

Review

Spectral Futures and Economic Civility: Rethinking Capitalism with Andy Hines

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Andy Hines' *Imagining After Capitalism* (2025) presents a bold, speculative intervention in contemporary critical thought, offering a framework to envision economic, social, and cultural structures beyond the entrenched capitalist paradigm. By engaging with utopian imaginaries and theoretical extrapolations, Hines attempts to chart a course toward alternative modes of existence where human flourishing is no longer subordinated to market imperatives. This review interrogates *Imagining After Capitalism* through the lens of cultural studies, critical posthumanities, and transhumanist discourse, situating Hines' work within a broader conversation about economic hegemony, technological transformation, and the aesthetics of futurity in the wake of classical liberalism's supercalifragilisticexpialidocious enchantment.

One of the most striking insights, or enchantments, from Hines' argument, as emphasized in his interview with myself, Nathan Moore, on the *New Books Network*, is the assertion that "we are living in an economy rather than living in a society." This observation encapsulates the tension between capital's totalizing logic and the residual aspirations for social cohesion and ethical collectivity. This claim resonates with my previous work (Moore 2024), where I examined how technological infrastructures and transhumanist thought are frequently co-opted by neoliberal agendas, transforming them into tools of further economic enchantment and stratification rather than genuine liberation. Hines' critique, while deeply theoretical, calls for an urgent political reimagining of how technological and economic systems can be repurposed for the collective good rather than individual accumulation.

Hines' approach toward the "imaginary" or supercalifragilisticexpialidociousness aligns with recent inquiries in hauntological studies, particularly the specters of past economic failures and unfulfilled political promises that continue to shape contemporary imaginaries of the frontier. *Union Pacific* (1939) by movie director Cecil B. DeMille uses Hollywood's cinema of spectacle to explore how mass media reinforces the myth of frontierism's economic and geographical expansion, especially during or after wartime, as a moral and nationalistic imperative. Similarly, *Imagining After Capitalism* exposes the ideological scaffolding that is analogous to the transcontinental railroad motif, rendering alternative economic structures seemingly impossible within "capitalist realism," a notion deeply indebted to the work of Mark Fisher (2009). Furthermore, popular culture in the U.S., as it was partly shaped by mass media and a new Japan in the 1980s (McKevitt 2005), reflects on the international impacts *Capitalist Realism* ad-

dresses in reshaping a modern shock-and-awe cultural landscape. Hines' work, however, moves beyond criticism of capitalism and into speculative reconstruction (see *Union Pacific*), challenging readers to conceive of an economic system that fosters creativity, autonomy, and sustainability in new communities.

From a media-theoretical perspective, Hines' exploration of economic imaginaries can be fruitfully juxtaposed with theories of cinematic and digital spectatorship. The role of visual culture in shaping ideological constructs cannot be overlooked. Just as Sergei Eisenstein's montage film theory suggested that meaning is actively constructed by the viewer through juxtaposition (1949), Hines' method of critically re-imagining post-capitalist futures operates through a similar dialectical process—deconstructing the present to reveal potential alternatives. This is further complicated by the digital economy's reliance on spectacle, where consumerist desire is continually regenerated through algorithmic manipulation. Hines' challenge, then, is to carve out imaginative spaces not yet enclosed by neoliberal imperatives while maintaining a nuanced understanding of how economic freedoms contribute to human flourishing.

Another compelling aspect of *Imagining After Capitalism* is its engagement with historical trajectories of economic phantasms of thought (see *The Phantom of the Opera*), yet it occasionally falls into the abstraction that often plagues theoretical projects of this scale (Gunning 1986). While Hines acknowledges the material conditions necessary for systemic change, his analysis could benefit from a more explicit engagement with contemporary political movements actively working toward these transformations. This is where a synthesis with transhumanist and digital humanities scholarship could strengthen his vision. An intersection of spectacle and ideology is crucial to understanding the dissemination of economic mythologies. Hines' work, while gesturing toward the necessity of new narratives, could further develop the role of media and technological infrastructures in shaping post-capitalist consciousness.

Andy Hines' *Imagining After Capitalism* then presents a bold, provocative engagement with the necessity of envisioning alternative socio-economic structures in a world deeply entrenched in neoliberal ideology, a crossroads for classical liberalism. As an extension of utopian and speculative thought, Hines' work resonates with contemporary debates on post-capitalist futures, where imagination is not simply an intellectual exercise but a political imperative to building New Worlds. His core argument—that we have been living in an Economy rather than a Society—captures the ideological shift that has undergirded late-stage capitalism's reification of economic logic over collective well-being. This review situates *Imagining After Capitalism* into non-normative bounds as Hines suggests and into the broader intellectual traditions also transitioning to Cultural Studies.

Hines' project ultimately follows in the tradition of utopian theorists, offering a clear rejection of the fatalism that often accompanies discussions of capitalism's dominance. His work challenges us to rethink the frameworks of production, exchange, and labor, engaging with traditions that range from Marxist *critiques* of alienation to contemporary posthumanist *interventions*. However, a critical question emerges when examining Hines' vision through the lens of classical liberalism: *Can we construct an emancipatory economic future while still preserving the fundamental principles of individual liberty, voluntary exchange, and limited government?*

A useful counterpoint to Hines' perspective is found in *Freedom and Equality: Essays on Liberalism and Feminism* (Chambers 2024), where liberal theorists contend that economic liberty and social justice are not inherently at odds but can be synthesized through institutional design. Hines' vision of a post-capitalist world risks neglecting the insights of classical liberalism, particularly the Hayekian (1944) critique of central planning and the unintended consequences of top-down economic intervention. While his speculative approach is compelling, it lacks a clear engagement with how liberal institutions might *evolve* rather than be wholly discarded in pursuit of a new socio-economic environment.

Hines' argument also recalls Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, in which ideological dominance is not just enforced through coercion but is maintained through consent and cultural institutions. Just as Gramsci emphasized the necessity of a 'war of position' to counteract hegemonic structures, Hines' work implicitly calls for a new terrain of ideological struggle—one rooted in imagination, speculation, and alternative futures. His emphasis on speculative narratives, while primarily directed at economic structures,

aligns with the broader cultural currents and trends of transhumanist foresight, as seen in narratives of technological enhancement, immersive digital landscapes, and emerging debates on digital sovereignty.

Ultimately, Hines' *Imagining After Capitalism* is a timely and necessary intervention into contemporary debates on economic futurity. By foregrounding the importance of speculative thought, Hines aligns with the broader avant-garde currents that seek to dismantle existing ideological structures in favor of more just and imaginative alternatives. His work is essential reading for scholars of cultural studies, political theory, and digital humanities who seek to engage with the pressing question: *What comes after capitalism?* As this review has suggested, *Imagining After Capitalism* is best read alongside contemporary engagements with posthumanism, emanation theory, and transhumanist speculation, as these fields offer complementary tools for understanding and enacting systemic change in an increasingly technologized world.

However, a truly *radical* imagination should not merely seek to replace capitalism but rather critically interrogate how economic systems—capitalist, socialist, or otherwise—structure human relationships. Classical liberalism has long argued that markets, when properly constrained by legal and ethical frameworks, are among the most effective means of fostering human cooperation and innovation. The challenge, then, is not simply to envision life after capitalism but to explore how economic liberty can coexist with egalitarian principles in a manner that is just, sustainable, and, most importantly, free. By incorporating these concerns, *Imagining After Capitalism* could offer a more robust vision for the future—one that is not only speculative but also deeply attuned to the enduring tensions between freedom, equality, and economic organization.

A critical engagement with *Imagining After Capitalism* must also address its limitations. While Hines' work is rich in theoretical speculation, it occasionally underestimates the material Malthusian constraints that prevent ideological transformation. Similar to what I discussed in my academic research on the Great Divergence, the aestheticization of utopia can sometimes obscure the historical forces that resist positive structural change. Hines' vision of a post-capitalist future risks an over-reliance on intellectual abstraction, requiring a more concrete engagement with political strategy and praxis in a synthesis of both culture and science. This echoes debates within transhumanist discourse, where the promise of human enhancement is frequently detached from the socio-political conditions that govern access and control to technologies.

Nevertheless, Hines' book offers an invaluable contribution to contemporary debates on economic futures. *Imagining After Capitalism* revitalizes the utopian impulse that is often dismissed within mainstream discourse by foregrounding imagination as a political tool. Drawing from my work (2024), I argue that a post-capitalist imaginary must not only challenge economic structures but also interrogate the epistemological frameworks that underpin them. The book serves as a crucial reminder that alternatives to capitalism are not merely theoretical exercises but necessary acts of intellectual and political resistance. In conclusion, Andy Hines' *Imagining After Capitalism* is a provocative and timely work that demands engagement from scholars across disciplines. While it requires further elaboration on practical implementation, its speculative approach is a necessary antidote to the cynicism that pervades contemporary economic thought. As we navigate an era defined by technological acceleration and economic precarity, Hines' book offers a vital space for reimagining what comes next.

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