

GEORGE RITZER



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The
McDonaldization
of
SOCIETY

Into the Digital Age



The McDonaldization of Society

Tenth Edition

George Ritzer

*With love to the youngest member of the family, Mandela,
and to his teenage sister, Marley, and brother, Bodhi.*

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George Ritzer

University of Maryland



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PREFACE

This is the 10th edition of the *McDonaldization of Society*, first published in 1993. I have always taken revisions very seriously, and this edition is no exception. As usual, I have updated the literature, data, and examples to better reflect current realities. I have also once again restructured the chapters to, I hope, improve the argument. To help shorten the book, Chapters 1 and 2 in the previous edition have been combined. The new Chapter 1 involves both an introduction to the idea of McDonaldization and a discussion of the history of McDonaldized systems. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the basic dimensions of McDonaldization—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. They deal with those dimensions as they relate to consumers in McDonaldized systems. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the same dimensions as they affect producers (workers) in those systems. The new sixth chapter deals with the irrationality associated with highly rational McDonaldized systems. New in this chapter is a discussion of discrimination by McDonald's against Blacks as employees, store managers, and franchise owners. Chapter 6 is the heart of the critique being offered here of the McDonaldization of society.

In many ways, this is the most daunting revision yet. I started work on it in mid-2019. However, as I was nearing completion, the world was struck by the COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the United States particularly hard. The pandemic changed everything, including the process of McDonaldization. While COVID-19 is mentioned at a number of points in the book, it is discussed in more detail in the new epilogue entitled “McDonaldization in the Age of COVID-19.”

While the effect of COVID-19 on McDonaldization is far from the most important of the pandemic's impacts, it is nonetheless significant. The COVID-19 pandemic was, at least from the point of view of society, highly irrational. In that way, it was in many ways the antithesis of McDonaldization, which is a contemporary term for the rationalization of society.

As discussed throughout this book, McDonaldization is defined as a process characterized by efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. In many ways, COVID-19 led to much *inefficiency*, had an almost *incalculable* effect on society (although there were efforts to quantify much about it), led to a great deal of *unpredictability* in people's lives, and above all proved difficult to *control* in the

absence of effective technologies (e.g., a vaccine, a treatment). While irrationality is also a characteristic of McDonaldization, it is in many ways the defining characteristic of the pandemic.

While the efforts to control it have, at least as I write, been unsuccessful, especially in the United States, those efforts continue. Not surprisingly, there have been attempts to McDonaldize those efforts. For example, we have seen attempts to increase the efficiency of the creation of a vaccine, to quantify those efforts as much as possible, and to produce a vaccine that has as few unpredictable effects (e.g., negative side effects) as possible and greatly enhances our ability to control the disease, largely by preventing it from occurring in the first place. Thus, McDonaldization offers a unique and quite useful way of thinking about both the disease and the efforts to control it. By the time you read this, we will know more about the disease and especially our efforts to deal with it.

I would like to thank my editor at Sage, Jeff Lasser, who, as always, has been highly supportive of my work. Special thanks to Hayley Margolis for her assistance with this edition and for a number of insights found throughout its pages.

Finally, I would like to take the unusual step of thanking, in a preface, the classical sociological theorist, Max Weber (1864–1920). It is his work on the process of rationalization that forms the basis of my research on, and thinking about, McDonaldization. Rationalization and McDonaldization have the same basic dimensions, but they differ on the major example of the process. A century ago it was, to Weber, the bureaucracy, but today it is the fast food restaurant, most notably McDonald's. Hence the use of the more contemporary "McDonaldization of society" rather than simply the rationalization of society.

1

INTRODUCTION

McDonald's and Ray Kroc (1902–1984), the person most associated with it, were the subjects of motion picture *The Founder*. However, Kroc was *not* the founder of McDonald's. Nor was he the source of the early innovations that were the basis of that restaurant chain's phenomenal success. Rather, it was the McDonald brothers—Richard and Maurice—who were the true founders of McDonald's in 1937 and its real innovators. Kroc *was* the ruthless force behind the franchising of McDonald's restaurants and the eventual creation of what is now a globe-straddling chain of tens of thousands of restaurants. But even Kroc could not have anticipated that McDonald's would become the basis of one of the most influential developments in contemporary society. Its reverberations extend far beyond its point of origin both in the United States and in the fast-food business. It has influenced a wide range of businesses and many other types of organizations. Most generally, it is a global force affecting the way of life of a significant portion of the world.¹ That impact will continue during the COVID-19 pandemic that began in late 2019, although it will be altered in various ways as the pandemic evolves (see Epilogue).

This chapter begins with a discussion of McDonaldization, the concept and process that defines this book. After summarizing the basic principles that lie at the base of McDonaldization, its advantages and disadvantages (its “irrationalities”) are analyzed. We then turn to a discussion of the broader influence (the “long arm”) of McDonald's as well as the fact it has become an American and even a global cultural icon. The history of McDonald's is discussed in the context of the development of other brick-and-mortar chains. McDonald's is then compared to the largely digital Amazon. Because we live in the “digital age” and

* Notes may be found in the back of book.

Amazon is mainly digital (Amazon.com), it now is now a much more powerful force in consumption than the “brick and mortar” McDonald’s. Amazon’s digitality has also allowed it to become more McDonalldized than McDonald’s. As a result, the paradoxical question will be raised: Is McDonalldization still the best label for the process discussed in this book?

McDonald’s has center stage in this analysis, at least initially, *because it is the major example of and the paradigm for the wide-ranging process of McDonalldization.*² Most of this chapter as well as of this book is about that process, as well as the many phenomena affected by it.

McDonalldization is the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.³

MCDONALDIZATION: THE BASIC PRINCIPLES

Why has McDonald’s proven to be so successful and so powerful? Eating fast food, much of it at McDonald’s, has become increasingly common—over a third of American adults eat fast food on any given day.⁴ More subjectively, McDonald’s has become a “sign”⁵ for many that, among other things, they are in tune with the contemporary lifestyle. There is also a kind of magic or enchantment associated with such food and its settings. However, the focus here is not on McDonald’s per se but on the process of McDonalldization that is defined by four principles—*efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control*⁶—that lie at the heart of the success of McDonald’s and, more generally, of all McDonalldized systems. In short, McDonald’s and the other McDonalldized systems have succeeded because they offer consumers, workers, and managers the advantages of and association with these principles. Chapters 2 through 5 will be devoted to a discussion of these dimensions of McDonalldization from the perspectives of customers and workers, but the dimensions need to be introduced at this point.

Efficiency

One important element in the success of McDonalldized systems is their *efficiency*, or finding and using the optimum method for getting from one point to another.⁷ For consumers, McDonald’s (its drive-throughs are a particularly good example; the increasingly important online ordering and home delivery

systems—including McDonald’s own “McDelivery”—are others) offers the best available way to get from being hungry to being full. The fast-food model offers or at least appears to offer an efficient method for satisfying many other needs as well. Other businesses fashioned on the McDonald’s model offer similar efficiency to their consumers in, for example, exercising, losing weight, lubricating cars, getting new glasses or contacts, completing income tax forms, making online purchases, and using and paying for ride-hailing services through an app. It has even been applied to the widespread use of the highly addictive drug OxyContin for pain relief.⁸ Like their customers, workers in McDonaldized systems function efficiently by following the steps in a predesigned, often well-choreographed,⁹ process.

Calculability

Calculability emphasizes the quantitative aspects of products sold (number sold, portion size, price) and services offered (the time it takes to get the product). In McDonaldized systems, quantity has become equivalent to quality; large portions or their quick delivery is taken to mean that they must be good. “As a culture, we tend to believe deeply that in general ‘bigger is better.’”¹⁰ People can quantify things and feel that they are getting a lot of food for what appears to be a nominal sum of money. This is best exemplified by the McDonald’s \$1, \$2, and \$3 menu items. In a Denny’s ad, a man says, “I’m going to eat too much, but I’m never going to pay too much.”¹¹ This calculation does not take into account an important point, however: The profitability of fast-food chains indicates that the owners, not the consumers, get the better of the deal.

Consumers also calculate how much time it will take to drive to McDonald’s, be served the food, eat it, and return home; they then compare that interval to the time required to prepare food at home. They often conclude, rightly or wrongly, that a trip to the fast-food restaurant will take less time than eating at home. This sort of calculation is especially important to home delivery franchises, such as Domino’s and Papa John’s, as well as to other chains that emphasize saving time. A notable example of time savings in another sort of chain is LensCrafters, which has promised its customers “Glasses fast, glasses in one hour.” H&M (and similar clothing chains) is known for its “fast fashion.” The next day delivery by Amazon Prime is a major example of this. The emphasis on speed is central to McDonaldized systems.

Some McDonaldized institutions combine the emphases on time and money. Domino’s has promised pizza-delivery in half an hour, or the pizza is free. Pizza Hut has claimed that it will serve a personal pan pizza in five minutes, or it too will be free.

Workers in McDonaldisized systems also emphasize the quantitative rather than the qualitative aspects of their work. Because the quality of the work is allowed to vary little, workers focus on how quickly tasks can be accomplished. In a situation analogous to that of customers, workers are expected to do a lot of work, very quickly, for low pay.

As will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, calculability has become infinitely more important in the era of the computerized collection of massive amounts of data (“big data”) and the automated mining and analysis of that data using applied mathematics, especially sophisticated algorithms, in order to uncover hidden patterns. These data are especially important with reference to digital sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Many of these sites are highly McDonaldisized, with Amazon being an even more McDonaldisized consumption site than McDonald’s. Given the escalating importance of these sites and the big data associated with them, we can be said to live in an increasingly “computational culture.”¹²

Predictability

McDonald’s also offers *predictability*, the assurance that products and services will be much the same over time and in all locales. Egg McMuffins in New York will be virtually identical to those in Chicago and Los Angeles. Also, those eaten next week or next year will be about the same as those eaten today. Customers take great comfort in knowing that McDonald’s offers no surprises. They know that the next Egg McMuffin they eat will not be awful, but it will not be exceptionally delicious, either. The success of the McDonald’s model suggests that many people have come to prefer a world in which there are few surprises. “This is strange,” notes a British observer, “considering [McDonald’s is] the product of a culture which honours individualism above all.”¹³

The workers in McDonaldisized systems also behave in predictable ways. They follow corporate rules, the dictates of their managers, and the demands of the systems with which—and in which—they work (e.g., tending to automated French fry machines). In many cases, what they do and even what they say (they are often scripted; see Chapter 5) is highly predictable.

Control

The fourth element in the success of McDonald’s, *control*,¹⁴ is exerted over the customers who enter McDonald’s. Lines, limited menus, few options, and uncomfortable seats all lead diners to do what management wishes them to do—eat quickly and leave. Furthermore, the drive-through window invites diners to

leave before they eat. Customers increasingly never enter in the first place, as they order online and await home delivery. Of course, this is even more true of Amazon.com and all online consumption sites.

Those who work in McDonaldized organizations are also controlled to a high degree—and usually more blatantly and directly than customers. They are trained to do a limited number of tasks in precisely the way they are told to do them. This control is reinforced by the technologies used and the way the organization is set up to bolster this control. Managers and inspectors make sure that workers toe the line. Amazon's factories and delivery systems are similarly highly controlled.

This discussion leads to the need to offer an expanded definition of McDonaldization incorporating the four dimensions discussed above: **McDonaldization** is the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control—are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.

THE ADVANTAGES OF McDONALDIZATION

McDonald's and other McDonaldized systems have succeeded so phenomenally for good, solid reasons. Most generally, McDonaldized systems offer the advantages associated with their basic principles—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

Many knowledgeable people, such as the economic columnist Robert Samuelson, praise effusively this system as well as McDonald's business model (copied by many). Samuelson confesses to “openly worship[ing] McDonald's,” and he thinks of it as “the greatest restaurant chain in history.”¹⁵ In addition, McDonald's offers many praiseworthy programs that benefit society. One example is its Ronald McDonald Houses, which permit parents to stay with children undergoing treatment for serious medical problems. The process of McDonaldization also moved ahead dramatically undoubtedly because it has led to positive changes.¹⁶ Here are a few specific examples of such changes:

- A wider range of goods and services is available to a much larger proportion of the population than ever before.
- Availability of goods and services depends far less than before on time or geographic location; people can now do things that were impossible previously, such as text message, e-mail, arrange dates online, make

online purchases, arrange online for the delivery of food, and participate in online social networks in the middle of the night with people halfway around the world.

- People are able to acquire what they want or need almost instantaneously and to get it far more conveniently.
- Goods and services are of far more uniform quality; many people even get better-quality goods and services than before McDonaldization.
- Far more economical alternatives to high-priced, customized goods and services are widely available; therefore, people can afford things (e.g., IKEA furniture rather than handmade furniture) they could not previously afford.
- Fast, efficient goods and services are available to a population that, at least before the COVID-19 pandemic, was working longer hours and had fewer hours to spare for consumption.
- In a rapidly changing, unfamiliar, and seemingly hostile world, the comparatively stable, familiar, and safe environments of a McDonaldized system (e.g., chains of urgent care centers) offer comfort (although that is now countered in the pandemic by the fear of being in any enclosed setting).
- Because of quantification, consumers can more easily compare competing products.
- Certain products (e.g., exercise and diet programs) are safer in a carefully regulated and controlled system.
- People are more likely to be treated similarly, no matter their race, sex, sexual orientation, or social class (although see Chapter 6 for examples of discrimination against Black customers and employees by McDonald's and other McDonaldized centers).
- Organizational and technological innovations are more quickly and easily diffused through networks of identical operators.
- One society's most popular products and services are more easily disseminated to others.

A CRITIQUE OF McDONALDIZATION: IRRATIONALITY

McDonaldization clearly offers powerful advantages, but rational systems inevitably spawn irrationalities. The downside of McDonaldization will be dealt with most systematically under the heading of irrationality. Some of major irrationalities to be discussed in Chapter 6 are

- inefficiency (rather than efficiency);
- high cost (even though McDonaldized goods and services often seem to be inexpensive);
- its falseness, especially in the way employees relate to consumers;
- disenchantment;
- homogenization; and
- dehumanization.

Criticism can, in fact, be levelled at all of the specific elements of the McDonaldizing world. As just one example, at the opening of Euro Disney, a French politician said that Disney will “bombard France with uprooted creations that are to culture what fast food is to gastronomy.”¹⁷ McDonald’s and other purveyors of the fast-food model spend billions of dollars each year detailing the benefits of their system. Critics of the system, however, have few outlets for their ideas. For example, no one sponsors commercials between children’s programs warning them of the dangers associated with fast-food restaurants.

Nonetheless, legitimate questions may be raised about this critique of McDonaldization: Is it animated by a romanticization of the past, an impossible desire to return to a world that no longer exists? Some critics do base their critiques on nostalgia for a time when life was slower and offered more surprises, when at least some people (those who were better off economically) were freer, and when one was more likely to deal with human beings than robots or computers.¹⁸ Although they have a point, these critics have undoubtedly exaggerated the positive aspects of a world without McDonald’s and McDonaldization, and they have certainly tended to forget the liabilities associated with earlier eras.

As an example of the latter, take the following anecdote about a visit to a pizzeria in Havana, Cuba, which in some respects is decades behind the United States:

The pizza's not much to rave about—they scrimp on tomato sauce, and the dough is mushy.

It was about 7:30 P.M., and as usual the place was standing-room-only, with people two deep jostling for a stool to come open and a waiting line spilling out onto the sidewalk.

The menu is similarly Spartan. . . . To drink, there is tap water. That's it—no toppings, no soda, no beer, no coffee, no salt, no pepper. And no special orders.

A very few people are eating. Most are waiting. . . . Fingers are drumming, flies are buzzing, the clock is ticking. The waiter wears a watch around his belt loop, but he hardly needs it; time is evidently not his chief concern. After a while, tempers begin to fray.

But right now, it's 8:45 P.M. at the pizzeria, I've been waiting an hour and a quarter for two small pies.¹⁹

Few would prefer such a restaurant to the fast, friendly, more diverse offerings of, say, Pizza Hut. More important, however, critics who revere the past ignore the fact that we are not returning to such a world. In fact, fast-food restaurants such as Kumba King have begun to appear even in Havana (and many more are likely).²⁰ The increase in the number of people crowding the planet, the acceleration of technological change, and the increasing pace of life make it impossible to go back to a world, if it ever existed, dominated by home-cooked meals, traditional restaurant dinners, high-quality foods, meals loaded with surprises, and restaurants run by chefs free to express their creativity.

It is more valid to critique McDonaldization from the perspective of a conceivable future.²¹ Unfettered by the constraints of McDonaldized systems but using the technological advances made possible by them, people could have the potential in the future to be far more thoughtful, skillful, creative, and well rounded. In short, if the world were less McDonaldized, people would be better able to live up to their human potential.

We must look at McDonaldization as both “enabling” and “constraining.”²² McDonaldized systems enable us to do many things we were not able to do in the past; however, these systems also keep us from doing things we otherwise could do. McDonaldization is a “double-edged” phenomenon.

McDONALD'S: CREATING THE "FAST-FOOD FACTORY"

As mentioned above, the basic McDonald's approach—and the basis of the McDonaldization process—was created by two brothers, Richard and Maurice McDonald, in their first restaurant in Pasadena, California, in 1937.²³ They based that restaurant on the principles of high speed, large volume, and low price. To avoid chaos, they offered customers a highly circumscribed menu. Instead of personalized service and traditional cooking techniques, the McDonald brothers used assembly-line procedures for cooking and serving food. In place of trained cooks, the brothers' "limited menu allowed them to break down food preparation into simple, repetitive tasks that could be learned quickly even by those stepping into a commercial kitchen for the first time."²⁴ They pioneered the use of specialized restaurant workers such as "grill men," "shake men," "fry men," and "dressers" (those who put the "extras" on burgers and who wrap them). They developed regulations dictating what workers should do and even what they should say. In these and other ways, the McDonald brothers took the lead in developing the rationalized "fast-food factory."²⁵

Ray Kroc not only did not invent McDonald's basic principles, he also did not invent the franchise:

Franchising is a system in which one large firm . . . grants or sells the right to distribute its products or use its trade name and processes to a number of smaller firms. . . . Franchise holders, although legally independent, must conform to detailed standards of operation designed and enforced by the parent company.²⁶

Singer Sewing Company pioneered franchising after the Civil War, and automobile manufacturers and soft drink companies were franchising by the turn of the 20th century. By the 1930s, it had found its way into retail businesses, such as Western Auto, Rexall pharmacies, and the IGA food markets.

There had been many efforts to franchise food service before Kroc arrived on the scene in the early 1950s. The first food service franchises, the A&W Root Beer stands, made their debut in 1924. Howard Johnson began franchising ice cream and other food in 1935. The first Dairy Queen opened in 1944; efforts to franchise it nationally led to a chain of about 2,500 outlets by 1948. Other well-known food franchises predated McDonald's. Big Boy started in the

late 1930s, and Burger King (then Insta-Burger) and Kentucky Fried Chicken began in 1954. Thus, Kroc's first McDonald's, which opened on April 15, 1955, was a relative latecomer to franchising in general and to food franchising in particular.

In 1954, when Ray Kroc first visited it, McDonald's was a single drive-in hamburger stand in San Bernardino, California (ironically, the same city where Taco Bell was founded by Glen Bell).²⁷ The basic menu, the approach, and even some of the techniques for which McDonald's is famous had already been created by the McDonald brothers. Although it was a local sensation, the McDonald brothers were content to keep it that way. They were doing very well and had few grand ambitions despite a few tentative steps toward franchising. With plenty of ambition for all of them, Kroc became their franchising agent and went on to build the McDonald's franchise empire. At first, Kroc worked in partnership with the McDonald brothers, but after he bought them out in 1961 for \$2.7 million, he was free to build the business as he wished.

Kroc took the specific products and techniques of the McDonald brothers and combined them with the principles of other franchises (food service and others), bureaucracies, scientific management, and the assembly-line. Kroc's genius was in bringing all these well-known ideas and techniques to bear on the fast-food business and adding his ambition to turn it, through franchising, into a national, then international, business phenomenon. McDonald's and McDonaldization, then, do not represent something new but rather represent the culmination of a series of rationalization processes that had been occurring throughout the 20th century.

Kroc was impressed, above all else, by the efficiency of the McDonald brothers' operation, as well as the enormous profit potential of such a system applied at a large number of restaurant sites. Here is how Kroc described his initial reactions to the McDonald's system: "I was fascinated by the simplicity and effectiveness of the system. . . . Each step in producing the limited menu was stripped down to its essence and accomplished with a minimum of effort. They sold hamburgers and cheeseburgers only. The burgers were all fried the same way."²⁸ But Kroc's obsession with streamlined processes predated his discovery of McDonald's. When he was selling blenders to restaurants, he was disturbed by the restaurants' lack of efficiency: "There was inefficiency, waste, and temperamental cooks, sloppy service and food whose [*sic*] quality was never consistent. What was needed was a simple product that moved from start to

completion in a *streamlined* path” (italics added).²⁹ Kroc toyed with other alternatives for streamlining the restaurant meal before settling on the McDonald’s hamburger as a model of efficiency:

He had contemplated hot dogs, then rejected the idea. There were too many kinds of hot dogs . . . there were all sorts of different ways of cooking hot dogs . . . boiled, broiled, rotisseries, charcoaled. . . . Hamburgers . . . were simplicity itself. The condiments were added to the hamburger, not built in. And there was only one way to prepare the hamburger—to grill it.³⁰

Kroc and his associates experimented with each component of the hamburger to increase the efficiency of producing and serving it. For example, they started with partially sliced buns that arrived in cardboard boxes. But the griddle workers had to spend time opening the boxes, separating the buns, slicing them in half, and discarding the leftover paper and cardboard. Eventually, McDonald’s found that buns sliced completely in half, separated, and shipped in reusable boxes could be used more efficiently. The meat patty received similar attention. For example, the paper between the patties had to have just the right amount of wax so that the patties would readily slide off the paper and onto the grill. Kroc’s goal in these innovations was greater efficiency:

The purpose of all these refinements . . . was to make our griddle man’s job easier to do quickly and well. And the other considerations of cost cutting, inventory control, and so forth were important to be sure, but they were secondary to . . . what happened there at the smoking griddle. This was the vital passage of our *assembly-line*, and the product had to flow through it smoothly or the whole plant would falter.”³¹ (italics added)

To this day, efficiency remains the focus at McDonald’s. For example, in at least one McDonald’s, “the workers labored with an assembly-line efficiency.”³²

However, Kroc’s major innovation lay in the way he franchised McDonald’s. He did not permit regional franchises in which a single franchisee received control over all the outlets to be opened in a given area. Other franchisers had floundered because regional franchisees had grown too powerful and subverted the basic principles of the company. Kroc maximized central control and thereby uniformity throughout the system by granting franchises one at a time and rarely granting more than one franchise to a specific individual. Kroc also gained

control over and profited from the franchisee's real estate.³³ Another of Kroc's innovations was to set the fee for a franchise at a rock-bottom \$950 (today, a potential franchisee needs at least \$500,000 in liquid assets even to be considered for a franchise, and the cost of obtaining a franchise will be between over \$1 and over \$2 million). Other franchisers had set very high initial fees and made most of their money from the initial setup. As a result, they tended to lose interest in the continued viability of their franchisees. At McDonald's, profits did not come from high initial fees but from the 1.9% of store sales that headquarters demanded of its franchisees. The success of Kroc and his organization thus depended on the prosperity of the franchisees. This mutual interest was Kroc's greatest contribution to the franchise business and a key factor in the success of McDonald's and its franchisees, many of whom became multimillionaires.

Although Kroc imposed and enforced a uniform system, he encouraged the franchisees to come up with innovations that could enhance not only their operations but also those of the system as a whole. Take the case of product innovations. Kroc himself was not a great product innovator. One of his most notorious flops was the Hula Burger, a slice of grilled pineapple between two pieces of cheese wrapped in a toasted bun. Successful creations, such as the fish sandwich (the Filet-O-Fish), the Egg McMuffin, McDonald's breakfast meals, and even the Big Mac, came from franchisees. Thus, McDonald's achieved a balance between centralized control and the independence of franchisees.

Kroc spearheaded a series of developments that further rationalized the fast-food business.³⁴ For one thing, he (unwittingly) served as preacher and cheerleader for the principles of rationalization as he lectured "about uniformity, about a standardized menu, one size portions, same prices, same quality in every store."³⁵ This uniformity allowed McDonald's to differentiate itself from its competitors, whose food was typically inconsistent. McDonald's also led the field by imposing a limited menu (at first, 10 items), by creating tough standards for the fat content of its hamburgers, by converting to frozen hamburgers and French fries, by using inspectors to check on uniformity and conformity, and by forming in 1961 the first full-time training center in the business (called Hamburger University and offering a "degree" in "hamburgerology").

In 1958, McDonald's published an operations manual that detailed many of the principles for operating a franchised fast-food restaurant.³⁶ It told operators *exactly* how to draw milk shakes, grill hamburgers, and fry potatoes. It specified *precise* cooking times for all products and temperature settings for all equipment. It fixed *standard* portions on every food item, down to the *quarter ounce* of onions placed on each hamburger patty and the *thirty-two slices per pound* of cheese.

It specified that French fries be cut at *nine thirty-seconds of an inch* thick. And it defined quality *controls* that were unique to food service, including the disposal of meat and potato products that were held more than *ten minutes* in a serving bin.

Grill men . . . *were instructed* to put hamburgers down on the grill moving from left to right, creating *six rows of six* patties each. And because the first two rows were farthest from the heating element, they were instructed (and still are) to flip the third row first, then the fourth, fifth, and sixth before flipping the first two.³⁷ (italics added)

It is hard to imagine a more rational system.

McDonald's success and importance is readily apparent. By 1994 it had already sold 99 billion burgers;³⁸ it has now sold hundreds of billions of them. Its revenues peaked in 2013 at \$28.1 billion (greater than the gross domestic product [GDP] of many countries, including Ecuador),³⁹ with a net income of \$5.6 billion.⁴⁰ In late 2019, revenues were *only* \$21 billion, and net income *had only risen to* \$5.8 billion. While McDonald's revenue has dropped slightly in recent years and its net income has been stagnant,⁴¹ it remains an economic superpower. It has almost 39,000 restaurants in 101 countries throughout the world, serving an average of nearly 70 million customers a day.⁴² A computer programmer compiled a visualization of all the McDonald's locations in the United States (just over 14,000 in 2019) and reported that it is impossible to get farther than 115 miles from a McDonald's.⁴³ The "McFarthest Spot," as the programmer labeled it, lies in Nevada.⁴⁴ A British commentator archly notes, "There are McDonald's everywhere. There's one near you, and there's one being built right now even nearer to you. Soon, if McDonald's goes on expanding at its present rate, there might even be one in your house. You could find Ronald McDonald's boots under your bed. And maybe his red wig, too."⁴⁵

MCDONALD'S AND OTHER BRICK-AND-MORTAR CONSUMPTION SITES

When the first edition of this book was published in 1993, its focus was on "brick-and-mortar" consumption sites, like your local McDonald's restaurant, and those of other chains of fast-food restaurants, as well as Wal-Mart, shopping malls, and so on. Before the advent of the consumption sites on the Internet, that's pretty much all there was (although the Sears mail order catalogue and that of others,

such as Montgomery Ward, were exceptions; see below on IKEA's catalogue). Some brick-and-mortar sites (including McDonald's) have expanded enormously in the last three decades, but many others have declined dramatically (department stores, big-box stores, some chain stores, shopping malls). Overall but *not* in the fast-food business (among others), brick-and-mortar locales devoted to consumption are increasingly being supplanted in importance by the largely digital sites. *However, as we will see, a clear and unequivocal distinction between the brick-and-mortar and the digital is increasingly untenable; they are increasingly merging into, augmenting, one another.* For example and as will be discussed further, Domino's largely brick-and-mortar structures are increasingly doing business online, and Amazon has opened brick-and-mortar bookstores, convenience stores,⁴⁶ and more importantly, bought the Whole Foods chain of about 500 supermarkets for over \$13 billion.⁴⁷

Largely brick-and-mortar franchises generated about \$2.1 trillion in business in the United States in 2014. They employed over 8.2 million people.⁴⁸ Franchises have continued to grow rapidly;⁴⁹ more than 80% of McDonald's restaurants are franchises (up from 57% in 2006). (Interestingly, another giant in the fast-food business—Starbucks—refuses to franchise its operations in the United States, but it does license them to independent owners. It has been franchising in Europe and elsewhere.) In the words of a McDonald's report, "We believe locally-owned and operated restaurants are at the core of our competitive advantage, making us not just a global brand but also a locally relevant one."⁵⁰

The McDonald's model has been adopted not only by other budget-minded hamburger franchises, such as Burger King and Wendy's, but also by a wide array of other budget-priced fast-food businesses. In 2019, Yum! Brands, Inc., operated more than 43,000 restaurants in more than 125 countries and territories.⁵¹ It encompasses Pizza Hut, Wing Street, KFC, and Taco Bell. Yum! Brands has more outlets than McDonald's, although its total sales (over \$49 billion in 2018) and net income (\$1.5 billion) are not nearly as high as McDonald's.⁵² Subway has almost 41,000 outlets in more than 100 countries; about 24,000 are in the United States.⁵³ The Cleveland, Ohio, market, to take one example, is so saturated with Subway restaurants that one opened *inside* the Jewish Community Center.⁵⁴ Among the innumerable other successful budget-oriented fast-food chains are Chipotle (still embattled because of a series of health scares), Chick-fil-A, Dunkin' Donuts, Firehouse Subs, Five Guys, Panera, and Jimmy John's.

In-N-Out Burger is a relatively small West Coast chain with nearly 350 restaurants. While Stacy Perman argues that In-N-Out Burger is "the antithesis of McDonald's,"⁵⁵ it is, in fact, in most ways highly McDonaldized. Another

food chain is Pret A Manger, a British company (the name is French, meaning “ready to eat”). Founded in London in 1968, it remains based primarily in Great Britain. As of this writing, there are about 450 Pret A Manger restaurants in the world⁵⁶—less than 100 of them in the United States (New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Boston)—but more are promised.⁵⁷ Unlike In-N-Out and McDonald’s, Pret A Manger does *not* sell hamburgers but rather a variety of foods (salads, soups, wraps, desserts, etc.). Pret is best known for its high-quality sandwiches, such as Balsamic Chicken & Avocado. Like In-N-Out, Pret avoids the use of preservatives and chemicals. Pret does not make its sandwiches to order, but it does have them made in the shops several times a day.

One new and growing fast-food chain is Blaze Pizza. Founded in 2011, by early 2020 it had over 300 outlets. It involves an assembly-line-like operation where customers can select ingredients as they move along the service line. Once they have made all their topping selections and reach the end of the service line, their personalized pizza is fast-fired and is ready in about three minutes.⁵⁸

The McDonald’s model has been extended to more upscale, higher-priced, “fast casual,” brick-and-mortar chain restaurants. Among the burger chains in this category are Shake Shack and its “ShackBurger.”⁵⁹ Smashburger, once the hottest new burger chain, is noted for its burgers made crispy by smashing them with a steel mold. However, it fell on hard times and was acquired in 2018 by a Philippine-based chain, Jolibee. The dominant higher-priced restaurant chains offer fuller menus. Major examples include Outback Steakhouse, Chili’s, Olive Garden, Cheesecake Factory, and Red Lobster.

Morton’s is an even more upscale, high-priced chain of steakhouses (Ruth’s Chris is another) that has overtly modeled itself after McDonald’s: “Despite the fawning service and the huge wine list, a meal at Morton’s conforms to the same dictates of uniformity, cost control and portion regulation that have enabled American fast-food chains to rule the world.”⁶⁰ In fact, the chief executive of Morton’s was an owner of a number of Wendy’s outlets and admits, “My experience with Wendy’s has helped in Morton’s venues.”⁶¹ To achieve uniformity, employees go “by the book”: “an ingredient-by-ingredient illustrated binder describing the exact specifications of . . . Morton’s kitchen items, sauces and garnishes. A row of color pictures in every Morton’s kitchen displays the presentation for each dish.”⁶² Other types of brick-and-mortar business are increasingly adapting the principles of the fast-food industry to their operational needs. Said the vice chair of Toys“R”Us, “We want to be thought of as a sort of McDonald’s of toys.”⁶³ (Interestingly, Toys“R”Us collapsed in 2018 because of, among other things, the difficulty competing with the even more massively McDonaldized Wal-Mart and

its toy business.) The founder of Kidsports Fun and Fitness Club echoed this desire: “I want to be the McDonald’s of the kids’ fun and fitness business.”⁶⁴ Other chains with similar ambitions include Gap, Jiffy Lube, AAMCO Transmissions, Midas Muffler & Brake Shops, Great Clips, H&R Block, Pearle Vision, Bally’s, Kampgrounds of America (KOA) (called the “McDonald’s of camping”),⁶⁵ KinderCare (dubbed “Kentucky Fried Children”),⁶⁶ Home Depot, PetSmart, Jenny Craig, and Curves (which claims to be the world’s largest chain of women’s fitness centers).⁶⁷ The European budget airline Ryanair has copied the McDonald’s model in a process that has been called “Ryanization.”⁶⁸

McDonald’s has been a resounding success in the international arena. The majority of McDonald’s restaurants are now outside the United States (that was true of only about 25% of its restaurants in the mid-1980s).⁶⁹ About half of McDonald’s revenue comes from its overseas operations.⁷⁰ The leader is Japan with almost 3,000 restaurants,⁷¹ China is catching up quickly with its 2,700 McDonald’s restaurants.⁷² (However, Yum! Brands operates more than 5,000 KFCs in China—the Chinese greatly prefer chicken to beef.⁷³ Yum! Brands is expanding faster in China than McDonald’s.⁷⁴) France, the bastion of fine food, has become the second most profitable market in the world (the United States is first) for McDonald’s.⁷⁵ There were over 600 McDonald’s in Russia in 2018.⁷⁶ In fact, many other fast-food restaurants are succeeding in Russia; Russians seem to love American fast food.⁷⁷ Although there have been recent setbacks for McDonald’s in Great Britain, that nation remains the “fast-food capital of Europe.”⁷⁸ Israel is described as “McDonaldized,” with its shopping malls populated by “Ace Hardware, Toys‘R‘Us, Office Depot, and TCBY.”⁷⁹

Many highly McDonaldized, largely brick-and-mortar, firms outside the fast-food industry have also had success globally. Wal-Mart is the world’s largest brick-and-mortar retailer, with 2.3 million employees (over half of them in the United States) and almost \$500 billion in revenue in 2019. It opened its first international store (in Mexico) in 1991; over half of its approximately 11,500 stores are now outside the United States.⁸⁰ Although it is working hard to become a larger digital presence, Wal-Mart continues to be dominated by its brick-and-mortar sites.

Other nations have developed their own variants on the McDonald’s chain. Canada has a chain of coffee shops called Tim Hortons (merged with Wendy’s in 1995, purchased by Burger King in 2014, and now part of Restaurant Brands), with almost 5,000 brick-and-mortar outlets (about 700 in the United States) in 2016.⁸¹ It is Canada’s largest food service provider; much larger there than McDonald’s. The chain dominates Canada’s coffee business, but it has fallen on

hard times in United States.⁸² Paris, a city whose love for fine cuisine might lead one to think it would prove immune to fast food, has a large number of fast-food croissanteries. The revered French bread has also been McDonaldized;⁸³ it can even now be purchased in vending machines.⁸⁴ However, there is at least one effort to return to the production and sale of the classic French bread in traditional boulangeries.⁸⁵ An increasing number of French restaurants serve industrially produced food rather than food produced in their own kitchens. Overall, for the first time, in 2013 the French spent more money in fast-food restaurants than in traditional restaurants.⁸⁶ India has a chain of fast-food restaurants, Nirula's, that sells mutton burgers (about 80% of Indians are Hindus, who eat no beef) as well as local Indian cuisine.⁸⁷ Mos Burger is a Japanese chain with more than 1,700 restaurants, including six in Australia.⁸⁸ In addition to the usual fare, Mos Burger sells Teriyaki chicken burgers, rice burgers, and "Oshiruko with brown rice cake."⁸⁹

War-ravaged Beirut, Lebanon, once the most unlikely spot for an indigenous fast-food restaurant, witnessed the opening of Juicy Burger in 1984. It had a rainbow instead of golden arches, and J. B. the Clown stood in for Ronald McDonald. Its owners hoped (in vain) that it would become the "McDonald's of the Arab world."⁹⁰ However, a newer competitor for the most unlikely spot for a McDonald's clone is Teheran, Iran, which now has a "Mash Donald's." It joins "K.F.C. (Kabooki Fried Chicken) and clones of Pizza Hut (Pizza Hat) and Burger King (Burger House)."⁹¹

And now McDonaldization is coming full circle. Other countries with indigenous McDonaldized institutions have begun to export them to the United States. Great Britain's Pret A Manger has already been mentioned. Pollo Campero was founded in Guatemala in 1971 and by 2011 had over 350 restaurants in Latin America and several other countries, including the United States.⁹² Jollibee (see above), the Philippine chain, has about 1200 stores, with a number of U.S. outlets.⁹³ Pollo Campero is a smaller presence in the United States than the American-owned Pollo Tropical chain.⁹⁴ However, Pollo Campero is more significant because it involves the invasion of the United States, the home of fast food, by a foreign (Guatemalan) chain. As exemplified by Jollibee's purchase of Smashburger, even the hamburger business in the United States is not immune to an influx of foreign competition. BurgerFuel, a small, high-end, New Zealand burger chain with 88 outlets in six countries, expanded into the United States in 2017.⁹⁵

While it is highly McDonaldized, IKEA, a Swedish-based (but Dutch-owned) home furnishings company, is a powerful force on its own. In fact, there is discussion of "IKEAization" independent of the process of McDonaldization.

IKEA did about 35 billion euros of business in 2016, derived from the more than 684 million people visiting its over 400 brick-and-mortar superstores in 52 countries.⁹⁶ (Purchases were also made from the over 200 million copies of its catalog printed in 62 editions and 29 languages; an interactive version is now available online.⁹⁷ In fact, that catalog was reputed to print annually the second largest number of copies in the world, just after the Bible.⁹⁸) IKEA bridges the brick-and-mortar and digital worlds; its website reported 2.1 billion visitors in 2016.⁹⁹ IKEA is so popular in Europe that “it is said that one in ten Europeans is conceived on an IKEA bed.”¹⁰⁰ Another significant franchise is H&M, an international chain of clothing stores. Founded in 1947, it now has almost 5,000 shops in 74 countries.¹⁰¹ It currently employs 179,000 people and had over \$24 billion in sales in 2019.¹⁰² Another leader in the global clothing business is Zara, which opened its first shop in 1975 and now has more than 2,000 of them in 96 countries. Zara is part of a large group of fashion retailers that make up the Spanish firm Inditex. Taken together, there are more than 7,400 Inditex shops in 96 countries operating under nine different brand names.¹⁰³ Inditex had a total revenue of over 23,000 billion euros in 2016.¹⁰⁴

Much of the above emphasizes the geographic and spatial expansion of McDonald’s and other McDonaldized brick-and-mortar businesses, but in addition, they have all expanded temporally. McDonald’s has shifted some of its attention from adding locations to adding hours to existing locales, thereby squeezing greater profits from each of them. For example, at first McDonald’s did not offer breakfast, but now that meal has become the most important part of the business day; McDonald’s dominates the fast-food breakfast market. There is also a trend toward remaining open on a 24/7 basis. While less than 1% of McDonald’s restaurants in the United States operated nonstop in 2002, about 8% were operating that way until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Moreover, an even greater number of its U.S. locations opened by 5 a.m.¹⁰⁵ Time, like space, is no barrier to the spread of McDonald’s and McDonaldization.

THE LONG ARM OF McDONALD’S

Beyond the increasing influence of its business model (and of its impact on the larger culture; see below), McDonald’s has striven to continually extend its reach within American society and beyond. As the company’s chairperson said, “Our goal: to totally dominate the quick service restaurant industry worldwide. . . . I want McDonald’s to dominate.”¹⁰⁶

McDonald's began as a phenomenon of suburbs and medium-sized towns, but later it began to build brick-and-mortar restaurants in smaller towns, which supposedly could not support such restaurants, and in many big cities where consumers were supposedly too sophisticated to eat in them.¹⁰⁷ Today, you can find many fast-food outlets in New York's Times Square. In Paris, McDonald's is not only on the Champs-Élysées, but there is even a branch *in* the Louvre.¹⁰⁸ Soon after it opened in 1992, the McDonald's in Moscow's Pushkin Square sold almost 30,000 hamburgers a day and employed a staff of 1,200 young people working two to a cash register.¹⁰⁹ In early 1992, Beijing witnessed the opening of what was the world's largest McDonald's, with 700 seats, 29 cash registers, and nearly 1,000 employees.¹¹⁰ On its first day of business, it set a new one-day record for McDonald's by serving about 40,000 customers.¹¹¹ Today, the world's largest McDonald's ("Epic McD"), at least physically, is in Orlando, Florida, which is also the home of Disney World. It is three stories high, encompasses 19,000 square feet, and operated around the clock every day of the week. Among the more striking sites for a McDonald's restaurant are at the Grand Canyon; in what was once the world's tallest building, the Petronas Towers in Malaysia; as a ski-through on a slope in Sweden; and in a structure in Shrewsbury, England, that dates back to the 13th century.

McDonald's can even be found on the Guantanamo Bay U.S. Naval Base in Cuba and in the Pentagon. Small, satellite, express, or remote outlets, opened in areas that could not support full-scale fast-food restaurants, are also expanding rapidly. They are found in small storefronts in large cities and in nontraditional settings such as museums, department stores, service stations,¹¹² and even schools. These satellites typically offer only limited menus and may rely on larger outlets for food storage and preparation.¹¹³ A flap arose over the placement of a McDonald's in the then-new federal courthouse in Boston.¹¹⁴

Not content to dominate the strips that surround many college campuses, fast-food restaurants have long since moved right onto many of those campuses. The first campus fast-food restaurant opened at the University of Cincinnati in 1973. Today, college cafeterias often look like shopping mall food courts (and it's no surprise, given that campus food service is a multibillion-dollar-a-year business).¹¹⁵ In conjunction with a variety of "branded partners" (e.g., Pizza Hut and Subway), Marriott supplies food to many colleges and universities.¹¹⁶ The apparent approval of college administrations puts fast-food restaurants in a position to further influence the younger generation.

Fast food has long been available at many convenient rest stops along the road. After “refueling,” we can proceed with our trip, which is likely to end in another community with about the same density and mix of fast-food restaurants as the locale we left behind. Fast food is ubiquitous in airports and is also increasingly available in hotels.¹¹⁷

In other sectors of society, the influence of fast-food restaurants has been subtler but no less profound. Food produced by McDonald’s and other fast-food restaurants or that strongly resembles such food is now found in high schools and trade schools.¹¹⁸ Said the director of nutrition for the American School Food Service Association, “Kids today live in a world where fast food has become a way of life. For us to get kids to eat, period, we have to provide some familiar items.”¹¹⁹ Few lower-grade schools as yet have in-house fast-food restaurants; however, many have had to alter school cafeteria menus and procedures to make fast food readily available.¹²⁰ Apples, yogurt, and milk may go straight into the trash can, but hamburgers, fries, and shakes are devoured. Fast-food restaurants also tend to cluster close to schools.¹²¹ The attempt to hook school-age children on fast food reached something of a peak in Illinois, where McDonald’s operated a program called “A for Cheeseburger.” Students who received As on their report cards received a free cheeseburger, thereby linking success in school with McDonald’s.¹²² In Australia, toy versions of food featured by McDonald’s have been marketed to children as young as three. The toys include “fake McDonald’s fries, a self-assembling Big Mac, milkshake, Chicken McNuggets, baked apple pie and mini cookies.”¹²³ Many fear that playing with such toy food will increase still further children’s interest in eating the real thing.

The military has also been pressed to offer fast food on both bases and ships. Despite criticisms by physicians and nutritionists, fast-food outlets have turned up inside U.S. general hospitals and in children’s hospitals.¹²⁴ While no private homes yet have a McDonald’s of their own, meals at home often resemble those available in fast-food restaurants. Frozen, microwavable, and prepared foods, which bear a striking resemblance to meals available at fast-food restaurants, often find their way to the dinner table. There are even cookbooks—for example, *Secret Fast Food Recipes: The Fast Food Cookbook*—that allow one to prepare “genuine” fast food at home.¹²⁵ Home delivery of fast food, especially pizza, was revolutionized by Domino’s. In recent years, especially after the start of the pandemic, many other fast-food restaurants began delivering food to homes either on their own (e.g., Burger King) or by delivery services such as Grubhub, DoorDash, and Uber Eats.

Another example of the influence of McDonald's was to be found in movie theaters and reflected in the following newspaper headline: "To Woo Young Moviegoers, AMC Thinks Like McDonald's."¹²⁶ For example, building on McDonald's principle of calculability, especially large size (as best exemplified by the Big Mac), AMC theaters began offering "the Bavarian Beast," "a pound-and-a-half salted pretzel the size of a steering wheel."¹²⁷

Another type of expansion involves what could be termed "vertical McDonaldization";¹²⁸ that is, the demands of the fast-food industry, as is well documented in Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, have forced industries that service it to McDonaldize in order to satisfy its insatiable demands. Potato growing and processing, cattle ranching, chicken raising, and meat slaughtering and processing have all had to McDonaldize their operations, leading to dramatic increases in production. That growth has not come without costs, however.

As demonstrated in the movie *Food, Inc.* (2008), meat and poultry are now more likely to be disease ridden; small (often non-McDonaldized) producers and ranchers have been driven out of business; and millions of people have been forced to work in low-paying, demeaning, demanding, and sometimes outright dangerous jobs. For example, in the meatpacking industry, reasonably safe, unionized, secure, manageable, and relatively high-paying jobs in firms with once-household names—such as Swift and Armour—have been replaced with unsafe, nonunionized, insecure, unmanageable, and relatively low-paying positions with largely anonymous corporations (many of which were plagued with COVID-19 illnesses in 2020). While some (largely owners, managers, and stockholders) have profited enormously from vertical McDonaldization, far more have been forced into a marginal economic existence.

McDonald's is such a powerful model that many businesses as well as entities in many other domains have acquired nicknames beginning with "Mc." Examples include "McDentists" and "McDoctors," meaning drive-in clinics designed to deal quickly and efficiently with minor dental and medical problems;¹²⁹ "McChild" care centers, meaning child care centers such as KinderCare; "McStables," designating the nationwide racehorse-training operation of D. Wayne Lukas; and "McPaper," describing the newspaper *USA TODAY*.¹³⁰ (Scholars have used the term "McSexy" to describe the McDonaldization of exotic dancing.)¹³¹ McDonald's is not enamored, to put it mildly, of the proliferation of businesses using "Mc" as a prefix. Take the case of We Be Sushi, a San Francisco chain with a half-dozen outlets. A note

appeared on the back of the menu explaining why the chain was not named “McSushi”:

The original name was McSushi. Our sign was up and we were ready to go. But before we could open our doors we received a very formal letter from the lawyers of, you guessed it, McDonald’s. It seems that McDonald’s has cornered the market on every McFood name possible from McBagle [*sic*] to McTaco. They explained that the use of the name McSushi would dilute the image of McDonald’s.¹³²

Like virtually every other sector of society, sex has copied the McDonald’s model.¹³³ In New York City, an official called a three-story pornographic center “the McDonald’s of sex” because of its “cookie-cutter cleanliness and compliance with the law.”¹³⁴ In the movie *Sleeper*, Woody Allen not only created a futuristic world in which McDonald’s was an important and highly visible element, but he also envisioned a society in which people could enter a machine called an “orgasmatron” to experience an orgasm without going through the muss and fuss of sexual intercourse. Use of such machines (e.g., vibrators) will increase as the plague continues.

The porn site RedTube mimics the standardized interface of YouTube to provide various categories of adult content that users can view on the site or embed in their own web pages. The web is filled with video chat sites where users can request the performance of various sex acts. The Casual Encounters section on Craigslist.org provides people from every major city in the world with a centralized interface to find sexual partners. Tinder is a phone application usually used by people for the purpose of “hooking up,” but more long-term relationships, even marriages, seem to be occurring as a result of initial contact via Tinder.¹³⁵ A variety of devices, termed “teledildonics” or cyberdildonics by the adult entertainment industry, enables users to stimulate one another through computer networks. 3Feel is a virtual 3D environment where users can interact in real time and engage in sexual activity (with or without teledildonics).¹³⁶ As Woody Allen anticipated with his orgasmatron, “Participants can experience an orgasm without ever meeting or touching one another.”¹³⁷

In a world where convenience is king, disembodied sex has its allure. You don’t have to stir from your comfortable home. You pick up the phone, or log onto the computer and, if you’re plugged in, a world of unheard of sexual splendor rolls out before your eyes.¹³⁸

These examples suggest that no aspect of people’s lives is immune to McDonaldization.

Various pharmaceuticals can be seen as McDonaldizing sex. Viagra (and similar drugs such as Cialis) do this by, for example, making more predictable the ability of males to have an erection. (There are not yet similar, effective drugs for females, but research continues.) Such drugs also claim to work fast and to last for a long time. MDMA (ecstasy), an illicit drug, lasts for as much as eight hours and tends to increase the intensity of sensory information and feelings of social (including sexual) connectedness.

The preceding represents merely the tip of the iceberg as far as the long arm of McDonald's is concerned. Other areas affected by it (many of which will be discussed throughout this book) include the following:¹³⁹ outdoor recreation,¹⁴⁰ especially mountain climbing (e.g., reliance on guidebooks to climbing routes),¹⁴¹ professional sports,¹⁴² tourism,¹⁴³ the police,¹⁴⁴ the criminal justice system (profiling, "three strikes and you're out"),¹⁴⁵ family (books, TV shows devoted to quick fixes to family problems),¹⁴⁶ "McSchools" and the policies that serve to McDonaldize them,¹⁴⁷ "McUniversities,"¹⁴⁸ e-learning,¹⁴⁹ especially Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs; see Chapter 6),¹⁵⁰ as well as entire academic fields such as kinesiology ("McKinesiology"),¹⁵¹ the practice of medicine,¹⁵² psychotherapy,¹⁵³ death and dying, including funeral practices in Islamic societies,¹⁵⁴ losing weight and the McDonaldization of the body,¹⁵⁵ farms and their supersizing,¹⁵⁶ religion and the McDonaldization of religious creeds¹⁵⁷ and spirituality,¹⁵⁸ banking,¹⁵⁹ "McJobs" (see Chapters 4 and 5),¹⁶⁰ politics ("cool" versus "hot" politics; "drive-through democracy"),¹⁶¹ and scientific research.

MCDONALD'S AS AN AMERICAN AND A GLOBAL ICON

McDonald's has come to occupy a central place not just in the world of brick-and-mortar businesses but also in American and global popular culture.¹⁶² When McDonald's first opened in Manhattan, the "city went nuts."¹⁶³ To this day, the opening of a new McDonald's in a small town can be an important social event. Said one Maryland high school student at such an opening, "Nothing this exciting ever happens in Dale City."¹⁶⁴

Fast-food restaurants also play symbolic roles on television programs and in the movies. They have been satirized on *Saturday Night Live* and played a prominent role in a number of movies including *Coming to America* (1988), *Falling Down* (1993), *Sleeper* (1973), *Tin Men* (1987), *Scotland, PA* (2001), *Fast Food*

Nation (2006), the 2008 remake of the sci-fi classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, as well as *The Founder* (2016).

When plans were made to raze Ray Kroc's first McDonald's restaurant, hundreds of letters poured into company headquarters, including the following: "Please don't tear it down! To destroy this major artifact of contemporary culture would, indeed, destroy part of the faith the people of the world have in your company."¹⁶⁵ In the end, the restaurant was rebuilt according to the original blueprints and turned into a museum.¹⁶⁶ A McDonald's executive explained the decision: "McDonald's . . . is really a part of Americana."

Americans aren't the only ones who feel this way. At the opening of the McDonald's in Moscow, one journalist described the franchise as the "ultimate icon of Americana."¹⁶⁷ When Pizza Hut opened in Moscow, a Russian student said, "It's a piece of America."¹⁶⁸ Reflecting on the growth of fast-food restaurants in Brazil, an executive associated with Pizza Hut of Brazil said that his nation "is experiencing a passion for things American."¹⁶⁹ On the popularity of KFC in Malaysia, the local owner said, "Anything Western, especially American, people here love. . . . They want to be associated with America."¹⁷⁰ One could go further and argue that at least culturally, McDonald's has become more important than the United States itself, at least in some people's eyes. Take the following news story about a former U.S. ambassador to Israel officiating at the opening of the first McDonald's in Jerusalem wearing a baseball cap with the McDonald's golden arches logo:

An Israeli teen-ager walked up to him, carrying his own McDonald's hat, which he handed to Ambassador Indyk with a pen and asked: "Are you the Ambassador? Can I have your autograph?" Somewhat sheepishly, Ambassador Indyk replied: "Sure. I've never been asked for my autograph before."

As the Ambassador prepared to sign his name, the Israeli teen-ager said to him, "Wow, what's it like to be the ambassador from McDonald's, going around the world opening McDonald's restaurants everywhere?"

Ambassador Indyk looked at the Israeli youth and said, "No, no. I'm the American ambassador—not the ambassador from McDonald's!" Ambassador Indyk described what happened next: "I said to him, 'Does this mean you don't want my autograph?' And the kid said, 'No, I don't want your autograph,' and he took his hat back and walked away."¹⁷¹

Two other indices of the significance of McDonald's (and, implicitly, McDonaldization) are worth mentioning. The first is the annual "Big Mac index" (part of "burgeronomics"), published, tongue-in-cheek, by a prestigious magazine, *The Economist*. It indicates the purchasing power of various currencies around the world based on the local price (in dollars) of the Big Mac. The Big Mac is used because it is a uniform commodity sold in many different nations. In the 2020 survey, a Big Mac in Switzerland cost \$6.71; in the United States, it cost an average of \$5.67; in China, it was \$3.12; and in Russia, it was \$2.20.¹⁷² This measure indicates, at least roughly, where the cost of living is high or low as well as which currencies are undervalued (China) and overvalued (Switzerland). Although *The Economist* is calculating the Big Mac index only half seriously, the index represents the ubiquity and importance of McDonald's around the world.¹⁷³

The second indicator of the global significance of McDonald's is the idea developed by Thomas Friedman that "no two countries that both have a McDonald's have ever fought a war since they each got McDonald's." Friedman calls this the "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention."¹⁷⁴ Another tongue-in-cheek idea, it implies that the path to world peace lies through the continued international expansion of McDonald's. Unfortunately, it was proved wrong for the first time by the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999, which at the time had McDonald's.

To many people throughout the world, McDonald's has become a sacred institution.¹⁷⁵ At that opening of the McDonald's in Moscow, a worker spoke of it "as if it were the Cathedral in Chartres . . . a place to experience 'celestial joy.'"¹⁷⁶ Kowinski argues that indoor shopping malls, which almost always encompass fast-food restaurants and other franchises and chains, are the modern "cathedrals of consumption" to which people go to practice their "consumer religion."¹⁷⁷ Similarly, a visit to another central element of McDonaldized society, Walt Disney World,¹⁷⁸ has been described as "the middle-class hajj, the compulsory visit to the sunbaked holy city."¹⁷⁹ McDonald's has achieved its exalted position because virtually all Americans and many others have passed through its golden arches (or by its drive-through windows) on innumerable occasions. Furthermore, most of us have been bombarded by commercials extolling the virtues of McDonald's, commercials tailored to a variety of audiences and that change as the chain introduces new foods, new contests, and new product tie-ins. These ever-present commercials, combined with the fact that people cannot drive or walk very far without having a McDonald's pop into view, have embedded McDonald's deep in popular consciousness. Some years ago, a poll of school-age children showed

that 96% of them could identify Ronald McDonald, second only to Santa Claus in name recognition.¹⁸⁰ Over the years, McDonald's has appealed to people in many ways. The restaurants themselves are depicted as spick-and-span; the food is said to be fresh and nutritious; the employees are shown to be young and eager; the managers appear gentle and caring; and the dining experience itself seems fun filled. Through their purchases, people contribute, at least indirectly, to charities such as the Ronald McDonald Houses for sick children.

DIGITAL McDONALDIZATION

The Internet in general and Amazon (founded in 1994) in particular was coming of age about the time the first edition of this book was published and long after I wrote my first essay on the topic.¹⁸¹ Without Internet sites such as Amazon.com to analyze from the perspective of rationalization (McDonaldization), the focus was on all there was to analyze—brick-and-mortar consumption sites such as McDonald's restaurants. While some brick-and-mortar sites (especially McDonald's) have expanded dramatically in the intervening years, that growth has been dwarfed by a wide and ever-increasing margin by the expansion and proliferation of Internet sites devoted to consumption.

For example, Amazon, which started operations when McDonald's was already a giant in the business world, has long since grown much larger than McDonald's, and its advantage will become ever larger in the coming years. As large and powerful as Amazon has become, Alibaba in China is an even bigger e-commerce site; also growing and of increasing importance is India-based Flipkart. However, as discussed previously, when we look solely at all retail business, the brick-and-mortar realm had a huge but diminishing lead over digital businesses. However, the pandemic greatly increased online consumption and further reduced the amount of business done by brick-and-mortar sites.¹⁸²

The center of the McDonaldization of consumption (and much, if not everything, else), as well as the most extreme examples of it, are to be found *not* in the brick-and-mortar world but rather in the digital world. Consumption on digital sites tends to be much more *efficient*, *predictable*, *calculable*, and *controlled* than consumption in brick-and-mortar sites. This is certainly true for consumers, but in many ways, it is even truer for the "work" that gets done on those sites. As direct relationships with human workers are reduced to a minimum on digital sites and in many cases are eliminated completely, that work is increasingly done by an array of nonhuman technologies without direct human involvement.

Because human beings are a, if not *the*, major source of inefficiency, unpredictability, incalculability, and loss of control, digital systems that minimize or eliminate their role are likely to approach a degree of McDonaldization unimaginable in the brick-and-mortar world (although, of course, in digital systems, humans operate behind the scenes in creating, refining, and maintaining them).

However, the clear distinctions between brick-and-mortar and digital worlds are eroding as those worlds increasingly interpenetrate, augmenting one another in a “bricks-and-clicks” world.¹⁸³ Data from online and from stores complement one another. The resulting world of consumption, with brick-and-mortar and digital sites augmenting one another, promises even more McDonaldization in the future. In terms of consumption, augmented reality creates an increasingly seamless way to blend “the digital and the physical allowing a shopper to shift seamlessly between the two realms. . . . Customers . . . tend to jump constantly between the two worlds without noticing.”¹⁸⁴

Amazon was once almost totally digital, except for such aspects of its business as the warehousing and delivery of material products. It has recently moved strongly into the brick-and-mortar world by opening physical bookstores (it already has about half of the consumer book market in the United States), convenience stores (Amazon Go), and, most significant, the purchase of the Whole Foods chain of supermarkets. This is a major example of the fact that the never hard-and-fast distinction between the material and the digital is fast disappearing. (Although, it seems clear that the material world of consumption will be greatly diminished in the future.)

For example, as a result of its “grab-and-go” system, Amazon Go consumers can physically go to the brick-and-mortar shop, select, pick up, and take home groceries, ready-to-eat meals, and meal kits with all of the ingredients to create a meal at home in 30 minutes. Because of the integration of the digital in Amazon Go shops, it is not necessary for them to wait in line to physically pay for their purchases on checkout; Amazon Go offers checkout-free shopping. All shoppers need do is use the Amazon Go app on entering the store, take whatever automatically detected products they want to purchase, and leave the store.¹⁸⁵ Amazon Go’s “Just Walk Out Technology” is connected to the Internet and employs computer vision, sensors, and deep learning.¹⁸⁶ All of this serves to make shopping at Amazon Go far more McDonaldized (especially more efficient) than in any other brick-and-mortar convenience store or supermarket. (Uber has done much the same thing. Because rides are prepaid through an app, passengers can exit an Uber without the need to pay or tip.)

In fact, Amazon is expanding in so many directions and augmenting its online business in so many different ways that it has created fear of an emerging modern monopoly similar to the 19th-century railroads that led, in their day, to the development of anti-monopoly laws.¹⁸⁷

Because of what it sells—food—McDonald's is doomed to remain, at least for the foreseeable future, an almost totally brick-and-mortar phenomenon (McDonald's does now have digital kiosks for ordering food), at least until a way is found to transport food digitally, directly to consumers.

It is in the digital world, as well as the augmented world of bricks-and-clicks, that McDonaldization has reached new and unprecedented heights. More generally, the worlds of online and off-line consumption have grown far more McDonaldized. We are still in the early stages of this development, which is likely to accelerate at an ever-increasing pace.

Is “McDonaldization” Still the Best Label?

This leads to the issue of whether it makes sense to continue to use the term *McDonaldization* to describe the process of concern in this book. In discussing that issue, the question then becomes whether *Amazonization* would be a better term than *McDonaldization* for that process. For example, it is much easier to transform consumers into *prosumers* (those who *both* produce and consume, sometimes simultaneously) online. Indeed, if Internet businesses and other digital sites are to operate successfully, *consumers must become prosumers* (see Chapter 2). Brick-and-mortar sites have long done this, most notably McDonald's with its efforts to get consumers to perform tasks traditionally performed by paid workers. However, this is accomplished much more easily and extensively on Internet sites. It is hard, if not impossible, for consumers to find workers to help them online. In the main, if prosumers online want something done, they have little choice but to do it themselves.

Then there are all the material realities and impediments associated with a brick-and-mortar site like McDonald's. Consumers (and workers) must physically go to them in order to consume; goods must be delivered there; the goods must often be processed before they can be sold to consumers; and so on. All of these steps are reduced in the online consumption of products, and they are almost entirely eliminated as far as digital products, such as e-books and e-music are concerned.

Given the limitations of such brick-and-mortar sites as McDonald's restaurants, would we be justified in renaming the process of concern in this book

“Amazonization”? A strong argument can be made in support of such a relabeling. However, the basic principles of McDonaldization apply as well or even better to largely digital sites and bricks-and-clicks entities like Amazon than they do to brick-and-mortar sites like McDonald’s. In fact, successful digital (and bricks-and-clicks) consumption sites are arguably *more* McDonaldized than brick-and-mortar sites; they are more *McDonaldized than McDonald’s*. The present and even more the future of consumption belongs to the digital world in general and Amazon in particular. This became even more the case with the pandemic where many people grew increasingly reluctant to go to a brick-and-mortar site.

However, McDonald’s is still the pioneer in the creation of the process of McDonaldization. As a result, we will continue to use that term for this process.

A LOOK AHEAD

Because this book is a work in the social sciences, I cannot merely assert that McDonaldization is spreading throughout society; evidence must be presented for that assertion. Numerous and diverse examples in each chapter demonstrate the degree to which McDonaldization has come to dominate, even define, society and at an accelerating rate.

The focus throughout is on the impact of McDonaldized systems (e.g., fast-food restaurants, universities) on people, especially the people—consumers and workers—who are found in them. Chapters 2 and 3 concentrate on the consumers in McDonaldized settings. The focus is on the four basic principles of McDonaldization outlined in this chapter—efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control—and the ways in which they affect consumers. Chapters 4 and 5 shift the focus to the workers, the producers, in those settings and their McDonaldized occupations, especially their “McJobs.” As was the case with consumers, workers are discussed from the perspective of the four dimensions of McDonaldization. In Chapter 6, the irrationality associated with these seemingly rational systems is explored. While there is much that is rational about McDonald’s and McDonaldization, including its basic principles, much of the book is a critique of McDonaldization. Chapter 6 presents that critique most clearly and directly, discussing a variety of irrationalities, the most important of which is dehumanization. Also discussed in this chapter are several perspectives on the issue of whether or not McDonaldization’s irrationalities need to be dealt with and, if so, how. The new Epilogue deals with profound effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on McDonaldization.

2

EFFICIENCY AND CALCULABILITY

Consumers 1

Chapter 1 dealt with the process of McDonaldization, as well as McDonald's and other brick-and-mortar consumption sites that are reflective of that process. It also dealt with the largely online world, most notably on Amazon.com, as well that which integrates bricks-and-clicks. It is there where McDonaldization has reached new heights. Needless to say, people exist in and on these settings. It is the norm to distinguish between two types of people in or on these settings: consumers (or customers, clients) and producers (or workers). However, it is important to note that people as exclusively producers are of declining importance in material sites and virtually nonexistent on digital sites. Herrman describes digital consumption sites as "employee-light."¹ For example, while Amazon.com employs about 23 workers for every \$10 million in revenue generated, brick-and-mortar retailers require almost 50 workers to generate the same amount of revenue.² Uber and Airbnb do not employ drivers (Uber sees them as "independent contractors" lacking the rights of employees, e.g., for overtime) and homeowners; they are on their own in exchange for a percentage of the income derived from the services they offer. In Airbnb's case, homeowners get the lion's share of the income. They pay Airbnb a 3% fee, while guests pay the company a 6% to 12% fee. In the case of Uber, drivers usually get between 15% and 25% of the fare. However, these companies do employ people to manage these systems; Uber, with revenue of over \$11 billion, has only about 22,000 employees.

These companies are also described as being “asset-light,” and it is the “lightness” in both paid employees and assets that allows Internet sites to reach new heights of McDonaldization. For example, Uber owns no cars; those who drive for Uber own the cars and pay the expenses associated with buying (or leasing) and maintaining them. Similarly, Airbnb owns no properties; those who offer them for rent on the site own them, and they too are responsible for all of the expenses associated with the properties. With relatively few employees and minimal material assets, these Internet sites are free to maximize the process of McDonaldization. However, it is important to note that those who do the work in these systems—the drivers and homeowners—have little ability to McDonaldize most of what they do. In addition, as members of the “gig economy,” they generally earn comparatively little and have no job security, in part because they do not have jobs in the conventional sense. This frees up Uber, Airbnb, and others to exploit them greatly.

The norm of differentiating between consumers and producers will be adhered to in the next four chapters. This chapter and the next will deal with consumers, while Chapters 4 and 5 will be devoted to producers. However, as pointed out previously, scholars are rejecting the binary distinction between producers and consumers and thinking more in terms of *prosumers*, or those who both produce and consume.³ In fact, both are, in reality, prosumers because producers must consume at least to some degree and consumers must also produce in various ways. We will have more to say about prosumers at several points in this book, but for the time being, we will set that concept aside and deal separately with consumers and producers.

This chapter covers consumers in terms of two of the four basic dimensions of McDonaldization: efficiency and calculability. Chapter 3 deals with consumers through the lens of the other two dimensions of McDonaldization: predictability and control. While the focus is on the consumer, workers—the producers—will inevitably be touched on in these chapters and discussions.

We will discuss a wide array of consumers in the next two chapters, including tourists, students, campers, diners, patients, parents, mothers-to-be, shoppers (including cybershoppers), dieters, exercisers, and those looking for dates (or simply for sex).

EFFICIENCY: DRIVE-THROUGHS AND FINGER FOODS

Efficiency is perhaps the dimension of McDonaldization most often linked to the seeming increase in the pace of contemporary life. Increasing efficiency is behind just-in-time production, faster service, streamlined operations, and tight

schedules everywhere—from the workplace, to Disney World, to the home, and most importantly, to consumption sites on the Internet.

Efficiency is generally a good thing. It is clearly advantageous to consumers, who are able to obtain what they need more quickly and with less effort. Similarly, efficient workers are able to perform their tasks more rapidly and easily. Managers and owners gain because more work gets done, more customers are served, and greater profits are earned. But as is the case with McDonaldization in general and each of its dimensions, irrationalities such as surprising inefficiencies and the dehumanization of consumers and workers are associated with the drive for increased efficiency. Most extremely, the drive for efficiency in both brick-and-mortar and digital (e.g., websites) settings has the irrational consequence of the great reduction, if not near-total elimination, of human workers. Along with automated technologies, prosumers increasingly do the work, for no pay, that those paid workers once did.

Efficiency means choosing (or having chosen for you by others) the optimum means to a given end. However, the truly optimum means to an end is rarely found. People and organizations rarely maximize because they are hampered by such factors as the constraints of history, financial circumstances, organizational realities, and the limitations of human nature.⁴ Organizations continue to strive for maximization in the hope that they will at least increase their efficiency. Organizations are now coming closer to maximizing efficiency on the Internet, in brick-and-mortar settings where unpaid prosumers do more and more of the work, and in the world that augments the two.

In a McDonaldized society, consumers and workers rarely search for the best means to an end on their own; rather, they tend to rely on previously discovered and institutionalized means. Thus, when people start a new job, they are not expected to figure out for themselves how to do the work most efficiently. Instead, they undergo training designed to teach them what has been discovered over time to be the most efficient way of doing the work. Once on the job, people may discover little tricks that help them perform the task more efficiently, and these days, they are encouraged to pass this information on to management so that all workers performing that task can perform a bit more efficiently. In this way, over time, efficiency (and productivity) gradually increases. In fact, much of the economic boom in the late 20th and early 21st centuries was attributed to the dramatic increases in efficiency and productivity that permitted significant growth with little inflation. Even after the onset of the Great Recession beginning in late 2007, efficiency increased, but this time, employers discovered ways of producing as much or more with fewer and fewer employees, more automated technology, and robots, as well as greater use of unpaid prosumers as “working

consumers” (see Chapter 4). It remains to be seen how the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the resulting economic decline, will impact all of this.

For their part, consumers are generally interested in the most efficient ways to traverse the remaining shopping malls, get through a fast-food restaurant, wend their way around a theme park or a cruise ship, and arrive at the right website and find what they want. To make this easier, all of these settings have created systems that direct or even force consumers in the most efficient direction. They have done so, at least in part, because it is in their interest to do so. Consumers who are able to get to desired locations and to obtain goods and services more expeditiously are then able to buy more of those goods and services. They are therefore able to spend more money creating greater profits for the owners of the locations. This has coincided with technological advances (automation, robotization, artificial intelligence, the boom in the Internet) that have served to further reduce the need for human workers. The ongoing and coming loss of jobs associated with these changes, especially robotization, has been termed a “robocalypse.”⁵ This loss of paying jobs will enable further the role unpaid working consumers play in the con(pro)sumption process.

Although the fast-food restaurant certainly did not create the desire for efficiency or the methods used to increase it, it has helped turn efficiency into an increasingly universal reality. Many sectors of society have had to change in order to operate in the efficient manner demanded by those accustomed to, among other things, life in the drive-through lane of the fast-food restaurant. This is even more the case online where the level of efficiency far exceeds that found in brick-and-mortar sites. While many manifestations of efficiency can be traced directly to the influence of the fast-food restaurant, many more of them predated and helped shape the fast-food restaurant. Others postdate the founding of McDonald’s and are traceable to the coming of age of the Internet in the late 20th century. Nonetheless, they all contribute to the concern, even preoccupation, with efficiency—a central aspect of what is still best described by McDonaldization. The Internet has greatly enhanced that yearning for efficiency as people nearly effortlessly handle tasks—or more likely have them handled for them—without ever leaving their home. What could be more efficient than that?

Streamlining the Process

Efficiency will be discussed under three broad sub-dimensions: streamlining the process, simplifying the product, and putting consumers (as prosumers) to work.

The Fast-Food Industry: Speeding the Way From Secretion to Excretion

As pointed out in Chapter 1, Ray Kroc was obsessed with streamlining McDonald's operations in order to increase efficiency, not only for its workers but also for those who consume its food. For its customers, McDonald's has done "everything to speed the way from secretion to excretion."⁶ For example, the process of getting diners into and out of the fast-food restaurant has been streamlined in various ways. Parking lots adjacent to the restaurant offer readily available parking spots. It's a short walk to the counter, and although customers sometimes have to wait in line, they can usually quickly order, obtain, and pay for their food. The highly limited menu makes the diner's choice easy, in contrast to the many choices available in traditional restaurants. ("Satellite" and "express" fast-food restaurants in, for example, gasoline stations, are even more streamlined.) With the food obtained, it is but a few steps to a table and the beginning of the "dining experience." With little inducement to linger, diners generally eat quickly and then gather the leftover paper, cardboard, and plastic, discard them in a nearby trash receptacle, and return to their cars to drive to the next (often McDonaldized) activity.

Those in charge of fast-food restaurants discovered that the drive-through window made this whole process far more streamlined. Instead of requiring diners to undertake the "laborious" and "inefficient" process of parking their cars, walking to the counter, waiting in line, ordering, paying, carrying the food to the table, eating, and disposing of the remnants, the drive-through window offered diners the streamlined option of driving up to the window and driving off with the meal. If they wanted to be even more efficient, diners could begin to eat as they were driving away from the drive-through. Drive-through windows are also efficient for fast-food restaurants. As more and more people use drive-through windows, fewer parking spaces, tables, and employees are needed. Furthermore, consumers take their debris with them as they drive away. This reduces the need for employees to clean up after customers, for trash receptacles, and for workers to empty those receptacles periodically and dispose of all that trash.

Modern technology offers further advances in streamlining. Here is a description of some of the increased efficiency at a Taco Bell in California:

Inside, diners in a hurry for tacos and burritos can punch up their own orders on a touch-screen computer. Outside, drive-through customers see a video monitor flash back a list of their orders to avoid mistakes. They then can pay using a pneumatic-tube like those many banks employ for drive-up

transactions. Their food, and their change, is waiting for them when they pull forward to the pickup window. And if the line of cars grows too long, a Taco Bell worker will wade in with a wireless keyboard to take orders.⁷

Customers' and employees' use of touchscreens and handheld computers (at Taco Bell and others, including McDonald's) streamlines the ordering and paying for food, thereby reducing the need for counter people and cashiers.⁸

Further increasing efficiency is the growing use of credit and debit cards in fast-food restaurants. Fumbling for cash and dealing with change, especially increasingly useless and possibly virus-ridden coins, is far less efficient for consumers (and workers) than swiping their cards or inserting those with a built-in chip into a terminal at the checkout counter. Increasingly common are cards with radio-frequency identification, which read cards that are a short distance away and eliminate all that swiping, inserting, and physical contact. Recent advances increase efficiency further by eliminating the need for credit cards and allowing people to touch their cell phones to a credit card machine in order to complete a transaction. Venmo allows people to send money to and share costs with family and friends and to pay independent contractors.

Home Cooking (and Related Phenomena): "I Don't Have Time to Cook"

In the early 1950s, at the dawn of the era of the fast-food restaurant, the major alternative to fast food was the home-cooked meal, made mostly from ingredients purchased beforehand at various local stores and early supermarkets. This was clearly a more efficient way of preparing meals than earlier methods, such as hunting game and gathering fruits and vegetables. Cookbooks also made a major contribution to efficient home cooking. Instead of inventing a dish every time a meal was prepared, the cook could follow a recipe and thus more efficiently produce the dish.

Soon, the widespread availability of the home freezer led to the expanded production of frozen foods.⁹ The most efficient frozen food was (and for a few still is) the "TV dinner." Swanson created its first TV dinner, its meal-in-a-box, in 1953 and sold 25 million of them in the first year.¹⁰ The large freezer also permitted other efficiencies, such as making fewer trips to the market for enormous purchases rather than making many trips for smaller ones.

However, with the advent of microwavable meals,¹¹ frozen dinners began to seem comparatively inefficient. Microwaves cook faster than stovetops and other ovens, and people can prepare a wider array of foods in them. Perhaps

most important, microwave ovens spawned a number of food products (including microwavable soup, pizza, hamburgers, fried chicken, French fries, and popcorn) similar to the fare people had learned to love in fast-food restaurants. For example, one of the first microwavable foods was Hormel's array of biscuit-based breakfast sandwiches similar to the Egg McMuffin popularized by McDonald's.¹² As one executive put it, "Instead of having a breakfast sandwich at McDonald's, you can pick one up from the freezer of your grocery store."¹³ In some ways, "homemade" fast foods seem more efficient than the versions offered by fast-food restaurants. Instead of getting into the car, driving to the restaurant, and returning home, consumers need only pop their favorite foods into the microwave. However, the microwaved meal does require a prior trip to the market.

Supermarkets have long been loaded with other kinds of products that streamline "cooking" at home and eliminate trekking to a fast-food restaurant. Instead of starting from scratch, the cook can use prepackaged mixes to make "homemade" cakes, pies, pancakes, waffles, and many other foods. In fact, entire meals are now available right out of the box. Dinty Moore's Classic Bakes promise to be "hot and hearty, quick and convenient, ready in minutes." Dinty Moore also offers "Big Bowls" of, for example, beef stew, which can be microwaved and served in the bowls in which they are sold. The bowls are then to be tossed in the garbage, thereby eliminating the inefficiencies associated with washing and drying them.

An increasingly important alternative is the fully cooked meal consumers may now buy at the supermarket. People can simply stop on the way home and purchase main courses, sides, and even entire meals, which they "prepare" by unpacking the food and perhaps reheating it—no actual cooking required.

The meal-kit delivery business involves a fascinating new example of McDonaldized meals, albeit ones that *do* require cooking. The industry leader is Blue Apron, but there are others such as Hello Fresh and Marley Spoon. Amazon entered the online meal-kit business in mid-2017 with the slogan, "We do the prep. You be the chef."¹⁴ The enterprises differ slightly, but the main point from the perspective of McDonaldization is that they provide consumers with the recipes and all of the ingredients needed for several meals a week; no trips to the supermarket required. Blue Apron's customers often receive ingredients (e.g., fairy tale eggplant, pink lemon) not typically found in supermarkets. However, the production of those unique ingredients, as well as the rest of Blue Apron's processes, is highly McDonaldized. Once consumers receive their kits, they become prosumers doing the work involved in producing the meal—chopping, stirring, cooking the provided ingredients—as well as cleaning up afterwards.¹⁵ Nevertheless, one of the

company's owners claims: "The food almost cooks itself."¹⁶ One of Blue Apron's early competitors, Munchery (now out of business) went much further in this direction and provided meals that only required "cooking" in the microwave.

Blue Apron has basically helped to rationalize everything from farm production, to the delivery of the kit, to the cooking of the meal. It increases predictability by matching the supply of various ingredients to the expected customer demand. Long before ingredients are shipped to Blue Apron's customers, the company creates its "shopping lists," and farmers are organized to plant and produce the various ingredients, including such exotica as those fairy tale eggplants. This is made efficient by the fact that farmers produce only as much as Blue Apron projects it will need; there is no excess in the crops. This requires a high degree of control, coordination, and organization because plans for what a farm will produce are laid a year or more before the products are needed for the kits to be delivered to the customers. However, adjustments are made along the way; there is flexibility in case, for example, a given crop fails. There is still much non-McDonaldized hand-cutting and packaging at Blue Apron's fulfillment centers, but the company is moving in the direction of increased automation. The supply chain is so highly organized that it is likely that ingredients remain in one of the centers for only a few hours before they are combined, boxed, and sent out for next-day delivery.

In terms of the meals themselves, they are highly calculable in the sense that consumers receive the precise amounts of each ingredient needed for a given recipe. However, each ingredient is packaged separately, thereby creating a great deal of waste. Online consumers order the meals they want (out of a limited set of options), and the ingredients for those meals arrive each week on their doorsteps. The beauty of the Blue Apron system is that consumers believe that they have been creative in cooking their meals, sometimes with unique ingredients, but everything involved has been highly McDonaldized. As one chef put it, "To me, meal kits sound like cheating, not cooking."¹⁷ Everything is disenchanting, especially quantified. Lost is the "heart, and joy, of cooking."¹⁸ Blue Apron customers can feel that they are rejecting McDonaldization while remaining safely within the constraints of a highly McDonaldized, farm-to-table, system.

The McDonaldization of food preparation and consumption closely relates to the booming diet industry. For example, eating too much fast food tends to lead to obesity. Losing weight is normally difficult and time-consuming, but diet books promise to make it quicker and easier. The preparation of low-calorie food has thus also been streamlined. Instead of cooking diet foods from scratch, dieters may purchase an array of prepared diet foods in frozen or microwavable

form—for example, from Weight Watchers. Nutrisystem sells dieters, at substantial cost, streamlined and prepackaged freeze-dried food. Those who do not wish to go through the inefficient process of eating these diet meals can consume products such as diet shakes and bars (SlimFast, for example) in a matter of seconds. (For those who wish to gain weight and muscle, there is Boost—a high-protein, high-calorie drink.) Dieters seeking even greater efficiency can turn to various pills that expedite weight loss—the now-banned “fen-phen” and the still available (by prescription) Xenical (Orlistat). The same drug can be obtained even more efficiently over-the-counter under the name Alli. Further streamlining radical weight loss is cosmetic surgery to quickly drop pounds of fat. Even more radical and invasive is gastric bypass surgery.

There are efficiencies in dieting outside the home as well. There are, for example, brick-and-mortar diet centers such as Jenny Craig¹⁹ and Weight Watchers.²⁰ In many cases, streamlined online consultations have replaced the more time-consuming ones that require trips to brick-and-mortar diet centers. Beyond online consultations, there are now even a large number of apps (e.g., Noom) available on smartphones dealing with weight loss and health. They can be accessed easily, and they make obtaining information on how to lose weight even more efficient.

Shopping: Creating Ever More Efficient Selling Machines

Shopping for all kinds of goods and services, not just food, has also been streamlined. The now declining department store was obviously a more efficient place in which to shop than a series of specialty shops dispersed throughout neighborhoods, cities, and suburbs. In its day, the shopping mall streamlined shopping by bringing a wide range of department stores and specialty shops to one location and under one roof.²¹ It was cost-efficient for retailers because the “mall synergy” created by a number of shops and department stores in close proximity to one another brought in throngs of people. And it streamlined consumption for consumers because, in one stop, they could visit numerous shops and stores, have lunch at a “food court” (likely populated by many fast-food chains), see a movie, have a drink, and, perhaps, go to an exercise or diet center.

While malls may still seem streamlined and appear to offer various efficiencies, they pale in comparison to those available on online sites such as Amazon. This is a major reason for the decline of malls, as well as of the department stores and chains that are often found in them.

Consumers who do not feel that they have the time to visit the mall are able to shop from the comfort of their homes through catalogs (such as IKEA's)—increasingly available and accessed online.²² Another alternative to visiting the mall is home television shopping. The efficiency of shopping via catalogs, on TV, and especially online is increased even further by express package delivery systems, overnight or even same day, from FedEx, UPS, and from Amazon.

The drive for shopping efficiency did not end with the malls. 7-Eleven and its clones (for example, Circle K, ampm, and Wawa) have become drive-up, if not drive-through, minimarkets. Efficiency is further increased for consumers because these stores almost always also offer gasoline pumps out front and only a few steps away. For those customers who need only a few items, pulling up to a highly streamlined 7-Eleven (almost 70,000 locations worldwide)²³ is far more efficient (albeit more costly) than running into a supermarket. Shoppers have no need to park in a large lot, obtain a cart, wheel it through myriad aisles in search of needed items, wait in line at checkout, and then tote purchases back to a sometimes distant car. At 7-Eleven, they can park right in front and quickly find what they need. Like the fast-food restaurant, which offers a highly circumscribed menu, 7-Eleven has sought to fill its shops with a limited array of commonly sought goods: bread, milk, cigarettes, aspirin, even videos, and self-serve items, such as hot coffee, hot dogs, hoagies, microwaved sandwiches, cold soda, and Slurpees. 7-Eleven's efficiency stems from the fact that ordinarily it sells only one brand of a highly limited number of items.

For greater selection, consumers must go to the relatively inefficient supermarket. Of course, supermarkets have sought to streamline shopping for consumers who might otherwise frequent convenience stores by automated self-checkout lanes (see below) and 10-to-15-item-limit, no-checks-accepted, lines. Even more efficient is the use of a delivery service, such as Instacart, which works with paid people to do the supermarket shopping for consumers.

Higher Education: Multitasking in McUniversity

In the contemporary rationalized university²⁴ (now often dubbed “McUniversity”),²⁵ students (the consumers in a university) are increasingly able to be more efficient *in* class by using their laptops and smartphones to multitask in various ways. This can be educationally beneficial when it involves doing relevant Google searches during a lecture, but it can have adverse effects when students are playing games online, writing on someone's Facebook wall, or texting on their smartphones. Also worth noting is RateMyProfessors.com, where students can efficiently evaluate their professors as well as find such ratings by other students.

Wikipedia has become an efficient source of information for both professors and students. There was a time when most professors were critical of the use of Wikipedia, but more and more have come to embrace it for their students; they likely also now use it themselves.

One other academic efficiency worth noting is the ability of students to purchase already completed term papers online. A variety of websites²⁶ now promise to deliver original, customized research papers on any topic for a “low, low fee” of, say, \$12.99 per page. You could (although it is not advised) purchase a 10-page paper on McDonaldization on one website for less than \$130.²⁷ Websites even have quick service and express delivery available (\$14.99 per page if you need the paper in 48 hours) for those students who have put off academic dishonesty to the last moment. Beware, however, for there are also other websites (e.g., Turnitin.com) that help professors detect plagiarism, thereby combating student gains in efficiency through plagiarism with an efficient system to detect it.²⁸

Health Care: Docs-in-a-Box

It might be assumed that modern medicine and its consumers—the patients—are immune to the drive for efficiency and invulnerable to rationalization more generally. However, medicine has been McDonaldized.

Perhaps the best example of the streamlining of visits to medical practices in the United States is the growth of walk-in/walk-out surgical or emergency centers. “McDoctors,” or “docs-in-a-box,” serve patients who want highly efficient medical care. Each center is streamlined to handle with great dispatch a limited number of minor problems. Although stitching a patient with a minor laceration cannot be done as efficiently as serving a customer a hamburger, many of the same principles apply. It is more streamlined for the patient to walk into a neighborhood McDoctors without an appointment than it is to make an appointment with a regular physician, perhaps travel great distances to her office, and to wait, sometimes quite a long time, until the patient can be seen. For a minor emergency, such as a slight laceration, using a McDoctor’s office is a far more streamlined process than the cumbersome process of working one’s way through a large hospital’s emergency room. Hospitals are set up to handle serious problems for which efficiency is not (yet) the norm, although many hospitals employ specialized emergency room physicians and teams of medical personnel in order to further streamline emergency care. Docs-in-a-box are also more efficient than private doctors’ offices because they are not structured to permit the kind of personal (and therefore inefficient) attention patients expect (but often do not get) from their private physicians; in other words, they streamline the doctor–patient relationship.

“Minute clinics” are increasingly found in pharmacies (e.g., CVS, which has over a thousand of them) and even in supermarkets, discounters, and big-box stores (e.g., Target). Nurse practitioners and physician assistants may staff these and offer streamlined help in the case of minor medical matters. It has become increasingly common to get shots (for flu, etc.) in a neighborhood pharmacy or supermarket (perhaps offered adjacent to the meat department and by a butcher—just kidding!).

Entertainment: Moving People (and Trash) Efficiently

Many people no longer deem it efficient to trek to their local theater to see a movie. For a time, DVDs, and the stores that rented them, boomed. Blockbuster, at one time the largest video rental firm in the United States, considered “itself the McDonald’s of the video business.”²⁹ However, Blockbuster went bankrupt in late 2010, mainly because it was inefficient in comparison to a number of newer, more streamlined, alternatives.

One example is the video rental machine. Redbox—once owned by McDonald’s—is the major player in this area. However, this is far less popular (and efficient) than streaming movies, for a fee, from Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, Hulu, Disney, and others. Then there are the on-demand and pay-per-view movies offered by many cable companies. Offerings from these providers can be viewed at home as well as on a variety of mobile devices. DVRs permit customers to record their favorite shows while they are watching something else or to rewind or pause live television. Then there are the satellite networks that streamline the process of watching football games by allowing viewers to watch several football games at once. With “NFL RedZone,” viewers can watch all games on a given day when the ball is within the opponent’s 20-yard line. Thus, a football game is streamlined by eliminating all the “unnecessary” action between the 20-yard lines; in other words, it is unnecessary to watch 60% of the football field, of the game, and of the action that takes place there.

Another sort of efficiency in the entertainment world is the system for moving people at modern amusement parks, particularly Disneyland and Disney World.³⁰ A series of roads filters thousands of cars each day into the appropriate parking lots. Jitneys whisk visitors to the gates of the park. Once in the park, they find themselves in a vast line of people on what is, in effect, a huge conveyor belt that leads them from one ride or attraction to another. Once visitors actually reach an attraction, conveyances such as cars, boats, submarines, planes, rockets, or moving walkways move them rapidly through, into, and out of the attraction.

Disney World has been victimized by its own success: Even its highly efficient systems cannot handle the hordes that descended (at least before the pandemic) on the park at the height of the tourist season. Since 1999, Disney has sought to deal with this problem with its even more streamlined FASTPASS system that allows a visitor to arrange a specific time to be at a given attraction and to enter via a separate and much faster-moving FASTPASS line. Of course, there are limits on the number of FASTPASSes that can be issued. It would be self-defeating if every visitor used a FASTPASS for every trip to every attraction. There are still long lines at Disney resorts; even the FASTPASS lines may not be so fast. In 2014, in an effort to further increase efficiency and reduce wait times, Disney introduced the still more streamlined FASTPASS+ system, which allows visitors to reserve times in advance for up to three attractions per day.³¹

The movement of people is not the only thing Disney World has streamlined.³² The throngs of visitors who frequent such amusement parks eat a great deal (mostly fast food, especially finger foods) and therefore generate an enormous amount of trash. If Disney World emptied trash receptacles only at the end of each day, the barrels would be overflowing most of the time. To prevent this eyesore (and it must be prevented since order and cleanliness—some would say sterility—are key components of the McDonaldized world in general and Disney World in particular), hordes of employees constantly sweep, collect, and empty trash. To take a specific example, a group of cleaners brings up the rear in the nightly Disney parade. They almost instantly dispose of whatever trash and animal droppings have been left behind. Within a few minutes, they have eliminated virtually all signs of a parade. Disney World also employs an elaborate system of underground tubes. Garbage receptacles are emptied into this system, which whisks the trash away at about 60 miles per hour to a central trash-disposal plant far from the view of visitors. Disney World is thus a “magic kingdom” in more ways than one. Here is the way one observer compares another of the modern, highly rational amusement parks—Busch Gardens—to ancestors such as county fairs and Coney Island: “Gone is the dusty midway. . . . In its place is a vast, self-contained environment . . . endowed with the kind of *efficiency* beyond the reach of most cities.”³³

Internet Consumption Sites and Streamlining

The Internet (as well as the augmented reality it creates with brick-and-mortar consumption sites) is clearly the most important factor in greatly increased efficiency in consumption. As we saw in Chapter 1, Amazon, via Amazon Go and its physical bookstores, is making brick-and-mortar shopping more efficient in a