

We Are the Crisis of Capital

A John Holloway Reader

John Holloway

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In ancient Greek philosophy, *kairos* signifies the right time or the “moment of transition.” We believe that we live in such a transitional period. The most important task of social science in time of transformation is to transform itself into a force of liberation. Kairos, an editorial imprint of the Anthropology and Social Change department housed in the California Institute of Integral Studies, publishes groundbreaking works in critical social sciences, including anthropology, sociology, geography, theory of education, political ecology, political theory, and history.

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Opening Speech

1

My opening speech has a title: Opening Speech. When Daniel sent me the programme and I saw that I was due to give an opening speech, I thought, “Yes, yes, yes! Just what we need. A talk that opens. A dream, a wonderful dream!” Thank you, Daniel, for the suggestion. But is it possible? A talk that really opens, a talk that opens a world that is closing. Maybe even a talk that opens a festival that opens.

I want a talk that is not just the first talk in the festival. Of course that is already fantastic, a great honour, it is beautiful to be in Graz again, to be in the Dom again, to be on the stage after Kate Tempest. All that is wonderful. But I want more than that.

2

An opening talk (a talk that opens) walks in the wrong direction. It moves against the closing of the world. Just like the student protests of five years ago here in Austria. Those protests were directed against the closing of the world that the Bologna Process means: a closing of spaces within the universities, a closing of the possibilities of critical thought, a closing of the mind, a tighter subordination of the universities to the requirements of the system.

This closure is not restricted to the universities. A certain logic is being increasingly imposed on all aspects of life: the logic of money, the logic of profit, the logic of closure. In the universities, this logic tells us, “Don’t think too much, just learn the correct answers.” In the countryside it says, “Don’t think that you can just live in the same way as your parents

and grandparents, keeping some cattle and planting the crops you need to live. Now you must make way for agricultural mass production with all the chemicals and insecticides required.” Or, ever more frequently, “Now you must make way for the mines, the dams, the motorways, the high-speed trains. In fact, why don’t you just get out of the way altogether?” Millions upon millions of people are forced off the land into the world’s slums every year. While in the cities the logic of money tells us, “Don’t just think you can do what you want with your lives, you need to earn your living, and that means you need to do something that will increase profits, increase the power of the wealthy.” That is what is happening: an obscene concentration of wealth all over the world, a huge increase in the power of the wealthy, in the power of money.

Money presents itself as a world of freedom, as an opening of possibilities for all. In fact it is just the opposite. The logic of money is the logic of closure. It is the weaving together of all human activity into a world totality, a system that nobody controls but that follows a simple law: more, more, more profit. And if you do not want to follow the rule of money, if you want to do something else with your lives, then you must be mad or criminal and should certainly be locked up. Money is a prison, supported by multiple lines of closure that are becoming more and more violent: borders, for example. The dynamic of money is the shattering of the hopes and dreams of youth, and we see it over and over again: dreams broken on the reality of unemployment or, often worse, the reality of employment.

3

It is not just that we live in a world of enclosure, but that the enclosure is becoming tighter all the time. Money has a dynamic. Money is capital and it cannot stand still. The rule of capital is “faster-faster-faster.” And the rule of faster-faster-faster means “out of the way with the people who are holding things up, out of the way with the protesters and into the prisons with them, or into the mass graves that are multiplying throughout the world.” The walls are closing in on us and threatening to crush us completely. The dynamic of money is the closure of life itself.

The dynamic of money is the dynamic of death. And the servants of money are the servants of death. Look closely at them, whether they be capitalists, like Gates or Slim or Buffett, or their political lackeys, like Obama or Cameron or Putin, and you will see that their faces are death

masks. The apparent masters of the world are the servants of a system that is destroying us.

It is not just a question of future doom through climate change or shortage of water or nuclear war. The twilight is already upon us. The death of communities, the death of species, the death of many, many people. There is a real possibility that this is the closing of humanity's day on earth. Neoliberalism it is often called, but it is not a question of policy: it is capital that is celebrating its orgies—it is money as a form of social organisation that is reaching its limit.

A time of depression, perhaps, a time when most parents expect life to be more difficult for their children than it was for them, a time when the possibility of radically transforming the world seems to have faded.

4

That is why an opening speech is necessary, a speech that really opens. “Now is the time to learn hope,” as Ernst Bloch wrote after the experience of the Nazis and the war. Not just a silly, empty hope that everything will turn out all right in the end, because it's not like that. It must be a grounded hope, a *docta spes*, as Bloch calls it.

In Bloch's day, hope was still tied to the Party and the idea of winning control of the state. But all that has gone, the party is over. We have to relearn hope, rethink hope, learn to open our eyes and open our minds and see beyond the closing walls of capitalism.

Hope lies not in building the party, not in winning control of the state, an institution absolutely integrated into capitalism that cannot be used to overcome it. Hope now lies in the millions and millions of us who say: No we will not accept your destruction and your mines and your dams and your guns and your wars. We will not accept the rule of money. We shall do things in different ways, connect to one another in different ways. We do not want your totality of death. We do not want any totality. We saw in the last century what happens when one totality is replaced by another, one closure replaced by another—the shameful tragedy of communism as it was. And now we say No. We break away from the totality of capital-death in a million different ways. We communise, fight to take control of the earth before they destroy it completely. We fight to open a gap between the future of capitalism, which can only be death, and the future of humanity, which can still be life.

Bloch pinned hope to the power of the Not Yet, the power of that world that does not yet exist, and therefore exists not-yet in our refusals, in our dreams, in our experimental creations, in our pushings against and beyond. It is a question of learning to listen and, hearing, to extend and strengthen. Arundhati Roy expresses this beautifully: “Another world is not only possible, she’s on her way. . . . On a quiet day, if I listen very carefully I can hear her breathing.”

Listen carefully, then. This Opening Speech, this Opening, this Festival, is part of the breathing of a world struggling to be born. There will be no closure.