

Supply Chain Realism

Themes

Supply Chains, Futures, Infrastructure, Function, Socialism

Argument

It is hard to imagine postcapitalist futures because the objects of material culture that surround us are all commodities - products of capitalism. We cannot imagine their creation, and the essential use value they bring us, happening without capitalist incentives.

Research

- Capitalist Realism, Mark Fisher
<https://libgen.li/ads7991c18bf42d70566cdc71849b497db5MJY72QNN>
- Capital, Volume One, Karl Marx - Chapter One: Commodities
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm>
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/commodity.htm>
- Value, Unlearning Economics
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Z2LCNAVfMw>
- Economies of Design, Guy Julier
<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/economies-of-design/book245028>

Text

{5th March 2024}

Have you ever had a conversation about alternatives to capitalism? If so, you might have heard something similar to this retort: 'Well what do you think makes all the stuff you need?'

In the West, when we look around, we see a great deal of objects, and we understand those objects as products of capitalism. Some have been brought here from faraway shores, some are the crusty shelters that we've dug into the ground. But in most all of them, we can intuit the series of processes that took to bring them together into a product, and we know that those processes and the associated relations were under capitalist terms. Capitalism is encoded into our material landscape, and it is as hard to imagine extricating capitalism from our lives as it is to remove its influence from the objects we use and need.

{17th June 2024}

Our stuff, which we need, is made by capitalists. Our stuff is commodities. In our homes, we are surrounded by possessions. Outside the house, particularly in urban environments, we are surrounded by objects. All of these objects, whether they're ours or not, form our material culture¹. And our material culture, the products of human creation, is almost entirely manufactured capitalist structures and incentives.

We intensely understand this. We can intuit how the processes that have brought an item into our immediate vicinity were driven and altered by profit motives. The logic of why a producer would produce a profitable product is completely obvious to us, and the

inverse mostly unthinkable. These logics are inextricably mineralised into the object's bodies, when we look at them or touch them we can feel the crust it forms.

As well as this imminent tangibility, there is also a deep abstraction in our understanding of capitalist material culture. Complex and globalised supply chains have, especially for those in the West, further veiled the origins of any one product. We know our things come from somewhere, most likely China, but where and how exactly is an intractable mish mash of actions and interactions, whose elucidation reveals little to us anyway. We are comfortable leaving this gap unbroached.

Most crucially perhaps, we need these things. Our lives are sustained and benefitted by these commodities. For many examples, we cannot imagine going without them.

This combination - the materialised yet abstracted understanding of capitalism's effect on the objects around us, and their necessity to us - evokes capitalist production as indomitable. It structures our material surroundings so totally that imagining material surroundings built on other economics principles has become impossible. The material world and the structures it results from is far more imminent to us than any idea we might have of an alternate societal form.

{20th July 2024}

We can't overthrow capitalism, because how will I get my breakfast - tomorrow.

I will, tomorrow morning, immediately need breakfast.

Maybe there's some beans in the cupboard. Hope so.