

THE GLOBALIZATION OF NOTHING

by George Ritzer

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Much has been said and written about globalization. Nevertheless, the topic remains inexhaustible and equally challenging for the general public and the academic world. Taking up the challenge entailed by such a vast theme, renowned contemporary sociologist George Ritzer proposes to readers the book entitled *The Globalization of Nothing*, whose Romanian edition was published by Editura Humanitas, Bucharest, 2010.

Writing about *globalization*, particularly on the impact of globalization on economic, social, cultural and political theories, is not a straightforward task, in view of the complexity inherent in the term itself.

Currently, specialist literature on globalization is expanding as a result of research that reaches out to the fields of economics, political sciences, international relations, anthropology and sociology. It is the approaches of the latter that George Ritzer uses as foundation of his analysis.

Accordingly, in the first chapter, he provides an overview of globalization and theories of globalization, detailing the central role of the concept of *glocalization* (“interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas”) in the reflection on globalization. The author’s aim was to introduce a new concept, *grobalization* (“the imperialistic ambitions of nations and organizations to impose themselves in various geographic areas. The main interest of the entities involved in grobalization is in seeing their power, influence and in many cases profits grow throughout the world”) and of the *central driving forces* (Americanization, McDonalidization and Capitalism), which facilitate a more accurate understanding of aspects overlooked by glocalization and of the overall process of globalization.

For most scholars of globalization and of its cultural elements in particular, the conflict in this field, if indeed there is one, arises between the global and the local. However, this book contends that the primary conflict is between *grobalization* and *glocalization*. The author’s assertion is supported by at least two arguments: on the one hand, globalization is a process which “involves transplanetary processes” requiring certain clarifications (such as the distinction between grobalization and glocalization) and, as such, is not in part of the conflict; on the other hand, nowadays in our communities, it is increasingly harder to find something that has not been affected by globalization. For an increasing number of regions of the world, the alternative seems to consist in “the choice between that

which is inherently and deeply globalized – globalization - and that in which the global and vestiges of the local intermingle -glocalization”.

In chapter two, George Ritzer presents a new pair of concepts, “*something and nothing*”, reflecting the primary aim of the book, which is to provide a *new conceptualization and a new theory of globalization*. *Nothing* is a “cornucopia of increasingly affordable things”, defined as “a social form that is generally centrally conceived and comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content”. The author takes a critical look at nothing, as signified by credit cards, their marketing, debt generated by credit cards and at the world of hyper-consumption. These defining features of nothing cause the author to associate it with the “modern mass production era”. *Something* is “a social form that is generally indigenously conceived, controlled”. While credit card loans are a largely empty forms through which lines of credit are extended to consumers, “a line of credit negotiated personally between banker and customer is the parallel within the realm of *something*”.

Indeed, chapters II-IV provide a new reflection on consumer culture, seeking to develop certain conceptual tools and approaches that may facilitate an accurate understanding into the two “social constructs”, i.e. *nothing* and *something*, which cannot exist independently of each other and may furthermore provide an insight into the *something-nothing continuum* and its *dimensions* (in terms of complexity, spatiality, temporality, human and magical dimension). In other words, the status of “nothing” and “something” is not inherent to any place, thing, service or person.

A further area of focus of the work is consumption, especially the globalization of consumer culture, yet the author provides extensive and noteworthy instances of production, for instance in the field of popular culture, which has come to be mass produced and distributed throughout the world. As a result, a phenomenon that used to be *something* is transformed into *nothing* (e.g. the machine-made and painted matryoshka dolls retain little resemblance to the popular art from which they derive).

Actually, Ritzer demonstrates, in chapter V, the elective affinity of globalization with the proliferation of *nothing* (every Disney theme park is a non-place, replete with non-things and non-people; so are the malls and retail chains, etc.), whereas glocalization is intimately tied with *something*, resisting, at least in part, the spread of *nothing* (handmade pottery, weaving and the craftspeople who produce them and give demonstrations to tourists).

Chapters VII and VIII tackle further aspects (creative destruction in consumption, brand communities, and loss despite *monumental abundance*) and targets potential solutions to the issues identified in the book. This loss amidst monumental abundance occurs even as countries are overwhelmed by the unprecedented affordability of non-places, non-things, non-services and non-people. In other words, “we could be said to be dying of thirst even though we are

increasingly surrounded by drinkable water”. It appears that the *new age* we live in today needs “new theories” and “new diagnoses of its defining problems”.

The Globalization of Nothing encourages us to explore new paths. It is equally relevant for sociologists, anthropologists, economists or any other researchers of socio-economic phenomena. Replete with ideas yet devoid of superfluous digressions, it is one of those books, which, if ignored, would leave behind a tremendous void.