

The New Means of Consumption: A Postmodern Analysis

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Ritzer believes modernism and postmodernism are perspectives that can be used to look at the same phenomena.

Postmodern society is a consumer society that invents new means of consumption, such as credit cards, shopping malls, and shopping networks.

“The fact is the capitalists need consumers to consume in this way to keep the economy operating at a high and growing level. Thus, capitalism is a major force in the invention of these new means of consumption.... In fact, more attention seems to be devoted these days to inventing new means of consumption than to the more traditional course of creating new means of production.... Most important, capitalism needs us to keep on spending at ever-increasing levels to be and remain capitalism. Without ever-increasing consumerism, capitalism as we have come to know it would collapse or at least be transformed dramatically.” (p. 340-41)

Some postmodern concepts/phrases that can be applied to capitalism: simulacra, “America as a dry and emotionless desert” (Baudrillard), euphoria, spectacles, “fragmented and discontinuous character of life,” “implosive technologies.”

“In the postmodern world, objects and commodities are signs; in using and consuming them we are using or consuming signs. Thus, in using or consuming fast-food restaurants and their products, we are making statements about ourselves. Of course, those statements are controlled and kept in a narrow range by the code.” (p. 349)

Strategies for dealing with the new means of consumption: offering “gifts” to the system it can’t reciprocate, reckless expenditure, homeopathic remedies (responding to postmodern systems the same way they deal with us), return of invisibility, identifying those who have avoided the new means, scrambling signs associated with the code, new cognitive maps for critiquing the new means and finding alternatives.