

A Consuming Passion: An Interview with George Ritzer

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George Ritzer is Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. Ritzer was co-founding editor of *Journal of Consumer Society* with Don Slater. In addition to his considerable work in the area of the sociology of consumption, Ritzer is especially known for *Metatheorizing in Sociology* (1991), *The McDonaldization of Society* (1993), *The Globalization of Nothing* (2004), and a truly scandalous number of additional publications in social theory and sociology generally.

D&D: We want to ask you first a question about ecological issues. It very much appears that the earth's glaciers, not to mention its polar icecaps, are measurably receding as a result of human-caused global warming. While the adult opinion leaders are supposed to read *Time*, the kids are supposed to watch *Ice Age: The Meltdown* and become cautiously introduced to the idea of planetary ecological catastrophe. What role should sociologists of consumption and consumer society play in the response to this unprecedented ecological problem, not to mention in response to its packaging as another form of consumption?

Ritzer: I happened to see *Ice Age II*. I took my grandson to see it. Certainly the message is clear. It is, for children, a pretty powerful depiction of global warming. A truthful response is that people interested in ecology have often criticized me for not dealing much with the ecological implications of consumption. You know, I think it's another one of those issues that should be done, must be done, but I'm not an ecologist. While I'm interested in it from a personal and social point of view, from a scholarly point of view it's not one of my concerns. I don't think there is any question that there is a very direct linkage between consumption and global warming, you know in terms of air conditioning and chlorofluorocarbon and...

D&D: The ozone.

Ritzer: The ozone, right, and... CO2. Obviously, I have just demonstrated how weak my... (everyone laughs).

D&D: Do you think sociologists of consumption or consumer society ought to make ecological issues a more significant part of their agenda?

¹ The interviewers would like to thank Shannon Williams of the Department of Sociology at the University of Tennessee for his many hours of meticulous work transcribing four hours of recorded conversation.

Ritzer: I think sociologists of consumption, all sociologists, should be guided by what it is that bothers them in the pit of their stomachs. I think that there are going to be, from the one side, ecologists who are going to approach consumption because of the profound sense of that's where the problem lies, and I think sociologists of consumption are going to come to that. But I don't think that one should dictate this kind of thing. I think different people come to different questions because of what it is that animates them, and I think the best work comes from that kind of direction. I don't think it comes from a call to sociologists of consumption to deal more with ecological issues. I think that kind of concern will flow naturally as the ecological problems grow and as sociologists of consumption are drawn more to the linkage between consumption and those problems.

D&D: Your point is well-taken, but Max Weber (someone we know you like pretty well) speculated over one hundred years ago that the production system would churn 'until the last fossilized coal is burnt.' Could the same be said of consumption, that it's going to continue until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt?

Ritzer: Absolutely. I think that we are going to go on until we are literally forced to cut back. I just read in the paper yesterday that the gasoline prices have now gone over \$3.00 a gallon, and there is no evidence that Americans have cut back on their driving. There are certainly limit points involved, but nobody knows exactly what they are in terms of dollars, costs of gasoline, or ecological damage of one kind or another. But there are definitely points which will force cutbacks in consumption, but it's not going to happen until, literally, people are forced to do it. All of the forces of the culture industry continue to portray consumer toys as so attractive and desirable. We are so brilliant at manufacturing new and shiny versions of all of these things and luring people into them. It has become so much a focus of so many people's lives and this desire to acquire them is so great that it's not going to be contained until there are ecological limits or other kinds of limits that just stop us cold in our tracks.

I think you are beginning to see some greater awareness now, limits in potential oil reserves and the global warming issue, which I think... During my entire lifetime we have heard about these issues: 'we ought to find alternative fuels,' 'we ought to have better mass transportation,' 'we ought to do all sorts of things to cutback on consumption of automobiles and gasoline,' but nobody has ever done anything about it. Crises pass and people go on consuming as much as they were before or more. Going back to the oil crisis of the early '70s and then to have predicted that twenty-five years later we would have this tremendous boom in SUVs, people driving these huge behemoths of automobiles. I can't tell you how many times (and Sue [Ritzer's spouse] gets mad at me) I scream at Cadillac Escalade drivers. Recently we were in Florida and the only car that they had to rent us was an SUV. That's the first time I've ever driven an SUV. I drove it for one day. I don't get it. I don't understand why people need it, other than the fact that you are more likely to kill somebody than they are to kill you. It's just overkill.

D&D: On a societal level of analysis, overkill sounds just like the conclusion reached by those who view systematic over-consumption as a function of systematic over-production. Are you a Keynesian Marxist in this sense?

Ritzer: Well, I mean it's certainly an accurate statement, but I tend not to approach it in that way because I oppose the productivist bias in sociology and in the social sciences generally. So, in Marxian theory, as you note, there is a tendency to see consumption and over-consumption as driven by production and over-production. Therefore, consumption becomes a secondary phenomenon, which is determined by the production function, which is where Marx and the whole Marxian logic would lead you. While I'm sympathetic to that point of view, much of what I have written in the last decade and a half has to do with the fact that this productivist bias leads us to obscure the great significance of consumption in its own right, that we need to focus more attention on consumption and not just on consumption as derivative of production. There's a kind of natural tendency --not just in Marxian theory, but in society in general-- to prioritize issues of production. My whole view is that it doesn't make sense for this whole prioritization to be taking place because in the day-to-day world what more and more people are doing, especially in the developed countries, is prioritizing consumption.

D&D: Is the sociology of consumption itself, then, a form of resistance to the incredible power of the productive system?

Ritzer: Well, I think that the widespread view in the sociology of consumption is to see the consumer as hero. The consumer is independent, a decision maker, is expressing love in shopping, is resisting the capitalist system through these acts of consumption, and so forth. That's another one of the things that I write against and that troubles me, because from my point of view... I mean this comes down to the famous issue of people supposedly expressing resistance by buying jeans and then cutting holes in them and 'aren't they heroic in doing that,' and my line has always been, 'Yeah, but in the end they're buying the jeans.' The capitalist doesn't care. This is largely a romanticization on the part of many sociologists who look at the process of consumption.

On the one hand, people are critical to the production system. The entire global capitalist system is dependent on hyper-consumption and also the exportation of hyper-consumption to the rest of the world. From my point of view, one could argue that it is more and more consumption that is driving the production system than it is production that is driving consumption. The best example of that is the fact that the largest corporation in the United States is now Wal-Mart. It's not General Motors. It's not any of the giant production companies. It's a company that is oriented toward consumption, and which is dictating to producers around the world how much to produce, how to produce it, and how much they're going to pay for it.

So, all of these things come together in terms of this issue of prioritizing consumption. I guess if there's one thing that animates all of this, it's the view that I see increasingly around me that, through consumption, one can create a meaningful and satisfying life, and if there's anything I'm critical of, it is that idea. I just find it very difficult to believe that consumption is going to provide people with the kind of life and gratification that they're interested in, the same sort of life and gratification that, for some, historically, the experience of work used to provide. What I often think of is Collin Campbell's

contribution to the analysis of consumption. He focuses on the notion of “self-illusory hedonism,” which I think describes most consumers. That is, for Campbell, and I agree, most consumers are hedonistic. They think that what they are going to consume is a sort of *This is it!* *This* is going to be tremendously satisfying. They find, of course, that it’s not, but that does not seem to prevent them from saying, ‘Ok, that didn’t do it, but *this* will do it!’ So the focus shifts to that next thing, which once achieved proves to be similarly dissatisfying, and then on we go in this cycle of self-illusory hedonism. I think above anything else, it is this problem, which I see around me all of the time, that’s the overwhelming concern.

D&D: Do any policy prescriptions flow from your analysis of consumption? Would you favor, for example, a consumption tax?

Ritzer: I think that something like a consumption tax, if it was great enough and painful enough, would lead to a cutback in consumption. But no politician in their right mind is going to institute such a thing, given the importance of consumption in our society. I don’t think that anybody who does has any chance of being elected again. Since all politicians are about getting elected, they’re not going undertake such a thing. It seems as if the only things that ever happen in that realm are things that are forced on us, forced on us as citizens, forced on the government. But to take proactive stances is not a strength of ours, as a people or a government.

D&D: Herbert Marcuse use to tell his students, either there will be a catastrophe or things will get worse. Do you agree?

Ritzer: Well, look, many people think things are getting *better*, many people, that is, in the United States or the developed world generally. They have more and more toys; they have bigger and bigger homes; they are more able to afford McMansions. There was an article in the paper this weekend about the new taste for these enormous industrial-size kitchens. You can have a double-sized refrigerator, a double-sized stove, and so forth. So, for those who can afford it, there’s ever bigger and newer toys out there. I think that this group of Americans, the middle and upper classes in the United States, think things are better than ever. There are all of these warning signs on the horizon, but things are better than ever.

So, there is this sort of duality between people’s perceptions of what’s going on and the structural realities of what’s going on. The structural reality involves things like global warming, other ecological changes, and more importantly, I think, they involve a global redistribution of the wealth. I think what we are seeing now is that the incredible period of American affluence compared to the rest of the world is eroding, and a lot of that wealth is now being spread throughout much of the world, especially to China and India. Those parts of the world are going to grow wealthier and we are going to grow less affluent. I think that’s going to be a kind of corrective.

Then again, you look at the Delphi workers who are going from, what is it, \$28 an hour to \$8 an hour. I could be wrong about the particular details (editorial note: in more recent

bankruptcy proceedings, Delphi has since proposed \$16 per hour as a wage ceiling), but they're expecting a tremendous decline in their hourly wage, and clearly they're going to be much smaller players in the world of consumption as a result of that. More generally, if I look at the future of the United States, the American economy, American consumption relative to the rest of the world, I think we are going to move closer to other parts of the world. In one sense, that is to be welcomed, because we have enjoyed a disproportionate size of the world's wealth. On the other hand, from the point of view of my arguments in *The Globalization of Nothing*, I think it means that massive numbers of middle class Chinese people are going to be rushing to purchase all of these shiny forms of nothingness. I'm not sure that I answered your question, but I can't remember what the question was!

D&D: No worries. You mention *The Globalization of Nothing*, which we wanted to talk about anyhow. We understand it is forthcoming in a second edition.

Ritzer: Yeah, I'm just finishing up. It has actually turned out to be a major revision of the book. I think that the book, in its first edition, ended up being two books, one about globalization and another about 'nothing.' My intention was to write a book about the *globalization* of nothing, but the balance was off. I've tried to be much clearer that the book is about globalization, how it fits into globalization studies, what its contribution is to globalization studies. I've added a number of new chapters and sections and restructured the book so the balance is much more in the direction of globalization. The message is clearer. I've also tried to be much stronger about the idea that people have to leave behind their preconceptions about what 'nothing' and 'something' means and buy into this new kind of perspective. I don't know - it's funny, when you tear something apart like that and put it back together again, I'm a little uneasy about how well it holds together. I'm uneasy about taking apart an argument that I have carefully constructed and putting it together again so quickly and so soon. So, we'll see.

D&D: Switching gears a bit, would you consider Jean Baudrillard the most important theorist in consumer society or is there another?

Ritzer: Yes, I think that's right. That 1970 book on consumer society was really the first strong systematic theoretical statement about consumer society.

D&D: We've read a few recent works in which you seem to explore Baudrillardian postmodern theory to the point of adopting its language and attitude. At this point in your career, do you see yourself perhaps wanting to explore this dimension of postmodern theory, where you just don't write about it, you practice it?

Ritzer: No, because I'm not just interested in rationality for academic reasons. I'm also, frankly, a highly rational, sequential kind of thinker. It's very hard for me to be off-the-wall in terms of my own thinking. I might be better off to do that, but I find it very difficult to do. I think Zygmunt Bauman's distinction between postmodern sociology and sociology of postmodernity works for me in the sense that I'm not apt to do a postmodern sociology but I am apt to do a sociology that's a rational sociology of the postmodern era.

D&D: Speaking of the distinction between modern and postmodern eras, this past week saw the passing of both Jane Jacobs and John Kenneth Galbraith, arguably the quintessential theorists of modern urban life built around ‘something’ (as opposed to ‘nothing’) on the one hand and society based on the emptiness of affluence on the other. Do you see Jacobs and Galbraith as important precursors to theorizing the globalization of nothing?

Ritzer: That’s a good question. I have previously dealt with Galbraith and his notion of the affluent society. The question puts in mind of building highways, Robert Moses, the era in which the goal was to rationalize New York, rationalize the movement of people in New York as much as possible. So, in that sentiment, in Jacob’s and in Galbraith’s work, there are certainly relationships with mine, but neither has been particularly important in my own thinking.

D&D: We noticed a bumper sticker on your office door at the University of Maryland that says, “Question Consumption.” That’s the medium, what’s the message?

Ritzer: Well, I think we live in a society in which, increasingly, the center of people’s lives is consumption. I think we need to question that, question the degree of which we are really going to gain gratification from that. Just a little anecdote: relatives were here this weekend, and so my wife says, “Where do you want to go?” They said, “We want to go to the mall.” I say, “What! Why do you want to come to Washington to go to the mall? What do you think you’re going to find in a Washington shopping mall?” I said, “It’s nothing!” And she says, “They want to go to the shopping mall.” So, my wife takes them to the mall and she calls me a half hour later and says, “I got to get out of here. I don’t get it. I don’t understand what it is that people are doing here.” I mean, ‘I want to travel to Washington from New York so I can go to a Washington mall!?’ Please.

So, I don’t know. The main thrust of my work in this whole line is to say, ‘We’ve gone from a society in which our central core was work to a society in which our central core is consumption.’ To me, the question is, ‘Can consumption really give you the kind of gratifications that at least some people (I mean, I understand it’s class related) got from their work?’ As you can hear from all of this, to me, the core of my life is my work and my family, that’s about it. I get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from my work. But what I can’t understand is how people get the kind of satisfaction that I get from my work by going to the mall, buying another blouse or shirt. I don’t get it. I think it’s... You know, all the literature indicates that you end up being dissatisfied with whatever you buy. It doesn’t really satisfy you; it’s sort of an endless spiral of dissatisfaction.

D&D: Because it’s nothing.

Ritzer: Because it’s nothing and because, ultimately, I don’t think most people are going to find meaning in their most recent acquisition. To me, that’s not where meaning comes from. But again, maybe that’s just another... sort of like my bias having grown up in

New York City. Maybe that's just another bias of mine that relates to my life. But you know, I think we all write from our core, and there are certain core things from which I write. Whether or not I do good sociology is not the point. The point is, sociology has to come from that kind of passion.

D&D: Do you worry that people don't have such a core? The same way that consumption is the "center" of their life; what if they don't have a center?

Ritzer: Yeah, I think that's right.

D&D: One gets the sense that there will be nothing left. There will be no minds, no substantive judgment, no persons with character that can develop through experience and conflict and the externalization that comes from writing or any kind of work, a sense that down the road there will be nothing left?

Ritzer: As you said that, what popped into my head was how often that theme has animated me in the sense that the workers at McDonalds, their work is so denuded that there is nothing left. The people in the credit card industry who do the telemarketing, it's all scripted; there's nothing there, the malls. In a way, that is my fear. We're rushing headlong to empty things.

Maybe that's a good way of talking about the connection between outsourcing, which I'm working on currently, and my previous work. We're sort of rushing headlong to empty things, and then we're going to look at those empty things and say, 'well ok, what's left?' It's like these two guys in one of my favorite cartoons, who are looking at an empty factory and wondering what's left to outsource. You know, what have we done? To what end have we emptied all of it out? I think this kind of hollowing out, this emptying out of being... You know, everybody talks about how busy they are, they can't do this, they can't do that. I hear it from students and I hear it from adults. We're so busy we have no time for this, we have no time for that. Well, what are we doing? There's this simultaneous paradox of we're so busy, but we've hollowed out all of the things that traditionally have made us busy, and I'm not sure that what we put in its place is going to provide the gratifications that the things we taken away did.

D&D: Kafka's last words *The Trial* are "Like a dog," which K says as he's being killed for what appears to be nothing.

Ritzer: Yeah, well Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle* are so Weberian in their imagery. Kafka was pulled to images of empty structures, which characterizes the kind of despair that you find in those novels.

D&D: This is one thing your readers may not know. You feel this way but it doesn't typically show through in your writing. In Adorno, for example, it's a straight shot: he feels that way; he writes that way; he is that way. But you write in a way that engages people. There's a humor to it. It's doubtful that most readers understand how depressive you are, just how... You know?

Ritzer: Well, there's your mission! After I'm dead you two can say, 'he may have seemed like a jovial character, but he really was depressive and depressing!' You know, in all seriousness, humor is very important. The editors for *The Globalization of Nothing* had changed some of my headings in the revision process. They took the humor out and I'm going to tell them to put it back.

D&D: Meet the nullities?

Ritzer: Exactly! That's what they took out! It was changed it to just 'the nullities.' I'm sure they're going to say that nobody is going to remember *Meet The Fockers* or *Meet The Parents* or wherever I got it from. But, it's true, I find all sorts of developments around me to be very depressing. Yet, I never lose my sense of humor about it, unless it's talking in this way.

D&D: It's reminds us of Hunter S. Thompson. He had the humor that comes from rage and anger, but then again, you don't dabble in psychedelic drugs.

Ritzer: Not lately. I think it's probably a bit of a weakness of mine. Sometimes I'm more interested in a laugh than making a profound point.

D&D: Maybe Woody Allen, then, is the apt allusion?

Ritzer: Woody Allen is another one of my idols, especially the early Woody Allen. I resonate with a lot of the pop culture. I don't know if you saw the *Sopranos* Sunday night, but the *Sopranos* was about *McDonaldization*. It was hysterical. A few gangsters demand kickbacks from all of the shopkeepers in the neighborhood. So they're saying, 'You pay us and nothing will happen to you,' which is to say, 'If you don't pay us, we're going to wreck your store.' So, they walk into the Starbucks (it's clearly a Starbucks), and they tell the manager that he has to kick back to them. The manager says, 'Look, I can't kickback to you. Starbucks in Seattle counts every coffee bean. I have no extra money to kickback to you.' So, they're left with nothing to do in response. They walk outside and say, "God, the neighborhood is going downhill."

Yeah, there are a lot of pop culture icons for me. My kids say that I should watch more of *The Simpsons* and more of *South Park*, but I haven't quite brought myself to that. Jerry Seinfeld has a documentary called *The Comedian*, which is about going back out on the road to do stand-up comedy and how difficult it is, how trying it is, how depressing it is. I resonate with this kind of struggle between depression and humor. One of my real heroes, Larry David, was the creator of *Seinfeld* and the model for the character George Costanza. Larry David is me: New York Jew, with this kind of humor but depressive. I think it fits with Woody Allen as well. There's a kind of ethnic New York combination of depression and humor, cynicism and sarcasm, which just go together.

D&D: What do you see as your major contributions to the study of, especially the sociology of, consumption?

I think it is the systematic effort in all my work to bring social theory to bear on consumption. I seek to bring social theory up-to-date and to develop it further where possible. I simultaneously seek to gain new insights into the realm of consumption.

In the *McDonaldization of Society* my primary resource was Weber and his theory rationalization. The main theoretical contribution here is to shift the paradigm of the process from the bureaucracy to the fast food restaurant and to extend rationalization from the domain of production-work to consumption; to show how rationalization affects *both* workers and consumers. Substantively, I think that book shows what a wide-ranging effect the process of McDonaldization (rationalization) and its basic principles are having on consumption, especially consumption settings of all types (and much else besides).

Expressing America: A Critique of the Global Credit Card Society (1995) brought the role of the credit card into the sociology of consumption and paved the way for work by Bob Manning (and others). Interestingly, I don't think that many in the field yet see the great sociological (and empirical) importance of credit cards; it is still seen as largely an economic phenomenon and issue. A diverse set of theoretical resources are brought to bear here, but I think the most important is extending Simmel's ideas on money to credit cards and using them to highlight similarities and differences between them. Substantively, using Simmel's idea allows us to see in a new way the problems associated with credit cards including indebtedness, invasions of privacy and fraud, especially the fraudulent actions of the credit card companies.

Enhancing a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption (1999/2005) also draws on a range of theories, most importantly Weber's thinking on enchantment/disenchantment, Marx on the means of consumption (Marx is always present in my work, implicitly and explicitly), Benjamin on arcades, and especially postmodern theory, most notably Baudrillard's ideas (I like his early work very much; he has gone way over the top in the last decade or two) on simulations and implosion. In bringing together all these theories, and others, I think this book offers the most complex theoretical perspective that I have developed to explore consumption. Substantively, it allows the reader to see what is similar among a wide range of consumption settings and how they seek to enchant themselves in order to overcome the liabilities of disenchantment (rationalization) and to attract large numbers of consumers, to get them to engage in "hyperconsumption," and to spend lots of money (often with credit cards) that they frequently don't have.

Finally, *The Globalization of Nothing* (2004/2007) draws on, but seeks to extend, theories of globalization as they apply primarily to consumption. More specifically, the book challenges the hegemony of "glocalization theory," or more generally theories of cultural hybridization, and argues that they tell only part of the story. To tell that larger story I create the term "grobalization" to complement "glocalization". We need to look at both of these processes and their interrelationship. I use the concepts of "nothing" and "something" which I define in some detail, and quite idiosyncratically, to analyze consumption (although they have far broader uses). These two pairs of concepts and their

juxtaposition allow me to identify the “globalization of nothing,” as well as its conflict with the “glocalization of something,” as my central concerns in the study of globalization (especially as it relates to consumption). Furthermore, these are not just of theoretical interest since I see the realm of consumption being increasingly dominated by globalized forms of nothing and reducing the space and demand for glocalized forms of something.

D&D: Are you currently working on any new projects in the sociology of consumption?

Ritzer: Well, I’ve just finished the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, which has been a Herculean task of ten volumes and... well, eleven volumes. The eleventh volume is the index of the other ten volumes. Seventeen hundred entries or so all total. The kind of disturbing thing about it is that they’ve discovered that the libraries want this to be not only a bound volume, but available on-line. And being on-line, they want it being revised and revisable. So one of the issues that we’re going to be discussing is (because I thought I was done with this) my continuing role in terms of editing the on-line version. It’s been a nightmare job. On the other hand, I’ve come this far and I’m not sure I can just leave it to somebody else. They’re also talking about a revision in five years. I don’t know if I have the stomach to do this again. But, honestly, a lot of my life has to do with revisions of books. This summer, next up is a revision of *McDonaldization* and then a revision of all my theory texts.

Then somewhere in there, I’ve got to find the time to write this book on outsourcing, which interests me a great deal. It is something of a return to production as opposed to consumption because we’re primarily talking about the outsourcing of work. But I think that there are some really neat ideas in terms of the way I’ve conceptualized this. For example, I’m not just looking at outsourcing in the economy but also in the military, in government, and in healthcare. Outsourcing is occurring in a variety of social institutions, not just in the economy.

D&D: Last question. We’re conducting this interview in your astonishingly lovely Maryland home, which is one of three that you own and which fairly resembles, inside and out, Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Fallingwater*! It’s unfair, of course, but how do you reconcile this luxurious, artful way of life and the critical focus of your work on consumption?

Ritzer: (Ritzer laughs.) Well, there are two ways of answering it. One of my biases is that there are relatively few things that gratify me, but one of them is my work. I think that I’m lucky in the sense that I do work that I find extremely satisfying. I always think of myself as a sculptor, sculpting a book or something like that. I just like the process of doing it. Unlike most workers today, at the end of something, for better or worse, I can say I made that, that’s my product. I enjoy the process. I get a very kind of traditional craft sense of the process that I go through and the production at the end of the road. So one way of responding is that, in terms of production and consumption, my main interest and satisfaction comes from production.

Now the reality is, my books have been pretty successful. I've earned a fair amount of money from them and that's allowed me to acquire things, mostly houses, and this gives me the ability to live the way I want to live. It's not the houses per se --and it's not even the things in these places-- that interest me so much as it is... For example, I like to be outdoors. I like to be able to be outdoors, to sit outdoors, or to look outdoors. So I'm forever acquiring homes that give me that capacity. So, for me, it doesn't have to do with things or the consumption of things, it has to do with acquiring access to a way in which I want to live.

D&D: They are not an ends in themselves, they are a means...

Ritzer: Right, I've found increasingly in recent years that winter around here is depressing. It's gray. I can't sit outside and for a month or two I can't walk outside. And one of my hobbies is that I try to walk three or four miles a day. If I can't do that for a month or two...? Remember, I'm sitting around the house most of the time writing, and if I can't get out to walk, that really has a negative effect on me. So we bought a place in Florida, which allows me to go down there and get out and walk anytime I want, which is very important to me. I mean the reality is, what's humorous, the royalty checks come in and I give them to Sue and I, you know, go deposit them... Sue is not a great consumer either... You're looking at all of the things we have consumed... (Ritzer laughs)

D&D: This house isn't by any means thrown together.

Ritzer: No. Well, there's a story there. We had lived in the same house since '75 until three years ago when we moved to this present house. We had basically lived with the same furniture for those thirty years, and so we decided that when we were going to move that we were going to get rid of all of that old stuff. We weren't going to move any of it here. So, we came to look at this room, which is a difficult room to decorate. We said, "We're never going to figure out what to buy for this place." So, actually, we did hire an architect. We ended up going to New York and buying things that are very New Yorky, but with big discounts, because he knew a place down on Broome Street to go for discounts.

But the truth is, I'm mostly oblivious to my surroundings. I'm mostly working or thinking about working. What I like mostly about this place is that right now I'm looking out there at those trees and I'm in those trees. Sometimes I'm up early in the morning working down here and, around dawn I'm looking out there and... Or during the day, I sit on the patio and work. I mean, look, there's no question that I have a lot of stuff. I'm a pretty affluent person.

D&D: For a sociologist. (everyone laughs)

Ritzer: For a sociologist, but not a capitalist. There is an inconsistency, I suppose, given my... You know Thorstein Veblen was famous for living in shacks. He died, as I recall, in a shack outside Palo Alto, California. He eschewed all these kinds of things, and I

suppose the logic of my life view and sociological view would lead in the same direction, but... Well, look, here's the bottom line. The bottom line is that for many people I know, consumption is the epitome of their lives. For me it's something I have to do, as rarely as I possibly can, to get on with what is the epitome of my life, which relates to work and family primarily, in environments that I feel comfortable in. I think that's mainly what my relative affluence has allowed me to do. That is, I can be where I want to be, and I can go where I want to go. I mean that's what Bauman says about the difference between the haves and have-nots in the contemporary world. I think he distinguishes between the tourists and vagabonds. The tourists are those that are relatively affluent who have mobility and that's very important to me, whereas the vagabonds are *forced* to move from one place to another.