

Nothing Beats a 2x2 Matrix: a Short Commentary on George Ritzer's *Globalization of Nothing*

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abstract

This paper examines George Ritzer's *Globalization of Nothing* thesis and, in particular, his deployment of a 2x2 matrix – a device of cunning simplicity which is at its most effective when one corner is clearly 'good' and the opposite 'bad'. Armed with such a tool the world can be neatly packaged and our strategic direction decided. But beyond the mere banalities of management, a more sophisticated matrix might be necessary – one that captures the fluidity and ambiguity of the social world. And, to use such a device as part of the construction of a 'grand narrative', we shall need to carefully consider the axes by which we can cleave the world. We may require new terms that capture what has hitherto been missed, as well as audacious re-interpretation and re-examination of existing concepts (while ensuring that we continue to pay attention to other theoretical work within that canon). Not only that, to avoid (postmodern and feminist) accusations of judgemental elitism, it may be necessary to derive new objective criteria through which we can safely allocate and partition social artefacts. And through examination of these discursive moves, we may be able to better understand how knowledge is disseminated in "the critical study of contemporary social phenomena".¹

Introduction

Near the start of his keynote address at 2007's Critical Management Studies conference, Professor Ritzer boldly declared that he was critical of nothing. And, as his talk went on, so it seemed. Worse, perhaps, malcontents in the audience suggested that the organisers of the conference and the delegates may have received nothing new for their money,² for this was seemingly the same presentation (talk, slides and even the jokes) delivered in Australia two years earlier, itself derived from a paper – *Rethinking Globalization: Glocalization/Grobalization and Something/Nothing* – published two years before that.

In that paper, and in the presentation, Ritzer introduced a concept 'grobalization' that he positioned on the opposite end of a continuum to 'glocalization' and juxtaposed this with a second continuum, of 'something/nothing' to generate four quadrants. For Ritzer,

¹ Comment on cover of *The Globalization of Nothing*.

² £5,000 plus expenses, allegedly.

“[o]f greatest importance are the grobalization of nothing and the glocalization of something, as well as the conflict between them. The grobalization of nothing threatens to overwhelm the latter and everything else” (p. 193). But, within the globalization of nothing, Ritzer goes on to claim that, “... nothing can be marketed globally far more aggressively than something... [and that nothing]... generally can be easily and efficiently packaged and moved, often over vast areas” (p. 200).

Had I missed the joke? Was his show at CMS5 actually decorous: an elaborate performance critiquing academia and self? Whether by memory-stick, CD or just t’Net, PowerPoint slides slip easily from place to place. And a quick glance at Ritzer’s C.V. shows that the reach of the McDonaldization thesis approaches that of the eponymous company. Was Ritzer somehow arguing that his work and academic endeavour in general, was nothing? Or that no work was better than nothing? Perhaps a closer look at his ideas might reveal more and the obvious place to start is with the extended work *The Globalization of Nothing*.³

Nothing Comes Before the Introduction

Not long ago I was contacted by a producer for a syndicated TV show starring former *Today* host, Jane Pauley. In effect, the producer conducted an audition with me on the phone to see whether I could communicate my ideas to a lay audience. Things went well in a discussion of McDonaldization, but then she asked about a more recent work, *The Globalization of Nothing* (Ritzer, 2004). I demurred for a moment, knowing from experience that this is a more difficult set of ideas to communicate simply, but I plunged ahead. As I did, I could almost feel the producer lose interest. When I finished, she in effect said, “Don’t call us, we’ll call you”, and I said, “Well. I guess my ideas on ‘nothing’ and its globalization were not ‘McDonaldized enough’”. She laughed and said, “That’s right!” (Ritzer, 2006: 212)

We can perhaps see some of the steps that Ritzer makes in his own journey along these lines. For in his admirable extension of the McDonaldization thesis, he makes it clear that there is more than just *one* thing wrong with McDonalds. It’s not just that the food is a bit crap, tasteless and standardised, nor is it just that it is a monolithic capitalist enterprise that operates across the world. No, elements of both are the problem. And, if we look at some of Ritzer’s *bêtes noires*, we find a substantial list amenable to such dissection – Coca-Cola; Lunchables; Domino’s Pizza; Johnny Rockets; KFC; Pizza Hut; Taco Bell; and Starbucks – are all derided. But, as Ritzer argues, ‘It’s not just about the food’⁴ and the breadth of his analysis goes beyond mere food and drink to encompass GAP clothing, Gucci, IKEA, Microsoft, and Disney World as well as more generic targets such as cruise ships and Internet shopping.

But it is essential to find the right axes through which to cleave the world. Some obviously work better than others – the key often seems to be to find words that immediately capture the necessary distinction: Ritzer has chosen something-nothing and Glocal-Global for his. But this is not an uncontroversial choice and there are dark forces that seek to prevent Ritzer from speaking out in this way.

3 Unless otherwise annotated all references are to *Globalization of Nothing*.

4 Comment at CMS5.

Nothing Is Worse than Post-modernism

... our objective is to rescue our ability to use ideas like something and nothing, just as other scholars have sought to find ways of salvaging concepts like humanism, liberalism, justice and rationality in a postmodern age. (p. 207.)

To be sure, concepts like humanism, liberalism, justice and rationality are important, and it would be nice to think that ‘ideas like something and nothing’ are as vital, and it could be worrying if they are equally endangered by this postmodern age. But Ritzer’s task is not easy, for his argument “involves what the postmodernists call a ‘grand narrative’, a story of a huge swath of human history” (p.4). For Ritzer, “[t]he idea of a grand narrative has been greatly criticized by postmodernists” (p. 217). Fortunately, however, “modernists continue to develop such theories of general historical developments” (p. 217) and Ritzer is particularly wedded to the idea that his work is a grand narrative⁵ – it crops up in the sales blurb even – rather than, say, Lyotard’s synonym of meta-narrative. This may merely be that a grand narrative sounds, well, *grand* or it may be a more considered dig. And Ritzer certainly seems at least aware that there may be more to it than just a big story:

Also in the realm of the postmodern (and feminist) critique is the seeming “god’s eye” perspective that pervades this discussion. It seems as if I, as the author, am able to make distinctions (as well as judgments) that most, if not all, others are unable to make. What gives me the right, or the ability, to make a set of distinctions that no one else seems capable of making? There is clearly an elitism associated with this self-aggrandizement, but there is an even more profound form of elitism associated with all of this. That is, since most people seem to prefer the nothing end of each of the continua discussed here (such as the Paris casino-hotel [in Las Vegas] to Paris, France), there is an implied criticism of those choices and a clear preference for the something end of the continuum. It seems as if I know more than most people and that I am capable of making judgments – especially that they are increasingly choosing nothing over something and that that is a problematic choice – that most people are unable to make. Thus, this analysis would seem to be subject to many of the same criticisms as those leveled at the Frankfurt School of social theory. (p. 204)

However, Ritzer is alert to part of this problem:

[There are] at least two major differences between the approach taken here and that of the Frankfurt School. First, there is a set of objective criteria developed in Chapter 2 (as questionable as such a modern undertaking might be). Second, [...] the bulk of [this analysis] is devoted to outlining what is meant by nothing and then describing the trend toward, and ultimately the globalization of, nothing. (p. 204)

Objective criteria are always useful in the social sciences and even the Frankfurt School were alive to the possibility (see, for example, as one reviewer kindly pointed out, Fromm’s *The Sane Society*). However, Ritzer’s criteria are particularly illuminating. They are: Unique – Generic or One-of-a-kind – Interchangeable; Local Geographic Ties

5 Specifically, “a story of a large swath of human history, asserting that we are witnessing a general historical trend in the direction of more and more nothing. That is, there is historical movement towards that which is centrally controlled and conceived and increasingly devoid of substantive substance (as well as, as we will see, of uniqueness and individuality, among other things)... While it would be tempting to over generalize, this grand narrative (as well as the rest of this book’s main arguments) is best restricted to the realm of consumption” (pp. 4-5).

– Lack of Local Ties; Specific to the Times – Relatively Time-less; Humanized – Dehumanized; Enchanted – Disenchanted. The exemplars for each are intriguing: gourmet meal v microwave meal⁶; handmade pottery from a small town in Mexico⁷ v pottery mass-manufactured for a world market; VW Beetle and 1969 Pontiac Firebird⁸,⁹ v Kia and Dodge Neon; small teaching college v Internet university¹⁰; and gourmet meals (again) v Domino’s Pizza and Lunchables¹¹.

Ritzer is aware that this might be critiqued on the grounds of intellectual snobbery and he is keen to point out that he is proud to be an intellectual. On the snobbery, he is less forthcoming. Of those distinctions, more later. But to return to the grand narratives – since Ritzer has written on post-modernism and the only source he refers to on grand narratives is Lyotard, we might assume that he is alive to some of the issues that Lyotard raises. It would be unfair to merely suggest that Ritzer’s “grand narrative has lost its credibility” (Lyotard, 1984: 37) or that Ritzer’s work is part of the

6 This is not any microwave meal, this is Marks and Spencer’s... .

7 That still seems to be exported – so it’s not just about the market. But it’s not about being handmade, presumably, because that would replicate the previous distinction. So is it something to do with the small town in Mexico? That obviously differs from a pottery town such as, say, Stoke-on-Trent in all sorts of ways – but are the local ties of Stoke somehow different? A difficult question.

8 This is a truly intriguing set of examples to take that demands greater engagement from the reader. The Beetle debuted in 1938 and ended production in 2003 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VW_Beetle - consulted 11 January 2008] and was “the longest-running and most-produced automobile of a single design” (*ibid.*). Although the Beetle has its origins pre-war it is only in the 1960s on the back of a sustained advertising campaign (and a Disney movie) that it became iconic in America. Can advertising make something-of-the-times? Is it the very ‘nothingness’ that it would be seen as by other of these ‘objective’ criteria that gives the scope for a variety of other meanings to be leant to it – not least the engineered nostalgia underpinning the marketing of the New Beetle?

The 1969 Pontiac Firebird, rather than the 1967 (when the model was introduced) is also an inspiring choice. The changes for the 1969 model were: “a major facelift with a new front end design made of an Endura bumper housing the headlights and grilles. Inside, there was a revised instrument panel and steering wheel. Also, the ignition switch was moved from the dashboard to the steering column with the introduction of GM’s new locking ignition switch/steering wheel” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontiac_Firebird - consulted 11 January 2008].

Does this icon-of-the-times also include the unloved 6 cylinder base models as well as the V8 440? Why has Ritzer not chosen the Chevrolet, whose Camaro was virtually identical – but for whom the platform was created. And especially why not the Ford Mustang, from whom the whole concept was blatantly copied and which is more commonly seen as the iconic Pony Car? (Perhaps Ritzer is alluding to something else when he describes them as ‘muscle cars’.) We shall return to that later. Why is an entire company (Kia) that has half a dozen different models in its line-up chosen as comparator rather than a single model – would we find anything distinctive if we took Pontiac (even 1969 Pontiac) as a whole, as the exemplar of ‘specific-to-the-times’? Professor Ritzer asks some difficult questions of us.

9 Oh, and Herbie, the VW beetle from the Disney movie crops up reassuringly often (even in Disney parks). Maybe it’s not that hard to stick a number 53 and a couple of racing stripes on a Beetle (even a new one).

10 Perhaps a consideration of Foucault’s emphasis on the importance of the examination might be being lost here. The standardised processes of evaluation that unite both private teaching colleges and Internet universities may perhaps be an example of ‘dehumanization’ but the substantive difference between the two examples can largely be attributed to wealth and privilege – a slightly awkward position given Ritzer’s general praise for concepts such as ‘justice’ and ‘equality’ (pp. 205-7).

11 We return to the issue of ‘simulated’ and ‘genuine’ enchantment later.

‘unacceptable’ (*ibid.*: p.14) attempt to partition off ‘critical’ knowledge. And surely Ritzer wouldn’t be demanding that his work be seen as terrorist, silencing dissent (*ibid.*: 63-64)? So, it seems that Ritzer must be being a bit playful here and really pointing to something else in his Lyotard reference – the alternatives are otherwise just too unpalatable.

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

It is not hard to find possibilities as to what Ritzer was perhaps alluding to:

[T]o speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of a general agonistics. This does not necessarily mean that one plays in order to win. A move can be made for the sheer pleasure of its invention: what else is involved in that labor of language harassment undertaken by popular speech and by literature? Great joy is had in the endless invention of turns of phrase, of words and meanings, the process behind the evolution of language on the level of *parole*. But undoubtedly even this pleasure depends on a feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary—at least one adversary, and a formidable one: the accepted language, or connotation. (Lyotard, 1984: 10)

‘Nothing’ might be found here. For when we look at Ritzer’s definition, we see that he “refers to a *social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content*” (p. 3, original emphasis). Intriguing – for Ritzer nothing does have *form* and *content*,¹² is conceivable and controllable. Perhaps manageable even. A marked move from most other definitions of nothing. Where can we go with this – perhaps the relatively rare discipline of nothingology might enjoy a welcome revival? Nothingarians might finally have something to believe in. No longer might we suffer absence as there is always something there. Perhaps we could even see the end of nihilism¹³ and following that, the end of all negativity and destruction? Maybe I should stop here then?

That may be a little too much to hope for. But such language games do have some benefits: Ritzer is able to cite several fine names who have written about nothing. Parmenides, Zeno, St Augustine, Shakespeare, Galileo, Pascal, Newton, Einstein, Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Sartre, Marx and Simmel (as well as Huxley, Hemingway and Seinfeld) are included in the roll call. But Ritzer is soon able to mark the distinctive substantive content of his nothing.

From Kant’s point of view, it would be inaccurate to say that a form (or its content) is empty, that it is nothing.... However, this is all of little relevance to the argument being made here since Kant’s forms exist in the mind while those discussed here exist in the social world. While it may be that Kant’s forms logically cannot be empty of content (they cannot be nothing), that has little or nothing to do with the argument that centrally conceived and controlled *social* forms can be, and increasingly are, (largely) lacking in (distinctive) content. (p. 191)

12 To be fair, Ritzer does seemingly acknowledge this – that “nothing is nothing” (p. 14). Which adds to the complexity of his comparisons with eminent authors who also use the term ‘nothing.’

13 A little sneaky, to be sure, since (according to the OED) the definition of nihilism as nothingness is now obsolete. But well within the scope of the games that are being played here.

Is it starting to unravel? Surely Ritzer is not acknowledging that nothing is different? Maybe not. Hegel is congratulated for identifying the “dialectical relationship between nothing and being” (p. 191), their inseparability, and that they “cannot be disentangled because neither exists outside the relationship of *becoming*” (p. 191, original emphasis). And this dialectical approach is “of course, picked up by Marx” (p. 191). But:

Similarly, while we accept the view that there is a dialectical relationship between form and content and, more important, between something and nothing – that each is continually becoming the other – we, too, have in fact had to separate them out [like Marx] for analytical purposes. Of course, a concept like nothing is anathema to Marx. It is too abstract, too philosophical for his tastes and interests. After all, Marx has a materialistic interest in a concrete analysis of a specific economic form – capitalism. He is interested not only in understanding it, but in helping to hasten its demise. Given such an orientation, ruminating on form and content, their dialectical relationship, and whether form can be devoid of content, would not only not be issues of interest to Marx, but they would be abhorrent to him. (p. 191)

Kant too philosophical, Marx too anti-philosophical, Hegel refusing to allow the separation of nothing and being, thereby refusing pragmatic analysis. Sartre’s thinking on nothing has “little relevance” and “it is difficult to see much relationship between Heidegger’s sense of nothing and the way that concept is used here” (p. 195). Simmel, when talking about form and content is too close to Kant although his comments on the ‘tragedy of culture’ are cited approvingly as perhaps a fore-runner of Ritzer’s insight. And here we could start to see some problems with the originality of Ritzer’s work. For, as Habermas suggests in his introduction to the book of Simmel’s essays that includes ‘Begriff und Tragödie der Kultur’ (‘The Concept and Tragedy of Culture’), Simmel’s analysis has seeped into analyses across the social sciences:

Taking into account the historical influences of the Simmelian diagnosis of the times, one can ascribe to it what Gehlen once maintained about the enlightenment: its premises are dead, only its consequences live on. All parties seem to agree on the consequences, although some criticize as negative totality what others celebrate as crystallization, and some denounce as objectification what others technocratically safeguard as materialities. (Habermas, 1996: 405)

Nothing relevant is said about nothing, but plenty seems to have been said about the themes that run through the book. As Ritzer himself points out, Heidegger on technology and Sartre on loss also do seem to be talking about many of the same issues, and the unwary reader may also think that Marx, too, may have some relevance. Indeed, the more cynical may well believe that there has been plenty written on such issues such as *social forms that are generally centrally conceived and controlled and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content*, be it from art, through organization to consumption. But on nothing itself, nothing relevant. And such mastery of the ‘Which-I-call’ move may indeed be one of the signature flourishes of the masters of some post-modernist language games.

Nothing To Talk About

Now Ritzer has so carefully established his right to talk about nothing, we can see if there is something in it. Since we have already established the ‘objective’ criteria through which nothing is determined, we can now turn to the ‘nullities’ themselves. Ritzer identifies non-places, non-things, non-people and non-persons. For Ritzer, “The

distinction between places and non-places is closely related to Manuel Castells's view that we are moving from a world characterized by 'spaces of places' to one dominated by 'spaces of flows'" (p. 40), with the exemplars:

... of spaces of places a well-established local residential community in which each house has been built to the owner's specifications and is therefore different from every other house.... not centrally planned or controlled by developers and builders. The contrast... are the myriad tract house and planned communities that followed in the wake of the construction of the paradigmatic Levittown in the post-WII era... The houses in such communities are built according to limited number of designs so that many houses are identical to many others. The entire community is conceived by a central source (usually a developer) and once in existence is subjected to centralized control (especially today's gated communities).

While sounding attractive, Ritzer might be inputting just a little too much local content.¹⁴ But those are not the only examples: food is always on the menu. Ritzer (2004: 42) compares Oldenburg's (1989/1997) "great good places" the "core settings of informal public life" [Oldenburg (1989/1997: 16), c.f. Ritzer (2004: 42)] to McDonald's and McDonaldized restaurants – an argument run (at least initially) over some 13 pages – by the end of which we learn that some of the themes explored in Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis (the drives for efficiency, predictability, calculability, control by non-human technology and dehumanization) militate against McDonalds becoming a great good place. (Lucky Ritzer didn't McDonaldize his Globalization text too much.)

Non-things are "centrally created and controlled and [...] lacking in distinctive substance" (p. 55). A cynic, looking at the general examples, might consider this merely extends to all branded goods,¹⁵ but that would be too easy, for the exemplars are a Big Mac and Culatello ham. Now there may be some similarities between the two products (both are available globally and carefully marketed) but, "some (at least those who know about the distinctiveness and quality of such ham) will pay more for a Culatello ham than for virtually any other type of ham" (p. 58). Reassuringly expensive for consumers with reassuringly expensive tastes.¹⁶ Yet, somewhat oddly for a sociologist of consumption, nothing is said of the many other theorists who have ploughed this earthy furrow.

14 Such categories are difficult to sustain outside of the US – in the UK the examples of the former would only be seen in the wealthiest suburbs (such as, say, Bishop's Avenue in Hampstead) – rarely seen as models of tight communities and frequently populated by the wealthy mobile while perhaps the epitome of identical houses built from limited plans, and still tightly controlled (down to the type and colour of paint allowable for doors and windows), would be the Georgian terraces of Bath or Edinburgh. An even starker contrast would be with the glossy Modernist constructions of the wealthy glorified on Channel 4's *Grand Designs* and the inner city urban estates of streets of identical dwellings built to house the working class during Britain's industrialization.

15 Sealy mattresses, Martha Stewart sheets, Chanel perfumes, Victoria's Secret, Ralph Lauren and Mickey Mouse sleepwear, Taco Bell burritos, Benetton sweaters, Gap jeans and Gucci bags make up the initial list.

16 Culatello ham is similar to Parma ham, which is sliced and packaged across the world to the extent that Parma ham has become an effective and widely acknowledged brand. And it has become so established that there is no need to differentiate within the product by brand, as you might do for something more mundane, such as pork sausages. Culatello ham has not yet travelled as far or as fast, of course, but it is on the same trajectory.

Cleverly, the separation between people and non-people revolves around the difference between local bartenders and cast-members at Disney although in a presumable precursor to the discussion on Americanization, Woody from Cheers rather than Al Murray – pub landlord, is chosen as the exemplar with the unsurprising conclusion that, “[i]t is difficult to imagine the faceless non-person who plays a Disney character becoming a cultural institution” (p. 63). But the artifice involved in Disney also has unexpected outcomes.

However, [In Disney] the efforts to produce simulated enchantment are highly rationalized and are therefore better described as being disenchanted. The irony is that Disney World terms itself the “Magic Kingdom”. There is, of course, magic there, but it is of the simulated and disenchanted variety. Nothing militates more against “genuine” magic than simulation and disenchantment.

There is a little puzzle here. Ritzer cites Baudrillard approvingly on simulation, provocatively suggesting “Closely related to the idea of nothing... is the idea of simulations, most closely associated with the work of the French postmodernist, Jean Baudrillard. To Baudrillard, a *simulation* is a copy of a copy for which there is no original. It could be argued that *all* forms of nothing are also simulations. That is, it is originals that have distinctive content (and are something), but copies—simulations—are by definition lacking in such content; they are nothing!”¹⁷ (Baudrillard, 1983: 220) Further, it is precisely simulations that tend to be centrally created and controlled. Baudrillard’s assertion that the world is being increasingly characterized and dominated by simulations is consistent with this book’s grand narrative about the global proliferation of nothing.

What is awkward here is the residual attraction to ‘originals’ for, as the quote above makes clear, simulation destroys the distinctions that would matter here. In addition, and more tellingly Baudrillard says,

[In the order of simulation] When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. (1994: 6-7)

Similarly, what might be authentic is open to question: for “in the US... culture is space, speed, cinema, technology. This culture is authentic, if anything can be said to be authentic” (1988: 100).

It therefore appears Ritzer may be being playful here with his distinction between what is simulated and what is genuine. And the examples suggest that this is so, as they slip unavoidably into parody. Since Ritzer’s first suggestion that ‘genuine enchantment’ is possible between bartenders and consumers is disarmingly deconstructed by Al Murray’s boorish landlord: “white wine/fruit-based drink for the lady?”(Murray, 2007: 170) we can turn to his extended example of enchantment when talking about non-service. Once again at a gourmet restaurant, we now find:

17 Oddly, some of Ritzer’s earlier examples are scarcely ‘originals’ – the 1969 Pontiac Firebird is a copy (of earlier iterations of that model) of a copy (the Camaro) of a copy (the Mustang). Something out of nothing, indeed!

Finally, the service at a gourmet restaurant is likely to have a magical quality about it, whereas the service provided by waiters on cruise ships, like the cruise ships themselves, is likely to be more simulated enchantment and therefore more disenchanting. In terms of the former, a good example would be one of Paris's great gourmet restaurants, especially during truffle season. Soon after diners are seated, and periodically during the evening, staff members circulate around the restaurant with a basket laden with truffles. Diners are allowed to gaze at this magical food and to inhale its aroma. The expressions on diners' faces indicate that this is clearly a magical moment. One is unlikely to experience such a moment, or such service, on a cruise ship, where the emphasis is on serving huge numbers of people lots of food quickly and efficiently. (p. 65)

It is as well that Ritzer is pulling our legs, for otherwise jaded readers might question how his objective criteria are being applied here and indeed how the distinction between real and simulated comes to be so apparent. Skeptics might also question why small rituals at specific restaurants are compared to more encompassing processes elsewhere.

Nothing Has Been Written on Globalization Yet

Ritzer is at his most modest when he discusses his contribution to the globalization debate. Take his introduction of the term 'grobalization':

While glocalization is an integrative concept, and Robertson is certainly interested in both sides of the glocal-global, homogenization-heterogenization continua, his work tends to emphasize the importance of the glocal and the existence of heterogeneity. This book seeks to offer a *more balanced view* on these issues by developing a second concept – *grobalization* – to supplement the undoubtedly important idea of glocalization. The concept of glocalization gets to the heart of not only Robertson's views, but also what many contemporary theorists interested in globalization think about the nature of transnational processes. *Glocalization* can be defined as the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas. The concept of *grobalization*, coined here for the first time as a much-needed companion to the notion of glocalization, focuses on the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves on various geographic areas. Their main interest is in seeing their power, influence, and in some cases profits *grow* (hence the term *grobalization*) throughout the world. Grobalization involves a variety of subprocesses, three of which – capitalism, Americanization, and McDonaldization – are, as pointed out above, central driving forces in grobalization, but also are of particular interest to the author and of great significance in the worldwide spread of nothingness. (p. 73, original emphases (unbelievably))

I should be clear here. Ritzer is being modest in his masterful play of another language game – a different variation on the 'Which-I-call' gambit. For while it is true that Robertson brought the term glocalization into the globalization debate, and that he has had a particular interest in exploring that aspect, globalization discussion is scarcely free from analyses that explore the drive of capitalism and Americanisation. (The more world-weary might even point out that glocalization was created, and works as a term, as a balance against overly consuming analyses that start from the effects of the development of capitalism and Americanisation.) The consummate skill that Ritzer shows is to include McDonaldization as a separate strand of thought from capitalism and/or Americanisation (for McDonalds' worldwide spread is often seen as mere exemplar of contemporary capitalism or Americanisation under globalisation (or often even cited as an example of Glocalization as menus and practices are adjusted to local cultures) through the coining of a new vocabulary. Grobalization includes McDonaldization, therefore if globalisation is to be discussed in these terms,

McDonaldization must be seen as a valid category of analysis. Or, more cynically, the contribution here is the globalisation of McDonaldization.

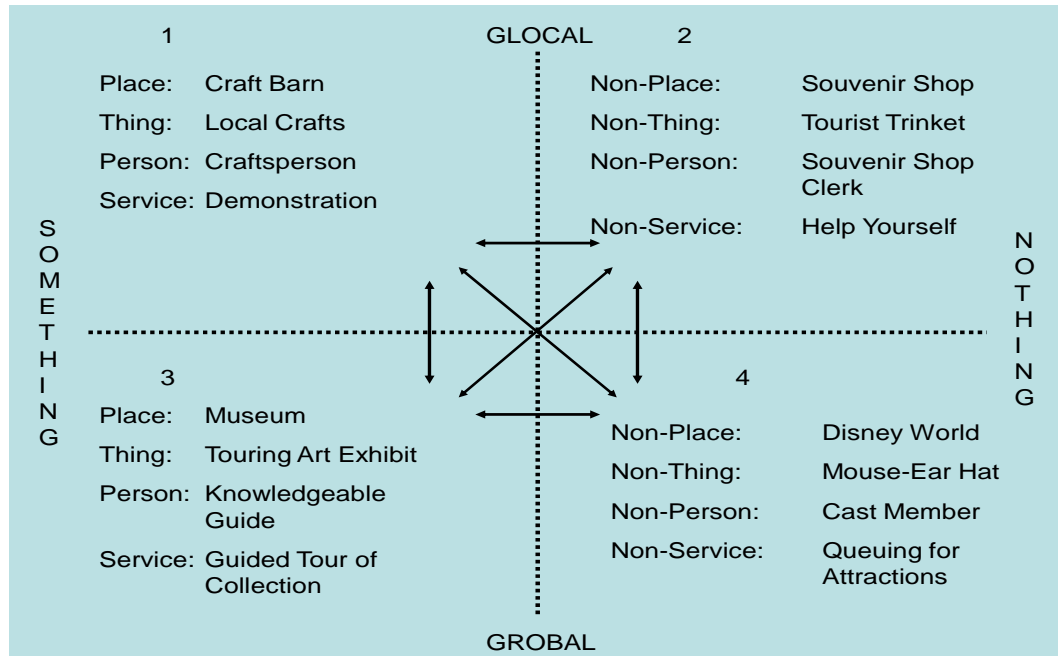
The McDonaldization of Globalisation

Helpfully, when George Ritzer gave his plenary presentation at CMS5 in Manchester, he used the 2x2 matrix from *The Globalisation of Nothing* to illustrate his thinking. Not only did this help to communicate and make intelligible the challenging ideas presented in his book, but it was a touching gesture for the audience of management academics as, arguably, such images are the defining legacy of management practice and theory. And why not? They are simple to understand, break the world down in to manageable categories that direct us to clear (strategic) directions. As the blurb for Lowy & Hood's (2004) book states, "2 x 2 Thinking is characterized by a fundamental appreciation for the dynamic and complex nature of business" (Wiley, 2009). Indeed, at their very best, they are able to inform us what is good, what is bad and what is somewhere in-between. Sadly their use outside management as guides to good and bad and right and wrong has been neglected. The potential is clearly there, as this matrix below indicates.

I Willing & Able	II Willing & Not Able
III Not Willing & Able	IV Not Willing & Not Able

Drawn from <http://www.lorober.com/favorites/favorites.htm> – "Another 2x2 matrix asking if people are willing and able for the task. Our response to each of the four types of people must be different". Last consulted 30/05/08.

This example clearly demonstrates how definitions of what is good and what is bad can be extended along two dimensions in order to give a better understanding of the many challenges in life. Thus this simple matrix enables the useless to be sorted from the feckless and from the fecking useless. However, Ritzer is not a shallow management academic or wincing psychologist but a public intellectual although, like Foucault and Baudrillard, one dismayingly unacknowledged in his own country. "Recently, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of McDonald's, I was contacted by about a half dozen *different* BBC stations and programmes. In contrast, I believe at that time I gave a total of two interviews to small US newspapers" (Ritzer, 2006: 209, original emphasis). Consequently his matrix (below) is much more nuanced. There are no solid lines demarcating categories and, indeed, to illustrate the delicate ambiguity in his argument, he uses double-headed arrows to emphasise the potential for boundary-crossing. The potential revealed by this is immense: if the Boston Consulting Group had been as sophisticated, perhaps some of those dogs could have become cash cows or stars (or maybe daring new hybrids) and so much misery caused by firm closures and down-sizing could have been averted.



Derived from figure 5.1: The relationship between Glocal-Grobal and Something-Nothing with exemplary (non-) places, (non-) things, (non-) persons and (non-) services. (p. 98)

Now we have the key axes for Ritzer’s matrix set out, we can briefly consider the different sections. Rightly, Ritzer points out that “the other two quadrants (2 and 3) are clearly residual in nature and of secondary importance” (p. 97). Rightly, that is, for any decent 2x2 should be broken into good, bad and something in-between categories. And as such, we shall not heed them here, quickly turning to the good and the bad. Perhaps surprisingly, neither gourmet meals nor McDonalds appear in either box. Instead, we find a good place to be a craft barn, local crafts as good things, a good craftsperson and good service realised though demonstration. Disney World is a bad place, Mouse-Ear hats are bad things, cast members are bad people¹⁸ and queuing for attractions is a bad thing.

On the last we can perhaps agree.¹⁹ But the rest appear merely as value judgements (that differ markedly from mine²⁰) stitched into a framework that simply works to reinforce those judgements. Which is fine as far as the 2x2 matrix is concerned – that’s its job. But the value judgements remain disappointing. Can we try some different ones within the same matrix? Let’s start with the bad. Ritzer helpfully suggests that:

18 A little naughty, that one.

19 Fortunately at Disney parks, for less than the price of a gourmet meal, you can purchase fast-track tickets that enable you to queue-jump.

20 Nothing is more likely to ruin my day than going to a craft barn and watching some craftsperson demonstrate how they make their useless tat. Tastes differ, I guess.

Nothing has an advantage in terms of transportation around the world. These are things that generally can be easily and efficiently packaged and moved, often over vast areas. (Ritzer, 2003: 200)

His PowerPoint slides, seemingly the same as those illustrating a talk at a conference 2 years earlier, certainly appear to fit that bill. We might also suggest that recooked McDonaldization tends towards being devoid of distinctive content and that many of the ideas about ‘nothing’ are more impressively examined elsewhere. Only using the term ‘nothing’ to describe something and then shamelessly comparing it to other luminaries who write about nothing, as nothing, might be described as distinctive. Perhaps, overall, by discounting those language games we can pitch this as a non-thing. CMS⁵ could have been held anywhere, and simulated BAM²¹ quite adequately – non-place perhaps? And cynics have suggested that this was the same script as delivered before – non-service? And non-person – no. That would just be too rude.

But is it Grobal? Well, the McDonaldization thesis seems nearly as widely distributed as the eponymous restaurant and is scarcely a *local* response, the thesis has been proven more than capable of being McDonaldized itself, and its promulgation does seem fuelled by the pursuit of the dollar. Enough there to put it mostly in the Grobalization of Nothing box (albeit with maybe one or two of those dinky arrows across the permeable divides). Perhaps it sits as neatly as any of the other examples.²²

And as to what would then be in the Good category? Well, it wouldn’t be me, since I am under no pretence that my own work couldn’t be subjected to the same critique... although, sadly, I don’t get paid £5,000 to turn up at conferences. (But there again, as Baudrillard (1999: 199) pithily recognized “A negative judgment gives you more satisfaction than praise, provided it smacks of jealousy.”).

Maybe, in the end, within academia, nothing sits there and this simple matrix ultimately shows that any grand narrative, or indeed the successful promulgation of all academic work, always veers to the globalization of nothing.

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21 British Academy of Management. Don’t even go there. But if you do, don’t pay.

22 But wait. Clearly the performance at Manchester would then have to have been a demonstration of the grobalization of nothing and thus something. And therefore, as Ritzer points out, “[w]e accept the view that there is a dialectical relationship... between something and nothing – that each is continually becoming the other...” (p. 191). Maybe I’ve been too cynical.

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