

Wednesday, November 1, 2017, 2:30-5:30 PM

Is the Power of Mass Culture Profitable?

Dr. James McMahon, University of Toronto (jmcmahon@yorku.ca)

[YouTube](#) || [Download HD \(5.6 GB\)](#)

This presentation will examine how and why political economic theories of mass culture have accumulated, but not settled, methodological issues about the meaning of value and the nature of productivity. Labour is certainly an important factor to any comprehensive study of capitalist mass culture, but it is our assumptions about economic productivity and not the ubiquity of wage labour that tells us we have to look at the latter in terms of productive output. Therefore, if we use entirely different assumptions, we might be able to create stronger links between profitability and the ideological aspects of mass culture.

Inspired by Fix's (2017) and Nitzan and Bichler's (2017) recent writings on growth and hierarchy, this presentation will focus on the ability of firms to, individually or collectively, negate the potential of creativity. Investment will still involve some type of production, but it can now also depend on the ability of alternative forms of human ingenuity to be neglected, marginalized or repressed by the authority of others. Labour and the costs of production still matter, but the strategies of business enterprise have an authoritative element when large firms can also set the terms of social creativity. Furthermore, this power can be specifically characterized as capitalist power the more we pull away from the assumption that institutional power is secondary or external to the "real" story of economic productivity, however measured.