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The De-McDonaldization of the Internet

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The rapidly changing Internet raises the issues of both how to theorize it in general as well as its most recent developments. One strategy is to use longstanding theories and theoretical concepts and to see to what degree they apply to, and illuminate, these new realities. There are, of course, innumerable theoretical ideas, and a large number of theories, from which to choose. To make this manageable, we will focus here on one traditional social theory—the theory of rationalization, in particular its most recent manifestation in the concept of McDonaldization. Applying the latter idea to the Internet is no easy matter, especially since the Internet is in the midst of dramatic changes, one of which is the move from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 as described below. Thus, one issue is whether the principles of McDonaldization apply, and apply equally well, to both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. A second is whether the ongoing change is reflective of a process of increasing McDonaldization. That is, the McDonaldization concept, and the underlying theory, would predict an increase in the McDonaldization over time as it moves more toward Web 2.0; it would also predict that Web 2.0 is more McDonaldized than Web 1.0.

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To anticipate the conclusion, it is argued here that while McDonaldization and its sub-dimensions can be usefully applied to both Web 1.0 and 2.0, the latter is *not* more McDonaldized than the former and that the Internet has *not* undergone a process of increasing McDonaldization. This leads to several issues: Does this finding indicate that the concept of McDonaldization is of declining utility? Does it serve to contradict the general thesis of the increasing McDonaldization of society? Or, is there something about the Internet in general, and Web 2.0 in particular, that distinguishes it from the rest of society, which continues, as a general rule, to undergo increasing McDonaldization? These issues will be dealt with in the final section of this essay, but first we need to take a closer look at the Internet and its continuing transformation, specifically of Web 1.0 and 2.0, and then seek to apply the dimensions of McDonaldization to both of them, as well as to the general trend away from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0.

Web 1.0 and 2.0

One could simply see Web 1.0 and 2.0 as indicating different time periods. That is, Web 1.0 as the Internet that existed before the dot-com bubble burst, or as the first decade of the Internet (the 1990s), and that which exists at the present, or the Internet's second decade (the 2000s), as Web 2.0 (and whatever the Internet has in store in the future as the tentatively labeled Web 3.0). Another way to contrast the two is by the change in connectivity speed, where Web 1.0 was most likely to be experienced through dial-up connections and Web 2.0 by high-speed connections. Yet another view of this move from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 focuses on the shift of the Internet from existing exclusively on a computer screen towards other, often mobile, platforms, such as laptops, cell phones, and other Internet-capable devices.

However, this essay rejects views of Web 1.0 and 2.0 being completely distinct. Here, the two are seen as overlapping phenomena. Not only have Web 1.0 and 2.0 always coexisted, they continue to coexist to this day. This essay deals mainly with the emerging importance of Web 2.0, and *it is the explosion of user-generated content that defines Web 2.0 and differentiates it from the provider-generated content of Web 1.0*. To put this another way, Web 2.0 is a bottom-up system, while Web 1.0 is centrally conceived and more top-down.

Web 1.0

Web 1.0 encompasses websites of the past that had not yet taken advantage of the user-generated content that is popular today as well as today's sites that remain top-down. Examples of Web 1.0 include:

- Switchboard.com and YellowPages.com, which centrally conceive how users find people and businesses through the framework of the sites.
- The Apple Store and other shopping sites that dictate the content and users' browsing (i.e., shopping).
- Online consumption of news on Web 1.0 was relatively more centrally conceived than today's popular news sites that allow users to "comment," or allow communities to direct user searches through the use of the "most emailed," "most blogged," or "most searched" lists. News sites in the past that did not have these features, as well as those news sites that have not incorporated them to this day, are examples of Web 1.0.
- The creators of Fodors.com use their own tastemakers to point tourists to various hotels, restaurants, activities, and so forth. More general information is searched for on sites like about.com, whose creators employ "experts" to help users find information, again, exemplifying the centrally conceived nature of Web 1.0.

It is very tempting to offer a "grand narrative" of a shift over time from a top-down Web 1.0 to a bottom-up Web 2.0. However, not only are such grand narratives passé, but like all grand narratives, this one would be far too simplistic. First, we recognize that the degree to which users can produce content on a site is not a dichotomous variable, but rather represents a continuum where some sites are further toward one end of the 1.0–2.0 spectrum than others. At least some user-generation occurs on many Web 1.0 sites and some top-down structures exist on Web 2.0 (e.g., the format of articles on Wikipedia or the profile pages on Facebook). Second, the "cyber-libertarian" ideology behind Web 2.0 that seeks to keep the Internet free and open (including to inputs by users) was present in Web 1.0, indeed, at the very beginning of all thinking about the Internet's possibilities. The Internet, much like many other technologies, was conceived by some as a revolutionary, if not utopian, development that would bring great increases in freedom for those involved. In spite of such great hopes and grand ambitions, the Internet has not fully resisted corporate structures, hierarchies, and control. Companies like AOL and Microsoft sought to control many Internet technologies with their own products and to purchase online real estate much in the same way this occurs in the material world. In this way, Web 1.0 came to lose many of its libertarian ideals as corporate entities began to control it and to create centrally conceived Internet products that structured and greatly limited the ways in which individuals used them.

Of course, at the time, this was not how many saw the Internet. It is with the benefit of hindsight that we can conceive of the Internet as once having been a more top-down system. In other words, Web 1.0 is a largely

retrospective label created and used in order to contrast it to the new technologies that emerged later, remembering the general point that remnants of Web 1.0 continue to exist today. While the Internet today is increasingly a place where users are able to produce content, it was not always this way. Web 1.0 was an attempt to reposition online traditional business and organizational models. At the time, this did not seem, as it might now, overtly top-down or constraining to much of the business community or to many users. Web 1.0, heavily supported by venture capital, was a major force in the emergence of the dot-com bubble of online businesses in the late 1990s. In 2000, that bubble burst due to the frantic expenditure of money on business models that were simply incapable, at least at the time, of being profitable.

However, the cyber-libertarian ideals that predated Web 1.0 had not disappeared. Those who bought into these ideals saw the bursting of the Web 1.0 bubble as an opportunity, as having the potential for “creative destruction.” According to Joseph Schumpeter, the essence of capitalism is its continual ability to destroy the old in order to make way for the new. In this case, the destruction of Web 1.0 (or at least some aspects of it) was seen as a needed prerequisite for the emergence of Web 2.0. To put it in other terms, the possibility of the emergence of a “flat world” free of competitive advantage, lay under the ruins of hierarchies that were at the base of Web 1.0. Here existed the opportunity to attempt again the actualization of the libertarian project online. This time it was fueled by, amongst other factors, the failure of the Internet to produce the expected profits and, more positively, the power of new high-speed technologies that enabled infinitely more users to interact online. The Internet as fast, accessible, useable, and as something that is always on, akin to other utilities, opens the door to a new kind of richly social and more humanized online experience.

Web 2.0

In contrast to Web 1.0, which is defined as being largely centrally conceived and controlled, Web 2.0 accords far less power to the creators of these systems and much more to their users; Web 2.0 sites, or at least the material on them, are, to a large extent, user-generated. In addition to the Web 1.0 experience of reading, browsing, and consuming online content, Web 2.0 *also* allows for writing and producing this content. It also permits the greatly increased ability to network with others in a very social sense. One way of describing this is to see the implosion of the consumer and the producer on Web 2.0 into the “prosumer,” that is, on Web 2.0, users produce that which they consume (e.g., users both produce and consume the

profiles and networks on Facebook) . . . Because of their user-generated content, sites on Web 2.0 are by and large more humanized and exist in a state of flux, as opposed to the more static Web 1.0.

Major examples of Web 2.0, and of the centrality of user-generation on them, include:

- Wikipedia, where users generate articles and constantly edit, update, and comment on them;
- Facebook, MySpace, and other social networking websites, where users create profiles composed of videos, photos, and text; interact with one another; and build communities;
- Second Life, where users create the characters, communities, and the entire virtual environment;
- The blogosphere, blogs (Web logs), microblogging (Twitter), and the comments on them are produced by those who consume them;
- eBay and Craigslist, where consumers rather than retailers create the market;
- YouTube and Flickr, where mostly amateurs upload and download videos and photographs;
- Current TV, where viewers create much of the programming, submit it via the Internet, and decide which submissions are aired;
- Linux, a free, collaboratively built open-source operating system, and other open-source software applications, like Mozilla Firefox, are created and maintained by those who use them;
- Amazon.com, whose consumers do all the work involved in ordering products and write the reviews;
- Yelp!, whose users create an online city guide by ranking, reviewing, and discussing various locations and activities in their area;
- The GeoWeb, which consists of online maps where, increasingly, users are creating and augmenting content with Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo tools (Helft 2007). Google Maps users, for example, can fix errors; add the locations of businesses; upload photos; link Wikipedia articles to; and blog about their experiences with, or reviews of, places on the map, thereby creating social communities.

This explosion of user-generated content has massively transformed the Internet. There are many different ways to describe this shift, to describe what is new and unique about Web 2.0, including the populist notion that many minds are better than one (the “wisdom of the crowds”), the view that emphasizes the productivity and originality of mass self-expression, or the cyber-libertarian notion of the advantages that accrue from breaking down barriers and structures online (creating a “flattened world”). It is likely that these views, and many others, are important in thinking about the shift from Web 1.0, where the user experience was best characterized as “looking stuff

up” preset by others, to a Web 2.0 experience of production in addition to consumption (prosumption) and the increasingly humanized and social nature of the web by way of networking, and collaborating that proliferation of prosumption allows. It is with this understanding of the Internet and changes that have taken place on it that we can apply the theoretical framework of McDonaldization and the concepts that are its essence.

McDonaldization

Here, we move to a discussion of the relationship between McDonaldization and the Internet. On the one hand, of interest is the issue of whether the ideas associated with McDonaldization help us to better understand Web 1.0 and 2.0, as well as the general trend in the direction of the predominance of the latter over the former. On the other hand, we need to address the issue of whether the concept and the theory of McDonaldization need to be revised, or even abandoned, in light of the changing realities online, as well as differences between them and the more material realities such as the fast food restaurant (keeping in mind the point that the Internet is not divorced from physical reality, and is perhaps increasingly merging with the physical, a point that will be touched upon at the conclusion of this essay). Rethinking McDonaldization is made especially pressing since the general argument to be made below is that the move from Web from 1.0 to 2.0 tends to be in the direction of *less* rather than more McDonaldization. This, of course, stands in opposition to Ritzer’s general argument about a society-wide, if not global, trend toward increasing McDonaldization (to say nothing of Weber’s similar argument about increasing rationalization).

McDonaldization is defined by Ritzer in terms of its basic dimensions—efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control by *nonhuman* rather than human technology. Like material realities such as fast food restaurants, Web 1.0 was, and is, highly McDonaldized. As previously described above, Web 1.0 websites are centrally conceived, that is, they are constructed in a one-size-fits-all model, and from the point of view of those who own, control or work on them, this makes the sites highly efficient to create and to maintain. They are also highly efficient from the point of view of users largely because they are created and designed with such efficiency in mind. There are, of course, slip-ups and failures in this regard, but they can be fixed relatively easily.

User efficiency is enhanced by the predictability of websites on Web 1.0; they are more or less identical from one time or place to another because content follows a predictable top-down pattern. The ubiquity of Web 1.0

sites like Yahoo! or the services of AOL served to eliminate inefficiencies associated with having to deal constantly with different or changing website content. Because user choices are limited or non-existent in the Web 1.0 environment, there is also great predictability for those in control of the websites. The major source of unpredictability in any McDonaldized system—human behavior—is largely eliminated from these websites, especially relative to Web 2.0. Furthermore, once a website is created, it can remain in place indefinitely, further enhancing predictability from the perspective of the website's owner and controllers. Calculability is *easy* on Web 1.0 since those in control of the sites can *easily* monitor their use and calculate precisely things like the number of users and how the sites are used. Similarly, users can compare available sites to assess which ones allow them to use their time on them most efficiently.

Web 1.0 is, of course, dominated almost completely by the websites that are, in effect, nonhuman technologies. Once in place, these websites control what users do on them and give them few options. Since the websites are largely static, and the goal is to keep them that way, control is exercised over those who produce content on the sites. Indeed, Web 1.0 is largely distinguishable from Web 2.0 precisely because the former is far less *human* than the latter.

Thus, a strong argument can be made that Web 1.0 is McDonaldized to a high degree. However, anything that is McDonaldized to such a degree is subject to the irrationality of rationality. One such irrationality that stands out in this case is dehumanization. On the one hand, the humans who work on, or for, Web 1.0 websites are highly limited in what they can do; they cannot fully exploit their creative human capacities to improve the sites, or respond as fully as possible to user needs and complaints. In addition, these websites are largely dehumanized from the point of view of their users. If they want to use a site, people must use it in the way its designers and operators intended. They cannot use their skills and abilities to alter the site or to use it in highly creative ways. Further, the sites are structured in ways that are relatively uncollaborative and much less social than what we see on Web 2.0. This is irrational, an irrationality of rationality, in the sense that Web 1.0 squanders its ability to make use of the skills and abilities of both those who work for the sites and those who use them. It is especially in the latter case that Web 2.0 has a huge advantage of 1.0. In one sense, Web 2.0 has reduced or eliminated the irrationality of rationality associated with Web 1.0. In another sense, it could be argued that it has greatly heightened the rationality of these systems by figuring out how to get the most out of the people who use the sites without allowing them to compromise the basic functioning of the system. In this way, while Web 2.0 can be viewed as a

rational next step, often in line with profit-based motives, it exists as such partially outside the principles outlined by the McDonaldization thesis, and thus Web 2.0 is argued to have, to some degree, *de*-McDonaldizing tendencies. This constitutes an important segue into a fuller discussion of Web 2.0 and its relationship to McDonaldization.

De-McDonaldizing the Web

In many ways Web 2.0 is less efficient than Web 1.0 (and material realities such as fast food restaurants), especially for the users. The amount of time and energy users spend producing content on social networking sites (often, users have more than one, including MySpace, Facebook and others), as well as blogging and microblogging (e.g., Twitter), writing comments on other's blogs, writing reviews on sites like Amazon and so on far exceeds the amount of user-generation that existed on Web 1.0. If efficiency is defined as the amount of output relative to the amount of input, then the massive amount of input that the user-generation of Web 2.0 allows tends not be as efficient as a centrally conceived structure, like Web 1.0. As Web 2.0 is defined by the ability for the masses to create content online, this general abundance of profiles, reviews, comments, opinions, news, photos, videos, and much else would be seen as wasteful in an efficient system, but is embraced on Web 2.0. How many users that ultimately contribute, or how much time they spend (for example, editing a Wikipedia entry), matters little; instead, the focus is on the quality of what they produce (leaving aside the debate on the actual quality of Web 2.0 content such as Wikipedia entries). That Web 2.0 involves a focus on output irrespective of the amount of input is an example of its relative inefficiency.

All of this also means that there is far more unpredictability on Web 2.0 sites than on Web 1.0 sites. The basic structure of many sites on Web 2.0 are predictable (e.g., the nature of a Facebook, YouTube, or Yelp! page), but what does or does not find its way onto that page is largely unregulated and unpredictable. There are limits that vary by site, but they are quite wide, with the result that users are unable to predict what they will find every time they log on to a site.

It is also much harder to quantify, to calculate, exactly what is transpiring on a 2.0 site. In part, this is because there is so much more going on and it takes so many different forms. More importantly, while Web 1.0 sites tended to be restricted to objective matters (did one order something? how much was paid for it?), Web 2.0 sites allow, and are even defined by, much more subjective inputs such as personalized messages, photos, and the like. Such things are harder, if not impossible, to quantify.

There are certainly nonhuman technologies involved in Web 2.0—for example computers, the web sites themselves—but human users are, by definition, much more able to manipulate content than on Web 1.0. While Web 1.0 sites are centrally conceived, prestructured, and largely immune to manipulation and alteration by users, Web 2.0 sites are based on the whole idea that users can, indeed must, manipulate and alter the sites in innumerable ways. In other words, humans have been put back in charge of technologies that in Web 1.0 totally controlled them. As a result, it is erroneous to describe the technologies involved in Web 2.0 as nonhuman technologies. While there are certainly technologies there, humans, especially human users, are to a large extent in control of them. Web 2.0 is far more than the wires and circuits that comprise the infrastructure of the Internet; it is also the intersection of machines with human production—of their creativity, identities, and socializing. To a great degree, machines and culture have merged on Web 2.0.

This discussion of the dimensions of McDonaldization leads into the issue of the irrationality of rationality and to the conclusion that Web 2.0 serves to reduce or eliminate such irrationalities, especially dehumanization, in comparison to Web 1.0, to say nothing of irrationalities associated with material realities (e.g., the fast food restaurant). Web 2.0 is clearly a far more humanized technology than Web 1.0. Indeed, in more fully utilizing the skills and abilities of users, it could be argued that Web 2.0 is a far more “reasonable” system than Web 1.0. On Web 2.0, human users remain human, and are valued for their unique contributions. User behavior is not directed, as is the case with Web 1.0, but, instead, is more creative in nature.

Further, we can ask whether the content on Web 2.0 sites such as Flickr or YouTube is McDonaldized? Is the content like McDonald’s highly McDonaldized food, for example, with a chicken “McNugget” replacing a home-cooked bird, or like McFalafel in Israel versus the authentic variety? Even a casual examination of the Flickr or Picasa photo sites reveals no evidence of McDonaldized photography. Photos are not created to please as many people as possible. The photos are human and enchanted and are not created in a mechanized, standardized, calculable, or efficient way. On the other hand, the presentations of the pictures are standardized across these sites. But, is this of great consequence? There may be a point to be made about capitalism and profiting from art on Flickr, but Flickr does not seem to be McDonaldizing photography. Because Flickr does not create centrally conceived processes by which the content is created, we can see this example of Web 2.0 as, in general, having *de*-McDonaldizing tendencies (keeping in mind the point of the standardization of the way the photos are presented and consumed).

Overall, then, Web 2.0 represents a process of the *de*-McDonaldization of the Internet, at least in comparison to Web 1.0. In that sense, it contradicts Ritzer's underlying argument about ever-increasing McDonaldization. Through the proliferation of user-generated content, Web 2.0 loses something with respect to calculability, efficiency, predictability and control through nonhuman technologies; but these dimensions, and McDonaldization more generally, have not disappeared completely on Web 2.0. Although content might be personalized and creatively produced on Web 2.0 sites like eBay in the realm of consumption and Facebook in terms of identity and socialization, McDonaldization continues to exist on those sites. For example, efficiency is manifest in Facebook's (and other Web 2.0 companies') profit models that are based on the utilization of the efficient creation of value by an unpaid workforce. In this way, much of Web 2.0 excels at allowing mass collaboration to occur much more efficiently than has been previously possible by creating value through the unpaid labor of their users with little to no special effort required of the owners of these sites.

Facebook also exerts control, and in fact constitutes an unprecedented intrusion of technology into socializing and selfhood, through the application of nonhuman technologies to these processes. Facebook, for instance, structures social networking through dictating the look and behavior of the profiles. Interaction itself, on Facebook, follows preset and centrally controlled principles and structures. For example, the Facebook-created mechanisms like writing on someone's "wall" or the constant feed of updates on everything your Facebook 'friends' are doing with their profiles. Identity is chosen from selecting from Facebook-determined options and checkboxes, with the result that the profile pages look very similar. MySpace, on the other hand, has lost much market share to Facebook by giving users who are not expert in web design the ability to customize and personalize their digital presentations of self to a far greater degree than has Facebook. The resulting MySpace profiles are often difficult to navigate. Facebook, however, has much more uniform profiles, where everyone's page has a very similar look and behavior. By making the content more strictly structured, Facebook has provided a clean interface that is user-friendly and promotes growth. Further, one can assume that if Facebook is monetarily dependent on the databases that it is building through interaction, then it has some incentive to structure those databases accordingly. In structuring the processes of online social networking and the digital presentation of self, we might argue that, on Facebook, socializing itself has been McDonaldized. However, this is not to downplay the importance of the customization that Facebook allows, which is much different than the highly predictable Big Mac sold at nearly *all* McDonald's. But if something like socializing can be structured under a set of principles, then we have seen a replication online

of what is at the heart of the McDonaldization thesis: the routinization of another very personal part of life.

While I have discussed the ways in which Facebook McDonaldizes socialization, we should also recognize that Facebook is *de*-McDonaldizing the web experience. Facebook, as an example of Web 2.0, makes the web more human through increased social interaction. This makes the experience highly unpredictable since one is interacting with humans. It is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify such interactions. Facebook makes keeping in touch with friends that are distant more efficient. However, it also is highly inefficient in that it also facilitates *more* socialization through the maintaining of social ties one might have lost in the past. And it is inefficient because of the constant and habitual way in which many people use these sites. The time spent on the site to upload pictures and to socialize online hardly seems an activity aimed at efficiency. Overall, while Web 2.0 is not without its McDonaldized elements, it is certainly less McDonaldized than Web 1.0. Does the theory of McDonaldization (and rationalization) need to be revised in light of this?

Conclusion

There are several conclusions to be derived from this analysis. First, it demonstrates the utility of thinking about the Internet, especially Web 1.0 and 2.0, from a theoretical perspective, in this case, the McDonaldization of society. Using that theory has proven useful in thinking about the differences between Web 1.0 and 2.0, as well as their differences (and similarities) with more material realities.

Second, it constitutes a kind of test of McDonaldization as a “grand narrative” and the idea that we are likely to see an ever-increasing McDonaldization of society. To the degree that Web 2.0 constitutes a later stage in the development of the Internet than 1.0, and of increasing relevance in society in general, it would be predicted that 2.0 would be *more* McDonaldized than 1.0. That this is not the case, and in fact Web 2.0 is far *less* McDonaldized than 1.0, casts considerable doubt on McDonaldization as a grand narrative.

Third, some crucial factors were uncovered that help to account for the *de*-McDonaldization associated with the move from Web 1.0 to 2.0. It is argued here that the principles behind *de*-McDonaldization begins with digitality (and the replicability this implies), which exists on both Web 1.0 and 2.0. However, it is Web 2.0 that also has profoundly changed the way this digital content is created. Web 2.0 is defined by users producing that which they consume (and, as such, are prosumers) leading to a general abundance, rather than scarcity. In sum, giving users the ability to create information, identities, and social networks online has led to an explosive humanization of the web.

In this post-scarce digital environment, this humanization sits comfortably next to the structuring of user-generated content mentioned previously in the context of Facebook. And it is because of this humanization that the McDonaldization process is of diminishing applicability, at least to this digital content. Thus, this theoretical analysis underscores Neustadt and Kestnbaum's previous point that "for those inclined to resist the McDonaldization of the Internet, we suggest going forth and producing content!"

While this analysis might lead one to the conclusion that the McDonaldization thesis needs to be abandoned, at least as a grand narrative, there are other trends that lead us to be cautious about leaping to that conclusion. One is the fact that the digital realities on Web 2.0 are coming to be integrated more and more with material realities, for example with the rise in popularity of "smart," internet-capable cell phones and 'mobile social networking.' Mobile social networking would be the use of social networking applications (like Facebook) on the cell phone, always on and always connected to the Web. With these devices, online social interaction can take place on the move in many different geospatial environments with technologies that locate one's device in relation to others in physical space. While it is not the objective of this essay to explicate this fully, one might further the argument made in this essay—that digital content resists McDonaldization—to mobile social networking. If and when social networking moves to cell phones, we might see a McDonaldization of this interaction since material realities are easier to McDonaldize. Alternatively, instead of viewing mobile social networking as the physicalization of digital realms, we might view it as the digitization of the material world, and, as such, a further possibility for *de*-McDonaldization. The applicability of the McDonaldization thesis diminishes as the ubiquity of our interaction with digital content increases, something that Web 2.0 has promoted, and that smart cell phones will undoubtedly promote to a far higher degree.

Thinking Critically

1. Are there benefits to McDonaldized interaction, especially online?
 2. Where has McDonaldization continued to persist online?
 3. Will the Internet become less McDonaldized in the future?
 4. Will social networking sites also become widely used cell phone applications, and how might this apply to the McDonaldization thesis?
 5. Does this critique of McDonaldization as an ever-expanding process mean that the theory is of declining utility?
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The process of McDonaldization has led to the creation of a large number of McDonaldized jobs, or as they have come to be called—"McJobs." Jos Gamble studied the issue of McJobs in UK and Japanese retailers in China through hundreds of interviews and questionnaires with service workers in these settings. He is critical of the idea of McJobs, especially the negatives that tend to be associated with the idea such as seeing the jobs as dehumanizing, degrading, deskilled, and leading to a dead-end. Gamble focuses mainly on the workers' perceptions of their jobs rather than the structure of the jobs. That is, for example, he looks at the workers' perceptions of whether they acquired more skills on the job rather than looking at the job itself and asking whether it required less skills than jobs like it did in the past. He did find that the work in the Japanese stores was more McDonaldized structurally than in the UK stores, but even there employees felt that they had acquired new skills on the job. It is argued that there are specific aspects of these retailers, and the Chinese context in which they exist, that make it less likely that service work will be McDonaldized (although this could just be a transitional development) in those settings. However, it should be borne in mind that this study focuses on workers' self-perceptions, which could well be, and frequently are, distorted and idealized. A more fully adequate study would need to examine both self-perceptions and the structure of jobs, especially as they have changed over time.
