

Theorizing/Resisting McDonaldization: A Multiperspectivist Approach

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George Ritzer's *The McDonaldization of Society* has generated an unprecedented number of sales and scholarly interest, as demonstrated by highly impressive sales figures, new editions of the book, and the growing critical literature dedicated to the phenomenon of which this book is a part (see also Alfino, Caputo and Wynard 1998 and Kincheloe and Shelton, forthcoming). Ritzer's popularization of Max Weber's theory of rationalization and its application to a study of the processes of McDonaldization presents a concrete example of applied social analysis which clarifies important developments in the present moment, calling attention to their costs and benefits, their positive and negative sides. The wide-spread reception -- and the controversy it has evoked -- suggests that Ritzer has touched upon some vital nerve centers of the contemporary era which I suggest have to do with discontents over modernity and ambivalent attitudes toward the rapid transformation of the present for which the term "postmodernity" has been coined.

The choice of McDonald's restaurants as an example of defining problematical aspects of our contemporary world is a felicitous one. The phenomenon of "McDonaldization" which Ritzer elicits from his analysis of McDonald's fast-food restaurants encompasses both production and consumption, and is applied to a broad scope of economic, political, social, and cultural artifacts and mechanisms. Ritzer is able to apply his concepts to phenomena ranging from work to leisure, from food to media, from education to politics. Encompassing such a diverse field of topics and artifacts exemplifies the sociological moment of illuminating abstraction, of generating a concept so broad as to conceptually grasp and interpret a wealth of data in a way that theorizes defining and constitutive features of the present moment. Such a mode of theorizing -- now under attack by some modes of postmodern theory -- helps us critically view key social dynamics, institutions and problems, thus exemplifying the major strength of classical social theory.[1]

In this study, I will attempt to illuminate both the strengths and weaknesses of Ritzer's theory of McDonaldization and will suggest some alternative perspectives. I will first discuss how Ritzer theorizes McDonaldization, focusing on his mode of social analysis and will argue that Ritzer fails to adequately explicate its cultural dimensions. Drawing on contemporary cultural studies, I accordingly add a cultural perspective to Ritzer's analysis and discuss whether McDonaldization is properly a phenomenon of modernity or postmodernity, and whether it is better grasped by modern or postmodern theory. I then take on the issue of the standpoint and strategy of critique of key phenomena like McDonald's, or McDonaldization, and sketch out some critical perspectives and strategies of resistance that explicate and supplement Ritzer's normative stance.

My argument is that Ritzer does not adequately distinguish between McDonald's and the broader phenomenon of McDonaldization, that his taking the infamous fast-food company McDonald's as the paradigm of McDonaldization skews his analysis negatively, missing the dialectics of McDonaldization, its positive and negative features. Yet I also want to argue that Ritzer does not develop an adequate standpoint of critique to evaluate either McDonald's or

McDonaldization and this this problem results from excessive dependence on Weber's theory and that a multiperspectivist method can overcome these problems. Accordingly, I argue for a multiperspectivist approach to capture the complexity of McDonald's and McDonaldization so as to better critically evaluate its multifarious aspects and effects.

McDonaldization, Social Theory, and Cultural Studies

The McDonald's fast-food restaurants certainly provide a useful example of a familiar sociological artifact that can be analyzed to generate a more general and macro level of conceptualization. Few artifacts and institutions of the contemporary world are as well-known and ubiquitous as McDonald's with its Big Macs, Golden Arches, Ronald McDonald's, promotional tie-ins with popular films and toys, its charities, and saturation advertising. Both the rationalization of production and consumption in McDonald's is unparalleled in the contemporary era, and serves as a model for what Ritzer calls the "McDonaldization of society" defined by increased efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control through substitution of human labor power with technology, all of which constitute a quantitative and to some alarming growth of instrumental rationalization.

Ritzer's project combines use of Weber's sociological theory to generalize about McDonald's with a wealth of empirical data to illustrate and flesh out the points. His research method follows what Alvin Gouldner called "newspaper sociology" (1976), assembling information and news on McDonald's through gathering and citing newspaper articles to illustrate his arguments -- as opposed to historical sociology, ethnography, phenomenology, cultural studies, and so on.[2] This perspective combines a theoretical optic with empirical illustration to enable the reader to see how the general theoretical points are embodied in concrete phenomena that can be observed, confirmed, and discussed.

Ritzer privileges Weber's conception of rationalization to theorize the phenomenon of McDonaldization which he sees as "coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world" (1996, 1). Ritzer extends Weber's analysis to a wealth of phenomena, demonstrating that the principles of McDonaldization are restructuring a vast array of fields, ranging from the food, media, education, and health care industries, encompassing fundamental life processes from birth to death (1996, 161ff). The strength of the analysis is the light that such strong perspectives shed on general social dynamics and the mapping of the macro structures of contemporary social organization. The limitation of the analysis is that the Weberian-inspired perspectives often generate a one-sided and limited optic that needs to be supplemented, corrected, and expanded by further critical perspectives.

We might, for instance, deploy a Marx/Weber synthesis to theorize McDonaldization as a combination of instrumental rationalization of production and consumption with a sustained corporate attempt to increase profit.[3] Indeed, McDonaldization seems to equally involve commodification and rationalization, to commodify food production and to rationalize its production and consumption so as to increase profitability. While Ritzer applies the McDonaldization model to production and consumption, he largely emphasizes consumption and thus downplays the ways that McDonaldization has revolutionized production -- despite some references to Taylorism and Fordism (Ritzer 1996, 24-27, passim). Likewise, although he

stresses the role of profit in driving McDonaldization (1996, 44, 62f, 87f, passim), Ritzer could better contextualize the phenomenon within the framework of a restructuring of capitalism, aiming at the increase of productivity and profit through rationalization of production and consumption. For in addition to being part of a rationalization process, McDonaldization is part of a new global form of technocapitalism in which world markets are being rationalized and reorganized to maximize capital accumulation.[4]

Equally, while Ritzer's largely sociological analysis illuminates key features of McDonald's fast-food chains and the applicability of its principles to a variety of other phenomenon is striking, he neglects the cultural dimensions of the McDonald's phenomenon and in particular the ways in which the corporation mobilizes advertising campaigns and promotional stunts to create an experience of fun, of family togetherness, of Americanization itself which is associated with the McDonald's experience. Thus, when one bites into a Big Mac s/he is consuming the sign values of good times, communal experience, consumer value and efficiency, as well as the (dubious) pleasures of the product. McDonald's is not just selling fast-food, but a family adventure of eating out together, intergenerational bonding, and a communal experience, as their advertising campaigns reiterate over and over in various ways. Purchasing and ingesting a specific food product is only one part of this experience, which includes the consumption of sign values such as inexpensive food, a family outing, Americana, or modernity (see the detailed analyses in Goldman 1992: 85ff. and Kincheloe 1997: 249ff.).

McDonaldization is thus an ideology as well as a set of social practices, a cultural construct with its myths, semiotic codes, and discourses. McDonald's itself projects an ideology of the U.S. as a melting pot in which all citizens participate equally in its democratic pleasures, irregardless of race, class, gender, and age. It furnishes a model of the United States as a land of consumer innovation and technical rationality which produces inexpensive and desirable goods for all, serving its customer's needs and providing a valuable product. McDonald's associates itself with traditions like the family, national holidays, patriotism, Christian charity, and the icons of media culture. Going to McDonald's for denizens of the U.S. is thus joining the consumer society, participating in the national culture, and validating common values.

Ritzer thus underplays the ways that McDonald's is an ideological and cultural phenomenon, as well as an economic and sociological set of practices. Although he applies his analysis of McDonaldization to a wide range of cultural phenomena (the media, education, travel, food, etc.), Ritzer does not really engage the specifically cultural dimension of the operation. In Weberian terms, he neglects the charisma of the Golden Arches, Ronald McDonald's and McDonaldland, the tie-ins and promotions, and the ubiquitous advertising, aimed at a variety of gender, race, class, and national subject positions.[5]

Consuming McDonald's

Ritzer also excessively generalizes his analysis of the homogenization, massification, and standardization of McDonaldization, neglecting the variety and diversity of consumer practices in different regions and parts of the world and the various uses to which consumers can put McDonaldization, using its products and procedures to serve their own needs. British cultural studies has stressed the importance of analyzing the ways that audiences or consumers create

their own meanings and experience. The McDonald's fast-food chains and other aspects of what Ritzer calls McDonaldization generate a variety of ways specific pleasures, meanings, and effects which a micro analysis of particular forms and experiences of McDonaldization can interrogate. As I suggest below, people in different countries no doubt experience both McDonald's and McDonaldization in a variety of ways and there are different gender, race, class, and regional differences in the phenomena of fast-food and societal rationalization that Ritzer fails to explore in much detail.

By largely privileging Weber's theory of rationalization in his analysis of McDonaldization, Ritzer thus misses the subjective aspects of the process and the ways that various individuals and groups deploy McDonaldization to serve their own needs and interests. His privileging of the category of rationalization is thus too objectivistic and fails to articulate the subjective and cultural complex of McDonaldization. Indeed, I am not sure that Weber's metaphor of the "iron cage" that Ritzer suggests, nor the alternative metaphors he proposes of the "velvet" or "rubber" cage, are the best ways to interrogate the McDonald's phenomenon. In the case of McDonald's -- and many other fast-food emporiums, sites of mass entertainment and consumption, and media culture --, perhaps something like "the plastic fun house" is more appropriate. Whereas societal rationalization accurately describes aspects of the socio-economic roots of McDonaldization, there is a more hedonistic and fun-oriented cultural side that metaphors of a "cage" do not adequately capture.

It is, for example, unlikely that many McDonald's customers see themselves as trapped in a cage, although no doubt most of its workers feel enclosed and encaged in their constrictive labor conditions, as evidenced by their especially high turnover rates (see below). On the cultural side, McDonaldization hides the conditions of rationalization with a colorful environment, often decorated with images from current films and icons of popular entertainment to provide a funhouse experience and to entertain the customer as well as to fill their stomachs. Beneath the glitzy and kitschy appearance, inexorable conditions of rationalization (and attempts to maximize profits) work behind the backs of the customers, masked by the facade of the promised experience of McDonald's restaurants as providing fun and pleasurable fast eating for a fast-paced consumer society.

McDonald's Between the Modern and the Postmodern

Rationalization is itself equated with modernization in standard interpretations of Weber, and one might raise the question of whether McDonaldization is properly interpreted as an expression of modernity, as Ritzer argues (1996, 148f.), or of postmodernity. Clearly, the rationalization or industrialization of food production constitutes a rupture with traditional life (For earlier analyses of the mechanization of agriculture, food, labor, house-cleaning, the objects of everyday life, and death, see Giedion 1969). As Ritzer argues, following Weber's model, increased rationalization of everyday life involves ruptures with tradition and the substitution of new "modern" forms, thus creating tensions between the modern and the premodern. Claims that we are now leaving modernity behind for a new postmodernity would suggest that we are leaving modern social and cultural forms like McDonaldization behind in favor of new postmodern conditions.

Against extreme binary either/or positions which would hold that we are either within modernity or a new postmodernity, I would argue that we are currently between the modern and the postmodern, in a borderline space between two cultural and social paradigms (Kellner 1995; Best and Kellner 1997), and that there are identifiable features of both the modern and the postmodern involved in McDonaldization. In particular, McDonaldization as a rationalization of production and consumption is clearly modern in inspiration and form, whereas the proliferation of sign value in the McDonald's experience through advertising and publicity stunts has postmodern ramifications, as its consumers enter a quasi-mythical hyperreal world of Americana, family fun, and good times.[6]

In other words, I would argue that whereas initially McDonaldization was preeminently an expression of modernity in its mass production and consumption of food, it crossed the postmodern divide through its phantasmagoric advertising and commodity spectacle, drawing its customers into a world of simulation, hyperreality, and the implosion of boundaries, especially as it became globalized and part of postmodern hybridization that synthesizes signs of modernity with local traditions and culture. Thus, it seems to me a mistake to either insist that McDonaldization is primarily an expression of modernity or of postmodernity, for it is arguably both. Indeed, McDonaldization relates not only to both Weber's analysis of rationalization and Marx's theory of commodification, but also postmodern conceptions are involved in it. Thus, Baudrillard's investigations of implosion, hyperreality, and simulation, as well as analyses of postFordist globalization, the hybridization of identity, and semiotic practices that some see as central to the postmodern condition can usefully be deployed to analyze McDonaldization.

Interpreted from a Baudrillardian postmodern perspective, McDonald's cuisine can be seen as a simulation of food, since its artificial products, tastes, and pleasures simulate such familiar products as burgers, fries, and shakes. The products themselves are heavily dependent on chemical additives and artificial substances for their flavor, texture, and materiality, and can thus serve as examples of artificially-produced food stuffs. McDonald's products thus constitute a technological model of fast-food production and consumption reconstituting food itself, using food technologies to produce novel substances, tastes, and substitutions, and hence anticipating the artificial technofoods of the future.

The McDonald's experience is a hyperreal one, in which its model of fast-food consumption replaces the traditional model of home-prepared food with commodified food, which then becomes a model for food production, replicated through frozen and prepared food and the spinoff of countless other chain fastfood restaurant businesses. In other words, McDonald's provides a new hyperreal model of what food and eating are, mediated by its food technologies and organization of food production and consumption. As suggested earlier, the McDonald's customer is also made to feel that they are especially virtuous and smart to take out their family, or to treat themselves or their friends to a fast, inexpensive, and ready-made meal. And the advertising and promotion enables the McDonald's customer to participate in the hyperreal ideologies of Americana, family togetherness, and social bonding. McDonald's also implodes boundaries between tradition and the contemporary, coding their ads with traditional images of Americana and family ideology, as it undermines family eating practices and redefines diet and culinary value, familial togetherness, and communal experience.

Ritzer is thus probably mistaken to distance his analysis of McDonaldization from postmodern theory (1996, 153ff), though he is certainly correct to see and emphasize the links with modernity and modernization. Ritzer's downgrading of the postmodern elements of McDonaldization are related to his failure to adequately theorize the cultural dimension of McDonaldization. And yet Ritzer does see how there is something like a McDonaldization of culture in the culture industry's rapacious lust for audiences and profits and rationalized cultural production. Likewise, it is clear that McDonaldization can be linked with globalization, including its postmodern elements. Part of a postmodern globalized culture is the way that transnational cultural forms help produce a global culture, but one that is inflected by local conditions and practices (see the studies in Cvetovitch and Kellner 1996 for examples of the dialectic between global and local).

McDonald's Between the Global and the Local

There is no doubt that McDonaldization is spreading as an international phenomenon. As the London *Economist* notes, "McDonald's reported that in 1996 and 1997 they intended to open around 32,000 new restaurants (compared to 1,787 in 1994 and 2,430 in 1995) of which around two-thirds would be outside of the USA.... [Whereas] in 1985, some 22% of units were located overseas accounting for \$2.2 billion (20% of total) sales and 18% of operating profit: by 1996 these figures were \$14 billion (47% of total)" (xx, 1996). Ritzer is aware of the globalization of McDonald's and notes how it varies its product, architecture, and atmosphere to local conditions, but does not adequately analyze the different meanings, social functions, and experiences McDonald's generates in a variety of local conditions.

For instance, I experienced its varied dynamics myself one night in Taichung, Taiwan, as I sought a restroom in the midst of the city. While wandering through the space of the local McDonald's -- a three-story building within a densely populated urban region --, I noticed that the place was packed with students studying, young people talking, and couples coupling. My host said that in a crowded city, McDonald's was a good site for study and socializing, and the locals were taking advantage of this. Obviously, the social purposes and functions were quite different in Taiwan than in the U.S. which neither encouraged, nor in some cases did they even allow, hanging out and using the site as a study den, or make-out pit. The point is that McDonald's, or any global artifact, has very different meanings and functions in different regions and parts of the world, and a concrete analysis should interrogate local conditions in which consumers provide their own narratives of their site-specific and particular experiences to capture the variety and diversity of meanings of the McDonald's effect.

My Taiwanese host told me that it was especially young children who sought the McDonald's eating experience, demanding of their parents to take them to McDonald's for special treats or celebrations. For people in non-Western societies, McDonald's seems to signify Western modernity and to offer alternatives in terms of cuisine and social experience. Yet no doubt it is also advertising and promotion that helps produce these meanings, providing a postmodern hyperreal and hybrid consumer experience for denizens of the many corners and crevices of the globe who consume Western modernity when they ingest a Big Mac. Moreover, McDonald's adapts to local cultures and cuisines, serving noodle dishes in Asian countries, along with the Big Macs, and allows local owners to vary the menu according to local tastes. Thus, while on one

level, McDonald's helps standardize and homogenize a global consumer culture, on another level it brings variety, diversity, and novelty to many parts of the world, thus contributing to the creation of a hybridized postmodern global popular.

There are consequently both modern and postmodern aspects to the phenomenon of McDonaldization and the perspectives of both modern and postmodern theory can illuminate the phenomenon. In analyzing a complex phenomenon like McDonaldization, it is important to focus on both production and consumption, grasping both the modern dimension of rationalized production and consumption, and the postmodern cultural dimension of hyperreal and hybridized consumption. Some of Ritzer's critics focus too exclusively on the domain of consumption, which often leads them to defend McDonaldization on the grounds that Ritzer overlooks the variety and diversity of consumer practices and the varied meanings and effects McDonaldization can have on different types of consumers (see Parker 1998 and Miles 1998). While there is some validity in this criticism, it overlooks the extent to which McDonaldization constitutes a standardization and homogenization of production and consumption that is often highly dehumanizing and degrading to workers and consumers.

Thus, in my reading, McDonaldization is linked to the problematics of global capitalism and the project of rationalization of the labor process, markets, and consumption to increase capitalist profitability and power. McDonaldization thus encompasses, from this perspective, both the forces of instrumental rationality and efficiency and a postmodern realm of hyperreality, simulation, implosion, and hybridity. While it is perhaps the intensity and the relentlessness of his application of the Weberian optic that lends Ritzer's analysis both its power and limitations, other modes of interpreting McDonaldization could be deployed to supplement, complement, and correct Ritzer's perspectives.

I would thus argue for what I call a multiperspectivist social theory (Best and Kellner 1991 and 1997; Kellner 1995) to engage the phenomenon of McDonaldization and to provide a more contextual and multidimensional paradigm for analyzing the multiplicity of economic, socio-political, and cultural aspects of McDonaldization. This requires mobilizing the resources of both modern and postmodern theory, using both Marx and Weber, and Baudrillard and postmodern theory, as well as the resources of cultural studies and a critical multiculturalism, to theorize the full-range of the phenomenon of the global hybridization of McDonaldization, its cultural and ideological construction, and its complex effects. McDonaldization is a many-sided phenomenon and the more perspectives that one can bring to its analysis and critique, the better grasp of the phenomenon one will have and the better one will be able to develop alternative readings and generate oppositional practices.

Criticizing/Resisting McDonaldization

Ritzer's critics often complain that he is too pessimistic, does not adequately articulate resistance to McDonaldization, and/or is too totalizing in his criticism (Parker 1998; Rinehart 1998; and Taylor, Smith and Lyon 1998). While Ritzer adds a list of the positive features of McDonaldization to the most recent edition of his book (1996, 12f), on the whole his interpretation is primarily negative, although, as I argue, he fails to develop adequately a critical standpoint to take on his target. For the most part, Ritzer uses Weber's conception of the

irrationality of rationalization, of the ways that it comes to contradict its own goals, to reprimand McDonaldization, thus developing an immanent critique of the irrationalities that are produced by McDonaldization. In this section, by contrast, I will develop a multiperspectivist normative position to develop a more systematic and contextual critique.

Ritzer's critical optic is similar to some extent to the Frankfurt School critique of mass society that expands homogenization, standardization, commodification, and instrumental rationality in such ways that produce a decline of individuality, freedom, and, in Habermas' terminology, create a colonization of the life world by the social system.[7] These critical perspectives on modernity and rationalization articulate people's fears of increased conformity, loss of freedom and diversity, and domination by external societal forces bound up with the evolution of modern societies. McDonald's encapsulates in a provocative way these concerns and itself can thus serve as a target for the discontents with modernity and its problematical aspects.

On the whole, it is the merit of Ritzer's study to raise the question of from what standpoint one can critique a popular phenomenon like McDonald's and how one can justify one's critique without falling prey to charges of elitism. Ritzer is to be commended for taking on a popular part of American and now global culture like McDonald's and generating a critical discussion. Ritzer's critics often accuse him of elitism (Parker 1998; Rinehart 1998; Taylor, Smith and Lyon 1998), but themselves often fall prey to an uncritical populism (Parker 1998; Taylor, Smith and Lyon 1998), or fail to offer adequate responses or to articulate in more detail how one resists McDonaldization (Rinehart 1998). Many of Ritzer's critics thus create apologetics and celebration of the mass culture he criticizes, thereby uncritically replicating a position increasingly widespread in cultural studies that puts all the weight of praxis and production of meaning on the side of the subject, thus effectively erasing the problematics of domination, manipulation, and oppression from critical social theory (see the critique of this position in Kellner 1995). Such positions put a positive gloss on McDonaldization, mass culture, or consumerism in which moments of resistance and the construction of meaning are highlighted, as if these phenomena merely furnished resources to empower individuals and to resist dominant meanings or practices.

In general, it is a mistake to be overly abstract and one-sided in relation to a complex phenomenon like McDonaldization, or, for that matter, such things as mass culture, consumerism, or the consumer society itself. Contemporary positions often are skewed into one-sided optics that primarily celebrate or denigrate the phenomenon under scrutiny, rather than providing a more contextual and dialectical approach that evaluates specific phenomena, articulates negative and/or positive dimensions, and then makes nuanced judgments. Perhaps Ritzer does not adequately appreciate or valorize the positive features of McDonaldization, but often his critics do not acknowledge the negative side, and are all too eager to defend mass culture, consumption, or McDonaldization against Ritzer's often scathing criticisms.

In my own view, Ritzer's book is valuable for provoking a theoretical and practical debate concerning key novel and defining features of our contemporary world and forcing us to define our response to crucial aspects of our everyday life. Although many of Ritzer's critics chide him for being too pessimistic and negative, this dose of critical negativity is salutary in an age of positive thinking only too eager to embrace and celebrate the joys of consumer capitalism.

Ritzer's analysis of McDonaldization is thus valuable for articulating discontents of critical individuals with relentless rationalization and accordant standardization, homogenization, and massification of experience.

Indeed, in response to his many critics who argue that Ritzer is too hard on McDonaldization and rationalized consumer practices, I would argue that at least his sharp critique of McDonald's itself is perfectly justified and that there is little good which one can say of this particularly noxious institution.[8] Yet neither Ritzer himself nor many of his critics always adequately distinguish between McDonald's and the broader phenomenon of McDonaldization. Failure to make this differentiation often skews normative judgements and evaluations of the respective phenomena. In other words, one should distinguish between specific concrete examples of McDonaldization such as the McDonald's corporation and the more general societal dynamics associated with rationalization and the application of instrumental rationality to social phenomena, relations, and institutions.

For instance, I would not hesitate to develop the most sharp negative critique of McDonald's as a corporation and junk food emporium, while at another level, I would propose a more nuanced evaluation of McDonaldization as a social phenomenon. In the following analysis, I will accordingly articulate a multiperspectivist approach to criticize and resist McDonald's and McDonaldization, offering separate criticisms of these two phenomena. While I draw on Ritzer's appropriation of Weber's notion of the irrationality of rationalization in my critique, I argue that it does not provide an adequate standpoint to criticize either McDonald's nor McDonaldization. Moreover, as my drawing on and expanding specific criticisms made by Ritzer of McDonald's suggests, he himself contributes aspects of a stronger evaluative position, which he does not, however, adequately articulate.

The Case Against McDonald's

I want to mobilize a variety of perspectives in this section to criticize the McDonald's corporation and its product. This process is facilitated by the existence of an extremely impressive website which furnishes a vast amount of information about McDonald's and offers ample material for a substantive critique.[9] This site was developed by two British activists who were sued by McDonald's for distributing leaflets denouncing the corporation's low wages, advertising practices, involvement in deforestation, harvesting of animals, and promotion of junk food and an unhealthy diet. The activists counterattacked, organized a McLibel campaign, assembled a McSpotlight website with a tremendous amount of information criticizing the corporation, and assembled experts to testify and confirm their criticisms. The five-year civil trial, Britain's longest ever, ended ambiguously on June 19, 1997, with the Judge defending some of McDonald's claims against the activists, while substantiating other of their criticisms. The case created unprecedented bad publicity for McDonald's and was circulated throughout the world via Internet websites, mailing lists, and discussion groups. The McLibel/McSpotlight group claims that their website was accessed over twelve million times and the *Guardian* reported that the site "claimed to be the most comprehensive source of information on a multinational corporation ever assembled" and was part of one of the more successful anticorporate campaigns (February 22, 1996; the website is at: <http://www.mcspotlight.org>).

Building on material assembled in this site, one can construct a very strong case against McDonald's. To begin, from a nutritional point of view, I think it is fair to say that McDonald's food is simply junk -- as indeed the popular term "junk food" denotes. As Ritzer himself notes (1996, 126ff and 179f), McDonald's food is overly saturated with salt, sugar, and fats, producing high cholesterol and dubious nutrients. It is standardized and homogenized fare, providing predictably bland and unexciting taste. As Joel Kovel remarks, the label "junk food" is perfectly appropriate in light of the fact that nutritional experts almost universally agree that the kind of food sold by McDonald's is bad for you. With 28 grams of fat, 12.6 of which are saturated, in a Big Mac, and 22 more grams in an order of French fries, along with 52 additives being used in its various food products, it is scarcely surprising that an internal company memorandum would state that: "we can't really address or defend nutrition. We don't sell nutrition and people don't come to McDonald's for nutrition." When the company's cancer expert, Dr. Sydney Arnott, was asked his opinion of the statement that "a diet high in fat, sugar, animal products and salt and low in fibre, vitamins and minerals is linked with cancer of the breast and bowel and heart disease," he replied: "If it is being directed to the public then I would say it is a very reasonable thing to say."

Although the McDonald's corporation defends their products as forming part of an overall "balanced diet," Professor Michael Crawford, a consultant to the World Health Organization, testified at a public hearing: "Not only are McDonald's encouraging the use of a style of food which is closely associated with risk of cancer and heart disease, whilst health professionals are trying to reduce the risks to Western populations, but they are actively promoting the same cultures where at present these diseases are not a problem" (McLibel Support Campaign, 1994). In addition, in relation to the challenge of more health-conscious parents seeking better diets for their children, McDonald's is now targeting more advertising at children, aggressively using tie-ins with popular films and pop culture artifacts, their Ronald McDonald clowns, and heavy advertising to children in order to attract younger customers who presumably will persuade their parents to take them to eat at McDonald's.

Moreover, from the perspective of culinary taste, one could argue that McDonald's is regressive, even in terms of hamburgers and fast-food. I remember going to my first drive-in hamburger stand in Virginia in the 1950s and discovering the pleasures of a juicy cheeseburger with all the trimmings, a thick milk shake, and crunchy french fries. I remember the introduction of McDonald's from this same era and how bland and boring its fare was in comparison with the rich and succulent burgers and shakes from the local hamburger joint. From my current perspective of concern with health and nutrition, I would not without guilt eat any fatty burger, but would argue that even within the range of possible burgers McDonald's is among the most mediocre and over priced. And from the perspective of choosing from the possible range of health and gourmet foods open to us, I would say that from the standpoints of culinary taste and nutrition, McDonald's offers an obviously inferior option.

Ritzer uses Weber's theory of rationalization and argues that even from the standpoint of economic rationality, McDonald's does not provide the value that it promises. He suggests that there is a tremendous mark-up of profit in the fries, drinks, burgers and other products sold (1996, 60f.) and the multi-billion dollar profit margin every year would confirm that consumers are not getting a good value from the product, but are enriching the corporation at their own expense. This is obviously true and McDonald's decline in sales over the past year may in part be

consumer recognition that they were getting ripped off, that McDonald's did not give good food value.

In addition, the McDonald's experience in eating is an example of assembly-line consumption that is hardly conducive to conversation and social interaction, and is thus rarely a quality family social experience or communal eating experience. The McDonald's goal is to guarantee a ten-minute eating experience (Love 1986), and the production and consumption operation is geared to getting customers in and out of the restaurant as quickly as possible. As a corporation, McDonald's ads which celebrate traditional and family values, as well as good value, are thus highly misleading and as Ritzer points out, its practices often contradict the imperatives of value, efficiency, and wholesomeness that its ads and corporate propaganda proclaim (1996, 121ff).

From the standpoint of the production and consumption of food, McDonaldization articulates the tendencies toward conformity and massification noted by social theorists of the 1950s. The whole McDonald's experience forces one into the mold of preformed sameness and homogenization; one orders from a small range of choices and one must fit their taste to the corporate experience. Whereas standard multipage menus address consumers as individual subjects, with their own complex likes and taste, in which one can privately contemplate the range of choices, the McDonald marquee illustrates the product in a public space, fitting the individual into the slot of homogenized consumer subject. McDonaldization in this sense is essentially a phenomenon of modernization, part and parcel of the mass society with its frenzied pace and standardized consumption and production.

But McDonald's homogenization of food consumption went so far that it appears now as a caricature, a joke, the ultimate in kitchiness and trash. From a postmodern perspective that valorizes difference, otherness, and variety, McDonald's is the paradigm of mass homogeneity, sameness, and standardization, which erases individuality, specificity, and difference. In this sense, McDonald's is thus profoundly out of synch with the postmodern turn and if it survives, it is because of the weight of nostalgia, tradition, and habit that will drive those previous consumers back to the site of earlier pleasant experiences. McDonald's ads indeed stress the continuity, stability, and tradition guaranteed by the corporation, with one ad picturing a man returning to his town after many years away and finding that everything has changed, that much has disappeared, except for the good old McDonald's, still serving the same fare in the same place after all these years (see the detailed analysis in Goldman 1992: 97f).

Curiously enough, those who defend McDonald's, who are still attached to it, are nostalgic for those very institutions of modernity that destroyed tradition. Indeed, the paradox of McDonald's longevity is that an institution which destroyed tradition (i.e. home cooking, individualized family restaurants, a balanced and healthy diet) has itself become tradition that accrues nostalgia and the aura of Americana -- in part the result of McDonald's advertising campaigns. Yet nostalgia for McDonald's, continuing loyalty to its product and institution is in part the result of its longevity, of the fact that it has by now accumulated billions of consumers who return to the site of pleasant remembrances of when one was younger.

Architecturally, the McDonald's environment is a sterile and dehumanizing site of standardized and banalized design and structure signifying sameness, corporate homogeneity, and artificial

standardized space. As for its workers and conditions of labor, the McDonald's production mechanism is an extremely blatant and degrading form of low-paid and alienated labor which is a career dead-end, "minimum wage from cradle to grave," generating extremely high turnover rates. McDonald's is notorious in resisting unionization and firing workers who try to create a union. While writing this article, I received the following bulletin concerning workers who produce products for McDonald's:

Urgent action alert! Disney & McDonald's Linked to \$0.06/Hour Sweatshop in Vietnam

Summary: Seventeen year old women are forced to work 9 to 10 hours a day, seven days a week, earning as little as six cents an hour in the Keyhinge factory in Vietnam making the popular giveaway promotional toys, many of which are Disney characters, for McDonald's Happy Meals. After working a 70 hour week, some of the teenage women take home a salary of only \$4.20! In February, 200 workers fell ill, 25 collapsed and three were hospitalized as a result of chemical exposure.

Background: Included in the Happy Meals sold at McDonald's are small toys based on characters from Disney films. According to McDonald's senior vice president Brad Ball, the Happy Meals characters from the "101 Dalmatians" movie were the most successful in McDonald's history. Ball adds, "As we embark on our new global alliance, we anticipate ten great years of unbeatable family fun as customers enjoy 'the magic of Disney' only at McDonald's" (PR Newswire Associates, March 19, 1997).

Located in Da Nang City, Vietnam, the Keyhinge Toys Co. Factory employs approximately 1,000 people, 90 percent of whom are young women 17 to 20 years old.

Overtime is mandatory: shifts of 9 to 10 hours a day, seven days a week. Wage rates average between six cents and eight cents an hour--well below subsistence levels. Overcome by fatigue and poor ventilation in late February, 200 women fell ill, 25 collapsed and three were hospitalized as a result of exposure to acetone. Acute or prolonged exposure to acetone, a chemical solvent, can cause dizziness, unconsciousness, damage to the liver and kidneys and chronic eye, nose, throat and skin irritation. All appeals from local human and labor rights groups continue to be rejected by Keyhinge management which refuses to improve the ventilation system in the factory or remedy other unsafe working conditions. Along with demanding forced overtime, Keyhinge management has not made legally mandated payments for health insurance coverage for its employees, who now receive no compensation for injury or sickness. Many of the young women at the Keyhinge factory making McDonald's/Disney toys earn just 60 cents after a 10 hour shift. The most basic meal in Vietnam--rice, vegetables, and tofu--costs 70 cents. Three meals would cost \$2.10. Wages do not even cover 20 per cent of the daily food and travel costs for a single worker, let alone her family (clr2@igc.apc.org" [3-May-1997 07:19:40.99]).

In addition, from an environmentalist perspective, McDonald's products are environmentally degrading and contribute to depreciation of the soil, rain forests, and grain and other resources that are used to make its beef and dairy products. Moreover, the production of beef in particular uses territory and resources that could produce more nutritious food and contributes to environmental pollution from excessive waste products involved in the production of beef. Cattle require a tremendous amount of resources to produce with a single beefsteak requiring up to 1,200 gallons of water, up to sixteen pounds of soybeans and grain are required to produce one pound of meat, and cow manure is a major source of pollution (see Rifkin 1992). Whereas McDonald's initially denied that it imported beef from rain forest areas like Costa Rica and Brazil that were threatened by excessive deforestation, subsequent legal procedures revealed that McDonald's did receive supplies of meat from these areas (McLibel Support Campaign, 1994 and www.mcspotlight.org). Thus, while McDonald's made concessions to environmental concerns -- under intense public pressure -- to substitute more biodegradable products for their previously non-biodegradable styrofoam cups and other packaging materials, on the whole its products and practices are environmentally harmful.[10]

Thus, I would strongly support Ritzer's concluding call for what amounts to a boycott of McDonald's in the interests of good health, quality eating experience, environmental concerns, and socio-political concerns with McDonald's labor practices and corporate policies. To critics who argue that such condemnation negates the popular pleasures of members of socio-economic groups other than one's own, I would argue that there are a variety of objective reasons devolving around health, environment, economics, and politics that would justify critique of McDonald's and resistance to its products.

Evaluating McDonaldization

The phenomenon of McDonaldization, however, interpreted as a set of processes geared at increasing efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control is more complex and ambiguous. There are times when one wants what Ritzer calls McDonaldization, when efficiency and various modes of instrumental rationality are particularly beneficial and when one desires to avoid their opposite. Rationalization/McDonaldization of labor might serve to deskill labor and oppress the work force as Braverman (1974) and Ritzer remind us, but this same procedure might free workers from dehumanizing and alienating labor that is better done by machines and automation. Likewise, there are some products and services that one wants to be as rationalized, predictable, and instrumental as possible, such as safe and efficient air travel and habitable hotels. Ritzer's celebration of such things as bed-and-breakfast establishments or the older forms of non-franchised motels could be the site of unpleasant surprises, as well as quirky and pleasing novelty or more customized service. When travelling, seeking food or shelter in unfamiliar environments, or utilizing machines and products, one often wants rationalized and predictable forms of goods and services, while other times one goes for the more novel and unpredictable experience.

The same dialectical analysis can be applied to Weber's analysis of bureaucracy and rationalization as Gouldner (1976) and others argue. Whereas bureaucracies can be insensitive to individual differences and oppressive of particularity, highly rational and legally-articulated rules and regulations can protect individuals against the excessive power of potentially oppressive

institutions. Although within universities, all students and teachers have suffered from the oppressive force of bureaucracy, it is often useful to have articulated, calculable, efficient, and controllable bureaucratic rules, procedures, and practices. Thus, rationalization can promote the forces of domination and hierarchy, but it can also empower individuals against institutions via standardized practices and regulations.

In terms of resisting McDonaldization as societal rationalization, one needs to organize oppositional practices and subcultures that provide alternatives to more rationalized corporate forms of social and economic organization. Food coops, health food or ethnic restaurants, and growing and preparing one's own food generates alternatives to the sort of massified and standardized food that McDonald's offers and in terms of health care, travel, and a variety of other everyday practices one can often seek or devise alternatives to the corporate mainstream. In each case, it is a question as to whether the rationalized service and product does or does not serve individual needs in a socially responsible manner, produce a useful product or service at a fair price, and proffer a reasonable product in comparison with other alternatives -- and whether, in specific cases, one enjoys the luxury of choice.

On the whole, one might rationally choose to pursue alternatives to corporate rationalization and mass-produced goods and services, and to avoid McDonaldization at all costs. On the other hand, one is sometimes forced to utilize services or products from large McDonaldized corporations if there are no reasonable alternatives. Ritzer's critique, however, in some ways replicates the critique of mass society and culture produced by both the left and the right. Such critique bemoans the increase in the contemporary world of standardized sameness and homogenization, and the decline of individuality, diversity, and multiple taste cultures. Ritzer also seems to assume that McDonald's is inexorably and relentlessly homogenizing the world, obliterating individuality and diversity. While there are undeniably tendencies toward homogenization, massification, and globalization taking place for which the rubric McDonaldization provides a partial optic, there is also a proliferation of difference, diversity, variety, and heterogeneity, as some forms of postmodern theory suggests. And while globalization partially involves the homogenizing of local culture and differences, it also involves proliferation of difference, hybridization, and the expansion of consumer and life-style choices -- at least for some privileged groups and individuals.

Consequently, while Ritzer primarily focuses on the phenomenon from the vantage-point of Weber's theory of rationalization, I have been arguing for what I call a multiperspectivist social theory to engage the phenomenon of McDonaldization in terms of theoretical analysis, social critique, and resistance. While Ritzer's strong Weberian perspective calls attention to and illuminates key elements of what he calls the McDonaldization of society, I have proposed that adding other perspectives produces a fuller grasp of the McDonaldization phenomenon, thus supplementing Ritzer's analysis and critique. Which perspectives one deploys depends on one's own theoretical and practical projects and the specific contexts and extent of one's inquiry. In this paper, I have obviously been limited to making a few theoretical and practical proposals which I hope facilitates critical discussion of the constitution and effects of the present organization of society.

Concluding Remarks

In sum and to conclude, Ritzer's study is valuable for helping us better understand important changes in the contemporary world that enable us to practically intervene and shape the social conditions that circumscribe our everyday experience and to empower us against oppressive forces. Ritzer's critical analysis calls attention to the dehumanizing and irrational sides of McDonaldization and forces us to articulate a standpoint of critique and to think of forms of resistance and alternatives. This involves producing individual and group strategies of resistance, as well as the production of viable and socially responsible alternatives. Perhaps Rinehart (1998) is right that Ritzer's approach is too individualistic and fails to articulate collective responses to McDonaldization, but most of his critics do not themselves spell out specific collective social alternatives and contestatory practices, projects that would have to be undertaken in any case by oppositional groups and social movements.

Yet Ritzer challenges us to consider precisely what form of society, values, and practices we desire. There is no question that McDonaldization is here to stay and that we need to decide how social rationalization can serve individual and social needs and what sorts of alternatives we need to McDonaldization. I have suggested that we should simply refuse McDonald's (and other junk food sites) as a form of culinary practice, that we should exercise Herbert Marcuse's "great refusal" (1964) and refuse to have anything to do with this highly objectionable form of assembly-line junk food. The social dynamics of McDonaldization are more complicated to evaluate, however, and Ritzer leaves us with the challenge to determine which forms of McDonaldization are positive and beneficial and which are harmful and destructive. It is the merit of Ritzer's book to force us to reflect upon these issues, and I have argued that thinking through McDonaldization from a multiperspectivist approach will help us to better understand the current form of contemporary society and to attempt to conceive of and create a better one.

Notes

1. Ritzer himself defines his project: "As a theoretically based work in social criticism, this book is part of a historical tradition in the social sciences in which social theory is used to critique society and thereby to provide the base for its betterment" (1993: xiii). Thus, he situates his problematic in the tradition of classical social theory.

2. For an ethnographic account of McDonald's which draws on personal experience to analyze the menu, the line, the order, and the dining, see Shelton 1996. Goldman 1992 and Kincheloe 1996 dissect the ideological and cultural meanings of McDonald's, while there are several histories that contain a wealth of stories, anecdotes, and lore concerning the origins, history, and dynamics of McDonald's as a corporate organization, and product of individuals (e.g. Love 1986). Ritzer, by contrast, uses grand theory to map the phenomenon of McDonaldization and journalistic accounts to document its contemporary manifestations and effects.

3. For examples of the Marx-Weber dialogue and the issues involved, see Antonio and Glassman 1985. My own take on the connections between Marx, Weber, and critical theory are contained in his article (Kellner 1985).

4. Offe 1985 and Lash and Urry (1987 and 1994) describe this process as "disorganized capitalism" while I would stress that capitalism is currently reorganizing itself on global and what Ritzer describes as McDonaldized lines. See the discussion of globalization in the introduction to Kellner and Cvetovitch 1996.

5. McDonald's has expanded its target audiences over the years, moving from family-oriented ads to targeting urban minorities and even GenXers (see Goldman 1992: 89 and Goldman and Papson 1996: 11f. and 237f.).

6. Ritzer emphasizes the former, but neglects the hyperreal cultural aspects of the McDonald's experience in which consumption of sign value is as fundamental as actually consuming the products in the act of eating. In other words, the McDonald's customer is not only chomping a burger, but gaining identity as a McDonald's consumer, participating in the communal experience of family fun or social belonging promised by the McDonald's ads and promotions. Or, alternatively, many McDonald consumers may identify themselves as thrifty shoppers who are getting a good value for their money as they consume McDonald products -- a false conception as I argue later.

7. For my take on the relation between Weber and the Frankfurt School, see Kellner 1985 and for my views on critical theory, see Kellner 1989a. For Habermas' interpretation of the dialectic of system and lifeworld, which he relates to Weber's theory, see Habermas 1984 and 1987.

8. Ritzer himself says that "I bear no particular animus toward McDonald's" (1996: xix), though I am suggesting that McDonald's itself deserves a negative animus from many possible perspectives, while McDonaldization itself is more complex and must be judged in its particular manifestations in specific contexts in order to adequately appraise its effects, as I argue in the following pages. I also believe that Ritzer derives his predominantly negative evaluation of McDonaldization by taking McDonald's itself as the primary focus of his analysis.

9. For a more detailed account of the McLibel campaign, see Kovel 1997: 26ff. I might add parenthetically that computer data bases and especially the World Wide Web supersede the sort of newspaper sociology that was widespread earlier and that Ritzer put to good use in his study. It used to be that one way to gather sociological data was through compiling newspaper articles on one's topic of inquiry. This was a highly specialized and time-consuming mode of research -- that I myself engaged in for years -- requiring access to a large number of newspapers, the ability to find material in periodic reader's guides, and the patience to search out the articles in question. Computer data bases simplified this process and I was able to publish my book on the Gulf War the year after the event itself (Kellner 1992), thanks to the use of Nexis-Lexis data bases, as well as PeaceNet and alternative sources. This mode of research was even more costly and specialized, unless one had access to a free University account -- as I did. But now the World Wide Web makes accessible a tremendous amount of information, collecting newspaper articles, scholarly studies, and a wealth of other material. This source, of course, generates its own problems as well (reliability of information, information overload, learning how to access the most productive sites, etc.), but revolutionizes research and makes it relatively easy to track the fortunes and vicissitudes of a corporation like McDonald's.

10. The McSpotlight web site notes that despite lipservice to environmental concerns, the actual impact of McDonald's on the environment is extremely harmful. As Kovel (1997: 30) notes: "Professor Graham Ashworth (director-general of the Tidy Britain Group sponsored by McDonald's) had to testify that McDonald's was in the 'top 1 or 2 percent' of all companies whose products end up as litter, it being estimated that on a given day in the UK, the company disgorges 7.9 million items as takeout that end up on the street.... When multiplied by the number of stores in the world, the inhouse garbage is equivalent to over 1 billion pounds of waste every year."

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