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## HOW TO RAGE AGAINST THE DYING OF THE LIGHT? A CRITIQUE OF RITZER'S McDONALDIZATION THESIS<sup>1</sup>

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### Summary

Ritzer presents his 'The McDonaldization of Society' as a social critique on the rationalization of modern society. In this article I will analyze the underlying assumptions of his critique. By means of a meta-theoretical analysis, I examine Ritzer's views on modernity and rationality. This analysis reveals that Ritzer holds a rather dualistic view of the relation between man and society. Ritzer does not give much thought to the ambivalence of modernity. I will further argue that Ritzer uses a restricted idea of rationality. As a result, he can not escape the pessimism which also marked Weber's vision of the future. Ritzer can only offer his reader the hope that an awareness of McDonaldization will unleash a critical attitude towards the inevitable rationalization of the lifeworld. He does not present a well-founded theory of rational behavior, necessary for coping with a McDonaldized society. By introducing Habermas' theory of communicative action, and more specific his idea of rationality, I propose an alternative to Ritzer's hope.

### 1 Introduction

"Do not go gentle into that good night.... Rage, rage against the dying of the light". With this quote of the poet Dylan Thomas, Ritzer concludes his book on the McDonaldization (1993a: 188). This phrase captures Ritzer's solution for coping with the rapid spread of McDonaldization in society. *The McDonaldization of society* is presented as a social critique in the historical tradition of social theorists like Simmel, Marx, Durkheim, C. Wright Mills and Habermas (Ritzer, 1993a: xiii). The McDonaldization thesis is thus meant as a critique of modernity, but without adhering to sociological theories that claim the end of modernity, like post-industrialism, postfordism, or postmodernism (Ritzer, 1993a: 152-159). By providing the reader with a profound critique of contemporary society, Ritzer wants to make us aware of the dangers of McDonaldization, which he also describes as 'The new American menace' (1993b). With this knowledge and insight Ritzer hopes the

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reader will be able to create for her/himself a place under the sun which is not too homogenized and too dehumanized (1993a: xiv-xv, 187).

Notwithstanding the obvious provocative style that belongs to a tradition of social critique, the thesis can be evaluated on its theoretical merits. Especially, since Ritzer emphasizes the firm theoretical foundations of his study (1993a: xiv). Questions arise like What does Ritzer understand by concepts such as modernity and rationality? What kind of critique on modernity is Ritzer offering? And, how exactly can we escape McWorld? Therefore, the purpose of this article is to analyze the theoretical validity of Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis. By theoretical validity I mean the way the concepts are employed in relation to the purpose of the thesis. In order to get a better view on Ritzer's argumentation I will begin with a metatheoretical analysis of the McDonaldization thesis.

## 2 The ingredients of McDonaldization: a metatheoretical analysis

Like every sociological theory, the McDonaldization thesis is based on a set of underlying assumptions concerning the relation between actors and society. Uncovering these assumptions can provide us with a deeper understanding of the thesis. Such an approach to theory is usually referred to as metatheory (Ritzer, 1991; Ritzer, 1992b; Turner, 1991)<sup>2</sup>. I will use the term metatheory as it is broadly defined by Ritzer: "...as the systematic study of the underlying structure of sociological theory" (1992c: 7). He distinguishes three types of metatheorizing: (1) metatheorizing as a means of attaining a deeper understanding of theory ( $M_u$ ), (2) metatheorizing as a prelude to theory development ( $M_p$ ), and (3) metatheorizing as a source of overarching theoretical perspectives ( $M_o$ ) (Ritzer, 1991: 6). In this article I am mainly concerned with  $M_u$ , because this type of metatheory seems the most suitable to analyze the contents of a sociological theory. Ritzer discusses several metatheoretical tools for attaining a deeper understanding of theory. One of the most promising tools is the concept of a sociological architectonic (Ritzer, 1991: 68). A sociological architectonic is part of  $M_u$  and can be used for getting a better understanding of the works of social theorists.

The underlying assumptions of the McDonaldization thesis will be analyzed with the use of a sociological architectonic. This can be seen as a sort of framework which consists of several key concepts. These concepts or components are used to cover the essential questions one can ask a certain theorist or theory. There is no standard or fixed set of components. This is due to the fact that the composition of the terms of an architectonic will depend on the research question. Ritzer emphasizes that "...architectonics can give us a firm understanding of the various bases used - in past, present, or future - to systematically erect sociological theories of social phenomena" (1991: 67). The sociological architectonic that I will deploy, consists

of six basic components<sup>3</sup>. Hereafter, I will present these components in relation to the McDonaldization thesis.

The first component is a *philosophical anthropology*, which assumes "... that people are endowed with the ability to think, and that action and interaction are largely based on this capacity" (Ritzer, 1991: 69). Ritzer combines the idea of human potential of Marx with Weber's ideas on rational and nonrational action. Therefore, Ritzer's actors become rather dualistic. On the one hand, Ritzer is pointing to ways in which actors can escape the process of McDonaldization, and thereby emphasizing the possibility of actors to create, to some extent, their own social reality. "... people have the potential to be far more thoughtful, skillful, creative, and well-rounded than they now are, yet they are unable to express this potential because of the constraints of a rationalized world" (1993a: 13). He also discusses ways in which actors can influence the foregoing process of McDonaldization (1993a: see especially chapter 9). On the other hand, however, there seems to be not much room for creative human action. Actors can merely undergo, or at the most react on, the process of McDonaldization. On several occasions, Ritzer argues that any form of escape will only be temporary. In the end, almost every human action will inevitably be McDonaldized<sup>4</sup>.

The second component is the process of *institutionalization*, which consists of "... a series of steps whereby the thoughts, actions, and interactions of people are transformed into larger social structures and social institutions" (Ritzer, 1991: 70). This transformation can be referred to as objectification, or the way actors objectify their ideas in the material world (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Starting with a history of the McDonald's restaurant, throughout his book Ritzer is putting a lot of effort in pointing to the institutionalization of the principles of McDonald's in the wider society. By presenting almost numerous examples, Ritzer argues that the principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control, are imitated in a wide variety of social settings. "Almost all social institutions (for example, education, sports, politics, and religion) were adapting McDonald's principles to their operations" (1993a: xii). This, for the most part tacit, acceptance of these ideas in nearly every aspect of social life seems the basis of Ritzer's social critique.

The third aspect of the sociological architectonic concerns the process of *reification*, or the "... loss of control over macro-level phenomena" (Ritzer, 1991: 70). Wholly in line with Weber's idea of the 'iron cage of rationality', Ritzer shows a firm awareness of a reified world. Due to the institutionalization of the aforementioned principles in particular, people do not easily question this ongoing process. Let alone they are feeling powerful enough to change it. There is, however, a difference between Weber and Ritzer. Weber sees these reified structures as, in a way, inevitable:

"No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and

ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved'" (1958: 182).

Ritzer, on the other hand, wants to make his readers aware of these reified structures, so hopefully they can be overcome. Despite of his hope, Ritzer seems rather pessimistic about the possibility to escape McDonaldization (for example 1993a: xv, 147, and 188).

After this process of reification "... it is likely that these creations will come to exert control and *domination* over the people who created them both historically and on a continuing basis" (Ritzer, 1991: 70). Domination is the fourth component of the sociological architectonic. No doubt, Ritzer sees the process of McDonaldization leading to domination. In fact, the idea of domination takes a central place in the definition of McDonaldization. "Perhaps the ultimate irrationality of McDonaldization is the possibility that people could lose control over the system, and it would come to control us" (1993a: 145). Domination or 'irrationality' is one of Ritzer's main foci.

The fifth component concerns the idea that reified and dominating structures create "... the likelihood that they will have *adverse consequences* on the individuals who exist within those structures" (Ritzer, 1991: 70). Again following Weber, Ritzer sees the adjustment of people to the reified and dominant structures as adverse consequences. Especially the tacit acceptance of the principles of McDonaldization, e.g. the increasing emphasis on formal rationality, leads to an adjustment to structures, and results in a decline of substantive rationality. Whereby substantive rationality stands for creative and active thinking about the world. "In effect, more and more of peoples' ability to think will be taken from them and built into the technology" (1993a: 120). Ritzer describes these adverse consequences mostly in terms of irrationality.

And finally, "... there is a concern in this architectonic for how people can achieve *emancipation* from these reified structures and their adverse effects" (Ritzer, 1991: 70). The goal of Ritzer's social critique is to make people aware of the process of McDonaldization, so that appropriate measures can be taken. "This critique is based not on what people were like in the past, but on what they could be like in the future, if only the constraints of McDonaldized systems were eliminated, or at least eased substantially" (1993a: 13). Although Ritzer seems less pessimistic than Weber about the future, he also offers no real escape.

By means of the sociological architectonic I addressed the underlying assumptions of Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis. There are two remarkable positions in his thesis. At first, Ritzer presents his thesis as a critique of modernity, but modernity is more or less a container concept. It has many different meanings, each can lead

a social critique in another direction. Therefore the question remains: What constitutes modernity for Ritzer? The second remarkable position is closely tied to the first, and concerns Ritzer's idea of rationality. His conceptualization of rationality seems rather restricted. Again, he seems mainly concerned with teleological or formal rationality. This restricted use of rationality prevents Ritzer from offering a well-founded escape route. I will discuss an alternative conception of rationality, as put forward by Jürgen Habermas in his theory of communicative action. Habermas' approach of rationality enables us to present an alternative to Ritzer's fainting hope for the future society.

### 3 Critique of what modernity?

Modernity could be described as consisting of two separate discourses: (i) a discourse of liberation, and (ii) a discourse of disciplinization. Each discourse puts the emphasis on only one aspect of modernity. The liberation discourse refers to the ideas on (individual) freedom as formulated by Enlightenment thinkers (Wagner, 1994: 5). The establishing of civil, political, and social rights are well-known examples of this discourse. Also the emergence of science, and the decreasing importance of traditional values and norms in modern society (or, at least, the weakening of traditional constraints), the growing importance of individualism and pluralism, are expressions of the liberation discourse. At the same time, however, the disciplinization discourse refers to the quest for order (Wagner, 1994: 40-41) and stability in modern society. These societal changes are referred to as the transition from traditional to modern societies, which remains a core object of sociological analysis. This process is usually called modernization:

"... by which the social world comes under the domination of asceticism, secularization, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the differentiation of the various spheres of the lifeworld, the bureaucratization of economic, political and military practices, and the growing monetarization of values" (Turner, 1990: 6; see also Giddens, 1990: 1)<sup>5</sup>.

Modernization is mostly described through analytically constructed dichotomies, like Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity, or Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. The same applies to Weber's *entzauberungs* thesis, where the underlying dichotomy is set out as the difference between *Wertrationalität* and *Zweckrationalität*. The relation between these two forms of rationality is Weber's main point for explaining the transition from traditional to modern society. Weber described the increasing subordination of substantive rationality to formal rationality as an historical process of rationalization. All these dichotomies are used to compare two different societies: traditional versus modern society. The analytical construction of the 'traditional society' "... was developed as a tool for comparison when trying to grasp the present" (Wagner, 1994: 38). Thus instead of comparing two different societies, these dichotomies point to two sides of the same picture, e.g. modern society.

Since the end of World War II several historical, philosophical and sociological studies emerged, all pointing to new sorts of societal transformations, like globalization, individualism, and pluralism. These transformations are captured in new terms for our contemporary society instead of labelling these phenomena as modern, they are being called post-modern, post-industrial, post-fordist, and so on (Kellner, 1990). Daniel Bell's idea of post-industrial society got considerable attention, but the debate on (post)modernity really took off with the publication of Lyotard's *La Condition Postmoderne* (1979). It caused an enormous gulf of publications in the social sciences. Roughly, these works can be captured in three different approaches towards modernity: (1) some authors want to complete the unfinished 'project of modernity' (Habermas), (2) while others claim a new era called post-modernity (Lyotard). And (3), a wide range of authors claiming something in between: reflexive modernity (Bauman, 1993; Giddens, 1990), the emergence of a risk society (Beck, 1992) or a knowledge society (Stehr, 1994).

This recent, and renewed, attention to (post-)modernity is precisely directed to the aforementioned ambiguity of modernity (Wagner, 1994: 13). In recent literature modernity has also been characterized or described by an almost infinite amount of dichotomies; for instance liberty versus discipline (Wagner, 1994), lifeworld versus system (Habermas, 1984; 1987), reason versus culture (Gellner, 1994), mind versus heart (Mestrovic, 1992), and nature versus culture (Latour, 1994). Again, these dichotomies point to the same ambiguity or ambivalence that surrounds the idea of modernity. Modernity applies to liberty as well as disciplinization. This leads me to conclude that both discussions - the one on the emergence of modern society, and the one on the emergence of a postmodern society - are essentially about the same phenomenon: the ambiguity of modernity<sup>6</sup>. The difference between both discussions can be summarized as follows: the debate on the transition from traditional to modern society was primarily focused on the issue of order (the disciplinization discourse), while the debate on the emergence of a postmodern society is mainly focussed on freedom, pluralism, and individualism (the discourse on liberty)<sup>7</sup>.

As the above discussion has showed, there are many different conceptions of the term modernity. As a result, several kinds of critique of modernity are possible. In this respect, Ritzer distinguishes two forms of social critique, or two ways of criticizing the process of McDonaldization. At first there is a critique based on romanticizing the past. Secondly, a critique can be formulated as hope for the future (1993a: 13). Ritzer presents his critique of modernity as the latter<sup>8</sup>. Modernity in his eyes stands for an increase in rationalization, or disciplinization. In this respect the McDonaldization thesis belongs to a critical tradition which focuses on the one-dimensional emphasis on formal rationality in modern society. For example, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse are all dealing with the negative consequences of such an one-sided focus on teleological rationality. This critical tradition

is firmly rooted in the disciplinization discourse, which results in an underestimation of the human potentials as set out in the liberation discourse.

Ritzer's conception of the term modernity can now be formulated as the result of a mixture between fear and hope. His fear is based on Weber's *Entzauberungs* thesis, and thus connected with the discourse of disciplinization. His hope, however, is derived a more Marxian notion of human potential (Ritzer, 1992d: 50), which is connected to the discourse of liberation. This dualistic position already became clear in Ritzer's philosophical anthropology. Strangely enough, Ritzer, however, seems to pay almost no attention to a theoretical foundation of this position. Thus, despite his reference to the liberation discourse, Ritzer does not formulate a theoretical position that could validate his hope. This is due to his conception of rationality.

#### 4 From restricted to extended rationality

The McDonaldization thesis is an actualization of Weber's disenchantment thesis, by which the Occident becomes more and more rationalized. This process of rationalization and the concept of rationality are Ritzer's main themes. I now will take a closer look at the way Ritzer deploys these concepts. He distinguishes four underlying principles at the McDonaldization process: (i) efficiency, (ii) calculability, (iii) predictability, and (iv) control. These principles "... constitute the basic components of a *rational system*" (1993a: 12; italics in the original, BP). In this respect, McDonaldization becomes the contemporary equivalent of formal rationalization (compare Ritzer, 1992a: 136-140). This process creates, besides certain advantages (Ritzer, 1993a: 14-15), also many disadvantages or irrationalities. Ritzer is particularly interested in these "irrationalities of rationality". While discussing the four underlying principles of McDonaldization, he constantly outlines the irrationalities which these principles spawn. In fact, he offers a whole chapter on the irrationality of rationality (chapter 7). This leads to the question: What is exactly meant by the term or idea of irrationality? Ritzer's conception of irrationality seems mainly presented as just the opposite of formal rationality. Understood in this manner it largely undermines the advantages of formal rationality.

"... irrationality means that rational systems are *unreasonable systems* - they serve to deny the basic humanity, the human reason, of the people who work within them or are served by them. In other words, rational systems are dehumanizing systems. Whereas the terms *rationality* and *reason* are often used interchangeably in other contexts, here they are employed to mean antithetical phenomena" (Ritzer, 1993a: 121).

Formal rationality is mainly seen from a systems viewpoint, and irrationality mostly from the perspective of the individual actor, e.g. his or her lifeworld (cf. Habermas). Ritzer argues that there are three underlying forces that keep society driving into the iron cage of McDonald's. At first he mentions the longing for material interests<sup>9</sup>, secondly, he points to the internalization of the four underlying



principles, and thirdly, McDonaldization seems to fit nicely into the continuously changing contemporary society. "For these reasons, the most likely scenario is for increased McDonaldization; the likely end-product is an iron cage of McDonaldization" (1993a: 151-152).

There are several problems attached to Ritzer's conceptions of rationality and irrationality. At first, it is not clear if irrationality is only an adverse or unintended consequence of social action, which happens to be formally rational, or if every formally rational organized action always leads to irrationality. Ritzer seems to imply the latter, if we follow his line of argument about the McDonaldization of society. The question then shifts to: irrationality for who? What tends to be irrational for one group can be rational for another one, and vice versa. In addition to the fact that something can be rational in one context, while being irrational in another. For example, long waiting lines at a McDonald's restaurant might be irrational from a customers perspective, but it can be rational from the perspective of the owner of the restaurant. Although long waiting lines can be seen as inefficient or irrational for the restaurant owner as well (Ritzer, 1993a: 122), serving customers at their table can be more inefficient. For the customer, long waiting lines clearly seem irrational, except if the customer thinks cooking a meal at home is more inefficient or irrational. Ritzer tends to define irrationality as a result of, in Habermas' terms, the colonization of the lifeworld. In this, Ritzer does not pay much attention to the fact that every system can only be the result of an institutionalization of social action (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1967). He almost sketches a picture of the big, unpersonal, and inhuman system versus the poor and innocent individual. This leads to the rather paradoxical point in his thesis: on the one hand Ritzer underestimates the capacity of people to make and change 'the system', while on the other hand he believes that this same capacity is the only thing we got to escape McDonaldization. The most important point here, is that Ritzer does not give a firm foundation for his optimistic view that people are able to overcome the colonization of the lifeworld. He pays a lot of theoretical and empirical attention to the increase of rationalization in a wide variety of social settings, but he neglects to come up with a theoretical account for rational human behavior. In other words: he does not give a theoretical foundation for social action capable of 'raging against the dying of the light'. This is the result of a restricted conception of rationality, and this unnecessary theoretical weakness could be overcome with a more extended idea of rationality.

One of the most promising contemporary theories of rationality is set out by Jürgen Habermas. In his magnum opus *Theory of communicative action* Habermas sketches a new story of rationalization. Habermas builds on the ideas of rationality as formulated by Weber. To Weber human reason or rationality became the guiding line for social action, e.g. rationalization. Like Weber, Ritzer sees the domination of formal

rationality in the modern society as inevitable and with no real escape routes. This is due to the impossibility to ground formal rationality on itself:

"Whether it is a choice between formal and substantive rationality or between conflicting standards of substantive rationality, between *Zweck-* and *Wertrationalität* or between conflicting maxims of *Wertrationalität*, this choice cannot itself be a rational one, for it is precisely criteria of rationality that must be chosen" (Brubaker, 1984: 87).

In the end every human action is guided by certain values, and for Weber these values "... are in eternal conflict with one another, and this conflict cannot be rationally resolved" (Brubaker, 1984: 60). In other words: for Weber and Ritzer formal rationality has its limitations, given by the incompatibility of the underlying value systems, and the impossibility to overcome this incompatibility. This results in Weber's famous idea of the 'iron cage of rationality', and Ritzer's McDonaldization thesis.

Where for Weber rationality was seen from the perspective of individual action (Brubaker, 1984: 49), Habermas takes communication as a starting point for rationality, which implies interaction. By presenting communicative action as a theoretical and practical alternative, Habermas pays attention to linguistics. The essential point is Habermas' switch to intersubjective understanding between actors, possible through communicative action. Habermas distinguishes four types of action: (i) teleological action, or instrumental action which it is concerned with means to achieve ends, (ii) normatively regulated action, which is behavior oriented to common values of a group, (iii) dramaturgical action being action involving conscious manipulation of oneself before an audience or public, and (iv) communicative action which is the interaction among those agents who use speech and nonverbal symbols as a way of understanding their mutual situation and their respective plans of action in order to agree on how to coordinate their behaviors. These types of action each appear in different kinds of worlds. These formal world concepts - the objective, the social, and the subjective world - constitute the lifeworld.

"The objective world is presupposed in common as the totality of facts, where 'facts' signifies that a statement about the existence of a corresponding state of affairs (...) can count as true. And a social world is presupposed in common as the totality of all interpersonal relations that are recognized by members as legitimate. Over against this, the subjective world counts as the totality of experiences to which, in each instance, only one individual has privileged access" (Habermas, 1984: 52).

Only with communicative action the actors have full access to all worlds, and with the help of the aforementioned speech acts they can reach understanding.

"Only the communicative model of action presupposes language as a medium of uncurtailed communication whereby speakers and hearers, out of the context of their preinterpreted lifeworld, refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social, and subjective world in order to negotiate common definitions of the situation" (Habermas, 1984: 95).

Together with the lifeworld comes the system which is the institutionalization of social relations, like the family, the state, the judiciary, and the economy. Through the process of institutionalization the system tends to develop its own structural characteristics, and by this development the gap between the lifeworld and the

system becomes wider. The more these structures grow independent of the lifeworld, the more they start to dominate the lifeworld, e.g. a process of reification. This growing dominance is also possible through the steering capacity of money and power, which fulfill the same functions in the system as language does in the lifeworld (Brand, 1990: 54). The growing difference between lifeworld and system is due to the different development of rationality between these two. While increasing rationalization in the lifeworld "... involves growth in the rationality of communicative action" (Ritzer, 1992d: 586), the increasing rationalization in the system causes a domination of the system over the lifeworld. "The rationalized lifeworld makes possible the rise and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives strike back at it in a destructive fashion" (Habermas, 1984: xxxiii). This whole process of the domination of the system over the lifeworld is called the 'colonization of the life-world'. Throughout his work Habermas is trying to examine and explain this process.

There is thus a big difference between Ritzer and Habermas in the way they look at society. While Ritzer's critique is based on concern, Habermas' theory is about human emancipation through a critical approach to society. Another difference is the way they both see the outcome of the rationalization process. While for Ritzer this process leads inevitably to a McDonaldized world, Habermas:

"... does not present the 'colonization of the lifeworld' as the inevitable, or the only, outcome of rationalisation. He does not regard it to be the only outcome because he recognizes more than one dimension to the rationalisation process. He does not accept it as inevitable because he makes a careful distinction between the logic and the dynamics of development" (Brand, 1990: 51).

For Habermas the process of uncoupling the lifeworld (substantive rationality) from the system (formal rationality) is a historical process, caused by the process of rationalization. But instead of Ritzer's pessimism over this historical process, Habermas tries to look for theoretical and practical solutions to again integrate lifeworld and system (Bernstein, 1985: 5). Like Weber, Ritzer not really takes much effort to overcome theoretically the growing subordination of substantive to formal rationality. In this perspective Habermas offers us a way out of the 'colonization of the lifeworld' by means of the theoretical and practical possibility of restoring the balance between the two forms of rationality. In this respect, his concept of communicative rationality is a real improvement of Ritzer's conception of rationality.

Habermas' extended theory of rationality, thus, provides a possibility for giving a theoretical foundation for Ritzer's hope on human potential. The attraction of Habermas' theory of communicative action is the combination of Marx's emancipatory theory, with its normative or political idea of change in society, and Weber's concern of the process of rationality, with his ideas of ideal types as methodological tool. Habermas' greatest accomplishment is giving back a positive and emancipatory connotation to rationality, and combining this theory with praxis. In sum: rationality is seen as the necessary driving force behind human reason. His commu-

nicative action approach enables Habermas to see possibilities to resolve value conflicts in the lifeworld, and consequently leads him to a much brighter vision of the future. Habermas argues that there is a possibility of consensus over conflicts by means of communicative rationality. In other words, and somewhat simplified, where Ritzer only offers an action theory, Habermas offers an interaction theory. The possibility of an interaction theory based on communication also gives a new direction to the process of rationalization.

"The rationalization of society would then no longer mean a diffusion of purposive-rational action and a transformation of domains of communicative action into subsystems of purposive-rational action. The point of reference becomes instead the potential for rationality found in the validity basis of speech" (Habermas, 1984: 339).

Habermas argues that there is a possibility of consensus over value conflicts by means of communicative rationality. In this perspective the use of rationality becomes extended into the area of values in society, where for Ritzer this is, and for Weber this was impossible. Communicative rationality consists of formal, as well as substantive rationality, and it provides a basis to overcome the dispute on values.

Returning to the McDonaldization thesis, the above discussion has the following consequences. Because Ritzer is broadly equating rationality with formal rationality, he is not able to tell us how we can act rationally against the negative consequences of McDonaldization. If we, however, replace Ritzer's conception of rationality with Habermas' communicative rationality, this goal can be reached<sup>10</sup>. If we do so, McDonaldization has to be equated with the colonization of the lifeworld, e.g. it is therefore only one aspect of what modernity has to offer. In this way, McDonaldization is not only a process you have to 'rage' against, but it becomes a process that can be discussed in a rational manner. I think that such a rational discussion on rationalization could have a much deeper effect on overcoming the negative consequences of McDonaldization, then the hope for individual protests can offer.

## 5 Conclusion

The McDonaldization thesis is based on a dualistic philosophical anthropology. On the one hand people are increasingly strangled by the ongoing process of McDonaldization, and in the end all the efforts to escape this situation are doomed to fail. On the other hand, however, people are endowed by the potential to be creative, thoughtful, and thus able to resist McDonaldization. A theoretical foundation of the latter seems, however, to be lacking. After a closer examination of Ritzer's operationalization of the concepts modernity and rationality, I conclude that he used these concepts in a rather restricted way. Ritzer does not account for the ambiguity of modernity, which leads to his dualistic position with regard to the pro- and con's of McDonaldization. He also overemphasizes the importance of teleological or formal rationality in modern society, while he neglects the power or potential of substantive rationality. This restricted conception of the idea of rationality can not provide

us with the arguments of how to overcome, or cope with, a McDonaldized society. Although he is pointing to rationalization on the economic, the cultural and the social scale, Ritzer forgets the potentialities of rational behavior of actors: the human scale.

Ritzer seems to overlook, for example, Habermas' ideas of a more extended version of rationality, which implies a less darker vision of the future. Although this might be a necessary consequence of presenting a social critique, he hereby underestimates the potential modernity and rationality has to offer. In other words: by mainly emphasizing the discourse of disciplinization, Ritzer neglects the duality of the concept of modernity (Wagner, 1994: 8). More important, however, is that this duality, liberation as well as disciplinization, can be overcome with a theory of extended rationality. The proposed shift in approaching the process of McDonaldization is not only a theoretical exercise. In practice, the growing nightmare of a McDonaldized society can now be seen as a challenge for human reason. Understood in this manner, I would prefer: Reason, reason against the dying of the light!

#### Notes

1. This article is a revised version of a paper which was delivered at the XXXII Congress of the IIS, Trieste (Italy), 3 July 1995. My participation in the congress was partly made possible by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO 12-2096).
2. There are at least two positions regarding the usefulness of a metatheoretical approach. Turner finds it nothing more than 'interesting philosophy' (1991: 8-9), while Ritzer clearly sees advantages in a metatheoretical approach to theory (1991). In his view this approach can give a more detailed insight into theory. I think Ritzer's approach is indeed more fruitful, and I will follow his line of argument in this essay (for a more elaborated discussion see Ritzer, 1992b).
3. The sociological architectonic I will use consists of the same components as the architectonic Ritzer develops for comparing the works of Weber, Simmel, Marx, and Berger and Luckmann (Ritzer, 1991; chapter 4). If we consider the background of the aforementioned authors, this could be called a German architectonic.
4. Ritzer's own 'guidelines' can also be seen as a McDonaldized handout for escaping the McDonaldization process (see chapter 9). I am indebted to Jacintha van Beveren for bringing this to my attention.
5. Modernization has been criticized for being primarily focused on societal changes in western societies, and thereby it ignores other forms of social change (compare Wallerstein, 1991). This criticism certainly applies to Ritzer's argument that McDonaldization will dominate more and more sectors

of the rest of the world. However, in this article I will be mainly concentrated on the validity of the theoretical assumptions of the McDonaldization thesis in relation to societal change in western societies.

6. There is more evidence for this hypothesis, for instance the debates on the idea of time-space compression are held both by classical sociologists, as well as by postmodernists (Giddens, 1993). See also Ritzer's contribution in this journal.
7. A general tendency in postmodern theory is its rejection of modernity, where modernity is mostly understood in terms of the disciplinization discourse. Regarding this rejection, Turner puts his finger exactly on the problem of this kind of remarks: "If one believes that traditional society was based on hierarchy, inequality and violence, then the modernist critique of tradition is progressive. If, however, one regards the gas chambers as the final resting point of modernization, then postmodern objections to modern instrumental rationalism are progressive" (1990: 10).
8. Although Ritzer proclaims that he does not want to 'romanticize the past' (1993a: 13), it could be argued that his actualizing of Weber's rationalization thesis is somehow contradictory. The work of Weber could also be evaluated as a conservative longing for values from the past (compare Boudon, 1989: 27). At least, Weber's ideas are infected by a certain amount of nostalgia (Robertson, 1990).
9. In this regard, he makes a rather curious remark on the breaking apart of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Ritzer suggests that communism (which was actually never more than state socialism, BP) was a barrier to McDonaldization, e.g. rationalization. And that after 1989, these countries are McDonaldizing in rapid pace (Ritzer, 1993a: 148). However, according to Weber socialist bureaucracy's are even more capable of rationalization than capitalist bureaucracy's. This seems to point in the direction that for Ritzer McDonaldization is solely tied to the capitalistic market economy. If this is the case, then this must be a result of his rather dualistic philosophical anthropology.
10. Notwithstanding the fact that Habermas' perspective is often criticized as being only theory without any praxis, there are more and more empirical indications that validate its assumptions. For instance, one can think of the increase in international relations, international organizations, and even international peacekeeping. All these efforts point to a possibility to rationally discuss conflicts, at least more than the opposite, e.g. war.

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