While social theorists (and other social scientists) have long been interested in globalization, in recent years there has been an explosion of work on the topic by leading contemporary thinkers. The flowering of such theories (and other work) is a reflection of the fact that globalization is of great concern to, and of enormous significance for, the larger population. Virtually every nation and the lives of billions of people throughout the world are being transformed, often quite dramatically, by globalization. The degree and significance of its impact is to be seen virtually everywhere one looks, most visibly in the now-commonplace protests that accompany high-level meetings of such key global organizations as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. As is made clear by the magnitude of the issues before these organizations, the level of protest against them, and the fact that these protests have taken place in widely dispersed geographic areas, people throughout the world feel very strongly that they are confronting matters of great importance.

Globalization theory also emerged as a result of a series of developments internal to social theory, notably the reaction against such earlier perspectives as modernization theory. Among the defining characteristics of this theory were its orientation to issues that were 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, and so on). Other theories (for example, world system and dependency theory) emerged in reaction, at least in part, to such a positive view of the West (as well as the Northern versus the Southern Hemisphere) and offered global perspectives that were critical of
it for, among other things, its exploitation of many other parts of the world. Nevertheless, they retained a focus on the West, albeit a highly critical orientation toward it. While there are many different versions of globalization theory, there is a tendency in virtually all of them to shift away from a focus on the West and to examine transnational processes that flow in many different directions, as well as those that are independent of any single nation or area of the world.6

Thus, there are good reasons, both external and internal to academia, for the rise in interest in globalization in general, and globalization theory in particular, but globalization is not an idea without severe ambiguities and limitations.

We can start with a definition of globalization as “the worldwide diffusion of practices, expansion of relations across continents, organization of social life on a global scale, and growth of a shared global consciousness.”7 As it has come to be used, the notion of globalization encompasses a number of transnational processes which, while they can be seen as global in their reach, are separable from each other. It is beyond the scope of this book to deal with the full range of globalization processes and issues,8 but at this point we must at least give the reader a sense of the breadth of this still-burgeoning topic and literature.

Politics9 is a major concern of those interested in globalization with a specific focus on such issues as international governance10 and the future of local democracy11 and of the state (and other political entities).12 A new type of city, the global city, is seen as emerging and it has been the subject of considerable thought and research.13 Globalization has naturally been of great interest to those in business, especially the emergence of new global markets and the ideologies that accompany them.14 Related to many other issues is the relationship between technology and globalization, including the role technology plays in global inequalities.15 Of special interest and concern in this regard is the computer, the Internet,16 and the emergence of the global digital divide.17 Then there are such issues as the relationship between globalization and religion,18 sport,19 pop music,20 and virtually every other aspect of the social world, as well as the linkage of globalization to a range of social problems such as poverty and inequality,21 global crime,22 global sex23 and the international sex trade,24 and terrorism,25 as well as the impact of globalization on the environment.26 All of these problems, and many others, have led to considerable interest in the morality and ethics of globalization.27

In his recent overview of globalization theory, Roland Robertson outlined what he considers to be the key issues in globalization theory.28 While all are important, three of them lie at the center of this book and two of them are closely related to one another. The two interrelated issues are as follows: “Does global change involve increasing homogeneity or increasing heterogeneity or
a mixture of both?” And “What is the relationship between the local and the global?” These two issues are tightly linked since the predominance of the local would tend to be associated with heterogeneity while the dominance of the global would be associated more with homogenization. Whatever the mix (and there is always a mix) of the local and the global, heterogeneity and homogeneity, the third issue raised by Robertson remains of great importance: “What drives the globalization process? What is its motor force?” The answer to the last question(s) is highly complex since there is certainly no single driving force, nor is there a single process of globalization. However, later in this chapter, after we’ve specified our approach to the globalization process, we will discuss several of the motor forces—capitalism, McDonaldization, and Americanization—that will concern us here.

Whatever the answers to the above questions, to say nothing of the other central questions that he raises, it is clear that to Robertson, and many other students of globalization (especially Appadurai) the central theoretical issue is the relationship between the highly interrelated topics of homogeneity–heterogeneity and the global–local. Indeed, Robertson is not only known for his interest in these issues, but for his articulation of a now-famous concept—glocalization—that emphasizes the integration of the global and the local.32 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.33 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.34 Glocalization can be defined as the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas. The concept of grobalization, coined here for the first time as a much-needed companion to the notion of glocalization,35 focuses on the imperialistic ambitions of nations, corporations, organizations, and the like and their desire, indeed need, to impose themselves on various geographic areas.36 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 McDonaldization37—are, as pointed out above, central driving forces in grobalization, but also are of particular interest to the author and of great significance in the worldwide spread of nothingness.

It will be argued that grobalization tends to be associated with the proliferation of nothing, while glocalization 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. It is the fact that these two processes coexist under the broad heading of globalization, and because they are, at least to some degree, in conflict in terms of their implications for the spread of nothingness around the world, that globalization as a whole does not have a unidirectional effect on the spread of nothingness. That is, in some of its aspects (those involved in globalization) globalization favors the spread of nothing, but in others (those related to glocalization) it tends toward the dissemination of something. This issue will be addressed in depth in this chapter and the next.

Glocalization and Grobalization

Grobalization and glocalization are rooted in competing visions of the contemporary world. Grobalization is a very modern view emphasizing the growing worldwide ability of, especially, largely capitalistic organizations and modern states to increase their power and reach throughout the world. Two of the most preeminent modern theories—those of Karl Marx and Max Weber (and of their followers)—undergird this perspective. While Marx focused on the capitalistic economic system, Weber was concerned with the rationalization of not only the economy, but many other sectors of society, in the modern world.

Marxian (and neo-Marxian) theory leads to the view that one of the major driving forces behind globalization is the corporate need to show increasing profitability through more and more far-reaching economic imperialism. Another is the need for corporations, and the states and other institutions (media, education) that buttress them, to support efforts at enhancing profitability by increasing their cultural hegemony throughout the world. Thus, from this perspective, the need for (especially) American corporations to show ever-increasing profits, and the related and supporting need of the United States and American institutions to exert ever-increasing cultural hegemony, go to the core of globalization. American corporations aggressively export commodities for their own profit, and the nation as a whole is similarly aggressive in the exportation of its ideas in order to gain hegemony over other nations, not only for its own sake, but for the increased ability to market goods and services that such hegemony yields. Of special interest are the various consumer products and systems that the United States is exporting to the rest of the world and the ways in which they are altering what and how people consume.

The second modern perspective informing our views on globalization is the Weberian tradition that emphasizes the increasing ubiquity of rationalized
structures and their growing control over people throughout the world, especially, given our interests, in the sphere of consumption. The Weberian approach attunes us to the “grobal” spread of these rationalized structures. That is, rationalized structures have a tendency to replicate themselves throughout the world and those nations that do not have them are generally eager to acquire them. While American corporations, indeed the United States as a whole, can be seen as highly rationalized, there are, as we will see, many other rationalized structures not only in the United States, but throughout the world.

While modern theories like those associated with the Marxian and Weberian traditions are closely linked to the idea of grobalization, glocalization is more in tune with postmodern social theory and its emphasis on diversity, hybridity, and independence. In conjunction with local realities, the globalization of so many commodities and ideas gives communities, groups, and individuals in many parts of the world an unprecedented capacity to fashion distinctive and ever-changing realities and identities. Rather than increasing penetration by capitalist firms and the states that support them, or by rationalized structures, this perspective sees a world of increasing diversity. Although all nations are likely to be affected by the spread of capitalism and rationalization, they are likely to integrate both with local realities to produce distinctively glocal phenomena.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that grobalization and glocalization offer very different images of the impact of transnational processes. After all, they tend to stem from the antithetical bases of modern and postmodern social theory.

Globalization can be analyzed culturally, economically, politically, or institutionally. At the extremes, in the realm of culture, grobalization can be seen as a form of transnational expansion of common codes and practices (homogeneity) whereas glocalization involves the interaction of many global and local cultural inputs to create a kind of pastiche, or a blend, leading to a variety of cultural hybrids (heterogeneity). The trend toward homogeneity is often associated with cultural imperialism (see below), or, to put it another way, the growing international influence of a particular culture (hence, an aspect of grobalization). There are many varieties of cultural imperialism, including those that emphasize the role played by American culture, the West, or core countries. Robertson, although he doesn’t use the term cultural imperialism, tends to oppose the idea (as do others) and thereby supports, as we have seen, the concept of glocalization by describing a series of cultural hybrids resulting from the interpenetration of the universal and the particular.

Theorists who focus on economic factors tend to emphasize their growing importance and homogenizing effect throughout the world and are therefore
in tune with the idea of globalization. They generally see globalization as the spread of the market economy throughout many different regions of the world. Recently, George Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and former chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, issued a stinging attack on the World Bank, the WTO, and especially the IMF for their roles in exacerbating, rather than resolving, global economic crises. Among other things, Stiglitz criticizes the IMF for its homogenizing, “one-size-fits-all” approach that fails to take into account national differences. The IMF in particular, and globalization in general, have worked to the advantage of the wealthy nations, especially the United States (which effectively has veto power over IMF decisions), and to the detriment of poor nations; the gap between rich and poor has actually increased as a result of globalization.

While the IMF is supposed to help poor countries by providing them with economic aid, Stiglitz shows that it is often the case that the reforms that the IMF insists that poor countries undertake to fix their economic problems often end up making them worse off economically.

While those who focus on economic issues tend to emphasize homogeneity, some differentiation (heterogeneity) is acknowledged to exist at the margins of the global economy. Examples include the commodification of local cultures and the existence of flexible specialization that permits the tailoring of many products to the needs of various local specifications. More generally, those who emphasize glocalization would argue that the interaction of the global market with local markets would lead to the creation of unique glocal markets that integrate the demands of the global market with the realities of the local market.

A political–institutional orientation also emphasizes either homogeneity or heterogeneity. One example of a globalization perspective in the political domain focuses on the worldwide spread of models of the nation-state and the emergence of isomorphic forms of governance throughout the globe—in other words, the growth of a more-or-less single model of governance around the world. The most important example of this is the global spread of a democratic political system. One of the most extreme views of globalization in the political realm is Benjamin Barber’s thinking on “McWorld,” or the growth of a single political orientation that is increasingly pervasive throughout the world.

Interestingly, Barber also articulates, as an alternative perspective, the idea of “Jihad”—localized, ethnic, and reactionary political forces (including “rogue states”) that involve a rejection of McWorld in the political realm. Jihad also tends to be associated with an intensification of nationalism and therefore is apt to lead to greater political heterogeneity throughout the world. The interaction of McWorld and Jihad at the local level may produce unique, glocal political formations that integrate elements of both
the former (for example, use of the Internet to attract supporters) and the latter (for example, use of traditional ideas and rhetoric). 48

Overall, we can, following Robertson, offer the following as the essential elements of glocalization:

1. The world is growing more pluralistic. Glocalization theory is exceptionally sensitive to differences within and between areas of the world.

2. Individuals and local groups have great power to adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a glocalized world. Glocalization theory sees individuals and groups as important and creative agents.

3. Social processes are relational and contingent. Globalization provokes a variety of reactions—ranging from nationalist entrenchment to cosmopolitan embrace—that feed back on and transform globalization, that produce glocalization.

4. Commodities and the media, arenas and key forces in cultural change in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, are not seen as (totally) coercive, but rather as providing material to be used in individual and group creation throughout the glocalized areas of the world.

Naturally, globalization leads to a variety of largely antithetical ideas:

1. The world is growing increasingly similar. Globalization theory tends to minimize differences within and between areas of the world.

2. Individuals and groups have relatively little ability to adapt, innovate, and maneuver within a globalized world. Globalization theory sees larger structures and forces tending to overwhelm the ability of individuals and groups to create themselves and their worlds.

3. Social processes are largely one-directional and deterministic. Globalization tends to overpower the local and limits its ability to act and react, let alone act back on the global.

4. Commodities and the media are the key forces and areas of cultural change and they are seen as largely determining the self and groups throughout the globalized areas of the world.

Derived from this is another important difference between these two perspectives: the tendency on the part of those associated with the glocalization perspective to value it positively 49 and to be critical of globalization as well as those who emphasize it. This is traceable, in part, to the association between glocalization and postmodernism and the latter’s tendency to value
positively the individual and the local over the totality—diversity over uniformity. A more specific set of examples is to be found in the essays in James Watson’s *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia.*50 The McDonald’s in Beijing is described (and valued) for being more human than McDonald’s in other places, especially the United States, because people can hang out there, ceremonies like children’s birthday parties are more common, and there are even kindly “Aunt McDonald’s” who serve as receptionists in the restaurants. In Beijing customers are allowed to linger over their meals and take about twice as long to eat as do Americans. In Taipei, like Beijing and Hong Kong, McDonald’s is a hangout for teenagers, a kind of home away from home. There is something heroic about Watson’s conclusion about East Asian consumers and their ability to assert themselves in the face of the globalizing efforts of McDonald’s: “East Asian consumers have *quietly,* and in some cases, *stubbornly,* transformed their neighborhood McDonald’s into local institutions.”51 In these and other ways, these glocalized McDonald’s are depicted positively, and they are used not only to counter the idea of globalization, but also to be critical, explicitly and implicitly, of it.

**Glocalization**

A discussion of some closely related terms (and related examples) will be of considerable help in getting a better sense of glocalization. One such concept, already mentioned several times, is *heterogenization,* a term that emphasizes the diversity that is characteristic of glocalization and that stands in stark contrast to the *homogenization* that can be seen as accompanying globalization.

Another is *hybridization,* which emphasizes the mixtures of the global and the local, as opposed to the greater *uniformity* associated with globalization.52 A hybrid would involve the combination of two or more elements from different cultures or parts of the world. Among the examples of hybridization (and heterogenization, glocalization) are Ugandan tourists visiting Amsterdam to watch Moroccan women engage in Thai boxing, Argentinians watching Asian rap performed by a South American band at a London club owned by a Saudi Arabian, and the more mundane experiences of Americans eating such concoctions as Irish bagels, Chinese tacos, Kosher pizza, and so on. Obviously, the list of such hybrids is long and growing rapidly with increasing glocalization. The contrast, of course, would be such uniform experiences as eating hamburgers in the United States, quiche in France, or sushi in Japan. More to the point of this book, globalization brings with it forms and products (for example, Gap chinos,
Starbucks coffee) that tend to replace local variants and to lead to increased uniformity throughout the world.

Yet another synonym for glocalization is creolization. The term creole generally refers to people of mixed race, but it has been extended to the idea of the “creolization of language”, involving a combination of languages that were previously unintelligible to one another. The opposite of creolization might be conceived of as purification, whereby alternative languages and peoples are prevented from entering, or driven out if they succeed in gaining entree, in order to maintain the purity of a language or a race. At its extreme, grobalization involves purification as indigenous elements are driven out and replaced by purely grobal alternatives. Creolization is often used interchangeably with hybridization so that the following example could be used to illustrate both concepts (as well as glocalization): “sitting in a [Starbucks] coffee shop in London [they are now ubiquitous there] drinking Italian espresso served by an Algerian waiter to the strains of the Beach Boys singing ‘I wish they all could be California girls.”

All of the above—hybridization, heterogenization, and creolization—should give the reader a good feel for what is meant here by glocalization, and, as pointed out previously, those terms will sometimes be used as synonyms for it. Similarly, although a better feel for grobalization awaits the discussion of capitalism, McDonaldization, and Americanization, the terms homogenization, uniformity, and purification are more or less synonymous with it. That is, as we will see, all three of these processes seek to replace indigenous alternatives wherever they are found in the world and in the process create increasingly pure capitalistic, McDonaldized, and Americanized forms across the globe.

Those who emphasize glocalization tend to see it as militating against the globalization of nothing and, in fact, view it as leading to the creation of a wide array of new, glocal forms of something. In contrast, those who emphasize grobalization see it as a powerful contributor to the spread of nothingness throughout the world. This being said, it must be noted that there are important similarities and differences between glocalization and grobalization and their roles in the globalization of nothing and they must be delineated as we proceed.

Grobalization

The concept of grobalization, as well as the subprocesses of capitalism, McDonaldization, and Americanization, are at odds, to some degree, with the thrust of globalization theory—especially glocalization—that have the greatest cache today. There is a gulf between those who emphasize the increasing
grobal influence of capitalistic, Americanized, and McDonaldized interests and those who see the world growing increasingly pluralistic and indeterminate. At the risk of being reductive, this divide amounts to a difference in vision between those who see a world that is becoming increasingly grobalized—more capitalistic, Americanized, rationalized, codified, and restricted—and those who view it as growing increasingly glo-  

glocalized—more diverse, effervescent, and free.

While there are many different subprocesses that could be discussed under the heading of grobalization, we will focus on capitalism, McDonaldization, and Americanization. While it is clear that all of these processes are important, their relative significance and impact will vary (to the degree that they can be separated) on a case-by-case basis (nation, export considered, and so on). Furthermore, even though each of these will be discussed separately, it is clear that while they are not reducible to one another, they are highly interrelated.

Capitalism

No force has contributed more to globalization in general, and grobalization in particular, both historically and especially today, than capitalism. As Marx fully understood over a century ago, capitalist firms must continue to expand or they will die, and when possibilities for high profits within a given nation decline, capitalistic businesses are forced to seek profits in other nations. Eventually, such firms are led to explore and exploit possibilities for profit in more remote and less developed regions. Thus, except perhaps for the earliest forms, capitalistic businesses have always had global ambitions; they have always been interested in grobalization and contributed to glo-  

glocalization. However, their impact has greatly accelerated in the past several decades.

During the Cold War that lasted much of the 20th century there were powerful restraints on capitalism’s grobal ambitions. Most important, there was a seemingly viable alternative to it—socialism/communism—and this served to temper capitalism’s expansion. On one hand, the Soviet Union and China, as well as nations within their orbit, were largely closed to incursions by the capitalists. The idea, posited first by Winston Churchill in 1946, that an iron curtain had descended between Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe and Western Europe made the barrier to capitalism, and much else, perfectly clear. On the other hand, many other nations throughout the world, even if they were not behind the iron curtain, were influenced by the ideas, if not the military and political power, of the communist countries. As a result, they were at least ambivalent about participating in the capitalist system, if not overtly hostile to it. In these and other ways,
capitalism’s global ambitions were limited to some degree throughout much of the 20th century.

However, by the close of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, with the death of the Soviet Union and the near-death of communism/socialism, as well as with China and Russia behaving very much like capitalist nations, almost all limits to the global ambitions of capitalistic firms were eliminated. As a result, it is only now that we are beginning to see the full-flowering of globalization in capitalism. After all, in Marx’s day (the mid- to late 1800s), capitalistic businesses were comparatively small and the important technologies (computers, telecommunications, huge cargo planes and ships, and so on) that permit and encourage high levels of globalization did not exist. Today’s enormous capitalistic firms, equipped with magnificent globe-straddling technologies, are far better able to globalize than their predecessors. And, they move into a world in which there is no viable alternative to capitalism. We live in an era in which, truly for the first time, capitalism is unchained and free to roam the world in search of both cheap production facilities and labor as well as new markets for its products. As two neo-Marxian thinkers, Ellen Meiksins Wood and John Bellamy Foster, put it, “humanity is more and more connected in the global dimensions of exploitation and oppression.” As a result, there are those who believe that the death of communism around the world will not spell the death of Marxian theory, but rather serve to resuscitate it. That is, Marxian analysis will be more necessary than ever with capitalism free to exploit more and more people and geographic areas of the world. It could be argued that it is only now that capitalism exists as a truly global phenomenon and the implication of Marxian theory is that this sets the stage, for the first time, for the emergence of global opposition to it.

Capitalism is clearly related to economic globalization, especially in the area of consumption which is of central interest here. That is, it is capitalistic firms that produce the vast majority of non-places, non-things, non-people, and non-services on offer throughout the world. However, capitalism is also related to other aspects of globalization. Without adopting a simplistic (economic) base–(political) superstructure model, it is clear that much globalization in the political realm is affected to a large degree by the capitalistic economic system. Thus, the United States’ much-avowed desire to see democracy throughout the world, as well as many of its military adventures, is closely related to the needs of its capitalistic system. That is, democratic societies are more likely to become capitalistic and they are more likely to be open to the incursions of capitalistic firms from other countries (especially the United States). And, in those cases where a society does not move on its own in the direction of “democracy,” there is always the possibility of American military involvement in order to nudge it, not so gently,
in that direction. While the state clearly has its own interests, it just as certainly shares many interests with the capitalistic economic system to which it owes much of its existence and success. Political leaders are generally safe as long as the economy is performing well; however, their situation becomes precarious when the economy falters.

Similarly, organizational–institutional globalization is also closely related to capitalism. For example, the proliferation of the franchise system of organization (this involves a franchiser [e.g., Subway] selling others [franchisees] the right to operate an outlet, although some control remains with the franchiser, which also usually gets a share of each franchisee’s profits\(^69\)) throughout the world is driven, in significant part, by capitalist economics. That is, some franchisers have grown fabulously wealthy as a result of this system, and it is not unusual to find franchisees who have become multimillionaires from the profits from one or several franchises. However, again it is important not to reduce all of this to (capitalist) economics alone (some value the franchise system, or a specific franchise, in itself and not just for its profit potential).

We need not go into great detail here about capitalism because so much has been written about it, its operations are so well known, and it is so obviously a form of globalization. We turn now to two somewhat less well-known forms of globalization, although we will have occasion to return under each of them to their relationship to capitalism.

McDonaldization

This is the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society and an increasing number of other societies throughout the world. It fits under the heading of globalization because it involves the growing power of this model and its increasing influence throughout the world. The model’s principles, as we have already seen, are efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, particularly through the substitution of nonhuman for human technology, as well as the seemingly inevitable irrationalities of rationality that accompany the process.\(^70\) The basic concept, as well as its fundamental dimensions, is derived from Max Weber’s work on formal rationality.\(^71\) Weber demonstrated that the modern Western world was characterized by an increasing tendency toward the predominance of formally rational systems and that the rest of the world was coming under the sway of these systems. Thus, the process of McDonaldization, or at least its forerunner (increasing formal rationality and bureaucratization), obviously predates McDonald’s as an institution.\(^72\) However, that franchise is the exemplar (the bureaucracy was the model in Weber’s approach) of the contemporary
phase of rationalization. While the fast-food restaurant is the paradigm of this process, the process has by now affected most, if not all, social structures and institutions in the United States, as well as most nations (at least those that are reasonably developed economically) in the world. Thus, McDonaldization is restricted neither to the fast-food industry nor to the United States. Rather, it is a wide-ranging and far-reaching process of global change.

Recent work has tended to support the McDonaldization thesis. It has been applied well beyond the fast-food restaurant and even everyday consumption to such areas as higher education (“McUniversity”),73 politics,74 religion,75 and criminal justice.76 Of course, not all systems (or nations) are equally McDonaldized; McDonaldization is a matter of degree, with some settings more McDonaldized than others. However, few settings (or nations) have been able to escape its influence altogether.

In terms of globalization, the McDonaldization thesis contends that highly McDonaldized systems, and more important the principles that lie at the base of these systems, have been exported from the United States to much of the rest of the world. Many nations throughout the world, and innumerable subsystems within each, are undergoing the process of McDonaldization. While McDonaldization is traceable, most proximately, to the United States, and especially the founding of the McDonald’s chain outside Chicago in the mid-1950s, the process cannot simply be subsumed under the heading of Americanization. First, it has roots outside the United States, including the German bureaucracies analyzed by Weber at the turn of the 20th century. Second, the process has taken root by now in many nations and at least some of them are in the process of exporting their own McDonaldized systems throughout the world, including back into the United States (for example, the exportation of England’s Body Shops or Sweden’s Ikea [it’s actually owned and managed by a company based in the Netherlands] to the United States and many other nations). McDonaldization can be thought of as a transnational process that is increasingly independent of any particular nation, including even the United States, and therefore is not reducible to a specific form of Americanization. As such, it is a particularly powerful force in the globalization of nothing. In the future, paralleling the history of mass manufacturing, we can anticipate that the center of McDonaldization will shift from the United States to other parts of the world.

It is worth noting that when they have addressed the McDonaldization thesis and related ideas, some globalization theorists, especially those committed to the ideas of heterogeneity and glocalization, have tended to be critical of it for its focus on its homogenizing impact on much of the rest of the world. For example, Robertson says that “the frequent talk about the
McDonaldization of the world . . . has to be strongly tempered by what is increasingly known about the ways in which such products or services are actually the basis for localization." Instead, those associated with this view emphasize such things as local diversity and heterogeneity, the multidirectionality of global flows, and the existence of global processes that are relatively autonomous of specific nation-states. While all of these processes exist and are significant, it is also the case that some aspects of globalization are best described as having a largely homogenizing effect on much of the rest of the world.

McDonaldization is obviously a global perspective, but it is both less and more than a theory of globalization. On the one hand, McDonaldization does not involve anything approaching the full range of global processes. For example, many economic, cultural, political, and institutional aspects of globalization are largely unrelated to McDonaldization. On the other hand, McDonaldization involves much more than an analysis of its global impact. For example, much of it involves the manifold transformations taking place within the United States, the main source and still the center of this process. Furthermore, one can analyze the spread of McDonaldization (once it has arrived) within many other nations and even subareas of those nations. In addition, one can, as we have seen, look at the McDonaldization of various aspects of the social world—religion, higher education, politics, and so on—without considering the global implications for each. Thus, McDonaldization is not coterminous with globalization, nor is it solely a global process. Nonetheless, McDonaldization has global implications and can thus be a useful lens through which to examine changes taking place around the globe.

What is clear is that McDonaldization deserves a place in any thoroughgoing account of globalization. There can be little doubt that the logic of McDonaldization generates a set of values and practices that has a competitive advantage over other models. It not only promises many specific advantages, but also reproduces itself more easily than other models of consumption (and in many other areas of society as well). The success of McDonaldization in the United States over the past half century, coupled with the international ambitions of McDonald’s and its ilk, as well as those of indigenous clones throughout the world, strongly suggests that McDonaldization will continue to make inroads into the global marketplace not only through the efforts of existing corporations but also via the diffusion of the paradigm.

It should be noted, however, that the continued advance of McDonaldization, at least in its present form, is far from ensured. In fact, there are even signs in the United States, as well as in other parts of the world, of what I have previously called deMcDonaldization. There are,
for example, the increasing problems of McDonald’s: It recently lost money for the first time and, as a result, was forced to close restaurants, fire employees, scale back planned expansion, and even let its chief executive go. Internationally, McDonald’s restaurants have become targets for various groups with grievances against the restaurant chain, the United States, and even globalization. In light of such international difficulties, McDonald’s is rethinking its plans to expand in certain areas and is cutting back in places where it is particularly likely to be an object of protest and attack. Thus, the continued growth of McDonald’s is not inevitable, although the same cannot be said of the underlying process of McDonaldization (more on this later).

Nonetheless, at the moment and for the foreseeable future, McDonaldization will continue to be preeminent and it is clearly and unequivocally not only a global process, but also one that contributes mightily to the spread of nothingness. The whole idea behind McDonaldization is to create a formal model based on a limited number of principles that can be replicated virtually anywhere in the world.

Capitalism is clearly closely related to McDonaldization. The spread of McDonaldized systems throughout the business world is motivated largely by the high profits they tend to produce. However, McDonaldization cannot be subsumed under the heading of capitalism. For one thing, even within the economic system, there are other reasons (e.g., the cultural importance and meaning of franchises) for their spread. More important is the impact of McDonaldization on many aspects of the social world (church, education, and so on) that can be seen as largely independent of the capitalistic economic system.

Americanization

Americanization can be defined as the propagation of American ideas, customs, social patterns, industry, and capital around the world. It is a powerful unidirectional process stemming from the United States that tends to overwhelm competing processes (e.g., Japanization) as well as the strength of local (and glocal) forces that might resist, modify, or transform American models into hybrid forms. Moreover, the notion of Americanization is tied to a particular nation—the United States—but it has a differential impact on many specific nations. It can be subsumed under the heading of globalization because it envisions a growth in American influence in all realms throughout the world.

Americanization is inclusive of forms of American cultural, institutional, political, and economic imperialism. For example, we can include under the heading of Americanization the worldwide diffusion of the American
industrial model and the later global proliferation of the American consumption model; the marketing of American media including Hollywood films and popular music; the selling of American sports such as NFL football and NBA basketball abroad; the transnational marketing of American commodities including cola, blue jeans, and computer operating systems; the extensive diplomatic and military engagement with Europe, Asia, and South America; the training of the world’s military, political, and scientific elites in American universities; the expansion of the American model of democratic politics; and the development and use of the international labor market and natural resources by American corporations.

The reach of Americanization is great. A good recent example involves a traditional, century-old Scottish soft drink, Irn-Bru (containing a bit of real iron). A 2002 report indicated that for the first time in its history, Irn-Bru had been surpassed as the most popular soft drink in Scotland. The new favorite (with 41% of the Scottish soft drink market)? Coca-Cola, of course! Said an entertainer, “It really is a national icon, even the name itself conjures up something of Scotland to me. . . . I am sorry to hear it’s been beaten—it was nice that Scotland was independent in a way for a time.”

Or, take the case of Hollywood films. The American film industry has overpowered many national film industries in Europe (especially France and Great Britain) and elsewhere, to the detriment of national artistic expression. The blockbuster films of Julia Roberts and Harrison Ford not only flow through an official distribution system, but videotape and DVD versions are also pirated and sold on the streets of third world cities. While several nations, including India and China, continue to produce large numbers of commercial films, even in these countries, American films are often featured on theater marquees. Similarly, many films that are less successful in America find a global market, and this can hold true for art films as well as action movies. The result is not simply a general familiarity with American movies and many other cultural products; those products tend to have an adverse effect on local products. Indeed, in France today there is a very public debate over the so-called cultural exception, which involves, among other things, the subsidization of its flagging movie industry.

Yet this is only one part of the Americanization of contemporary cinema. Another side is that the grammars of other national cinemas are being transformed for distribution in America. The Chinese, for example, have bemoaned the fact that their leading directors (including Zhang Yimo and Chen Kaige) make films that exoticize (or “orientalize”) Chinese culture and history for Western audiences. A recent example is Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which won many international prizes, but reportedly was unsuccessful in mainland China. In short, Chinese films are being tailored to American sensibilities in order to gain prestige and
sales. As a result, American film culture has, at least in some senses, become world film culture. This is not to say that American cinema is not subject to diverse interpretations depending on the cultural context in which it is viewed, but only to suggest that American cultural artifacts are an increasingly central element of global culture.

A particularly good example of Americanization, and one of particular interest to the author, is the spread of the “new means of consumption,” most of which were created in the United States and are now spreading throughout the world. The new means of consumption are, in the main, settings (a supermarket is one example, although one that is not very new) that allow us to consume or that serve to increase the amount that we consume. There has been an almost dizzying creation and proliferation of settings that allow, encourage, and even compel us to consume innumerable goods and services. These settings have come into existence, or taken revolutionary new forms, in the United States since the close of WWII. Building upon, but going beyond, earlier settings, they have dramatically transformed the nature of consumption.

The following are the major new means of consumption with notable examples and the year in which they began operations:

- Franchises (McDonald’s, 1955)
- Shopping Malls (the first indoor mall, Edina, Minnesota, 1956)
- Mega-malls (West Edmonton Mall, 1981; Mall of America, 1992)
- Superstores (Toys R Us, 1957)
- Discounters (Target, 1962)
- Home Shopping Television (Home Shopping Network, 1985)
- Cybermalls (Wal-Mart, 1996)
- Theme Parks (Disneyland, 1955)
- Cruise Ships (Sunward, 1966)
- Casino-Hotels (Flamingo, 1946)
- Eatertainment (Hard Rock Cafe, 1971)

With the exception of mega-malls and the Edmonton Mall (created in Canada, but now supplanted in importance by Minnesota’s Mall of America) and eatertainment and the Hard Rock Cafe (which was created in London, albeit to bring “American” food to England), all of these are American innovations that, in recent years, have been aggressively exported to the rest of the world; that is, they have become global phenomena.

All of the new means of consumption are highly McDonaldized (and McDonald’s, fast-food restaurants, and franchises are such new means), but there is much more to these settings than simply their McDonaldized characteristics. The exportation of these new means of consumption must
be considered, along with McDonaldization, in the context of a discussion of globalization.

What is it about these new means of consumption that make them distinctly American (in Germany, the new McDonaldized Starbucks have been described as “Anywhere USA”\(^\text{87}\)), excellent examples of Americanization, when they are exported to other countries? First, and most obviously, they are about consumption and the United States has been, and is still, the world leader in consumption and in innovations in that realm by a wide margin.\(^\text{88}\) When anyone in the world thinks of consumption, a cornucopia of goods and services, and a rate of consumption so frenetic that one can only think of “hyperconsumption,” one thinks of the United States.

Second, most of the new means of consumption relate in one way or another to the high rate of mobility associated with American culture. The vast majority of them have to do with the massive addiction of Americans to their automobiles, extensive and frequent automobile travel, and the consequent development of a road and highway system unparalleled in the world. Others relate to other types of mobility by plane (Las Vegas casino hotels, Disney theme parks), boat (cruise ships), and over the Internet (cybershops, cybermalls).

Third, the sustenance of these means of consumption requires the level of affluence that is so widely available in the United States. While other nations may have higher average levels of income, no nation has nearly as many people affluent enough to afford to visit, and to consume in, these sites on such a regular basis.\(^\text{89}\) So many Americans are so affluent that they can afford to eat more meals out in franchises, eatertainment sites, and the like than people in any other nation. Only they can afford to descend in droves on meccas of consumption such as Las Vegas, Nevada; Orlando, Florida; and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Fourth, many of the new means of consumption reflect the American mania for that which is huge and enormous. The idea is that the United States is a huge country and that necessitates that as much as possible be done in a big way. Many of the cathedrals of consumption reflect this peculiar mania for size—the mega-malls, superstores, theme parks, cruise ships, and casino-hotels all seek to outdo each other in terms of size. Size is also reflected in the sheer quantity of products available in these settings. Malls and mega-malls are chock full of well-stocked stores (often franchises): superstores have virtually everything one could think of in a particular line of products (sporting goods, athletic shoes, linens, etc.); Disney theme parks, especially Disney World, are characterized by a number of worlds, tens of thousands of hotel rooms, many restaurants, and much kitsch for sale; and of course Las Vegas is over the top in terms of everything it has to offer and it increasingly seems to offer everything.
Then there is, of course, the tendency for fast-food restaurants of all types to be in the business of “supersizing” everything they possibly can.90

What of the linkage between Americanization and capitalism? Clearly, there is a strong relationship here—the American economy is the unchallenged leader of global capitalism. But, of course, the two are not coterminous. On the one hand, many other nations are also capitalistic and, furthermore, still others (most notably China) are moving strongly in that direction. On the other hand, there are forms of Americanization in, for example, the arts and basic sciences, that are, at least to some degree, separable from capitalistic interests.

The relationship between Americanization and nothing is less clear-cut than that between McDonaldization and nothing. On the surface, Americanization inherently involves something—especially the fact that fundamental American characteristics and values infuse all of its forms. The shopping mall, as we have seen, is closely linked to the importance of the automobile in the functioning of American society as well as to the value Americans place on their automobiles—the love affair Americans have with their cars.

However, many of the Americanized forms exported to the rest of the world are attractive not just because of their American character and roots, but also because they have proven to be particularly malleable and adaptable to many other cultures and nations. They often can be detached from their American roots and reconstructed in many different ways in many other places. For example, Orchard Road, the main shopping street in Singapore, is awash with huge indoor malls, but they are in a highly urbanized area and rely heavily on foot traffic and consumers who arrive by public transportation rather than by automobile.91 Thus, many other countries have now adopted the shopping mall and still others are likely to do so in the future. While malls in other parts of the world may have some, even many, indigenous shops and products, they are still clearly malls and very much in line with their American models and predecessors.

Americanization and Nothing

Why is Americanization a greater force in the proliferation of nothing than other similar processes (say, Japanization or Brazilianization)?

First, there is simply much more Americanization than any of the competing global processes. As the world’s greatest power, especially economically, the United States simply produces92 more of virtually everything that is on offer around the globe than any other nation. The United States’ capitalistic enterprises, as well as many other organizations, churn out
Americana of all sorts, and there are great pressures, especially the need for ever-escalating profits, to export them throughout the globe. In contrast, a nation like Brazil, for example, produces far less “Braziliana” and there is far less pressure to export it globally.

Second, American exporters are more likely to be able to afford to use the world’s advertising and marketing systems to disseminate their products. Furthermore, advertising and marketing are themselves American specialties, with the result that American products are likely to be presented not only more ubiquitously, but also more expertly. Bombarded by omnipresent and clever advertisements that may well conceal the American roots of various products, natives are more likely to accept them.

Third, in order to cater to a global market, American exporters are more likely, at least at times, to conceal the roots of these exports and to transform them into ever-emptier forms that can adapt to virtually any locale.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, the United States, as Todd Gitlin has made clear, is everyone’s “second culture.” That is, even when people are able to distinguish their own culture from American exports, they are likely to be quite comfortable with things American. Since the latter are often relatively empty forms, they are easy to accept and to infuse with whatever meaning the locals desire.

Capitalism, McDonaldization, and Americanization

The argument here is that capitalism, McDonaldization, and Americanization are all globalization processes deeply implicated in the proliferation of nothing throughout the world. However, there are important differences among them that need to be fleshed out here.

Capitalism is certainly a powerful force in the globalization of nothing. There are many reasons for this, but perhaps the most important is that in order to maximize profits, capitalistic firms are generally driven to reduce products to their simplest, most basic elements. To put this in terms of our definition of nothing, they seek to produce that which comes ever closer to the nothing end of the something–nothing continuum. While capitalistic businesses can and do produce that which lies toward the something end of that continuum, there is far less money to be made in the production of something than of nothing (for one thing, the demand for something is far less than that for nothing). Thus, capitalists are most likely to be drawn to that which is already nothing or to transform something progressively into nothing. This dynamic helps to explain the attraction of McDonaldized systems to other capitalistic organizations, but we must go beyond capitalism because, as we have seen, nonprofit organizations also seek to become increasingly McDonaldized.
McDonaldized systems are imperatively, and by design, minimalist; they are long on form and short on content. Thus, when McDonaldized systems are exported, especially from the United States to other parts of the world, little or nothing can or need be extracted in order to allow them to fit into the new environment. Second, in addition to the fact that there is so little substance to McDonaldized systems that there is little to remove, there is also little in the way of demand from local populations to remove offending elements because there are so few elements and those that exist are mainly generic forms that can fit almost anywhere. Third, a few local elements can be larded into the extant system, either by addition or substitution, without altering the system in any dramatic way or conflicting with the generic components. Thus, for example, McDonald’s adds local items (suitably McDonaldized) to its menus in many countries, but its underlying principles remain sacrosanct and therefore almost totally unchanged. It is for these reasons, and undoubtedly others, that there is near perfect fit between globalization, the exportation of nothing, and McDonaldization.

There is a less perfect fit between the globalization of nothing and Americanization. The reason is that Americanized systems are, to varying degrees, laden with content, with something—fundamental American characteristics. In some cases, American systems are welcomed in other nations because of their Americanism; it is that cultural something associated with these systems that allows them to succeed elsewhere. However, in those instances we are talking about Americanization as the globalization of something (for much more on this see Chapter 5).

In other instances, however, Americanization brings with it, or becomes, nothing in other societies. For one thing, as everyone’s second culture, the United States exports what appear to be innocuous phenomena that fit quickly and easily into other cultures. For another, that which is distinctly American about these phenomena is quickly lost sight of, or systematically extracted, rendering the American export nothing, or seemingly so. In some cases, success throughout the world depends on playing up the American roots and characteristics of these exports, while in other cases it involves playing them down or even striving to obliterate them. To the degree that things like Levi’s, Coke, Mickey Mouse hats, Barbie dolls, and the like come to be disconnected from their American roots and become forms that fit anywhere and everywhere—that is, nothing—they can move effortlessly from one culture to another and be sold widely in all cultures. Thus, the success of McDonald’s in Japan, and elsewhere, is aided by the fact that it is regarded by many as a local restaurant chain. This is exemplified by the case of a Japanese Boy Scout who, on a trip to the United States, was surprised to find McDonald’s in Chicago—he thought McDonald’s was a Japanese chain.
Of Power and Purity

In the end, however, Americanization is at a disadvantage relative to both capitalism and McDonaldization in the global spread of nothing. As we have seen, the desire of capitalists to maximize profits leads them in the direction of producing nothing and aggressively exporting it to the rest of the world. For their part, McDonaldized systems are largely devoid of substance and therefore need do very little in order to fit into other cultures. In contrast, Americanized systems are defined by elements of American culture and, at least in some cases, those elements must be extracted in order for them to succeed in other cultures. Furthermore, in different countries it is not always the same elements that must be extracted and this greatly complicates matters. That is, one culture may require the removal of one set of elements, while another may demand a very different set be removed. Overall, both capitalism and McDonaldization are purer forces in the globalization of nothing than Americanization. That is, that which emanates from capitalism and McDonaldization will generally be close to the nothing end of the continuum, while that which stems from the United States will contain at least some of the “something-ness” of American culture. That is not to say that capitalism and McDonaldization are necessarily more powerful factors, but they are certainly purer factors.

In fact, overall, it is capitalism that is the most powerful force in the globalization of nothing. To the degree that it can be separated from capitalism, Americanization is a more powerful force than McDonaldization. Furthermore, both capitalism and Americanization are more multidimensional forces than McDonaldization. That is, they are more likely to bring with them both something and nothing. While the impact of the United States has its ambiguities, and is not as powerful as capitalism, it is clearly an enormously powerful force throughout the world. The power of Americanization comes from its strength in all of the sectors being discussed here—cultural, economic, political, and institutional. While capitalism affects all of these realms, its greatest impact is obviously in the economic realm. McDonaldization also is found in all of these sectors, but its most profound effects are cultural and economic. Americanization is not only a potent force in these realms, but its power extends much more into the political and institutional areas, including the military. The political and military hegemony of the United States in the world today accords it enormous power. While it is possible to discuss the role of capitalism and McDonaldization in politics and the military, there is far more to those realms than simply increasing profitability and increasing rationalization.
Anti-Americanism and the Global Attacks on McDonald’s

The thrust of the argument made in this chapter is confirmed, in an odd way, by the recent acceleration of deadly attacks on American interests and on McDonald’s restaurants throughout the world. In terms of the latter, the most extreme and heinous example is the destruction of the World Trade Center and part of the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 (for more on September 11th, see Chapter 7). In addition, McDonald’s has become a favorite target around the world, with innumerable examples of protests against (Jose Bove’s efforts in France are the best-known example), and even bombings of, its restaurants. As I write this, a bomb has gone off in a McDonald’s in Indonesia, killing three people. In terms of the arguments being made in this book, these attacks reflect, at least in part, a growing awareness that capitalism, Americanization, and McDonaldization, and more generally the process of globalization under which they can be subsumed, are threats to indigenous cultures. It is clear to an increasing number of people around the world that ever-increasing and accelerating expansionism lies at the heart of globalization and that resistance is necessary if they wish their cultures to survive.

Making this argument should not be construed as a defense of the kinds of deadly actions mentioned above. Clearly, other ways need to be found to oppose these processes. Such responses are far worse than the problems they seek to deal with. Nonetheless, they do make it clear that the processes discussed here have great power and they are being met with strong, albeit sometimes misguided and even downright malevolent, responses.

The hostile reactions to capitalism, Americanization, and McDonald’s (as a capitalist organization, as American in origin, and as the paradigm of the process of McDonaldization) raises the issue, again, of whether the three subprocesses can truly be differentiated. After all, for many around the world McDonald’s is both capitalist and a key symbol of the United States and Americanization. For example, on the opening of McDonald’s in Moscow, one journalist called it the “ultimate icon of Americana,” and on the opening of a Pizza Hut in that city, a student labeled it a “piece of America.” Furthermore, while many attacks on McDonald’s are on the chain itself, as well as the process it represents, others, especially the most violent and deadly, are motivated by the idea that McDonald’s is a worldwide surrogate for the United States and assaults on it are attacks on the United States and its interests. To those who oppose capitalism and Americanization, and want to do something about them, a McDonald’s restaurant represents a far more ubiquitous and easily assailable target than, say, American embassies or General Motors factories. Thus, when Jose Bove wanted to protest increases of American tariffs on French
products, he chose McDonald’s as his target (there are many of them, they are easily accessible, and they do not have the guards one finds in and around American embassies and large factories throughout the world).

In addition to its association with capitalism and the United States, and its vulnerability to attack, McDonald’s is an attractive target because forays against it get enormous attention throughout the world from the mass media. The reason is McDonald’s enormous success and visibility worldwide, as well as the fact that it is a prime example of globalization. It is an icon to many people around the world in both a positive and a negative sense. Thus, there is great interest in news of attacks on it.

In spite of this association, we continue to hold to the view that it is important to adhere to the distinctions among capitalism, Americanization, and McDonaldization, at least for analytical purposes. While there are important overlaps among them, the fact is that there are global processes that can more easily be included under one or more of these headings than the other(s). The spread of foreign fast-food chains into the United States can be included under the heading of McDonaldization and capitalism, but not Americanization. The political and military influence of the United States throughout the world is an example of Americanization, but not of McDonaldization and only partially of capitalism. The opening of a General Motors factory in Mexico is mainly linked to the dynamics of capitalism, has less to do with Americanization, and is hard to relate to McDonaldization.

This discussion leads to another issue: Does the acceleration of attacks on capitalism, Americanization, McDonaldization, and globalization represent the beginning of the decline of these processes? This is a complex question involving multiple, overlapping processes and predictions about the future. Let me offer four thumbnail answers to close this discussion.

First, as pointed out above, rather than slowing down, capitalism is expanding at an unprecedented level in the wake of the decline of the only global alternative to it—communism/socialism. The current wave of attacks on it is unlikely to have any impact on its continued expansion.

Second, anti-Americanism is so strong and is growing so fast in many parts of the world that it is possible to conceive of some slowdown in the incursions of Americanism throughout the world. However, there are powerful economic (capitalism!) and political forces behind Americanization, with the result that my view would be that the slowdown is likely to be mild and short-lived. Furthermore, existing side by side with anti-Americanism, is widespread and powerful pro-Americanism. Thus, a recent Pew Survey found that anti-Americanism was on the rise and that a majority of those surveyed in many countries opposed the spread of American ideas, but they also liked American culture, such as its movies, music, and television.

Third, a slowdown, even reversal, of the global fortunes of McDonald’s is much more likely than a similar development in the realm of
Americanization. This is clearly a corporation in trouble not only in its global operations, but it is in even more serious difficulties in the American market. However, a slowdown in the global proliferation of McDonald’s, or even its disappearance, does not spell the decline or demise of McDonaldization. While the paradigm may change (Starbucks is the current star in the fast-food industry and is undergoing enormous global expansion [it is currently expanding rapidly in Europe and has just announced plans for a massive invasion of heretofore tea-drinking China]; can we think in terms of “Starbuckization”?), the underlying process of rationalization, encompassing the basic principles (efficiency, and so on) discussed above, is likely not only to continue, but to accelerate.

Finally, globalization is the major worldwide development of the age and it is almost impossible to envision a scenario whereby it would slow down, let alone be stopped. There is too much power behind the forces pushing globalization, the forces opposing it (at least at the moment and for the foreseeable future) are far too weak, and there are far too many real and imagined gains associated with it. In any case, for most nations of the world, there is little choice. Efforts to opt out, even if they were successful (and that’s not likely), would push the nations that do so into the backwaters of the global system. A more likely option for most is to become active exporters in the global system rather than being passive recipients of that which is created and produced elsewhere, especially in the United States.

**Some Complexities**

While this discussion has largely been set up as a confrontation between globalization (and something) and globalization (and nothing), the reality, even as it will be discussed in this book, is much more complex than that. As we will see in the next chapter, there is a glocalization of nothing and a globalization of something, and their existence already adds great complexity to this discussion. However, even that only begins to scratch the surface.

As Douglas Goodman recently pointed out, there are many examples of contradiction within the social and cultural world in general and more specifically within the realm of the consumer culture that is the focus of this book. Furthermore, these contradictions play themselves out at all levels from the most local to the most global and everywhere in between. It is not simply that globalization and globalization (and something and nothing) contradict one another, or at least seem to, but that out of their mutual interactions a wide range of other contradictions emerges. Thus, the globalization of nothing often spawns a reaction that leads to the emergence or reemergence of a more local tradition. For example, the influx of fast food into South Korea gave impetus to the rebirth in chewing betel nuts.
There is another possibility. Instead of combating the globalization of nothing through the creation of a glocal something, it is possible that all that will be created is yet other consumer products that fit our definition of nothing—they are centrally conceived, controlled, and devoid of distinctive content. One example is an Eastern European product, Ordinary Laundry Detergent, created there as an alternative to Tide, which is advertised as “better than ordinary laundry detergent.” In fact, by touting the “ordinary,” the Eastern European detergent could be seen as more nothing than Tide’s branded version (for more on brands, see Chapter 8). Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that it, or a product like it, could become successful outside Eastern Europe as yet another example of the globalization of nothing.

Yet another possibility is that glocal elements could respond with what Robertson calls “willful nostalgia” and purposely create products that embed themselves in the indigenous past of a particular region or nation. Examples include the Shiseido cosmetics firm and the makers of French chocolates, both of which invoke an image of the past to sell their products in their home countries and internationally. Of course, these, too, become simply other centrally conceived and controlled consumer products devoid of distinctive content that are to be globalized, this time from a base in Japan or France.

Yet another layer of complexity is added when we realize that global firms themselves make their own use of “willful nostalgia” by creating products for a specific market that draw on the history and traditions of that market. Again, what appears to be a glocal alternative becomes simply another tool to further the globalization of nothing. A good example is the fact that McDonald’s sells kampong burgers in Singapore. The term kampong refers to the local villages in which most Singaporeans lived before being resettled in the high-rise buildings that are now so common there. Thus, McDonald’s is using nostalgia not to create something truly glocal, but rather to further the globalization of nothing, this time embodied not only in itself and its usual fare, but also in the kampong burger, a thinly camouflaged minor variation on one of the paradigmatic examples of the globalization of nothing—the hamburger.

The point of this is to make it clear that the use of the concepts that have been delineated theoretically in this book—in this case the globalization of nothing and the glocalization of something—reveals interesting and important variations when we descend into the real world of glocal–glocal consumption (and much else). These ideal–typical concepts, as well as the more general theoretical perspective outlined here, are useful not only in themselves, but also for their utility in helping us analyze apparent deviations from, or variations on, them.