

Michael Lecker's Field Proposal
Mass Culture and Urban Space
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Theories of mass culture vary in their perspective and object choice; each having its own history and trajectory. Within this field I limit my scope to theorists engaging with the production and consumption of mass culture. In particular, I wish to explore in this field how theories regarding the production and consumption of mass culture have informed (and have themselves been informed by) discussions of the production and consumption of urban spaces. In this way, this field recognizes that the discussion of urban space has always played a significant and central role in larger discussions of mass culture, and has recently gained renewed attention within critical and cultural theory. The first half of the field thus focuses on the major arguments within the consumption/production dialogue in theories of mass culture. The second half then narrows in on the influences, trajectory, and impact of critical and Marxist geographers within cultural studies, particularly around questions of the production, appropriation, and transformation of not only cultural commodities, but also urban spaces and places.

In the first section, I begin with Karl Marx's account of industrial capitalism's rise and the subsequent alienating of subjects from themselves, their labor, and their culture. I move to Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin of the Frankfurt School and their diverse accounts of the way institutions influence population in order to create the (passive?) masses and situate the public for the exploitation of their labor. Jürgen Habermas breaks away from this trajectory by showing how reason could but fails to combat the irrationality of the system described by the Frankfurt School. Williams, Bourdieu, and Dubord examine the forms created by mass culture to show how not just capitalism but aesthetics and form confine and define experience and perception. Within this framework political economists, such as Mark Andrejevic and Sut Jhally, discuss how the industry transfer audiences with forms into a labor source. Other political economists, such as Robert McChesney, Vincent Mosco, and Herbert Schiller argue that economic strategies of monopolization, global saturation, and exportation of products and structures of thinking adversely affect political thought and cultural production.

Whether in response to or as a supplement to theories focusing on production, other writers developed theories of consumption. Inspired by Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, the Birmingham School, including Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, and David Morley, discuss mass culture as a site of ideological struggle between producers and consumers. Their models consider the consumer as active. Their influence within the field sparked others, most notably John Fiske and Janice Radway, into theorizing and investigating the audience. Audience reception theorists focus on how spectators negotiate meaning out of cultural products and whether audiences are indoctrinated, resist, or do neither completely. A branch of this field reverses the producer/consumer dichotomy by seeing the audience as producing culture through the alteration of the products they consume.

The theories referenced above can easily be, and often have been, applied to the study of urban space. Marx, Benjamin, and Kracauer were early commentators on capitalism's impact on space, either altering it to enhance productivity and reduce turnover times, or for the promotion and celebration of consumption. David Harvey draws upon Marxism and critical theory to examine on the historical geography of capitalism and the inequalities, which result in the

production of space suited to the needs of capital. His work began a long trajectory of other theorists, such as Neil Smith, Sharon Zukin, and Don Mitchell, each of whom examine the production of space and its impact on subjects on a global, national, and local scale. The work of these geographers contributes to questions raised by political economists. Differing in focus, cultural geographers such as Doreen Massey and Peter Jackson draw on the work of Michel DeCerteau, the Birmingham School, and feminists to examine how subjects navigate and alter spaces that seek to exclude them. Similar to the Birmingham School, they see space as a contested area.

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