

# AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE RITZER

## on prosumption, McDonaldization, enchantment, and globalization

Interviewed by  
Andrew Mark Creighton

George Ritzer is an American sociologist whose work has covered a variety of topics, including metatheory and the history of sociological thought and theory, globalization, consumerism, and rationalization. A Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Maryland, he has been a prominent figure in sociology, and the wider social sciences and culture studies throughout this and the late 20th century. The justifications for this interview partially stem from these accomplishments and innovations Ritzer has contributed to sociology and greater academia, especially regarding his work on rationalization, prosumption, enchantment, and globalization. The prominence and importance of these concepts within sociology and similar fields mark them as important for consideration in wider semiotic studies of institutions, media, behavior, and so on, as they offer valuable insights into human action and organization.

Further justifications come from my personal and professional perspective as a scholar interested in culture, zoosemiotics, and rationalization. I have taken a particular fascination with Ritzer's works, especially regarding McDonaldization and enchantment, as this theoretical framework serves as an important means to understand the treatment of animals within various institutions, such as zoological gardens and aquarium parks, as well as the human and nonhuman animal interactions within these settings. Consequently, I have also conducted this interview to gain further insights and clarifications from Ritzer on these concepts and associated terms such as nonhuman technology, simulated animals and humans, etc., to develop my own understanding of the sociologist's work.

A third reason for this interview is to help disseminate Ritzer's work within semiotic circles. With the continued managerialization of universities and other important institutions, the prevalence of ecological disasters and the Anthropocene, and the ever-present anomie and alienation within our societies, works like Ritzer's are increasingly important as they offer a critical framework to understand how and

why such issues are so pervasive throughout the world. As such, I believe Ritzer's work should be considered within semiotics as a voice capable of offering much to the field and its practitioners as individuals through informed critical analysis of the rationalization process, globalization, and their enchantment. Consequently, I intend this interview as a starting point for young and early-career semioticians to use as a stepping-stone into academics on McDonaldization, prosumption, globalization, and the wider sociology of labour and consumption. The interview was held over Zoom on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, with me being in the doctoral student's room at the semiotics department at the University of Tartu, and with Dr. Ritzer at his sunny Florida home. Aside from a few internet connectivity issues, the interview went pleasantly well, and Dr. Ritzer covered a wide-range of topics from the above-mentioned McDonaldization, prosumption, globalization, enchantment and so on, to the importance of experience in developing sociological perspectives, all of which can be found in the following interview.

## Interview

**Andrew Mark Creighton:** As a warm-up question, can you discuss McDonaldization in general? What are the negative and positive aspects of McDonaldization? How did you come to the idea? How does it relate to Max Weber's concept of rationalization?

**George Ritzer:** Well, there's a kind of a duel or multiple sources of my interest in McDonaldization. One is autobiographical in the sense that I was raised in New York. New York, when I was a kid, was the town of small entrepreneurs, small shops, maybe the beginning of supermarkets, but certainly no McDonalds or anything like it, or much like it. So, I remember in 1959, '60, I was going up to Amherst with a friend who was enrolling there as a student, and when we got there, we went past a McDonald's, and I'd never seen a McDonald's. For some reason, it made an indelible impression on me, and part of the reason for that was the fact that it was something new. It struck me as something significant. I don't think I knew at that point what the significance was, but I knew I wanted to attend to it at some point.

Then, from a sociological point of view, my work in the beginning was on production and the sociology of work. As I worked on that, I came to see the importance of consumption in concert with production, and so I came to the view that you had to look at both of them. Now, I had to overcome my initial focus on the sociology of work, and it took me a while to accord consumption the importance that it deserved. But eventually, I came to see consumption and production as co-equal parts in the importance of economic analysis, especially in capitalism, but anywhere. When I started teaching, I was teaching largely social theory, particularly the work of Max Weber. I was struck particularly by his work on rationalization, and he focused on bureaucracy, which was largely an organizational form oriented towards

production. What I came to see is that his thinking on bureaucracy had a parallel in the realm of consumption. And that parallel, eventually, that I came to see was the fast-food restaurant. He saw bureaucracy as a revolutionary development in his time, and the fast-food restaurant was, for me, a revolutionary development.

I think it clearly has been a revolutionary development in terms of its world impact, and even now, McDonald's ending its business in Russia reflects its global importance<sup>1</sup>. Somehow, I was drawn to the fast-food restaurant as a parallel, in the realm of consumption, to the bureaucracy, in the realm of production. Gradually, as my focus shifted from production to consumption, it shifted from the bureaucracy and the kind of organizations that Weber was interested in, to the fast-food restaurant. The fast-food restaurant, to me, was a basic model, as was the bureaucracy for Weber<sup>2</sup>, for the larger process, and that larger process is rationalization. Bureaucracy has served to rationalize work and production, and the fast-food restaurant came to rationalize, primarily, consumption. Although production as well, I mean the worker in a fast-food restaurant is also rationalized, as is the consumer, and now that is the great revolution that seems to be in fast-food restaurants and McDonald's in particular. It's one thing to rationalize the work of a worker that you pay and who has to basically go along with whatever you do, and it's quite another thing to rationalize the work of a consumer you're providing a service for, and they don't have to go along with it, but they did. They eagerly conformed to the norms as they developed and to the structure of the fast-food restaurants.

For instance, there were long lines, like being in Russia in the early 90s, huge lines at the McDonald's in Moscow. That's when Russia was first opening up; of course it's now closed again. But in any case, and in the United States, the lines weren't as long, but always there was a long line of people waiting to get to McDonald's. So, it's obviously very busy, and it became very proficient at handling a throng of people like that, and in rationalizing the work of workers to handle that number of people, and imposing work on the consumer. The consumer does a lot of work in the fast-food restaurant. It's not all provided by the workers; there are various things that consumers have to do. They have to stand in line, they have to get their food, they have to get the trays and go to the condiment bar, things like that before they can get to their tables. They have to serve themselves, and they have to clean up after themselves. So, I came to see the consumer as working. Just as I had come to see the producer as consuming, and eventually, I came to the view that you can't think of consumption without production. There's no such thing in my mind as consumption without production. You are producing something when you consume; you may be physically producing a part of the meal as you're doing at a fast-food restaurant, or

<sup>1</sup> Dr. J. Michael Ryan mentioned to me through email correspondence that *Vkusno i tochka* (Вкусно - и точка), which translates roughly to "Tasty, and that's it" has taken the place of McDonalds in Russia. Ryan also informed me that *Vkusno i tochka* has taken the place of McDonalds in Kazakhstan too, due to supply chain issues.

<sup>2</sup> See: Weber, Max 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. (Gerth, Hans H.; Mills, C. Wright, eds.), New York: Oxford University Press.

you may be producing the means that are necessary in such a setting. So, no such thing as consumption without production, and no such thing as production without consumption. Really, all producers are consuming various things or materials in the process of production. So, I came to think of those as inextricably involved. I had been reading Alvin Toffler's book, *Future Shock*<sup>3</sup>, and he, as part of his grand narrative, introduced the prosumer. He really doesn't do very much with it. It's kind of a throwaway in his broader grand narrative of what he's developing, and I hit upon that idea as being what I was trying to get at when I saw both consumers and producers as important, and both consumers and producers as consuming and producing. So, I came to see a continuum of producers, on the one hand, and consumers, on the other hand. With the middle as a kind of pure prosumption, but always, if you're a consumer, you're mainly consuming, but you're also producing. There's no such thing as consumption without production. At the same time, on the other end of the continuum, it is production, but there's no production without consumption. You have to consume things in order to produce. So that led to a kind of continual view of this, with prosumption in the middle and production and consumption related to the poles of this continuum and relegated, I think, to secondary importance.

That is, I think in the history of sociology in the United States especially, work was central. Whereas in Europe, eventually, they came to focus more on consumption, which I was really unaware of when I came to be concerned with consumption. But there's this bifurcation of work on production and work on consumption as if they were separate from one another. From my point of view, they were never separate and especially not separate in contexts where prosumption is the main form of activity. This is clearest, I think, on the Internet, where you're always producing things and consuming things almost simultaneously. So, I wrote about this in the digital age and about how important this is in the digital age, but it was always important.

**AMC:** You discuss this concept of prosumption, especially in regards to the new Cathedrals of consumption or the new means of consumption, and you give quite a lot of examples, including self-checkout machines and, again, cleaning up your own mess in fast-food restaurants. So, I understand that this concept of prosumer, and prosumption, is really beneficial for understanding consumption and production as being two processes within the wider dichotomy, I guess you could say. But within consumer societies, I think we see an emergence of these sorts of, I guess you could say, everyday occurrences of prosumption, where once there was some division between consuming and producing (Ritzer 2005; 2010; 2015). So, I was wondering, why is this happening? What causes or enables consumers to go along with this merging, or what you refer to as the implosion, of the different roles of consumption and production?

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<sup>3</sup> Toffler, Alvin 1970. *Future Shock*. New York: Random House.

**GR:** That's an interesting question. Why is it? Why do consumers not just do this work of production or work in general, but they do it happily or joyfully? They're happy to line up and get their own food and cart it to their table. I always marveled because I was older when I first came to McDonald's. I always marveled at the fact that people were cleaning up after themselves; weren't there workers to do this? Why was I going to do this?

So, this system was based on, I mean, the McDonald's system or others like it, was based on the idea that the consumers would do the work and they'd work for nothing. Now, that's critical because McDonald's and fast-food restaurants operate in a capitalist context, and capitalism is all about profit. And to gain profit when you have workers, going back to Marx, you seek to drive the wages of the workers down as close to zero as you possibly can. Of course, you can't get to zero because no one is going to come to work if you're not paying them. But consumers were coming to work, and they weren't being paid anything, and they were doing it happily. You didn't have the kind of alienation that you had in work settings where people were being forced to produce. I kind of marveled at this; why are people doing this for nothing? Why are they doing it so joyfully? My exposure in the sociology of work had always been to workers who were alienated workers who were angry. Workers on the assembly line don't like the production process. Now, it's clearly not a consumer or prosumer's main activity, but nonetheless, it is a significant activity, and they're doing it happily. In the end, what prosumers do is increase the profit of capitalism. You can get prosumers to do work for nothing that you used to have to pay low-paid workers, pay, in order to do it. So, there are fewer and fewer lowly paid, poorly paid workers and more and more consumers who are doing that work. That struck me as another one of the miracles of capitalism, that capitalism has accomplished the seeming impossibility of getting people to work for nothing and do it happily.

**AMC:** Perhaps you can discuss how your concept of the prosumer and prosumption differs from Toffler's?

**GR:** He doesn't develop the concept very much; it's not central to his work. It's a stage in this larger grand narrative, as sociologists call it, of the development of the economy, and it's largely undeveloped in his work. It's largely a throwaway concept, and so what I did was focus on it and develop it more. To flush it out to this continuum idea, as prosumption involves both production and consumption, consumption and production as production, and consumption as consumption, and consumption as production. So maybe that's a little complicated to say it that way, but basically, you have to look at the consumer side of the producer and the production side of the consumer. So, it's a much more, I think, elaborate model of the prosumer than it was in Toffler's work.

**AMC:** I believe you first published a text about McDonaldization in the 1980s, but it really became prominent in the 90s. It's been used to analyze a wide range of phenomena, from agriculture (Morris, Reed 2007) to academic libraries (Nicholson 2015). It's been applied over quite a large area, and I've seen a lot of applications. So, considering the duration, popularity and variety of applications of McDonaldization theory, do you have any criticisms on how it has been used? For instance, have you noticed oversimplifications in some papers, or have you noticed applications appearing too far out of its intended context?

**GR:** Well, first, let me say that I've been amazed at the impact that McDonaldization has had as a book. I mean, in the early years when it first came out, it sold very widely to students as a teaching book, and it is still used that way. What surprised me was eventually, that is also simultaneously, it has its impact on academics. And academics were using it in a variety of different ways. That's what you're talking about here: the ways in which academics have used the concept. I mean, it's still used in the classroom; it's a very teachable book, but the use of it by academics has proliferated, as you suggest. I don't know if I can go into the details; I'm not sure I've read them all. But the main criticism I had a lot when I was asked to review papers for journals, well for our colleagues, the main thing I objected to was the mechanical way in which my four — five — dimensions of McDonaldization were being applied. As a sort of mechanical exercise in taking these four concepts, five concepts, five concepts include the irrationality of rationality, and applying them to whatever you happened to be working on, and that was a simplification.

My main criticism of a lot of it was that they were mechanically applying those five dimensions of McDonaldization to whatever it was they were analyzing, and so there was nothing critical about it, nothing self-reflective about it; it was just mechanical. You could say in a way that the research was McDonaldized, as it was just mindlessly applying my model to whatever phenomenon they were interested in. Now, it did apply to a lot of different things, but it had to be more than simply mechanically applied. So, I'm sure I had specific criticisms of specific works, but that was my main criticism of the whole body of literature on McDonaldization: we see that model repeat over and over and over again.

**AMC:** When I was preparing for this interview, I went through the various editions of *The McDonaldization of Society*, and it's, quite apparent that we can't simply reject McDonaldization, and it's in a sense, becoming more and more ingrained within our society. Specifically, in the 2021 edition, you discussed how there seems to be less and less interest in resisting rationalization in general. So, I was wondering, is there still hope? Can we somehow resist McDonaldization or even overcome it?

**GR:** Well, a phenomenal number of people have accepted the model. They've accepted the fact, sort of like the academics using my McDonaldization model, we've accepted the model that McDonald's imposes on us and how we're supposed to



operate and get in line, march through, pick up our food, pay for our food, take it to the table, eat the food, clean up after ourselves, that sort of thing. There's very little obvious criticism of that model or rebellion against it. In fact, it's the opposite; I think more and more people have come to accept it as the way it goes. It's kind of depressing from my point of view, but people are not rebelling against the imposition of this model on them. In the area of the sociology of work, people who worked at assembly lines, actively rejected that model, which was being imposed on them; people who worked in bureaucracies actively resisted that.

I used to write about resistance to McDonaldization; escape routes from McDonaldization. I think in the last edition there was still a section on escape routes, but in the latest edition, I took it out because I don't think anybody is much interested in escaping McDonaldization. I think they love it, or like it, they'll put up with it, but they don't really rebel against it. And, of course, it's also class-linked. If you're wealthy, you can afford to eat in a non-McDonaldized restaurant and non-McDonaldized places in one kind or another. But if you're not wealthy you're really forced to eat in those kinds of places, if you want an inexpensive meal. And the relatively poor, or non-wealthy people, they're not rebelling against the model because it works for them. They're able to get things inexpensively. Ironically, the wealthy accept it as a basic model for basic things, but when they want to live a wealthy life, they go to a fancy restaurant. They can go to a fancy restaurant in the U.S. or in many places and pay \$500.00 for a chef-prepared meal. So, the wealthy go there; they don't go to the McDonald's to eat. Although, I think it's also the case that the McDonald's model is being extended to a higher and higher level of dining and other kinds of things. So, it's a model that is very attractive because, mainly, as I said before, those who run these places have a system where, well, they're earning money because they're not paying anybody to do the work. So, they want to employ this model as much as they can, and people are more and more accepting of it. It's hard to, as I said, I used to write about escape routes, and it's hard to write about that. I don't think anybody is much interested in escaping from McDonaldization; I think we're either resigned to it or like it.

I think Disney World, for example, is a very regimented world, and people love that world, and they march from one attraction to another, and line up here and line up there, and nobody who goes to Disney World is rebelling against it. That's the other thing, of course, is the model exists throughout society now, and there is a debate about whether it's Disneyfication or McDonaldization. Fundamentally, from my point of view, they're the same basically, operating on efficiency and productivity, and things like that. So, the ubiquity of the model and the fact that people have come to accept it and not rebel against it is troubling for me because, as you can guess from the book, I don't much like this. I don't much like the world that's being produced here, and I think good sociology has to be animated by strong feelings, and I have strong feelings about this. They're not at the forefront of my work, but they're behind the work, and that reflects in various ways in the work.

**AMC:** Would you say that age also has a part, or plays a part, in the lack of resistance against McDonaldization? Where people who were born and raised within a very McDonaldized setting really don't understand what it means, or what it feels like, to be outside of such settings?

**GR:** Yes, absolutely. I think if you don't know that there are alternatives, if you haven't lived in other cultures, for example, most Americans live in America — they only know America, they don't travel to other societies very much, and so they don't see alternatives, so people are raised in this environment. From childhood, they're brought up in this environment, and they don't see any other alternatives, and they don't yearn for an alternative to it. It just comes to be accepted as a way of life, and I think that's generally what we see now; people are accepting of all this.

Of course, as I pointed out, I was born in a different era, and in my era, there were people who did the work for you, you didn't do the work for them. If I went to a delicatessen, the deli man sliced the meat and put it on bread for me, I didn't have to create my own sandwich. So that experience led me to see that there is an alternative to having this work imposed on the consumer, and so the older generation should see the difference between what the world was like when they were younger and what it's like today. On the other hand, as the younger generation gets older, they too, have only experienced McDonaldization. So, you end up with a very bleak Weber-like conclusion where we're in this iron cage of rationalization, and people don't know any alternative to it. Even if they go to another society, they go on a tour or take one of the most McDonaldized things, a cruise ship, and so they like these kinds of regimented sort of things. And in the main, even the older generation does not necessarily know the alternatives to a McDonaldized world.

**AMC:** In the 2002 interview between you and ecophilosopher Derek Jensen, you both discussed the rationalization of the means of escape, especially in regard to this sort of awe that nature inspires. You both come to the conclusion that due to various rationalized avenues, and being socialized into consumer culture, even when we are within a natural setting, we don't build a relationship with it. We just sort of go through it, and enjoy it, which prevents us from escaping rationalized systems; it's just another wall in a sense. And Jensen specifically noted, and I'm quoting Jensen here from the interview, "Even our interactions within the natural world are merely aesthetic; we consume natural beauty rather than being in relationship with nature" (Jensen, Ritzer 2002). And I think Jean Baudrillard also discussed something similar in his book, *The Consumer Society*, where he describes parks, nature reservations, etc., as being sort of, quoting Baudrillard, "background scenery for second homes" and he sort of, well, he categorizes this as a type of simulation (Baudrillard 1998: 100-101). So, I was wondering, can our relationships with nature be fully or absolutely McDonaldized, either with nature being completely simulated or with us being so acculturated to consumer codes that the awe of nature becomes fully dulled or consumable?



**GR:** Well, to some degree, the latter is true. I mean, our appreciation of nature is being reduced to one form of consumption. But the thing about nature is that it has its way of acting back on people and acting in unanticipated ways, and we have lots of examples of that with global warming. So, I live in Florida, and we have our hurricane season, and you have these events that nature brings about that upset the notion that this is a controllable world, like a Disney world. A woman in my community, or nearby community, and this happened a week or two ago, got eaten by an alligator. I have alligators in my little pond down here, and there are alligators all over Florida. They are part of the environment, but sometimes nature strikes back, and at one level, it's a hurricane; at another level, it's an alligator that eats a person. But at a higher level, it's climate change, and so in various ways, because we can't control it, nature takes on a different kind of meaning than does the rest of the social world.

**AMC:** So, I remember you discussed being on a trip with your son around Dollywood, and you were quite overwhelmed by how thoroughly McDonaldised this area was. Later on, however, outside of Dollywood, there was a traffic jam because a bear had appeared by the road (Ritzer 2010; Jensen, Ritzer 2002). So, in a sense, I think this is similar to what you were talking about just now about climate change and alligators. So, do you think this may offer some potential, the uncontrollability of nature, for a relationship that can ignite some resistance?

**GR:** It might, but on the other hand, what it does is spur efforts of control. We don't want unpredictability, we want a predictable world, we don't want people eaten by alligators, we don't want hurricanes, and we don't want bears in our way. So, we seek to expand our control over these sorts of things, and to a large degree, we're successful at that. I mean, there are these accidents, but they are rare accidents. The reality is I watch the alligators swim by in my pond. They're basically part of a tourist site. We have visitors who come to see the alligator swimming out here. So, mostly, we've controlled this, we've rationalized this. And so, the unpredictabilities associated with nature are progressively reducing, especially in rich developed countries where you have the wealth to handle this in various kinds of ways. Whereas in the less developed areas of the world, nature is much more at your doorstep, much more active, much more threatening, and much more dangerous. After all, McDonaldisation is about, in part, eliminating all the dangers from your life. So, you have various things at Disney World, where you could be in what could've been a dangerous environment, with a lion or whatever, and it's neutralized, it's controlled. So, what people increasingly see more than the uncontrolled nature and the nature of nature is the way in which we're able to control nature. But you know, when a hurricane hits or when an alligator eats somebody, we're reminded of the unpredictability, just as the traffic jam was created by the bear on the road near Dollywood.

**AMC:** Perhaps we can look at your concepts of human technology and nonhuman technology. You describe nonhuman technology as being technology that controls its users, as opposed to human technology, which the user controls (Ritzer 1983). When you apply these two concepts in analysis, would you say there are significant absolute examples of nonhuman technology in our everyday life?

**GR:** Well, I think increasingly nonhuman technologies control us, and maybe the best example of this is the expanding use of artificial intelligence. We're increasingly communicating with the computer, and we're increasingly communicating with a smart computer that's getting to be as smart as we are, if not smarter. So, I don't think that is declining. I think rather it is increasing with advances in technology. And as technology advances, I think these new technologies will certainly have more control over us. Students are now researching topics based on what they see in artificial intelligence, what we're saying about things that we've seen in artificial intelligence, rather than researching what other humans have done. So, I suppose if you looked up McDonaldization, you'd get an analysis from the computer of what it is that concept is all about. You'd get a computer's version of what that concept is about rather than a human being's reading of what that's about. So, you get a pretty mechanical, by definition it's going to be mechanical, perspective of the concept, and then you end up with a mechanical view of the world rather than the more organic view.

**AMC:** Would you say the increasing popularity of this nonhuman technology and its ability to control us comes from us just going happily along with it?

**GR:** Well, yeah, I think students are probably happy to have artificial intelligence write their paper for them rather than to do the research themselves. And I think that probably applies in a variety of settings.

**AMC:** Do most nonhuman technologies control us despite behavior and norms, or on the other hand, do many examples of nonhuman technology rely on McDonaldized norms and behaviors, or codes, to implement control over its users?

**GR:** Well, I guess I would say that artificial intelligence would, as an extreme example. It doesn't rely on norms and values. It's a technical system that controls us. So, I think we're moving away from the control of bureaucracy, which was a combination of man and a rational system; it combined human beings into it. Artificial intelligence has taken human beings out of the equation, and it's producing things on its own rather than consulting with and relying on human beings. So, my view is sort of in line with my pessimistic view of the world, and I share that with Weber. Weber was a pessimist, talking about the iron care of rationalization. I'm very pessimistic about all these things, because I think that these things increasingly being accepted by people are going to exert control over them, and exerting control on them that they never realized was inexorable.

**AMC:** In much of your work, you stress the global aspect of McDonaldization, so I'd like to explore how this relates to the concept of 'nothing'. You refer to 'nothing' as an ideal type, and I am quoting you here, "a social form, that is, generally, centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content" (Ritzer 2003: 191), and you place this on a spectrum with the other, the opposite side of 'nothing', that being 'something' which is indigenously conceived, containing substantive contents, yet still controlled. So, how much is 'nothing' a product of McDonaldization, especially on a global scale?

**GR:** Well, 'nothing', I think, is a broader concept than McDonaldization. The argument, I think, about 'nothing' and ultimately about the globalization of 'nothing', and globalization more generally, is in *The McDonaldization of Society*. My paradigm of 'nothing' is the fast-food restaurant. The fast-food restaurant is centrally conceived, centrally controlled, and lacking in distinctive content. So, in a way, I was generalizing from that to a broader theory of 'nothing', which, I saw as a definition of a McDonald's restaurant, versus 'something', which I saw as a gourmet restaurant, for example. So, I think in that kind of continuum terms, and I would say that McDonaldization is the basis of my thinking about 'nothing', not the other way around; I was led to the concept of 'nothing'.

I wrote about the McDonaldization process as a globalizing process, so what's being globalized if McDonald's is 'nothing'? Then, 'nothing' is being globalized. I think there's some truth to that, that culturally indigenous forms are being replaced by McDonaldized forms, and forms that are significant in certain ways are being replaced by those which are insignificant. McDonald's has globalized the fast-food restaurant and, in the process, has globalized the 'nothingness' of restaurants. And it's a basic example of the globalization of 'nothing', but it's far from the only one. In fact, there are broader examples of mass-produced products of one kind or another. Most products are 'nothing' in those terms, if you're mass-producing an automobile, it is 'nothing'; it meets my definition of 'nothing'. So, the great expansion of mass-produced products and their global distribution is another example of the globalization of 'nothing'.

**AMC:** So, perhaps I can focus a little more on this indigenous aspect of McDonaldization. And for instance, from what I understand, McDonald's itself was developed in California but has really gone globally, obviously. So, how indigenous is McDonald's still to California? How do you categorize something as being indigenous? Is it just when it is transplanted from another region? Or can something develop within a specific region but become alien to the region through its rationalization or development of 'nothingness'?

**GR:** Well, California was really the home of a lot of the early McDonaldized systems, and a number of fast-food restaurants have their origins in California. Part of the reason for that was the automobile and the drive-through restaurant, where you

could eat your meal in a parking lot or go through a drive-through window. California was the centre of that kind of culture. So, it was a model that developed in California. It developed, refined, and expanded in California and then expanded throughout the world. It works well in California, but it works less well in Uganda, for example, so I think these forms fit into a particular local environment, but when they get generalized globally, they fit less well. So that's the problem: how do they adapt to these other kinds of environments? How do other environments adapt to them? I mean, the paradox is that McDonald's, on the one hand, adapts to a local environment by serving different kinds of foods, so it serves foods that are familiar to the local population. But it doesn't adapt its methods or the way it prepares and serves food or doesn't serve food. So, the imposition on the rest of the world of this McDonald's model of eating, in that sense, is an imposition on the local environment of a model created in California.

Many of the other models are created in the United States and exported to the rest of the world. But now, we see lots of other examples of models that are being created elsewhere and being exported to the United States and exported to other parts of the world. Entrepreneurs in other countries have got it, and so they're producing taco chains that are modeled after McDonald's, or whatever one wants to think of. But in any case, it's the same model being globalized and being exported elsewhere, but it's also being exported back to the United States, and the whole of this model is being populated by these indigenous, if you can call them that, fast-food restaurants that are not native to the United States.

**AMC:** You discussed another set of ideal types, glocalization and grobalization, and you relate them to the concepts of 'nothing' and 'something'. You consider glocalization to be, simply put, the mixing of the global and local, creating new systems, products, etc., while grobalization refers to the imperialist behaviors and aspirations of nations, companies etc. So, you associate 'something' with glocalization, and grobalization with 'nothing', on a general level. You argue, using this concept from Weber, that these types relate to each other through elective affinity, that the pairs tend to merge together through one type's influence on the other and vice versa (Ritzer 2003). So, for instance, grobalization and 'nothingness' tend to appear in tandem, and both are fundamental for each other's growth. You present glocalization as being an alternative to the homogeneity and hegemony of grobalization, as glocalization allows more creative and complex products: 'somethings'. As you've noted, it is difficult to construct glocalized products as it takes more resources to translate them, produce them, and sell them. While the 'nothing' of grobalization is easier to produce, sell, and translate across the world. So, from a viewpoint of production, this really makes sense to adapt to the grobalization model. But from the view of the consumer, why would products that are relatively devoid of 'something' have any appeal outside of some short-lasting novelty? So why do consumers continuously return to the 'nothing' products or nullities of grobalization?

**GR:** Well, first, I don't think people think in those terms. Secondly, global products, such as McDonald's or Coca-Cola, are mass produced all over the world, and they are advertised very widely, and advertising affects marketing; it affects what people buy. People buy into these global products and global systems. Whereas, on the other hand, anything that is glocal is by definition more local than the global and therefore lacks the ability to project its model onto the rest of the world. So, the result is that the global is much easier to sell worldwide than the glocal. And very few products that are glocal in nature are successful worldwide. Whereas products that are global in nature like McDonald's or Coca-Cola are relatively easily accepted around the world. It's partly the power of America, partly the power of advertising and marketing, but in any case, America is not pushing glocalization; America is pushing globalization, and America benefits from globalization. And lots of people around the world, even though they sometimes rebel against American products — Russians, for example, have recently rebelled against some American products — they love American products, they're eager to have access to American products, and if they don't have access to products and services they're upset. America basically, and American capitalist businesses and foreign policy exports this, and people come to associate a love-hate relationship with America. Some people love everything that's American, and hate everything that's American, but you know, most are in the middle ground. These American exports are generally accepted and loved throughout the world, and the profits all end up going back to the global companies like Coca-Cola, so they profit from this.

**AMC:** Perhaps we can turn to a concept that closely coincides with McDonaldization, the concept of enchantment. But first, I think it would be helpful to discuss enchantment and the spectacle. Specifically, how does your concept of the spectacle connect with Guy Debord's concept? I understand his work influenced yours, but you also further Debord's work by dividing the spectacle into two concepts: the spectacle and the extravaganza (Ritzer 2010). So, how do these concepts relate to each other, and how do they differ? Are they ideal types, for instance?

**GR:** Well, basically, I think an extravaganza, which is really not a central concept in my work, is something that is produced by some central organization, so Disney World produces these extravaganzas, and other organizations produce extravaganzas. Las Vegas is an extravaganza, or it's one whole series of extravaganzas within that setting. From my point of view, extravaganzas are centrally produced spectacles. Whereas, I think the concept of spectacle is broader, and hence spectacles are more naturally produced, not produced by organizations for profit. So, I think an extravaganza is seen as a kind of product of organizations that are seeking to profit from the extravaganza. Disney World is a good example, Las Vegas is a good example, and there are a lot of examples. A cruise ship is an extravaganza. Cruise ships that house 5,000 passengers and thousands of crew members and are sailing along peacefully are an extravaganza. It's very rationalized, and it's very often

off-putting, but yes, it's an extravaganza; it's being consciously produced. That's where I see the difference in the spectacle, which is a more naturally organic product. Falling stars or the northern lights would be examples of spectacles. On the other extreme is the mass-produced extravaganza for a population that is buying something or wants to buy something.

**AMC:** Just to elaborate on this question, you have discussed the enchantment and reenchantment of rationalized, or McDonaldized systems, especially in consumer settings. That this enchantment and reenchantment present these systems as attractive while hiding their rational structure and their dehumanizing destructive characteristics, the irrational rationalities (Ritzer 2010). However, I have difficulties understanding what enchantment exactly is, and how it relates to the spectacle. Can we differentiate between enchantment and the spectacle? Or does the spectacle create enchantment? What are the dynamics between these two concepts?

**GR:** Well, I would say that the spectacle<sup>4</sup> is designed to create enchantment. So, they talk about Disney World as an enchanted world, I think they used that term, and it's an enchanted world, but it's a very rationalized world. It's an enchantment being produced by some central organization. Whereas, there's also enchantment that lots of people crave, especially in a McDonaldized society, which is that natural kind of enchantment, the enchantment of being at the beach. There's not a crowd, and it's not at a pier, but just being at the beach can be enchanting. So, I think the fundamental difference is the enchantment is produced, and the spectacle is produced artificially. Whereas in the natural world, it's produced naturally, not artificially. So, no one's producing the spectacle of being at the ocean. It's the ocean that's producing that spectacle, and nobody can control it. Whereas the spectacles that we're accustomed to seeing, the parade at Disney World, the reality of life in Las Vegas with all the lights and banging of machines and things like that, are artificially produced. It's a spectacle, and there's no question it's a spectacle, but it's an artificially produced spectacle.

**AMC:** We've already discussed Weber's iron cage to a certain extent, but perhaps we can discuss your concept of the rubber cage because it seems to note that rationalization does not always progressively control people within McDonaldized systems. Some are able to free themselves from this rationalization, or even use it to their advantage (Ritzer 2021). How does this concept relate to enchantment? Are those within rubber cages more likely to resist simulations, extravaganzas, etc., due to being positioned in the margins of society, or perhaps it's the opposite, they're in a very privileged and wealthy position? What kind of person tends to be in this position?

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<sup>4</sup> Here we are speaking about extravaganzas as intentionally produced spectacles in comparison to the more natural incarnations of spectacles.



**GR:** You have to be in an elite position to afford a rubber cage, to afford to be in a rubber cage. The elites often find themselves in cages of various kinds that have rubber bars, and they can get out anytime they want. They're very attractive cages; they don't necessarily want to get out, but if they want to, they can get out and it's a very pleasant world for them. Most of my world is like that, actually. I mean, I'm a privileged college professor, or retired college professor, and the world is a rubber cage for me, largely. So, I could avoid restrictions in the university that were placed on assistant professors that were not being placed on me as a distinguished university professor. I talked very little, I was teaching small classes, had very few administrative responsibilities and things like that. So, the university is an iron cage for an untenured assistant professor, but it's a rubber cage for a tenured senior professor, and the world, I think, is much like that. If you're wealthy, you can treat the world that way, so if you find yourself at McDonald's, you might have lunch there, but it's not an iron cage because you can go in the evening and have a gourmet dinner for \$600. And so, the wealthy, I think, if they're in cages, they're in rubber cages. I've actually called them velvet cages, it's not just rubber, but they're velvet. They love being in that cage, and they love rolling around in the velvet cage that rich people find themselves in. But most of the world finds themselves in an iron cage. Somewhere in the middle, there are people in rubber cages where they're able to get out occasionally, but mostly, they're kind of locked in.

**AMC:** So, I'll move on to my last question. In *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, you mention two forms of simulations: simulated humans and simulated animals. Both are still humans and animals, but from what I understand, they are humans and animals within a rational system that structures their behavior. So, you give the example of employees at fast-food restaurants behaving according to the protocols of managerial regulations. While simulated animals are animals trained and structured along similar grounds, such as dolphins at Las Vegas casino water shows (Ritzer 2010; 2005). So, you largely focus on these simulations within the context of labor for humans, and captivity for animals. However, are there examples of these simulations specifically regarding, at least from an intuitive view, situations that aren't coercive? For instance, situations where there are no harsh employee-employer relations, or captivity and forced training regarding animals? So, examples of such simulations as much more voluntary.

**GR:** Well, maybe this would be a good example. I live in a gated community in Florida, and in a sense, it's a simulated world. It's not the world of the real Florida; it's been controlled. Alligators are allowed in, but they're being controlled. Cougars are largely kept out, anything dangerous is largely kept out, as are poor people, since these are relatively affluent communities. So, in a sense, I'm sitting, looking across my pond, at the other houses in this community, and this is a simulated community; it's a simulation of Florida. It's not the real Florida it's the creation of the developers, and so, increasingly, developers are developing Florida, and other places, and they're

creating their sanitized versions of Florida, and the people in these communities are very happy with that. They don't have to deal with the animals that are dangerous, or the poor people, because they can't get past the gate. While on the other hand, they still have the sun and warmth of Florida. So, it's a great world; it's a great world for the wealthy, but most of the world isn't wealthy. This is a simulated world. I don't know if anybody in this community sees it that way, but I see it that way. I've always lived in environments where, while living in that environment, I've also been critical of that environment. In fact, there is no environment that I've been in that I haven't been critical of, that I haven't critically analyzed; it's probably the disease of the sociologist to critically analyze things. So, I'm well aware that I'm sitting in the sun with warm breezes. It's wonderful, but it's a simulated world, and I don't like that. But I live here, and for most people that live here, it's a velvet cage. They're in a cage, and they can get out anytime they want, so it's a rubber cage as well, but it's not an iron cage. Unlike inside the ghetto, which, for most people inside the ghetto, is an iron cage they can't get out of.

**AMC:** Thank you, George; this has been really informative, and I could not have asked for a better interview. I really appreciate this, but before I go, could I just ask if you want to add anything else?

**GR:** I think you've got a sense of my thinking and orientations of the world and personality, and view of the world and the specific sociology that's come from that. I mean, first of all, sociology is always shaped by the personalities and the upbringing of the sociologist, and mine is very much like that. So, you need to understand the person and the environment of the person in order to understand the sociology that he or she produces. And I think that goes against what most sociologists would say, that as a science, we're not being shaped by these kinds of things. But we are very much shaped by where we were raised, how we were raised, and the world we lived in, and that affects our view of the world that we inhabit. In many ways, my view of the world is based on my experiences of, for example, living in the era before McDonald's, seeing the first McDonald's, and then seeing the explosion of cars and other fast-food restaurants. So, there's an autobiographical character to all of this, which couldn't have been done by somebody who was born recently, who has had other experiences, or someone born in other societies who would not understand, let's stay, the formula used at the fast-food restaurant. So, it's very much a dialectic between the personality and socialization of the person doing the analysis and the analysis that's produced. And, I guess the final thing I would say is you have to take that into account.

This is my view of the world shaped by my training and my personal experience and upbringing. And it's not necessarily right, of course it's not; there are no right answers in sociology, but it's my perspective on it, and the question is, does it resonate with you? Does it work for you, or does it partially work for you, or does it work at all? That is a judgement that anybody who reads my work or listens to me

has to make for themselves. What's your view of the world based on, after you've heard what I've said? Now, take your own experiences, integrate all those things, and come up with your own view of the world, which may or may not be affected by my view. I'm very conscious of the way in which this is my view of the world affected by my upbringing and experiences, and, you know, that's both the strength and limiting factor of all sociology.

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