

# MARK FISHER: WE NEED A POST-CAPITALIST VISION

*Mark Fisher is the author of [Capitalist Realism](#) and the [k-punk](#) blog. He coined the term 'capitalist realism' to describe the way in which capitalism presents itself not in ideological terms but as the only possible political-economic system. We asked Mark about capitalist realism, the fight against austerity and where the left should be heading.*

AntiCapitalists.org: **Paul Mason recently argued that in light of the Arab revolutions, capitalist realism has come to an end. Do you agree?**

Mark Fisher: I think that is going too far. I understand why Paul made that claim, but capitalist realism is very tenacious. Certainly, things look very different to how they did a few years ago during the high pomp of capitalist realism – when it was thought that the age of revolutions was in the past, that no great change will ever happen again, that every part of the world will eventually end up capitalist.



These ideas — basically, the theses of Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* — were widely accepted at an unconscious if not a conscious level, even by those opposed to capitalism. It's that acceptance of capitalist dominance, or rather the unthinkability of any break from that dominance, which constitutes what I've called capitalist realism. But with what has happened in the Arab world, the hope for radical, systemic change has been re-ignited. It's part of a shift in ideological atmosphere that we have seen manifested this week in the French and the Greek elections, with their [votes against austerity](#).

Austerity, after all, is the deflated yet intransigent form that capitalist realism has assumed since the bank crises. Before the bank crises, capitalist realism managed to look as if it were a post-political condition — not a particular ideological constellation, just the way things were. It's no longer able to sustain that post-political mask. But if capitalist realism were actually finished, then there wouldn't be any austerity at all; it's only because people continue to accept that there is no alternative, not only to capitalism, but to neoliberal capitalism, that the swingeing cuts that have been imposed in the name of austerity have gone through. As it is, in Europe, we are only seeing the beginnings of a challenge to austerity. These challenges are by no means insignificant, but it's not yet the end of capitalist realism.

But there's another way in which capitalist realism persists. Capitalist realism can also be seen as the inability to imagine an alternative to capitalism, and I don't think we're close to overcoming this yet. Not surprisingly, after thirty years of capitalist realism, our capacity to even conceive of alternatives to capitalism has atrophied. Opposition to neoliberalism is growing, but this new anti-capitalist mood has yet to bring forth any powerful vision of post-capitalism. Certain tendencies in anti-capitalism are, in effect, inversions of capitalist realism — they accept that capital controls technological modernity, and offer only withdrawal and retreat as an alternative.

AntiCapitalists.org: **How can the left organise itself today to maximise its impact?**

Mark Fisher: The most important problem the left now faces seems to me to be co-ordination. There are any number of groups hostile to capitalism, but the task is to bring them together to form a sustainable antagonism. We need to forge greater links between those already engaged in struggle — the [unions](#), [Occupy](#), the [student movement](#), the [various anti-cuts groups](#) — and also to reach out to those who aren't yet politicised. The way that the opposition between centralization and decentralization has dominated discourse on the left recently has distracted us from the fact that co-ordination does not entail Stalinist centralization. Systems can be co-ordinated and decentralized at the same time. After all, that's how capitalism operates!

A key question is institutional memory; a system that has no memory cannot learn and will keep repeating the same mistakes. What's crucial is that we give up any nostalgia for previous eras. Leftist politics has been weakened by its attachment to superseded forms of economic and political organisation. There's a strange romance of glorious failure which we have to give up.

A major part of grasping the potentials of the present is reaching out to precarious workers. We need to think creatively about how they can be politicised and organised.

AntiCapitalists.org: **Do you think that the autonomist critique of classical Marxism has any relevance in helping us understand the modern world?**

Mark Fisher: Yes, I do. The autonomist critique of authoritarianism and Stalinist bureaucracy is something that we shouldn't forget. Any credible leftist politics now has to take the problem of anti-authoritarianism very seriously. At the same time, however, we have to recognise that the situation is very different from the context in which autonomist ideas first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Then, the Communist Party and the trade unions were very powerful; Stalinism was still an oppressive presence.

None of these things are true today. Whatever the merits of autonomist anti-statism, it has to be acknowledged that anti-statism is now hegemonic. There's a congruence between the language of neo-anarchism and David Cameron's Big Society, which is not to say that the discourses are identical. But one problem with anti-statism — particularly when coupled with localism, as it often is — is that it makes any defence of institutions like the NHS very difficult. The drive of the original autonomists was to escape existing institutions, whereas I think our aim today should be to produce new institutions.

AntiCapitalists.org: **Today people talk about ‘zombie capitalism’: an undead system which people can't see beyond. Does this chime with Owen Hatherley's *Militant Modernism* argument about the way the left has to challenge the dominance of neoliberalist capitalism as the only modernising force on the planet?**

Mark Fisher: Yes. Neoliberalism is now undead: it was massively discredited after the bank crises, but that hasn't stopped it continuing in zombie form. The default settings of most of our institutions remain neoliberal, and will do so until they are reset. In claiming there was “no alternative” to neoliberalism, the neoliberals were staking a claim that they were the only modernisers. Resistance to neoliberalism was a resistance to modernisation.

Neoliberal ideologues have successfully imposed an equation between neoliberalisation and modernisation; this has been central to capitalist realism. Look at the way that something like the Royal Mail disputes are reported in the mainstream media: the workers are always said to be struggling against “modernisation”, when really they are opposed to privatisation.

At the same time, it's clear that neoliberalism has in many ways arrested modernity. That's part of the point of *Militant Modernism*: the rise of neoliberalism has seen a turn to “postmodern” cultural and political forms, a formal nostalgia that is manifested in the refurbishing of familiar modes. It's not for nothing that Fredric Jameson [calls](#) postmodernism, with its culture of retrospection and pastiche, “the cultural logic of late capitalism”. Neoliberalism claims to be the only modernising force, but it's increasingly clear that it is incapable of delivering modernity. The current crisis is a massive opportunity for the left to reclaim modernity for itself.