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Abstract
Near the start of his keynote address at last summer’s CMS5, 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 and delegates of the conference may have received nothing new for their money¹, for this was the same presentation (talk, slides and even the jokes) delivered in Australia two years earlier, itself derived from a paper published two years before that.

But in that paper Ritzer claims:

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).

Had I missed the joke? Was this actually decorous: an elaborate performance critiquing academia and self? Whether by memory-stick, CD or just t’Net, slick 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?

We shall see. To aid our understanding of his complex material, Ritzer deployed 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 shall 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)

¹ £5,000 plus expenses, allegedly.
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 created in ‘the critical study of contemporary social phenomena.’

2 Comment on cover of Ritzer (2004)
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)

**Nothing comes before the introduction**

Helpfully, when George Ritzer gave his plenary presentation at CMS5 in Manchester, he used a 2x2 matrix to illustrate his thinking. Not only did this help to communicate and make intelligible the challenging ideas presented in *The Globalisation of Nothing* 245, 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.

![2x2 matrix diagram](image-url)

(Derived from figure 5.1: The relationship between Glocal-Global and Something-Nothing with exemplary (non-) places, (non-) things, (non-) persons and (non-) services. (p98.)

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3 Critical Management Studies 5. Don’t even go there. But if you do, don’t pay.

4 That ‘2’ demonstrates Ritzer’s audacious thinking. Perhaps a bit like Web 2.0 – the same as before but with better visuals?

5 Unless otherwise annotated all references are to Ritzer’s (2004) *Globalization of Nothing*. 
And why not? They are simple to understand, break the world down into manageable categories that direct us to clear (strategic) directions. Indeed, at their very best, they are able to inform us what is good, what is bad and what is somewhere in-between. However, Ritzer is a public intellectual\(^6\), not a shallow management academic, and consequently his matrix 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 downsizing could have been averted.

Sadly their use outside management as guides to good and bad and right and wrong has been sadly neglected. The potential is clearly there, as the matrix below indicates.

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And this example clearly demonstrates how definitions of what is good and what is bad can extended along two dimensions in order to give a better understanding of the challenges in life. Our two by two matrix enables us to sort the useless from the feckless and from the fecking useless.

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\(^6\) Although one dismaying 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)
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 noire, 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” 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 with a good 2x2 matrix, it is essential to find the right axes through which to quarter 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.

**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. (p207.)

To be sure, concepts like humanism, liberalism, justice and rationality can be seen as important, and it would be nice to think that ‘ideas like something and nothing’ are as vital, and 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 swathe of human history.’ For Ritzer, ‘The idea of a grand narrative has been greatly criticized by postmodernists’ (p217) although he only specifically references Lyotard here. Fortunately, however ‘modernists continue to develop such theories of general historical developments’ (p217). Ritzer is particularly wedded to the idea that his work is a grand narrative – it crops up in the sales blurb even – rather than, say, a 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

7 Comment at CMS5.
discussed here (such as the Paris casino-hotel 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. (p204)

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.

Objective criteria are always useful in the social sciences and Ritzer’s criteria are
particularly illuminating. They are: Unique-Generic, One-of-a-kind –
Interchangeable; Local Geographic Ties – 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 meal⁸; handmade
pottery from a small town in Mexico⁹ v pottery mass-manufactured for a world
market; VW Beetle and 1969 Pontiac Firebird¹⁰¹¹ v Kia and Dodge Neon; small

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⁸ This is not any microwave meal, this is Marks and Spencer’s.…
⁹ 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 differs from a pottery town such as, say, Stoke-on-Trent in all sorts of
ways – so there is probably some defining point when the local ties of Stoke would get expunged.
¹⁰ 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). 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? Does that include advertising a fake nostalgia?
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). And 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.
teaching college v Internet university\textsuperscript{12}; and gourmet meals (again) v Domino’s Pizza and Lunchables\textsuperscript{13}. 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 the ‘grand narrative has lost its credibility’ (1984: 37) and that Ritzer’s work is simply incredible – partly because Ritzer’s narrative is not one of the grand narratives that Lyotard alludes to and at best would be seen as part of the ‘unacceptable’ (p14) attempt to partition off ‘critical’ knowledge. And surely Ritzer wouldn’t be demanding that his work be seen as terrorist, silencing dissent (ibid, pp. 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.’ (p3, original emphasis). Intriguing – for Ritzer nothing has form and content, is conceivable and controllable. Perhaps manageable even. 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 nothingness, absence negated, as there is always something there. Perhaps we could even see the end of nihilism\textsuperscript{14} and following that, the end of all negativity and destruction? Maybe I should stop here then?

\textsuperscript{11} 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).

\textsuperscript{12} Alarmingly, I am reminded of Hoskin & Macve (1986).

\textsuperscript{13} We return to the issue of ‘simulated’ and ‘genuine’ enchantment later.

\textsuperscript{14} 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 Ritzer is playing.
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. Parminides, 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. (p191).

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’ (p191) their inseparability and that they ‘cannot be disentangled because neither exists outside the relationship of becoming’ (p191, original emphasis) with the dialectical approach ‘of course, picked up by Marx.’ (p191) 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. (p191)

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 it used here.’ (p195) 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 would start to see some problems with the originality of Ritzer’s work, were he being serious. 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 points out, Heidegger on technology and Sartre on loss also 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 hopelessly naïve 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, nothing relevant. And such mastery of the “Which-I-call” move may indeed be one of the signature flourish 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 Castell’s view that we are moving from a world characterized by “spaces of places” to one dominated by “spaces of flows.”’ (p40) 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.15 But those are not the only examples: food is always on the menu. Ritzer

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15 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
compares Oldenburg’s ‘great good places’, the ‘core settings of informal public life’ to McDonalds 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.) Helpfully, the enthusiastic celebration of the great good also points us to which quadrant of his matrix might be the good one.

Non-things – centrally created and controlled and lacking in substance – are ‘more pervasive than things’. A cynic, looking at the general examples, might consider this merely extends to all branded goods, but that would be too easy, for the exemplars are a Big Mac and Culatella 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 Culatella ham than for virtually any other type of ham.’ (p58) Reassuringly expensive for consumers with reassuringly expensive tastes. Yet, somewhat oddly for a sociologist of consumption, nothing is said of the many other theorists who have ploughed this earthy furrow.

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, ‘It is difficult to imagine the faceless non-person who plays a Disney character becoming a cultural institution.’ (p63). 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 disenchancement.

There is a little puzzle here. Ritzer cites Baudrillard approvingly on simulation so is presumably aware of Baudrillard’s initial point about simulation: epitome of identical houses built from limited plans, and tightly controlled (down to the type and colour of paint allowable for doors and windows), would be the Georgian terraces of Bath or Edinburgh. Still, local content, eh?

16 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.

17 Culatella ham is similar to Parma ham, which is sliced and packaged across the world, to the extent that it is just Parma ham. No need to even differentiate by brand, as you might do for something mundane such as pork sausages. Culatella ham has not yet travelled as far or as fast, of course, but it is on the same trajectory.

18 Provocatively, Ritzer suggests: ‘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
To simulate is to feign to have what one hasn't. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But the matter is more complicated, since to simulate is not simply to feign: "Someone who feigns an illness can simply go to bed and pretend he is ill. Someone who simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms" (Littre). Thus, feigning or dissimulating leaves the reality principle intact: the difference is always clear, it is only masked; whereas simulation threatens the difference between "true" and "false", between "real" and "imaginary". (Baudrillard 1994: 3)

It 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. Ritzer suggests that 'genuine enchantment' is possible between bartenders and consumers ('white wine/fruit-based drink for the lady?'(Murray 2007:170)), he gives a fuller example of enchantment when talking about non-service. Once again at a gourmet restaurant, we now find:

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 disenchanted. 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. (p65)

It is as well that Ritzer is pulling our legs here, 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 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! 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. (See Baudrillard, J. [1983]. Simulations. New York: Semiotext[e].) (p220) This does redirect us to what might be deeper complexities in some of Ritzer’s earlier examples – for the 1969 Pontiac Firebird is a copy (of earlier iterations of that model) of a copy (the Camaro) of a copy (the Mustang). And General Motors is clearly a global corporation with strong central control over creation. Something out of nothing, indeed!
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 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 glocalization, but also are of particular interest to the author and of great significance in the worldwide spread of nothingness. (p73, 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 Americanization (for McDonalds’ worldwide spread is often seen as mere exemplar of contemporary capitalism or Americanisation under globalisation (or 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, then McDonaldization must be seen as a valid category of analysis. Or, more nastily, the contribution here is the globalisation of McDonaldization.

The Matrix Reloaded
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.’ (p97) 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 craftperson and good service realised though demonstration. Disney World is a bad place, Mouse-Ear hats are bad things, cast members are bad people and queuing for attractions is a bad thing.

On the last we can perhaps agree. But the rest appear merely as value judgements (that differ markedly from mine) 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:

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 BAM 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 prevalent 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 Globalization of Nothing box (albeit with maybe one or two of those dinky arrows across the permeable divides). Certainly as clearly as any of the other examples.

19 A little naughty, that one.
20 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.
21 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.
22 British Academy of Management. Don’t even go there. But if you do, don’t pay.
23 But wait. Clearly the performance at Manchester would then have to have been a demonstration of the globalization of nothing and thus something. And thus, as Ritzer points out, “[w]e accept the view
And as to what would be in the Good category? Well it wouldn’t be me, but I don’t divide the world up by 2x2 matrices, anyway. And if I did, I wouldn’t use one that condemns its own analysis. So, on that, I have nothing to say.

that there is a dialectical relationship … between something and nothing – that each is continually becoming the other…” Maybe I’ve been too cynical.
Nothing need be referenced