

“For a collage artist, destruction is the first necessary step. Your materials need to be broken down before they can be put back together in a new way.”

Sometimes Mark Wager— American artist best known for collages made of United States paper currency— often thinks of his medium as simply that: material. In the short video “Money is Material”, Wager his meticulous, designerly way of deconstructing individual banknotes into their most crucial components. His final pieces are intricately woven into subjects ranging from wealth, inequality, and American Identity. “It’s wrapped up with Capitalism. It’s wrapped up with the American Dream”, Wager states.

“Money and currency don’t actually exist in the real world. They’re just something we’ve made up.”

This statement has some resonance, as capitalism is a manmade construct. In *Anti-Capitalism* by Simon Tormey, it is stated: “Markets have existed for longer than human history itself, which is not to say that the market is inevitable or necessary to human life as such, only that markets frequently arise in the course of human interrelationships...” Here, Tormey posits that capitalism and “the market” are two entirely separate entities that *can* (and have before) exist separately.

But then, how has capitalism historically existed? In *Capitalism* by James Fulcher, he states “Capitalists existed before capitalism proper. Since the earliest times merchants have made money by investing in goods that they sold at a profit.” So, we are left with the notion that markets and capitalism have always existed independently. However in today’s age, the combination of those two, along with the pervasiveness of wage labor frameworks— it appears the entire system is malfunctioning.

In *Capitalism*, Fulcher describes the history, growth and rapid change of the capitalist system. I found it particularly striking when he described the evolution of the “modern workday.” According to Fulcher, there came a point where “The exploitation of labour was not just a matter of keeping the wage bill down but also involved the disciplining of the worker... They commonly used the crude and negative sanctions of corporal punishment (for children), fines, or the threat of dismissal, but some developed more sophisticated and moralistic ways of controlling their workers.” And perhaps the most evocative statement of the section: **“Time became a battleground.”** Reading about the development of workplace daily was particularly fascinating, as I observed certain markers of change that have rippled throughout the centuries up until today— where I experience remnants of the trends in my own professional experiences.

“...it is difficult to survive without paid work and little choice of work or employer may be available.” As a student and young professional, this quote from *Anti-Capitalism* particularly resonated with me. Young people feel pressured to find steady jobs right after graduating, and expect to join the masses in their quest towards building a better life. The statement ignited with some repressed pressure I put on myself to constantly be making the “right” professional and academic decisions in order to better prepare myself for the Real World. I sometimes wonder— where does that pressure come from, and why does that sort of ingrained behavior feel so “normal”? Fulcher might attribute this to the fact that capitalism is ‘hegemonic’, or ruling or dominant in a political or social context. Capitalism is the way it is— because it *IS*.

Another quote from Capitalism I though hit fantastic points was this: “The easy answer is that since the dawn of capitalism in the early modern period, capitalism has obviously changed a great deal. Indeed it has changed so much that it is remarkable to be talking about the same ‘thing’ at all, the world of the twenty -first century being radically different to that of even the nineteenth century, let alone the seventeenth.” This describes how capitalism *today* is not the same thing as capitalism in the *seventeenth century*– stunningly calling into question its relevance in the current age... This same argument is often made against the documents that founded our nation, and if a piece of parchment written by a room full of rich white men truly holds any weight in the America of today.

Source:

<https://vimeo.com/79148964>

http://grcd3021-f18.studiojunglecat.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Fulcher-James_AVSI-Capitalism_ch1.pdf

http://grcd3021-f18.studiojunglecat.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Tormey-Simon_AntiCapitalism_ch1.pdf

<https://newleftreview.org/II/87/wolfgang-streeck-how-will-capitalism-end>