

The Parable of Mahagonny: Urban Deserts and the Creation of Suburbia

Abstract

*It has become natural to buy: the shift between classical production-based capitalism to postmodern consumer-based capitalism specifically examining its effects on the city and its role in the creation of suburbia. Taking Brecht and Weill's opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* to reflect this shift and using Detroit as the prime example, this paper examines how consumer capitalism created a desert urban wasteland in what was once the booming industrial city. Geographically, capitalism has shifted from the agrarian rural to the industrialized urban, to the consumptive suburban. Primarily using Marx/Engels, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Jameson, the exodus from the city to suburbia is explained in cultural terms. The suburban is an ideological framework more than a geographic location. This idea, along with an examination of the megapoleis of Asia compared to the U.S. Eastern seaboard, I contend that late capitalism created a suburbia which gave postmodernism an ideological space. Ultimately, the paper leaves reader with two questions: will Asian industrialization and its decline mirror that of the United States and what space and mode, geographic and discursive, will capitalism take next?*

KEYWORDS: *Urban; Suburban; Consumer capitalism; Engels; Adorn & Horkheimer; Jameson*

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Show Me the Way to the Next Little Dollar

The urban desert and the carnivalesque suburbia – signifiers of the shift from the market-based to hyper-consumption-based capitalism – is the central theme and tone to Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's opera *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. The story of Mahagonny reflects and possibly predicts the shift from classical to late capitalism. Traditionally, the city presents a threshold for the carnivalesque, a place of unchecked libidinal freedom as suggested by Fredric Jameson in "The Antinomies of Postmodernity."¹ Similarly, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer critique the culture industry, which creates mass culture, in their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Both *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*

prophesy suburbia as the site of generative space for late consumer capitalism and the resulting degradation of the urban city, an idea that presents a chronology from Marx, Engels, Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin to Jameson. In the context of late capitalism urban space became a proverbial wasteland of industry.

To speak of this change in concrete terms, the epitome of this shift is Detroit, which mirrors *Mahagonny* in the abandonment of production in favor of consumption and the resulting flight to the suburbs. This exodus from the urban city is possibly best seen in the “Rust Belt” of the United States, once again, specifically the city of post-Fordist Detroit.² In this way, the culture industry abandons classical production-based, urban areas in favor of a commercialized suburban space that, coincidentally, was created by the industrial urban. Using Detroit and *The Rise and Fall of Mahagonny* as metaphors, one can trace a link, or lineage, from the theories of Adorno and Horkheimer to Jameson. Detroit presents a case study for their theories, and literary examples provide instances of their thought in contemporary culture. In the opera, *Mahagonny* presents a pleasure land, and, when compared to the postmodern writings of DeLillo, Pynchon, and Ballard shift the center of hyper-consumptive pleasure from the once-manufacturing desert urban into a suburban space.

Historically, these processes seem to alternate between production to consumption of the manufactured product, an oscillating dialectic each wholly contingent on the other. This cyclical mode presents a two-fold problem: the displacement of the production city as urban space and the rise of postmodern suburbia, a trend that has extended itself into our contemporary e-commerce. Thus, the compulsion to consume decentralizes the city as a point of desire, of productive control, and places the newfound pleasure drive of consumption into a newly created suburban subject, created for the sole purpose of unbridled, compulsive hyper-consumption.

The Fall of Ford/Detroit/Production

In his commentary on the 2015 production of *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* for the Royal Opera, associate director John Fulljames comments that the opera “tells the story of the founding of a city, its uncontrolled excessive growth into a city of consumption, a city of pleasure, and then its decay, its gridlock, its inability to progress because it’s been a society built on gratification, on consumption. [...] It’s about our world reflected on the stage.”³ While there may be parallels to current politico-economic trends – the economic crisis of the 2000s and China becoming a powerhouse of production – I would propose that *Rise and Fall of Mahagonny* mirrors the shift from classical to late capitalism.

The city as the epicenter of the productive market is perhaps best characterized by industry. Geographically contingent, these centers promote a commodity made readily available for consumption. But what happens to these urban spaces when production is geographically diversified, when a global market develops and such commodities are no longer dependent on a central location? Fordism and its inherent link to Detroit was a powerhouse of automobile manufacturing in the first half of the twentieth century, but, along with geographic diversity, its product, the automobile, is displaced from its namesake town thereby forcing factory workers as well as other engineers and administration to relocate to the suburbs. Therefore without production, the industrial urban city is vacant of purpose and, in a sense, its identity.

In Friedrich Engels' preface to the English edition of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, he explains the cyclical nature of economy and differences between manual labor and manufacturing, which raises implications for the ontology post-consumer-capitalist society:

Political economy has generally been content to take, just as they were, the terms of commercial and industrial life, and to operate with them, entirely failing to see that by so doing it confined itself within the narrow circle of ideas expressed by those terms. Thus, though perfectly aware that both profits and rent are but sub-divisions, fragments of that unpaid part of the product with the laborer has to supply to his employer (its first appropriator, though not its ultimate exclusive owner), yet classical political economy never went beyond these recent notions of profits and rents, never examined this unpaid part of the product (called by Marx surplus product) in its integrity as a whole, and therefore never arrived at a clear comprehension, either of its origin and nature, or of the laws that regulate the subsequent distribution of its value. Similarly all industry, not agricultural or handicraft, is indiscriminately comprised in the term of manufacture, and thereby the distinction is obliterated between two great and essentially different periods of economic history: the period of manufacture proper, based on the division of manual labor, and the period of modern industry based on machinery. It is, however, self-evident that a theory which views modern capitalist production as a mere passing stage in the economic history of mankind, must make use of terms different from those habitual to writers who look upon that form of production as imperishable and final.⁴

Thus, Engels has suggested a move beyond his contemporary mechanized, industrialized, production-based economic period to one beyond: late consumer capitalism. The implications of such a shift from manual labor, agricultural labor to mechanical labor, industrialized labor mirrors the shift from industrialized labor to office labor, bureaucrat labor. Relegating and dispersing industrialization, productions, and their commodities only enable this switch globally. Yet, this shift from production-based capitalism to consumption-based capitalism raises questions about what future shift capitalism, in all its forms, will take next.

Geography plays a pivotal role in terms of manufacturing the proletariat and can be traced as the centers for capitalism shift. Engels discusses the differences between the serf and the proletariat in regards to geography in "Principles of Communism" saying, "The manufactory worker lives almost always in the country and in more or less patriarchal relations with his landlord or his employer in a purely money relationship. The manufactory worker is torn up from his patriarchal relations by large-scale industry, loses the property he still has and thereby only then himself becomes a proletarian." Engels continues about how the country and the city intermingle: "The serf frees himself either by running away to the town and there becoming a handicraftsman or by giving his landlord money instead of labor and becoming a free tenant."⁵ Before industrialization, the city was a place of escape, of pleasure as opposed to production, carnival space to escape from work. Following Engels, in his essay "The Antinomies of Postmodernity" Jameson writes that "the city always seemed to promise freedom, as in the medieval conception of the urban as the space of escape from working the land and from feudal labor and serfdom, from the arbitrary power of the lord: 'city air' from this perspective now becomes the very opposite of what Marx famously characterized as 'rural idiocy.'"⁶

With industrialization, the carnivalesque libidinal freedom of the urban was reestablished as the powerhouse of production characterized by wage slaves:

We dwell in large dark cities: miles of sewers below them;
Thick over them, smoke; in them nothing at all.
No peace, no joy: here is no soil to grow them;
Here we quickly fade. More slowly they also shall fall.⁷

From revel-making and freedom from the lord, the city became the center of production: mills and factories, the industrial district. For the proletariat, the city's libidinal quality was replaced with smog, litter, and dismality.

Jameson claims that this "urban degradation, which characterizes the First World, has, however, been transferred to a separate ideological compartment called postmodernism, where it duly takes its place in the arsenal attacks on modern architecture and its ideals."⁸ The ideals that Jameson refers to is the utility of design, the thought that every object should serve a purpose devoid of ornamentation. It is a strictly functionalistic, anti-bourgeois, desire-negating, economic aesthetic. Every object, building, business, and action must be a commodity in terms of its value thereby linked to its production. Fordism – the single black model used for utility, the production lines for the efficient completion of the product, and the linear hierarchies of management – reflects this mechanization and perhaps is the pinnacle of what Marx and Engels refer to as the decline of the artisan. They write, "The various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalized, in proportion as machinery obliterates all distinctions of labor."⁹ Fordism and the linear mechanization of the proletariat worker become synonymous with production. It is this type of production that dominates classical capitalism and its modes of economic control. However, as Jameson suggests of the degradation of the urban, these modes of production shift culminating in post-World War II postmodern suburbanization.

It is the mass production of sameness – the standardization of production – that signals the beginnings of a shift into a consumption-based economy. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer refer to this process of mass social control through standardization as the *culture industry*. They write:

Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms. It is alleged that because millions participate in it, certain reproduction processes are necessary that inevitably require identical needs in innumerable places to be satisfied with identical goods. [...] Furthermore, it is claimed that standards were based in the first place on consumers' needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows even stronger.¹⁰

In this way, the production of a mass, normalized culture exerts control over the population and sinisterly implies that this conformity is a means of manipulation. Similarly, Walter Benjamin writes, "The stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose 'sense for all that is same in the world' has so increased that, by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique."¹¹ While Benjamin was contemporary

of Brecht, this principle – the standardization of culture as a means of adherence to the un-whispered rule of the manufacturers of culture – has shifted titles from mass culture to twenty-first century pop culture.

Adorno and Horkheimer continue this argument saying that “The stronger the positions of the culture industry become, the more summarily it can deal with consumers’ needs, producing them, controlling them, disciplining them, and even withdrawing amusement: no limits are set to cultural progress of this kind.”¹² Besides the paranoiac view this position has today, Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* might be the first to signal the shift from classical capitalism – described by Marx and Engels’ industrialization and the plight of the blue-collar, proletariat worker – to late capitalism where the once union-organizing worker has transformed into a lower middle-class worker. The blue-collar worker has shifted into a “beige-collar” office worker. This shift is of monumental importance to the city as the industrial center as it was in classical capitalism. The new proletariat does not live in the urban slums but, rather, the suburbs. Therefore, the areas of pleasure and consumption are displaced into a rigorously structured and endlessly standardized suburbia resulting in the postmodern condition.

As mentioned, the shift from urban to suburban capitalism is perhaps most recognizable and takes place at the center of Fordist activity: Detroit. The prosperity of the automobile industry caved, and continues to cave, into an urban desert of abandoned and dilapidated buildings once intricately detailed in their architecture and grandeur. The exodus from Detroit began around 1970 when the population was at its peak then halted and started to decline.¹³ While the abandonment of Detroit is not as simple as a shift from production to consumer capitalism, it best exemplifies an urban city and its shift to an urban desert, an industrial wasteland:

The population of the [Detroit] metropolitan area actually declined 4.1% over the 20 years from 1970 to 1990. [...] Partly as a consequence of the failure of the metropolitan area to grow, the population of the central city fell by 32.0%. Population loss was greater in the 1970s (20.4%) than in the 1980s (14.5%), but both of these declines were larger in percentage terms than the losses sustained in each of the previous two decades.¹⁴

Such a mass exodus from Detroit left the city barren with an abandoned downtown area and sparse commerce. George Galster describes this downtown wasteland in *Driving Detroit* saying, “we’ve seen how capitalists’ thirst for land-extensive plants in nonunion environments led to systematic abandonment of production facilities in Detroit. This obituary of hallowed and now hollowed monster factories includes Dodge Main, Continental Motors, Cadillac, Hudson, and Ford Highland Park.”¹⁵ This list of abandoned automobile factories are the gravestones of production giants and signify the death of production capitalism, and, in turn, create an urban desert similar to industrial centers described by Adorno and Horkheimer: “The decorative industrial management buildings and exhibition centers are much the same as anywhere else. The huge gleaming towers that shoot up everywhere are outward signs of the ingenious planning of international concerns, toward which the unleashed entrepreneurial system (whose monuments are a mass of gloomy houses and business premises in grimy spiritless cities) was already hastening.”¹⁶ Industrialization had reached its zenith and was circling back to the spiritless urban desert. The urban, as it is represented, has become something of a Ballardian landscape. He writes in *Crash*:

Looking closely at this silent terrain, I realized the entire zone which defined the landscape of my life was now bounded by a continuous artificial horizon, formed by the raised parapets and embankments of the motorways and their access roads and interchanges. These encircled the vehicles below like the walls of a crater several miles in diameter. [...] The arch of the flyover rose against the skyline, its northern ramp shielded by the white rectangle of a plastics factory. The untouched rectilinear volumes of this building fused in my mind with the contours of her calves and thighs precedes against the vinyl seating.¹⁷

The urban desert, concrete plains and austere industrial spaces have removed the carnival from the city. Paul Virilio might describe the passage saying “the banalization of *cold perception* - paradoxically, a privileged feature of the scientific gaze - in fact developed an aesthetic specific to that gaze: a kind of *elementary structuralism* which was to infuse fields as various as the visual arts, literature, industry, design or even the social and economic utopias of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”¹⁸ Yet, if the centers of pleasure were confined to the limits of the traditional, carnivalesque city of consumption, where is the center or space of late postmodern capitalism since the production-based city has died?

Founding of the City of Suburbia

The urban as the sphere of pleasure, its shift to industrialized production, the subsequent negation of production—the gridlock of production, over-production, and the growing strength of labor unions—displaces the libidinal and consumptive space into another sphere, an arena where a newly formulated postmodern, Epicurean desire reigns supreme, suburbia:

One means to eat all you are able;
Two, to change your loves about;
Three means the ring and gaming table;
Four, to Drink until you pass out.
Moreover, better get it clear
That Don'ts are not permitted here.
(So long as you have money).¹⁹

This “eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you die” approach is the hedonistic principle of consumer capitalism and causes a rupture between the traditional market/production capitalism and the postmodern consumer capitalism that comes to its zenith around the mid-twentieth century. It is the extension of the urban: “The urban becomes the social in general, and both of them constitute and lose themselves in a global that is not really their opposite either (as it was in the older dispensations) but something like their outer reach, their prolongation into a new kind of infinity.”²⁰ Jameson claims that the urban could not contain both industrialization and a center for unbridled pleasure and consumption. So, it grew; the urban separated industrialization and business from pleasure and consumption thereby creating consumer suburbia and the postmodern condition.

Geographically, there was a need to link centers of consumption with their dwindling, production grandfathers. Thus, instead of creating a completely divorced entity from the urban, it

haphazardly searched for any sphere to appease a consumer public. The result was “sprawl.” Jameson addresses this saying:

Where the world system today tends toward one enormous urban system—tendentially ever more complete modernization promised that, which has however been ratified and delivered in an unexpected way by the communications revolution and its new technologies: a development of which the immediately physical visions, nightmares of “sprawl” from Boston to Richmond, or the Japanese urban agglomeration, are the merest allegories—the very conception of the city itself and the classically urban loses its significance and no longer seems to offer any precisely delimited objects of study, any specifically differentiated realities.²¹

The problem with this thought is that Jameson still assumes the urban center as sprawling, that a central city extends outward. Therefore, the suburban seems contingent on the urban. However, with the advent of these megacities (Jameson mentions Boston to Richmond),²² the city itself ceases to be centralized and seemingly anti-Asiatic, and, in that sense, ceases to be a city at all. Rather, these megacities are a pastiche of individual spaces sewn together solely based on geography. At this point, it is imperative to be reminded that suburbia is not geographic, in the postmodern, consumptive sense, it is a lifestyle, a culture of its own. The suburban culture is not contingent on geography or even its proximity to the urban center; suburbia creates its own contingencies with respect to the culture industry.

There is no geographic center for consumer capitalism. While Jameson notes the “Japanese urban agglomerations,” these mega-cities are fundamentally different from those found in the United States. The Asian mega-cities have developed from the center; the city begins and expands from a central point or space still maintaining its urban-ness. However, the U.S. megacities are a collision of sub-urban sprawl. Cities form from the center and extend outwards into the sub-urban. These sub-urban spaces then conflate and amass with the other to produce a seamless mega-city, which is not a city at all, but a populated area so expanded and distended that the boundaries between cities are blurred to the point of nonexistence. Therefore, using Jameson’s Boston to Richmond statement, there is no New York City; there is Boston/New York/Philadelphia/Baltimore/Washington, D.C./Richmond. While the so-called megapolis of the American Eastern seaboard might appear to be urban, the mega-city, it is, in fact, a conglomerate of urban “essences” that seem to form a center, but these cities are denied a coherent, self-contained identity by their amalgamation through other cities through sub-urban sprawl. Globally, it will be an interesting to see if these Asian productions, industrialization, and mechanization continue in the trend of Detroit, especially in China’s Pearl River Valley.

With the fall of Detroit, a depopulation that is not localized to “The Motor City” but a broader trend, comes an almost simultaneous rise in its suburban population:

As is well known, the Detroit metropolitan area has been hit by the declining fortunes of the American automobile companies, and the central city has experienced massive losses of population and tax base. However, most of the major northeastern metropolitan areas have experienced roughly similar difficulties - loss of manufacturing base and large-scale suburbanization.²³

Consumption – the driving mode of late capitalism – has its center in the suburbs. While the suburbs is a term that has medieval roots as “urban areas that lay beyond the city’s physical limits,” it has come to signify mid-twentieth century, consumptive sprawl around an urban center; its distinctive culture is epistemologically based in postmodern consumer capitalism.²⁴ Or, how Jameson describes it, “Ideologically, what this dissolution of the boundaries of the traditional city and the classically urban enables a slippage, a displacement, a reinvestment of older urban ideological and libidinal connotations under new conditions.”²⁵ Now, suburbia has been stereotyped and is associated with images of made-up housewives in pearls, picket fences, two stylishly dressed children, and men in suits coming home to family dinner, the cult of domesticity. Therefore, while the suburban is a geographic term in the sense of its placement exterior to the urban city, it has been reified from the physical space and its geographic location: Suburbia a postmodern, *omnium rerum* identity.

Yet, postmodern, late capitalistic suburbia and these prevailing images of domestic life are driven by hyper-consumption. Therefore, it is important to mention commercial retail space. In his article “The Suburban Weekend: Perspectives on a vanishing twentieth-century dream,” Gary Cross notes that “By the 1970s not only did Americans spend as much as four times as many hours shopping as did Europeans, but Americans devoted far more space to shopping malls and other retail commercial activity. The distinction between leisure and consumption for many Americans had disappeared as time and money had become one.”²⁶ Supermarkets are perhaps the pinnacles of obsessive hyper-consumption. In literature perhaps the best depiction of suburban hyper-consumption comes from the lengthy, closing conceit in Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* that compares life in consumer capitalism to that of a supermarket. The quotation is vital, for it encapsulates suburbia’s compulsive hyper-consumption:

The supermarket shelves have been rearranged. [...] The scouring pads are with the hand soap now, the condiments are scattered. [...] Only the generic food is where it was, white packages plainly labeled. [...] But in the end it doesn't matter what they see or think they see. The terminals are equipped with holographic scanners, which decode the binary secret of every item, infallibly. This is the language of waves and radiation, or how the dead speak to the living. And this is where we wait together, regardless of age, our carts stocked with brightly colored goods. A slowly moving line, satisfying, giving us time to glance at the tabloids in the racks. Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and the extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead.²⁷

This description, as well as the entirety of *White Noise*, his other works, and the paranoid postmodernism of Pynchon’s “ordered swirl of houses and streets,”²⁸ satirizes American middle-class suburban life. This postmodern condition is a society compulsively obsessed with consuming standardized manufactured goods: people live and die consuming.

Unbridled hyper-consumption, the fulcrum of late capitalism is directly related to Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry as well as the writings of Jameson, particularly *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In his conclusion, Jameson writes, “Our own mass culture today, in full postmodernism, naturally enough seems a good deal more sophisticated than the radio and the movies of the thirties and forties: the television public is presumably better

educated and also has a good deal more experience of images than its parents had in the Eisenhower era.”²⁹ In this way, Jameson builds on the concepts of media’s influence on mass culture that Adorno and Horkheimer address in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Jameson continues saying, “But I want to argue that if anything, Adorno and Horkheimer’s intuition of the ideology of the thing is even more profoundly true today than it was then. For that very reason – its very universalization and interiorization – it is less visible as such has been transformed into a veritable second nature.”³⁰ The consumption, or at least the influence to consume, has become part of the social fabric itself. Keeping in mind the end of *White Noise*, it has structured itself into the metanarrative of postmodern American consumer-based society.

It has become natural to buy: “The market people today, however, marshal the same fantasies in defense of a market society now supposed itself to be somehow ‘natural’ and deeply rooted in human nature.”³¹ Jameson argues, in a Freudian sense that people “do so against the Promethean efforts of human beings to take collective production into their own hands and, by planning, to control or at least to influence and inflict their own future (something that no longer seems particularly meaningful in a postmodernity in which the very existence of the futures as such has come to seem enfeebled, if not deficient).”³² With the compulsion to hyper-consume, a new space had to be created. Thus, suburbia, as it is signified as a commercial center and not merely sub-urban, was created and socialized to meet the needs of late capitalism, to serve and control the consumer’s obsession.

These theories present a theoretical Marxist chronology for the rise of postmodernity through suburban consumption created by the culture industry. All three deal with the production and sameness of mass culture and its dissemination specifically in terms of technological factors. Benjamin writes, in a different translation from the previous quote, “The mass is a matrix from which currently all customary responses to works of art are springing newborn. Quantity has now become quality: *the very much greater masses of participants have produced a changed kind of participation.*”³³ However, Jameson takes this concept one step further than the analysis and reaction to the socialized, obsessive compulsion to consume and inspects it reflexively:

We must therefore also posit another type of consumption: consumption of the very process of consumption itself, above and beyond its content and the immediate commercial products. It is necessary to speak of a kind of technological bonus of pleasure afforded by the new machinery and, as it were symbolically reenacted and ritually devoured at each session of official media consumption itself.³⁴

Media, technology, and broadcasting structures all work together to produce an environment that creates a desire to consume by implying a lack of material. Therefore, along with the ubiquity of advertising, the consumer society and economy was born, and, when that society and economy could not function within the confines of the industrial, production-based urban city, it broke free and molded its own space decentering and depopulating the purely industrial into an urban wasteland devoid of its traditional economic merit.

As Adorno and Horkheimer hinted, the media’s influence on the standardization of suburban consumption has abstracted the process of making products, and, as Jameson continues in this thought, mass cultured is palatable through the processes of reification: “This [reification] sees the matter from the standpoint of the consumer: it suggests the kind of guilt people are freed

from if they are able not to remember the work that went into their toys and furnishings.”³⁵ There is a disconnection between product and production that frees the suburban consumer from considering the formation of the product. This disassociation allows the liberal consumer to assume that production/consumption is egalitarian. Jameson writes, “For a society that wants to forget about class, therefore, reification in this consumer-packaging sense is very functional indeed; consumerism as a culture involves much more than this, but this kind of ‘effacement’ is surely the indispensable precondition on which all the rest can be constructed.”³⁶ But there is a problem for the Marxist in this reification. In Ernest Mandel’s comprehensive book *Late Capitalism*, he claims, “Any rejection of the so called ‘consumer society’ which move beyond justified condemnation of the commercialization and dehumanization of consumption by capitalism to attack the historical extension of needs and consumption in general, [...] turns back the clock from scientific to utopian socialism and from historical materialism to idealism. Marx fully appreciated and stressed the civilizing function of capital.”³⁷ This examination presents a precarious concept when late consumer capitalism is theorized economically, but, as social phenomena, the results on the city as an entity and suburbia’s creation of postmodern hyper-consumption are distinct from former modes of labor, production, and capital. In this sense, suburbia has created its own cultural grammar and defense mechanism devoid of urban influence that shifts the culture industry, or at least its roots, from the urban to the suburban.

Suburbia is the postmodern condition actualized and possible origin of its condition. That is, the rise of suburbia allowed for the dissemination of postmodernity. It is “precisely the ideological and imaginary background against which it is possible to market and to sell the contemporary capitalist city as a well-nigh Bakhtinian carnival of heterogeneities, of differences, libidinal excitement, and a hyperindividuality that effectively decenters the old individual subject by way of individual hyperconsumption.”³⁸ In this sense, suburbia has *become* the contemporary capitalistic city driven by an eco-libidinal culture industry. Traditionally, the suburban was a designated space that was extra-urban. With the shift to late capitalism, the center is suburbia – suburbia is the subject.

With the fall, more correctly described as an exodus, of Detroit, the production industry market that powered through World War II was abandoned, and in its place a new city was founded:

Why, though, did we need a Mahagonny?
Because this world is a foul one
With neither charity
Nor peace nor concord
Because there’s nothing
To build any trust upon.³⁹

These lines are both the conclusion of the first aria “The Founding of Mahagonny” and sung in the opera’s chaotic closing. The rise of suburbia as a position of identity and the urban desert of post-Fordist, industrial cities mirror the move from production-based to hyper-consumption-based capitalism. This paradigm shift, seen in the suburban writings of DeLillo, Pynchon, and Ballard and the theories of Marx, Engels, Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, and Jameson, rearranged the economy as well as class relations. But, perhaps as far as culture itself is concerned, the veneer of a happy domestic life has been peeled back to expose the vulgar mechanics of technological

reproducibility that drives consumer capitalism, an urban desert. As this curtain is pulled further and further back, the normalized processes taken as epistemological truth are shown to be nothing more than reinforced, cultural repetitions. Fracturing fields such as poststructuralism, New Historicism, feminist, queer, and disability theory take this shifting epistemology as a starting point to disassemble and deconstruct preconceived normatives. While the typical progression and relation between postmodernity and the suburbs is shown to be causal (e.g. postmodernism created suburbia), that evaluation denies the Marxist precept that ideology follows economy. Therefore, I suggest that picket fences, shopping malls, supermarkets, and television *created* postmodernism in order to reconcile individuals' ideology and how they wield their pocketbooks.

Endnotes

¹ While Mikhail Bakhtin describes the carnivalesque as an inversion of the structure of society, unless otherwise noted (viz. p.14), I use it purely as the adjective of carnival, a synonym of revelry; also see Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 31.

² The term Rust Belt is a geographic area, generally spanning from Chicago, Illinois to Buffalo, New York in the north to mid United States, whose economy is primarily characterized by industrial production; post-Fordism signals the diversification of the production methods used by Henry Ford, specifically the production line.

³ John Fulljames, "John Fulljames on *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (The Royal Opera)," YouTube video, 2:26, posted by "Royal Opera House," December 23, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P07HO_8HouQ.

⁴ Fredrick Engels, preface to *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, by Karl Marx (London: Penguin, 1976), 111.

⁵ Fredrick Engels, "Principles of Communism," from *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), 344-345.

⁶ Jameson, *Seeds*, 29.

⁷ Bertolt Brecht, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny & The Seven Deadly Sins*, trans. W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman (London: Methuen, 1979), 7.

⁸ Jameson, *Seeds*, 30.

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 1967), 229.

¹⁰ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997), 121.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstone, Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 23-24.

¹² *Ibid.*, 144.

¹³ John F. McDonald, "What Happened to and in Detroit?," *Urban Studies* 51, no. 16 (2014): 3319, doi: 10.1177/0042098013519505.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ George Galster, *Driving Detroit: The Quest for Respect in the Motor City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 226.

¹⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, 120.

- ¹⁷ J. G. Ballard, *Crash* (London: Fourth Estate, 2011), 40, 57.
- ¹⁸ Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000), 57.
- ¹⁹ Brecht, *Mahagonny*, 38.
- ²⁰ Jameson, *Seeds*, 29.
- ²¹ Jameson, *Seeds*, 28-29.
- ²² While Jameson also addresses “Japanese urban agglomeration” this type of area post-dates the industrial period, and, therefore, is an entirely different ontological entity, and further expounds on the global implications of “sprawl” in “Future City,” a response to Harvard Design School’s *Project on the City*. He writes, “The fact is that traditional, or perhaps we might better say modernist, urbanism is at a dead end. Discussions about American traffic patterns or zoning – even political debates about homelessness and gentrification, or real-estate tax policy – pale into insignificance when we consider the immense expansion of what used to be called cities in the Third World.” Fredrick Jameson, “Future City,” *New Left Review* 21 (May-June 2003), <http://newleftreview.org/II/21/fredric-jameson-future-city>.
- ²³ McDonald, “What Happened,” 3309
- ²⁴ J. W. R. Whitehand and C. M. H. Carr, *Twentieth-Century Suburbs: A Morphological Approach* (London: Routledge, 2001), 1.
- ²⁵ Jameson, *Seeds*, 29.
- ²⁶ Gary Cross, “The Suburban Weekend: Perspectives on a vanishing twentieth-century dream,” in *Visions of Suburbia*, ed. Roger Silverstone (London: Routledge, 1997), 126.
- ²⁷ Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (London: Picador, 1985), 374-375.
- ²⁸ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Lowe & Brydone, 1967), 24.
- ²⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 351.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Jameson, *Seeds*, 31.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), 32-33.
- ³⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 276.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 314.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 315.
- ³⁷ Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), 395.
- ³⁸ Jameson, *Seeds*, 31
- ³⁹ Brecht, *Mahagonny*, 64.

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