

Postmodern Capitalism as Symbolic Action: Aesthetics and Commerce in the Hyper-real Economy

Richard H. Brown

*Department of Sociology, University of Maryland at College Park, College Park, Maryland
20742 – 1315, USA*

KEYWORDS Postmodern. Capitalism. Hyper-real. Symbolic. Aesthetics. Sociology. Economy

ABSTRACT Capitalism has been criticized for over a century by artists and the cultural avant-garde. In the recent period, however, aesthetics and commerce are converging, as art and even social criticism become more commoditized and as capitalism become more aestheticized. This condition calls for a new language of description and analysis that can articulate both the symbolic world of the imagination and the material world of capitalism. Drawing Emile Durkheim and Kenneth Burke, the author advance “symbolic realism” as an approach well suited for this task. He then show how contemporary finance, production, and consumption, especially in the core economies of the world system, are increasingly symbolic in character. Brown concludes that the symbolic realist perspective captures these developments more fully than theories that have been advanced by other major thinkers.