, there will be a lot of conflict of the kind that capital found in the last century – whenever possible – important to avoid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Holloway 2002, p. 193.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Holloway 2002, p. 194.

⁵⁴ Holloway 2002, p. 195.

Scream, anti-power and communism

In the currently existing form of society, doing 'exists antagonistically, as a doing turned against itself'.⁵⁵ However, the status of the 'un-alienated social flow of doing' is neither that of an actual reality nor that of 'mere ideas, romantic echoes of an imagined Golden Age'.⁵⁶ Holloway asserts that

whether there was ever a golden age of free doing (primitive communism) does not really matter to us now. They [these concepts] point not towards the past but towards a possible future: a future whose possibility depends on its real existence in the present.

Although the un-alienated doing does not exist, and has never existed, it does exist as 'a presently existing not-yet', as the 'revolt against its denial'. Its 'materiality' consists in that there cannot be a denial or domination without something which is being denied or dominated:

No matter how much the done dominates the doing, it depends absolutely on that doing for its existence. . . . Capital depends absolutely upon the labour which creates it (and therefore on the prior transformation of doing into labour). . . . That is the basis for hope.⁵⁷

To say 'we are not yet' is not the promise of a 'secure homecoming' in the near future, but that of 'a becoming with no guarantees',⁵⁸ of attaining 'not a lost humanity' but 'a humanity to be created'. It is basically good news that 'our not-yet-ness already exists as project, as overflowing, as pushing beyond', but this also implies that the becoming promised by the scream resonates with what the scream screams against. Being negation of the negation, the 'not-yet-ness' carries within itself traces of 'is-ness'. 'Humanity', in the sense of 'the negation of inhumanity',⁵⁹ is not, however, already there waiting like Sleeping Beauty (a.k.a. 'human nature') as 'humanism' (including 'humanist Marxism') postulates in its positivist naïveté.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 34.

⁵⁶ Holloway 2002, p. 35.

⁵⁷ Holloway 2002, p. 35ff.

⁵⁸ Holloway 2002, p. 152.

⁵⁹ Holloway 2002, p. 153.

⁶⁰ An important statement on communism is hidden away in a brief remark: the acknowledgement that the struggle for communism is endless implies that 'even if the conditions for a power-free society are created' with the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, the state and all the rest of it, 'it will always be necessary to struggle against the recrudescence of power-over' (Holloway 2002, p. 152). There will never be a 'final synthesis'. Under capital, 'human potential' is 'clogged up', the human

One might argue that the hope that ‘unalienated doing’ could be, and one day will be, an actuality, is in fact the *presupposition* of the analysis of capitalism as ‘alienation’ and ‘denial’, not its conclusion: after all, it is us who *understand* and accept as true the claim that the bases of capital are ‘alienation’, ‘denial’ and ‘organised armed robbery’ although we do not have positive, hard, factual evidence of what ‘non-alienation’ would be. We only ‘conclude’ from our own claim that capital is denial that there must be the presently absent presence of non-alienation that will, one day, become a present presence; if this is what the philosophers call metaphysical, we will have to live with it. It might mean that ‘in the beginning’ is not the scream but the hope, a vague intimation of a future of non-alienated doing, without which we would not even as much as have a notion of alienation, without which, in turn, we would hardly be able to scream (in the determined, revolutionary way that distinguishes our screaming from that of the pigs on slaughterhouse day). In other words, Holloway’s discovery of the ‘materiality’ of our hope for a non-alienated future is too good to be true, but it does no damage. We can rely on the hard fact that capital consists of the exploitation and appropriation of labour, which is, by definition, alienated doing, constituted as such *in* the process of alienation itself, not prior to it. How, if at all, the not-yet of non-alienation is ‘materially’ present in the capitalist process of its denial is not clear.

Holloway’s claim to have discovered the ‘material’ presence of the absent seems, however, to allow some bourgeois-liberal ideology to sneak in through the back door: the subsequent formulation that we ought to ‘liberate power-to from power-over’⁶¹ falsely implies (against himself) one could ‘liberate’ something that does not yet exist. It would be more to the point to say that we ought to *create* that which does not yet exist. Furthermore: the ‘re-’ in ‘the struggle for the reassertion of the social flow of doing’⁶² likewise suggests – against Holloway’s confessed intentions – that an unalienated ‘social flow’ already is waiting somewhere in the wings and merely needs to

potential to be humane as well as the human potential to be cruel and mean: the more ‘human potential’ will be liberated, the more ‘processual’, open-ended and uncertain human living-together will be. The type of security and predictability (‘Community, Identity, Stability’, the motto of the world-state in *Brave New World* [Huxley 1932]) which the iron cage of capital guaranteed (at least in its social-democratic variant) will be dissolved by communism. It will know acts of cruelty, but they will be dealt with differently, as easy bourgeois solutions such as prisons, asylums and so forth will not be at hand.

⁶¹ Holloway 2002, p. 36.

⁶² *Ibid.*

be kissed to life. When Holloway describes 'the dissolution of power-over' as 'the *emancipation* of power-to'⁶³ he takes on board in the same vein a concept that never even really worked for liberalism – a period piece of a nineteenth-century heritage that we would better do without: if someone (or something) is supposed to be emancipated, this someone must already exist.⁶⁴

'We', the 'anti-working anti-class', 'we are the wreckers'.⁶⁵ Capital 'constantly seeks to compose, to create identities, to create stability (always illusory, but essential to its existence)', while we are the ones 'who de-compose'.

What unites the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas or the Movement of the Landless (MST) in Brazil with the struggle of internet workers in Seattle, say, is not a positive common class composition but, rather, the community of their negative struggle against capitalism.

The question that needs to follow from here is whether this community of negativity needs also to be translated into a community of experience and of vision in order to become more than the *potential* of revolution.

Holloway's insistence on the power of negativity is shot through with assertions of positivity, such as when he declares – seemingly against the main line of his argument – that

actions that are purely negative . . . do nothing to overcome the separation on which capitalist rule is based. . . . [A]ctions must . . . assert alternative ways of doing . . . transform the experience of social life. . . . This means seeing struggle as a process of ever renewed experiment . . . as constantly moving a step beyond the absorbing identification that capitalism imposes.⁶⁶

Here, Holloway is moving from the negativity of everyday 'screams' to the positivity of 'oppositional self-organization'. The latter should lead to 'a cumulative breaking of linearity'.⁶⁷ Although organising (as a communicative process) is crucial in order to get things done, it must be instrumental to a 'politics of events'; the events must not become instrumental to building up an organisation (as a thing-like structure) and to 'expand[ing] the caste of militants'. But Holloway does not explain how the multiplicity of 'screamings' and non-subordination is mediated and related to a 'politics of events' as

⁶³ Ibid., my emphasis.

⁶⁴ Furthermore, the concept of 'emancipation' presupposes a subject who does the emancipating – usually the state, until 'self-emancipation' was invented late in the nineteenth century as a euphemism for nation-building.

⁶⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 164.

⁶⁶ Holloway 2002, p. 213.

⁶⁷ Holloway 2002, p. 214.

'events' are, by definition, not part of everyday life. The examples Holloway gives are the Zapatista rebellion and 'the wave of demonstrations against global neoliberalism' (Seattle and so forth).⁶⁸ While I can imagine how the Zapatista uprising must have been rooted in the everyday class struggle of 'classification' and 'insubordination' in Chiapas, I find this less self-evident in the case of Seattle: Holloway merely praises the rather formal aspect that Seattle et al. were 'event-centred', and writes that 'at their best', such events are 'carnivals of the oppressed'. The latter are, however, not necessarily 'flashes against fetishism' as Holloway seems to suggest (after all, the 'carnival' metaphor is a variation on a formulation by Lenin),⁶⁹ but could indeed contain intensely fetishistic and spectacular elements. Furthermore, in what way Seattle et al. supposedly served 'the dissolution of identity' (part of how Holloway defines revolution) is unclear.

'Social discontent today tends to be expressed' rather 'diffusely', and the 'vast area of activity directed towards changing the world in a way that does not have the state as its focus, and that does not aim at gaining positions of power' (*state* power he seems to mean here) 'is rarely revolutionary in the sense of having revolution as an explicit aim, yet the projection of radical otherness is often an important component of the activity involved'.⁷⁰ The latter is, Holloway suggests, the revolutionary moment of these activities.

Holloway accepts the objection whereby non-subordination that remains fragmented, 'private' and unconscious will easily be recuperated by 'power-over', but, nevertheless, all forms of non-subordination leave 'a residue'

⁶⁸ Holloway 2002, p. 215.

⁶⁹ It is worthwhile looking at how exactly Lenin used the image. The place is in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*: 'Revolutions are festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. . . . At such times people are capable of performing miracles, if judged by the limited, philistine yardstick of gradualist progress. But it is essential that leaders of the revolutionary parties, too, should advance their aims more comprehensively and boldly at such a time, so that their slogans shall always be in advance of the revolutionary initiative of the masses, serve as a beacon, reveal to them our democratic and socialist ideal in all its magnitude and splendour, and show them the shortest and most direct route to complete, absolute, and decisive victory' (Lenin 1975, p. 140ff.). The 'festival/but' structure of Lenin's argument should immunise us against mistakenly believing that the affirmation of the festival/carnival metaphor implies *in itself* a critique of vanguard politics. It would be extremely useful were someone to analyse to what extent the de-centralised cadres of current 'anticapitalism' actually act differently from how Lenin recommended party cadres to act. My feeling is that the difference between revolutionary 'festivals of the oppressed' and Seattle et al. would lie precisely in the fact that, in the case of the latter, there still *is* somebody who hands out prefabricated slogans and placards.

⁷⁰ Holloway 2002, p. 21.

adding up to a 'substratum of negativity which, though generally invisible, can flare up in moments of acute social tension'.⁷¹ It is 'the materiality of anti-power'.⁷²

In the same way as the enclosures of the eighteenth century meant that conduct that was previously just minding one's own business now became conduct-against-capital . . . so the enclosures of today mean that conduct previously considered as normal begins to appear as a threat to capital.⁷³

Holloway quotes as examples the desire of the 'indigenous people' of Chiapas to 'maintain their traditional patterns of life', and that of university students and professors to maintain their equally traditional pattern of working 'on themes like Plato and Aristotle', a good addition to the list of phenomena that fall under the concept of 'non-subordination'. A more specific statement is the following:

The Paris Commune discussed by Marx, the workers' councils theorized by Pannekoek, the village councils of the Zapatistas, and so on and so on: all are experiments in the movement of anti-fetishism, the struggle for the collective flow of doing, for self-determination.⁷⁴

The most problematic passage in this context is for me this one:

Often the No is expressed so personally (dying one's hair green, committing suicide, going mad) that it appears to be incapable of having any political resonance. Often the No is violent or barbaric (vandalism, hooliganism, terrorism) . . . a No so bare that it merely reproduces that which is screamed against. . . . And yet that is the starting point: not the considered rejection of capitalism as a mode of organisation, not the militant construction of alternatives to capitalism. They come later (or may do). The starting-point is the scream, the dangerous, often barbaric No.⁷⁵

Holloway lumps together here two very different ways of saying 'No': those that appear 'unpolitical' but, arguably, are political in a not so obvious way; and those that are 'violent and barbaric' and reproduce what they scream against. 'Barbaric' and 'terrorist' reproductions of the existent violence, however,

⁷¹ Holloway 2002, p. 159.

⁷² Holloway 2002, p. 160.

⁷³ Holloway 2002, p. 202.

⁷⁴ Holloway 2002, p. 105.

⁷⁵ Holloway 2002, p. 205.

212 • Marcel Stoetzler

are clearly not 'starting points' for communism (although green hair may be, a little bit). The 'considered rejection of capitalism' better not lag very much behind the starting-point/screaming, or it might never come; first, the screaming, then the considered rejection, sounds rather un-dialectical. Is not traditional 'socialist' anti-Semitism a classic case of the barbaric scream? The expectation that smashing the shop-windows of 'Jewish capital' will sooner or later be followed by 'considered rejection' of the capitalist mode of production was held by some German Social Democrats in the 1890s only briefly, as they found out quickly that it was devastatingly wrong. More recently, in the context of the current 'antiglobalisation' movement, the predominance of screaming over 'considered rejection' encouraged, in some cases, fascists to jump onto the 'anticapitalist' bandwagon (an old tune) exploiting the 'anticapitalist' screaming about the alleged dominance of finance capital over industrial capital, and so forth.⁷⁶ Clearly, Holloway's point that 'screaming' is 'the starting point' is right, but it is the starting point of a lot of different things, not all of which feed into communism.

Holloway's formulations are also somewhat ambiguous on another issue, that of 'tactical identity'. 'By giving discontent an identity, "We are women", "We are indigenous", we are already imposing a new limitation upon it, we are already defining it'.⁷⁷ Holloway rejects here the 'fight for recognition' of identity and refers to the Zapatista habit of wearing a balaclava in public as implying that theirs is 'the struggle of non-identity'.⁷⁸

Holloway takes up Adorno's argument that, although 'all conceptualization involves identification',⁷⁹ dialectical thinking works against its own identifications as it conceptualises on the basis not of being but of doing and becoming. What Adorno wrote about the process of thinking, Holloway argues is similarly true about struggle: struggle ought to identify only to the extent that it negates identification 'in the very moment of identification: we are

⁷⁶ Apparently, this was most visible in the Netherlands a few years ago. See texts in *De Fabel van de Illegaal*, 52/53, 2002.

⁷⁷ Holloway 2002, p. 156.

⁷⁸ My understanding would have been that the respective statements by the Zapatistas were not a rejection of *collective* identity but an intelligent re-interpretation of the fact that the balaclava is a disguise of one's *individual* identity for fear of assassination by gunmen. Holloway's point could also have been bolstered here by reference to the recognition made by important strands of 1970s and 1980s feminism that the category, or 'class' (developed by Guillaumin especially very much in Holloway's sense of 'classification') 'woman' needs to be abolished (Wittig 1992; Guillaumin 1995; also Foucault 1990 and, in his wake, Butler 1990).

⁷⁹ Holloway 2002, p. 102.

indigenous-but-more-than-that, we are women-but-more-than-that'. In other words, although anti-fetishistic struggles inevitably have to operate with identifications, they must take them up (givens of an actually fetishistic social reality) in order to negate them. The subsequent application of this theoretical statement to the paradigm of the Zapatista uprising however is rather ambiguous:

[T]he strength and resonance of the Zapatista movement, for example, comes not from the fact that it is an indigenous movement, but from the fact that it goes beyond that to present itself as a movement fighting for humanity, for a world of many worlds.⁸⁰

Which movement in the modern period has not tried to 'present itself' as 'fighting for humanity', and which nationalist-anticolonialist movement has not worked towards 'a world of many worlds'? If the Zapatista movement really 'goes beyond' the 'fact that it is an indigenous movement',⁸¹ it must be doing this other than merely through the way it 'presents itself'. Holloway does not discuss how movements can deal with the danger that preliminary identification, often defined by movements as 'merely strategic' or 'tactical' identity politics, relapse into affirmative identifications; defenders of nationalist identity politics have regularly, and not wrongly, pointed to the fact that the respective movements are actually 'more-than-that', but this should not have excused that they were also, and perhaps primarily, nationalist.

Earlier in the book, Holloway takes a soft position on identity politics, too: 'an apparently affirmative, identitarian statement', he writes, can carry 'a negative, anti-identitarian charge'.⁸² To say 'I am black' in 'a society characterised by discrimination against blacks' is 'despite its affirmative, identitarian form . . . a negative, anti-identitarian statement'. And:

to say 'we are indigenous' in a society that systematically denies the dignity of the indigenous is a way of . . . negating the negation of dignity, of saying 'we are indigenous and more than that'.

Whether or not such claims to collective identity carry a 'negative charge' depends on 'the particular situation' – in what way exactly, Holloway does not explain.

⁸⁰ Holloway 2002, p. 103.

⁸¹ It is not clear what kind of 'fact' that might be, as 'indigenous movement' is a rather unspecific category.

⁸² Holloway 2002, p. 64.

214 • Marcel Stoetzler

There is a tension in such positive-negative statements . . . in which the positive constantly threatens to engulf the negative. Thus, for example, the nationalism of the oppressed (anti-imperialist nationalism), although it may aim at radical social transformation, is easily diverted from its broader aims into simply replacing 'their' capitalists with 'ours', as the history of anti-colonial movements makes clear. Alternatively, of course, the positive-negative tension may also explode in the opposite direction, into an explicitly anti-identitarian movement, as is currently the case of the Zapatista movement in Mexico.

The first part of this statement is supported by overwhelming historical evidence, while the second part – beginning with 'alternatively' – is very thinly supported by reference to the Zapatista uprising only. Although I cannot claim the right of an opinion on the latter, the claim this is 'an explicitly anti-identitarian movement' seems exaggerated to me. I feel that, rather than trying to identify such a thing as an 'anti-identitarian movement' in the present reality, one would do better to try and point out anti-identitarian *moments within* existing social movements. Such a more modest approach would be more in keeping with Holloway's own account of the 'paradox of revolution'.

A peculiar characteristic of Holloway's book is that any criticism of its weak sides can almost entirely be based on its strong sides; or, in other words, selective reading and quoting can construct either a crowd-pleasing, romantic 'anti-global-capitalism' Holloway, or an austere 'back-to-Marx-via-Adorno-and-Italian/German-autonomism', anti-identitarian Holloway. Although my sympathies are with the second, the book's ambiguous positioning is what makes it unique. It is perhaps part of its appeal that it gives expression to real contradictions by being itself contradictory.

In terms of conclusion, I would like to point to the following as the most important of Holloway's points:

- The innocence of anti-power is a dangerous illusion, while the revolutionary dilemma is a reality: the more urgent revolution is, the more difficult it becomes.
- A critical, or revolutionary theory must, nevertheless, emphasise not domination but the vulnerability of domination and its dependence on the dominated (as far as I can see, a unique property of Marxism). Despite the increasing closure of the capitalist totality (a totality based on an antagonism), the totality is never complete.

- Capital imposes classification and identity; we are the wreckers and de-composers.
- Humanity is not yet; there will neither be a going home to *Paradise Lost* nor a final synthesis: the hope is that human history will begin.

Holloway's book is bold and asks all the right questions, and I cannot think of another book that would provide as much of what is necessary to answer them. If ever a text was a battlefield, this is one, but one that is worth battling through.

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