

# THE MCDONALDIZATION OF SOCIETY 6

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*For information:*



Pine Forge Press  
An Imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc.  
2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks,  
California 91320

E-mail: [order@sagepub.com](mailto:order@sagepub.com)

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.  
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative  
Industrial Area

Mathura Road,  
New Delhi 110 044

India

SAGE Publications Ltd.

1 Oliver's Yard

55 City Road

London EC1Y 1SP

United Kingdom

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific

Pte. Ltd.

33 Pekin Street #02-01

Far East Square

Singapore 048763

Printed in the United States of America

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Ritzer, George.

The McDonaldization of society 6 / George Ritzer.—6th ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4129-8012-8 (pbk. : acid-free paper)

1. Social structure—United States. 2. United States—Social conditions—1980-  
3. Management—Social aspects—United States. 4. Fast food restaurants—Social  
aspects—United States. 5. Rationalization (Psychology) I. Title.

HMZ706.R58 2011

306.0973—dc22

2010007162

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

10 11 12 13 14 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Here is the way Nuland describes dehumanized death amid a sea of non-human technologies:

The beeping and squealing monitors, the hissings of respirators and pistoned mattresses, the flashing multicolored electronic signals—the whole technological panoply is background for the tactics by which we are deprived of the tranquility we have every right to hope for, and separated from those few who would not let us die alone. By such means, biotechnology created to provide hope serves actually to take it away, and to leave our survivors bereft of the unshattered final memories that rightly belong to those who sit nearby as our days draw to a close.<sup>81</sup>

## 8 Globalization and McDonaldization

Does It All Amount to . . . Nothing?

The preceding five chapters have dealt with the basic characteristics of McDonaldization, as well as the irrationalities of rationality that seemingly inevitably accompany it. In this chapter the focus shifts to McDonaldization as a type of social change. While McDonaldization is, in itself, an important type of social change, in this chapter I consider its relationship to what many observers consider to be the most important and far-reaching change of our time—globalization.

McDonaldization has many aspects and implications, but one thing that is abundantly clear is that it has global implications in terms of the exportation of McDonald's, as well as many other McDonaldized systems, from a largely American base to many other parts of the world. It is also clear that a wide range of indigenous McDonaldized forms have developed in those regions, and they are now increasingly being exported to various parts of the world, including back into the American market, the original source of much McDonaldization.

A very interesting indicator of the relationship between McDonaldization and globalization is the creation by McDonald's Europe of "McPassport." This is a certificate of training and skills that allows McDonald's workers in Europe—there are 225,000 of them in 29 countries—to move easily among jobs in McDonald's restaurants in the member nations of the European

Union.<sup>1</sup> Such global implications scream out for the need to analyze the relationship between McDonaldization and the larger process of globalization. This chapter will deal not only with that broad topic but also with how McDonaldization relates to my recent work on what I have called the "globalization of nothing."<sup>2</sup> To discuss the latter issue, I need to introduce the reader to what I mean by both globalization and nothing (and the related idea of something).

## Globalization

Globalization can generally be defined as the worldwide diffusion of practices, expansion of relations across continents, organization of social life on a global scale, and growth of a shared global consciousness.<sup>3</sup> It is clear that the world has been affected increasingly by globalization in general, as well as by the subdimensions of that process as enumerated in this definition.

McDonaldization can be seen, at least in part, as one of a number of globalization processes.<sup>4</sup> Though it is important to remember that McDonaldization is not only a globalization process (for example, it is also revolutionizing life within the United States), it is clear that, in at least some of its aspects, it can be considered under that heading. Let us look at the relationship between McDonaldization and each of the four aspects of globalization that make up the definition of that term.

First, the *practices* (for example, putting customers to work, routinely eating meals quickly and on the run, using drive-through windows) developed by McDonald's (and other leaders of the fast-food industry) in the United States have been diffused to fast-food restaurants in many other countries around the world. More generally, a wide range of practices that define many different McDonaldized settings (for example, education, law enforcement) have similarly been disseminated globally. Thus, universities in many parts of the world have been drawn toward the increasing use of large, lecture-style classes and textbooks, and police forces in many countries employ many of the efficient techniques for law enforcement and crowd control pioneered in the United States.

Second, many *intercontinental relationships* that did not exist before came into being as a result of the proliferation of McDonaldized systems. That is, the deep linkages among and between McDonaldized systems have necessitated a large number of these global relationships. For example, there are strong ties among the various restaurants around the world that are part of Yum! Brands, Inc. (e.g., Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets in various geographic locales). Less formal, but no less important, are the relationships

between law enforcement agencies or universities as they share knowledge of, and experiences with, the latest advances in the McDonaldization of their respective domains.

Third, the ensemble of these relationships has led to new ways of *organizing social life* throughout the world and across the globe. To put it most generally, the ways in which the social world is organized, even across great distances, have been McDonaldized. Not only have the ways in which people eat been restructured (for example, less in the home and more in fast-food restaurants), but the structures of higher education (fewer personal tutorials, more large lectures) and law enforcement (the increased use of "assembly-line" justice) have changed as well. In innumerable ways, the organization of everyday life has been altered, sometimes dramatically, by the spread of McDonaldization across the globe.

Finally, McDonald's, to say nothing of the many other McDonaldized systems, has led to a new *global consciousness*. Many people are well aware that they are part of an increasingly McDonaldized world, and they revel in that knowledge. Some people are thus more willing to travel to far-off locales because they know that their ability to adjust to those settings will be made easier by the existence of familiar McDonaldized settings. However, there are others with a similar (if not greater) level of awareness who abhor the process and what it is doing to their lives and the lives of many throughout the world. Such people may be disinclined to travel to some places that they believe have become highly McDonaldized. McDonald's and other McDonaldized businesses are such active and aggressive marketers that people can hardly avoid being conscious of them and the way they are changing their lives and the lives of many others throughout the world.

Thus, while it is many other things, McDonaldization is also an aspect of globalization. This fact is reflected in the ease with which the basic elements of the definition of globalization can be applied to it.

One of today's leading globalization theorists, Roland Robertson, has outlined what he considers to be the key issues in globalization theory.<sup>5</sup> While all these issues are important, three lie at the center of this chapter (and the relationship between globalization and McDonaldization), and two are closely related to one another. The two interrelated issues are these:

Does global change involve increasing homogeneity or increasing heterogeneity or a mixture of both?

What is the relationship between the local and the global?

Global heterogeneity predominates when local (or indigenous) practices are dominant in different geographic locations throughout the world. In

other words, when the way various things are done differs from one locality to another, there is a high level of heterogeneity. It is highly unlikely that any given locality, left on its own, would do anything exactly the way it is done in any other locality. In contrast, the predominance of the global in different locales throughout the world is associated with greater homogenization. That is, similar global inputs and pressures lead many localities to do various things in much the same way. Whatever the mix (and today there is always a mix) of the local and the global—heterogeneity and homogeneity—the third issue raised by Robertson remains of great importance:

What drives the globalization process? What is its motor force?<sup>7</sup>

The answers to these questions are highly complex since there is certainly no single driving force, nor is there a single process of globalization. However, after specifying my approach to the globalization process later in this chapter, I will discuss McDonaldization as one of the major motor forces in globalization.

Whatever the answers to the above questions, to say nothing of the other central questions that he raises,<sup>8</sup> it is clear that, to Robertson and many other students of globalization, the central issue is the relationship between the highly interrelated topics of homogeneity-heterogeneity and the global-local. Indeed, Robertson is known not only for his interest in these issues but for his effort to deal with this relationship through the articulation of a now-famous concept—"glocalization"—that emphasizes the integration of the global and the local and involves far more heterogeneity than homogeneity.<sup>9</sup> While glocalization is an integrative concept, and Robertson is certainly interested in both sides of the glocal-global, homogenization-heterogenization continua, he emphasizes the importance of the local and the existence of the heterogeneity associated with it.<sup>10</sup>

The concept of glocalization not only gets to the heart of Robertson's views but also speaks to what many other contemporary theorists interested in globalization think about the nature of transplanetary processes.<sup>11</sup> *Glocalization* can be defined as the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas. That is, global forces, often associated with a tendency toward homogenization, run headlong into the local in any given geographic location. Rather than either one overwhelming the other, the global and the local interpenetrate, producing unique outcomes in each location.

This emphasis on glocalization has a variety of implications for thinking about globalization in general. First, it leads to the view that the world is growing increasingly pluralistic. Glocalization theory is exceptionally

sensitive to differences within and between regions. Thus, the glocal realities in one part of the world are likely to be quite different from such realities in other parts. This worldview leads one to downplay many of the fears associated with globalization in general (and McDonaldization more specifically), especially the fear of increasing homogeneity (recall that this is one of the irrationalities of rationality) throughout the world.

Those who emphasize glocalization thus argue that individuals and local groups have great power to adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a glocalized world. Glocalization theory sees individuals and groups as important and creative agents. Although they may be subject to globalizing processes, these powerful individuals and groups are not likely to be overwhelmed by, and subjugated to, them. Rather, they are likely to modify and adapt them to their own needs and interests. In other words, they are able to glocalize them. Social processes, especially those that relate to globalization, are thus seen as relational and contingent; that is, forces pushing globalization emanate from many sources, but they generally face counter-forces in any given area of the world. What develops in any region is a result of the relationship between these forces and counter-forces; that is, whether or not the forces of globalization overwhelm the local is contingent on the specific relationship between the forces and counter-forces in any given locale. Where the counter-forces are weak, globalizing forces may successfully impose themselves, but where they are strong (and to glocalization theorists, they appear strong in most areas), a glocal form is likely to emerge that uniquely integrates the global and the local. Thus, to fully understand globalization, we must deal with the specific and contingent relationships that exist in any given locale.

From the point of view of glocalization, the forces impelling globalization are not (totally) coercive but, rather, provide material to be used in concert with the local, in individual and group creation of distinctive glocal realities. As an example, the global mass media (say, CNN or Al-Jazeera) are not seen as defining and controlling what people think and believe in a given locale but, rather, as providing additional inputs that are integrated with many other media inputs (especially those that are local) to create unique sets of ideas and viewpoints.

There is no question that glocalization is an important part of globalization, but it is far from the entire story. Furthermore, although some degree of glocalization occurs with McDonaldization, another aspect of globalization relates better to McDonaldization. That aspect of globalization is well described by the concept of *grobalization*, coined in my book *The Globalization of Nothing*, which is a much-needed companion to the notion of glocalization.<sup>12</sup> Grobalization focuses on the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed

their need, to impose themselves on various geographic areas.<sup>13</sup> Their main interest is in seeing their power, influence, and in some cases profits grow (hence the term *globalization*) throughout the world. Globalization involves a variety of subprocesses, three of which—capitalism, Americanization, and McDonaldization<sup>14</sup>—are central driving forces in globalization and thus of particular interest. While all three were dealt with in *The Globalization of Nothing*, the focus in this book will naturally be on McDonaldization. McDonaldization is both a major example of, and a key driving force in, globalization.

Globalization leads to a variety of ideas that are largely antithetical to the basic ideas associated with glocalization. Rather than emphasizing the great diversity among various glocalised locales, globalization leads to the view that the world is growing increasingly similar. While it is recognized that there are differences within and between areas of the world, what is emphasized is their increasing similarity. This focus, of course, heightens the fears of those who are concerned about the increasing homogenization associated with globalization. In contrast to the view associated with glocalization, individuals and groups throughout the world are seen as having relatively little ability to adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a globalized world. Globalization theory thus sees larger structures and forces overwhelming the ability of individuals and groups to create themselves and their worlds.

In yet another stark contrast, globalization argues that social processes are largely unidirectional and deterministic. That is, forces flow from the global to the local, and there is little or no possibility of the local having any significant impact on the global. As a result, the global is generally seen as largely determining what transpires at the local level; the impact of the global is not contingent on what transpires at the local level or on how the local reacts to the global. Globalization thus overpowers the local. It also limits the ability of the local to act and react, let alone to act reflexively back on the global.

From the perspective of globalization, then, global forces are seen as largely determining what individual(s) and groups think and do throughout the world. This view would accord far more power to global media powers such as CNN and Al-Jazeera to influence people in any given geographic area than does the viewpoint that emphasizes glocalization.

## McDonaldization and Globalization

The McDonaldization thesis contends that highly McDonaldized systems—and more important, the principles that lie at their base—have been exported from the United States to much of the rest of the world. Many nations

throughout the world, and innumerable subsystems within each, are undergoing the process of McDonaldization. To put it another way, the influence of McDonaldization has been growing throughout much of the world, and this clearly places it under the heading of globalization. The major driving force is economics—the ability of McDonaldized systems to increase profits continually is based on the need to steadily expand markets throughout the world. However, other factors help account for the growing global presence of McDonaldization, including a deep belief in the system by those who push it and a strong desire to obtain it on the part of those who do not have it.

It is interesting to note that, when they have addressed the McDonaldization thesis and related ideas, globalization theorists, especially those committed to the ideas of heterogeneity and glocalization, have tended to be critical of it for its emphasis on globalization and the resulting focus on its homogenizing impact on the rest of the world. For example, Robertson, who, as we have seen, is most associated with the idea of glocalization, says that “the frequent talk about the McDonaldization of the world . . . has been strongly tempered by what is increasingly known about the ways in which such products or services are actually *the basis for localization* [italics in original].”<sup>15</sup>

McDonaldization is obviously a global perspective, especially a global one, but it is both less and more than a theory of globalization. On the one hand, McDonaldization does not involve anything approaching the full range of global processes. For example, many economic, cultural, political, and institutional aspects of globalization are largely unrelated to McDonaldization. On the other hand, McDonaldization involves much more than just an analysis of its global impact. Much of it involves the manifold transformations taking place within the United States, the source and still the center of this process. Furthermore, one can analyze the spread of McDonaldization (once it has arrived) within many other nations and even subareas of those nations. One can, as we have seen, look at the McDonaldization of various aspects of the social world—religion, higher education, politics, and so on—without considering the global implications for each. Thus, McDonaldization is not coterminous with globalization, nor is it solely a global process. Nonetheless, McDonaldization does have global implications and can be a useful lens through which to examine changes taking place around the globe.

What is clear is that McDonaldization deserves a place in any thoroughgoing account of globalization, especially globalization. There can be little doubt that the logic of McDonaldization generates a set of values and practices that have a competitive advantage over other models. It not only promises many specific advantages, but it also reproduces itself more easily than other models of consumption (and in many other areas of society, as well). The success of

McDonaldization in the United States over the past half century, coupled with the international ambitions of McDonald's and its ilk, as well as those of indigenously clones throughout the world, strongly suggests that McDonaldization will continue to make inroads into the global marketplace, not only through the efforts of existing corporations but also via the diffusion of the paradigm.

It should be noted, however, that the continued advance of McDonaldization, at least in its present form, is far from assured. In fact, there are even signs in the United States, as well as in other parts of the world, of deMcDonaldization (as discussed in Chapter 10).<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, at the moment and for the foreseeable future, McDonaldization will continue to be an important force, and it is clearly and unequivocally not only a global process but also one that contributes mightily to the spread of "nothingness."

### Nothing-Something and McDonaldization

I have now discussed the ideas of glocalization-globalization as they relate to McDonaldization, but a second set of ideas—nothing-something, also derived from *The Globalization of Nothing*—needs to be discussed here. As we will see, these ideas relate not only directly to McDonaldization but also to its relationship to globalization in general and glocalization/glocalization in particular.

*Nothing* can be defined as a "social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content."<sup>17</sup> It should be abundantly clear that any McDonaldized system, with the fast-food restaurant being a prime example, would be a major form of nothing. However, it is important to point out that there are many other examples of nothing that have little or no direct relationship to McDonaldization.

Let us look at the example of a chain of fast-food restaurants from the viewpoint of the basic components of our definition of nothing. First, as parts of chains, fast-food restaurants are, virtually by definition, *centrally conceived*. That is, those who created the chain and are associated with its central offices conceived of the chain originally and are continually involved in its reconceptualization. For their part, owners and managers of local chain restaurants do little or no conceptualizing on their own. Indeed, they have bought the rights to the franchise, and continue to pay a percentage of their profits for it, because they want those with the demonstrated knowledge and expertise to do the conceptualizing. This relative absence of independent conceptualization at the level of the local franchise is one of the reasons we can think of the franchise as nothing.

We are led to a similar view when we turn to the second aspect of our definition of nothing—*control*.<sup>18</sup> Just as those in the central office do the

conceptualization for the local franchises, they also exert great control over them. Indeed, to some degree, such control is derived from the fact that conceptualization is in the hands of the central office; the act of conceptualizing and reconceptualizing the franchise yields a significant amount of control. However, control is exercised by the central office over the franchises in more direct ways as well. For example, it may get a percentage of a local franchise's profits, and if its cut is down because profits are down, the central office may put pressure on the local franchise to alter its procedures to increase profitability. The central office may also deploy inspectors to make periodic and unannounced visits to local franchises. Those franchises found not to be operating the way they are supposed to will come under pressure to bring their operations in line with company standards. Those that do not are likely to suffer adverse consequences, including the ultimate punishment of the loss of the franchise. Thus, local franchises can also be seen as nothing because they do not control their own destinies.

The third aspect of our definition of nothing is that it involves social forms largely *lacking in distinctive content*. This is essentially true by definition for chains of franchised fast-food restaurants. That is, the whole idea is to turn out restaurants that are virtual clones of one another. To put it another way, the goal is to produce restaurants that are as alike as one another as possible—they generally look much the same from outside, they are structured similarly within, the same foods are served, workers act and interact in much the same way, and so on. There is little that distinguishes one outlet of a chain of fast-food restaurants from all the others.

There is thus a near perfect fit between the definition of nothing offered above and a chain of fast-food restaurants. However, this is a rather extreme view since, in a sense, "nothing is nothing." In other words, all social forms (including fast-food restaurants) have characteristics that deviate from the extreme form of nothing. That is, they involve some local conceptualization and control, and each one has at least some distinctive elements. To put this another way, all social forms have some elements of somethingness. Consequently, we need to think not only in terms of nothing but also in terms of something, as well as a something-nothing continuum.

This leads us to a definition of *something* as "a social form that is generally indigenously conceived, controlled, and comparatively rich in distinctive substantive content."<sup>19</sup> This definition makes it clear that neither nothing nor something exists independently of the other; each makes sense only when paired with, and contrasted to, the other.

If a fast-food restaurant is an example of nothing, then a meal cooked at home from scratch would be an example of something. The meal is conceived by the individual cook and not by a central office. Control rests in the hands of that cook. Finally, that which the cook prepares is rich in

distinctive content and different from that prepared by other cooks, even those who prepare the same meals.

While nothing and something are presented as if they are a dichotomy,<sup>20</sup> we really need to think in terms of a continuum from something to nothing, and that is precisely the way the concepts will be employed here—as the two poles of that continuum. Although a fast-food restaurant falls toward the nothing end of the continuum, every fast-food restaurant has at least some elements different from all others; each has some elements of somethingness associated with it. Conversely, while every home-cooked meal is distinctive, it is likely to have at least some elements in common with other meals (for example, they all may rely on a common cookbook or recipe) and therefore have some elements of nothingness. No social form exists at the extreme nothing or something pole of the continuum; they all fall somewhere between the two.

However, it remains the case that some lie closer to the nothing end of the continuum, whereas others lie more toward the something end. In terms of our interests here, fast-food restaurants, and more generally all McDonaldized systems, fall toward the nothing end of the something-nothing continuum.

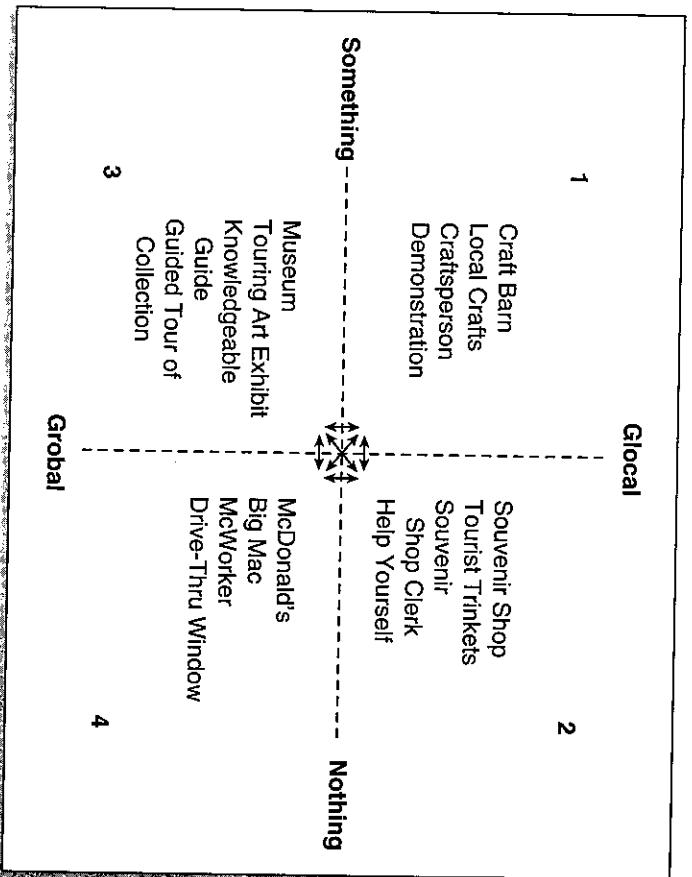
### Nothing-Something and Globalization-Glocalization

I turn now to a discussion of the relationship between globalization-glocalization and something-nothing and its implications for our understanding of McDonaldization. Figure 8.1 offers the four basic possibilities that emerge when we crosscut the globalization-glocalization and something-nothing continua. It should be noted that, while this visualization yields four “ideal types,” there are no hard-and-fast lines between them. This is reflected in the use of both dotted lines and multidirectional arrows in Figure 8.1.

Quadrants 1 and 4 in Figure 8.1 are of greatest importance, at least for the purposes of this analysis. They represent a key element of tension and conflict in the world today. Clearly, there is great pressure to globalize nothing, and often all that stands between it and the achievement of global hegemony is the glocalization of something. We will return to this conflict and its implications below.

While the other two quadrants (2 and 3) are clearly residual in nature and of secondary importance, it is necessary to recognize that there does exist, at least to some degree, a glocalization of nothing (quadrant 2) and a globalization of something (quadrant 3). Whatever tensions may exist between them, however, are of far less significance than those between the globalization of nothing and the glocalization of something. A discussion of the globalization of nothing and the globalization of something makes it clear that

Figure 8.1 The Relationship Between Glocal-Global and Something-Nothing With Examples



SOURCE: Adapted from George Ritzer. *The Globalization of Nothing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2007, p. 120.

globalization is not an unmitigated source of nothing (it can involve something) and that glocalization is not solely a source of something (it can involve nothing).

### The Globalization of Something

Some types of something have been globalized to a considerable degree. For example, gourmet foods, handmade crafts, custom-made clothes, and Rolling Stones concerts are now much more available throughout the world, and more likely to move transnationally, than ever before in history. In a very specific example in the arts, a touring series of Silk Road concerts recently brought together Persian artists and music, an American symphony orchestra, and Rimsky-Korsakov's (Russian) *Scheherazade*.<sup>21</sup> As another

example of the globalization of something, note the touring art exhibitions of the works of Vincent Van Gogh, the museums throughout the world in which such exhibitions occur, the knowledgeable guides who show visitors the highlights of the exhibition,<sup>22</sup> and the detailed information and insights they are able to impart in response to questions from gallery visitors.

In spite of examples like these, why is there comparatively little affinity between globalized and something? That is, why is globalization more likely to be associated with nothing than something? Among the most important reasons are the following:

1. There is simply far less demand throughout the world for most forms of something, at least in comparison with the demand for nothing. One reason for this is that the distinctiveness of something, be it gourmet foods, handmade crafts, or Rolling Stones or Silk Road concerts, appeals to a far more limited audience than does nothing.
2. The complexity of something, especially the fact that it is likely to have many different elements, means that it is more likely to have at least some characteristics that will put off, or even offend, large numbers of people in many different cultures. For example, a Russian audience at a Silk Road concert might be bothered by the juxtaposition of Persian music with that of Rimsky-Korsakov.
3. The various forms of something are usually more expensive, frequently much more expensive, than competing forms of nothing (gourmet food is much more costly than fast food, although as we saw earlier, fast food can be expensive for what you get). Higher cost means, of course, that far fewer people can afford something. As a result, the global demand for expensive forms of something is minuscule in comparison with that for the inexpensive varieties of nothing.
4. Because the prices are high and the demand is comparatively low, far less can be spent on the advertising and marketing of something, and this serves to keep demand low (and in some cases, tends to prevent demand from getting too high).
5. Something is far more difficult to mass manufacture and, in some cases (Silk Road concerts, Van Gogh exhibitions), impossible to produce in this way.
6. Since the demand for something is less price sensitive than nothing (the relatively small number of people who can afford it are willing, and often able, to pay almost any price), there is less need to mass manufacture it (assuming it could be produced in this way) to lower prices.
7. The costs of shipping (insurance, careful packing and packaging, special transports) something are usually very high, adding to the price and thereby reducing the demand.

8. It could also be argued that the fact that the globalization of something (compared with nothing) occurs to a lesser degree helps to distinguish something from nothing. Because it is relatively scarce, something retains its status and its distinction from nothing. If something came to be mass produced and globalized, it is likely that it would move toward the nothing end of the continuum.

## The Globalization of Nothing

The example of the globalization of nothing in Figure 8.1 is a meal at McDonald's. There is little or nothing distinctive about any given McDonald's restaurant, the food served there, the people who work in these settings, and the "services" they offer. And, of course, there has been a very aggressive effort to expand the presence of McDonald's throughout much of the world. The global expansion of McDonald's (and other fast-food chains) is therefore a near-perfect example of the globalization of nothing.

The main reasons for the strong affinity between globalization and nothing are basically the inverse of the reasons for the lack of such between globalization and something. For example:

1. Above all, there is a far greater demand throughout the world for nothing than something. This is the case because nothing tends to be (although not always is)<sup>23</sup> less expensive than something, with the result that more people can afford the former than the latter (as we know, McDonald's places great emphasis on its low prices and "value meals").
2. Large numbers of people are also far more likely to want the various forms of nothing because their comparative simplicity and lack of distinctiveness appeals to a wider range of tastes (the food at McDonald's is famous for its simple and familiar—salty and sweet—taste).
3. As pointed out earlier, that which is nothing, largely devoid of distinctive content, is far less likely to bother or offend those in other cultures (although it has aroused outrage in some cultures, the simple and basic foods of McDonald's have shown the ability to fit into many different cultures).
4. Finally, because of the far greater potential sales, much more money can be, and is, devoted to the advertising and marketing of nothing, thereby creating a still greater demand for it than for something (McDonald's spends huge sums on advertising and has been very successful at generating great demand for its fare).

Given the great demand, it is far easier to mass produce and distribute the empty forms of nothing than the substantively rich forms of something. Indeed, many forms of something lend themselves best to limited, if not



one-of-a-kind, production. A skilled potter may produce a few dozen pieces of pottery, and an artist, a painting or two, in perhaps a week, a month, or even a year(s). While these crafts and artworks may, over time, move from owner to owner in various parts of the world, this traffic barely registers in the total of all global trade and commerce. Of course, there are the rare masterpieces that bring millions of dollars, but in the main, these one-of-a-kind works are small-ticket items. In contrast, thousands, many millions, and sometimes billions of varieties of nothing are mass produced and sold throughout the globe. Thus, the global sale of fast food like Big Macs, Whoppers, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, as well as the myriad other forms of nothing, is a far greater factor in globalization than the international sale of pieces of high art (for example, the art of Van Gogh) or of tickets to the Rolling Stones' most recent world tour.

Furthermore, the economics of the marketplace demand that the massive amount of nothing that is produced be marketed and sold on a global basis. For one thing, the economies of scale mean that the more that is produced and sold, the lower the price. Almost inevitably, then, American producers of nothing (and they are, by far, the world leaders in this) must become dissatisfied with the American market, no matter how vast it is, and aggressively pursue a world market for their products. The greater the global market, the lower the price that can be charged (McDonald's can buy hamburger meat on the global market at rock-bottom prices because of the huge number of burgers it sells), meaning, in turn, that even greater numbers of nothing can be sold to far reaches of the globe in less-developed countries.

Another economic factor stems from the stock market's demand that corporations that produce and sell nothing (indeed, all corporations) increase sales and profits from one year to the next. When corporations simply meet the previous year's profitability, or experience a decline (and McDonald's was one of them not long ago), they are likely to be punished in the stock market and to see their stock prices fall, sometimes precipitously. To increase profits continually, the corporation is forced, as Karl Marx understood long ago, to continuously search out new markets. One way of achieving that end is to constantly expand globally. In contrast, since something is less likely to be produced by corporations—certainly the large corporations listed in the stock market—there is far less pressure to expand the market for it. In any case, given the limited number of these things that can be produced by artisans, skilled chefs, artists, and so on, there are profound limits on such expansion. This, in turn, brings us back to the pricing issue and relates to the price advantage that nothing ordinarily has over something. As a general rule, the various types of nothing cost far less than something. The result, obviously, is that nothing can be marketed globally far more aggressively than something.

Also, nothing has an advantage in terms of transportation around the world. These items generally can be easily and efficiently packaged and moved, often over vast areas. The frozen hamburgers and French fries that form the basis of McDonald's business are prime examples. Clearly, it would be much harder to package and move fresh hamburgers and freshly sliced potatoes, especially over large distances.

Furthermore, because the unit cost of such items is low, it is of comparatively little consequence if they go awry, are lost, or are stolen. In contrast, it is more difficult and expensive to package something—say, a piece of handmade pottery or an antique vase—and losing such things, having them stolen, or breaking them is a disaster. As a result, it is far more expensive to insure something than nothing, and this difference is another reason for the cost advantage that nothing has over something. These sorts of things serve to greatly limit the global trade in items that can be included under the heading of something.

### The Glocalization of Nothing

Historically there has been a tendency to romanticize and glorify the local, and in recent years, globalization theorists have tended to overestimate the global. It is seen by many as not only the alternative to the evils of globalization but also as a key source of much that is worthwhile in the world today. Globalization theorists often privilege the glocal something over the global nothing<sup>24</sup> (as well as over the glocal nothing, which rarely appears in their analyses). Although most globalization theorists are not postmodernists (Mike Featherstone is one exception;<sup>25</sup> see Chapter 2 for more on postmodernism), the wide-scale acceptance of various postmodern ideas (and the rejection of many modern positions) has led to positive attitudes toward glocalization among many globalization theorists.

Friedman is one social theorist who explicitly links "cultural pluralism" with the "postmodernization of the world."<sup>26</sup> The postmodern perspective is related to glocalization theory in a number of ways. For example, the work of Michel de Certeau and others on the power of the agent in the face of larger powers (like globalization) argues that indigenous actors can create unique phenomena out of the interaction of the global and the local. De Certeau, for one, talks of actors as "unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality."<sup>27</sup> A similar focus on the local community gives it the power to create unique glocal realities.<sup>28</sup> More generally, a postmodern perspective is tied to hybridity, which, in turn, is "subversive" of modern perspectives such as "essentialism and homogeneity."

While there are good reasons for the interest in, and preference for, globalization among globalization theorists,<sup>29</sup> it is clearly overdone. For one thing, globalization (especially of nothing) is far more prevalent and powerful than is commonly believed. For another, globalization itself is a significant source of nothing.

One of the best examples of the globalization of nothing is found in the realm of tourism,<sup>30</sup> especially where the global tourist meets the local manufacturer and retailer (where they still exist) in the production and sale of global goods and services (illustrated in quadrant 2 of Figure 8.1). There are certainly instances, perhaps even many of them, where tourism stimulates the production of something—well-made, high-quality craft products made for discerning tourists or meals lovingly prepared by local chefs using traditional recipes and the best of local ingredients. However, far more often, and increasingly as time goes by, global tourism leads to the globalization of nothing. Souvenir shops are likely to be bursting at the seams with trinkets reflecting a bit of the local culture. Such souvenirs are increasingly likely to be mass manufactured, perhaps using components from other parts of the world, in local factories. If demand grows great enough and the possibilities of profitability high enough, low-priced souvenirs may be manufactured by the thousands or millions elsewhere in the world and then shipped back to the local area to be sold to tourists (who may not notice, or care about, the “made in China” label embossed on their souvenir replicas of the Eiffel Tower). The clerks in these souvenir shops are likely to offer little in the way of personalized service, and tourists are highly likely to serve themselves. Similarly, large numbers of meals slapped together by semiskilled chefs that vaguely suggest local cooking are far more likely than authentic meals that are true to the region or that truly integrate local elements. They are likely to be offered in “touristy” restaurants and to be served by waitpersons who offer little in the way of service.

Another major example involves the production of native shows—often involving traditional costumes, dances, and music—for global tourists. While these shows could be something, there is a very strong tendency for them to be transformed into nothing to satisfy global tour operators and their clientele. They are thus examples of the globalization of nothing, because they become centrally conceived and controlled empty forms. The shows are often watered down, if not eviscerated, with esoteric or possibly offensive elements removed. The performances are designed to please the throngs of tourists and to put off as few of them as possible. They take place with great frequency, and interchangeable performers often seem as if they are going through the motions in a desultory fashion. These shows are just about all the global tourists want in their rush (and that of the tour operator) to see a performance, eat an ersatz local meal, and then move on to the next stop on the tour. Thus, in the area of mass tourism—in souvenirs,

performances, and meals—we are far more likely to see the globalization of nothing than of something.

### The Globalization of Something

The example of the globalization of something in Figure 8.1 (quadrant 1) is in the realm of indigenous crafts like pottery or weaving. Such craft products are quite distinctive, and they are likely to be displayed and sold in unique places like craft barns. A craftspeople is likely to make and demonstrate his or her own wares, and customers are apt to be offered a great deal of service by such craftspeople.

These global products usually remain something, although there are certainly innumerable examples (e.g., Russian *matryoshka* [stacking] dolls) that have been transformed into global, and in some cases global, forms of nothing. In fact, there is often a kind of progression here from global something to global nothing as demand grows, and then to global nothing<sup>31</sup> if some entrepreneur believes there might be a global market for such products. However, some global forms of something (indigenous cooking and art) are able to resist this process.

Global forms of something tend to remain as such for various reasons:

1. For one thing, they tend to be costly, at least in comparison with mass-manufactured competitors. High price keeps demand down locally, let alone globally.
2. Global forms of something are loaded with distinctive content. Among other things, this means that they are harder and more expensive to produce, and consumers, especially in other cultures, find them harder to understand and appreciate. Furthermore, their idiosyncratic and complex character makes it more likely that those in other cultures will find something about them they do not like or even find offensive.
3. Those who create global forms of something are not, unlike larger manufacturers of nothing, pushed to expand their business and increase profits to satisfy stockholders and the stock market. While craftspeople are not immune to the desire to earn more money, the pressure to do so is more internal than external, and it is not nearly as great or inexorable. In any case, the desire to earn more money is tempered by the fact that the production of each craft product is time-consuming and there are just so many of them that can be produced in a given time. Furthermore, craft products are even less likely to lend themselves to mass marketing and advertising than they are to mass manufacture.

This discussion of the four types of globalization puts what is McDonaldized in a larger category (the globalization of nothing) and, in

turn, in the larger context of other major types of globalization. More to the point, what is being argued here is that the most important form of globalization today is the globalization of nothing, especially the globalization of McDonaldized forms of nothing.

Although the globalization of nothing is at odds with the glocalization of something, clearly much of the power today lies with the globalization of nothing, which threatens to overwhelm and undermine the glocalization of something (through, for example, McDonaldizing these forms of something). The globalization of nothing is also at odds with the globalization of something, but these two processes seem able to exist rather comfortably side by side. One reason is that the two processes often serve very different audiences and rarely confront one another in the global marketplace. Another is that the globalization of something is minuscule in comparison with the globalization of nothing, and the latter has little difficulty simply ignoring it. Finally, there is no conflict between the globalization and the glocalization of nothing. Not only are both involved in the sale of nothing, but both are subject to the process of McDonaldization. While globalization is the natural home of McDonaldization, it is increasingly likely that the glocal will be subjected to McDonaldization and will offer McDonaldized products that manage to reflect something of the local.

Given this overview of globalization theory, especially my recent work on the globalization of nothing (and related ideas), let us now turn to a more specific discussion of McDonaldization in this context. There are two polar positions on the global implications of McDonaldization, and they parallel the two central quadrants in Figure 8.1—the glocalization of something and the globalization of nothing—and the fundamental conflict between them. On the one side are those who see McDonald's (as the prime representative of McDonaldization) as a force that integrates with the local to produce new glocal phenomena. This view leads to the idea that McDonaldization is, at worst, a benign or, at best, a positive force in the world, producing new and welcome social forms. On the other side are the critics of McDonaldization who see it as a globalizing force that overwhelms the local. Here, McDonaldization is seen as a largely negative force, destroying local differences and leading to more global homogeneity.

### The Case for McDonaldization as an Example of the Glocalization of Something

There is no question that McDonald's (and other McDonaldized systems) adapts to local conditions, realities, and tastes. In fact, the president of

McDonald's International says that the goal of the company is to "become as much a part of the local culture as possible."<sup>32</sup> Although its basic menu remains intact around the globe, McDonald's has added these local foods (among many others):

- Norway: McLaks—a grilled salmon sandwich with dill sauce on whole-grain bread
- Netherlands: Groenteburger—a vegetarian burger
- Uruguay: McHuevos—hamburgers with poached eggs—and McQuesos—roasted cheese sandwiches
- Japan: Chicken Tatsuta sandwich—fried chicken spiced with soy sauce and ginger, with cabbage and mustard mayonnaise
- Philippines: McSpaghetti—with tomato sauce or a meat sauce with frankfurter bits<sup>33</sup>
- Russia: Pirozhok—potato, mushroom, and cheese pies<sup>34</sup>
- England: McDonald's has adapted to the country's growing love affair with Indian food by offering "McChicken Korma Naan" and "Lamb McSpicy."<sup>35</sup>

And, of course, McDonald's is not alone in this effort to adapt by offering food suited to local tastes and preferences. For example, in Israel during Passover, Pizza Hut sells pizza with unleavened bread, and KFC's fried chicken has barbecue sauce rather than breading. Not to be outdone, McDonald's makes its Chicken McNuggets with matzo meal.<sup>36</sup>

McDonald's also adapts to the local environment in the way it operates its outlets.

- In Beijing, the menu is identical to that in the United States, but the food is eaten more as a snack than a meal. In spite of perceiving the food as a snack, Beijing customers (and those in other nations, as well) often linger for hours rather than eating quickly and leaving or taking their food with them as they depart the drive-through window. Perhaps the biggest difference, however, is that in Beijing McDonald's presents itself as a local company and a place to "hang out" and have ceremonies (for example, children's birthday parties) rather than someplace to get in and out of as quickly as possible. Each outlet employs 5 to 10 female receptionists; these "Aunt McDonalds"<sup>37</sup> (Ronald McDonald is known as "Uncle McDonald" in Taiwan) primarily deal with children and talk to parents.<sup>38</sup>

- As in Beijing, McDonald's in Hong Kong is a more human setting, with customers taking about twice as much time as Americans to eat their food. It is a teenage hangout from three to six in the afternoon, and McDonald's makes no effort to limit table time; it feels more like "home."<sup>39</sup> Employees rarely smile at customers. Instead, they display the traits valued in that culture—"competence, directness, and unflappability."<sup>40</sup> Those who eat in the Hong Kong

McDonald's do not bus their own debris. In addition, napkins are dispensed one at a time because, if they were placed in a public dispenser, they would disappear very quickly.

- In Taipei, McDonald's is also a hangout for teenagers. Generally, it is treated as a home away from home; it is "familiar and indigenous."<sup>41</sup> The same customers return over and over again and come to know one another quite well.

As a way of summarizing the preceding examples, James L. Watson contends that "East Asian consumers have quietly, and in some cases stubbornly, transformed their neighborhood McDonald's into [g]local institutions."<sup>42</sup> Or even more on target from the perspective of the argument being made in this section, Watson argues that in Hong Kong it "is no longer possible to distinguish what is local and what is not."<sup>43</sup> In China, McDonald's is seen as being as much a Chinese phenomenon as it is an American phenomenon. In Japan, McDonald's is perceived by some as "Americana as constructed by the Japanese."<sup>44</sup> In James L. Watson's terms, it is a "transnational" phenomenon. To Watson, rather than being monolithic, McDonald's is a "federation of semi-autonomous enterprises."<sup>45</sup>

All these examples point to McDonald's (and more generally McDonaldization) as a glocal phenomenon, and in making this case, the implication is that what is produced is—in the terms of this analysis—something. Although what is produced is sometimes described as local, it is clearly not local since it is affected, often profoundly, by the global; it is an integration of the global and the local—it is glocal! It cannot be thought of as global since the local is not being overwhelmed but, rather, integrated with the global. And much of what is produced at the glocal level can be thought of as something, or at least as lying closer to that end of the something-nothing continuum than clearly global phenomena such as Big Macs or Chicken McNuggers. While they may be the same throughout Uruguay, McHuevos or McQuesos are unique in content, if for no other reason than they are not sold in many, if any, other countries. In contrast, of course, the Big Mac sold in Uruguay is just about the same as one sold anywhere else. Similarly, because people are encouraged to hang out in certain McDonald's in East Asia, they are more likely to create a unique social environment there than they are in most other places where they rarely stay long enough to create anything unique.

There is no question that McDonald's (and other McDonaldized systems) adapts in various ways to local realities throughout the world. The ability to adapt has helped McDonald's succeed overseas. However, if McDonald's adapts too much—if it abandons its standard foods and methods of operation<sup>46</sup> and thus loses its identity and uniformity—it undermines the source of much of its worldwide success. If local McDonald's around the world go their own way, will they eventually cease to be identifiable as McDonald's?

Will the company itself (or at least its international operations) eventually be undermined, and perhaps destroyed, by such local adaptation?

### The Case for McDonaldization as an Example of the Globalization of Nothing

As is made clear at the close of the preceding section, McDonaldized systems must remain standardized. They cannot help but impose themselves (and their standardized products and systems), at least to some degree, on local markets throughout the world. Although McDonald's may adapt to local realities in various ways, its basic menu and the fundamental operating procedures remain essentially the same everywhere in the world. In this sense, McDonald's can be seen as the epitome of the globalization of nothing. Thus, the "nothingness" of its standard fare and its basic operating principles tend to threaten, and in many cases replace, local fare and principles of operation.

The enormous expansion in the international arena of the giant fast-food chains that originated in the United States is one manifestation of the globalization of nothing. In many ways, however, the mere existence of standard American chains in other countries is not the most important indicator of the globalization of nothing in the form of McDonaldization; rather, the more vital indicator is the existence of indigenous clones of those McDonaldized enterprises in an increasing number of countries throughout the world. After all, the presence of American imports could simply be a manifestation of an invasion of isolated and superficial elements that represent no fundamental threat to, or change in, a local culture. But the emergence of native versions reflects an underlying change in those societies, a genuine McDonaldization, and powerful evidence of the globalization of nothing.

The following examples reflect the power of McDonald's to transform local restaurants. They are also manifestations of nothing in the sense that they are largely lacking in distinctive content and aping many standards developed by McDonald's and others of its ilk.

- The success of the many McDonald's restaurants in Russia<sup>47</sup> led to the development of indigenous enterprises such as Russkoye Bistrot. Said Russkoye Bistrot's deputy director, "If McDonald's had not come to our country, then we probably wouldn't be here."<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, "We need to create fast food here that fits our lifestyle and traditions . . . We see McDonald's like an older brother . . . We have a lot to learn from them."<sup>49</sup>
- In China, Ronghua Chicken and Xiangfei Roast Chicken emulate Kentucky Fried Chicken. The Beijing Fast Food Company has almost a thousand local restaurants and street stalls that sell local fare. Several of the company's

- executives are former employees of KFC or McDonald's, where they learned basic management techniques. Even "the most famous restaurant in Beijing—Quanjude Roast Duck Restaurant—sent its management staff to McDonald's and then introduced its own 'roast duck fast food.'"<sup>58</sup>
- In Japan, the strongest competitor to McDonald's is Mos Burger (with over 1,600 outlets), which serves "a sloppy-joe-style concoction of meat and chile sauce on a bun."<sup>51</sup> The corporate parent also operates chains under other names such as Chirimentei, a chain of 161 Chinese noodle shops in Japan (and two more in the People's Republic of China), Nakau (rice and Japanese noodles), with 266 outlets, and Milkoshi, four Japanese noodle houses in California.<sup>52</sup>
  - In Seoul, competitors to McDonald's include Uncle Joe's Hamburger (the inventor of the kimchi burger, featuring an important local condiment made from spicy pickled cabbage)<sup>53</sup> and Americana.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond providing a model for local restaurants (and many other local institutions), McDonaldization poses a threat to the customs of society as a whole. This threat involves the globalization of nothing to the degree that distinctive local customs are dropped and replaced by those that have their origins elsewhere and are lacking in distinction. For example,

- While their parents still call them "chips," British children now routinely ask for "French fries."<sup>55</sup>
- In Korea (and Japan), the individualism of eating a meal at McDonald's threatens the commensality of eating rice, which is cooked in a common pot, and of sharing side dishes.
- As in the United States, McDonald's has helped transform children into consumers in Hong Kong (and in many other places).
- Immigrants to Hong Kong are given a tour that ends at McDonald's.<sup>56</sup> If all cities did this, there would, at least in this case, be nothing to distinguish one city from another.
- In Japan, McDonald's is described as a new "local" phenomenon. A Japanese Boy Scout was surprised to find a McDonald's in Chicago; he thought it was a Japanese firm.<sup>57</sup>

As local residents begin to see McDonald's and McDonaldized systems as their own, the process of McDonaldization, and more generally the globalization of nothing, will surely embed itself ever more deeply into the realities of cultures throughout the world.<sup>58</sup> For example, the traditional and quite distinctive Japanese taboo against eating while standing has been undermined by the fast-food restaurant. Also subverted to some degree is the cultural sanction against drinking directly from a can or bottle. The norm against eating with one's hands is holding up better (the Japanese typically eat their burgers in the wrappers so that their hands do not touch the food directly); nevertheless, the fact that deeply held norms are being transformed by McDonald's is

evidence of the profound impact of McDonaldization. It reflects the globalization of nothing in the sense that norms common in the United States and elsewhere (for example, eating while standing and drinking from a can) are now replacing norms distinctive to Japan (and many other nations).

McDonaldization and the globalization of nothing are powerful global realities, but they do not affect all nations, nor do they affect nations to the same degree. For example, Korea, unlike other East Asian locales, has a long history of anti-Americanism (coexisting with pro-American feelings) and of fear that Americanism will destroy Korean self-identity. Thus, one would anticipate more opposition there to McDonaldization than in most other nations.

Despite the negative effects of McDonaldization on local customs, we must not forget that McDonaldized systems bring with them many advances. For example, in Hong Kong (and in Taipei), McDonald's served as a catalyst for improving sanitary conditions at many other restaurants in the city. In addition, McDonaldization has at times helped resuscitate local traditions. For example, although fast-food restaurants have boomed in Taipei, they have also encouraged a revival of indigenous food traditions, such as the eating of betel nuts. In his book *Jihad vs. McWorld*, Benjamin Barber argues that the spread of "McWorld" brings with it the development of local fundamentalist movements (*jihad*s) deeply opposed to McDonaldization.<sup>59</sup> However, in the end, Barber concludes that McWorld will win out over the *jihad*. To succeed on a large scale, he says, fundamentalist movements must begin to use McDonaldized forms of communication (such as e-mail, the Internet, and television).

It is worth closing with the point that the globalization of nothing in general, and McDonaldization in particular, are most important about the proliferation of systems. While most of the attention of those who study the globalization of consumption focuses on products, especially food, more attention should be devoted to the globalization of systems. In fact, when critics of the McDonaldization thesis point to the modest food adaptations in various societies, I often feel impelled to shout out: "McDonaldization is *not* about the food!" Rather, it is about the system characterized by the basic principles of McDonaldization—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control—and its global proliferation.

Alan Bryman understands that McDonaldization (as well as his notion of Disneyization) involves a system, a set of principles for producing, delivering, and presenting goods and services.<sup>60</sup> As a former managing director of McDonald's in Singapore said, "McDonald's sells . . . a system, not products."<sup>61</sup> Uri Ram also understands this point: "'McDonaldization' is not merely or mainly about the manufactured objects—the hamburgers—but first and foremost about the deep-seated *social relationships* involved in their production and consumption [italics added]."<sup>62</sup>