

In, against and beyond labour

Gordon Asher, Leigh French, Neil Gray
in an exchange with John Holloway

This exchange with John Holloway follows on from our engagement with his most recent work, *Crack Capitalism* (2010)¹. Holloway's work has become well known in and beyond activist circles since *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2002)² was published and widely read. This intentional popularisation has, arguably, tended to obscure Holloway's previous work while drawing strength from it. We want to acknowledge here his part in what we consider to be some of the more constructive theoretical debates within and around Marxism in the last thirty years. First with the Conference of Socialist Economists, and the London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, an associated working group that produced *In and Against the State*³ which discussed the critical role of socialists who are opposed to the state but operate within it and against it. Holloway was also a key figure in the 'open' Marxist school which deployed a sophisticated critique of fetishism to challenge, among other things, the 'closed' analysis of overly-deterministic readings of capital and society they saw associated with structuralist and regulationist approaches within Marxism⁴.

While Holloway's recent work draws strongly on his interests in the Zapatistas and other movements and struggles in the Global South, where he is presently based⁵, it should also be noted that he was, for some time, based in Edinburgh and wrote regularly for *Common Sense: Journal of the Edinburgh Conference of Socialist Economists*⁶, between 1987 and 1999. The journal broadly presented a forum for the development of 'open' and autonomous Marxist critical theory with contributors including such key figures as Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Sergio Bologna, Antonio Negri, Ed Emery and George Caffentzis among many significant others. The recent republication online of these texts is noteworthy not only for its use value for the development of critical autonomous and 'open' Marxist theory, but for the fact that it has taken until now for the journal to be republished. The ideas presented in *Common Sense* deserve a wide readership, particularly at a time when left liberalism in the UK, as Holloway challenges below, seems determined to "lock us firmly into capital and close down all alternatives" through regressive campaigns such as 'Right to Work' or the recent 'March for the Alternative'.

We would like to thank John Holloway for this opportunity for dialogue and for the speed and grace with which he responded to these questions – themselves the result of a rushed exchange between three over-worked, under-paid cultural producers. While we share an affinity of politics this is not consensual or homogenous; the questions below were posed in a constructive, dialogical manner, not intended as a clarification of a 'correct' position, rather as a contribution to an open discussion we feel is both necessary and overdue.

Variante: How does the notion of 'cracks' take us beyond other metaphors such as Henri Lefebvre's 'moments' which he suggested were those instances where fleeting sensations at moments of radical rupture (e.g. the Commune of 1871, May '68) were revelatory of the total possibilities in everyday life? The Situationists later argued that Lefebvre's conception of 'moments' was superseded by their tactic of creating 'situations'⁷. For Debord for instance, the 'moment' was limited both by passivity and by temporality, whereas the 'constructed situation' was defined both as interventionist and spatio-temporal: "A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambience and

game of events"⁸. How does the concept of 'cracks' fare in relation to these concepts, and can it be seen in the same lineage?

John Holloway: *I think the different notions push in the same direction, but I wasn't thinking of those authors in particular when I started talking about cracks. For me it is important that the cracks are not just moments of radical rupture such as '68 and not just conscious interventions, but also and above all rooted in everyday experience. Radical rupture is inherent in everyday existence. At one point in the book I explain this in terms of the distinction between doing or concrete labour as both the constant basis of and subversion of abstract or alienated labour, on the one hand, and the autonomist notion of self-valorisation on the other, which I think points to exceptional situations. We are ordinary people, we are all in some way anti-capitalist revolutionaries, and if we don't start from the powerful presence of communism in everyday life, then the project of communism cannot go very far.*

V: Your notions of the 'scream' and of the 'crack' are centred on the necessity to resist, "to stop making capitalism" (and the relations on which it depends) and to think and act differently. However, I worry that these metaphors over-emphasise resistance (negation), and non-prioritised anti-capitalist 'doing' (a flattening of our non-/anti-capitalist activity). Do we not also need visions, strategies and orientation that speak to the beyond – the alternative worlds we believe are possible, necessary and under construction? How do we connect and prioritise our 'doing'? in order to build not only alternative relations, but also institutions, organisations and movements?

JH: *Yes, certainly we need alternative visions and practices, but the problem is not so much to create them as to recognise them and build upon them. They are there already. They are movements not just beyond, but against-and-beyond. Their drive comes from a scream, a negation, a refusal and I think it is important to emphasise this simply as a means of resisting the forces that constantly pull us back into conformity. Over all our projects we should raise a flag saying "Capitalism is a catastrophe for humanity" and we should keep it constantly in view.*

You ask "How do we connect our doing in order to build not only alternative relations, but also institutions, organisations and movements?" An important question difficult to answer. I think of this in terms of the confluence of the cracks, of these spaces or moments of refusal-and-creation. How do we bring the cracks together or, better, is there any way in which we can stimulate them to come together? I don't think it helps to think in terms of institutions or organisations – organisation yes, but not organisations. Simply on practical grounds – I don't think that they work, I don't think that the rebellions of life come together through institutions. Institution-building is often a waste of time or worse. Think of the World Social Forum, one of the great institutions to emerge from the alter-globalisation movement – I'm not against it at all, but that's not the way that a real confluence of rebellions will take place. Better to think of resonances rather than institutions.

V: I also worry that these metaphors over-focus on capitalism, to the exclusion of the other integrated oppressions that we face (based on gender, sexuality, disability, ethnicity and other aspects of our identities, contexts and relations). Do we need to expand the metaphor, or perhaps more accurately its scope, and consider 'cracks' not just in capitalism but in all the integrated systems of oppression, repression and exploitation which

we oppose and wish to move beyond? How do we envision and explore the tensions, connecting our struggles and movements in doing so in a complementary holistic manner?

JH: *By capitalism I understand the way in which our activities interrelate with one another. This is the focus because it is our activities (our doings) and their interrelation that create all the oppressions and this is what we can change. If you want to attribute what you call the "other integrated oppressions" to something other than the way in which we act-and-interrelate, then I don't understand how we could change them. How do we struggle to change the dynamic of how we act-and-interrelate? In a million different ways.*

V: How do cracks cope with the inevitable range of disciplinary government and corporate reactions – hard to soft power – from co-option and recuperation to oppression and to outright repression and force? For instance, you use the example of a mother skiving off work to spend time with her child as a moment of a 'crack' in capital. Yet in a low-wage economy this would negatively impact on the money she can bring into the house to pay for food, electricity, etc. This is why she works. Moreover with contractual obligations increasingly absent in the UK workforce, the threat of the sack now hangs over many workers. While it is easy to appreciate the resistance and negation of capital behind absenteeism and sabotage, etc, we shouldn't neglect the coercive power of capital in continuing to make us work – as seen in recent reports which show the many billion pounds UK business 'earns' from unpaid workers who feel obliged to stay on after work hours.⁹ How do you address this issue? And beyond issues of recuperation and co-option, how do we deal with outright resistance and repression – with attempts to close/shut/destroy the 'cracks', including through violence, if that is seen as necessary by state/capital?

JH: *Look around. Free Hetherington¹⁰, for example. A lovely crack – how does it deal with disciplinary reactions?*

The answer, in other words, is best seen by looking around and seeing how all these misfitting activities, these cracks, dignities, deal with the problems of repression and co-option, and you'll find a wide variety of responses. Logically, of course, these cracks should not exist, but they do, and when they are suppressed, they reappear in the same place or somewhere else. The danger on the left very often is that we anticipate our own defeat and do capital's work for it.

Having said that, I don't think it's enough to sing the praises of the cracks. A big section of the book is devoted to discussing precisely the difficulties you point out. I don't think there is any simple answer, but I do think that there is a fundamental change taking place in the way that we are thinking about the possibilities and meaning of revolution. This change I present in terms of the crisis of abstract labour, or the revolt of doing against labour.

V: Why 'cracks' as a metaphor? The metaphor seems to suggest something solid which needs to be cracked, yet your previous work – drawing on Marx's conceptual use of fetishisation – has consistently shown that 'things' themselves are really only social relations between people which are fetishised in the form of things (commodities)¹¹. You've used this position to critique the state-form, political economy, and structuralist and regulationist accounts of capital that tend to consolidate it by fixing and describing it an 'object' of study (as with 'post-fordism' for instance)¹². But doesn't the use of cracks as

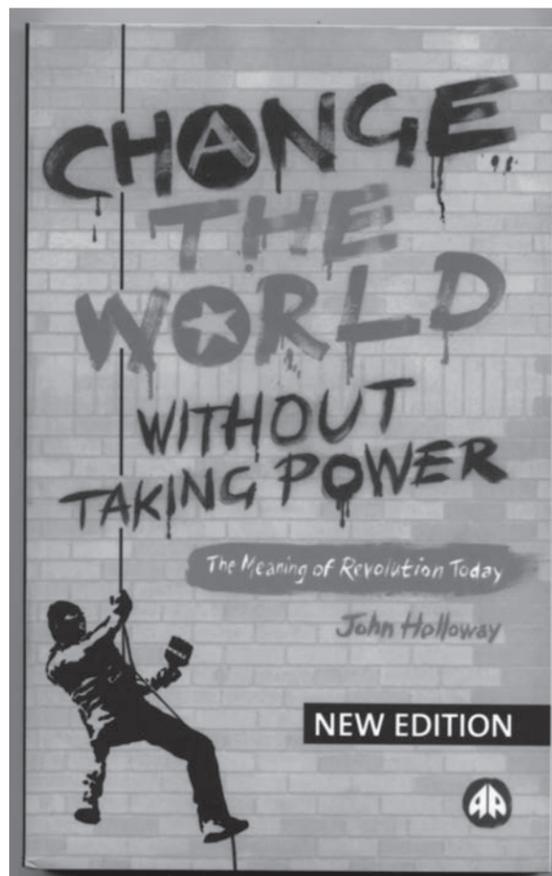
a metaphor suggest an 'object' that must be cracked? And doesn't this then risk once again reifying capital as a 'thing'? And thus, that cracks also become things and as such, at least in part, as *Aufheben*¹³ suggest, theories of fetishism can themselves become fetishistic.

JH: I see what you mean, but the point about cracks is that it is a revolt against things, against a world of things, a thing-ified world. That is why we want to lash out and break, to crack this world open. Of course we realise at some point that it is not a physical breaking that we are talking about, it is rather a reversal in the flow of social determination. What we crack is the flow of determination from above, from capital-money-abstract-labour, and try to force a determination from below, from what we consider socially necessary or desirable. But the metaphor of crack remains important for me, firstly because of that impulse to break and secondly because cracks are dynamic, constantly on the move, spreading, multiplying, perhaps being plastered over, reappearing.

V: Your metaphor of 'cracks' perhaps optimistically affirms other points of opposition to be located within capitalist society. Alongside what we understand as your deliberate project of popularisation, these points of rupture are not (solely) those of traditional Marxism, rather you stress the mundanity of antagonisms, from having a walk in the park to family and our personal social relations ('love'). Seemingly there is no longer anything that is specific to the antagonistic struggle in capitalist society. We would agree that forms of resistance have to change, not only according to the redeployments of capital, but also according to grassroots consciousness. And we take it you accept any such acts, if indeed they have any associated agency, are 'vulnerable to the cunning of capitalist reason'. So on what grounds are these other points of opposition located, and how can they be actualised in the face of the continuous 'novelties' of capitalism? Addressing agency, practice and strategy seems essential.

JH: The first point is to recognise is that anti-capitalism (or communism, if you like) is deeply ingrained in our everyday lives. Unless we can see that, then communism necessarily becomes an elitist project. In the same way as capital penetrates every aspect of our lives, so our struggles against it, our pushes against-and-beyond it, exist everywhere. Revolutionary thought has to start from there, from an appreciation of and critical engagement with these everyday cracks. The cracks actualise themselves constantly in the face of the 'novelties' of capitalism: theoretical reflection runs behind, trying to understand, to participate, perhaps to propose lines of extension forward. The notion of "strategy" implies that there is someone who can or should control the flow of rebellion, and I suspect that it can't be done and that in most cases it does more to stifle rebellion than to promote it. Look at the history of revolutionary parties. The same with agency. I don't think it helps to define agents: capital and anti-capitalist rebellion are social relations that cannot be tied to agents, they flow.

V: On your popular approach to broaden the definition of political action beyond the classical Marxist points of antagonism, on what grounds are these other points of opposition to be located? You have set out to bring the multiplicity of conflicts together to establish an over-arching relation between them, previously emphasising the role of 'totality' for a 'theory against society'; "the real subsumption of labour under capital as a process which is not restricted to the factory but has come to encompass the whole of society". This is set against a critique of the mystifying separation off of the struggle over exploitation into an 'economic' sphere which stresses the permanence of structures over human subjects and their disorganisation and reorganisation of social relations; "the left currents that put the activity and seizure of power by a political party in place of the self-emancipation of the working class". Yet, is it de-mystifying enough? Do we not need to explain the specific historic and contemporary character of 'labour'? Otherwise, is the danger, as has previously been asked, that, "the subject



of struggle becomes a mere anthropological category".

I want to make use of an extended quote by Wildcat here, as they present a sharp interrogation of your work in this regard: "The question immediately arises of why we produce our own world in this deranged manner. To say that this negation 'takes place through the subjection of human activity to the market' does not explain it, but merely indicates the form. And this form must be explained from the specific content, the specific historic character of labour. You avoid this problem by making subjectivity, which creates over and against itself an alienated objectivity, into an ever thinner, more abstract and unhistorical residue: 'humanity (dignity repressed and in struggle) against neoliberalism (the current, savagely destructive phase of capitalism)'. The subject of struggle becomes an anthropological category: 'the indestructible (or maybe just the not yet destroyed) NO that makes us human'. In other texts you have characterised this residue, referring to Hegel, as the 'sheer unrest of life'. Here there is no longer anything that is specific to the antagonistic struggle in capitalist society. ... The problem you (and we) started from was a different one: you wanted to criticise the left currents that put the activity and seizure of power by a political party in place of the self-emancipation of the working class. But in attempting to oppose the objectivist, definitional and classificatory concept of class, you throw the baby out with the bathwater. If we reduce the concept of class to a general human contradiction present in every person between alienation and non-alienation, between creativity and its subordination to the market, between humanity and the negation of humanity, then the class concept loses all meaning. It then only has the value of a moral characterisation which we can apply to all possible movements, without saying anything at all about them, their character and their importance for the worldwide revolutionary process. The antagonism is accordingly timeless in your work: it exists all the time, sometimes weaker, sometimes stronger – there is no end in sight. 'Revolution is simply the constant, uncompromising struggle for that which cannot be achieved under capitalism: dignity, control over our own lives.' Revolutionary theory must work out how a concrete perspective of emancipation and liberation is contained in struggles in spite of their fragmentation, and bring this perspective into them. Showing that there is a general human content in all these single struggles does not create this bond, but runs away from the real political problems to a philosophical level."¹⁴

JH: For the answer let me just take a little bit of your question: "Yet, is it de-mystifying enough? Do we not need to explain the specific historic and contemporary character of 'labour'?" To that the answer is that clearly it

is not demystifying enough, the only real demystification is revolution. But the central argument in the book is precisely that we have to start from the specific historic and contemporary character of 'labour' and that the only way to understand this is in terms of the dual character of labour as concrete and abstract labour, as a crisis of abstract labour. The central theoretical thrust is to split open the unitary character of labour that has dominated left thinking until recently. If we can do that, we may not have the answers, but we open a whole new way of asking the questions.

V: In a recent talk in Glasgow you were clear that the fight against capital is actually the fight against 'abstract labour'. I've been taken by this emphasis on 'abstract labour' (labour which takes place under the alienating conditions of wage-labour under capitalism), and 'concrete labour' (or 'doing', as you prefer which is characterised as free productive human activity). This recognition of the two-fold character of labour¹⁵ gets us back to a position whereby a critique of political economy can be developed, and where we can challenge the traditional image of the labour movement as primarily a movement of abstract labour within capitalism. In this context, what do you make of the UK Right to Work campaign or the TUC 'March for the Alternative: Jobs, Growth, Justice'? How is your emphasis on the two-fold character of labour critically useful with regard to these movements?

JH: The campaign for the right to work is a good illustration of the struggle of abstract labour. It might conceivably lead to an improvement of living standards if it were successful (which seems unlikely in the present context), but it also locks us firmly into capitalism and closes down all alternatives. A crisis is a moment of contraction of capital, a moment when it withdraws to some extent from our lives. To call for the right to work is in effect to say "come back, capital, please exploit us again!" That locks us into the dynamic of death that the existence of capital implies. But of course the problem is what else can we do? The only alternative I can see is to develop other ways of living that are not immediately capitalist, that push against and beyond capitalism. We have to think of what Raúl Zibechi calls "a political economy of resistance", which I take to include everything from occupied factories to alternative schools or clinics or free software movements, alternative radio stations, community gardens, the embryonic development of a gift economy.

This can be seen in terms of the issue of precarity. In a capitalism in which precarious labour has become the norm, do we call for full stable employment or do we struggle for a life based on meaningful activity, an activity that we consider necessary or enjoyable? Precarity and unemployment are the crisis of abstract labour: how do we deepen that crisis and release the potential of our creative power? That is the challenge, and that is what an awful lot of people are already trying to do, in many different ways.

V: Criticisms of classical Marxists have been of the formalising of work as 'all-constitutive', which leads to all riches and all social appearances being the product of work – "if 'work' is defined simply as human activity, statements about the centrality of work become tautological, because by definition all practice has already been declared to be work", and "to lead everything back to work easily comes close to the glorification of work by the workers' parties" – whereas there are any amount of activities that people would not recognise and therefore not describe as 'work' – of which Wildcat posited free artistic activities, games or struggles within society, categories about which I have some reservation. In response and in development of your position, you now seem to have categorised everything 'else' as resistance – non-capitalist by default appears anti-capitalist – whereas Wildcat insisted "there must be an investigation of the change in form and the transformations in the process of production." Clearly this would require more than the work of any one individual. This is one reason I concur with the collective approach Wildcat advocate, that of an empirically oriented sociology, alongside the requirement to look beyond what already exists. In your recent

writing is there a refusal in your methodology to make analytical distinctions between agency and structure, and if so might it have resulted in a lop-sided bias towards agency?

JH: *I agree of course with your criticism of the unitary concept of “work” – this seems to me fundamental. On the question of alternatives, I don’t see anything as simply “non-capitalist”. Our lives are a constant misfitting, a constant attempt to develop social relations that do not fit into the logic of capital: the assault of capital on our lives constitutes such activities as anti-capitalist, as a “waste of time” or anti-social. So I think we cannot draw a clear line between the non-capitalist and the anti-capitalist – what is important is the lines of continuity and potential.*

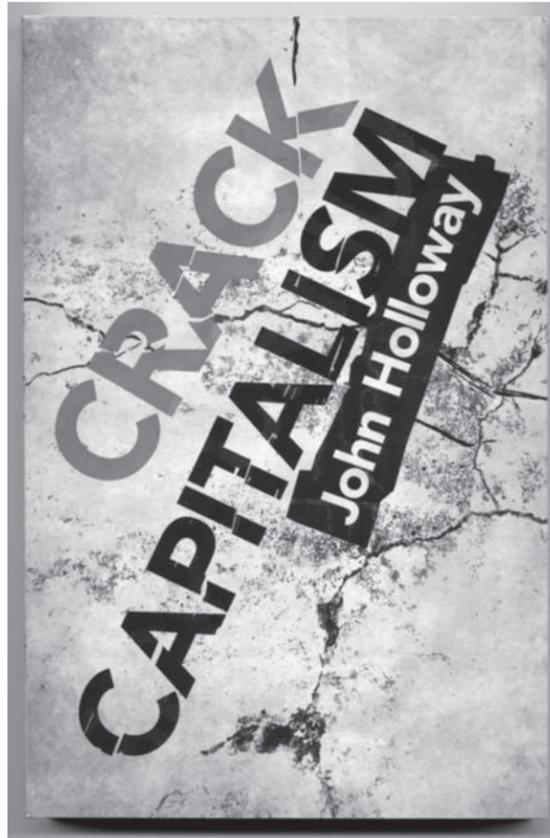
On the last point of your question, I do not understand Marxism as a sociology but as an anti-sociology, as a critique of sociology (and all other forms of thought). It is a critique of structure, an attempt to understand that which appears as independent of human action as being the product of such action. Hence the critique of money or the state, for example. The attempt to change the world depends on understanding how we make the world, so it makes no sense to talk of a lop-sided bias towards agency.

V: While I agree that antagonism is inscribed in social relations, do you recognise a potential danger that your process of ‘totalising’ could result in a similar effect of abstraction? “The different conflicts within society are today generally juxtaposed without any relation being established between them. The result is an image of a multiplicity of conflicts, in which the ‘totality’ of capitalist society and hence a revolutionary goal no longer appear.” (Wildcat) I would ask for a negativity geared towards locating and actualising points of ‘rupture’ within capitalist society. Whereas your metaphor of ‘cracks’ at times seems extra-worldly in its insistence on being able to subtract itself from capitalist social relations, while seemingly also inevitably antagonistic to them. Could this be interpreted as a retreat from the forms of agency that formerly provided resistance to capital – however subsumed today – without the evolution of more emancipatory alternatives?

JH: *If you mean by “retreat from the forms of agency that formerly provided resistance to capital” a retreat from the working class, then the answer is clearly no. But I do not understand working class as a form of agency, but as a pole of an antagonistic relation. What I am trying to do is to understand the movement of the capital/anti-capital antagonism (the movement of the working class, if you like, as long as we understand working class as both anti-class and anti-work), the changing forms of anti-capitalist struggle.*

An important change is taking place in the way that people fight against capital, a change that is often connected with the concept of autonomy. More and more struggles are oriented not towards taking control of the system in order to change it but towards breaking the dynamic of the system by uncoupling ourselves from it. The book is an attempt to explore the force and the difficulties of this approach and to argue above all that it is bringing about a change in the whole (anti-)grammar of anti-capitalism which has great emancipatory potential.

V: You speak of ‘the student movement’ as a contemporary site of hopeful resistance. I agree there is something potentially powerful happening here, though I hope it is more accurate and inclusive to speak of the education movement. However, from within, I am most aware that one of the most significant problems we face is the exceedingly heterogeneous nature of the movement. It is not anti-capitalist, though sections of it are. Rather, it covers a wide spectrum of beliefs and orientations from those that are happy to return to where we were before the proposed cuts, to those who envision the creation of a very different notion of both education and society. We need to ensure the expansion of this movement across educational sectors, to link it with a broader movement addressing the issues across public services, as we have begun to see happening, most recently in London. We then need



to take this further, to move from resistance, from the ‘in and against’, to the ‘beyond’ – to proactive proposition and evolution of alternative ways of living, thinking, relating and acting in the world that imagine and create a very different education, other public services and broader society. As an educator, working in the state sector yourself, I’d be most interested to hear your views on this. What roles do you see for mainstream education (and educators and students within it) in informing and evolving our struggles? Where are state-centred education and educators situated in the metaphor of cracks? What of the roles for alternative pedagogies and educational spaces and opportunities?

JH: *I agree completely with what you say about the education struggle. If we are in the state sector of education, as students or teachers, we are in a situation of in-against-and-beyond: we are within the system, struggle against it and try to push beyond. There is one central question that we must pose over and over again, no matter where we are in the education system: How can we stop the rush of humanity towards self-annihilation? That is really the only scientific question that remains for us. And a sub-division of the question has to be: how do we get rid of the social system that generates this suicidal dynamic? This is the question that we must explore in all our teaching and studying. It is a question that can be posed anywhere, as relevant to a physics degree as to a degree in psychology or politics or literature.*

I think we have to struggle from where we are, in the public education system, but we should also recognise that serious discussion and education are increasingly moving beyond the formal education system, that there is less and less room for thought in the university system.

V: As with education, with media (which plays another significant pedagogical role in society), it appears to me we need to both exert influence through engagement with, and pressure on, the mainstream, and to build and evolve alternatives – radical/critical media. What do you see as the roles for such alternative, critical/analytical media in our struggles for transformation? Do the movements of the left pay sufficient attention to the creation, support and evolution of media capable of contributing to the critical dialogues and engagement necessary for evolving conscientisation?

JH: *I agree that this is very important, and that it is being increasingly recognised on the left. The mainstream is becoming more and more suffocating and increasingly it is the alternative media that provide the only space for critical thought.*

V: Picking up on your recent dialogue with Hilary Wainwright you appear to suggest that “democracy is not the main issue”¹⁶. While I would agree that a focus on representative democracy is part of the problem rather than part of the solution (indeed such systems are not actually democratic), is a notion of participatory democracy not central

to the kind of transformation, oriented to ‘social justice’ (conceived of as short-hand for economic, political, kinship, ecological, social justice) that we seek? How do we relate, organise, campaign, connect and act in and on the world successfully if not through building authentic and genuine, bottom up democratic practices? Does relating in such a manner not speak in fact to the very values we espouse and objectives that we seek to attain? Do we not need our own forms of politics to succeed, and to recognise what such success might look like?

JH: *Yes, I agree with all this, certainly we need, and create all the time, genuine democratic practices. But the problem with just emphasising democracy is that the question of the systemic constraints imposed by capital disappears. Democracy does not take us very far unless we get rid of capitalism as a form of social organisation. Democracy obviously implies the abolition of money, since social self-determination is incompatible with the existence of money as the social nexus, but perhaps most people don’t understand it that way. So we have to be explicit and say in one breath “yes we want genuine democracy and that means the abolition of money-capital-state-abstract-labour”.*

V: In a reply to Hilary Wainwright discussing your conception of the state and our situatedness within and engagements with it, you say, “I distinguish between a situational contact with the state, where we try to go beyond the state because we are already in it, as employees or recipients of grants or benefits, and a sought contact with the state, where we try to enter it (as elected representatives say) and turn it in our direction.” If I can take, as examples, yourself (as an academic) and myself (as a student) both situated within the academic wing of the state (and one, where an aspect of its purpose is as a disciplinary, hegemonic tool of the state and of capital) we can, and should, choose to think and act in, against and beyond the academy, mainstream education and the broader systems and relations of which they are an essential part. However, I cannot see a distinction between us doing so, as already situated there (having previously chosen to enter it), and someone else choosing to enter or engage with the state with a similar intention? We are all inevitably within, and in engagement with, the state in a myriad of ways across and throughout our lives and with varying degrees of choice according to our contexts (from paying rent or a mortgage, to driving a car or walking the streets to using public services). I agree that we need to move, and orient ourselves, in, against and beyond the state, but it seems to me that this may well involve entering the state or into certain engagements with it – a decision for each to make according to their contexts and orientation?

JH: *Yes, I think that’s right. Nevertheless, especially given the weight of state-centred thought on the left, it is important to point out that the state is not a neutral terrain, that it is an interwoven set of practices that exclude self-determination and channel activity towards compatibility with the reproduction of capital. In certain situations it may make sense to choose to engage on that terrain, to choose to move in-against-and-beyond the state, but it is certainly not a neutral institution or something to be defended without more.*

V: In your discussion with Hilary Wainwright, you question her emphasis on reclaiming the state. For you, Wainwright’s discussion fails to suggest that another world might be possible, “a world without government grants and bureaucrats, without money and profit, without capital”. You argue that Wainwright’s celebration of those moments of democratisation at the state level attain a limited level of subjectivity but this might be so “if such advances in democratisation were seen as part of a movement in-against-and-beyond capitalism, in which the issue of rupture remained central”. The difficulty is that as you say, those seeking immediate gains, tend to be ‘sucked into’ the old routines of statecraft, yet as campaigns over public/social housing, or the NHS, or welfare are where people are at, it seems necessary to enter political struggle at that level where a mass of

people are directly affected. How to combine struggles for immediate gains with those that would take us 'beyond' capitalism? The minimal and the maximal? How to think both at once?

JH: Yes, this is difficult. My feeling is that, simply in practical terms, defence does not work very well. Of course we want to defend the NHS and public education, but if that is not combined with criticism, with a pushing-beyond, a pushing towards what we would really like to see in health care and education, then the defence rings hollow.

V: I'm intrigued by how you would situate the example of contemporary Venezuela within your critique of the state. It seems to me that it poses a most thought provoking challenge to those of us who wish to reject and move beyond the state. It seems from my limited knowledge to be an interesting example of state power (through pressure from social movements) acting to empower anti-capitalist movements and struggles, and to build parallel, alternative institutions and relations that could potentially speak to the beyond. From your position in, and knowledge of, Latin America where is the Venezuelan state situated within your wider critique?

JH: I do discuss Venezuela explicitly in the book. I agree that it is a very interesting example. I think that in some parts of the state at least, there is a genuine drive to dissolve the state and promote communal self-organisation. I just think that this is very difficult to achieve from within a state structure.

V: I'd like to pick up on Michael Albert's (and others') concept of class, constituted by contemporary divisions of labour, in the context of a need to recognise and supersede (move beyond) class relations. Do you find useful, to a transformative engagement with class struggle, the concept of 'the co-ordinator class'? (The "coordinator class is ... composed of managers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and other people whose roles in economic life give them substantial control over their own conditions of work and over the conditions of work of those below.") This

seems to me an important insight and a class conception/position which we must recognise and engage with if we wish to achieve a genuinely classless society, and avoid the replacement of one particular form of class domination with another (that of the co-ordinator class). Albert¹⁷ contends that this is best achieved by the formulation of vision and strategy that works towards a world in which socially valuable labour (doing) is (at least transitionally) centred on balanced job complexes, and remuneration for effort and sacrifice. Would you agree? Where would the concept of the co-ordinator class fit, if at all, within your own analysis, critique and vision?

JH: No, I don't find that very helpful. I feel that rather than design a new society, we have to push outwards from the struggles that are already taking place. We have to move out from the rage and creativity expressed in current struggles rather than design models of what a future society might look like.

Very many thanks for putting so much energy and care into the formulation of this interview.

Notes

- 1 *Crack Capitalism*, John Holloway (Pluto, 2010)
- 2 *Change the World Without Taking Power*, John Holloway (Pluto, 2002)
- 3 Pamphlet available online: <http://libcom.org/library/against-state-1979>
- 4 For *Aufheben* magazine's analysis of the debate between theorists associated with the Open Marxism school and structuralist-regulationist approaches influenced by Althusser and Poulantzas, see: 'Review: the State Debate and Post Fordism and Social form', <http://libcom.org/library/state-debate-review-aufheben-2>
These hugely important debates can be found in concentrated form in: Bonefeld, W. and Holloway, J. (eds), *Post-Fordism and Social Form: A Marxist Debate on the Post-Fordist State*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1992.
- 5 In the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico.
- 6 Available online as PDFs at: <http://commonsensejournal.org.uk/>
- 7 See David Harvey's afterword, in, Lefebvre, H., *The Production of Space*, 1991, Blackwell, p.430.
- 8 Knabb, K. (ed), *Situationist International Anthology, Bureaus of Public Secrets*, 1981, p.45. Also available online at: <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SI/en/display/7>
- 9 'More people working unpaid overtime than ever before', TUC, 22 February 2011, <http://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace/tuc-19200-f0.cfm>
- 10 The Free Hetherington, the occupation of the old Hetherington Research club, University of Glasgow: <http://freehetherington.wordpress.com>
- 11 See for instance, Crisis, Fetishism, Class Composition', in, Bonefeld, W. et al (eds) *Open Marxism: Volume II Theory and Practice*, Pluto Press, 1992.
- 12 Pamphlet available online: <http://libcom.org/library/against-state-1979>
- 13 Review - 'Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today', John Holloway (Pluto Press, London 2002), *Aufheben* 11, 2003 http://www.reocities.com/aufheben2/auf_11_holloway.html
- 14 Open Letter to John Holloway, *Wildcat-Zirkular* No. 39 - September 1997 - pp. (german edition) 31-44 <http://libcom.org/library/Wildcat-john-holloway>
- 15 The argument is expressed in condensed form for *Antipode* magazine, 2011, as 'Cracks and the Crisis of Abstract Labour': <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2010.00781.x/pdf>
- 16 Wainwright, H. & Holloway, J. (2011) *Red Pepper*, March 2011, 'Crack capitalism or reclaim the state?' <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/crack-capitalism-or-reclaim-the-state/>
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