

To anyone living in America, it is no secret that our world is becoming increasingly modernized every single day. Things become quicker, cheaper, and easier, adopting some new form of convenience seemingly quicker than we as consumers can keep up. However, these processes that control our economy are changing pace behind the scenes too, not only affecting us as consumers, but those whose livelihoods are based on meeting our demands. George Ritzer's theory of McDonaldization and Max Weber's of rationalization provides the demand side manifestation of the "iron cage," to which Karl Marx suggests that the workers on the supply side are trapped as well.

In his theory of McDonaldization, Ritzer uses the four main pillars of the success of the fast food industry and compares them to American society. Efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control are all factors that we have come to not only appreciate but expect in the majority of our social interactions, especially those that involve the consumption of goods and services. These attributes have been recently expanded to many more systems and institutions, reflected in things like online shopping, ordering ahead & curbside pickups, and online and technology based learning systems. All of these are systems where we previously would've had a much more interactive experience with the provider of the service, such as a cashier, waiter, or teacher. Now, the system controls how people interact within it, and places a focus on how the customer receives the product and the interaction that they are met with. Weber expands this idea with his theory of rationalization, which provides the idea that social systems and institutions have now been created to accomplish social tasks instead of actually providing people with meaning inside of society. In simpler terms, it's a sort of one-size-fits all approach, just for many different aspects of society. For example, marriage previously used to be an individualized and significant experience. What was originally meaningful to people by their own definition has now become institutionalized, becoming expedited by both technology and capitalism, giving people different motives for engaging in that tradition. Rationalization works by taking the unknown in life, what sociologists would call the "informal space," things that we as society didn't necessarily have a collective answer for, and creating systems that provide a common meaning within society. This results in less room for interpretation, diversity, and creativity within the informal space.

In Karl Marx's *Estranged Labor*, he presents his idea of alienation, which he argues is exemplified under capitalism. Alienation is the lack of identity and connection that workers have to the labor, goods, and services that they are producing due to the control and exploitation that the market has over them. The competition and repetition within a capitalist society and market allow for laborers to become detached from their work and controlled by external factors. Workers become just another commodity in the market and a cog in the machine. Marx disapproves of this because he explains that humans have a high capacity for creativity and the ability to produce meaning through our work. For labor to be rationalized is a complete waste of human potential. By creating this divide between the laborer and the product, rationalization also

in completely separate spaces and dynamics. This eliminates any sense of human interaction, meaning, or significance for both parties, making the exchange completely transactional and materialistic. Both parties become unaware and unable to have any appreciation for the other due to the market being institutionalized.

Before the Industrial Revolution and rise of capitalism, labor and consumption had a completely different relationship. The two processes occurred within the same space which provided meaning and appreciation for the processes that resulted in some material or consumption. This can be seen under the feudal system in Europe during the Middle Ages. Someone in your village would blacksmith the ax that you would then use to harvest timber that someone used to light a fire to cook the food that someone else hunted. It was only with the rise of capitalism that labor became commoditized because it could be controlled by an outside institution. Now, that results in production and consumption occurring in completely separate spaces, eliminating any relationship between the laborer, the product, and the consumer. On the consumer side, the presence of rationalization has created a society where we expect conformity in the market. We are supplied with a capitalistic market where we will be provided with what we desire and expect. However, this market has cost us the loss of meaning and we as consumers are unable to recognize the other side of the market, or take any benefit or meaning of interaction from it. We are ignorant to all that goes into the production of the things we buy on our phones or have delivered to our doorsteps, without ever even having to talk to another person. We have created this iron cage where the fruit of the market has no meaning to us. Also in the cage are the workers who have lost meaning because they feel no connection to the endless, meaningless products they are producing. The rationalization of their labor has eliminated any sense of human capacity to do that labor, therefore removing a personal connection with that work. That loss of identity reflects a lack of appreciation on both sides for humans' ability for imagined labor. Whether you are behind the shopping cart or the assembly line, it seems that we have become unable to recognize that there is someone on the other side.