

A love letter to Ayn Rand.

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Ms Ayn Rand,
Kensico Cemetery,
Valhalla, Westchester County,
New York, USA

Dear Ms Rand,

I write to you in response to discovering your writing and comprehension of your philosophical ideas and theories, which, I initially thought were something that I could use to help develop myself as a person and take into my work as a designer. I must say that I originally had the intention of making this a love letter in some way or another to you, though as I further read two of your most influential novels; Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged and looking deeper at your ideas and thoughts. I have concluded that being on the tracks of enjoying and supporting your work, almost wanting (for maybe a matter of a few hours) to become a Randian hero would have likely made me one of the most despised and controversial students within my design degree. Luckily, I have quickly seen past my naivety...

The problem that I have with you is that many people choose to ignore you and your work, I don't blame them now, they have multiple very valid reasons to simply disregard your philosophy (if they even call it that), though, ignoring you isn't going to make any of your ideas go away. So, what was so monstrous about the works that have led people to despise you in such ways? You didn't sympathise with Fascist or Communist ideals, but you did have the opposite view in ways. You were a radical individualist – believing that the state should only be restricting individuals restricting the freedom of other individuals. Therefore, making you a libertarian. And not a light libertarian at that, you went a lot further than most have by developing a much deeper ethical basis for your views. You objected not only to the state enforcing our moral obligations to help others, but completely condemned the existence of these obligations altogether – as you know, your view on Altruism is that it is to be utterly evil.

In ways many people see your ideas as quite simply mad; some even claimed them to be dangerous. Afterall, selfishness and greed has led to some of the worse financial and political chaoses in the modern world. 'The job of politics is to manage and control the individuals' selfish desires' (Rand and Branden, 1998); I follow your vision of another kind of world where everyone is free and truly free. I doubt you'd be surprised by the current state of the world, its exactly how you wanted it to turn out. The final stage of capitalism is upon us; many societies have found themselves stuck in seemingly repeated days of a mundane, consumerist cycle. Though, this is pretty much exactly how you wanted things to turn out, no? I would expect you to be at least somewhat marvelled by the world you led to

create. I feel the main point I want to make though, is the generalised problem with your philosophy, to be blunt and honest with you, I find the overall point of it to be confusing.

I feel the main point I want to make though, is the generalised problem with your philosophy, to be blunt and honest with you, I find it very difficult to find the overall point of it.

The heart of your philosophy is to be selfish, to care for your own self-interest. Calling for people within society to uphold reason and a sense of rationale is key to the moral code that you labelled 'rational self-interest'. This moral code is to be the objective standard of moral values that guides man's life. As you say, humans are rational beings, beings whose basic means of survival is the use of reason – a reason which sustains and furthers the life of a rational being, is good or moral; and that which is to harm or destroy a rational being is bad or evil. (A. Rand, 1964).

Human beings are individuals, as you say, we all have our own bodies, own mind, and our own life. As such each own life is its ultimate value, I can agree with you on this idea – I too, in some ways, hold life to be the ultimate value. You say that each individual can choose to peruse their own life-serving values, that no greater value should be surrendered for a lesser value, and that one should never sacrifice. You once said:

“Man—every man—is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others. He must exist for his own sake, neither sacrificing himself to others nor sacrificing others to himself. The pursuit of his own rational self-interest and of his own happiness is the highest moral purpose of his life.” (Ayn Rand for New York: Meridian, 1989).

As I said, I can get behind this to some degree, though I can't fully support it. You see there have been times in my life when I have wanted to sacrifice my own happiness, in order to further the happiness of another individual, this goes against your moral code. I can't say for certain, but I don't think I am the only one who has or will sacrifice their own happiness for another. Simply, such a moral code will not sit with people who want to maintain the notion that people within a society have the moral duty to sacrifice their value or self for the sake of others (altruism in short).

You also regard any form or degree of physical force against other individuals as illegal. In your words the essential construct of a civilised society is that:

“Men deal with one another, not as victims and executioners, nor as masters and slaves, but as traders, by free, voluntary exchange to mutual benefit”.

And that:

“No man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force, and no man may initiate the use of physical force against others.” (A. Rand, 1964).

I must also say that your committed views on mutual exchange benefit and moral opposition to the use of force to gain values from others have not been popular with people and governments who want to use force to indeed obtain values from people. Those people along the lines of criminals, fraudsters, and now more apparent in my time, the governments – these people and organisations would not embrace a moral code that forbids them to do so. In particular, Governments that want to force people to serve a common good, community, or some form of the ruling power, also won't uphold, or probably even recognise a form of morality that forbids them to initiate force within a society. The top economic rulers who end up being the ones who want the government to control, regulate, and dismantle their competition with force will also not uphold or recognise your moral code that forbids such either. Though this is seemingly what happened...

To be selfish:

This may come as a surprise to you, or not, as you don't know me as a person and know nothing about my past; but overall, to an extent, I would consider myself selfish, I think for that you should admire me in some way.

I say I have been selfish particularly on account of my actions within the past 6 or 7 months. To clarify, I mean not selfish in the way that exploits others for personal gain, but in the sense that I have made many choices that have an impact on my own happiness but done so without thinking as much as I should have about how they have impacted others within my life. You might be thinking that this is not the aim of selfishness that your moral code endorses, but I made the majority of these actions for myself, as an individual, in pursuit of my own happiness. I can just imagine the smile on your face right now as you read how much of an individualist I have come to be.

To cut that smile short, I must stop and say my extreme individualism was not rational; it was in ways ‘an end to myself’ (Ayn Rand, 1964). I attempted to make the greatest sacrifice, which I thought at the time, would lead to my highest possible level of happiness and self-interest, to sacrifice myself.

I didn't intend my love letter to have such a dark turn, but I can only hold you partly responsible for the world that I find myself surviving in, responsible for my mind to conclude that simply ending my life is the only viable way to possess happiness in your ideal world.

I can say now that I find myself in a much better mental state and can see my happiness in other, less selfish ways. Having said that I want to go back to how your ideal world put me in such a place...

I have spent a part of my life in one state of depression or another. I tried, for a time to tell stories about myself, the world I live in, and the systems I am part of. I experimented with fantasy, drugs, and

love; all attempts to alleviate the burden of reality from myself. All attempts to force myself into happiness through changing my narrative.

They were all fun, but ultimately unsuccessful.

I found that the only actions that required a hyper-focused state helped: sport, art, sex, and self-harm could alleviate my suffering. I was not living in or telling my own story; I was only existing in one set for me in a clouded dystopia I had no control over. I feel my life, in its simplest form, is a fusion and feeling of these 4 things: pain, connection, sensation and elevated states. They all come together to create an opportunity where I can enjoy tangible, existential dread. A moment to invite suffering to dinner.

I Think My Boyfriend is a Nihilist:

I do have a thought though,

Not only do I see myself as selfish, but I also think my boyfriend (now ex) is even more so. I think my boyfriend is a nihilist.

I know that this is quite an extreme statement or observation to make but I really do think it's true. From my time with him, I was quickly able to grasp his perspective that he lives his life without objective meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value (this might sound rough, but these were the underlying values he had). It's an outlook that questions traditional values and beliefs and often led him to a belief that nothing really matters, without potential of hope or a future. Simply the traits of a nihilist. He really had accepted the absurdity of life (which I envy as I wish I could accept in the same ways) and held an emphasis on individual action.

I often looked at his thinking as a rather pessimistic, but after a year I found ways to see nihilism as a positive. He rejected the religious beliefs that he had been raised with and the traditional values that came paired with religion, and instead focused on living in the present moment, free from the constraints of society he had previously felt (that's what he told me at least). He also rejected traditional notions of morality and instead focused on personal values and beliefs, believing that morality and justice are subjective and based on the preference of the individual. From a nihilistic standpoint, life may lose all meaning, but it also can become a place of freedom and exploration, without the burden of societal expectations or obligations.

I started to see that nihilism can be seen as a liberating force, allowing individuals to explore their own values and beliefs and to find meaning in their own lives – this could be compared to your own Objectivist approach, wanting radical individualism and for all men to pursue their own selfish happiness?

The moral and logical implications of nihilism are explored by M. Polanyi in his 1960 work. Nihilism is the belief that nothing is meaningful, and that the world is without purpose or inherent value. Polanyi argues that this belief can lead to a range of troubling moral implications, including a sense of moral relativism and the dismissal of moral codes. In addition, Polanyi suggests that nihilism can lead to a lack of motivation and direction in life as there is no perceived purpose or meaning. Furthermore, nihilism can lead to a sense of despair and nihilistic feelings of hopelessness. (M. Polanyi, 1960).

On a logical level, Polanyi argues that nihilism can lead to a rejection of any form of logical thought, as nihilism does not allow for the existence of any form of truth. This leads to a rejection of logical reasoning and the ability to evaluate and draw conclusions from facts. Ultimately, Polanyi argues that nihilism can have a significant and detrimental effect on someone's moral and logical outlook. A detrimental effect that might just lead them to accept your objectivist morals.

Despite this, I can see how nihilism doesn't necessarily mean that life is devoid of all meaning, perhaps as how individuals can create their own meaning by pursuing their own goals and values. Therefore, while nihilism may suggest that life is meaningless, I have seen how it can also be seen as an opportunity for individuals to explore their own values and create their own purpose.

To bring this back to referring to your work, Objectivist Capitalism, as described by H. Rubin in the New York Times in 2007, is a system of thought that emphasises the individual's right to pursue his or her own happiness. This system is rooted in the belief that one's own efforts and achievements are the only things that truly matter in life, this idea is highly individualistic and places little value on the collective (H. Rubin, 2007). As such, some have argued that this system is nihilistic, as it does not prioritise the collective's needs and does not recognise the importance of altruism. This is especially true when one considers your assertion that sacrificing one's own needs for the collective's is a form of moral corruption. This could be seen as a form of extreme selfishness, as it fails to recognise the benefit that collective effort can have for society. By prioritising the individual over the collective, could your Objectivist Capitalism be seen as a form of nihilism?

Capitalist Realism:

Between my selfish views, mental illness, and newly discovered nihilist outlook, I can maybe say that the feeling of a cancelled future is to blame for my depression and suicidal tendencies?

There is a more modern writer, Mark Fisher, I wish that you could have met him during your life, I have a feeling that he might have been able to run some sense into you. His theory, *Capitalist Realism* explains the widespread acceptance of capitalism as the only realistic economic system. It insists that capitalism has become naturalised, to the point where it now appears to be the only viable option, removing any possibility of any competing economical system.

Mark Fisher's 2009 book, *Capitalist Realism*, examines the negative effects of neoliberalism, which he identifies as the most dominant form of ideology in the Western world, and argues that it has caused a pervasive atmosphere of despair and apathy (something that I personally can feel). Fisher critiques the idea that capitalism is the only viable economic system and argues for the need to develop alternatives. Through his critique, he offers a new way of understanding the contemporary world and the role that ideology plays in it, inspiring several social movements and has been particularly influential in the development of the anti-capitalist movement. His analysis of how neoliberalism has affected our lives has been widely accepted and has been used as a basis for further research into the impact of neoliberalism on society. His critique of capitalism has been used to inform debates about the nature of contemporary society and the need for radical change, as such, Fisher's work has had a profound and lasting impact on the way people view modern society.

He claims that this situation has created a sense of resignation and powerlessness in society, which has resulted in a reduced ability to imagine a different, better future. In addition, Fisher argues that this situation has enabled the rapid development of a type of consumerism and individualism which has resulted in a further sense of isolation, alienation, and lack of control over one's own Freedom. Suggesting that capitalist realism has had a significant impact on the political process, leading to an increasingly conservative agenda and an increased emphasis on economic growth and material consumption.

Capitalist realism is essentially our inability to imagine a different system outside of capitalism, which leads to a sense of resignation in the face of the current system, arguing that this resignation is a form of false consciousness which prevents people from being able to think and act in a way that can challenge the system.

As a key practitioner in the development and popularisation of neo-liberalism, I think that you would have liked his ways of thinking and concepts. You would most likely agree that his thinking saw capitalism as the only viable economic system, and his saying that "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." (M. Fisher) Though you might not have been so fond for his post-capitalist vision.

Hauntology, A Cancelled Future:

This is where I must present you Fisher's theories on the idea of a cancelled future due to the lack of being able to imagine anything new; his idea that our current capitalist system was not the only system existing in the world with no one being able to yet present anything new/other to replace it. He argued that capitalism's current connotation of linear, modernising thought and all subsequent order is a vicious circle of violence and oppression.

Mark Fisher's concept of hauntology, as discussed in his article in *Film Quarterly*, 2012, is a powerful way to analyse the current state of contemporary culture. Fisher says that hauntology is a way of looking at the world that is deeply informed by the spectres of the past. By looking at how the past is still present, Fisher suggests that we can better understand the potential for alternative systems to capitalism. Providing a way of understanding how the past can inform our present in order to create a better future by recognising the presence of the past, we can begin to imagine a different way of organising our lives that is beyond capitalism. Thus, providing an important tool for understanding our current moment and the potential for alternative systems outside of capitalism.

Hauntology is still a further emerging theoretical framework for examining alternative systems other than capitalism, as highlighted by L. E. Cantero in their 2017 article in the *American Anthropologist*. This framework draws on the work of Jacques Derrida and his concept of the 'haunt', which suggests that past and present are linked, and that this relationship can be used to explain the persistence of certain structures. The potential of hauntology is to explore how these structures that have endured beyond capitalism may be utilised to construct alternative systems, (Cantero, 2017). To this end, Cantero's article studies the role of the Cuban Revolution in creating a sense of 'hauntological nostalgia', where a utopian future is envisioned through the nostalgia of a revolutionary past. This suggests that hauntology can be used to understand how certain structures have been able to resist the forces of capitalism, and how they can be used to create alternative systems.

Mark Fisher's concept of hauntology has the ability to open alternative approaches to thinking and the ways in which systems, other than capitalism, may be pursued (much to your dislike I can assume). Hauntology offers new ways of understanding the impacts of globalisation on both cultural production and life itself. Rather than pursuing a singular path of economic thought, hauntology allows for the consideration of alternative systems; drawing in elements from the past, present, and future, to create something truly unique. In doing so, this produces a new way of looking at a range of socio-economic concepts, without the need to limit one's imagination to capitalism as the only answer.

Acid Communism:

All these points I'm discussing may seem rogue and disjointed to you. I guess you're sat here reading this with not much of an idea about what I'm trying to get across, the links between my extreme selfishness, suicide, nihilism, and capitalism all seem a bit confusing. The one common link they all have is a lack of hope for the future. And the next step to my overall point, in some form, includes the addition of psychedelic substances. I know you're not opposed to substances as such from the time when you said;

"I do not approve of any government controls over consumption, so all restrictions on drugs should be removed [except, of course, on the sale to minors]. The government has no right to tell an adult

what to do with his own health and life. That places a much greater moral responsibility on the individual; but adults should be free to kill themselves in any way they want. ” (A. Rand)

From this I would assume, although not caring if others were to use substances, you would personally not use such substances. Though ‘ *while completing [your] second novel (The Fountainhead), [you] began taking the prescription amphetamine Benzedrine to fight fatigue.*

The use of prescribed substances is perfectly valid, however, *[your] continued use of it for several decades also may have contributed to volatile mood swings observed by [your] associates in later years. ”* (Burns, 2009). The further use of the substance post-prescription shows some hypocritical tendencies. So, from this, I’ll take it that you aren’t opposed to using drugs to alter your state of mind and further your thinking, which I can admire.

I mention this as Mark Fisher developed a philosophy to imagine the much needed ‘new future’, alternative ways that we can go beyond capitalist realism. His book, which was unfinished prior his death in 2017, ‘*Acid Communism*’. His concept of acid communism is an eclectic and experimental set of ideas aimed at subverting capitalist realism and imagining a more meaningful and utopian future. It draws on a number of different sources and has developed over time, though the core of the concept is the idea that our current society is artificially constrained through capitalism and other organisational structures, and that these can be actively undermined in order to create something different and essentially better.

(I will first say that Fisher used the term ‘acid’ as an adjective, where one deliberately expands and furthers their thoughts by means of materialist means – not necessarily exclusively through psychedelic drugs; though influenced)

At its core, the phrase encapsulates a crisis of disambiguation and a variation on Marx's manifesto in the 21st century. By invoking industrial chemicals, psychedelics, and various sub-genres of dance music in the word 'acid' alone, the phrase is full of contradictory and promiscuous meanings that make it difficult to define. Recent attempts to define Acid Communism, such as those by former collaborator Jeremy Gilbert, address the manifest desire for liberation but overlook the fact that this liberation is a project beyond the pleasure principle. Through the writings of Marx, Fisher and many others, Acid Communism forms a project for seeking 'the outside' of socio-political hegemony and a collective subject that has long been desired but still resists instantiation (Gilbert, 2017). Gilles Deleuze's passage offers a summary of how desire is inseparable from both the commodity and the revolutionary politics of Acid Communism;

[T]here is no subject of desire, and no object either. The objectivity of desire itself is only its flows. There is never enough desire. Desire is the system of a-signifying signs out of which unconscious flows are produced in a social-historical field. Every unfolding of desire, in whatever place it may occur, such as a family or a school in the neighbourhood, tests the established order and sends shock

waves through the social field as a whole. Desire is revolutionary because it is always seeking more connections. (Deleuze, 2006).

Mark Fisher's Acid Communism is a revolutionary idea that has the potential to construct a new society based on a shared understanding of the need to create a better, fairer, and more just world. (Fisher and Colquhoun, 2016) Argue that Acid Communism is a form of Marxism which rejects the 'old left' forms of revolution and instead emphasises the need to develop a more creative, collective, and communal approach to revolutionary change. They suggest that this form of Communism seeks to promote a culture of experimentation and collaboration, and that it is more of a process than a fixed set of ideas.

Acid Communism investigates the force of desire, a topic that is virtually absent from standard Marxist thought. Fisher's work is largely influenced by the works of Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher who suggested that desire might be a driving force for emancipation. Desire is a naturally revolutionary energy that may be exploited to challenge existing power systems and open up new avenues of possibility. Fisher investigates the revolutionary potential of rave culture and the prevalence of psychedelic substances in the late twentieth century to establish this. He claims that by utilising these liberating tools, people were able to challenge established power dynamics and develop new kinds of collective action. "These new kinds of social action could not have been realised without the force of desire," Fisher says. Fisher's Acid Communism illuminates the possibility of revolutionary change and how it might be released by exploring the revolutionary force of desire.

L. Schutzbach also investigates Mark Fisher's concept of acid communism, which has the potential to revolutionise how people conceive about a post-capitalist society. Fisher's vision of a post-capitalist society is one in which a people-oriented economy is developed and decision-making is centred on the demands of the majority. Fisher's vision, according to Schutzbach, looks to the future, attempting to break away from the existing capitalist system, which is largely regarded as insufficient in terms of serving people's needs. Fisher's acid communism is based on a reconsideration of the present economic structure, emphasising corporate resource management and wealth redistribution to the public. Schutzbach considers the concept of post-capitalist society to be revolutionary since it challenges the present power dynamic and strives to build a more equal and beneficial system for all. It is evident that acid communism has the potential to transform how people think about a post-capitalist society, and as such, it is a notion worth exploring further.

(M. Fisher and M. Colquhoun, 2016) investigate the potential of acid communism as a means of breaking out from capitalist by saying that acid communism allows them to conceive a future that is not defined by current class structures, power hierarchies, or repressive institutions. Fisher and Colquhoun investigate the possibility of acid communism to build a more fair, egalitarian, and just society, with an emphasis on developing radical, social production and consumption systems capable of challenging capitalist logics. They argue that acid communism, as a means of establishing an

alternative socioeconomic system based on solidarity, mutual help, and community ownership, may be an effective strategy in the struggle against neoliberalism. Furthermore, they argue that acid communism could provide a means to question our existing system's prevailing ideals and construct a future based on values of freedom, autonomy, and self-determination. Finally, and Colquhoun's book makes a persuasive case for acid communism's ability to reform and revolutionise our existing system of capitalist realism, while also offering a vision of hope for a better and more just future.

Acid Communism is a concept that has recently gained traction in contemporary debates surrounding a better future for the world. As A Nelson notes in their article from *Dialogues in Human Geography* (2022), the term is not a hard and fast political ideology, but rather a means of reimagining a world beyond the boundaries of capitalist realism. In this, Acid Communism is linked to a range of alternative political tendencies, including anarchism, autonomism, and post-capitalism. In essence, the concept offers a space for reimagining human relationships, challenging the existing power structures, and pushing a new path forward. It is hence seen as a means of hope and possibility, particularly for those marginalised by capitalist realism.

At the same time, Acid Communism can be seen as a way of acting and creating tangible change. Through its explorations of new economic possibilities and its emphasis on community-building and collective action, Acid Communism has the potential to create a more equitable and sustainable future for all. Ultimately, Acid Communism offers a way forward from the disempowerment of capitalist realism and provides a space for imagining and creating a better world.

In theory, Acid Communism should be something that you despise with your whole heart - A philosophy that would even suggest an alternative to a capitalist realism? I suppose that your imagination probably wouldn't let you conjure such thoughts anyway, I can tell from reading your novels that imagination is something that you profoundly lack.

I think it is also important to mention that Mark Fisher was never able to finish his book *Acid Communism* as he unfortunately committed suicide in 2017. I do have to wonder if, like for me, the sense of a cancelled future. Perhaps from his own work on acid communism, hauntology and capitalist realism, he felt as if there was no viable alternative world that even a psychedelic overdose could imagine. For Fisher it may truly have been "easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism." And he would rather see the end of his world than spend another minute in what seemed like a vicious cycle of capitalist realism.

I envy him. Or I would have 7 months ago. Maybe not now as much as I try to imagine a post-capitalist world and as a designer create ways to help me escape the current world I survive in.

A Desire To Escape:

Saying that I have one more politically based point to make to you, freedom. More like how I feel the need to escape. This time I don't intend to attempt an escape in the same way Fisher did – I tried and failed with that. Instead, I intend on escaping through my imagined future, countercultures and designing my own freedom. These are the reasons why:

Your ideas of Objectivism, which emphasises the importance of individualism and rationality, have been celebrated by some as a path to freedom and personal success. However, a closer examination of the philosophy reveals that it ultimately limits the freedom of individuals by promoting a narrow and self-centred worldview.

Your emphasis on individualism and rationality leads to a disregard for the collective good, individualism leads to a prioritisation of self-interest over the needs of others, emphasis on rationality leads to a belief that emotions and feelings are inferior to reason. This combination of values creates a society in which individuals are only concerned with their own well-being and disregard the impact of their actions on others. This can be seen in your belief that the government's role should be limited to protecting individual rights and property, with little regard for the needs of society as a whole. This just leads to a limited view of freedom. According to you, freedom is the ability to act on one's own rational self-interest, without interference from others. However, this view of freedom ignores the fact that individuals are not isolated entities, but are instead connected to and dependent on others in a complex web of social and economic relationships. In this sense, true freedom requires the ability to act in accordance with one's own values and goals, while also respecting the rights and needs of others.

Additionally, individualism and rationality also limits the freedom of individuals by promoting a narrow and self-centred worldview. Your philosophy encourages individuals to focus solely on their own self-interest and disregards the needs and perspectives of others. This can lead to a lack of empathy and understanding, and a lack of willingness to work towards the 'greater good'.

While the philosophy of Objectivism may appear to promote freedom and personal success, looking closer it reveals that it ultimately limits the freedom of individuals by promoting a narrow and self-centred worldview. It disregards the collective good and encourages a limited view of freedom that ignores the interconnectedness of individuals and society which could lead to a lack of empathy and understanding and a lack of willingness to work towards the greater good.

David Graeber's *Critique of Anthropology* (2006) is an important work in understanding the impact of capitalism on political and social control. Graeber examines how individuals and societies have been shaped and limited by the emergence of capitalism, and how it has impacted social life and the structures of power. He argues that the emergence of capitalism has caused an ideological shift in which, instead of relying on tradition and social consensus, people now rely on the market and capital

to shape their lives and decisions. This reliance on capital encourages an unequal distribution of power between those who have access to capital and those who do not, leading to the exploitation of the less privileged and the perpetuation of oppressive systems. It also looks into how capitalism has been used by governments and corporations to control how people think and behave, as well as to manipulate markets and economies.

As David Graeber explains, this form of control encourages hierarchical social structures in which the wealthy are able to wield immense influence, while the needs of those at the bottom is largely ignored. It also alters the way we think and act, resulting in the unsustainable exploitation of resources and workers. So, while capitalism can provide economic growth, it requires careful consideration in order to protect individuals and ensure the prime motivation of economic pursuits is not profit, but the betterment of human societies. (Graeber, 2018).

Another way in which capitalism controls people is through the manipulation of desire, capitalism creates an endless cycle of desire, where people are constantly encouraged to want more and more, regardless of whether they actually need it, achieved primarily through the use of advertising and marketing (Graeber, 2018). This endless cycle of desire creates a sense of dependence on the capitalist system, as people become reliant on the constant influx of new things and experiences to satisfy their desires.

Other than just manipulating desires and needs, capitalism also creates a system of domination through the manipulation of time. Capitalism in ways creates a sense of urgency and time pressure, where people are constantly encouraged to work harder and faster, in order to meet the needs of the market; creating a sense of exhaustion and burnout, as individuals struggle to keep up with the demands of the capitalist system; this manipulation of time also creates a sense of disconnection from the natural world and from others, as people become gradually consumed by the system.

Capitalism also creates a system of domination through the manipulation of social relations by creating a system where people are constantly encouraged to compete with each other in order to achieve success and prosperity. This creates a sense isolation and loneliness, as people become obsessed with their own success and forget the importance of community and social connection (Graeber, 2018). This competition also creates a sense of inequality and injustice, as some people are able to achieve success and prosperity, while others are left behind, usually those financially lesser off.

Hopefully you can see that I am not a huge fan of the capital realist world that you so much adorned for. It is my goal as a designer to explore and develop ways to find my true happiness in the world, and hopefully, slowly find ways to imagine my own post capitalist world using the philosophy of acid communism. I may choose to remain selfish and focus on ways that I can increase my happiness as an individual, or I may open up and find ways to make the society a generally happier place (just to

really annoy you and disregard your moral codes.) Either way I want to overcome the social and political control that the current system has over me, peruse my own happiness and escape into my own ideal society. Probably with the help of some psychedelic substances.

The Game of Pong:

There was an experiment conducted in 1972 by Loren Carpenter where Loren Carpenter demonstrated how free will can be expressed, involving computers and a basic video game that would later become 'pong'. His experiment helped initiate the discussion over how much humans are in control of the decisions they make. This experiment opened the door to a new concept of free will, in which people can make choices independently of any predetermined rules or external influences, (Kaufmann et al, 2020).

The idea of a society where technology could create an order without central control has been a popular one since the 1970s, when computer utopians in California first thought of the idea. This idea was based on the belief that if human beings were linked by computers, they could create their own kind of order. However, this idea of a no central control could never be implemented as at the heart of Western political thought is a fear that if individuals are given too much freedom, anarchy will ensue. Though, in 1991 a computer engineer gave a dramatic demonstration, He invited hundreds of people to a large complex, and on each seat there was a small paddle and in front of them, a giant screen.

“We told them nothing for a while. We just left them like the things on the seats. And people would pick this up and look at it say What's that? And then somebody noticed that there's little red and green dots up there on the screen and this is red and green. So maybe that has something to do with that would be that. Okay, there I am. And when that happened, the room erupted. Just totally spontaneous.” (Loren Carpenter, from Adam Curtis's; *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace - Episode 1 - Love and Power*, 2011)

Each half of the audience jointly controlled the bat on their side of the screen. If an individual held up red on their paddle, a computer sensor picked it up and the bat on the screen went up, when red was held up, the bat on the screen went down. If they held up green, it went up. But they had to operate it together.

“When the game was being played, and the ball is going back and forth, some people are going to have to show red to keep it from going all the way to the top. If everybody just showed green, it would climb up to the top of the board too fast. So, something happened in that group of people where some decided to show green, and some decided to show red to cause it to stop in the right place. We have no idea what did that.” (Loren Carpenter 2011)

Loren imagined a society without a hierarchy, where individuals were free to make their own decisions without guidance or influence from a higher control. yet through their interconnectedness with machines, stability and order was created. The individuals were able to act independently, but an orderly system emerged as a result. This concept works in the sake of a video game and a relatively small scale 'society', though what if it was to be used to help develop a post-capitalist system? Where each individual is truly free in their own right, but stability and order remain as a result of government that allows the total freedom of the population. I would take this idea into my design work, mixing it with the concept of speculative design to become a Randian hero and design to get as close to this utopian society as we can without causing anarchy. I think the best way to describe it to you Ayn, is through the basics of speculative design.

Designing for a Cancelled Future:

A method that combines Design thinking, design fiction, and storytelling to develop concepts that aid the progression of the future. That is to say that profit and marketability are not the primary goals in Speculative Design, but instead we are looking to spark discussion and debate, and to raise awareness which is fitting with my views for a less capitalist system. One of the main challenges of Speculative Design is to manage the speculation, as designs that are too far-fetched or implausible will not be able to connect with the audience. Therefore, a key aspect of successful speculative design projects is to create a bridge between the audience's perception of their world and the fictional element of the concept. Speculative Design should not be misinterpreted as an attempt at predicting the future or promising solutions to our problems. Instead, it should be viewed as a way of reframing our current perspective on the future. It can reveal countless potential futures, alternatives to the one that we may envision as individuals, and unseen trajectories of environmental, technological, cultural, and socio-economic trends. By taking an intuitive approach, as opposed to one that is data-oriented, the process goes beyond realistic commercial expectations.

In conclusion, Speculative Design is a powerful tool that can help us to navigate infinite possibilities of the future and create the most optimal way forward. It is a way of reframing our current perspective on the future. And while utopia is arguably the end goal, we must work within the realms of realism at this current moment to avoid overwhelming ourselves (Manzini, E, 2016).

Goodbye, Ayn:

I'm glad that I was able to write to you and relieve some of my thoughts that I had about you and your philosophies, instead of just passing off your work as uninteresting, discredited and pretty much awful, I feel I can use some of your arguments and beliefs to help motivate me to design for a better 'cancelled future' in hope that I feel it will not be cancelled and a post capitalist system can be developed.

From some of the points I, and more trustworthy writers have made, I hope that you can realise how awful a world you have influenced to be created, how miserable the vast majority of people have become in such a neo-liberal world that you wanted so bad. I quite literally despise you. It's probably very apparent that this isn't actually a love letter, I just needed to grasp your attention for a second and pull you in, and what better way to get the attention of an individualist narcissist than a love letter, just in time for Valentine's day? I hope that you have read through the entirety of my letter, I wanted it to just tell you about the world after your death, how your work is still influential (in all the worst ways) and the people and theories that conflict your own.

I suppose I don't hate you entirely, hate is a strong word after all. The capitalist world we live in isn't all that bad, I am surviving, but at the cost of having to wake up each morning and realise that I am repeating my daily life in the signatory grid of modernism. Though, at least I don't live in an authoritarian far right system.... For that I'm somewhat grateful.

Still, I want to escape my current world, uncanceled the future and design ways to pursue my own happiness in rational ways.

Thank you for the inspiration and motivation.

Love,

Joshua Haswell

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