

Reading

Introduction to "Rethinking Globalization"

In the following article, Ritzer introduces his notion of globalization as the central dynamic shaping the world today. To this end, he analyzes the production and consumption of nothing, as well as the production and consumption of something that is associated with the counterprocess of globalization. However, he repeatedly points out that the elective affinities that exist between globalization and nothing on the one hand, and globalization and something on the other, represent developments that lie on a continuum: they do not presuppose a necessary, singular relationship between the various elements. In other words, globalization can lead to the production and consumption of something and, conversely, globalization can lead to the production and consumption of nothing. Yet such possibilities are of comparatively minor significance, the reasons for which Ritzer outlines in this reading.

Finally, the reader should note the parallels between Wallerstein's discussion of core, peripheral, and semiperipheral regions and Ritzer's analysis of the "economics of nothing." As you will read, the production and consumption of nothing and something are not spread equally around the globe. Those who produce many of the *nonthings* in the world have little access to them (though they are surrounded by them at their workplace) and cannot afford to purchase them. Workers living within the peripheral and semiperipheral regions labor long hours for low wages, often in unsafe conditions, so that those of us living in the core can enjoy nothing.

"Rethinking Globalization: Glocalization/Globalization and Something/Nothing" (2003)

George Ritzer

This essay seeks to offer a unique theoretical perspective by reflecting on and integrating some well-known ideas in sociology (and the social sciences) on globalization and a body of thinking, virtually unknown in sociology, on the concept of nothing (and, implicitly, something). The substantive focus will be on consumption, and all of the examples will be drawn from it. However, the implications of this analysis extend far beyond that realm, or even the economy more generally.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to deal fully with globalization, but two centrally important processes—glocalization and globalization—will

be of focal concern. Glocalization (and related ideas such as hybridity and creolization) gets to the heart of what many—perhaps most—contemporary globalization theorists think about the nature of transnational processes (Appadurai 1996; Garcia Canclini 1995; Hannerz 1987; Pieterse 1995; Robertson 1992, 1995, 2001; Tomlinson 1999). *Glocalization* can be defined as the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas. This view emphasizes global heterogeneity and tends to reject the idea that forces emanating from the West in general and the United States in particular (Featherstone 1995:8–9) are leading to

economic, political, institutional, and—most importantly—cultural homogeneity.

One of the reasons for the popularity of theories of globalization is that they stand in stark contrast to the much hated and maligned *modernization theory* that had such a wide following in sociology and the social sciences for many years (Rostow 1960). Some of the defining characteristics of this theory were its orientation to issues of central concern in the West, the preeminence it accorded to developments there, and the idea that the rest of the world had little choice but to become increasingly like it (more democratic, more capitalistic, more consumption-oriented, and so on). While there were good reasons to question and to reject modernization theory and to develop the notion of globalization, there are elements of that theory that remain relevant to thinking about globalization today.

In fact, some of those associated with globalization theory have adhered to and further developed perspectives that, while rejecting most of modernization theory, retain an emphasis on the role of Westernization and Americanization in global processes (Giddens 2000; Kuisel 1993; Ritzer 1995). Such concerns point to the need for a concept—*globalization*—coined here for the first time as a much-needed companion to the notion of glocalization. While it does *not* deny the importance of globalization and, in fact, complements it, globalization focuses on the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and other entities and their desire—indeed, their 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 “globalization”) throughout the world. It will be argued that globalization tends to be associated with the proliferation of nothing, while globalization tends to be tied more to something and therefore stands opposed, at least partially (and along with the local itself), to the spread of nothing. Globalization as a whole is not unidirectional, because these two processes coexist under that broad heading and because they are, at least to some degree, in conflict in terms of their implications for the spread of nothingness around the world.

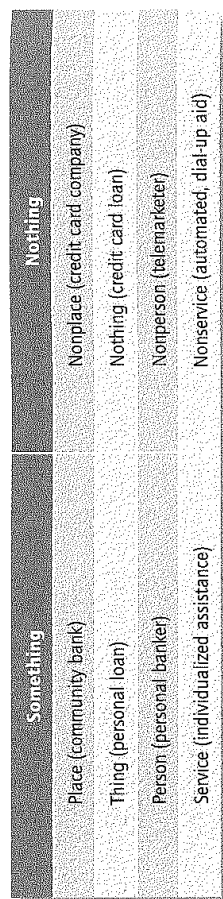
Having already begun to use the concepts of nothing and something, we need to define them as

they will be used here. Actually, it is the concept of nothing that is of central interest here (as well as to earlier scholars); the idea of something enters the discussion mainly because nothing is meaningless without a sense of something. However, nothing is a notoriously obscure concept: “Nothing is an awe-inspiring yet essentially undigested concept, highly esteemed by writers of a mystical or existentialist tendency, but by most others regarded with anxiety, nausea, or panic” (Heath 1967:524). . . .

CONCEPTUALIZING NOTHING (AND SOMETHING)

Nothing is defined here as a social form that is generally centrally conceived, controlled, and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content. This leads to a definition of something as a social form that is generally indigenously conceived, controlled, and comparatively rich in distinctive substantive content. This definition of nothing's companion term makes it clear that neither nothing nor something exists independently of the other: each makes sense only when paired with and contrasted to the other. While presented as a dichotomy, this implies a continuum from something to nothing, and that is precisely the way the concepts will be employed here—as the two poles of that continuum.

A major and far more specific source of the interest here in nothing—especially conceptually—is the work in social geography by anthropologist Marc Augé (1995) on the concept of nonplaces (see also Morse [1990] on “nonspaces”; Relph 1976). To Augé, nonplaces are “the real measure of our time” (Augé 1995:79). This can be generalized to say that nothing is, in many ways, the true measure of our time! The present work extends the idea of nonplaces to nonthings, nonpeople, and nonservices and, following the logic used above, none of these make sense without their polar opposites—places, things, people, and services. In addition, they need to be seen as the poles of four subtypes that are subsumed under the broader heading of the something/nothing continuum. Figure 1 offers an overview of the overarching something/nothing continuum and these four subtypes, as well as an example of each.

Figure 1 The four major subtypes of something/nothing (with examples) presented as subcontinua under the broad something/nothing continuum.

Following the definition of nothing, it can be argued that a credit card is nothing (or at least lies toward that end of the something/nothing continuum) because it is centrally conceived and controlled by the credit card company and there is little to distinguish one credit card (except a few numbers and a name) from any other (they all do just about the same things). Extending this logic, a contemporary credit card company, especially its telephone center, is a nonplace, the highly programmed and scripted individuals who answer the phones are nonpeople, and the often automated functions can be thought of as nonservices. Those entities that are to be found at the something end of each continuum are locally conceived and controlled forms that are rich in distinctive substance. Thus, a traditional line of credit negotiated by local bankers and personal clients is a thing; a place is the community bank to which people can go and deal with bank employees in person and obtain from them individualized services.

NOTHING/SOMETHING AND GLOBALIZATION/GLOCALIZATION

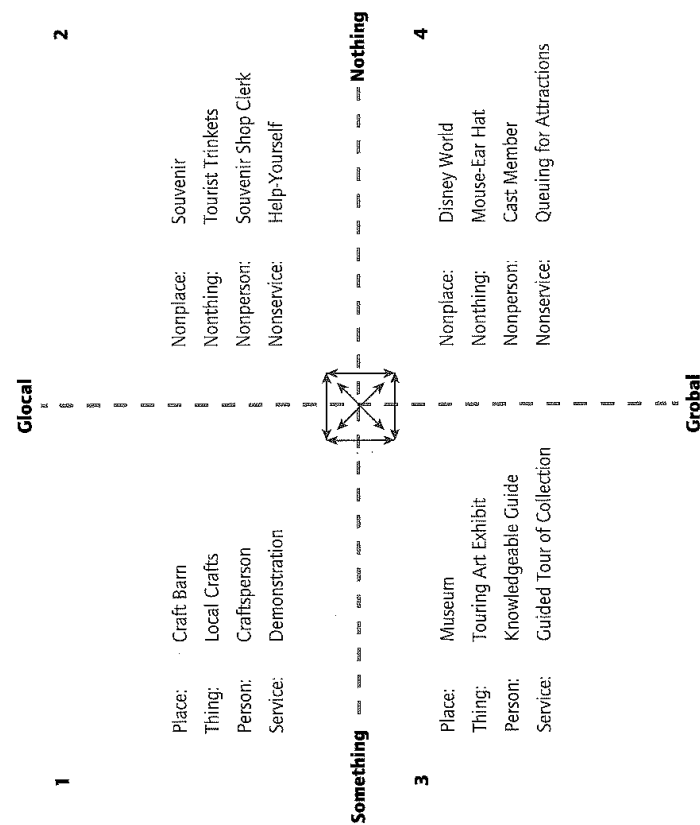
We turn now to a discussion of the relationship between globalization/glocalization and something/nothing. Figure 2 offers the four basic possibilities that emerge when we cross-cut the globalization/glocalization and something/nothing continua (along with representative examples of places/nonplaces, things/nonthings, people/nonpeople, and services/nonservices for each of the four possibilities and quadrants). It should be noted that while this yields four "ideal types," there are no hard and fast lines between them.

This is reflected in the use of both dotted lines and multidirectional arrows in Figure 2.

Quadrants one and four in Figure 2 are of greatest importance, at least for the purposes of this analysis. They represent a key point of tension and conflict in the world today. Clearly, there is great pressure to globalize nothing, and often all that stands in its way in terms of achieving global hegemony is the glocalization of something. We will return to this conflict and its implications below.

While the other two quadrants (two and three) are clearly residual in nature and of secondary importance, it is necessary to recognize that there is, at least to some degree, a glocalization of nothing (quadrant two) and a globalization of something (quadrant three). Whatever tensions may exist between them are of far less significance than that between the globalization of nothing and the glocalization of something. However, a discussion of the globalization of nothing and the globalization of something makes it clear that globalization of something makes it clear that globalization is not an unmitigated source of nothing (it can involve something) and that globalization is not to be seen solely as a source of something (it can involve nothing).

The close and centrally important relationship between (1) globalization and nothing and (2) glocalization and something leads to the view that there is an *elective affinity* between the two elements of each of these pairs. The idea of elective affinity, derived from the historical comparative sociology of Max Weber, is meant to imply that there is *not* a necessary, law-like causal relationship between these elements. That is, neither in the case of globalization and nothing nor that of glocalization and something does one of these

Figure 2 The relationship between glocal-global and something-nothing with exemplary (non-)places, (non-)things, (non-)persons, and (non-)services.

elements "cause" the other to come into existence. Rather, the development and diffusion of one tends to go hand in hand with the other. Another way of putting this is that globalization/nothing and glocalization/ something tend to mutually favor one another; they are inclined to combine with one another (Howe 1978). Thus, it is far easier to globalize nothing than something: the development of globalization creates a favorable ground for the development and spread of nothing (and nothing is easily globalized). Similarly, it is far easier to glocalize something than nothing: the development of glocalization creates a favorable ground for the development and proliferation of something (and something is easily glocalized).

However, the situation is more complex than this, since we can also see support for the

argument that globalization can, at times, involve something (e.g., art exhibits that move among art galleries throughout the world; Italian exports of food such as Parmigiano Reggiano and Culatella ham; touring symphony orchestras and rock bands that perform in venues throughout the world) and that globalization can sometimes involve nothing (e.g., the production of local souvenirs and trinkets for tourists from around the world). However, we would *not* argue that there is an elective affinity between globalization and nothing. The existence of examples of the globalization of something and the glocalization of nothing makes it clear why we need to think in terms of elective affinities and not law-like relationships.

THE GLOBALIZATION OF SOMETHING

Some types of something have been globalized to a considerable degree. For example, gourmet foods, handmade crafts, custom-made clothes, and Rolling Stones concerts are now much more available throughout the world, and more likely to move transnationally, than ever in history. In a very specific example in the arts, a touring series of "Silk Road" concerts recently brought together Persian artists and music, an American symphony orchestra, and Rimsky-Korsakov's (Russian) "Scheherazade" (Delacoma 2002).

Returning to Figure 2, we have used as examples of the globalization of something touring art exhibitions (thing) of the works of Vincent van Gogh, the museums throughout the world in which such exhibitions occur (place), the knowledgeable guides who show visitors the highlights of the exhibition (person),¹ and the detailed information and insights they are able to impart in response to questions from gallery visitors (service).

In spite of the existence of examples like these, why is there comparatively little affinity between globalization and something? First, there is simply far less demand throughout the world for most forms of something, at least in comparison to the demand for nothing. One reason for this is that the distinctiveness of something tends to appeal to far more limited tastes than nothing, be it gourmet foods, handmade crafts, or Rolling Stones or Silk Road concerts. Second, the complexity of something, especially the fact that it is likely to have many different elements, means that it is more likely that it will have at least some characteristics that will be off-putting for or will even offend large numbers of people in many different cultures. For example, a Russian audience at a Silk Road concert might be bothered by the juxtaposition of Persian music with that of Rimsky-Korsakov. Third, the various forms of something are usually more expensive—frequently much more expensive—than competing forms of nothing (gourmet food is much more costly than fast food). Higher cost

means, of course, that far fewer people can afford something. As a result, the global demand for expensive forms of something is minuscule in comparison to that for the inexpensive varieties of nothing. Fourth, because the prices are high and the demand is comparatively low, far less can be spent on the advertising and marketing of something, which serves to keep demand low. Fifth, something is far more difficult to mass-manufacture and, in some cases (Silk Road concerts, van Gogh exhibitions), impossible to produce in this way. Sixth, since the demand for something is less price-sensitive than nothing (the relatively small number of people who can afford it are willing, and often able, to pay almost any price), there is less need to mass-manufacture it (assuming it could be produced in this way) in order to lower prices. Seventh, the costs of shipping (insurance, careful packing and packaging, special transports) of something (gourmet foods, the van Gogh paintings) are usually very high, adding to the price and thereby reducing the demand. It could also be argued that the fact that the globalization of something (compared to nothing) occurs to a lesser degree helps to distinguish something from nothing. Because it is relatively scarce, something retains its status and its distinction from nothing. If something came to be mass-produced and globalized, it is likely that it would move toward the nothing end of the continuum. This raises the intriguing question of what comes first—nothing, or globalization and the associated mass production. That is, does a phenomenon start out as nothing? Or is it transformed into nothing by mass production and globalization? We will return to this issue below.

THE GLOBALIZATION OF NOTHING

The example of the globalization of nothing in Figure 2 is a trip to one of Disney's worlds. Any of Disney's worlds is a nonplace, awash with a wide range of nonthings (such as mouse-ear hats), staffed largely by nonpeople (the "cast members,"

in costume or out), who offer nonservices (what is offered is often dictated by rules, regulations, and the scripts followed by employees).

The main reasons for the strong elective affinity between globalization and nothing are basically the inverse of the reasons for the lack of such affinity between globalization and something. Above all, there is a far greater demand throughout the world for nothing than something. This is the case because nothing tends to be less expensive than something (although this is not always true), with the result that more people can afford the former than the latter. Large numbers of people are also far more likely to want the various forms of nothing, because their comparative simplicity and lack of distinctiveness appeals to a wide range of tastes. In addition, as pointed out earlier, that which is nothing—largely devoid of distinctive content—is far less likely to bother or offend those in other cultures. Finally, because of the far greater potential sales, much more money can be—and is—devoted to the advertising and marketing of nothing, thereby creating a still greater demand for it than for something.

Given the great demand, it is far easier to mass-produce and mass-distribute the empty forms of nothing than the substantively rich forms of something. Indeed, many forms of something lend themselves best to limited, if not one-of-a-kind, production. A skilled potter may produce a few dozen pieces of pottery and an artist a painting or two in, perhaps, a week, a month, or even (a) year(s). While these craft and artworks may, over time, move from owner to owner in various parts of the world, this traffic barely registers in the total of global trade and commerce. Of course, there are the rare masterpieces that may bring millions of dollars, but in the main these are small-ticket items. In contrast, thousands, even many millions, and sometimes billions of varieties of nothing are mass-produced and sold throughout the globe. Thus, the global sale of Coca-Cola, Whoppers, Benetton sweaters, Gucci bags, and even Rolex watches is a far greater factor in globalization than is the international sale of pieces of high art or of tickets to the Rolling Stones' most recent world tour. Furthermore, the various forms of nothing can range in cost from a dollar or two to

thousands, even tens of thousands of dollars. The cumulative total is enormous and infinitely greater than the global trade in something.

Furthermore, the economics of the marketplace demands that the massive amount of nothing that is produced be marketed and sold on a global basis. For one thing, the economies of scale mean that the more that is produced and sold, the lower the price. This means that, almost inevitably, American producers of nothing (and they are, by far, the world leaders in this) must become dissatisfied with the American market, no matter how vast it is, and aggressively pursue a world market for their consumer products. The greater the global market, the lower the price that can be charged. This, in turn, means that even greater numbers of nothing can be sold and farther reaches of the globe in less-developed countries can be reached. Another economic factor stems from the demand of the stock market that corporations that produce and sell nothing (indeed, all corporations) increase sales and profits from one year to the next. Those corporations that simply meet the previous year's profitability or experience a decline are likely to be punished in the stock market and see their stock prices fall, sometimes precipitously. In order to increase profits continually, the corporation is forced, as Marx understood long ago, to continue to search out new markets. One way of doing that is constantly to expand globally. In contrast, since something is less likely to be produced by corporations—certainly by the large corporations listed in the stock market—there is far less pressure to expand the market for it. In any case, as we saw above, given the limited number of these things that can be produced by artisans, skilled chefs, artists, and so on, there are profound limits on such expansion. This, in turn, brings us back to the pricing issue and relates to the price advantage that nothing ordinarily has over something. As a general rule, the various types of nothing cost far less than something. The result, obviously, is that nothing can be marketed globally far more aggressively than something.

Also, 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. Lunchables, for example, are compact, prepackaged

¹An interesting example of the trend toward nothingness is the increasing use of audio guides and rented tape players at such shows, and at museums more generally.

lunch foods, largely for schoolchildren, that require no refrigeration and have a long shelf life. Furthermore, because the unit cost of such items is low, it is of no great consequence if they go awry, are lost, or are stolen. In contrast, it is more difficult and expensive to package something—say, a piece of handmade pottery or an antique vase—and losing such things or having them stolen or broken is a disaster. As a result, it is far more expensive to insure something than nothing, and this difference is another reason for the cost advantage that nothing has over something. It is these sorts of things that serve to greatly limit the global trade in items that can be included under the heading of something.

It is important to remember that while most of our examples in this section are nonthings, it is the case that nonplaces (franchises), nonpeople (counterpeople in fast-food chains), and nonservices (automatic teller machines—ATMs) are also being globalized.

While the globalization of nothing dominates in the arena of consumption as it is generally defined, we find domains—medicine, science, pharmaceuticals (*Financial Times* 2001), biotechnology (Abate 2002), education, and others—in which the globalization of something is of far greater importance. While these areas have experienced their share of the globalization of nothing, they are also characterized by a high degree of the globalization of something. For example, the worldwide scientific community benefits from the almost instantaneous distribution of important scientific findings, often, these days, via new journals on the Internet. Thus, our focus on the globalization of nothing should not blind us to the existence and importance—especially in areas such as these—of the globalization of something.

THE GLOCALIZATION OF NOTHING

Just as there has historically been a tendency to romanticize and glorify the local, there has been a similar trend in recent years among globalization theorists to overestimate the global (Tam, Dissanayake, and Siu-huan Yip 2002). It is seen by many as not only the alternative to the evils of globalization, but also a key source of much that

is worthwhile in the world today. Theorists often privilege the global something over the global nothing (as well as over the glocal nothing, which rarely appears in their analyses). For example, Jonathan Friedman (1994) associates cultural pluralism with “a dehegemonizing, dehomogenizing world incapable of a formerly enforced politics of assimilation or cultural hierarchy.” Later, he links the “decline of hegemony” to “a liberation of the world arena to the free play of already extant but suppressed projects and potential new projects” (Friedman 1994:252). Then there are the essays in James Watson’s (1997) *McDonald’s in East Asia*, which, in the main, focus on glocal adaptations (and generally downplay global impositions) and tend to describe them in positive terms.

While most globalization theorists are not postmodernists (Featherstone 1995 is one exception), the wide-scale acceptance of various postmodern ideas (and rejection of many modern positions) has helped lead to positive attitudes toward globalization among many globalization theorists. Friedman is one who explicitly links “cultural pluralism” and the “postmodernization of the world” (Friedman 1994:100). The postmodern perspective is linked to globalization theory in a number of ways. For example, the work of de Certeau and others on the power of the agent in the face of larger powers (such as globalization) fits with the view that indigenous actors can create unique phenomena out of the interaction of the global and the local. De Certeau talks of actors as “unrecognized producers, poets of their own affairs, trailblazers in the jungles of functionalist rationality” (de Certeau 1984:34). A similar focus on the local community (Seidman 1991) gives it the power to create unique glocal realities. More generally, a postmodern perspective is tied to hybridity, which, in turn, is “subversive” of such modern perspectives as essentialism and homogeneity.

While there are good reasons for the interest in and preference for globalization among globalization theorists, such interest is clearly overdone. For one thing, globalization (especially of nothing) is far more prevalent and powerful than glocalization (especially of something). For another, globalization itself is a significant source of nothing.

One of the best examples of the globalization of nothing is to be found in the realm of tourism (Wahab and Cooper 2001), especially where the global tourist meets the local manufacturer and retailer (where they still exist) in the production and sale of glocal goods and services (this is illustrated in quadrant two of Figure 2). There are certainly instances—perhaps even many of them—in which tourism stimulates the production of something: well-made, high-quality craft products made for discerning tourists; meals lovingly prepared by local chefs using traditional recipes and the best of local ingredients. However, far more often—and increasingly, as time goes by—global tourism leads to the globalization of nothing. Souvenir shops are likely to be bursting at the seams with trinkets reflecting a bit of the local culture. Such souvenirs are increasingly likely to be mass-manufactured—perhaps using components from other parts of the world—in local factories. If demand grows great enough and the possibilities of profitability high enough, low-priced souvenirs may be manufactured by the thousands or millions elsewhere in the world and then shipped back to the local area to be sold to tourists (who may not notice, or care about, the “made in China” label embossed on their souvenir replicas of the Eiffel Tower). The clerks in these souvenir shops are likely to act like nonpeople, and tourists are highly likely to serve themselves. Similarly, large numbers of meals slapped together by semiskilled chefs to suggest vaguely local cooking are far more likely than authentic meals that are true to the region, or that truly integrate local elements. Such meals are likely to be offered in “touristy” restaurants that are close to the nonplace end of the continuum and to be served by nonpeople who offer little in the way of service.

Another major example involves the production of native shows—often involving traditional costumes, dances, and music—for global tourists. While these could be something, there is a very strong tendency for them to be transformed into nothing to satisfy global tour operators and their clientele. Hence these shows are examples

of the globalization of nothing, because they become centrally conceived and controlled empty forms. They are often watered down, if not eliminated, with esoteric or possibly offensive elements removed. The performances are designed to please the throngs of tourists and to put off as few of them as possible. They take place with great frequency, and interchangeable performers often seem as if they are going through the motions in a desultory fashion. For their part, this is about all the global tourists want in their rush (and that of the tour operator) to see a performance, to eat an ersatz local meal, and then to move on to the next stop on the tour. Thus, in the area of tourism—in souvenirs, performances, and meals—we are far more likely to see the globalization of nothing than of something.

THE GLOCALIZATION OF SOMETHING

The example of the globalization of something in Figure 2 (quadrant 1) is in the realm of indigenous crafts such as pottery or weaving. Such craft products are things, and they are likely to be displayed and sold in places such as craft barns. The craftperson who makes and demonstrates his or her wares is a person, and customers are apt to be offered a great deal of service.

Such glocal products are likely to remain something, although there are certainly innumerable examples of glocal forms of something that have been transformed into glocal—and in some cases global—forms of nothing (see below for a discussion of Kokopelli figures and matryoshka dolls). In fact, there is often a kind of progression here, from glocal something to glocal nothing as demand grows, and then to global nothing³ if some entrepreneur believes that there might be a global market for such products. However, some glocal forms of something are able to resist this process.

Glocal forms of something tend to remain as such for various reasons. For one thing, they tend to be costly, at least in comparison to mass-manufactured competitors. High price tends to

³Glocal forms of nothing (e.g., McDonald’s toys) can be transformed into something (either global or glocal) when, for example, they become collector’s items.

keep demand down locally, let alone globally. Second, glocal forms of something are loaded with distinctive content. Among other things, this means that they are harder and more expensive to produce and that consumers, especially in other cultures, find them harder to understand and appreciate. Furthermore, their idiosyncratic and complex character make it more likely that those in other cultures will find something about them they do not like or even find offensive. Third, unlike larger manufacturers of nothing, those who create glocal forms of something are not pushed to expand their business and increase profits to satisfy stockholders and the stock market. While craftspeople are not immune to the desire to earn more money, the pressure to do so is more internal than external, and it is not nearly as great or inexorable. In any case, the desire to earn more money is tempered by the fact that the production of each craft product is time-consuming and only so many of them can be produced in a given time. Further, craft products are even less likely to lend themselves to mass marketing and advertising than they are to mass manufacture.

WHICH COMES FIRST: NOTHING, OR ITS GLOBALIZATION?

At this point, we need to deal with a difficult issue: Is it possible to determine which comes first—nothing or its globalization? The key components of the definition of nothing—central conception and control, lack of distinctive content—tend to lead us to associate nothing with the modern era of mass production. After all, the system of mass production is characterized by centralized conception and control, and it is uniquely able to turn out large numbers of products lacking in distinctive content. While there undoubtedly were isolated examples of nothing prior to the Industrial Revolution, it is hard to find many that fit our basic definition of nothing.

Thus, as a general rule, nothing requires the prior existence of mass production. However, that which emanates from mass-production systems need not necessarily be distributed and sold globally. Nevertheless, as we have discussed, there are great pressures on those who mass-produce nothing to market it globally.

Thus, there is now a very close relationship between mass production and globalization; the view here is that *both* precede nothing and are prerequisites to it.

Take, for example, such historic examples of something in the realm of folk art as Kokopellis from the southwestern United States and matryoshka dolls from Russia. At their points of origin long ago in local cultures, these were clearly hand-made products that one would have had to put close to the something end of the continuum. For example, the Kokopelli, usually depicted as an arch-backed flute player, can be traced back to at least 800 A.D. and to rock art in the mountains and deserts of the southwestern United States (Acacia Artisans 2002; Malotki 2000). Such rock art is clearly something. But in recent years, Kokopellis have become popular among tourists to the area and have come to be produced in huge numbers in innumerable forms (figurines, lamps, keychains, light-switch covers, Christmas ornaments, and so on), with increasingly less attention to the craftsmanship involved in producing them. Indeed, they are increasingly likely to be mass-produced in large factories. Furthermore, offending elements are removed in order not to put off potential consumers anywhere in the world. For example, the exposed genitals that usually accompanied the arched back and the flute have been removed. More recently, Kokopellis have moved out of their locales of origin in the Southwest and come to be sold globally. In order for them to be marketed globally at a low price, much of the distinctive character and craftsmanship involved in producing the Kokopelli is removed. That is, the globalization of Kokopellis has moved them even closer to the nothing end of the continuum.

A similar scenario has occurred in the case of the matryoshka doll (from five to as many as 30 dolls of increasingly small size nested within one another) (Gift to Give 2002), although its roots in Russian culture are not nearly as deep (little more than a century) as that of the Kokopelli in the culture of the southwestern United States. Originally hand-made and hand-painted by skilled craftspeople and made from seasoned birch (or lime), the traditional matryoshka doll was (and is) rich in detail. With the fall of communism and the Soviet Union, Russia has grown

as a tourist destination, and the matryoshka doll has become a popular souvenir. In order to supply the increasing demand of tourists, and even to distribute matryoshka dolls around the world, they are now far more likely to be machine-made: automatically painted; made of poor quality, unseasoned wood; and greatly reduced in detail. In many cases, the matryoshka doll has been reduced to the lowest level of schlock and kitsch in order to enhance sales. For example, the traditional designs depicting precommunist nobles and merchants have been supplemented with caricatures of global celebrities such as Bill Clinton, Mikhail Gorbachev, and—post-September 11—Osama bin Laden (Korchagina 2002). Such mass-produced and mass-distributed matryoshka dolls bear little resemblance to the folk art that is at their root. The mass production and globalization of these dolls has transformed that which was something into nothing. Many other products have followed that course, and still more will do so in the future.

While we have focused here on nonthings that were things at one time, much the same argument can be made about places, people, and services. That is, they, too, have come to be mass-manufactured and globalized, especially in the realm of consumption. This is most obvious in virtually all franchises for which settings are much the same throughout the world (using many mass-manufactured components), people are trained and scripted to work in much the same way, and the same “services” are offered in much the same way. They all have been centrally conceived, are centrally controlled, and are lacking in distinctive content.

GROBALIZATION AND LOSS

Globalization has brought with it a proliferation of nothing around the world. While it carries with it many advantages (as does the globalization of something), it has also led to a loss, as local (and glocal) forms of something are progressively threatened and replaced by globalized (and glocalised) forms of nothing.

This reality and sense of loss are far greater in much of the rest of the world than they are in the United States. As the center and source of much

nothingness, the United States has also progressed furthest in the direction of nothing and away from something. Thus, Americans are long accustomed to nothing and have fewer and fewer forms of something with which to compare it. Each new form of or advance in nothing barely creates a ripple in American society.

However, the situation is different in much of the rest of the world. Myriad forms of something remain well entrenched and actively supported. The various forms of nothing—often, at least initially, imports from the United States—are quickly and easily perceived as nothing, since alternative forms of something, and the standards they provide, are alive and well. Certainly, large numbers of people in these countries demand and flock to nothing in its various forms, but many others are critical of it and on guard against it. The various forms of something thriving in these countries give supporters places, things, people, and services to rally around in the face of the onslaught of nothing. Thus, it is not surprising that the Slow Food Movement, oriented to the defense of “slow food” against the incursion of fast food, began in Italy (in fact, the origin of this movement was a battle to prevent McDonald’s from opening a restaurant at the foot of the Spanish Steps in Rome) and has its greatest support throughout Europe (Kummer 2002).

THE INCREASE IN NOTHING! THE DECLINE IN SOMETHING?

A basic idea—even a grand narrative—in this essay is the idea that there is a long-term trend in the social world in general, and in the realm of consumption in particular, in the direction of nothing. More specifically, there is an historic movement from something to nothing. Recall that this is simply an argument about the increase in forms that are centrally conceived and controlled and are largely devoid of distinctive content. In other words, we have witnessed a long-term trend *from* a world in which indigenously conceived and controlled forms laden with distinctive content predominated *to* one where centrally conceived and controlled forms largely lacking in distinctive content are increasingly predominant.

There is no question that there has been an increase in nothing and a relative decline in something, but many forms of something have not experienced a decline in any absolute sense. In fact, in many cases, forms of something have increased; they have simply not increased at anything like the pace of the increase in nothing. For example, while the number of fast-food restaurants (nonplaces) has increased astronomically since the founding of the McDonald's chain in 1955, the number of independent gourmet and ethnic restaurants (places) has also increased, although at not nearly the pace of fast-food restaurants (Nelson 2001). This helps to account for the fact that a city such as Washington, DC (to take an example I know well) has, over the last half century, witnessed a massive increase in fast-food restaurants *at the same time* that there has been a substantial expansion of gourmet and ethnic restaurants. In fact, it could be argued that there is a dialectic here—that the absolute increase in nothing sometimes serves to spur at least some increase in something. That is, as people are increasingly surrounded by nothing, at least some are driven to search out or create something. However, the grand narrative presented here is more about the relative ascendancy of nothing and the relative decline in something than about absolute change.

Nonetheless, at least some forms of something (e.g., local groceries, cafeterias) have suffered absolute declines and may have disappeared or be on the verge of disappearance. It could be argued that all of these have been victims of what Joseph Schumpeter (1950) called "creative destruction." That is, while they have largely disappeared, in their place have arisen successors such as the fast-food restaurant, the supermarket, and the "dinner-house" (e.g., the Cheesecake Factory) (Jones 2002). While there is no question that extensive destruction of older forms has occurred, and that considerable creativity has gone into the new forms, one must question Schumpeter's one-sidedly positive view of this process. Perhaps some things—even some measure of creativity—have been lost with

the passing of these older forms. It may be that the destruction has not always been so creative.

However, no overall value judgment needs to be made here; forms laden with content are not inherently better than those devoid of content, or vice versa. In fact, there were and are many forms rich in content that are among the most heinous of the world's creations. We could think, for example, of the pogroms that were so common in Russia, Poland, and elsewhere (Klier and Lambroza 1992). These were largely locally conceived and controlled and were awash in distinctive content (antisemitism, nationalism, and so on). Conversely, forms largely devoid of content are not necessarily harmful. For example, the bureaucracy, as Weber (1921) 1968 pointed out, is a form (and ideal type) that is largely lacking in content. As such, it is able to operate in a way that other, more content-laden forms of organization—those associated with traditional and charismatic forms of organization—could not. That is, it was set up to be impartial—to *not* (at least theoretically) discriminate against anyone.

There is very strong support for the argument, especially in the realm of consumption, that we are in the midst of a long-term trend away from something and in the direction of nothing. By the way, this implies a forecast for the future: we will see further increases in nothing and further erosions of something in the years to come.

THE ECONOMICS OF NOTHING

Several points can be made about the economics of nothing. First, it is clear that, in general, there is an inverse relationship between income and nothing. That is, those with money can still afford to acquire various forms of something, whereas those with little money are largely restricted to nothing.³¹ Thus, only the affluent can afford expensive bottles of complex wine, or gourmet French meals with truffles. Those with little means are largely restricted to Coca-Cola, Lunchables, microwave meals, and McDonald's fries.

Second, there is an economic floor to this: those below a certain income level cannot even afford much of that which is categorized here as nothing. Thus, there are those near or below the poverty line in America who often cannot afford a meal at McDonald's or a six-pack of Coca-Cola. More importantly, there are many more people in the less-developed parts of the world who do not have access to and cannot afford such forms of nothing. Interestingly, extreme poverty relegates people to something—home-made meals and home brews made from whatever is available. However, in this case it is hard to make the argument for something. These forms of something are often meager, and those who are restricted to them would love to have access to that which has been defined here, as well as by many people throughout the world, as nothing.

Third, thinking of society as a whole, some minimum level of affluence and prosperity must be reached before it can afford nothing. That is, there are few ATMs, fast-food restaurants, and Victoria's Secret boutiques in the truly impoverished nations of the world. There simply is not enough income and wealth for people to be able to afford nothing; people in these societies are, ironically, doomed—at least for the time being—to something. Thus, they are more oriented to barter, preparing food at home from scratch, and making their own nightgowns. It is not that they would not readily trade their something for the forms of nothing described above, but that they are unable to do so. It seems clear that as soon as the level of wealth in such a country reaches some minimal level, the various forms of nothing will be welcomed and, for their part, the companies that produce them will enter eagerly.

Fourth, even the wealthiest of people often consume nothing. For one thing, as has been pointed out previously, nothing is not restricted to inexpensive (non)places, (non)things, (non)people, and (non)services. Some forms of nothing—a Four Seasons hotel room, a Dolce and Gabbana frock, the salesperson at Gucci, and the service of a waiter at a Morton's steakhouse—are very costly, but they still qualify as nothing as that term is used here: relatively empty forms that are centrally conceived and controlled. The consumption of these very expensive forms of

nothing is obviously restricted to the uppermost reaches of the economic ladder.

Fifth, the wealthy are drawn to many of the same low-priced forms of nothing that cater to the mass of the population, even those who would be considered poor or very close to it. A credit card knows no income barriers—at least at the high end of the spectrum—and the same is true of ATMs. The wealthy, especially wealthy teenagers, are just as likely to be attracted to fast-food restaurants as are those from virtually every other income group.

There is no simple relationship between wealth and nothingness.

GLOBALIZATION VERSUS GLOCALIZATION

Returning to the issue with which we began this discussion, one of the key contributions here is the argument that the/a key dynamic under the broad heading of globalization is the conflict between globalization and glocalization. This is a very different view than *any* of the conventional perspectives on global conflict. For example, I think a large number of observers have tended to see the defining conflict, where one is seen to exist, as that between globalization and the local. However, the perspective offered here differs from that perspective on several crucial points.

First, globalization does not represent one side in the central conflict. It is far too broad a concept, encompassing as it does all transnational processes. It needs further refinement to be useful in this context, such as the distinction between globalization and glocalization. When that differentiation is made, it is clear that the broad process of globalization already encompasses important conflicting processes. Since globalization contains the key poles in the conflict, it therefore is not, and cannot be, one position in that conflict.

Second, the other side of the traditional view of that conflict—the local—is relegated to secondary importance in this conceptualization. That is, to the degree that the local continues to exist, it is seen as increasingly insignificant and a marginal player in the dynamics of globalization. Little of the local remains that has been untouched by the global. Thus, much of what we often think of as the local is, in reality, the

³¹But not exclusively. There are certainly many forms of something—a homemade soup or stew, a hand-knitted ski cap, homemade ice cream—that are inexpensive; indeed, they are often far less costly than comparable store-bought products.

global. As the global increasingly penetrates the local, less and less of the latter will remain free of global influences. That which does will be relegated to the peripheries and interstices of the local community. The bulk of that which remains is much better described as glocal than local. In community after community, the real struggle is between the more purely global versus the glocal. One absolutely crucial implication of this is that it is *increasingly difficult to find anything in the world untouched by globalization*. Ironically, then, the hope for those opposed to globalization, especially the alternative form of globalization—glocalization. This is hardly a stirring hope as far as most opponents of globalization are concerned, but it is the most realistic and viable one available. The implication is that those who wish to

oppose globalization, and specifically globalization, must support and align themselves with the other major form of globalization—glocalization.

Yet globalization does represent some measure of hope. For one thing, it is the last outpost of most lingering (if already adulterated by globalization) forms of the local. That is, important vestiges of the local remain in the glocal. For another, the interaction of the global and the local produces unique phenomena that are not reducible to either the global or the local. If the local alone is no longer the source that it once was of uniqueness, at least some of the slack has been picked up by the glocal. It is even conceivable that the glocal and the interaction among various localities are—or at least can be—a significant source of uniqueness and innovation.

ANTHONY GIDDENS (1938–): A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Anthony Giddens was born in 1938 in Edmonton, a suburb of London. His father was a clerk who worked for London Transport, and his mother was a housewife. Theirs was a typical middle-class family, and Giddens graduated from grammar school with below-average grades. He later attended the University of Hull, where he intended to study philosophy. However, Giddens found that he excelled in psychology and sociology. Inspired by a lively sociology department led by Peter Worsley, Giddens graduated with a first-class honors degree in sociology in 1959 (Kaspersen 2000:1). He then went on to study at the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science, where he wrote a Weber-inspired master's thesis on the development of sport in England in the 19th century. Unfortunately for Giddens, sport was a marginal topic in sociology at the time, leaving him to feel that his supervisors did not take his work all that seriously (Elliot 2001:293).

From 1961 to 1969, Giddens worked as a lecturer at the University of Leicester alongside several of Europe's top sociologists, including Norbert Elias and Ilya Neustadt, and held guest lectureships at Simon Fraser University near Vancouver, Canada, and the University of California, Los Angeles. During this time, Giddens began to focus on the connections and divergences among the core classical figures in sociology (Marx, Weber, and Durkheim) and drew up plans for his first book, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971). This book was followed by a spate of others, including *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1976)¹¹, *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (1977), *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979), and *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (1981a). His most ambitious work, *The*

¹¹The title of Giddens's book commemorates the influence of Émile Durkheim, whose book *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1938) was one of the first systematic statements outlining sociology as a distinct field of scientific study.

Constitution of Society, was published in 1984. In this book, Giddens outlined his theory of "structuration," which has made a lasting impact on the field.

In 1970, Giddens became a lecturer at King's College Cambridge and attained a professorship there in 1985. During this time, he continued to focus on structuration theory and historical sociology in such works as *The Nation-State and Violence* (1985) and *Social Theory and Modern Sociology* (1987). In *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), he turned his attention to the debates over postmodern theory while examining the effects of contemporary society on social relations and the role of trust in everyday life. In 1992, Giddens was named winner of the prestigious Spanish prize the Prince of Asturias Award for Social Sciences, which recognizes the "scientific, technical, cultural, social and humanistic work performed by individuals, groups or institutions worldwide." In 1996, Giddens left Cambridge to become director of the London School of Economics and Political Science, a position that he still holds.

In the mid-1990s, Giddens's career took a striking new turn as he became an adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, helping popularize the ideas of left-of-center politics known as the "Third Way." His books *The Third Way* (1998) and *Beyond Left and Right* (1994) have influenced debates about the future of democracy in many countries across the world. In the 1990s, his work also took a decidedly social psychological turn, as Giddens addressed such issues as the self, identity, intimacy, and sexuality in *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991) and *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992). Although Giddens's ongoing political and publishing activities (he is cofounder of Polity Press and consulting editor for two publishing companies) reflect a departure from more formal theoretical concerns, his query into the sociology of the self is not necessarily inconsistent with his earlier work: Giddens has always held that sociology is "not only about the big institutions, such as government organizations, business firms or societies as a whole. It is very much about the individual and our individual experiences. We come to understand ourselves much better through grasping the wider social forces that influence our lives" (Giddens 1999).

GIDDENS'S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES AND CORE IDEAS

Structuration

To better situate Giddens's understanding of globalization, we first provide an overview of his general theory of social action: the theory of structuration. In developing this approach, Giddens creatively combines the insights of linguistic philosophy, phenomenology, ethnomethodology, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, structuralism, poststructuralism, dramaturgy, and existentialism (Craib 1992:chap. 2) to fashion a multidimensional account of social life. At the heart of his theory is the notion that the individual and society form an interdependent duality that he terms the **duality of structure**. By this, Giddens means that social structures are both the "medium and outcome" of the practices they organize. To understand what Giddens means by the duality of structure, consider the use of language. Every time an individual communicates with someone, she relies on language to convey the information she wishes to impart. In this way, language serves as the medium or structure that allows the individual to communicate. Moreover, in intentionally using language to communicate, the language itself and the rules that govern its use are unintentionally reproduced as an outcome or consequence of the process of communication (Giddens 1981b:171, 172). The significance of Giddens's notion of the duality of structure lies in his attempt to overcome the dualism that plagues social theory—the divide between subjectivist/individualist and objectivist/collectivist approaches that, in fostering either/or views of social life, present only half of the story.