

Holloway, La Boétie, Hegel

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[The final, definitive version of this paper has been published in *Journal of Classical Sociology* Vol. 12, No. 2 (May 2012) by SAGE Publications Ltd, All Rights reserved. © The Authors.]

ABSTRACT: The article presents a comradely critique of John Holloway's *Crack Capitalism*, one which endorses Holloway's notion of grassroots revolution but which raises questions about his discussion's conceptual basis. In particular, Holloway's reliance on Etienne La Boétie's *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* is found wanting whereas strands of thought concerning 'contradiction' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* are held to provide more adequate foundation. Hegel, it is argued, not merely accounts for the possibility and necessity of revolutionary transformation; his account of the French Revolution in relation to the theme of 'recognition' indicates how revolution may be understood in a ground-up or grassroots sense.

I

Already in the title of John Holloway's latest book, *Crack Capitalism*, the reader gets an inkling of something dynamic and urgent, something which draws them in and pushes them forward towards a radical conclusion – an imperative of emancipation. As one of Holloway's favourite thinkers, Ernst

Bloch, might have said, there is something intriguing here even at the outset, something well worth following. Because Holloway's title contains an ambiguity that will be a clue to the book's profound message: 'crack' is both imperative and adjective, the urgent need to 'crack' capitalism inseparable in the author's eyes from the presence of already-existing 'cracks' and fissures in the capitalist edifice. The emancipation which on the Marxist left was traditionally ascribed to labour and awaited in some future revolution is for Holloway to be decoupled from a labour exposed as mere obverse of capital's coin, and construed not as potentiality but actuality; emancipation exists here and now, though at the margins or 'interstices' of a pervasive domination and exploitation. Put another way, in a formulation which recurs in *Crack Capitalism*, freedom exists 'in, against and beyond' capital. The marvellous idea of an already-existing 'interstitial freedom' is only one of many insights in this immensely rich and persuasive book.

But just as the book's title is ambiguous, so the question of which audience it addresses is, from the outset, not quite clear. It would be easy to see Holloway's as a guidebook for anticapitalist activists. Though this would overlook the challenge it poses to those of us working in the social sciences and who over the years have witnessed our discipline become progressively distanced from the activism which it once sought to comprehend and even assist. In recent times it has often seemed as if the academic study of society has been happy to posit ever-more intricate structures of social constraint, structures which by rendering the human subject theoretically subsidiary have consciously or unconsciously reinforced a practical appearance of oppositional powerlessness. It is precisely this tendency which Holloway turns on its head, reversing the polarity of social analysis, treating the social and economic structures of our capitalist societies not as omnipresent mechanisms of control and constraint but, in a return to the roots of Marxian critique, by tracing them back to reified forms of human praxis. Against what he correctly identifies as a lingering legacy of structuralist modes of thought in the academy, Holloway argues that the human subject is not merely 'a structural position, a bearer of social relations' (Holloway, 2010: 216) but someone (rather than something) disfigured by the rule of abstract labour and commodity exchange into the appearance of such a place-holder. Behind the character mask of abstract labour there exist, for Holloway, *humans* not *structures* and these humans remain the originator and prime mover of the social world. Where social scientific reflection has often seemed content to theorise its own unfreedom, Holloway's return to the radical humanist and

praxis-centred core of Marxian thinking places the concepts of freedom and emancipation back at the centre of theoretical reflection.

For the academic reader new to his work it may be helpful to know that in *Crack Capitalism* Holloway renews a long-standing critique of ‘top-down’ or structuralist tendencies within Marxism and left-wing thought generally. These are charged with having conceived of capitalism in positivistic and objectivistic manner, mistaking the merely congealed creations of subjects, whether the state or ‘ideology’ or economic ‘laws’, for things in themselves, and which in perverse manner were then construed ahistorically as determining or ‘interpollating’ subjects (compare Bonefeld, Gunn & Psychopedis, 1992). The mistake, so Holloway argues, was to overlook the human praxis or ‘social doing’ that produces and reproduces capital and which – and here lies the most radical moment in his analysis – is thus equally capable of ceasing to reproduce it (Holloway, 2010: 95). That we ourselves create and reproduce what Holloway calls ‘the existing system of domination’ (Holloway, 2002: 56) goes hand in hand with his belief that we can and must *stop* doing so, that we can ‘stop making capitalism’ (2010: 254). Not that Holloway’s work should thereby be construed as yet another critique of structuralism, with which social science is already replete. Holloway offers little solace to adherents of the post-structuralism or post-modernism which followed structuralism in the train of academic fashion and like their predecessor distracted a generation of potentially militant students. Though at first glance he may seem, like them, to emphasise ‘rhizomatic’ forms of struggle, Holloway is no friend of theories which relegate the human and its creativity to a mere effect of a ubiquitous power or ‘governmentality’ or seek to submerge human subjects within ‘networks’ of nonhuman ‘actants’.¹ In the light of Holloway’s approach the concepts of post-structuralism and post-modernism are revealed as phantom attacks upon the edifice of structuralism which leave its core belief untouched: the denial of human praxis as *primum mobile* of the social world.

This argument is mirrored in another important message of *Crack Capitalism*, which does more clearly address an activist audience, a critique of an equally deleterious legacy, namely that of a top-down (usually vanguardist) Marxist politics that conceives of the crisis of capitalism in purely determinist terms or of revolution as something to be led by the greater, more disciplined minds of the Party. For Holloway, who understands the state to be inherently a form of domination, a ‘derivative form of abstract labour’ (Holloway, 2010: 133), any top-down model of revolution in which the state is to be seized and somehow

rendered benign is, in the advanced capitalist world, neither possible nor desirable: were it even to succeed it would merely create a new ‘gatekeeper’, substitute one form of domination for another (Holloway, 2002: 201). Against the still influential but ultimately reactionary model of organisation still adopted by many anticapitalists, Holloway turns not only to Marx himself but to a less well-known but no less venerable tradition of left-libertarianism and direct democracy: ‘the tradition of the commune, council, soviet or assembly’ (Holloway, 2010: 40).

And Holloway turns to one particular figure from the past who will interest us here, because this turn makes clearer what is at stake in his conception of emancipatory change. The figure is one who has been used before by radical thinkers but who plays a particular and (we contend) key role in *Crack Capitalism*. Holloway’s choice of the 16th Century French writer Étienne la Boétie to express his conception of both domination and emancipation is one which we believe to be highly revealing of the wider impetus of his thinking. In what follows we will suggest that the use of la Boétie in Holloway’s book is not merely incidental but is in fact highly instructive of how Holloway views the power of capitalism and the revolt against it. To anticipate our thesis, Holloway conceives of capitalism as involving Boétiean ‘*voluntary servitude*’; conversely Holloway takes the breaking of capitalism’s domination to involve exactly the ‘*serving no more*’ of which La Boétie writes. Indeed it is, we suggest, Boétiean conceptions of both domination and emancipation which help generate the enormous appeal of Holloway’s argument. Yet this ‘appealing’ argument for emancipation will not be without its problems, most notably the danger that it makes the overthrowing of capitalism appear *too straightforward*. Perhaps aware of such problems Holloway on occasion equivocates between a Boétiean and a more Hegelian conception in which domination is understood as freedom *contradicted* rather than as freedom *voluntarily given up and straightforwardly retrievable*. We suggest that Holloway is right to be tempted by this Hegelian conception of freedom contradicted, because in fact it stands on firmer foundations, is more theoretically and practically helpful, and more political astute. It too can provide a basis (indeed a firmer basis) for the ‘ground-up’ (as opposed to ‘top-down’) Marxism which we, like Holloway, endorse. Nevertheless *Crack Capitalism* remains something of a *torn* work, torn between sympathies for these two quite different conceptions of emancipatory change and it is on this torn character that our paper and its critique – a critique

measured by our overwhelming agreement with Holloway, a comradely critique, in other words – will focus.

Before beginning, however, and having noted that *Crack Capitalism* addresses, as it were, two audiences, the activist and the academic, a brief aside is necessary. In what follows, whilst the same two audiences are addressed, we acknowledge that different parts of our argument may interest each in different ways. On the one hand, we share the activist's axiom that capitalism *is* to be overthrown and that debate need only centre on the 'how' of that emancipation. The activist may wish to focus more on this aspect of our paper. On the other hand, writing as academics, we also hope to persuade an audience whose interest may lie more in the historical resonances and conceptual consistency of Holloway's argument. The academic reader may concentrate more on these aspects. We hope, nevertheless, that ours is not mistaken for an uncritical attitude to the division of labour implied in the very separation of these two audiences and that our argument goes some way, even if only counterfactually, towards reuniting them.

II

If Holloway's project of ground-up social transformation is to be sustained, questions arise concerning the theoretical framework which *Crack Capitalism* employs. In general terms this framework is, as we have indicated, one of anti-positivist and anti-structuralist Marxism; but questions remain about how specific issues in such a Marxism are to be seen.

In the present section of our discussion, we focus on one such issue. The issue is that of how, conceptually, *revolutionary change* is to be pictured. What makes such change possible and, at the same time, needful? What allows revolutionary freedom to make its appearance in a hitherto-unfree world? Holloway, when he addresses such questions, appeals to two rather different theoretical traditions: on the one hand, as we shall see, he draws upon La Boétie's notion of 'voluntary servitude' whereas, on the other, he refers to themes – contradiction, mutual recognition – which have a Hegelian provenance. In *Crack Capitalism*, the line of thought associated with La Boétie is given emphasis although themes associated with Hegel are never far away. Our suggestion is that, in the pages of *Crack Capitalism*, La Boétie (as author of *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*)

and Hegel (as author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) may be pictured as spectral presences who struggle for possession of Holloway's theoretical soul. *Crack Capitalism* is, so we suggest, a theoretically 'torn' text. Our further suggestion is that, if the notion of revolutionary change is to be coherent, the battle for Holloway's soul is one which Hegel should win.

In what follows, we consider lines of argument linked to La Boétie and to Hegel in turn. First, however, we introduce our discussion by glancing at a passage where Holloway comments on revolution and brings La Boétie's notion of voluntary servitude into view.

The passage occurs at the end of *Crack Capitalism's* first chapter. There, Holloway comments that '*Nothing is more simple*' than revolution; he adds that '*Nothing is more difficult, however*' (Holloway, 2010: 6-7). The first of these declarations is supported by a passage from La Boétie, which argues that a tyrant depends on actions performed by his subjects and which, on the basis of this argument, concludes:

Resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break in pieces (La Boétie [1548] 2008: 16; quoted in Holloway, 2010: 6).ⁱⁱ

The second declaration is supported by the reflection that acts of rebellion are all-too-frequently repressed, with the result that 'many exciting experiments in anti-capitalism...have ended in frustration and recrimination' (Holloway, 2010: 7).

A reader of the passage may be struck by the asymmetry between the forms of support here offered. Whereas the thesis concerning *revolution's simplicity* is grounded theoretically, namely in La Boétie's account of how a tyrant may be opposed, the thesis concerning *revolution's difficulty* is allowed to rest on untheorised empirical observations and claims. Should this asymmetry be a source of disquiet? We suggest that it should. No doubt, theoretical and

empirical considerations can be combined in a number of fashions and no doubt, further, Holloway's remarks on 'frustration and recrimination' are all too justifiable. However, a theoretical appeal to the notion of voluntary servitude threatens to be one-sided and to sweep all other considerations aside. If revolution is seen as an ending of voluntary servitude, obstacles that stand in the way of emancipation *cannot but* be pressed to the edge of the conceptual picture. They *cannot but* appear as afterthoughts, or as qualifications to an argument which makes difficulties faced by revolution seem all-but-unreal. The problem with the passage lies not in an appeal to theory *per se*, but in the reductionist overtones of a theory which gives the notion of voluntary servitude a central place.

To what extent do worries of this sort count as worries about Holloway's position? If the notion of voluntary servitude is the conceptual bedrock on which *Crack Capitalism* rests then, we consider, questions concerning reductionism can be raised. However, *Crack Capitalism* is a book not merely about voluntary servitude but about contradiction and recognition: to the extent that these latter themes play a part in discussion, worries concerning reductionism need not apply. Which themes in Holloway's argument are fundamental? Does the passage at the end of Chapter One introduce a premise on which, throughout, discussion relies? Or does it use quotation merely to highlight a specific issue in an elegant and, indeed, moving way? Our aim in the present section is to underline the significance of these questions.

(i) *La Boétie*

Scholarly commentary on Etienne La Boétie (1530-1563) has tended to present the *Discourse* as a youthful work, written as a rhetorical exercise; La Boétie himself is described as – like Montaigne, his close friend – a devout Roman Catholic despite the circumstance that late sixteenth century Huguenots took the *Discourse* to be a politically sympathetic text. Here, our interest lies not in La Boétie's historical context but in whether his work provides an adequate framework for an understanding of revolutionary change. Our interest being thematic, we do not (rightly or wrongly) attempt to situate La Boétie as a figure in the history of sixteenth-century ideas.

Our first step in discussion is to step back from La Boétie's immediate argument. Why – it may be asked – might a view of revolution as an ending of voluntary servitude appear to be attractive? Such a view seems, we suggest, to

supply a welcome alternative to a plausible but (plausibility notwithstanding) *unattractive* position. With a quick sketch of this position our argument begins.

Let us accept, as a starting-point for discussion, that a revolution becomes possible and, perhaps, needful when a situation of *unfreedom* obtains. How should the notion of *unfreedom* be conceptualised? A plausible answer to this question is to say that an *unfree* situation is one where freedom is lacking or absent or does not exist. Engels appears to endorse this answer when, in *Anti-Dühring*, he describes communist revolution as ‘humanity’s leap [*Sprung*] from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom’ (Engels, 1969: 336). For Engels, a realm of pre-revolutionary ‘necessity’ and a realm of post-revolutionary ‘freedom’ stand abstractly opposed to one another – and the ‘leap’ which links them has properties of a quasi-magical and all-but-miraculous kind. *How* is the leap able to bring about the transition from one realm (the realm of ‘necessity’) to the other (the realm of ‘freedom’)? Perhaps the leap (communist revolution) is itself a free action? If so, the ability of revolution to found a realm of freedom is comprehensible – but it is less easy to see how, in a world marked by ‘necessity’, revolution may take place. Perhaps the leap is an action governed by ‘necessity’ and from which freedom is absent? If so, the occurrence of revolution becomes possible – but it is difficult to understand how a realm of freedom may be revolution’s result. (It is, we may note in passing, especially difficult to understand this if post-revolutionary *freedom* is pictured as *freedom which involves self-determination*.) In sum: if an *unfree* situation is taken to be a situation from which freedom is literally absent, revolution is seen as impossible. Alternatively, revolution is seen as possible – but in a miraculous sense.

A conception of revolution as an ending of voluntary servitude presents itself as a welcome alternative to the ‘unattractive’ view just sketched. The difficulty with the ‘unattractive’ view is that it pictures *unfree* existence as existence from which freedom is absent. By contrast, a conception of revolution which focuses on the ending of voluntary servitude takes freedom to exist even when, in a pre-revolutionary situation, *unfreedom* obtains. In a pre-revolutionary social world, according to the conception of revolution now under consideration, freedom (or ‘voluntary’ action) is by no means in abeyance; on the contrary, it subsists but furthers a tyrant’s power (or the power of capital) rather than promoting its own emancipatory ends. Revolution understood as an ending of voluntary servitude is able to project a realm of freedom, because it is an expression and articulation of already-free action. It is likewise able to occur, in world where ‘necessity’

rules, because the world which it opposes is a world to which freedom is the key.

Does the ‘attractive’ view of revolution – the view which turns on the notion of voluntary servitude – succeed, where the ‘unattractive’ view fails? We doubt that this is the case. As a means of exploring these doubts we turn, in greater detail than heretofore, to La Boétie’s text.

An important strand in the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*’s argument concerns not freedom (or liberty) but power: ‘a single tyrant’, writes La Boétie, ‘has no other power than the power they [the tyrant’s subjects] give him’ (La Boétie, 2008: 8; similarly p. 15). Holloway emphasises this strand when he states, by way of summary, that ‘the powerful depend on the powerless’ (Holloway, 2010: 17). La Boétie’s argument comes into focus, however, only when considerations concerning *power* are supplemented by considerations concerning *liberty* – as Holloway agrees. Why, it may be asked, is a ‘simple act of will’ sufficient in La Boétie’s view to disempower a tyrant (La Boétie, 2008: 13)? Why is it sufficient that a subject people ‘serve no more’ and ‘support him [the tyrant] no longer’ (La Boétie, 2008: 16: quoted above)? The answer can only be that the actions on the part of a people which empower a tyrant are actions which are freely performed. A host of passages in the *Discourse* confirm that this is indeed La Boétie’s claim (see La Boétie, 2008: 13, 23, 44). What sort of freedom does La Boétie attribute to a people who are subject to tyrannical rule? Our answer is that the freedom attributed by the *Discourse* is a freedom which is intact and undistorted and complete. If it were *less than* intact, why would the people be in a position to perform the ‘simple act of will’ which undercuts tyrannical power? Why would *serving the tyrant no more* and *supporting the tyrant no longer* be actions (or refusals of courses of action) which the people might perform? According to the line of argument pursued in the *Discourse*, political opposition to tyranny involves not an upsurge of freedom which might count as a ‘new beginning’ (Arendt, 2006: 19) but a harnessing of existing freedom to wiser and, perhaps, more self-consistent aims.

The notion that undistorted freedom already exists in a tyrannical society strikes us as problematic: it is a notion that is too logically powerful and, at the same time, too logically weak. It is *too logically powerful* in the sense that it makes the non-occurrence of revolution all but inconceivable, and presses aside (in a triumphalist fashion) difficulties and discouragements which a revolutionary project must face. It is *too logically weak* in the sense that it is question-

begging: if *voluntary servitude* is La Boétie's answer to the question of how 'one man alone may mistreat a hundred thousand' (La Boétie, 2008: 13), a further question instantly arises about *why* individuals should support (freely support) tyrannical rule. Passages where La Boétie attempts to answer this further question – he refers to lack of knowledge, to familiarity and to the 'influence of custom' (La Boétie, 2008: 23-4) – introduce issues other than voluntary submission *per se*.ⁱⁱⁱ

Before leaving La Boétie, a final point may be noted. The point supplies an additional reason for thinking that what we have termed the 'attractive' view of revolution is inadequate, or at least incomplete. A topic which appears in the margins of the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* is recognition – more or less in what we shall see is Hegel's sense. As individuals, we 'mutually know [*entreconnoistre* one another as companions' and 'each one can see himself and, as it were, recognize [*reconnoistre*] himself in the other' (La Boétie, 2008: 17-8; Screech, 1983: 111-2 – whose translation on this occasion we prefer). For La Boétie, as for Montaigne, questions of recognition are bound up with questions of friendship; and friendship is, for Montaigne and presumably for La Boétie as well, a relationship of a deeply personal and exclusive kind (La Boétie, 2008: 53; Montaigne, 2003: 211-3, 215). So to say, Montaigne and La Boétie – close friends – picture recognition as it may appear in a cold (a non-mutually recognitive) climate. Evidently, the theme of friendship cannot be pursued in the present paper. We refer to it in passing here because, as will be proposed in the second part of the present section, issues concerning *recognition* have a bearing on how revolution is to be seen.

Standing back, we return briefly to the questions raised at the end of the present section's introductory remarks. How fair is it to elide Holloway's and La Boétie's positions? It seems to us that it is difficult not to reply that the elision *is* justified, the chief reason being that the notion of voluntary servitude, once introduced, tends to dictate discussion's terms. From the moment that Holloway adopts versions of *serve the tyrant no more* and *support the tyrant no longer* as revolutionary slogans, a notion of freedom that remains pristine even under tyranny (or under capitalism) moves to the centre of *Crack Capitalism's* claims. If freedom under a tyrant were less than pristine, something more than non-service and non-support might be necessary (*pace* Holloway) to oppose the tyrant's claims. Does Holloway himself wish to argue that freedom is pristine even in a pre-revolutionary situation? Does he wish to argue that already, in a pre-revolutionary situation, we have all the freedom that is needed to

disempower capitalist tyranny? We doubt that this is the case. Our worry about the notion of voluntary servitude is that it unleashes a conceptual dynamic whose consequences Holloway is (rightly) unwilling to accept.

(ii) *Hegel*

We have commented on two conceptions of revolutionary change, the ‘unattractive’ and the ‘attractive’. Each is the mirror of the other: whereas the ‘unattractive’ view assumes that freedom is absent from a pre-revolutionary situation, the ‘attractive’ view understands such a situation as one where pristine and undistorted freedom already exists. Both views are, we have suggested, unsatisfactory. Where must a theory of revolution turn?

A theory of revolution may turn to Hegel. In chapter VI of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, history is described as culminating in the French Revolution wherein ‘absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world’ (Hegel, 1977: 357). We propose that Hegel’s understanding of history before the French Revolution and his understanding of the freedom which the French Revolution brings into existence moves beyond both ‘attractive’ and ‘unattractive’ views.

A preliminary note concerning our references to Hegel is necessary. Our comments draw upon a reading of the *Phenomenology* which we take to be valid but which cannot be presented in full and adequate detail here.^{iv} In what follows, we take for granted our preferred interpretation but a careful reader may wish to insert *sotto voce* inverted commas around Hegel’s name.

In the *Phenomenology*’s account of the history which leads up to the French Revolution, two themes are central: recognition and freedom. By recognition (*Anerkennung*), Hegel understands acknowledgement of other recognized and recognizing individuals. By freedom he understands (in a word) self-determination. The notions are intertwined. Freedom presupposes recognition: for Hegel, an individual is free not in spite of others (as in theories of ‘negative’ liberty) but through recognitive relations in which the individual stands. And recognition presupposes freedom: recognition counts as such only when it is freely given and, further, what an individual recognizes is the self-determining actions which other individuals perform.

This close intertwining of freedom and recognition has a specific implication: it is that freedom and recognition stand and fall together or, putting the point in a different way, social existence is fully free only when untrammelled and

unconstrained recognition exists. For Hegel, this means that freedom flourishes only when *mutual recognition* obtains. In Hegel's view, recognition is mutual recognition; recognition (together with freedom) exists in a contradicted or 'alienated' form whenever anything short of mutual recognition is in play. In the course of the *Phenomenology*, two contradictory forms of recognition are foci of attention. One is recognition that is 'one-sided and unequal' (Hegel, 1977: 116);^v the other is recognition which goes forward in terms of role-definitions^{vi} and the social institutions (or 'spiritual masses': Hegel, 1977: 300, 356, 361) wherein role-definitions are inscribed. Later, in section III, this distinction between forms of contradictory recognition is important to our argument. Here, however, it is the general point which deserves emphasis: until and unless a mutually recognitive social existence is achieved, recognition together with freedom subsists in a contradicted or 'alienated' way.

Relating these comments to our discussion of revolution, we note, first, that (if a Hegelian perspective is adopted) one-sided and unequal recognition is a feature of a situation where – in Holloway's words – 'the powerful depend on the powerless'. It is, we may say, *because* one-sided recognition is present that (now to quote La Boétie) 'one man alone may mistreat a hundred thousand'. And we note, second, that 'negative' liberty, or liberty *in spite of* other individuals, is decidedly a category which existing (pre-revolutionary) society appeals to and proclaims. The relevance of Hegel is not, however, exhausted when parallels between history as seen by the *Phenomenology* and the world in which we live are brought to mind. For the challenge which Hegel presents to be brought into focus, the notion of *contradiction* must be placed centre-stage.

Above, we asked how a situation of pre-revolutionary *unfreedom* should be conceptualised – and we argued against two diametrically opposed answers which this question has received. In the first place, we argued against the view (exemplified by Engels) that an unfree situation is one where freedom is literally absent. In the second, we argued against the view that freedom is present, in an undistorted form, in a situation before revolution takes place. This second view we associated with La Boétie (and with Holloway, to a lesser extent). Now, with the *Phenomenology's* account of history our starting-point, we sketch a further possibility. We do so in very general terms, our aim being to indicate a line of thought rather than to explore its ramifications. Our comments concentrate on the theme of freedom, introducing the theme of recognition only in a brief and incidental way.

For the Hegel of the *Phenomenology*, a situation of *unfreedom* obtains throughout history (as does a situation of *misrecognition*). Such a situation ends only when the ‘new world’ (Hegel, 1977: 7) of the French Revolution dawns. How does Hegel conceptualise unfreedom? In his view, a situation of unfreedom is, as we have indicated, one where freedom and thence recognition subsist in a contradicted or contradictory way. The notion of contradictory (or self-contradictory) existence is crucial. Changing the terminology slightly, we may say that *contradicted* freedom (or recognition) and *alienated* freedom (or recognition) is the same thing. That which is alienated exists as other than it is.

How may Hegel’s conception of history be related to (on the one hand) Engels’ and (on the other hand) La Boétie’s views of revolutionary change? Whereas Engels in the passage cited portrays revolution as a change from a situation where freedom is lacking to one where freedom is present, Hegel thinks of revolution as involving a change from a situation where freedom is already present to one where freedom comes into its own. There is a large measure of agreement between Hegel and Holloway/La Boétie. However the difference is no less significant: whereas La Boétie and, in some places, Holloway see revolution as a transition from a situation where already-intact and already-undistorted freedom is present to one where tyranny (or capitalism) is no longer supported, Hegel pictures revolution – in the *Phenomenology*’s argument, the French Revolution – as a transition from freedom in an alienated and distorted to freedom in a non-alienated form. Stated simply, Hegel sees revolution as a transition from *contradicted or alienated* to *uncontradicted and non-alienated* freedom.

The conceptual advantages of what may be termed a Hegelian understanding of revolutionary change are immense. Once *unfreedom* is understood as *contradicted or alienated freedom*, revolution need no longer be seen as a miraculous ‘leap’ from non-freedom to freedom; nor is there a need to avoid stipulating such a miracle by imagining that, under tyranny and under capitalism, perfect freedom exists. Avoiding both of these pitfalls, Marx’s conception of revolution as self-emancipation (see Marx and Engels, 1967: 62) comes into focus: emancipation is *needful*, because a transition from alienated to non-alienated freedom remains to be effected, whereas at the same time emancipation is *possible* because the self (who does the emancipating) is not merely a product of a predetermined and ‘necessary’ world. So to say, both the need for revolution (which Engels’s phrase underlines) and the possibility of

revolution (which La Boétie's perspective makes vivid) are acknowledged in Hegel's discussion.

If the conceptual implications of a Hegelian understanding are significant, so too are implications of a political kind. A picture of a pre-revolutionary situation as one where freedom is contradicted does justice, we propose, to the complexity – the combination of opportunity and 'frustration' (Holloway) – which a revolutionary project must face. Such a picture avoids (on the one hand) the grim and necessitous image of revolution that has prevailed in traditional Marxism and (on the other hand) the euphoric and triumphalist poetry that prevails in various *Autonomia*-influenced accounts. A focus on the notion of 'freedom-contradiction' allows for respect for a reality principle (in Freud's sense) but does so without renewing top-down, structuralist and elitist, patterns of thinking.

A final note in the present section must concern recognition. Freedom and recognition are, we have suggested, twin themes in a Hegelian account of history: each exists in a contradictory fashion until mutual recognition is achieved. (When mutual recognition is achieved, freedom and recognition together come into their non-alienated own.) The crucial point to bear in mind, here, is that recognition *just is* mutual recognition, just as freedom *just is* self-determination – however distorted and damaged and self-undermining and perverted this mutuality and this self-determination may be. In a pre-revolutionary situation construed in Hegelian terms, mutual recognition and self-determination are everywhere – and nowhere. This being so, we may agree with Holloway that, in revolutionary or emancipatory action, 'mutual recognition does not have to wait till the end of history' (Holloway, 2010: 39) and that, instead, radical change is to be pictured as going forward in an 'interstitial' (Holloway, 2010: 11, 63) way. If, however, we shift attention from mutual recognition's 'everywhere' to its 'nowhere', we may ask whether a view of revolution as an ending of voluntary servitude can sufficiently acknowledge the darkness and despair and helplessness that contradicted recognition can entail.^{vii} Above, we have indicated that recognition is a theme which appears in the margin's of La Boétie's *Discourse*: and we have suggested that the notion of a friendship which is unconditional and (or but) distorted by its exclusivity^{viii} is one contradictory form amongst others that mutual recognition may take in a non-mutually recognitive world.

If, in Holloway's words, 'we can make a start on it [mutual recognition] now' (Holloway, 2010: 39), and if a Hegelian understanding of unfreedom is to be unfolded, an account of freedom and recognition in their darker aspects must lie at the centre of revolutionary concern.

III

Earlier, we suggested that the author of the *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* and the author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be seen as locked in battle for Holloway's theoretical soul. Hegel, we indicated, was the winner whom we preferred. In the course of section II, we supplied reasons for hoping that Holloway might turn to Hegel for a theoretical grounding of his views.

But a little more is needed, to make our reasons for preferring Hegel clear. Our argument in section II has been that Hegel's emphasis on contradiction – more specifically, his emphasis on contradictory forms of freedom and recognition – is more fruitful than La Boétie's notion of voluntary servitude in providing an understanding of revolutionary change. In *Crack Capitalism*, however, Holloway's concern is not with revolution as a generic category; it is with revolutionary change or transformation understood in a specific way. Only when revolution is understood in this fashion can revolution authentically *be* revolution, in Holloway's view. The form of revolution advocated in *Crack Capitalism* is revolution of a 'ground-up' or grassroots or – to use Holloway's own term – 'interstitial' sort (Holloway, 2010: 11, 63). Revolution, argues Holloway, is not to be understood merely as a replacement of one social structure with another but as a struggle which calls in question structured social existence *per se*; it calls in question, for example, role-definitions inscribed by the rule of abstract labour and resists 'top-down' scenarios where revolutionary subjectivity counts as free in virtue of fitting into this or that allegedly-superior social order of things. 'Critical/crisis theory is the theory of our own misfitting' (Holloway, 2010: 9). Our aim in this final section is not to assess Holloway's 'ground-up' understanding of revolution – an understanding which we, for our part, strongly endorse. It is to address a more restricted question. Does what we see as a 'Hegelian' perspective provide merely a cogent view of revolution in general? Or does it, in addition, point to a notion of revolution understood in these laudable 'ground-up' terms?

Our proposal is that it points to revolution in the form which Holloway approves. It points, that is, to a notion of revolution understood in a grassroots rather than, so to say, a structure-replacement sense. In the final paragraphs our argument supporting this position will come in two stages. First, we argue that issues referred to in *Crack Capitalism's* account of capitalist society lend themselves to discussion in Hegelian terms. And second, we comment on the *Phenomenology's* lessons for revolution.

(i) *Holloway on capitalist society*

Crack Capitalism's discussion of capitalist society touches on a number of themes, a good many of which are emphasised in the Hegel-Marx tradition. Social life is seen as 'contradictory' (Holloway, 2010: 176) and as characterised by self-division (Holloway, 2010: 64, 221). It evinces 'alienation and abstraction' (Holloway, 2010: 93) and allows to creative action only existence 'in the mode of being denied' (Holloway, 2010: 169, 224). All such themes are, we suggest, ones of 'Hegelian' inspiration – as Holloway would, we think, be ready to agree.^{ix} However, Holloway's response to the theme is to place them in an overall conceptual context where the notion of voluntary servitude prevails. 'Let us repeat the argument: we create the society that holds us entrapped' (Holloway, 2010, 96). 'It is we ourselves who create the prison' (Holloway, 2010: 165). It is as though the themes drawn from Hegel and Marx serve only, in *Crack Capitalism*, to flesh out the social descriptions which make a logic of voluntary servitude more vivid and more realistic. In the last pages of the book, Holloway returns to the passage from La Boétie's *Discourse* on a colossus 'whose pedestal has been pulled away' (La Boétie, 2008: 16; see Holloway, 2010, 261 and the opening of section II, above).

Hegel or La Boétie? Here, we do not attempt to comment on the full range of issues considered by Holloway. Instead, we focus on two themes which play a central part in *Crack Capitalism's* discussion of capitalist social life. One is Holloway's contention that concentrations of power 'depend on the powerless' (Holloway, 2010: 17). The other is his characterisation of existing society as one where 'misfitting' – a sense of non-coincidence of individuals and social categories or roles – occurs (Holloway, 2010: pp. 9, 85). The themes intersect and add up, we would suggest, to a powerful (and telling) depiction. Our reason for drawing attention to them here is that each mirrors a key feature of pre-French Revolutionary history as seen by Hegel.

More specifically, each mirrors one of the contradictory forms of recognition which - as indicated in section II - the *Phenomenology* discusses. Holloway's notion of a power which *depends on the powerless* maps on to Hegel's conception of a recognition which is 'one-sided and unequal' (Hegel 1977, 116) - and thereby alienated. His notion of 'misfitting' maps on to Hegel's notion of an alienated form of recognition which - see section II, above - goes forward in terms of role-definitions. In passages from *Crack Capitalism* where La Boétie's influence is uppermost, the notion of voluntary servitude is the key to notions such as *misfitting* and a *power that depends on the powerless*. For us, such notions are intelligible in terms of the contradictory forms of recognition that they involve.^x Is there a difference between intelligibility in terms of voluntary servitude and intelligibility in terms of contradiction? We think there is. What follows from the notion of one-sided recognition or recognition in terms of role-definitions is the *movement of a contradiction*. Action which construes itself as the movement of a contradiction situates itself in and of an alienated society, rather than taking as its starting point an immediacy that lies outside alienation's realm. It meets Holloway's own requirement of being 'in, against and beyond' a society characterised by domination. Thought which goes forward in terms of voluntary servitude is, by contrast, thought where an appeal to immediacy is never far away. So to say, the notion of voluntary servitude gives us the 'against and beyond' but the 'in' - and the complexities and contradictions which it entails - is acknowledged only abstractly.

(ii) *Hegel and revolution*

We have proposed that major aspects of *Crack Capitalism's* critique of life under capitalism can, with advantage, be reformulated in Hegelian terms. But where does such a reformulation lead us? May Holloway take on board our 'Hegelian' advice and remain faithful to the grassroots activism and problematisation of social structures which *Crack Capitalism* advocates? Our answer is that indeed he may.

In Hegel's *Phenomenology*, history throughout its span is understood not as a sequence of social structures but as an unfolding of patterns of interaction to which recognition is the key. Social structure is, for Hegel, an instance of an inertialisation or (to employ a Marxist term) a fetishisation which alienated action may confront. For Hegel, social institutions or 'spiritual masses' can possess a quasi-natural momentum whilst remaining the alienated products of practical human interaction.

With these general comments on structure and action in mind, we may approach the question of how the *Phenomenology* views the notion of revolutionary change. As noted in section II, In Hegel's lifetime, one revolution in particular – the French Revolution – was of vital significance and it comes as no surprise that, in the *Phenomenology*, events in revolutionary France are presented as, in effect, the culmination of history itself. Here, space forbids going into any great depth about Hegel's reflections on the French Revolution (see Hegel, 1977: 355-63). But one thing is clear in those reflections, namely that the revolution turns on the notion of alienation. The social world which pre-dates the French Revolution is, for Hegel, one where there obtains 'absolute and universal inversion and alienation of the actual world and of thought' (Hegel, 1977: 316). Within the 'actual' world – or, stated differently, within the *realm of practice* – all 'moments' become inverted, 'one changing into the other'; 'each is the opposite of itself' (ibid.). Alienation at the level of *practice* generates alienation at the level of *theory* and 'there stands beyond that [practical] world the unreal world of *pure consciousness*, or of *thought*' (Hegel, 1977: 321). In sum, the safest thing to say about pre-Revolutionary existence as presented by Hegel is that *alienation is everywhere*. Nothing exists other than alienation or, in other words, the process of moments becoming other than themselves. Everything in pre-Revolutionary society is at issue: social structures exist, in a fetishised fashion, and claim allegiance – while at the same time scepticism saps their roots. Every part or aspect of such a society is contradictory and, this being the case, what Holloway regards as 'interstitial' forms of revolt might emerge. In a society where alienation is omnipresent, the authority possessed by individuals' stations and their duties is undermined. To put the matter in Holloway's terms, each and every position taken up in such a society and each and every action is afflicted by 'misfitting'. Extant norms contradict themselves, and an everyday life which is riddled with dissent and dislocation and opportunities of interstitial revolution becomes the order of the social day.

Hegel's account of Europe's *ancien regime* on the eve of the French Revolution is, we suggest, an account of a society ripe for revolution in Holloway's sense. When the French Revolution occurs, according to the *Phenomenology's* historical narrative, it does so not by hurling itself against fixed and structurally secure bastions; rather, '*absolute freedom...grasps the fact that its certainty of itself is the essence of all the spiritual "masses", or spheres, of the real [or practical] as well as of the supersensible [or theoretical] world*' (Hegel, 1977: 356). What is striking, for the purposes of the present argument, is how Hegel

conceives of revolution not as one social structure supplanting another but as a literal de-struction, the overcoming of fixed, structured social life. In revolutionary action, everything which previously seemed inert and immobile acquires an at-issue existence. The validity of all one-sided and unequal patterns of recognition is, together with all role-definitions and divisions of labour, at risk and in danger. Seemingly secure ‘spiritual masses’ are eroded and evacuated, and crumble within. When ‘absolute freedom ascends the throne of the world’, there comes into being a situation where ‘each, undivided from the whole, always does everything’ and where ‘what appears as done by the whole is the direct and conscious deed of each’ (Hegel, 1977: 357). There comes into being, that is, revolutionary crowd activity which is nothing other than non-alienated, mutually recognitive interaction; stated differently, there is revolutionary action which gives its rule to itself and which draws its legitimacy from the molten freedom which flows on the Parisian streets. For Hegel, it is evident, undivided and uncontradicted freedom is not merely *interactive action* but *interactive action from below*.

Should we conclude on the basis of the above that Hegel and Holloway have a similar understanding of revolutionary action? What is striking is, we think, the ground that they share. Although Holloway’s own comments on the French Revolution (Holloway, 2010: 11-12) may seem to diverge from Hegel’s we suggest that, without detriment to either, the positions may be reconciled. Both agree that the Revolution was not solely the work of a Danton or a Robespierre; rather, it was the work of the many who could no longer endure a life of alienated freedom. Both agree that real emancipation takes the form not of top-down action or support of a leader but of mutual and reciprocal action where ‘each...does everything’. And, lastly, Hegel’s image of an *ancien regime* where alienation is all-pervasive and Holloway’s image of cracks which ‘expand’ and ‘multiply’ and ‘resonate’ and ‘flow together’ (Holloway, 2010: 261) are images from different angles of a revolutionary process understood in related ways.

Standing back, now, from our comments on Hegel’s and Holloway’s conceptions of revolution, a cautionary note is in order. It has been impossible here to do justice to Hegel’s thoughts on the absolute freedom inaugurated by revolution (and we have necessarily abbreviated what is a continuing story in Hegel’s account, a story which will warn of the betrayal of revolutionary hopes in the re-emergence of structured social existence).^{xi} Themes have been touched on, rather than explored exhaustively. This said, we end our discussion by

assuming that the case for a Hegelian view of Holloway has been argued sufficiently. What issue or issues might Holloway-Hegel further address?

One issue in particular clamours for further attention: mutual recognition. For Hegel, mutual recognition is (as we have seen) the climax of history, the mode of existence wherein – via the crisis of the French Revolution – recognition and freedom flow together and each adopts an uncontradicted (or non-alienated) form. For Holloway, the notion of mutual recognition is likewise associated with an ending of alienation – in Holloway’s terms, an attainment of ‘dignity’ and a refusal of ‘practices which treat people...as the embodiment of labels, definitions, classifications’ (Holloway, 2010: 39-40) – and *Crack Capitalism* belongs in a long tradition of radical works which draw on the *Phenomenology* for an understanding of what an emancipated future might be. In the context of the present discussion, it is important to stress this overlapping of Hegel and Holloway since, as has been argued, recognition is a theme which La Boétie introduces but which appears only on the margins of the position that the *Discourse* presents. This said, it is no less important to acknowledge that Holloway’s comments on mutual recognition contain an emphasis not to be found – or, perhaps we should say, not *directly* to be found – in Hegel. When *Crack Capitalism* declares that ‘mutual recognition does not have to wait till the end of history’ and that ‘we can...make a start on it now’ (Holloway, 2010: 39), it makes a powerful and challenging move to link an ending of alienation with the notion of interstitial revolution and to see mutual recognition as existing in a pre-revolutionary, proleptic mode. For Holloway, mutual recognition already exists but, to employ Ernst Bloch’s terminology, exists not-yet. Here, in closing our discussion, we stress Holloway’s notion of prolepsis since the notion of a mutual recognition which exists *on the edge of revolution* and as a *necessary strand in revolution* is, in our view, one of the most fertile and welcome themes that *Crack Capitalism* contains.

Does Holloway’s emphasis on a mutual recognition which exists *on the edge of revolution* represent a step beyond or, indeed, away from Hegel? This question returns us to the present article’s central claim. Undoubtedly, an emphasis on mutual recognition which pre-dates revolution’s outcome is an emphasis which Hegel’s *Phenomenology* does not share. This said, however, our comments on Hegel’s notion of the pre-French Revolutionary *ancien regime* and on revolutionary transformation make it evident that the notion of mutual recognition’s proleptic existence is thoroughly in the spirit of the discussion that Hegel presents. If alienation is everywhere, and if the omnipresence of

alienation clears a proleptic and political space for interstitial revolt, mutual recognition *on the eve or revolution* and *in and through revolution* must exist in, so to say, an anticipatory way. Holloway's notion of a mutual recognition that pre-dates revolution is not a departure from Hegel but a development of a Hegelian theme.

We have, in our article, contended that an attention to Hegelian issues allows *Crack Capitalism* to overcome conceptual difficulties which are otherwise unresolved. Whereas revolutionary change is sometimes presented in a way that makes it miraculous (Engels) or unnecessary (La Boétie), Hegel's dwelling upon contradictory modes of existence allows revolution to take place in an intelligible and, at the same time, a transformatory way. Moreover, Hegel's understanding of revolutionary transformation is, as we have seen, one which turns on interactive and recognitive issues: what the *Phenomenology* says about the French Revolution points towards the grassroots and ground-up tradition of revolutionary thinking to which Holloway belongs. In sum, our contention is the doubtless-controversial one that, on the ground of Hegel's conception of freedom, Holloway's notion of changing the world without changing power may take root. Whereas La Boétie's *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* represents a false theoretical start, and generates as many problems as it claims to solve, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* offers a starting point from which Holloway's argument may begin.

In conclusion, we note our discussion's general implications. Our title ('Holloway, La Boétie, Hegel') is specific in its focus. However, an attempt to trace the oscillation in *Crack Capitalism* between rival philosophical lodestones has, we hope, provided pointers towards a conceptual ground on which a notion of revolutionary transformation may rest.

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- ⁱ For these tendencies see in particular Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Foucault (2010) and Latour (2005).
- ⁱⁱ Although our page references to La Boétie are to the French Folioplus edition of 2008, we quote the *Discourse* in Harry Kurz's 1942 translation (see http://www.constitution.org/la_boetie) – this being the translation which *Crack Capitalism* employs.
- ⁱⁱⁱ To be sure, such additional issues – the influence of custom, etc. - might themselves be analysed in terms of voluntary submission. But, then, *this* voluntary submission must be understood as subject to the influence of custom. And *this* influence of custom must be analysed in terms of voluntary submission... A re-introduction of the notion of voluntary submission leads nowhere since, when it is, argument runs round and round.
- ^{iv} This reading was presented in greater detail in Gunn's 'Five Lectures on Hegel' at the University of York in April 2011. The lectures are currently being prepared for publication.
- ^v The paradigmatic instance of one-sided and unequal recognition is that of a Master who depends for recognition on a Slave – whose capacity to give recognition the Master does not recognize (see Hegel, 1977: 115-9). Recognition which is, thus, one-sided and unequal is *contradictory* (or *contradicted*) recognition since, for Hegel, recognition is a two-way – or, indeed, multi-way – process: 'They [recognitive individuals] *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another' (Hegel, 1977: 112).
- ^{vi} Recognition which goes forward in terms of role-definitions is contradictory in that it risks severing an individual's universality from his or her particularity – and construing his or her universality merely as *abstract* universality, in the sense that a general term such as *butcher* or *baker* or *student* or *worker* is one which (abstracting from particularities) covers a range of individuals alike. On universality and particularity and individuality, see Hegel, 1969: 612ff.
- ^{vii} This comment is, to be sure, open-ended. We round it out, a little, by offering a literary reference. Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman* is an eloquent demonstration (reworking Sartre's *Huis Clos*) of how, in an oppressive world, mutual recognition and a drama of suspicion become all but indistinguishable. In a prison cell under a fascist regime, friendship and betrayal are difficult – even for the friend/betrayer – to tell apart.
- ^{viii} It is Montaigne who theorises La Boétie's invocation of friendship. In Montaigne's view, the actions of one friend are attributable to the other: if the actions of friends are out of step, the actors would be friends neither 'of each other' nor 'of themselves' (Montaigne, 2003: 213). Compare Hegel's notion of an 'I that is We and We that is I' (Hegel, 1977: 110) or his reference to a revolutionary crowd wherein 'each...always does everything, and what appears as done by the whole is the direct and conscious deed of each' (Hegel, 1977: 357). Mutual recognition appears to be prefigured by Montaigne. However, Montaigne also says 'the perfect friendship which I am talking about is indivisible: each gives himself so completely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with another' (Montaigne, 2003: 215). The exclusivity of Montaignean friendship is a first sign that the recognition which it invokes is distorted. Iron has entered friendship's soul.
- ^{ix} Indeed in Holloway's previous book, the edited collection of essays *Negativity and Revolution: Adorno and Political Activism*, these themes came (via a defence of Adorno's negative dialectics against the anti-dialectical tendencies of the Autonomists and Post-Autonomists) more to the fore. Adorno of course was well schooled in the Hegel-Marx tradition.
- ^x Holloway's comments on 'misfitting' harks back, of course, to Adorno's notion of non-identity thinking. See note 9, above.
- ^{xi} For more on this topic see Gunn, 1988.

