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Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets

Todd McGowan

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Why is capitalism so resilient? Despite creating vast inequalities and propping up reactionary world regimes, capitalism has many passionate defenders. But Todd McGowan argues that capitalism does not thrive because of what it withholds from some and gives to others with power. Capitalism dominates because it mimics the structure of our desire while hiding the trauma that the system inflicts upon it. People from all backgrounds enjoy what capitalism provides yet at the same time are told more and better is yet to come. Capitalism traps us by creating and sustaining an incomplete satisfaction that focuses our attention on the new, the better, and the more.

Capitalism's parasitic relationship to our desire gives it the illusion of corresponding to our natural impulses, which is how capitalism's defenders characterize it. By understanding this psychic strategy, McGowan hopes to divest us of our addiction to capitalist enrichment and helps us rediscover how we enjoy. By locating enjoyment in the present and not the future, McGowan frees us from an unhealthy attachment to a better future and the belief that capitalism is an essential outgrowth of human nature. From this perspective, our economic, social, and political worlds open up to real political change. Eloquent and enlivened by examples from film, television, consumer culture, and everyday life, *Capitalism and Desire* brings a new, psychoanalytically grounded approach to political and social theory.

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