

**Architectonics of McDonald's Cohabitation with Wal-Mart:
Critique of critical and mainstream theory and research perspectives**

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Abstract

Architectonics is proposed as a dialogic theory and method to research three aesthetic spheres: McDonald's corporation, McDonaldization, and McDonaldland. Architectonics has three meanings: the philosophy of systematizing knowledge, the science of architecture, and the structure of the symphony. Bakhtin proposed it as a new method for the human sciences, one that supplants dialectics with dialogics. This chapter develops it further, and applies it to the international study of globalization and localization, using the overlap of multiple perspectives to critique mainstream and critical theories of McDonald's and Wal-Mart corporations, which now cohabit one another.

Introduction to Architectonics

When McDonald's moved into two Wal-Mart superstores in Las Cruces, New Mexico, I decided to take a look. Since I was reading Bakhtin's works for articles I was preparing with colleagues (Boje, Driver & Cai, 2004), I went armed with a critical theory perspective, and a grotesque humour method. Here are three photos of a long mural I saw on the right wall (Figures 1 to 3).



Figure 1 - Wal-Mart McDonald's Mural – Left Panel – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission

The style of a corporate hero, in the mural (figure 1), Speedee, the original clown prince, sitting atop a neon golden arch, is given new corporate utterance, in the co-creation of McDonald's inside Wal-Mart, which I shall interpret as the ongoing dialogism of architectonics; see figure 4 Speedee mural, and 5, the Ronald depictions. The full wall mural is about 25 feet or more in length, from table top to ceiling (here presented in three camera images, figures 1 to 3).

Bakhtin (1986g) is a critical theorist, who writes about just a few neo-Marxist notes on architectonics in his school boyish notebook, in a section titled: "*Toward a Methodology of the Human Sciences*." While never explicitly defining it, Bakhtin seems to mean it as artistic, knowledge, and philosophical utterance. Bakhtin (1986g: 162) has an on going project to supplant Marxian (or Hegelian) dialectics with his dialogical theory: "dialectics was born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a high level (a dialogue of *personalities*)." Bakhtin (1981: 98) in *Dialogic Imagination* uses the term differently, to be the architectonics of plot line, where an organizational meeting, can fulfil "architectonic functions: it can serve as an opening, sometimes as a culmination, even as a denouement (a finale) of the plot."

The three contemporary meaning of architectonics (philosophical method, architectural science, & structure of symphony) along with the plot meaning can be applied to the mural, if we look at symphony as a form of heteroglossia, that manifest polyphony and in juxtaposition to context, carnivalization (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986).

The mural is part of the architecture, part of the textual dialog with other texts, and in terms of philosophy, the dialogue is not reified, since the it personalizes corporate history, even makes it a quite utopian and romantic, even mythological statement. See all the smiling ethnic customers and the carhop-worker's smile. In figure 1, a real mop leans against the mural, grounding its corporate spectacle in more carnivalesque questioning. Indeed the tops of heads of two Wal-Mart workers are visible in figure 1. The emplotment of the mural depends upon recognition of cultural symbols (car hops, drive in, vintage cars, poodle skirt and other clothing fashion); the emplotment is the grasping together of various elements, which, as we shall explore, are abstracted from quite different time periods (a car hop from period 1938 to 1948; a self-service restaurant from period 1948 to 1960; cars from the period after car hops were fired – see Figure 2 for cars from 1950s; and most of all a time that did not exist when various racial groups congregated in harmony in the California drive-in of the 1940s or 1950s). In short this is a chronotope which rewrites the history of the past in order to make a contemporary statement of the equality of all who go to the drive-in in 2004. The chronotope for Bakhtin is an Einstein-metaphor, the relativity of time and space. In studying globalizaiton and localization, chronotope is highly relevant since it deals with the intrinsic connections of temporal and spatial relationship, and how they are artistically expressed, in this case, in murals (Bakhtin, 1981: 84-85). I am very keen on identifying the chronotope of space-time that is McDonald's co-habitation within Wal-Mart.

Then there is the here-and-now temporal/spatial context of this McDonald's being embedded in a Super Wal-Mart store. I see this as the clash of two monsters, two monsters with gaping jaws that are out to swallow each other; it is like a remake of Godzilla versus King Kong. The only question is who will swallow the other? At first glance, it appears that Wal-Mart has swallowed McDonald's, but perhaps the reverse is equally true. Time is stretched and bent in this mural in order to give special meaning to Wal-mart swallowing McDonald's. This time-space is one of several spheres: the McDonald's corporate sphere, the McDonaldland underworld sphere of cartoons and clowns, and the McDonaldization sphere of generative growth, the spatial spread and diffusion of 30,000 restaurants that is sometimes actively resisted by locals (Boje, Driver, & Cai, 2004).



Figure 2 - Wal-Mart McDonald's Mural – Center Panel – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission.

There is utopian equanimity among ethnic and racial customer, car club, teenage carhop, the African-American girl on the bike, and family groups. The mural (Figures 1, 2 & 3) also displays awareness of the artists, the mural painter, perhaps by both McDonald's and Wal-Mart corporations that corporate identity does not coincide with historical origins. Indeed there are quite a few historical inaccuracies, besides those already mentioned, which I shall explore. That is a 1955 Ford Fairlane, and a 1955 Corvette, but as mentioned, the carhop in Figure 1, was no longer employed by Maurice or Richard McDonald, since in 1948 all twenty carhops were sacked, in order to attain higher efficiency and lower labour costs. Carhops took 30 to 35 minutes to process an order: the time it took to bring the menu to the car, return to take the order, then to fetch and return the order to the car. Richard and Maurice cut the time to process an order, to the line of people standing and waiting at the window, to just 15 seconds for burgers; customers entered a second line to the side of the Golden Arches to get their golden French fries.



Figure 3 - Wal-Mart McDonald's Mural – Right Panel – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission

Behind the white and orange 1956 Ford Fairlane, is a blue and white 1957 Ford Fairlane. In sum, the mural is an (ad) mixture of various time periods.

The mural is also bizarre, fantastic, and strange; it is grotesque both the common and Bakhtin usage of the term. In everyday language, grotesque means: (1) an artistic style, as in a painting, which intermingles people with bizarre, even fantastic landscape; (2) a distortion with incongruities in appearance, including manners; (3) ludicrously eccentric or strange, even ridiculous and absurd. The mural is all of these. The mural is also what Bakhtin (1968) describes as grotesque humour (obvious in the burger-headed icon in figure 1 & 4); but to see the distortions of corporate and human body, one must juxtapose the mural with its context; in the seats beneath the mural (out of camera view), several Wal-Mart crew members are eating, on the back of their blue work shirts is emblazoned the phrase, "how may I help you." This is an architectonics move, since contextual meaning gives new meaning to the mural's content; it's smiling peaceful and cozy faces no longer look so comfortable.

Further, we can begin to fill-in the gaps with remote contexts and give a philosophical-artistic interpretation that deepens and deconstructs the rational strategic corporate deployment of this mural (Bakhtin, 1986g: 160). The mural depicts a Speedee production system restaurant, the original site of the first franchised McDonald brothers' restaurant when the first came out with the Golden Arches design with the roof that slopes down from front to back and an arch on both sides and a neon sign with Speedee

(the first franchise went to Phoenix, AZ). The mural is a utopian dream, a bit of historical revisionism, that is far from the historical reality of the first McDonald's. The strategically deployed grotesque humour is rich in fantastic, bizarre, strange and grotesque incongruities, that upon cursory analysis reveal a level of absurdity, that it not just ridiculous, it is an authorial mask. And not just the mural, but to the left is an exhibit of a life-size Ronald statue grasping a Fisher-Price and Disney exhibit of Happy Meal characters from the Lion King 1 1/2 movie; behind Ronald is a mirror hanging at the height of an adult's head, with Ronald's head embedded in the glass; If you stand before it your face is superimposed onto Ronald's; and the juxtaposition is both grotesque and bizarre. The grotesque clown prince, Speedee (figure 1 & 4), is center stage, being the largest figure in the mural on the right wall, and having center stage as the only figure in the back wall.



Figure 4 - Wal-Mart McDonald's Speedee Mural – Back Wall – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission

The murals' chronotopic pieces of artistry, encompass the time and space of McDonald's corporate history, and its utopian origin, fusing it with current ambition; at the same time the mural is a transcend experience of McDonald's and McDonaldland spirituality, not only utopian, but carnivalesque ascension, and not one corporate experience, but many (Wal-Mart, Disney, Fisher-Price are also there, figure 5). It is a dialogue of multiple authors (artist, corporate McDonald's, and Wal-Mart, the franchisee, also other corporations). All the characters are smiling: the McDonald's car hop dressed in pink poodle-skirt, the two African-American couples, the African-American girl on the

bike, the Hispanic guys showing off their car club wheels, the young and older white couples, the children of varying ethnicity.



Figure 5 - Wal-Mart McDonald's Ronald statue & Mirror – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission

I acknowledge the murals, and therefore I disturb them; I acknowledge becoming a participant in the corporate event, and I am responsible for dissolving the ready-made message, and obliterating it with a dialogue with more remote and historical contexts. I bring the mural into dialogical contact with contexts (past and contemporary) and I disrupt the imagined rosy future. I personalize the historicity, so the others' words become more dialogic, and the corporation becomes less monologized; I set it into a more polylogic dialogue. For example, in figure 5, when seen in contrast with Speedee, in figures 1 and 4, there is old Ronald, at the margins, barely in the restaurant, to the left of the counter, while Speedee is everywhere. Standing in Ronald's mirror, I see a silent scream, a clown full of cosmic fear and terror; about ready to yell at Speedee.

Another example of putting text into remote context; if you compare the mural to the historical photo by Witzel, 1997: 35), the car hops in the octagonal shaped drive-in hamburger outlet were not dressed in knee-length poodle skirts, as in the mural, but in the shortest mini-skirts ever seen in California (photo p. 33); and they wore cowgirl boots, not roller skates, as the mural depicts. The 14th and E Streets location in San Bernardino, CA employed 20 young teenage carhops, also wore satin uniforms, and serviced 125 cars

a night that touched fenders in the McDonald's parking lot (Witzel, 1997: 33). So half of the cars in the mural, being after 1948, to as late as 1957, would not have been there, at the same time as the carhops. There are other incongruities, and together a pattern emerges. For example, Witzel (1997: 26-27) shows photos that the McDonald brothers Speedee sign read "Speedee Service System" but in the mural it reads "McDonald's Service System." Witzel reports, "Richard McDonald sketched ["Speedee"] as a new hamburger-faced mascot and installed a neon sign featuring the blinking chef roadside" (p. 35) in the San Bernardino location. In 1948, the McDonald brothers closed the San Bernardino restaurant long enough to fire all 20 car hops, went all self-service, and hired male teens in place of the females (p. 31).

At first glance, you might dismiss the painted mural, as nostalgic, as revisionist, in mixing historical periods, and full of inaccuracies, in terms of the uniform of the car hops, and so forth. This would miss an amazing point about strategic humor, particularly strategic humour that is grotesque. Wal-Mart is the Big Mac that has swallowed McDonald's whole, not just the restaurant, but all its historical images. The mural in all its historical incongruities is more than pure denial of the level of racial and ethnic segregation, as well as the use of sexuality (those mini-skirted car hops) to sell burgers and fries, but the mural is about the rebirth of the corporate image, not just McDonald's but also Wal-Mart's. And it is the grotesque humor that strategically rewrites the corporate history of McDonald's and creates the corporate partnering of the two giants. Speedee is recreated as the positive grotesque hero of both corporations; smiles are emblazoned on all the mural characters, and Speedee gives that knowing wink. The nuances in the mural, and its situation inside Wal-Mart reference the carnivalesque, exposing and parodying the hidden meaning behind this corporate artistic spectacle: a mediocre attempt to erase the way it was and the way it is, and then supplant that with the heroic, romantic, utopian corporate triumph; it is not unlike the commissioned paintings by monarchs that reveal the royals to an adoring public, while outside the palace gates, the public asks for their beheading.



Figure 6 - Wal-Mart McDonald's M with slash through it – Front Counter – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission

Without some historical research we had no idea why there was a slash through the golden arches. Was it an artist mistake, a stop M? Or, was it something to do with Wal-Mart, the mini-McDonald's?

Maurice and Ronald were grotesque humorists; they would not put a teen girl out as a carhop in a poodle skirt; only mini-skirts and satin blouses would sell burgers; why else would 125 cars line up? Certainly not for the French fries! The mural is an ironic dialog, an empirical and historical absurdity, a way for corporate spectacle to appropriate festive carnival in a very "hyperbolic style" (Bakhtin, 1986f: 154). The mural is both types of grotesque, exaggeration of history, exaggeration of the smiles, exaggeration of the diversity then, and of its equanimity now; eating and drinking to the grotesque humour of corporeal life, the material nature of the corporate bodies, stands in ironic contrast to the uniformed workers of both corporations working or eating there, while Las Cruces customers blow their noses into the napkins, taking it all in. They dine beneath a utopian sphere, cleverly rendered, yet as false as a two headed quarter, or as false as what is written about McDonald's on the pages of strategy journal articles, or in strategy textbooks which students are forced to memorize. It would be entertaining, just comical, were it not for the pretence to be historical 1950s fast food community life; a sphere were everyone smiles, exchanges courtesies with diverse ethnic characters, and all is well. Those who authored this mural, have done violence to history, prostituted their collective

strategic dialogue, engaged in grotesque humour, merged fiction with romantic corporate destruction. The spin is put on history to make the marriage of Wal-Mart and McDonald's triumphant.

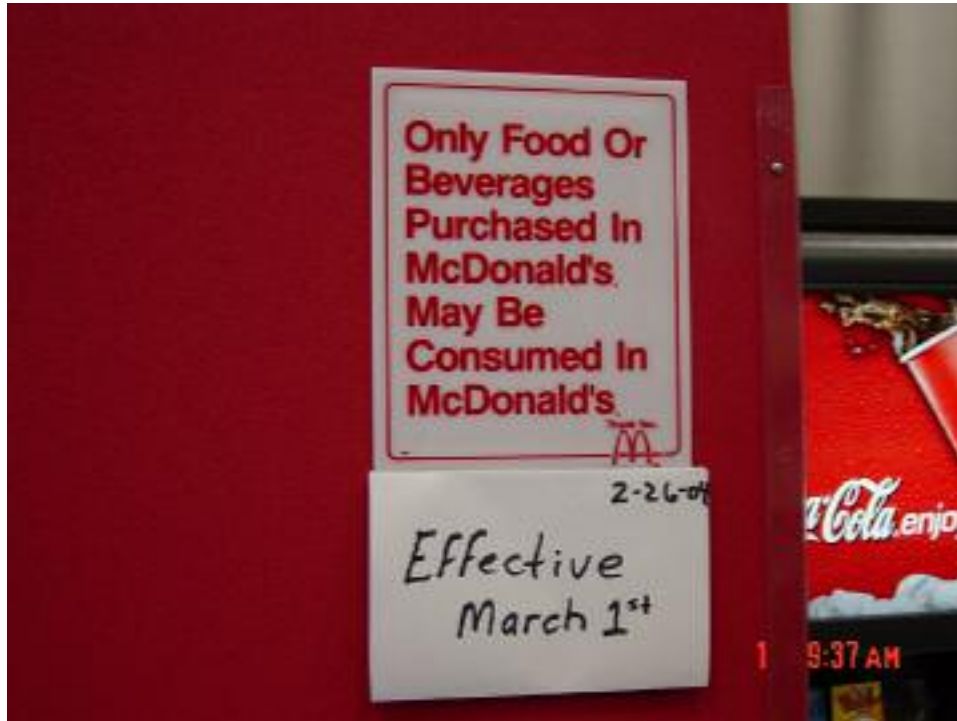


Figure 7 - Wal-Mart McDonald's Sign – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission

The rhetorical dispute is a dispute in which it is important to gain victory over the opponent, not to approach truth" (p. 152, Bakhtin, 1986). Here the opponent is the customer, the addressee of the mural, and the strategic dialogue.

This is polyphony, a polyphonic dialogue with ultimate ambition, where each corporation, customer, and artist are in worlds of their own (151). This mural lies "in the border between the ethical and aesthetic" (150). This is persuasive rhetoric, whose incongruities would escape Las Cruces customers, but not the sharp eyes of McDonald's executives; they take Speedee's history quite seriously. The mural is a clever allegory, a story in which people, cars, clowns, poodle skirts, are out of place, where there is a hidden meaning, and an important moral principle being co-authored by a team of writers. The characters in the mural do not speak, yet they are laughing, ironically, at the situation they have been place within. Speedee is laughing in belly roars, and as corporations try to elevate themselves to the heroic platform. This ready-made communication is all too easy to decode.



Figure 8 - Wal-Mart Employee before the Speedee Mural – Photo by Michael Keller, used by permission

“How may I help you?” reads the sign on the back of the Wal-Mart workers’ uniform.

For at the counter (not in photo), the workers are not smiling, nor are they using the standard greeting, the specific form that the co-authors of the mural are employing (p. 146, Bakhtin). The mural dissolves the boundaries between the characters and the masked authors, the writers of this mural.

In sum, this brief review is a critical study of the co-habitation of two giant international businesses. I explored the boundaries, the scope and overlap of two critical perspectives: the dialectic and the dialogic. I elaborated a new methodology, not only grotesque method, but the polyphonic method of architectonics, the mixing of architecture, philosophy, voice, and plot line; putting text into remote and contemporary contexts. I also think that this chapter is a critique of the mainstream corporate strategy literature, which is always making out McDonald’s and Wal-Mart to be rational, Weberian, just super heroes for the business college. Hopefully, my juxtapositions help to dispel that myth. For both corporations appropriate humour and carnival to temper and shape rational to their own will; both stretch time in order to accomplish spatial proliferation.

Conclusions

McDonald's inhabits Wal-Mart, but each is also swallowing the other. Literally Wal-Mart has swallowed a McDonald's. But, as well, McDonald's, with its gaping jaws, is swallowing Wal-Mart: McDonald's orders can be placed at each check-out counter, a separate line awaits the busy Wal-Mart shopper, who can pick up their order on their way to the car. Speedee is the appropriate clown prince of this grotesque shopping banquet, since speed is of the essence at Wal-Mart and McDonald's. In the Wacky Adventures of Ronald McDonald video series, with six videos produced between 1998 and 2002, the first three have a theme song, that I think offers a conclusion to this article.

The Wake Up Song

A narrator (hereafter N) voice begins to sing, and then Ronald (R) and Sundae (S) join in with spoken lines (note spelling is as it is in spoken lyrics).

- N: Time to wake up; it's another day. Time to get going: why sleep when we can play?
R: Good morning Sundae
S: Good morning Ronald
N: Got to get ready to enjoy the view; lookin kinda cool; lookin kinda new. There are things we should be trying, me and you; a new day is here and fun is overdue. Gettin even cooler, stepin to a new beat; there's a tingling inside me and its spreading to my feet. McDonaldland is changing; everything is rearranging. I can't sit still, because it's a beautiful day, and Ronald McDonald has something to say. Well good morning in McDonaldland; let's see what's happenin first.

I particularly like the line "McDonaldland is changing; everything is rearranging. I can't sit still, because it's a beautiful day, and Ronald McDonald has something to say." The song and the visual gestures are a dual-medium (verbal announcement of the coming out of refashioned McDonald's and showing the old and new bodily frames, in the visual language of renewal).

As this verse is sung, Ronald, dressed head to toe in his narrow pin-striped PJs, makes a strategic recrowning move, on the Chess Board (the piece gets a crown), then he begins polishing images in picture frames (a towel with patriotic stars & stripes hangs unused by his mirror); he spins the frames revealing the old and new characterizations, polishing each one with a different magic clown-cloth: old and new Birdie (her new face is slimmed down, the scarf around her old neck is gone, her neck is thin and long; her beck is more pointed, her pink outfit is changed; she is older & wears a green jacket; her eyes are bigger & blue); old and new Grimace (once called Evil Grimace, and depicted with four arms, since 1980 only two; other discernable changes: he is less fury & a lighter shade of purple); old and new Hamburglar (the new Hamburglar has sun glasses, instead of mask, the black & white stripes are narrow, instead of a cape, he wears a blue denim jacket with 'M' on the back; his head is less like Speedee's, shaped more like a Rugrat; the tie with the hamburgers is gone, his hat does not droop & has red instead of yellow band; he too is older, hipper with open jacket & defiant juvenile stare); old and new

Ronald presented in three contrasting frames (1. one face: his waved hair look in the 1970s disco costume with wide collar, narrow red/white shirt striping, tie, & the wide lapel; 2. the new clown face: wide stripes, red patch with yellow 'M' over heart, no tie, no white clown pocket, yellow gloves ; 3. a framed-toon-face: the cartoon look with spiked hair, narrower face, the 'M' over his heart has a red background; his ears are visible; the stripes are wider, & instead of tie just narrow red stripe down front of yellow jumper). In sum, the verbal song, announces and draws attention to the cycle of metamorphosis: the transition of the material bodily characters from old to new.

The Hamburglar, Ronald, and Grimace, are three characters who represent their own chronotope: "the rogue, the clown and the fool create around themselves their own little world, their own chronotope" (Bakhtin, 1981: 159). While Hamburglar (the Rogue) "still has some ties that bind him to real life" Ronald (clown) and Grimace (fool) are "not of this world" and "therefore possess their own special rights and privileges" (159).

From here, the camera zooms in a shot from above, looking down, the credits (Scared Silly flashes on the screen) and we are once again flying above Ronald's M-shaped house; we enter to watch Sundae watching a dinosaur movie on TV; two dinosaurs struggle; a female character on TV says, "I can't go on any longer."

In the remake of Godzilla battles King Kong, Wal-Mart and McDonald's are giants, dinosaur and super ape, but the crown prince is no longer Ronald, he has been upstaged by the old clown, the one penned long ago by Richard McDonald, the Speedee clown, a burger-headed grotesque figure, who still winks knowingly. This chrontopicity, the mural of temporal and spatial markers is a meeting place for two giants, and for the customers and employees who attend them, and there is as well the contact (meeting) of globalization and localization, right here in New Mexico. It is a meeting that is constantly changing and rearranging, an architectonics with something important to say: carnivalesque aesthetics is appropriated by two giants to sell fast food and fast shopping, using a reversibility of historical moments and temporal re-sequence to convey human equality and an interchangeability of giants in common meeting space (Bakhtin, 1981: 100). The two giants are undergoing a metamorphosis, a cycle of degradation and renewal, a descent into, guided into the netherworld by clown, fool, and rogue, in order to accomplish regeneration and renovation of their corporeal bodies.

Future time is ephemeral, unformed in contrast to time past and present; future time is just less concrete, so a mural allows the borrowing of concreteness from times past (and present) and stretches these temporal phenomena to give a density and weightiness to future time, to the marriage of McDonald's and Wal-Mart, using the artist to re-narrate history, to give it a future transposition. And this temporal repositioning, this making future more concrete, less ephemeral is also accomplished by the vertical cycle of descent (degradation) and ascent (renewal), through the semiotics of a mural (re) casting the Golden Age of the Golden Arches, as an antenarrative (Boje, 2001) of the future. In this way the chronotope is accomplished, stretching the horizontal axis of time, to invoke an other-worldly verticality, and establish a meeting place for two giants in Las Cruces, New Mexico. This is a future which never existed before, an historial inversion, a vertical

descent to netherworld, an eternal space outside time, the beginning of localization of the eternal values of two giant corporations. Yet the future is emptied out, moving from left (car hop and Speedee) to right (garage), across the mural of the Golden Arches, ending in urbanscape. This is a future fused with a strange being, ontology of netherworld, an inverted past/present, and a utopic conception of ethnic harmony. In this fictive imagination the full potential, spatially and temporally, of the two giants is being forged. The mural is also a mask, one penetrated by the broom, mop, and heads of Wal-Mart workers in Figure 1, and the worker wearing the corporate greeting in figure 8: “How May I Help You?” The broom and mop train the enchantment and corporate-glorification of the mural, grounding it in resistance, juxtaposing a real-life chronotope of degraded work with the chronotope of epic corporate heroization, presenting both in the corporate-provided public meeting place, where mural is intertextual to corporations, where globalization is intertextual to localization, where Ronald’s eternal cosmic scream can be heard in the silence of the mirror, as he looks in horror as Speedee dethrones the corporate prince, reasserting his claim to the crown. The transformation of a clown from Speedee to Ronald, and back, has enormous significance, whose essence is probably not grasped by Wal-Mart or McDonald’s; this is a meaning from the “deep recesses of pre-class folklore up to the Renaissance” (Bakhtin, 1981:165), which is recreated in contemporary Las Cruces, New Mexico.

These corporate giants are playing with several chronotopes: (1) folkloric pre-class chronotope of rogue, clown, and fool; (2) heroic epic chronotope of a monological revision history; (3) the netherworld of McDonaldland; (4) corporate biography. This to me is an amazing and bizarre corporate accomplishment, a multi-layered chronotope. And I am inspired by Bakhtin (1981: 1969) where, as critical theorist, he offers us activist-academics a way to proceed:

It is necessary to destroy and rebuild the entire false picture of the world, to sunder the false hierarchical links between objects and ideas, to abolish the divisive ideational strata.

How can we as academics liberate McDonald’s and Wal-Mart, let them enter into free unions with more organic, less monstrous relations with the natural and human world? There are here-and-now connections of these corporations to the world of nature and labour, that are being masked by the murals, by all the advertising and clownery of these giant corporations. The false associations, the historical revisions, the attempts to weld a more steely future, these can be deconstructed to bring the giants into proximity with the consequences of their generative world-wide growth, the materiality of their corporate contagion. For now all this is successfully covered over or masked by a transcendent, epic corporate heroization. In figure 5, Ronald and ourselves, look in the mirror and see grotesque realism, where the lofty and spiritual image is unmasked, where hyperbolization and transcendent aesthetic nor corporate mythology is providing camouflage. In the mainstream of the Academy of Management, globalization is depicted as positive growth, as inevitable future. Globalization as well as the necessity of Gargantua (Rabelais) is scribed into an affirmative and appreciate epic narrative. We have an opportunity to deconstruct the architectonics of the visual/verbal narrative

rendered in murals and other decorations, in order to engage in a more critical international research perspective. We can show the mythic abstraction and power of corporate appropriation of chronotopic self-heroic masks, and we critical theorists can plot a more collective and organic, perhaps more sustainable chronotope.

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