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## **The Globalization of Nothing: A Review Symposium of George Ritzer: The Globalization of Nothing(Pine Forge/Sage, 2003)**

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# THE GLOBALIZATION OF NOTHING

A Review Symposium of George Ritzer: *The Globalization of Nothing* (Pine Forge/Sage, 2003)

## 1. PETER BEILHARZ

Globalization signifies everything, and nothing. George Ritzer's great contribution in his new book is to manoeuvre these two terms together, to the extent that they are seen as inseparable, as mutually constitutive. The result is a study as catching, or fetching, as his *The McDonaldization of Society*, *Expressing America*, or *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*. Perhaps it is more like the metalevel theory which contains these other arguments. For those studies, say of McDonald's and American Express, are cultural but also institutional and specific in form. *The Globalization of Nothing* works at a different level of abstraction, at the same time more abstract and more concrete. The critique of globalized culture here is precisely that it is empty and time-less, not eternal, but outside time and place.

The focus of Ritzer's sociology persists: it is on culture, rather than production. The logic of Ritzer's optic is to view, for example, housing, or beer, or cola, all of which are plainly products, as consumer-side phenomena. Most of us, in the West, encounter these as consumer phenomena. What is changing, on this account, is the further homogenization of consumption through globalization. Nothingness, here, refers to the sense that consumptive life in the West is increasingly conceived centrally and controlled formally, while comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content. Objects or things nevertheless need to be plotted conceptually across a something–nothing continuum: there are places–non-places, things–non-things, people–non-people, services–non-services. And none of this analysis is more than descriptive, in the first instance; we may, in fact, individually or collectively prefer non-things to things, and so on. Ritzer, like the rest of us closer to or further away from critical theory, has to deal sociologically as well as personally with what you might call the democracy of the market, where consumers choose or select goods and services which are analytically empty. Ritzer does not

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succumb here to nostalgia, that occupational hazard of cultural critics; but he does nevertheless insist that we (us, if not others) need to seek to address what seems to be a situation of *loss amidst monumental abundance*.

Ritzer's addition to this consists not only in the innovative coupling or (in a certain sense) identification of globalization and nothingness. He also wants to modify the emptiness of globalization-talk, by introducing the distinction between *glocalization* and *grobalization*. The first, as in the work of Roland Robertson or various tillers in the field of anthropology, refers to the creativity of action at local level, or the cultural innovation sometimes referred to as hybridity. Ritzer coins the term *grobalization* to refer to the other dynamic, that which Castoriadis calls the dynamic of rational mastery. This is the growth dynamic of globalization, which Ritzer subsets through three other processes: capitalism, Americanization and McDonaldization. Capitalism frames Americanization and McDonaldization; the three can be read politically as symbolically identical, especially by opponents, for example those who seek to blow up McDonald's sites in protest against America and/or capitalism.

This world could be viewed as postmodern, but it does not need to be. As Ritzer has long argued, McDonaldization looks more like modernism, a fordism, the further industrialization and rationalization of an already existing institutional regime and production culture. The logic of globalization, of course, means that this is McDonald's for some, and haute cuisine for some others. On a global scale, *they* have nothing; we purchase it. As in David Brooks' *Bobos in Paradise*, we, with the means, discover the aesthetic bliss of imperfection, and faked primitive in consumption, to relieve us of the monotony of a prepackaged world. We combat planned obsolescence with revived retro. Smaller, on this account, might be more beautiful, or at least proximity might confer distinction. This is not, however, a romantic yearning for return, however privileged it might be. Place may be an idea with a romantic calling, but we can also make it modern. As Bauman insists on arguing, place-making is a precondition of politics, even in a restless world. Refusal to commit to place is tantamount to wilfully creating the pile of trash behind us that drives us forward, to vary Benjamin's image. It is good neither for politics, nor for ecology.

Ritzer does not claim this connection, and much of his sympathy is with Weber rather than Marx, but I wonder, in reading this, whether he is not asking us (among other things) to revisit and reopen the idea of alienation. Marx famously concretized and turbocharged the generic romantic idea of alienation, or strangeness, by fixing it to production, more specifically to labour. As the notes in the *Paris Manuscripts* indicate, alienation should henceforth be connected to the process of labour; to its results, the product; to our fellows; and to our species-being. A hundred and sixty years later, in the West, the cathedrals of capitalism grow ever taller, and we are, many of us, interpellated by them as consumers. The point is less, narrowly, that we

are alienated as consumers than that our experiences as consumers may well be empty, or filled only by such glimpses of intimacy or care as we can force into them.

Ritzer's practical point, here, is simply that it is easier to be human to the staff or customers in a diner than in McDonald's, where the script is less driven by pre-established format. Second-order McDonaldization – McHospitals, McUniversities – forces the template, makes it harder for the parties involved to work outside the box. We need to work outside these boxes, or at least this possibility should be available to us as part of a standard repertoire of everyday life. The alternative is more alienation, more commodity fetishism, more indifference to the humans who mediate these worlds of things.

If all this sounds grim, it does not mean that Ritzer's book is forbidding. It is immensely witty and clever. The wisecrack critique of Ritzer's *McDonaldization* book, of course, is that the book resembles the object it criticizes – Ritzer is charged with producing McSociology. Is this clever new book, then, not open to the parallel feedback loop change, that it is vacuous, empty? I don't think so, though we can already hear the critics warming up their word-processors. *The Globalization of Nothing* works on the glocalization axis, not that of globalization. Glocalization works on something. As Ritzer argues, a lot of nothing is still nothing. As he suggests, in closing the book, the real issue with McSociology is the Americanized global textbook, bite-sized, culturally empty or particularistic and full of lard. Ritzer's contribution is to stay working at the personal worries–social problems nexus which C. Wright Mills identified as sociology's primary place of activity. Ritzer's work does not claim to be a culture; it is a prosthetic, in Freud's sense, a means to help mediate the world. This is sociology not as hamburger, but as habitus. It is a door, not a window.

## 2. TREVOR HOGAN

*The Globalization of Nothing* is a sustained meditation on 'loss amidst monumental abundance'. 'Nothing' is important to George Ritzer and in this he is onto something. Nothing is systematically produced; the problem is not that it is without form but rather without substantive content. We can conceive of nothing, and produce and consume nothing only in relation to something. But if the world is increasingly a flux of non-places, non-things, non-persons, and non-services, all continually reinforcing each other and multiplying 'a lot of nothing', this is not so much a threat to human sociality as its very expression. Contra Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Ritzer is suggesting that we are being *in* nothing; the world, our world, is becoming empty by the very means by which we are living it. *The Globalization of Nothing* shows the social form of nothing, how it is produced, observed, at the point of its consumption.

Ritzer is a sociologist, not a philosopher, so for starters the title has a fat five-syllable passive noun that is one of sociology's less edifying contributions to global discourses of the past three decades: yep, here it is again, folks: 'globalization'. But Ritzer is nothing if not smart – like Roland Robertson before him, he puts the term to work by showing how a deceptively simple but sustained description of the social processes of globalization reveal a novel 'tragedy of culture' that confronts humankind in the 21st century. By tracing the ways in which nothing is being globalized, Ritzer reveals the spiritual emptiness that confronts us all in our everyday lives. Humans are awfully clever: we have created systems of material cultures that are comparatively inexpensive, convenient, efficient, fast, mobile, abundant and self-reproductive. These systems are ever expansive and increasingly incorporate the world as a whole and all human societies in a way that, potentially at least, enables all to participate in these benefits. So far so good. But these very same processes and systems are empty. As we all learned in math classes at school, more of nothing is still nothing. So Ritzer, being the good sociologist that he is, coins another neologism: 'Grobalization', defined as globalizing processes that are concerned with growth, or rather the production of super-abundance, material wealth, efficient order, speed and the fantasies of the world's number one cultural empire, America (capitalism, McDonaldization, Americanization). By this definition, Grobalization is not only the source of nothing but its own multiplier. Ritzer's close descriptions of these processes from the side of consumer culture shows that the grobalization of nothing is not a neutral process but one which actively eats up places, people, things and services and replaces them with its own 'centrally conceived and controlled forms that are largely lacking in distinctive content'. Ritzer provides many examples of these processes that trigger the reader's own. I recently read, for example, a report of a certain US academic expert on Internet usage and addiction who has since established his own Center for Online Addiction, a virtual clinic providing direct and affordable online counseling: virtual homeopathy, or give the dopes more opium.

*The Globalization of Nothing* seems to have two kinds of readerships in mind: North American sociologists who need a metatheoretical apparatus to explain to them why and how a sociology of globalization is of deadly seriousness, and an informed general reader who shares Ritzer's sense that it is possible to live inside the whale and still worry about truth, beauty and the good. Ritzer's urbane, witty critique is a cry of pain from the centre of grobalization: America. Readers who live in and off American abundance will immediately appreciate the truth of his claims, his aesthetic distaste, that together reveal the moral kernel of his critique. This is not a book to be read by the world's 'two-thirds poor' for they are not experiencing loss amidst abundance but rather loss because of others' abundance. For the poor, the story is not lamentation for what has been loss in abundance, but that of

resentment borne of exclusion from it even as they are forced to work for its reproduction.

And yet, I fear that Ritzer is too nice a guy to express the rage, the fury that 'nothing' really demands of us. Instead of a savage Swiftian satire or a righteous jeremiad, Ritzer's critique is well-tempered, his humour is good-natured, and he takes great care to anticipate possible objections to his argument. Once upon a time, Ritzer would have been called a humanist. In a world of heartless know-nothings perhaps he might like to wear such a label as a badge of honour. What is really objectionable about the globalization of nothing, however, is its sheer violence and metaphysical emptiness as it eats up our too-frail capacities to get by in everyday life. Ritzer exposes the butt-ugly brutality of the globalization of nothing – but seeks not to reproduce its horror on the page. Nevertheless, the ethical concerns of the author are present, if not foregrounded.

I detect three kinds of moral stories at work here, and all of them share a common concern for the future of humanity *qua* humanity. The first is the proverbial frog in the water that is boiled alive because it does not realize that the temperature is slowly rising. Here Ritzer finds common ground with environmentalists that argue that we are unable to act with urgency to global threats to human survival simply because we have lost our sensitivity to nature. It is not so much false consciousness, as Marxists decry, as it is no- or un-consciousness. Another moral issue that appears to animate Ritzer relates to this lack of consciousness: as globalization processes increase their pervasive control of all arenas of everyday life across the globe, could it be that we humans also lose all critical perspectives to be able to make meaningful judgements and choices? Globalization not only reduces choices, but it coerces consumers to make non-choices (without the necessary information and a broad-enough perspective) within highly constrained and artificial contexts. Ritzer's concern here reminds me of the early 1970s debate triggered by the planting of plastic trees along an LA freeway: it prompted an infamous article with the ironic title of 'What's Wrong with Plastic Trees?' Indeed.

As Ritzer laments, 'people come to prefer the empty to the full: they define the empty as the full and the full as the empty.' In the case of plastic trees, the full–empty dichotomy could be replaced by artificial–real with equal effect. These kind of distinctions are labelled old-fashioned modern but as Ritzer himself notes in the appendix, that is precisely his point: the erosion of the meaning of such distinctions is not an epistemological error by those espousing them, but rather a social erosion of distinctions rendered by the globalization of nothing. Finally, Ritzer's third existential anxiety and moral challenge recalls Gresham's Law of Money, 'that increases in nothing tend to leave less and less room for something'. This might also be called a win-lose, zero-sum game, or again as Ritzer himself puts it: 'not only does a lot of nothing not add up to something, but the increasing quantity of nothing leaves less space for something.'

Ritzer's ethical concerns and political arguments are presented in a suggestive and democratic manner (he offers the information and the broad scope for making informed judgement). As such, these concerns remain much less developed than the meta-theory presented in the first half of the book. The book might be seen as an interlude in a larger Ritzer symphony. In his earlier tomes he has presented a series of analyses of modern cultures of globalization and it might now be time to develop a more explicit set of constructive arguments for a more liveable and sustainable world that is the glocalization of something.

The ethical challenges of the globalization of nothing might have been enhanced, too, with another chapter or two exploring more ambiguous case studies than the Internet. The Internet is the prime example for Ritzer's case but is it the best choice of case study? It is certainly a leading edge information technology that enables virtual connections and forms of mediated communication between humans in virtual time and space. I wonder, though, whether or not it might be more illuminating to use examples that we take as part of our social worlds in real time and space? Whilst *The Globalization of Nothing* is best read in conjunction with his earlier books, I would have liked more on the fields of tensions between globalization and glocalization processes that Ritzer succinctly delineates in principle – such as team sports and popular music, for example. Both are realms of human endeavour that require persons, places, things and services interconnected and yet are undergoing extraordinary transformations by globalization processes also. In this sense, team sports and popular music cultures are better test cases for Ritzer's arguments than the Internet because they are quintessentially modern forms of culture that were also culture industries from the outset. In other words, I am particularly interested to try to understand how Ritzer's approach to globalization and glocalization processes work in relation to the fields of our deepest fantasies and dreams as connected to organized sports, music, film, the performing and visual arts, etc. – that is, where people are interacting in real time and space for no other reasons but to participate in wider endeavours that produce meanings and fantasies for others to consume.

Nevertheless, if nothing else, *The Globalization of Nothing* is really something. In depicting the insidious spread of nothing, its insinuation into everything, Ritzer provides both a sociology of nothing and its globalization. But Ritzer is not an iconoclast here. He is both more modest and more ambitious, for he wants to imagine that 'nothing' need not be our global destiny – and he invites the reader to join him in imagining the world as otherwise. As John Ruskin lamented over 130 years ago: iconoclasm doesn't grasp the problem – 'you can smash the icons but not convince people of the emptiness of their imaginations'. This is still the problem of modern nothingness. Ritzer provides the analytical means for describing the social reality of its spread and reproduction through globalization processes. Pop will eat itself. Consumption is cannibalism. And as David Byrne once sang: 'Heaven

is a place where nothing ever happens.’ But what to do about our imaginations? There is always a buck to be made out of our fantasies and dreams, but the dreams themselves do not need to be empty. Ritzer depicts the nightmare but we still need to dream otherwise. Then again, ‘Sleepers wake!’ There is a world outside, and sometimes it is better that it is not given wholly over to our fantasies, or at least to those whose business it is to sell nothing to the world, a world made over in the image of nothing.

### 3. BERYL LANGER

*The Globalization of Nothing* is an engaging book on a dispiriting subject – ‘loss amidst monumental abundance’ and the ‘death of the local’ – which will likely play to mixed reviews in a number of theoretical subcultures. On globalization, Ritzer’s thesis of an inexorable shift from ‘global’/ ‘local’ to ‘grobal’/ ‘glocal’ has sobering implications for ethnographic and post-colonial celebration of agency, creativity and vigorous hybridity. What happens, he asks, when all that’s left of ‘local’ culture is what remains within the ‘glocal’, so that hybrid forms are inexorably leached of locally specific content (something) and weighted towards the ‘grobal’ (nothing)? His thesis on consumption is similarly provocative to theoretical optimists. For Ritzer, the world of consumption is ‘increasingly characterized by nothing’, by which he means ‘a social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content’. If he’s right, the task of humanizing capitalism through creative consumption might challenge the ingenuity of Michel de Certeau’s ‘tricky poachers’ and Daniel Miller’s ‘thrifty shoppers’. Look forward to the inevitable flurry of critical activity in defence of everyday tactics and DIY construction of ‘something’ from ‘nothing’. The fact that Ritzer’s categories are ideal types on a continuum necessarily inclusive of things more ‘something’ than ‘nothing’, or that his concluding chapter expresses hope for a future defined by the creation of ‘entirely new forms of something’, is unlikely to deflect the umbrage of those who choose to read his analysis as one which denigrates popular taste and defines consumers as passive dopes. It doesn’t, but that’s not going to stand in the way of argument.

Ritzer will not be an easy target for the defenders of popular pleasure; a man who includes Jerry Seinfeld in his list of contributors to the philosophy of nothing is hard to cast in the role of a latter-day Adorno. Take the chapter title ‘Meet the Nullities’, for example – an evocation of Weber (‘this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved’) and TV sitcom (‘Meet the Flintstones’) available only to someone steeped in both social theory and popular culture. Notwithstanding the gloom of his cultural prognosis, Ritzer’s tone is cheerfully American – Capra rather than Kafka – Weberian in theory but not in spirit. While this invites criticism from yet another quarter, it is clear from Ritzer’s consistently accessible



writing that high theorists of the humourless kind are not his target audience. The legions of undergraduates encouraged to engage with Max Weber by reading *The McDonaldization of Society* are testament to the pedagogical wisdom of this strategy.

Ritzer's continuing commitment to Weber is signaled in the construction of 'something' and 'nothing' as mutually constitutive 'ideal types' used to generate a further set of ideal-typical oppositions between places/non-places, things/non-things, people/non-people, and services/non-services, and the notion of 'a powerful elective affinity between globalization and nothing'. It is also apparent in the specification of McDonaldization as a process separable from both capitalism and Americanization, but equally implicated in 'globalization' – 'the growing world-wide ability of, especially, largely capitalistic organizations and modern states to increase their power and reach throughout the world.' For this reader, however, the book has equally powerful echoes of the Frankfurt School and the early Marx – connections that Ritzer himself is perhaps unable, and certainly unwilling, to acknowledge. Marx is of course avowedly central to his theory of 'globalization', but it is the economic Marx of the profit imperative and economic imperialism, not the philosophical Marx of alienation. Indeed, Ritzer explicitly argues that 'a concept like nothing is anathema to Marx', declaring it 'too philosophical for his tastes and interests'. Not according to my reading of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, most obviously in the section on 'Estranged Labour', but also the 'Power of Money in Bourgeois Society'. These passages speak to directly to what Ritzer identifies as 'the problem of nothingness'.

The representation of global consumer culture in *The Globalization of Nothing* calls out for the re-articulation of Marx's theory of alienation to capture the estrangement and emptiness that is the downside of a social world shaped by continuous and increasingly meaningless consumption – a world evoked in bleakly comic American films like *Clerks* and *Mallrats*, novels like *Capital, Volume I* by Australian writer Anthony Macris, the lyrics of Tom Waits' 'Step Right Up', and so on. Ritzer's talent for typology would make easy work of transposing the four-fold process of estrangement from the sphere of production to the sphere of consumption. Critical work on alienated consumption is sorely needed, as evidenced by Daniel Miller's recent suggestion, in *A Theory of Virtualism*, that if social theorists would only stop fixating on production they might recognize consumer society as the utopian solution to the historical dialectic. There is arguably an urgent need for a new theory of alienated consumption untainted by any hint of the 'elitism' evoked by critics in their routine rejections of the Frankfurt School. Were Ritzer to overcome his reluctance to assume the very un-American mantle of Marxism, he might be just the theorist to provide one.

On the subject of the Frankfurt School, I would want to argue that there are strong parallels between Ritzer's conceptualization of nothing in terms of

'centrally conceived social forms that are comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content' and Horkheimer and Adorno's conceptualization of a 'culture industry' which 'intentionally integrates its consumers from above'. Ritzer explicitly rejects the connection by arguing that his analysis is based on 'a set of objective criteria', and that while it does have 'a critical thrust', 'the bulk of it is devoted to outlining what is meant by nothing and then describing the trend toward, and ultimately the globalization of, nothing.' I think that the difference between them might be more one of style than substance. While many of Adorno's comments on popular culture range from misguided to offensive, providing fuel for the elitist tag that allows the culture industry essay to be dismissed out of hand, the critical fusion of Marx on commodification and Weber on rationalization is perhaps closer to Ritzer than he would care to acknowledge.

There is so much more to be said about *The Globalization of Nothing*. It is theoretically sharp and substantively rich, but I have some quibbles around the edges. Why, for example, does mass-production *necessarily* move towards the 'nothing' end of the continuum? Does this mean the end of all hope that technology might be used to produce what William Morris referred to as 'a beautiful world to live in', a world in which 'something' is accessible to the many rather than the few? Is Ritzer's use of the term 'enchantment' in relation to everything from tasty food to 'great good places' too broad? Is his use of the term in this way quite what Weber had in mind when he spoke of the 'disenchantment of the world'? At the same time, I'm aware that most of the questions I might raise are probably answered already by Ritzer – this is a remarkably 'tight' book – and that in any case such quibbles are trifling in the context of the book as a whole. In the face of nothing and its globalization, we have at least the consolations of comedy, such as Woody Allen's 'eternal nothingness is OK if you're dressed for it'.

#### 4. GEORGE RITZER

Running through this excellent set of review essays is the issue: Why don't I use more Marxian and neo-Marxian (especially critical theory) approaches to address the concerns of *The Globalization of Nothing*? This, of course, is not the first time that issue has been raised about my work in this area, especially *The McDonaldization of Society*. (By the way, I think Beilharz is right to say that *Nothing* is a more meta-level argument, but it is one that not only encompasses my earlier books of this genre, but goes beyond them in a number of ways.) Marxian theory is, of course, represented in *Nothing*, especially in the discussion of capitalism as one of the driving forces in the globalization of nothing. And Marxian ideas appear elsewhere in my work, especially the 'means of consumption' in *Enchanting a Disenchanted World*, as well as in various places in *Expressing America: A Critique of the Global Credit Card Society*. Nonetheless, it is true that I tend to

de-emphasize Marxian approaches while privileging others, especially Weberian theory.

The irony is that I am probably more comfortable with a Marxian approach and have written a great deal about it in an array of textbooks and other outlets. I am a great admirer of Marx's own theory and often describe it to my theory students as the most 'beautiful', the most symmetrical, of all social theories. I also think that it is, if anything, even more relevant today with the demise of communist societies and the fact that capitalism is now free to roam the world without any significant alternative to it. I have a similar familiarity with, and appreciation for, many neo-Marxian theories including those of the critical school, Walter Benjamin and even the early Baudrillard before his break with Marx and Marxism. Given all of that, why am I so infrequently drawn actually to *use* a Marxian approach?

One factor is the optimism of Marx's own theory, as well as that of many neo-Marxists. I cannot abide the optimistic view that all will be well in the future when the proletariat (or some other set of agents) sees the light, when the inherent contradictions finally bring the system low, when we are finally able to communicate with one another freely and openly, and so on. They all seem to me the kind of hokey, overly romantic endings common to hundreds of Hollywood B movies that I saw in my youth. I much preferred the rare movie that lacked a happy ending, a *deus ex machina* that magically solved all problems in the end. Hence, in social theory I am far more drawn to such images as the 'iron cage of rationality' and the 'tragedy of culture' than those of a communist (or any other type of) nirvana. Behind the former images is a view of the world in which there is no escaping the cage and the only possible outcome is tragic. I don't like those images, I wish it were otherwise, but in the end they offer what seem to me to be the most likely scenarios. My own contributions here, my own efforts to be even more depressing and distressing than Weber and Simmel, include the 'globalization of nothing', 'the death of the local', and 'loss amidst monumental abundance'. Hogan is right; my book is a 'cry of pain from the centre of globalization'.

Given such a world view, how can I be such a 'nice guy' (Hogan) or, as Langer puts it, 'cheerfully American – Capra rather than Kafka' (the latter another of my heroes with a suitably depressing outlook on life)? One answer, I guess, is that it is better to 'whistle past the graveyard' (or the iron cage) than to spend all one's time weeping about it and the fact that one will soon be in residence there. Another is that despite my jaundiced view of the world, and my bleak view of its future, in the end I hope that I am wrong and that my work will help lead people to see the light and to alter our seemingly inexorable march in the direction of nothingness (okay, so I'm not as immune to those B movies as I'd like you to think). It is my hope that readers are more taken with a good-humored Capraesque critique than being beaten upside the head by a Marxian (Karl) analysis (although Groucho Marx's approach might work better!).

Yet, the critics are right to argue for the relevance of various Marxian concepts, not only *alienation* (how many people are naturally interconnected to the various forms of nothing that predominate increasingly across the globe?), but also *false consciousness* (many, perhaps most, think of nothing as something) and *commodities* (increasingly nothing) and their *fetishization* as well as the *reification* of systems that are nothing and are productive of additional forms of nothing. Indeed, the whole issue of commodities (as well as *use value* and *exchange value*) needs to be rethought in light of the fact that in the contemporary world almost all of them are nothing (what is the use value and exchange value of nothing?).

It is the idea of alienation that has the most obvious relevance to my work. In a way, that work amounts to an extension of that Marxian idea from production to consumption. It is a 21st century critique of alienated consumption based on the assumption that, at least for much of the developed world, consumption is coming to rival, if not supplant, production at the center of most people's lives. Such people are clearly *not* interconnected with their fast food restaurants and other franchises, their credit cards and the companies that purvey them, the many 'cathedrals of consumption' to which they are lured, and most clearly the wide array of forms of nothing that increasingly pervades their lives. Of course, many come to fetishize these inter-related systems leading to a reified world of consumption that comes to exercise increasing domination over people's lives. The idea of exploitation can also be extended to apply to this domain since consumers are generally paying a great deal for what amounts to little, in fact to *nothing*.

In spite of such a critical view, I am generally reluctant to do what Hogan suggests and 'develop a more explicit set of constructive arguments for a more liveable and sustainable world'. As desirable as it might be, such a vision, especially if it is totalized, would be yet another of those happy endings that make me so uncomfortable. In any case, I adopt Marx's own position here that it is far more useful to critique existing social realities than it is to create yet another utopian vision of the world. Nevertheless, there are places in my work – e.g. the last chapter of *McDonaldization*, my essay on 'McUniversity' in Hayes and Wynyard's *The McDonaldization of Higher Education* (2002) – where I do offer a number of constructive suggestions such as the use of advanced technologies in the classroom to help de-McDonaldize education.

One point in the Marxian vein raised by Hogan is the seeming irrelevance of *The Globalization of Nothing* to the two-thirds of the world that is poor. However, as is pointed out in the book, many of them are increasingly the *producers* of nothing. Their tragedy, in this sense, is that they are surrounded by various forms of nothing that they cannot afford to buy. Yet, in a perverse way they are advantaged since this often forces them to continue to consume something. Lest we romanticize this, most would gladly swap their abundance of something for just a bit of the rest of the world's nothing.

Hence, continuing with a Marxian approach, the world of consumption, like production, is upside down and is in need of being righted – that is, the rush to nothing needs to be supplanted by a search for something.

Unlike many of my value-free colleagues in mainstream American sociology (and increasingly much of the rest of the world, as well), I think good sociology is passionate sociology, stemming often from some set of things that the analyst finds painful. Well, the global spread of fast food restaurants, credit cards, the various ‘cathedrals of consumption’, and now ‘nothing’ inflict pain on me, and a variety of ‘good natured’ analyses have sprung from that pain. I am staking out a domain in social theory similar to that of Michael Moore, the documentary film maker, who is famous for his kindly and humorous treatments of painful subjects in movies like *Roger and Me* (plant closings and unemployment in the auto industry) and *Bowling for Columbine* (firearms abuse).

Finally, one key point that is lost in these reviews is the argument made in my most recent book that nothing is not necessarily ‘bad’ and something is not necessarily ‘good’. The global sale of life-preserving medicines is an example of nothing, and a pogrom is an example of something. Thus, while the thrust of my book is to critique the globalization of nothing, a far more complex and nuanced argument is embedded there that invites the reader to tease out carefully the relationships between globalization/glocalization and something/nothing. Yes, all the power lies with nothing, especially its globalization, but there is hope in something, especially in its glocalized forms. I hate to let you down and close on such a seemingly positive note, but I’m running out of space. Furthermore, *Seinfeld* (about nothing, as usual) is about to begin and it is the episode in which George (the other George) pushes past children attending a birthday party so that he can save himself from what he thinks is a burning building.