

Comments on Mike Rooke's "The Limitations of 'Open Marxism'"

Chris Wright

The following piece is a response to Mike Rooke's article "The Limitations of 'Open Marxism'", a review of John Holloway's book *Change the World Without Taking Power*, which appeared in *What Next?* No.23. The passages in italics are quotes from Mike's original article.

THIS IS in the form of comments based on the text. I hope this does not deter the reader rather too much. It was part of a discussion on the aut-op-sy listserv, which is dedicated to issues of class composition and libertarian communism.

"John Holloway has written an important book. It is a sustained critique of orthodox (i.e. Leninist) Marxism from the standpoint of the 'Open Marxism' of which Holloway is an exponent (along with others such as Richard Gunn, Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis)."

This may seem trivial, but it is not simply a critique of Leninist Marxism. Holloway critiques all kinds of Engelsian Marxism, the Hegelian Marxists from early Lukács to the Frankfurt School to the structuralist/post-structuralist Marxism of the Deleuze-Guattari-Foucault influenced strands of Autonomia via Negri.

"The central argument is that the strategic orientation of the (principally) Leninist tradition has focused on the capture and wielding of state power, and the conception of socialism characteristic of this tradition has been marked by a subordination to this goal ('the state illusion'). More specifically he targets the 'scientific-Marxist partyism' of this orthodox tradition (p.84), which he rejects for its pretensions to be an all-encompassing theory of reality (a scientific epistemology). The greater part of the 'post-Marx Marxist tradition', therefore, has become a reified theory and practice, reflecting an accommodation to the structures and thought of bourgeois society. Its fetishisation of state power (its capture) has led to the consistent betrayal of revolutionary aspirations, and the reproduction, rather than the abolition, of oppressive power

relations. While such criticisms of Lenin and Third International Marxism are not new, a large part of the uniqueness of Holloway's book derives from his use of fetishism as a critical category with which to construct a conception of revolution as the dissolution of power (as 'anti-power').

He begins from the 'scream', a starting point that is ontologically prior to 'doing'."

I cannot agree with this last part for several reasons. Firstly, Holloway intentionally aims his piece against a prioritization of the ontological. By not taking note of Holloway's other object of critique, the Althusserians and Deleuzoguattarians, Rooke seems to miss this essential point of departure.

Secondly, screaming and doing do not form separate moments for John. Just look at the word: screaming. Its from the verb "to scream", which is an action verb, not a being verb.

Finally, screaming, as Holloway makes clear later, results from the separation of the "doing" from the "done", what Marx might have referred to as the separation of the producers from their product and the means of producing.

We will see later that Rooke is at least partially correct in his assessment of part of the problem with leaving the terms Marx utilized. But this specific claim about the ontological status is simply incorrect in relation to a book which tries to put the ontological in its proper (read: subordinate) relation to human activity.

"In contradistinction to metaphysical materialism (which begins from the primacy of the material world) Holloway's conception of doing is that of 'practical

negation'. But human doing is broken when the 'powerful' separate 'the done' from 'the doers' and appropriate it for themselves, bringing about a destruction of subjectivity."

There are no meaningful prior "powerful". Mike here inadvertently creates a teleology where "the powerful" set about separating the done from the doers. What does this mean historically, genetically? The people who separated the doers from the done had a long way to go which involved the flight of some feudal lords from the immobility of the land and insubordination of serfs, and that is only in some cases, in Western Europe, in a handful of countries (England, The Netherlands, France, mostly). The process involved the recreation of pre-capitalist social relations of labor, in slavery, which combined with enclosures, and political struggles between mutually intertwined propertied classes, etc.

Positing "the powerful" prior to the doers already causes historical chaos and also misses John's point that the doers, the "not powerful" helped to produce their own separation because it was often, in the beginning, a means of gaining freedom. That this changed should not surprise us, and that capital would eventually spread not from the flight of pre-capitalist propertied classes from their being bound to serfs or as serfs, but from capital fleeing the insurgency of the new proletariat and the people who are either proletarianized or in the process of being proletarianized fleeing capital.

Also, subjectivity is not destroyed. This is wrong. Our subjectivity still exists, but in a specifically alienated, fetishized form (in the mode of being denied), qua capital. If our subjectivity ceased to exist, capital would not get value from our labor. In fact, as George Caffentzis points out in his article on machines and value in a book on high tech, labor is only value creating because it has a negating element within it which is hostile to the process. Our ability to struggle is exactly why we are capable of creating exchange value while machines cannot.

"This results in the struggle of the scream to liberate 'power-to' from 'power-over', to liberate subjectivity from its objectification. Holloway argues that his notion of 'power-to' is not captured by traditional revolutionary concepts of power (which seek to establish a 'counter-power' rather than an 'anti-power')."

But it does have precedence in *Autonomia* and the notions of *potestas* and *potentia*.

"In his discourse of the rupture of doing and done, Holloway relies on Marx's category of alienated labour. The attempt to develop Marx's category is based on a

critique of orthodox Marxism's way of conceptualising the working class and capital. The problem, now well elaborated in the texts of 'Open Marxism', is that in orthodox Marxism the working class is understood as standing in an external relation to capital, where the antagonism is one of separately constituted entities."

Yes and no. In orthodox Marxism, labor is first understood as a function of capital, not the other way around. In claiming a "prior powerful", Rooke does largely the same thing. Orthodox Marxism then relegates class struggle to a merely mediatory position in a larger capital logic, typified by the crude reading of the base-superstructure idea as one of separate levels, rather than as moments of a single relation. In other words, capital becomes the subject and labor has no subjectivity at all, which is what Rooke has claimed is Holloway's own position, and that is quite a mistake on Rooke's part.

Some elements in autonomist Marxism actually put forward the idea of capital and labor standing externally to each other as two opposed subjects, two armies at war. Open Marxism was always at pains to show that capital was nothing but our alienated subjectivity, at times taking it too far in the claim that there is no actual "us" and "them", but us against ourselves. Holloway makes this mistake in this book. Rather, there is an "us" and a "them", in so far as capital and labor take human form, are forms of human relations. Some people do embody capital and certainly labor must be embodied in actual people.

The real problem here is a slippage between levels of analysis. The capital-labor relation can manifest itself in various ways, but the working class and the capitalist class are not the same as the capital-labor relation, and this is something which Holloway's work can be accused of doing, of not attending to all of the various mediations.

*"Holloway argues that rather than seeing the working class as labour (it actually constitutes capital in its acceptance of the wage relation), it should be seen as the struggle **against** labour, and therefore **against** capital. In a clear reference to the 'failed' revolutions of the 20th century, Holloway argues that conceptualising the labour-capital relation as an external one is responsible for a view of struggle which leaves both sides essentially unchanged, and merely reproduces the old 'power-over' relation after any seizure of state power."*

This is a place where a critique of Holloway might be levelled in posing class as the struggle against labor. This has come up before (anti-work), and I think that we all need to be clear that labor is not a simply unified category. There is labor as the metabolic relation between human beings and

nature and alienated labor in the form of capitalist labor. We oppose the latter, but not the former. Holloway may not always be sufficiently clear on this or prefer a good turn of phrase to cautious formulation. But his intent is clear enough is in line with this and reflects the opposition to work as capitalist work which the Orthodox Marxist tradition has understood entirely incorrectly, resulting in their constant stream of demands for “better wages” and “more jobs”, but never the abolition of waged labor, which Marx suggested the trade unions (not even the revolutionaries) inscribe on their banners!

“How then can such a fetishised view of struggle and power be overcome? The first step is to see categories as the manifestation of forms of struggle, i.e. as open and therefore contested: ‘we exist against-and-in-Capital’ (p.90). A scientific (Marxist) approach involves dissolving the categories of thought in this way, in Marx’s words to grasp the absolute movement of becoming. In parallel with this is the ‘flow of doing’, the struggle for self-determination which constitutes the actual struggle against fetishisation in daily life.”

The first part is well put, but in the second half “parallel” gives the image of separation again. Doing and doing’s alienated form are not separate. Alienated doing is the way in which doing takes place in capitalist society. Appearance is the mode of existence of essence. There is no separation (Plato, Kant) nor a collapse of them into simply appearance (Hume, Nietzsche) or Being (Heidegger).

“In developing this argument Holloway draws on both Marx and Lukács, but employs his own distinctive categories: ‘doing’ and ‘done’; ‘power-to’ and ‘power-over’; and ‘anti-power’. I wondered throughout whether Holloway’s discourse of doing and done adds anything qualitatively new to Marx’s labour-capital antagonism.

I think that Holloway wants to get away from terms which have been damaged by mechanical Marxism’s use (read: abuse) and also as a pedagogical tool for explaining the real content of Marx’s notion of production and practice. The terms are not intended to bring us something new except some freedom from haggling over old terms. Of course, this also has risks in it, and we have already seen some of the negative impact, the slippage which Rooke is aware of.

In his insistence that the separation of the worker from the means of production must be seen as only part of a more general separation of subject and object, of people from their activity, Holloway draws the conclusion that value production cannot be the starting point of the analysis of class struggle (p.148).”

“Labour” here means capitalist labor, which cannot be the starting point because it is already embedded in the capital-labor relation. The struggle Rooke discusses below, as well as the anti-colonial struggles, stemmed from pre-capitalist labor’s attempt to reject the specific form of alienation that came with capital, as expropriation and enclosure.

Our activity is not and cannot be circumscribed wholly by activity as capitalist labor. Also, there is an insistence in Holloway’s work over the total nature of the capital-labor relation, of its impact in shaping all social relations. This is clearly from Debord’s comment that the acme of capital is separation.

“Holloway has in mind those struggles (such as the peasants of the Chiapas) not directly rooted in capitalist production. We cannot just start from labour, he declares. This, no doubt, explains his inclination throughout the book to collapse the category of (alienated) labour into the more general category of alienated ‘doing’, and thus to straddle (in my view, not too successfully) Marx’s historically specific dialectic of labour and a more general ontology of ‘doing’.”

Again with this ontology. If ontology is about being, we can hardly cite Holloway for an “ontology of doing”, which is an oxymoron. According to the online *Philosophical Dictionary*, Ontology is the “Branch of metaphysics concerned with identifying, in the most general terms, the kinds of things that actually exist. Thus, the ‘ontological commitments’ of a philosophical position include both its explicit assertions and its implicit presuppositions about the existence of entities, substances, or beings of particular kinds”. But this is a contentious note which I cannot flesh out.

Holloway is attempting to return to the content of Marx’s notion of human practice and labor in the sense of the metabolic relation with nature I mentioned earlier. As such, the point is that there are two kinds of labor: alienated (in specific ways, such as the capital-labor relation) or non-alienated, also in specific ways, which Holloway does not deal with sufficiently.

“This is directly contrary to the approach of Marx, who between the 1844 Manuscripts and the Grundrisse and Das Kapital progressively concretised the category of labour (and its dialectic), precisely in order to specify the central dynamic of the capitalist mode of production. Marx was not oblivious or indifferent to struggles originating outside this property relation, only insisting on the primacy of the wage-capital relation because it was the dominant means of pumping the surplus out of the direct producers.”

Now “wage-capital” relation is certainly a new formulation. The wage is certainly a form of labor as capital, so its a bit like saying the capital-capital relation. Also, while wage-labor may appear to be the dominant means of pumping surplus value out of the direct producers, this limited view has been critiqued by autonomists like Leopoldina Fortunadi as failing to grasp the production of surplus value in housework, ie predominantly by women outside the wage-labor environment. Others have critiqued the relation of slavery to capital formation and the struggles against the imposition of the capital-labor relation which formed the basis of many struggles since 1883. Even so, Marx also recognized the possible importance of the latter types of struggles when he began his research on Russia and the struggle against the imposition of capital in the form of the peasant collectives.

The capital-labor relation is also not simply constituted at the level of production, but also at the level of exchange and circulation, prerequisites for the realization of that funny thing called exchange value. Holloway rather tries to grapple with the capital-labor relation as a total social relation. He wants to grapple with the capital-labor relation in all its forms (understood as “mode of existence”), which includes non-waged forms of labor (housework, sex work, students [as reproduction of labor power and replacement for apprenticing]), the state, ideological formations, and so on. Marx had a specific intent in his critique of political economy, as a critique of the ideology that he saw as central to capital for the reason Rooke raises. But Holloway is not therefore engaged in something “opposite” of what Marx was doing, but is trying to make coherent all of the important matters raised by autonomist Marxism, the Situationists, feminism, the anti-colonial, student, and Black Liberation movements relative to Marx’s framework.

What worries me here is that Rooke seems to think that Marx is critiquing wage-labor as such. I think that is wrong. Rather, Marx is critiquing the political economic presentation of wage-labor. Certainly, Marx is hostile to wage-labor, but his project is the critique of political economy, of the fetishistic way in which capital understands and presents itself as ideology.

“If we do not start from labour, as Marx did, then we lose sight of the specific character of the exploitation of human labour under capitalism, and the property relation that dominates all others. If this is lost sight of, then we fail to ask the very question that Marx criticised the classical political economists for not asking: what sort of labour is it that produces value? The upshot of this is that Holloway not only de-historicises the category of

labour; but also the category of fetishism. This is a pity, since it is one of the noticeable failings of the mainstream Marxist tradition (with the exception of Lukács, Rubin and Debord) to have underestimated (or simply ignored) the centrality of fetishism for an understanding of capitalism and its overthrow.”

And yet Holloway does not lose the specificity of Marx’s inquisition nor of the points made by Rubin, Lukács and Debord. He rather attempts to integrate their critique into a world in which struggles at the point of waged-labor production are not the only struggles against capitalist labor in its specific form. John could just as easily discuss the separation of the producers from the means of producing, but it has all of the economic terminological hangovers, and so he chose to formulate the problem in a new way.

I think the main mistake in Rooke’s piece is to confuse labor with value production, which undermines his argument. Not all labor is value-producing and labor is a relation which is part of the terms in which value production takes place, but the capital-labor relation is not value-production as such. For example, his use of the term “wage-capital” relation assumes that all capitalist labor is waged labor, which is mistaken, as well as treating all labor as already for capital and thereby denying labor-against-capital. Nonetheless, I agree that there is something a-historical about Holloway’s formulation of the problem. He tends to flatten out the categories by skipping mediations.

“In Marx we see commodity fetishism as a necessary form of existence of alienated labour. Fetishism consists in the way in which the participants of value production experience the (de facto social) connections between themselves as relations between things. Lukács’s notion of reification was an elaboration on this, drawing attention to the way in which the atomisation and fragmentation of social life had penetrated deeply into, and shaped, social consciousness. It is a category, however, that is indissolubly related to the value form of production, and one that loses its explanatory force when generalised beyond (abstracted from) that context. Unfortunately, Holloway’s commentary does precisely this. It follows from the specific meaning that Marx attaches to commodity fetishism, that the struggle to dissolve it is inseparable from the task of dissolving commodity production: the de-commodification of social labour. This is the principal reason why Marx ‘privileged’ the proletarian struggle above others.

Holloway’s tendency to understate the historical specificity of (wage) labour and fetishism finds a further expression in the absence of a conception of history as necessary development. Marx’s idea that there is a logic to the historical process has become distinctly

unfashionable in these days of the celebration of contingency and indeterminacy."

What we have here is a complaint about the absence of a "historical materialism", a theory of how history develops from one stage to another. Well, it's Marx's weakest point, as Richard Gunn explains in *Open Marxism* Vol. 2 and as Cyril Smith explains in an article he wrote critiquing "historical materialism", ironically enough, for the journal *Historical Materialism*. In fact, where Marx elicits a theory of historical development it is not one of necessity, not a teleology, but one of class struggle. To say that all previous history has been a history of class struggles imputes no teleology, no necessary progressions from one "stage" to another. It is not a "theory of necessary development" in any meaningful sense.

John does fail to engage with the idea of history as a history of class struggles and therefore does fail to grapple with historical movement adequately. Cyril Smith, in his review for *The Commoner*, makes the same point. But I don't think that Holloway's account tends to be ahistorical because his notion of fetishism is not grounded in commodity production and commodity fetishism. This is in fact one of the strongest aspects of his book.

Not only is fetishism about how we "experience the (de facto social) connections between themselves as relations between things" but also about how they constitute themselves. Defetishization is not simply an ideological process, but a material process of undoing the capital-labor relation. Defetishization means the struggle against the material constitution of alienated labor in social practice, as well as our experience of alienated social relations. That is why John insists on the notions of fetishization and defetishization as active practices, processes, struggles. And he never has them separate from the specific form of alienated labor which he speaks about. The separation of the producers from the means of producing is unique, qualitatively, to capital as a social form which relies on the constant process of primitive accumulation (*The Commoner* 2 and 3, articles by Werner Bonefeld, Sylvia Federici, Midnight Notes and Massimo de Angelis). Nowhere else is labor free from the means of laboring so completely and also free from personal bondage (patriarchy) to the exploiting class. John is certainly all over this aspect of labor which is specifically capitalist and which constitutes fetishism in its specific form (pp.179-187 where John discusses its historical development and specificity to capital).

I do agree that there is a tendency to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" in trying to

avoid a historical determinism and teleologism. This is also evident in the essay by Monty Neill in *Auroras of the Zapatistas*, in which capitalism is no longer a necessary precondition for communism. It is hard to take this kind of stuff seriously and Holloway suffers from it to a lesser degree.

*"But beginning with **The German Ideology**, and continued at length in the **Grundrisse**, the notion that the development of the division and productivity of labour through various forms of property gives rise to the material pre-requisites of communism, was, for Marx, central."*

This is mixing issues. First, Marx certainly saw material prerequisites for communism as necessary. Communism, contrary to some anarchism, was not always a "leap of consciousness" away, but had become possible on the basis of certain types of social relations creating both the social and material reconditions for communism. Secondly, there is this idea that history represented a series of necessary stages from Slavery to Feudalism to Capitalism. Slavery did *not* have to give rise to feudalism. There was no logical progression from other pre-capitalist social relations to capitalism either. The necessity of this progression is read backwards into history, in part by Marx who wanted to equate the bourgeois revolutions with the proletarian revolutions, a rather dubious idea on at least two separate accounts, and which was *not* central to Marx's critique of capital and the possibility for communism.

Capital itself, however we got here, provided a sufficient basis for communism. That we got here by class struggle does not tell us that *we* had to get *here*. It has no teleological component and to the degree that Marx attempts to impose one, he creates and a prioristic theory of history which contradicts the core of his work.

*"Since Holloway claims to be continuing the 'scientific' inquiry begun by Marx (expressing the dialectic of negativity), it is incumbent on him to confront the question as to why the practical, daily struggle against fetishism **should** lead to the liberation of humanity to communism (for Holloway talks of the 'endlessness of the struggle for communism' [p.152])."*

Maybe I am being obtuse, but on the next page, John takes up exactly the dual nature of labor as capitalist labor but also as doing, creativity, practice. Defetishization leads to communism because defetishization involves the material transformation (which Mike Rooke misses in only focusing on "experience") of social life. Labor is our self-activity divided against us, which is John's whole point and the point of take off for communism. I think that Rooke misses the point

of the dualism of labor and the content of free labor which John goes into in detail as key. He is *very* historically specific in this whole discussion. However, I also have problems with this “endless struggle for communism” in Holloway’s book. The tension between Marx’s argument that communism is not a state of things to be achieved, but the real movement of the class itself, is lost. Communism may be the actual movement of the class, but it is also most certainly the abolition of alienated, fetishized social relations between people. It is not the prescription of specific alternative social relations, but the situation in which human beings will freely and consciously produce their own social relations and their own social existence. That, to me, is why Marx calls it the beginning of human history. There is certainly an end to class relations in sight. This problem in relation to the content of communism and to the lack of historical specificity in Holloway’s work seems related, but I do not see Rooke as getting to the problem adequately.

“It may be the case that Holloway fights shy of any commitment in this direction due to his (justified) antipathy towards the Engelsian dialectic as an objective movement of nature and society independent of the subject (the positivistic brand of Marxism). Whilst his critique of this tendency is suitably incisive, the bending of the stick in the direction of treating everything as struggle becomes a too one-sided de-historicising of categories.”

Is all social struggle class struggle? I think that Holloway tends in this direction, and so the problem is not the emphasis on struggle, but the avoidance of the multitude of ways in which antagonistic social relations manifest themselves. One could say that the capital-labor relation does not merely give rise to class struggles, but gives specific form to all sorts of antagonistic social relations, many of which pre-date capital and which it in part does away with and in part raises dialectically to a new level, in a new form.

On the other hand, Rooke seems likely to end up with the kind of dualisms which haunted “socialist-feminism” and Black Marxism in the 1970s.

“Although, as with Marx, Holloway identifies communism with the absence of fetishism, a slippage into the abstraction of power in general is a constant throughout this book. Just as the eternal separation of doing and done is not Marx’s starting point, neither is communism simply reducible to the absence of ‘power-over’. Marx never abstracted communism from the material preconditions brought into being by capital.”

Holloway has discussed this elsewhere. At the

same time, I agree with Rooke that the refusal to talk about the content of communism, and not its form, which is largely indeterminate outside of struggle, is a huge hole in the work. I just don’t think that it stems solely from his discussion of ideas like power-over/power-to and doing/done.

“We see this abstracting tendency at work when Holloway deals with value analysis. In contradistinction to the mainstream Marxist tradition, which has never fully appreciated the centrality of fetishism, Holloway makes it central to his account, which is informed throughout by the focus on the struggle ‘against-and-beyond capital’. But again he reverts to thinking in terms of ‘doing’ and ‘done’, and power in general, leaving the discussion without sufficient historical specificity. Nowhere in Marx will you find a posing of labour, exploitation, domination, in general. There is no ‘doing’ and ‘done’ in general, only historically specific forms of labour associated with similarly specific modes of surplus extraction.”

I think that this is the most solid point in Rooke’s argument, truthfully, and it points out the central weakness of Holloway’s book.

“The discussion of popular struggle in this book (the material reality of ‘anti-power’ as Holloway refers to it) is cast in terms of the re-appropriation of ‘the means of doing’. In order to be truly emancipatory, movements of the oppressed must rely on a fluidity of organisational forms, leadership (all must become leaders) and political programmes. Clearly, the orthodox Marxist models of party and programme, not to mention the idea of a proletarian state, have the effect of reproducing the ‘power-over’ that it is the aim of revolution to abolish. Holloway rejects the ‘politics of organisation’ in favour of ‘an anti-politics of events’ (p.214). The aim is not to ‘reproduce and expand the caste of militants (the organisation), but to ‘blast open the continuum of history’ (p.214).

Much of this is a necessary critique of some of the truly fetishistic organisational forms and practices of the Third and Fourth International traditions (and is reminiscent of the approach of the ‘Socialism or Barbarism’/Solidarity current of the ‘60s and ‘70s). But it conceals a serious lack. In his important attempt to recast Marxism as a truly radical theory of ‘anti-power’ – the dissolving of all ‘externality’ (p.176) – Holloway has avoided any concrete investigation of the relation between party and class and the organisational forms which these take. He poses the question of ‘re-appropriation of the means of doing’ repeatedly throughout the book, with, it has to be said, originality and power. But there, at a fairly high level of abstraction, Holloway leaves it, taking refuge in warnings of fetishised thinking: ‘To think in terms of property [expropriation of – M.R.] is, however, still to pose the problem in fetishised terms.’ But the question of organisation of unions, of factory committees, of neighbourhood committees, of soviets/

workers' councils and the relation of these to the organisation of revolutionaries, remains central to revolutionary tactics and strategy in situations of dual power and transition. It is the site of the practical testing out of the relation of theory to practice. Struggle, of course is always a shifting interrelation of leaders, programmes and mass action, and will never exist in an unfetishised form – the Zapatistas included. It is interesting that the historical examples that Holloway mentions approvingly as examples of leaderless, protean, struggle – May 1968 in France, the Stalinist collapse in Eastern Europe, the Zapatista rebellion, and the anti-globalisation movement while certainly being 'event centred', are perfect examples of movements characterised by a lack of organisational focus and strategic coordination, and which stop short of challenging the social order in a fundamental way. In this Holloway bows unnecessarily before spontaneity in celebrating the abstraction of pure, elemental, unfetishised rebellion."

Some of this is indeed true enough. In fact, Holloway fails to grapple with the content of working class organization. Rooke here seems a bit fixated on the forms, which are not so simple to gauge and not necessarily predictable. But the content of different types of organization should have been dealt with, around the differentiations between the relation of revolutionaries to the self-organization of the class. But for an academic, who has an imperative to publish, a captive audience, and a situation of constant dialogue, these problems are not always as imperative or obvious. Academia obscures that nature of these problems and lends itself to not taking up issues of organization.

"Within the limits set by his own categories, Holloway has drawn out in a consciously dialectical fashion the opposing poles of fetishised power (manifested in party and state) and 'anti-power'. His discursive method involves a continuous interrogation of categories, attacking all fixity, and drawing out the negative content. The book therefore becomes a dialogue between closed and open ways of apprehending the fetishised results of human practice. The result is an incisive and original demolition of the reified categories of much mainstream Marxist theorising. And theorising it is, since the retreat of Marxism into the academy has reduced it to the status of a 'classic' school of social science. But in a strange paradox, Holloway has ended up almost fetishising 'struggle' itself, identifying it as an absolute negation of creativity, rather than seeing it also as that which makes struggle possible."

This last sentence is hyperbole. It simply does not hold up in a close textual reading. Holloway instead sees the negative dialectic as the process out of which positive solutions will arise. And frankly, the history of the communist movement

does not leave us with any reason to believe that it will be revolutionaries who come up with the creative alternative ways of organizing social life. Rather, every significant new mode of struggle and forms of organization has come from the workers in struggle, through their process of refusal, in which they find themselves having to find new ways of "doing".

I don't think that Holloway is in the least bit wrong to therefore emphasize the importance of negation, especially in a period where the dominant tendency of both traditional Marxism in all its forms, from Engels to Althusser, and post-structuralist nonsense currently making its way around via Antonio Negri's radical refit of bourgeois sociology and psychology, have both imbibed of a deep positivism.

On its own terms, dialectic also makes sense only as negative dialectic, as a dialectic of resistance, refusal, negation. All movement is the movement of negation, but in saying this we recognize that what is positive, what is created, also arises from this same movement.

Rooke's failure to engage with Holloway's engagement with this neo-Spinozist/Left Nietzschean positivism (all of which is, in fact, like Nietzsche, a rehash of neo-Kantianism in theory and liberalism in practice) means that he misses the vital importance of this aspect of the book.

For Marx there was no struggle without organisation, and his entire life's work was inextricably bound up with the task of moulding revolutionaries into organisations capable of connecting with workers struggles. What is missing from Holloway's book is a consideration of the dialectic of consciousness and organisational form at different stages of class struggle. Holloway's dialectical presentation remains too abstract, missing the more concrete dialectic that exists between these two. This perhaps explains why there is no substantial engagement in the book with the actual experience of the Russian revolution and the degeneration of the Soviet state, and why the critique of Stalinism in this book is too abstract."

Why not the Spanish Civil War? The critique of Leninism is a critique of Stalinism. *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control* by Maurice Brinton showed that Stalinism represented the bitter fruition of Bolshevism. The "degeneration of the Soviet state" is a typical sort of Trotskyist phrasing that sounds like a leftover from an ill-digested self-critique. Holloway's whole point is that the creation of a "Soviet state" indicated the murder of the revolution. Paresh Chattopadhyay's work, among others, confirms this.

There is one further error: Marx did *not* spend his life "moulding revolutionaries into organisations". Marx exempted himself from this

for over a decade after the 1848 revolutions, had taken little interest in it prior to 1848, and did not place himself in an organization of revolutionaries, but in a mass working class organization thrown up by the struggles of the working class itself. Only in the last decade of his life can Marx be said to have concerned himself with the formation of revolutionary organizations, and often because they were in fact coming into existence and he hoped to impact them in positive ways that would avoid the damaging influence of both Lasalle and Bakunin. On this, he categorically failed, in part thanks to the weaknesses of his closest friend and comrade, Engels.

“In the political work of the Left Opposition (Trotsky, Serge, Rakovsky), and the Left-Communist/Council Communist tradition (Pannekoek, Gorter, Rühle, Korsch, Mattick), we have an invaluable record of how revolutionaries grappled with all the unavoidable problems of ‘counter-power’ in the circumstances of transition beyond the rule of capital. Given the focus of Holloway’s book – the exploration of a future beyond the fetishised structures of the present – this surely deserved more attention.”

Yes, but in content, not in form, a task which would require a much larger and very different book. This is asking the impossible in the way it is phrased.

But part of the answer to this organizational fetishism makes its appearance concretely here through the focus on the Left Opposition. Why these, but never the Workers’ Opposition or the Left Communists in 1918? Or Voline, Makhno and other anarchists? There are differences over a conception of the content of communist revolution which Rooke continues to fail to make clear. If Holloway also does this, there is a nut which we cannot crack if we do not get around to the problem of the conception of communism.

“There is therefore a major lacuna at the end of this book. On the vital and immediate question of how revolutionaries should organise themselves in relation to class struggles, Holloway has no practical perspective to offer. He makes the following admission: ‘How then do we change the world without taking power? At the end of the book, as at the beginning, we do not know. The Leninists know, or used to know. We do not’ (p.215). This really is taking the humility of Marxist theorising too far!”

Let me give a brief example. Some people critique Lenin’s notion of the relation between party and class assuming that Lenin held his whole life to the ideas he enunciated in *What Is To Be Done?* This is wholly false. The key to Lenin’s conceptions resides in a comparison of this with his pamphlet *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?* in the “July

Days” of 1917. In that piece, Lenin makes the argument that the workers do not need the party to come to revolutionary conclusions or even to overthrow the state and capital. The working class needs the party for one thing: to hold state power. This means that if the object of revolution is not the seizure of state power, then there is no need for the vanguard party in Lenin’s sense. Lenin’s whole reasoning for the vanguard party resides in this: his conception of revolution and of communism. Every critique of Lenin which does not take up this matter falls far short and usually ends up in the kind of critiques that treat Lenin as if he had stopped thinking in 1902. It is not his conception of organization which Lenin fails to rethink in 1914-15 and which haunts the Russian Revolution. No, Lenin fails to come to terms with communism and the meaning of communism as the real (in the German, I am told, “real” also translates as “actual”) movement of the class, as a process of self-liberation. This is evident in *State and Revolution*, Lenin’s supposedly most “anarchistic” book.

Neither Rooke nor Holloway fundamentally engage this question and so Rooke’s correct sense that something is wrong here fails to address the genuine weakness of Holloway’s work.

“After the collapse of Stalinism and the Communist parties, and with an increase in the variety and tempo of anti-capitalist struggles, the relevance of Marxism for the struggle for communism has never been greater. Holloway’s book is in this context a valuable contribution to the discussion about how regenerate Marxism. It deserves to be widely read and debated.”

Something I have noticed in the couple of reviews I have seen is that no one has captured the importance of Holloway’s book as a critique on the real competitor for self-understanding in the misnamed anti-globalization movement: the various post-alities of Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault, Althusser etc, all re-read through Negri. Leninism is less appealing to many of the people now participating, but also, through Althusser, we should remember that Leninism and (post) structuralism do not have to be at odds and that it can resurface in various ways, as in Negri’s apologies for Leninism and Zizek’s love of Lenin’s desire to “take power without changing the world”, a reactionary perspective indeed.

Holloway’s book is a resounding challenge, if an imperfect one, to not only Leninism, but also to the neo-Spinozist trash masquerading as a new libertarian communism (in anarchist circles as well). I applaud Mike Rooke for taking it up and making some thoughtful, if also imperfect, critiques. ■