Postcapitalist Desire:
The Final Lectures

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Edited and with an Introduction
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Lecture One:
What is Postcapitalism?

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MARK FISHER: …We'll just go through the structure as I see it at the moment. As I say, you can contribute to it, you can shape it — it's an open experiment, this course, starting now, really…

OK. Well, what I was going to do to start off was talk about the negative inspiration for the course. I was going to play you three things, but I'll have to talk these through because the sound isn't working for a reason I can't understand…

(*Fisher plays Apple's 1984 Super Bowl commercial, in which a woman wearing colourful sportswear, chased by security guards in riot gear, hurls a sledgehammer into a giant screen, before which sits an army of expressionless grey drones, reminiscent of an address by Big Brother in George Orwell's* 1984. *At the end, the advert declares: "On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like '1984'".*[1])

This is the first one — anyone recognise this? Anyone seen this before? (*General murmuring.*) Yeah. It features in the Steve Jobs film, doesn't it? Has anyone encountered it before that?… Yeah? Where have you seen it?

STUDENT #1: Well, I haven't seen the Steve Jobs film…

MF: Oh, you haven't seen the Steve Jobs film…

STUDENT #1: …But I think someone posted it on Facebook, I guess? I don't have a context here; I just know that it's an Apple Super Bowl commercial.

MF: Yeah, it's definitely worth watching later with the sound… As I say, I can't fix the sound at the moment… The image itself tells the story here. I often polemically say, "This is the most influential film from the last thirty-five years". It was made by… Anyone know who directed that?

STUDENT #2: Ridley Scott.

MF: Yeah, so Ridley Scott directed it and you can tell, can't you? You can tell from the style it's very similar to films that he'd recently made. He had redefined mainstream Hollywood cinematic science fiction via *Alien* and *Blade Runner*, from '79 and '82 I think, so this was two years after that. It's really the best film he's made since then, I think. Probably the only significant film he's made since then.

What this did, really, was seed the idea of many of the tropes that are now, I think, standard in our imagining: the idea of top-down, bureaucratic control systems versus the dynamism of a kind of networked individual mindset.

And what is clever, I think — or certainly significant — all advertising you could say is a form of dreamwork — dreamwork, as Freud says, involves conflation, and a compressing, a condensing of different ideas together. All this does, if you look at the imagery, is it condenses Cold War imagery — which none of you are really old enough to actually remember except historically, I think — Cold War imagery associated with the Soviet Union in particular; negative imagery to do with dreariness, bureaucratic submission of individuals. If you look at the film, these grey drones trudge around being subjected to the ultimately top-down commands coming from the talking head, clearly referencing *1984* of Orwell. (The Orwell estate

wasn't too happy about the ad but that's another story — we'll leave that aside.[2]) But it conflates that imagery that has long been associated with the Soviet bloc, with imagery to do with big computer corporations, such as IBM, which then dominated the computer world.

Apple is positioning itself as an upstart, as colour intervening into this grey, dreary, bureaucratic world. Apple is new. It's female, interestingly. It's colour intervening in this grey world of bureaucratic monoliths where IBM becomes, in the advertising dreamwork, equated with the Soviet Union. This, then, is the new world that is about to break out of this monolithic, dreary, grey, boring control system. And that's what happened! In a certain way, it was prophetic. It was more than prophetic; you could say it was hyperstitional.[3] It helped to bring about the very thing which it was describing.

From my point of view, what I think is interesting about this, then, is the way in which it suggests there is a problem of desire in terms of capital. The thing about the Cold War imagery — what it's suggesting is there is no real desire for… Or rather, there is *only* desire for capitalism. The Communist world, like IBM, and the then dominant corporate capitalist world, is boring and dreary, and that's an objection to it! The new capitalist world won't be like that. The new capitalist world will be about desire in a way that the Communist world won't be.

So that was part of the interest for me in that. I put the PowerPoint [presentation] up on the VLE[4] so you can watch it with sound later. It's just inevitable you get these bloody problems — actually immediately disproving the underlying message of that: that Apple and Microsoft would be smooth and glitch-free. We've spent five minutes here and we know that isn't the case… (*Laughter*.) So I can't see any reason why that sound isn't working, but it isn't…

Right. The second thing I wanted to show was this commercial from, I think, a similar time. Anyone seen this one? (*Mark plays "Levi's 1984*