This article is taken, with publisher permission, from the Rethinking Series book: Cannella, G. S. & Kincheloe, J. L. (Eds.) (2002). *Kidworld; Childhood Studies, Global Perspectives, and Education*. New York: Peter Lang. In this paper, globalization, modernization, consumption, marketing, power and politics emerge as Kincheloe examines McDonald's role in the changing social construction of childhood. The reader is referred to the complete book where such questions as the following are addressed: How are market-driven motives influencing the lives of (poor) children? How does the political climate of a nation affect children's cultural, linguistic, and educational rights? Can more just representation for children be accomplished?

The Complex Politics of McDonald's and the New Childhood: Colonizing Kidworld

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Childhood as we know it, of course, has not existed very long in historical time. Such an understanding is central to this book, as Gaile Cannella and I as editors and the various authors analyze the forces that shape and reshape childhood in the early twenty-first century. As several analysts have argued, childhood does not float in some timeless and placeless space, above and beyond the influence of historical and social forces. Like any other human dynamic, childhood is shaped by macro-social forces such as ideology. While individual response to such forces may be unique and self-directed, it is not simply free to operate outside of the boundaries drawn by such social influences.

Thus, the editors and authors here agree that childhood is a social construction, and based on this assertion set out to examine the forces that are presently constructing it. This chapter originates in that effort, as it examines the representative role that McDonald's plays in this process. McDonald's is representative of the many multinational corporations that devote great resources to marketing to children. The childhood issues that are raised by the activities of McDonald's elicit many questions about both the nature of childhood in the first decade of the twenty-first century and the ways present socioeconomic, political, and educational institutions contribute to its construction and reconstruction.

As Gaile Cannella has referenced in her work, this quest is still rather unique in the research and knowledge production that informs the literature of professionals who work with children. Much too often such literature has been content to leave the definition of childhood uncontested and separate from larger social forces. Thus, over the last few decades childhood has been viewed as "non-social" or "pre-social," more the province of developmental psychologists with their universalizing descriptions of its "normal" phases. Such academic approaches, while pursued with good intentions, have not served the interests of children and those who seek to help them. By undermining an appreciation of the diversity and complexity of childhood, such viewpoints have often equated difference with deficiency and sociocultural construction with "the natural." The complicated nature of childhood, childhood study, child psychology, social work for children, and childhood education demands more rigorous forms of analysis (duBois-Reymond, Sünker, & Krüger, 2001; Cannella, 1997; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997; Jenkins, 1998).

The New Childhood

As Shirley Steinberg and I argued in *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, a new era of childhood has been emerging over the last several decades with relatively few people who make their living studying or caring for children noticing it. Since we made that observation in 1997 more and more individuals have recognized this paradigm shift, yet it is still not part of the mainstream discourse of most child-related fields of study and practice. This shift has been shaped in part by the development of new information technologies and the so-called information explosion resulting from them. While information technologies are not the only factors reshaping childhood, they are very significant in this process. Because of this significance, Steinberg and I argued that those with the financial resources to deploy such technologies have played an exaggerated role in reconstructing childhood. This, of course, is why I chose to study the McDonald's corporation.

Because of the profound changes initiated by a variety of social, economic, political, and cultural forces, many analysts maintain we can no longer make sense of childhood using traditional assumptions about its nature. While childhood differs profoundly around the world, we can begin to discern some common trends in industrialized and to some degree in industrializing societies. With increasing numbers of one-parent families, the neo-liberal withdrawal of government from social responsibility for the welfare of children, the transformation of the role of women in society, and increased access to

information via new information technologies, the world of children has profoundly changed over the last couple of generations.

In respect to changes in access to information it can be argued that children now in the era of the new (postmodern?) childhood posses huge amounts of information about topics traditionally viewed as the province of adults. Some scholars have argued that children often have more information than adults in these domains because of the time many have to access television, radio, the Internet, CDs, etc. . . . One of the traditional ways suggested to differentiate between children and adults has involved knowledge of the world (Postman, 1994). In light of recent changes in information access, it is safe to conclude that traditional distinctions between childhood and adulthood may no longer be relevant (Casas, 1998).

Such factors not only change the way we categorize childhood and adulthood but change the nature of the relationship between them. Such changes hold profound consequences for parenting, teaching, social service case work, child psychological counseling, etc. . . . In the context of parenting, evidence indicates that many children have gained more influence in the life of the family. In such families negotiation, engagement, and more open and egalitarian forms of interaction have replaced authoritarian, hierarchical parent-child relationships. One can identify this loss of traditional forms of parental control in families operating in a variety of social and cultural contexts. To illustrate the confusion and conflict about perceptions of childhood and how we should address children, it is important to note that right at the time traditional assumptions about, and categorizations of, children have been crumbling the mobilization of the iconography of "the innocent child" has become omnipresent.

One cannot separate this innocent iconography from a larger right-wing reeducation project that began to take shape in the mid-1970s in relation to the reforms and liberation movements of the 1960s and early 1970s. What children need—especially those that have been "spoiled" by liberal forms of permissive parenting—the argument went, was a dose of old-fashioned parental authority and discipline. As children gained new forms of empowerment in the environment of the new childhood, their adult-like self-assurance and affect induced many individuals to intensify their attempt to assert childhood innocence and the need for a new adult authority.

The harder it became to answer questions about the duration of childhood, the demarcation between childhood and adolescenthood, the universality of developmental stages, or the cognitive capacities of children, the more frequently we have witnessed the raising of the flag of childhood innocence. In the confusion brought on by the advent of the new childhood, many nations in the industrialized world have witnessed profound disagreements in efforts to establish the age of competence. In this context numerous legal advocates have called for a reconceptualization of the very notion of competence that accounts for recent social changes in the nature of childhood. Driven by information technologies and media, these social changes have helped provide children with new degrees of control over the information they encounter. New technologies have allowed them to engage this information on their own time schedules in isolation from adult supervision (DuBois-Reymond, Sünker, & Krüger, 2001; Hengst, 2001; Jenkins, 1998).

In this new private space children use their access to information and media productions to negotiate their own culture, albeit within the ideological confines of the productions to which they are privy. Acting on this prerogative, children find it increasingly difficult to return to the status of passive and dependent entities that the iconography of innocence demands. This conflict between the empowerment and new agency that many children sense in the context of the new childhood versus the confinement and call for higher degrees of parental, educational, and social authority of the ideology of innocence has placed many children in confusing and conflicting social situations. The types of efficacy and self-direction they experience, for example, outside of school creates personal styles and modes of deportment that directly clash with the expectations of them possessed by numerous educators. The outcome of such interactions are not surprising, as the self-assured, adult-like countenance of particular children is perceived by educators as insolent and disrespectful behavior.

In my conversations with such children and educators the recipe for conflict is apparent. Concurrently, this same recipe for conflict is present in the interactions of parents and children in the social context created by the new childhood. When this social context is juxtaposed with the tendency of Western societies, U.S. society in particular, to view children as economically useless, we begin to understand the sense of confusion and frustration felt by many children. While the labor market demands that they delay their entry into the workforce to a later and later age, children are seduced by the material desires of a consumption-based view of selfhood and educated by an information

environment that opens the secret knowledge of adulthood to them far earlier in their lives than previously considered appropriate.

Thus, children in this new social context receive conflicting signals about their role in society, about what it means to be children. In the literature on childhood in the early twenty-first century we are beginning to observe debates about the future economic role of children. Those who embrace the innocence paradigm advocate the protection of children from economic participation, while those who celebrate the changes leading to the empowerment of children discuss the reemergence of the "useful child." Do not confuse this latter position with a lack of concern for the abuse of children through the horrors of child labor. With both parents working outside the home, many argue, new domestic responsibilities may fall to children that will further change their social role in the family. Recognizing this shift, advertisers are already beginning to advertise home appliances and food in children's magazines.

In the new childhood the distinction between the lived worlds of adults and children begins to blur. While certainly childhood and adulthood are not one in the same, the experiences of adults and children are more similar now than they were before. Even the materials and artifacts of children's play in the last years of the twentieth and first years of the twenty-first centuries come from the same informational networks that adults use in their vocational lives. Corporate producers, marketers, and advertisers recognizing these dynamics before other social agents have reduced prior target market segmentations based on chronological age to only two: (a) very young children and (b) all other youth. Abandoning divisions suggested by developmental psychology, such business operatives realize how blurred age categorization has become (Hengst, 2001).

As Lynn Spigel (1998) argues, television producers who had traditionally attempted to produce separate programs for children and adults quickly came to realize that adults liked children's shows, and that children loved to watch "the very things that adults deemed inappropriate juvenile entertainment" (p. 122). Anyone who spends much time with contemporary children knows that they enjoy television shows, movies, musical groups, video games, websites, and modes of consumption produced for much older audiences. Recognizing this blurring of age distinctions, marketers for Disney have in recent years targeted children, adults, and elderly people in their advertisements. No age restrictions need be placed on the type of entertainment found in Disneyland, Disneyworld, and EuroDisney.

It is important to note that despite this blurring of the lines that separate childhood and adulthood, childhood has not simply collapsed into adulthood. Indeed, the new childhood seems to distinguish itself from adulthood on the basis of an affective oppositional stance in relation to it. In this essay this concept of oppositionality provides a central insight into the ways McDonald's utilizes its corporate power to speak directly to children. Children, many argue, like many ethnic groups, seek to distinguish themselves from those with whom they are frequently in contact—adults. In this cultural context many researchers have noted that ironically the more similar different ethnic groups become, the more emphasis is placed on maintaining a specific group's uniqueness. In this context it is interesting to observe how children—especially those from middle-class and above backgrounds—are drawn to cultural productions and even food (e.g., McDonald's) that transgress parental boundaries of propriety, good taste, and healthfulness. Children's consumption in this context can be viewed many times as an act of resistance to the impositions of child-centeredness and middle-class norms.

Along with their new self-assured demeanors and egalitarian styles of interacting with adults, this resistance to dominant cultural assumptions adds to the negative perception of children held by many adults. When adults ask why contemporary children seem so defiant and hard to discipline and control, it is important to understand the social factors relating to our notion of the new childhood. In response to such queries I often maintain that children simply don't see themselves in the same way many adults do. In the contemporary information environment "new children" resist innocent representations of themselves as little tikes who need adult permission to operate. Of course, not all children react to the new childhood and their access to popular culture and other forms of adult information in the same manner; diverse children in different social situations relating to race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, geographical place and other dynamics will respond differently.

The fact remains, however, that adults have lost the authority they once held because they knew things that purportedly sheltered kids did not. Adult knowledge in an electronic information society is uncontainable; children now see the world from more adult perspectives—or at least how reality is filtered by corporate information producers. Television in the last half of the twentieth century, for example, created a world where parents had less power over the types of things children would want to consume. And few realized the ideological consequences of children possessing the desires and fantasies that

television advertisers and corporate marketers encouraged. McDonald's enters this story, as it used television advertising to insert itself into the consciousness of children (and, of course, adults). Early in its corporate history the company recognized the family politics and ideologies that were developing around the nature of childhood. It quickly became a player in the public conversation about these matters, as it concurrently directed huge amounts of money to its marketing to children (Spigel, 1998; Hengst, 2001).

McDonald's, Family Values, and the Ideology of Childhood Innocence

McDonald's founder Ray Kroc was obsessed with positioning his chain of restaurants in opposition to the social changes he saw occurring around him in the 1960s. He perceived such changes as tearing down the very values on which America had been founded, especially the value of the traditional family with dad working and mom staying home to take care of the children. Kroc and his corporate leaders understood their most important marketing priority was to tap into this protection of traditional values and to portray McDonald's as a "family kind of place." As an outward symbol of this commitment, McDonald's management in the late 1960s modified the spaceship-like red and white ceramic look of McDonald's restaurants to look more like the suburban homes that were built in the era. Ad campaigns proclaimed that McDonald's was home and that anywhere Ronald McDonald goes "he is at home." Indeed, home in the traditional everyone-knows-his-or-her-role Krocian articulation is where the burger is.

McDonald's ads of the era deployed home and family as paleosymbols— signifiers of our oldest and most basic belief structures. Such symbols positioned McDonald's as the defender of the traditional roles of men, women, and children and connected them to "the American way of life." Kroc (1977) would not have used the word, "paleosymbol," but he understood that McDonald's should promote an image that in his words was a "combination YMCA, Girl Scouts, and Sunday School." Devised to tap into the right-wing depiction of the traditional family under attack from anti-family feminists, homosexuals, and other "screwballs," McDonald's so-called "corporate legitimation ads" don't sell hamburgers directly, they sold social relations and ideology. In the midst of social upheaval and instability, McDonald's was presented as a rock of ages, a refuge in a society gone mad. McDonald's brings us together and provides a safe haven for our innocent children who are being exposed to all the filth of larger society.

After its unprecedented growth in the 1960s, McDonald's by the early 1970s began to realize it was no longer the "cute little company of the 1950s." Watching what he considered the horrors of the antiwar, civil rights, women's, and other social movements of the late 1960s, Kroc realized that connecting McDonald's to the traditional home and family would not only provide the nation with ideological service but would paint a happy and moral face on McDonald's, the big corporation. In the Zeitgeist of the late 1960s and early 1970s, corporate leaders felt the sting of public criticism and sensed the need for legitimation ads touting the social benefits and good citizenship of corporations was high. The corporate use of legitimation ads was successful, as public opinion came to view big business in a more positive light. McDonald's use of the theme of family values as a source of legitimation was one of the most successful campaigns in advertising history (Goldman, 1992; Love, 1986).

Popular Culture and the New Childhood

It is obvious in the first decade of the twenty-first century that childhood has changed. While many factors have contributed to this dynamic, this chapter will focus on popular culture, in particular the role McDonald's plays as a corporate knowledge producer in a media culture. Whenever one studies the relationship between cultural change and popular culture, attention must be given to the complexity of cultural production and reception. Simply put, researchers must understand that all audiences of popular and media texts make their own meanings of them. Just because McDonald's advertisers, for example, produce ads inscribed with particular ideological meanings, it does not mean that all receivers of such ads derive the set of meanings intended by the producers. Nevertheless, analysts of popular culture and popular culture for children (kinderculture) cannot discount the ideological intentions of corporations such as McDonald's. The relationship between producer and receiver is always complex and contradictory.

Since parents no longer possess the same amount of control of the cultural experiences of their children, they have lost a degree of influence they once played in shaping their children's values and worldviews. In the 1920s, for example, with the protected childhood firmly established, children had limited experiences that fell outside parental supervision or child-produced activities shared with other children. Since the 1950s more and more of our children's experiences are produced by corporations—not as much by parents or even children themselves. Popular and media culture are now the private domain of

the child, even replete with earphones. At this point a key theme of Kidworld emerges: traditional notions of childhood as a time of innocence and adult-dependency have been challenged by children's access to corporate produced popular culture.

As this change has occurred, parents and concerned citizens have typically ignored the corporate-controlled nature of television. Dissent toward television and the popular culture it transmits has been structured around the image of child as victim of the medium—little interest is generated concerning the power dynamics surrounding access to the dominant mode of communication in contemporary U.S. society. Within the paradigm of the innocent child a belief persists that adults can roll back the social, cultural, and economic changes that have shaped childhood over the last few decades, that we can simply plug up the holes through which adult secrets reach children in an electronic hyperreality. Such an undertaking would demand a form child sequestration tantamount to incarceration.

The task that faces childhood professionals and parents is intimidating but essential. We must develop education, parenting skills, and social institutions that will address this cultural revolution in a way that both nurtures and respects our children. Childhood professionals need to teach our children about particular scholarly knowledge work skills, while concurrently learning from them specific processing abilities that young people have developed in relation to the chaos of information in the electronic hyperreality. In this transformed context school becomes not as much an institution of mere information delivery as a hermeneutical site, that is, a place where meaning is made, where understanding and interpretation are engendered. Of course, this runs directly contrary to the standards-driven educational reforms of contemporary political leaders that focus on the memorization of isolated data for standardized tests with little interest in the sophisticated cognitive abilities or potentialities of our children.

Children have learned much from popular culture's "cultural pedagogy." Cultural pedagogy refers to the idea that education takes place in a variety of social sites, including but not limited to schooling. Pedagogical sites are those places where power is organized and deployed, including libraries, television, movies, newspapers, magazines, toys, advertisements, web sites, video games, virtual realities, books, sports, etc. . . . Our work as childhood educators demands that we study both in-school and cultural pedagogy if we are to make sense of the educational process in the first decade of the twenty-first century

(Spigel, 1998; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997; Hinchey, 1998; McLaren, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001; Grossberg, 1995). Operating on the assumption that profound learning changes one's identity, we see the pedagogical process as one that engages our desire. The process of engaging our desire involves our yearning for something beyond ourselves shaped by the social context in which we operate, our affective investment in that which surrounds us. In this way cultural productions can capture our imagination and in the process shape our consciousness.

The organizations that create this cultural curriculum are not educational agencies but rather commercial concerns that operate not for the social good but for individual gain. Cultural pedagogy is structured by commercial dynamics, forces that impose themselves into all aspects of our own and our children's private lives. Patterns of consumption shaped by corporate advertising empower commercial institutions as the teachers of the new millennium. Corporate cultural pedagogy has "done its homework"—it has produced educational forms that are wildly successful when judged on the basis of their capitalist intent. For example, McDonald's market analysts understood the emerging concerns with "family values" after the social upheavals of the 1960s. It was not merely accidental that their expensive marketing campaigns connecting McDonald's with family values emerged at a time where such concerns were fermenting within the U.S. population.

As Steinberg and I argued in *Kinderculture*, this corporate pedagogy has replaced traditional classroom lectures and seatwork with dolls with a history, magic kingdoms, animated fantasies, interactive videos, virtual realities, kick-boxing television heroes, spine-tingling horror books, Happy Meals, and an entire array of entertainment forms produced ostensibly for adults but eagerly consumed by children. Such teachers have revolutionized childhood. Such a revolution has not taken place in some crass manner with Leninesque corporate wizards checking-off a list of institutions they have captured. Instead, the revolution (contrary to the 1960s idiom) *has been televised*, brought to you and your children in vivid Technicolor. Using fantasy and desire, corporate functionaries have created a perspective on culture that melds with business ideologies and free-market values. The worldviews produced by corporate advertisers to some degree always let children know that the most exciting things life can provide are produced by your friends in corporate America. The economics lesson is powerful when it is repeated hundreds of thousands of times.

Situating the New Childhood in a Global Context

One cannot study the nature of childhood or McDonald's without situating both in the context of globalization. In short, globalization involves the expansion of corporations across national borders and the development of a group of cross-border economic relationships. Globalization is an ideology dedicated to promoting the value of the privatization process and its supposed inevitable triumph around the world. One of the disturbing aspects of globalization involves the fact that it was never approved democratically by peoples around the planet. Corporations have consistently called the shots and shaped the process of globalization in a manner that serves the interests of business. Governments controlled by corporate influence have played their part, typically issuing policy decrees that were arrived at without democratic deliberation.

With corporate ownership of media outlets the public has been subjected to huge propaganda campaigns by international knowledge producers and their elite allies. Such a process has consistently weakened democracy, as it contains the power of labor, scales down the welfare state, produces a corporate-friendly body of public information, and undermines public education as it champions a privatized, neo-liberal, and even more regulatory model in its place, and constructs new forms of cultural pedagogy to promote market values, consumerism, and good business climates. In this cultural pedagogical context multinational corporations have put together an ideological campaign to make their ways of seeing socioeconomic and political reality the "commonsense" of everybody everywhere.

The neoliberal corporate ideology of globalization touts the superiority of market economics, the ineffectiveness of government in the promotion of economic and political progress, the benefits of deregulation and privatization, a form of individualism and personal responsibility that benefits corporations by discouraging the formation of groups of citizens to challenge corporate power, the silliness of concerns with ecological destruction of unregulated corporate growth, and many other notions beneficial to corporate profits. These dynamics shape not only the grander economic and political spheres of life but also the intimate and personal aspects of individuals' lived worlds in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The changes in childhood and the discourse about family values taking place in more and more societies can no longer be viewed outside the influences of globalization. Traditional conceptions of family and modes of childrearing are changing in response to such influences. As women, for example, enter the workforce and renegotiate their social roles, the impact of these changes on children and family life become apparent. Globalization must be understood as a central force in the study of contemporary childhood (Herman, 1999; Giddens, 1999). Indeed, Kidworld is a globalized phenomenon and this chapter is dedicated to an effort to confront the antidemocratic, child-unfriendliness of the process. McDonald's, of course, is a key player in the ideological goals of globalization.

Corporate power without social responsibility opens tremendous opportunity for profit making and cultural damage. In so many contexts we can see the micropolitics of how this macro-feature of globalization plays out. Just one example of McDonald's power that we see play out again and again in many nations involves an ad sponsored by the health-conscious National Heart Savers Association (NHSA). As newspapers prepared to run the ad documenting the fat content of McDonald's burgers, McDonald's threatened to sue for libel. Arguing that the well-documented charges of the NHSA were "outrageous lies that no responsible newspaper should publish," lawyers for McDonald's induced five major newspapers to not run the ad (*Editor and Publisher*, 1990). Thus, corporate power operated to control knowledge production in a way that maintained its positive corporate image: "our burgers are good for you." In England, McDonald's was willing to spend tens of millions of dollars and many years in court fighting two unemployed activists who passed out a one-page leaflet entitled, "What's Wrong with McDonald's" in the much-publicized McLibel case (see Vidal, 1997).

In the first decade of the twenty-first century everything about McDonald's is connected to globalization. As a multinational corporation McDonald's is hard at work restructuring world markets to support the maximum accumulation of profit. In order to hide its corporate agenda, its lack of social responsibility, and its identification as an American company, McDonald's disguises itself in other countries as a local operation. Thus, while McDonald's has globalized its production and marketing operations, it has attempted to present itself in a way that engages local cultural appeal. In the midst of its globalizing activities McDonald's, not unlike other transnational corporations, filters its cultural pedagogies through the cultural lenses of the local. The so-called globalized McWorld is mediated through local situations and local perceptions. A

successful hegemonic power wielder attempting to win popular consent to its legitimacy would operate in no other way (Kellner, 1998; Goldman & Papson, 1996).

This localization within globalization is consciously promoted by McMarketers via a personalization motif. "You deserve a break today" has transmogrified into "My McDonald's." These restaurants claim the ultimate local status—they're yours, whether you are from Beijing, Fiji, Tel Aviv, or Peoria. And this, curiously, is what many analysts don't get: McDonald's customers are induced to produce idiosyncratic meanings of the Big Mac. When their customers "customize" the meanings of their consumption, McDonald's marketers have succeeded. Analysts unfamiliar with the complex workings of power wielders read this marketing/hegemonic success as an indication that concerns about corporate domination are overblown. Those social analysts and educators concerned with McDonald's and other corporate power wielders effects on children, the argument goes, are guilty of the same type of moral panic as the Christian Right (Buckingham, 1998). I believe this is a serious misreading of the relationship between globalized power wielders and the best interests of children.

So concerned is McDonald's about implanting this perception of localization/personalization in the mind of the public that the company actually employs a vice-president for individuality. The stated function of this officer is to make "the company feel small" despite the reality of globalization. In Beijing, McDonald's markets itself to the Chinese people as not an American but a Chinese company. Executives invest time and much money to let the Chinese people know the local features of the restaurants, including the local production of the beef and potatoes. The vast majority of the staff members, they are quick to assert, are Chinese. Despite omnipresent and fierce debates about Americanization and transnational corporate exploitation in Korea, many observers miss the power dynamics at work. Sangmee Bak (1997), for example, argues that Korean customers of McDonald's use creative consumption to transmutate the restaurants into Korean institutions. When researchers focus simply on the process of consumption, omitting any reference to production, in this case the marketing strategies of McDonald's, it is not surprising that power is erased. Hence, a complex power-driven global/local process is magically transformed into a happy individualized game of creative consumption. Concerns about corporate construction of childhood experience are irrelevant in this framework.

In such representations McDonald's is released from complicity in relation to, for example, East Asian environmental problems, economic exploitation, labor abuse, gender inequality, childhood obesity, and ideological conditioning of both children and adults. Many observers noting the culturally specific forms of marketing, advertising, and localization impulses that companies such as McDonald's employ, make the argument that transnational capitalism is <u>not</u> promoting cultural homogenization. In earlier decades the dominant model of assessing McDonald's global impact employed a crude cultural homogenization model. Such a perspective assumed that transnational corporations were homogenizing the world, that Beijing would soon look like Nashville and that the Chinese and the Tennesseans would think and act alike. If companies such as McDonald's were operating as global/local franchises and working their way into local cultures, then such crass homogenization was not taking place. In the absence of homogenization many analysts concluded that corporations were exerting little cultural, social, political, or economic effect (Salva-Ramierz, 1995−1996; Yan, 1997; Collins, 1998; Bak, 1997).

No Homogenization, but a Powerful Impact: McDonald's and the Ideology of Modernization

I became fascinated with the impact of McDonald's early in my life. In *The Sign of the Burger: McDonald's and the Culture of Power* (2000) I write of my personal relationship with McDonald's as a child growing up in the rural mountains of Tennessee. The company's signification of modern up-to-date "with-it-ness" was a key feature of McDonald's appeal to me. As a siren of modernity calling me away from my premodern southern Appalachian upbringing, McDonalds' played a significant role in helping shape my evolving identity and eventual entrance into the modern, if not postmodern, America of the middle and late 1960s. To understand McDonald's for me and millions of other children and young people around the world was to move from the backwoods to the cultural center.

In *The Sign of the Burger* I chronicled numerous interviews with individuals from India, Burma, Egypt, Nigeria, Indonesia, Turkey, and other nations who had learned the same modernization lessons I had derived from the cultural pedagogy of McDonald's. This ability of McDonald's to connect its corporate image to the modern, to "what's happening" is a central theme in the way McDonald's influences the lives of children. Vandana Shiva (1997) taps right

into this modernist dimension and its effect on children's consciousness when she refers to McDonald's attempt to invade India:

> There is a small middle-class and a tiny elite section that I believe feels inferior about what they are, that has been so subjected to the pressures of Westernization that they feel like second-rate Westerners, and people would go in [McDonald's] for the experience not because of what the experience is, but what it symbolizes.

As with modernity and "things modern" in general, McDonald's makes an Indian or a rural Southerner feel that he or she is getting something better than anything experienced before. McDonald's way of life involves something that is superior to <u>your</u> food, <u>your</u> culture, <u>your</u> family, and <u>your</u> perceptions of the way you presently conduct your daily affairs. Such elicitations don't homogenize the Indian and the Southerner but they do shape new ways of being that are accompanied by different life goals and different aspirations. Such influences represent the normalizing power of the Golden Arches in our lives. To "be somebody" my multinational interviewees and I understood in our own cultural and child-like ways that a modification of identity was necessary.

Of course, McDonald's marketers clearly appreciate this process and promote the corporation "as an exemplar of modernity" (Yan, 1997, p. 44). Indeed, hundreds of millions of people around the world in the first decade of the twenty-first century associate McDonald's with not only America but with the glorious benefits of Western modernization. McMarketers in this context have connected the sign of modernization to the company's devotion to scientific management with its standardized procedures of product generation, organization, and labor control. In China, for example, a central aspect of McDonald's advertising involves the assertion that the restaurant's food is carefully produced by modern scientific procedures and is thus much safer and "better for you than traditional Chinese foods. In a starkly misleading manner the company ties the modernist signifier to its operations by declaring the nutritional value of its <u>scientifically</u> constituted cuisine, even to the point of asserting the positive presence of fat in its burgers and fries. An important motivation for Chinese parents taking their children to McDonald's involves preparing children to succeed in a modern form of living. Learning about America, acquiring English, and observing how "moderns" live are believed to be central to the social advancement of young people.

McDonald's restaurants in China employ Aunt and Uncle McDonald's to extend the connection to this modernist Western signifier. Their role is represented as more than mere social directors—they are better described as facilitators of learning. Teaching children about topics such as geography, the West, and dancing, Aunt and Uncle McDonald come to embody the modernity and its closely associated ethic of success so valued by many Chinese people at the end of the century (Yan, 1997). Much like my own intuitions in Tennessee, many Chinese view McDonald's as a vehicle for escape from the blinders of traditionalism.

A similar modernist dynamic is occurring in Korea and Japan where traditional eating rituals involved the communal sharing of rice from the same cooking pot. At McDonald's the meal is removed from this traditional, premodern communal style and individualized. This individualization is viewed by Koreans and Japanese, especially children, as a marker of modernity in its promotion of individual choice and uniqueness (Bak, 1997). In my traditional rural southern Appalachian background, my extended family's love of sharing brown beans and cornbread from the same cooking pot and iron skillet was viewed by many young people as another sign of our premodern status—or as we might have termed it, being "hicks" or "rednecks." No one ate beans by themselves in isolation from the group.

The hegemony of the call of modernity induced my peers and me and increasingly young people around the world to forsake the cohesiveness (and claustrophobia) of traditional communities for the material mobility of modernity. Much to its marketers' credit in the value system of the corporate cosmos, McDonald's has successfully provided customers with a "modern experience." In a socio-political and pedagogical context this experience of "eating modernity" is part of a larger privatized hegemonic process of changing the world and modifying the identity of its people one by one.

In China, totalitarian governmental leaders have grown increasingly aware of this modernization pedagogy. After embracing McDonald's in the previous decade, Chinese state policy has begun to issue concerns about McDonald's as agents of cultural imperialism. In this construct McDonald's takes its place alongside popular music, television, movies, videos, comics, fashion, and home design. Emerging from the crass conception of cultural imperialism as cultural homogenization, Chinese leaders are starting to understand the subtlety of the globalizing hegemonic process. McDonald's in my life in the southern U.S.

forty years ago and in the lives of people in countries around the world in subsequent decades operated to desacralize premodern cultural experience. Holding out the view of a better life, the company subverted premodern alliances, networks, and affiliations. Social relationships are torn asunder as the private, abstract individual is constructed—an individual whose advertising-produced material desires necessitate his or her rejection of "old-fashioned" group membership.

Obviously, it is difficult to discern the specific impact of McDonald's marketing strategies, the way childhood is shaped, what is attended to, and what is ignored. The process is complex, involving the production of meanings and signifiers and their reception by individuals standing at different points in the socio-cultural web of reality. But complexity does not imply that power is not influencing those with whom it comes into contact. Scholars of childhood must become rigorous ethnographers and semioticians examining in detail what children make of and do with the products they purchase. The analysis of such consumptive acts is inseparable from concurrent analysis of the act of production. While children may not directly receive the ideological meanings from McDonald's advertisements that Ray Kroc intended, ignoring the ideological dimension of McDonald's various forms of cultural production will produce misleading child research (Watson, 1997b; Best & Kellner, 1991; Goldman & Papson, 1996; du Gay et al., 1997).

Ideology, Consciousness, and Power: Colonizing Children's Desires

In a neoconservative/neoliberal era the attribution of ideological influence to corporate behavior elicits charges of deterministic modes of analysis. In reviewing Steinberg's and my analysis of corporate influence on childhood in Kinderculture, David Buckingham (1998) charged that power analysis reflects an old form of politics that promotes a technological determinism. Such a way of seeing views technological change producing absolute and inevitable social and psychological consequences for children. Such approaches are dangerous in their concern with validating the "democratic choices" and interpretive freedom of the consumer and they ignore the influence of cultural producers. A more complex and balanced approach appreciates the complicated nature of power's effect on childhood and seeks to explore the construction of both consciousness and the unconscious. Many analysts have maintained that ideology is best transmitted in an unconscious manner and that resistance to such domination is always possible.

The process, for example, in which McDonald's engaged my interviewees and myself concerning the ideology of modernization is a terrifically complex unconscious process. My interviewees, for example, spoke at length about their perceptions of how they associated themselves with McDonald's modernity. All of them understood this dynamic in an idiosyncratic but conscious manner. As far as the ideological effects of such a process, none of them entered our conversations with such realizations. Interestingly, however, many of them began to consider such ideological effects as they answered questions about the influence of the modernization dynamic on their life paths. In these contexts the macro-aspects of the ideological interact with the micro-aspects of individual consciousness—and both must be examined by the scholar of childhood. The corporate producers of children's culture, kinderculture, have developed increasingly sophisticated ways to colonize children's desires both conscious and unconscious. They understand better, unfortunately, than many academic scholars of childhood the ways meaning can be manipulated by dominant forms of power (Gottdiener, 1995; Spigel, 1998).

In our naiveté about this complex process many scholars of childhood completely miss the hegemonic and ideological dynamics of McDonald's colonization of childhood and the profound effects this has when combined with thousands of other producers of kinderculture. After interviewing McDonald's customers in Seoul, South Korea, anthropologist Sanjee Bak (1997) wrote the following:

> Most customers I interviewed told me that their food choices do not simply reflect government guidelines or the agendas of interest groups that play on patriotic themes. Nor do they think that they are blindly influenced by the sophisticated marketing strategies of multinational restaurant chains. The young people who use the pleasant environment of McDonald's to socialize and study are fully aware that the management's intended use of this space is at odds with their own. Many customers even feel that they are taking advantage of the company by not spending enough money to compensate for the service received (p. 160).

The analytical failure here involves the need to look beyond the face value of an interviewee's words, a task of research discussed throughout the history of ethnographic research. How is subjectivity produced? How is consciousness

constructed?   Researchers asking these questions have often referenced the recursive nature of this process: neither the human agent nor the macro-social power wielder operates independently of one another. Each is shaped via the recursive interaction with the other (Giddens, 1986). Bak has excluded the macro-social in his interpretation of the meaning of these comments. As Anthony Giddens (1986) argues, it is a basic interpretive mistake to equate an individual's knowledge of a topic with what he or she holds in his or her conscious mind about it. The actions, social practices, and ideological observances one engages in can best be described as a form of tacit knowledge to which a researcher can never gain <u>direct</u> access.

Bak's mistake mirrors that of many educational and sociological researchers who interview individuals about, say, racism. Most interviewees in this period of history will tell such inquirers that they are not racist. Upon, however, further indirect questioning and observation, one may be confronted with a variety of comments and behaviors that indicate otherwise.   Contrary to the pronouncements of previous researchers of power who focused only on the production of ideology by social, political, economic, and cultural institutions, people are not cultural dupes. But a complex, measured analysis of the interaction of power producer and individual receiver indicates that in situations such as the consumption of McDonald's products and self-representations, individuals are influenced in ways that they themselves don't consciously recognize.   If they consciously recognized such ideological influences, McDonald's advertising and marketing wouldn't work as well as they do.

With these dynamics in mind the power of McDonald's and other producers of kinderculture rests on the fact that it employs a pedagogy of pleasure. The power of McDonald's or Disney, Mattel, Hasbro, Warner Brothers, Pizza Hut, etc. . . . is never greater than when it produces pleasure among children. In this manner consumption is linked unconsciously to identity formation (Warde, 1994), meaning in some degree that individual subjectivity cannot be separated from consumptive practices. Status in one's subculture, individual creations of style, knowledge of cultural texts, role in the community of consumers, emulation of fictional   characters, internalization of values, affective deportment, perception of one's role in an institution (the family, for example) promoted by popular cultural texts/products—all contribute to the personal identities of children. Corporate-produced popular culture provides children with intense emotional experiences often unmatched in any other phase of their lives. It is not surprising that such energy exerts powerful influences on self-

definition, on the ways children organize their lives, and on the very nature of childhood without children ever recognizing it. Often they are too caught up in the pleasure of it all to reflect on the impact.

The New Epistemology of Childhood

Thus, children's relation to McDonald's and other forms of popular culture is complex: it is not always oppressive; it is not always empowering. All phases of the relationship must be analyzed in their specificity and uniqueness. In the same manner every aspect of McDonald's does not signal a macro-social dynamic at work; on the other hand, however, many do. Researching the impact of McDonald's on children's attention to the testimonies and actions of specific child customers of McDonald's is certainly necessary; but it is not sufficient in the inquiry needed to tell this story. When one conducts interviews and observations of children in relation to their connection to McDonald's, such inquiry may yield little insight if not accompanied by the researcher's understanding of cultural knowledges and social formations (Grossberg, 1992, 1995).

For example, it was interesting to observe and record the following interaction between mother and child in a doctor's office. As to its larger insight into McDonald's and childhood, it necessitates analysis against the backdrop of cultural knowledges and social formations. The mother is struggling to contain a restless and frightened six-year-old boy waiting to see the doctor.

Mother:	Would you please sit still and stop crying. Stop it! Now! I'm not going to take you to McDonald's if you don't stop it.
Child:	(screaming) I want to go to McDonald's. Let's go, Mommy. Please . . . let's go now. (Crying) I want to go to McDonald's.
Mother:	I'm going to brain you. Now you just stop it.
Child:	I want a coke and a cheeseburger. Please (screaming) McDonald's, McDonald's, McDonald's! Cheeseburger!
Mother:	(Slapping child across face) You're not going to McDonald's, young man.
Child:	(louder screams and hysterical crying) McDonald's! McDonald's! McDonald's!

A level of this child's desire had been tapped into by McDonald's marketers that transcends rational understanding. In his time of stress in the doctor's office the child seeks the comfort of his provider of pleasure. He doesn't want to go home; he wants to visit the Golden Arches. Reading her child's reactions, the mother appeals to the most severe threat she can formulate in the situation—the threat of not going to McDonald's. As the child breaks free from the mother's restraint, he runs around the waiting room screaming, crying, and flailing his arms. She chases him for several moments, finding it difficult to corral the child. Finally catching him, she carries him back screaming, crying, and flailing to her seat. She reassesses her strategy in her attempt to diffuse the situation.

Mother:	I'm gonna buy you two cheeseburgers and one of them hot apple pies.
Child:	(immediately calmed by the prospect of consumption at McDonald's) You are?
Mother:	Yes, and I'm going to get you some of those animal cookies you like. Hippo-hippo-hippopotamus.
Child:	I love those cookies. I LOVE THEM! Cheeseburgers and cheeseburgers.

The two continue to talk fondly of various McDonald's offerings. The child grows calmer and happier with every reference to McDonald's products— burgers as pacifiers. Consumption in this child's cosmos is the pathway to salvation. An important and profound lesson about the nature of life in contemporary America has already been learned: the centrality of consumption in everyday life. A second lesson may involve the position of McDonald's as a primary provider of pleasure in the child's world. I cannot help but contrast my own notions of pleasure and where it might be obtained in the premodern, "before McDonald's" rural Appalachia I had experienced at the age of six. What is important about the doctor's office vignette? Is it the factual account of the incident or a multitextual interaction connecting my own subjectivity, social theoretical backdrops, and issues of McDonald's capacity as a contemporary power wielder to colonize childhood desire? The intersection of the micro and the macro thickens the interpretive possibilities of the ethnographic account (Fontana, 1994).

There is, of course, no final meaning to "trouble in the doctor's office"; the interpretations I offer are dependent on the social structures and the ideological constructs in which I have invested. Though meaning here is loose and slippery,

it does not mean that my readings are irrelevant. I stand ready to argue their contribution to the effort to understand McDonald's social power and resulting impact on contemporary childhood. It can be maintained that the vignette is a micro-political reflection of a new childhood that positions children at the vortex of the new information environment, that decenters parents' role as the primary providers of aid and comfort to their children. If childhood is an unstable historical category, then a new set of material realities, ideological assumptions, and configurations of power have made an impact on its arrangement. The child in the doctor's office possessed a detailed, if not expert, knowledge of McDonald's product line that he had learned via television. This knowledge was no longer regulated and the impact of this new condition was immediately recognizable (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1998; Jenkins, 1998).

The new childhood, thus, is enabled by a new epistemology of childhood. One of the many historical factors that shapes childhood involves children's access to knowledge. In the electronic information environment of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries children gain access to previously forbidden knowledges without parents knowing where or how they were obtained. Satellite and cable television systems carry 400 or more stations, Internet web sites multiply every year, and children have far more time to study and analyze these sources than adults. I have spoken to many children from the ages of five-years-old and older who tell me that "TV is their life." In the new information environment and the new childhood that accompanies it, attention to television, Internet, videogames, music CD's, videos, and other productions is the vocation of children. They are the experts in this domain and their knowledge surpasses almost every adult. How can they respect those individuals (most adults) who have so little knowledge about such an important dimension of life?

The epistemological construction of the new childhood is not the only factor shaping the historical watershed of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but it is very important. Through their new access to information children know that there exists an esoteric knowledge of adulthood and that adults are hiding information from them. And this information, they often reason, like McDonald's hamburgers, is something that can bring them pleasure. The traditional educational curriculum was based on the assumption that children were devoid of information. In this context the role of the curriculum was to provide them with a sequential set of facts about the world that would fill their epistemological void.

In the electronic information environment of the twenty-first century such curriculum assumptions are naive. Children now have huge volumes of information at a very early age (Spigel, 1998; Casas, 1998). Information delivery pedagogies serve to replicate a larger social process, only in a much slower and, in the perception of children, boring manner. In light of the new childhood the primary role of formal education may need to consider moving away from the monolithic role of information delivery to more of a meaning making, interpretive orientation. As children gain access to more and more information, they need help conceptually connecting and making sense of the data they have already absorbed. The new childhood demands new forms of social analysis, new understandings on the part of childhood professionals, and new modes of education (Spigel, 1998; Casas, 1998).

Seducing the Child: Teaching the Curriculum of Consumption

With the advent of television in the years following World War II the age boundaries of consumption began to shift. The power of television undermined the capacity of parents to control what would become the objects of children's desire, what they wanted to consume. Businesses saw the potential of television; they could directly and often in isolation from parents, provide consumer education for children (Spigel, 1998). With no one to monitor the process they could immerse children in the corporate curriculum of consumption. Television had produced a new form of domination in American society using an emerging form of techno-power. I borrow this term from Doug Kellner (1989) to describe the expansion of corporate influence via the use of technological innovation. Using techno-power derived from television and other technologies, McDonald's has increased its ability to maximize capital accumulation, influence social, cultural, and political life, and influence children's consciousness.

McDonald's is devoted to bringing out the kid in all of us, corporate executives proclaim. With their firm grip of unprecedented forms of techno-power, McDonald's entire operation works to seduce children with its kid-friendliness. Its name evokes the warm associations of Old McDonald and his farm. The safety of McDonald's provides asylum, if not utopian refuge, from the kid-*unfriendly* contemporary world of child abuse, broken homes, and childnapping. Offering something better to escape into, the company's television depiction of itself to children as a happy place where "what you want is what you get" is very appealing (Garfield, 1992). Thus, by the time children reach elementary school

they are often zealous devotees of McDonald's who insist on McDonaldland birthday celebrations and surprise dinners. Obviously, McDonald's advertisers are doing something right, as they induce phenomenal numbers of kids to pester their parents for Big Macs and fries.

McDonald's and other fast-food advertisers early on discovered an enormous and previously overlooked children's market. Children aged five to twelve annually spend about nine to eleven billion dollars of their own money according to what research study you believe. They influence household spending of an additional $160 billion each year and research indicates all of these numbers are increasing (Sengheu, 2000). Every month nineteen out of every twenty children aged six to eleven visit a fast food restaurant. In a typical McDonald's promotion where toys like Hot Wheels or Barbies accompany kids' meals, company officials can expect to sell 30 million to child customers. By the time a child reaches the age of three, more than four out of five know that McDonald's sells hamburgers. As if this level of child-consciousness colonization were not enough, McDonald's, along with scores of other companies, has targeted public schools as a new venue for child marketing and consumption. In addition to hamburgers for A's programs and advertising-based learning packets for science, foreign language, and other subjects, McDonald's and other fast-food firms have attempted to operate school cafeterias (Hume, 1993; Ritzer, 1993).

Make no mistake about it: McDonald's and its advertisers want to transform children into consumers—indeed, they see children as consumers in training (Fischer et al., 1991). Ellen Seiter (1993), however, warns against drawing simplistic conclusions about the relationship between advertisers and children, as have, she says, many well-intentioned liberal children's advocacy groups. ACT (Action for Children's Television), the leading voice against corporate advertising for children, fails to capture the subtle aspects of techno-power and its colonization of childhood. Viewing children in the culture of innocence who should watch only "good" television, meaning educational programs that portray middle-class values, ACT has little appreciation of the complexity of children's television watching. Children in the twenty-first century are not passive and naive television viewers. As advertising professionals have learned, children are active, analytical viewers who often make their own meanings of both commercials and the products they sell.

Whatever meanings they make, however, children definitely receive many of the messages that the advertisers want to insert into their minds. Over 81 percent of

children three to six recognize the McDonald's logo and can match the Golden Arches to hamburgers. Successful consumer training is taking place here. Indeed, it doesn't take a great researcher to quickly discern that the basis of McDonald's operation involves the colonization of children's consciousness. In the phenomenal McLibel trial in England in the mid-1990s—England's largest civil trial—McDonald's marketers presented lengthy defenses of their focus on this seduction of children. To accomplish such captivation McDonald's bombards them with songs, jingles, toys, gifts, collectibles, "lovable characters," and a clown. As a McDonald's ad running in the Chicago market in February 2001 self-consciously put it: "Resistance is futile!"

Brand loyalty is best created in children around the age of two, McDonald's spokespeople told the British court. If we can create an image of McDonald's in their mind at this age, we can induce them to get their parents to bring them to McDonald's. Using this connection with children, spokespeople continued, the corporation directs its efforts into new countries. When McDonald's first enters a country its advertisements are all aimed at kids—as one spokesperson put it at the trial: McDonald's "reaches families through children" (Vidal, 1997, p. 140). In the move to foreign markets spokespeople revealed that much money was delegated to the effort to connect McDonald's to soccer and other sports so children and parents will view McDonald's as a supporter of fitness and vigor. Such a connection will make people think, they maintained, that the company's food is healthy. In China, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea observers watch these child marketing dynamics play out like clockwork. Children are the vanguard of McDonald's new East Asian customers. The same changes in childhood occurring in the U.S. now seem to be affecting East Asia, as the independent consumption power of children is rising while their voice in the family is strengthening (Kovel, 1997; McSpotlight, 1997; Mintz, 1997).

Focused on the child as the center of its advertising universe, McDonald's turns all of its guns on teaching the curriculum of consumption. Promoting a McKids clothing line with embroidered McDonald's logos, Happy Meals for kids flying United Airlines, deals with TV networks for a dedicated in-store McTV channel for children, and a string of different magazines for children with an annual distribution of about 28 million copies, the company wants children to feel that they will be ridiculed and laughed at if they don't go to McDonald's (Synder & Waldstein, 1988; Kovel, 1997; Denston, 1992; Hume, 1987; McSpotlight, 1997). For these and numerous other tactics targeted at children, many governments around the world, including Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany,

and Japan have banned a variety of McDonald's marketing tools on the grounds that they exploit children.

Kroc knew immediately as he observed Mac and Dick McDonald's restaurant in the San Bernadino desert in 1954 that children were the key—the key to the heart of adult patronage of the Golden Arches. As he viewed the new medium of television emerging around him, he was particularly impressed with its lessons to children in the art of persuasion. Kroc was inspired by television's ability to coach kids on how to pester their parents for all the consumable goodies portrayed on the shows. This inspiration became the grounding concept for McDonald's Operations Manual—the so-called McBible. Encourage children, it implored McMarketers, to demand a greater voice in the family's decision on where to go to eat. In the McLibel trial one McDonald's executive testified that the company teaches children songs about the restaurant "to keep the memory of McDonald's at the forefront of their minds so they can again ask their parents if they can come to McDonald's" (McSpotlight, 1997). Amazingly, McDonald's official legal position during the trial was that their marketing never encouraged children to ask parents to take them to McDonald's.

Selling the System: McDonaldland

McDonaldland, I must admit, fascinates me as a site where the kidworld is colonized.   In *Kinderculture* I presented a detailed deconstruction of the ideological inscriptions of the characters (Kincheloe, 1997). McDonaldland is a kid's text fused with Kroc's psyche that emerges as an effort to sell the system, to justify consumption as a way of life. As central figure in McDonaldland, Ronald McDonald emerges as a multidimensional clown deity, virgin-born son of Adam Smith, press secretary for free-enterprise capitalism. He is also Ray Kroc's projection of himself, his ego creation of the most loved prophet of utopian consumption in the McWorld.

All of the other characters in McDonaldland, the company's promotional literature reports, revere Ronald. He is "intelligent and sensitive . . . he can do nearly anything. . . . Ronald McDonald is the *star*." If children are sick, the promos contend, Ronald is there. Even though he has become "an international hero and celebrity," Ronald is still the same friend of children he was in 1963 when he was "born."   According to the promotional literature designed for elementary schools, Ronald "became a citizen of [the McDonald's] International Division" in 1969 and soon began to appear on television around the world. Kroc was propelled to a new level of celebrity as the corporation "penetrated"

the global market. Now known everywhere on earth, Kroc/Ronald became the Grand Salesman, the successful postindustrial Willy Loman—they love me in Moscow, Belgrade, Beijing, and New York.

The Operations Manual describes Ronald McDonald as a "strong marketing tool" who loves McDonald's and McDonald's food. And so do children, because they love Ronald. Remember, children exert a phenomenal influence when it comes to restaurant selection. This means that you should do everything you can to appeal to childrens love for Ronald and McDonald's (McSpotlight, 1997).

Ronald and the McDonaldland characters were specifically created, McDonald's records indicate, for two to eight-year-olds. Advertising for this group was not designed to promote food but to highlight the "McDonald's experience." Such an experience involves more the entertainment value of McDonald's as a fun and colorful place to go. Such McDonaldland productions have worked better than the Dr. Frankensteins who created Ronald McDonald would have ever imagined. The success of Ronald's "world citizenship" is illustrated by children's love of him in Beijing. He is universally known in the city and merely the mention of his name produces great excitement.

Chinese children testify that their love for Ronald is based on his humor, kindness, and his understanding of the hearts of children. Interestingly, in light of the efforts of McDonald's to obscure its American origins, about two-thirds of children in Beijing think Ronald came from McDonald's headquarters in the city while one-third know of his origins in the U.S. Children in Beijing speak enthusiastically about their experiences in the restaurant. They tell stories about birthday parties, about the characters Aunt and Uncle McDonald created by the company for marketing purposes in China. As prime citizens of the Chinese McDonaldland, Aunt and Uncle McDonald recite poems, sing songs, and play games with young customers. Particular children describe the excitement of having "Happy Birthday" sung to them over the restaurant's loud speaker. One cannot come away from these accounts without an understanding of the profound power McDonald's exercises in the lives of Chinese children.

In the context of the nutrition of McDonald's products the company spares no expense in the promotion of the illusion of the healthiness of its food in every country in which it operates. In addition to the distribution of misleading school materials about McDonald's promotion of children's health, the company has

positioned Ronald McDonald in a rock band called Ronald and the Nutrients. Dressed in vitamin and mineral costumes the band sings and plays songs designed to semiotically connect the company to good nutrition and the practice of eating food from fundamental nutrient categories on a daily basis (Yan, 1997; Vidal, 1997). One former Ronald McDonald, Geoffrey Giuliano, issued a public apology for his collaboration in these types of McDonaldland activities. Revealing that he was not sufficiently McDonaldized to continue, Giuliano said that he could no longer participate in crass efforts to use the Ronald charter to hook children on food that is bad for them and the world (Toward Freedom, 1999). "I brainwashed youngsters," he said, "into doing wrong" (quoted in Kovel, 1997, p. 30).

In an interview for a television documentary, Giuliano spoke of children's love of the Ronald character: I once went to a town called Bellevue, Ontario and they had let school out for the day and there were literally 15-20 thousand kids, my road manager called in Ronaldstock. I had one little microphone and did corny little "needle through a balloon" magic tricks and stuff. Nobody could see or hear anything but, I mean, it was like a national hall, it was as if the President had come to town. For Ronald McDonald. That's the kind of hero worship that takes good money to buy, you have pay for that, it's called brain-washing, and you gotta start young (McSpotlight, 1997).

And the McDonaldland characters: The McDonaldland characters, I've forgotten all their names, it was so stupid, but we were told that if they asked where the food came from that the hamburgers grow in a patch with the French fries next to them, it was just wacky, it was really whacked, and the McDonaldland characters were as close as we were allowed to get to the facts. In fact the only grain of truth in those characters was the one called the hamburglar—he was a criminal who used to steal all the hamburgers. Maybe that was some sort of perverse reflection of the corporate McDonald's mentality, I don't know. They were all subservient in the court to Ronald, the king, the monarch, myself. I was the only one allowed to talk—you had to be highly trained to talk (McSpotlight, 1997).

The Right-Wing Contradiction: Free Market Values
Vs. Childhood Innocence

McDonald's stands squarely at the crosswords where one group of right-wing advocates of the market run into another right-wing group proclaiming the innocence of childhood. Though both of these tenets are parts of the conservative faith, something has to give when the interests of one intersect with

the other. Advocates of the free market want nothing to interfere with the right of corporations to operate in a way that will best enhance profits. Of course, advocates of childhood innocence argue that nothing takes precedence over the protection of children. On this issue the right-wing advocates of family values find themselves between the political rock and the hard place with little wiggle room. This is one of many areas where the inherent contradictions of the unencumbered market exert an adverse effect on people in general and children in particular.

Parents have realized that children's enthusiasm for kinderculture, with its enthusiasm for particular television shows, toys, and foods often isolates them from adults in their lives. What many parents and childhood professionals don't realize is that kids' exposure to market produced popular culture has profound effects on children's consciousness and the adult conception of childhood innocence. Drawing on this technology-enhanced isolation, children turn it into a form of power. They know things that mom and dad don't. How many parents understand the relationship between Mayor McCheese and the French Fry Guys in McDonaldland? In this context battle lines begin to be drawn between children and parents, as kids want to purchase McDonald's hamburgers and toy promotions.

Strife between parent and child in working- and lower/lower-middle-class may revolve around money; tension in upper-middle-class home may concern aesthetic or ideological issues. Questions of taste, cultural capital, and self-improvement permeate child-adult interaction in such families. In the ethnographic interviews I've conducted in relation to McDonald's as a cultural dynamic I found numerous expressions of these conflicts. One upper-middle-class parent put it this way:

> What I resent the most about McDonald's is the way they cultivate such bad taste in my children. Those awful hamburgers! My god, after those hamburgers children can't appreciate the difference between good and bad cuisine. They have to be deprogrammed. I don't know what to do sometimes; the more I try to deprogram them the angrier they get, the more they want to go back to McDonald's. I wish I could just shut McDonald's down.

What interesting cultural interactions between children and adults are set up by McDonald's. The child's ability to negotiate the restrictions of adult values is central to the development of an independent self. In the course of this struggle for independence and the experience of contradiction with the adult world, children of middle/upper-middle class, upwardly mobile parents may find negotiation of these dynamics quite difficult. Because of the parents' strict views of the inappropriateness of McDonald's and other forms of popular and television-based children's culture, the potential for parent-child alienation is great. At the heart of this familial conflict, ironically, is the knowledge production of the free market.

Again irony emerges in that it is the free market—that icon of the Right—that has recognized that children of the contemporary electronic era feel oppressed by ideology of childhood innocence. By drawing on the child's discomfort with middle-class protectionism and the accompanying attempt to "adjust" children to a "developmentally appropriate" norm, advertisers hit on a marketing bonanza. If we address kids as kids—a dash of anarchism and a pinch of hyperactivity—they will love our commercials even though parents (especially from the middle/upper-middle-class) will hate them. By the end of the 1960s, commercial children's television and advertising were grounded on this assumption. Such productions throw off restraint, discipline, and views that children should be innocent, humble, and reticent. Everything, for example, that educational television embraces—earnestness, child as incompetent, unknowledgeable adult, child in need of discipline—market-driven, commercial television rejects. In this market context, commercial television and the productions that colonize it such as McDonald's exacerbate children's oppositional culture.

Colonizing Positionality: The New Covert Kinderculture

Clearly understanding the contradiction between innocence and free marketing, McDonald's early on set its sights on the colonization of the covert and oppositional culture of kids. A covert children's culture has existed for a couple of centuries in schools and on playgrounds. The covert children's culture of the past, however, was produced by children and propagated via child-to-child interaction. Twenty-first century children's culture is created by adults and dispersed via television and other electronic sources for the purpose of inducing children to consume. As they carefully subvert middle-class parents' obsession with achievement, play as a serious enterprise, and self-improvement-oriented "quality time"—a subversion with several social benefits—advertisers connect

children's culture to their products. McDonald's has done an excellent job of inconspicuously promoting these dynamics.

In the globalized kidworld we can see these dynamics at work. McDonald's and other forms of fast food constitute a central topic of conversation for Hong Kong school children. Parents and adults for the most part know little about this subject (Watson, 1997c). The changes in kinderculture in Asia have come remarkably quickly, as children get more and more of their information from corporate sources and less and less from their family. The fodder for the covert children's culture is provided by McDonald's and its consequences in diverse places is profound. McDonald's, of course, is aware of the tightrope it is walking between tapping the kinetic power of children's subversive culture and the possibility of offending guardians of propriety. In this context McMarketers are always attempting to strike the right balance (Deetz, 1993; Mintz, 1997).

In their so-called "slice-of-life" children's ads, advertisers depict a group of preteens engaged in "authentic" conversations around a McDonald's table covered with burgers, fries, and shakes. Using children's slang ("radical," "dude," "we're into Barbie") to describe toys in various McDonald's promotions, children discuss the travails of childhood with one another. In many commercials children make adults the butt of their jokes or share jokes that adults don't get (Seiter, 1993; Goldman, 1992). Subtle though it may be, McDonald's attempts to draw some of the power of children's subversive culture to their products without anyone but the kids knowing. Such slice-of-life ads are opaque to the degree that adults watching them don't get it—they don't see the advertiser's effort to connect McDonald's with the subversive kinderculture.

This oppositional aesthetic is a key aspect of contemporary kinderculture. Henry Jenkins (1998) defines it as a phenomenon that "challenges or reverses adult categories and carves out a kids-only culture" (p. 29). Products such as fast food that kids can buy with their own money are often more liberated from the "good taste" of middle-class adulthood than more expensive commodities family members might buy as gifts for children. Because of this oppositional aesthetic advertisers now know that the marketability of a child product can be predicted by the degree of negative reaction it elicits from a parent. The popularity of Ugly Stickers, Wacky Packs, Garbage Pail Kids, Toxic High stickers, "Beavis and Butthead" and "South Park," and McDonald's food over

the last few decades reveals the power of this childhood oppositionality and the ways it can be colonized by marketers (Spigel, 1998).

When this oppositional aesthetic is combined with the fast pace of market change even adults in their late twenties find their consumptive cultural cosmos quite alienated from teens and children. And this is exactly part of the appeal: the children's consumption community grants them a particular and unique identity separate from those even close to them in chronological age. This kindercultural oppositional identity can be found not only in the U.S. but all around the McDonaldized world. For example, many children in Hong Kong refuse to eat with their parents and grandparents in traditional Chinese restaurants or in dim sums, demanding that family members take them to McDonald's. The same is true in Taiwan where children make a qualitative distinction between the modernity of McDonald's and the old-fashionedness of local modes of dining—they choose, of course, McDonald's modernity as an oppositional rejection of cultural tradition (Martin & Schumann, 1997; Bell & Valentine, 1997; Watson, 1997c; Kellner, 1998).

Knowing the proper behaviors that dining in McDonald's mandates is another factor that sets children apart from their parents and extended families. Children in Beijing reported that understanding the expected behaviors in the restaurant made them feel more civilized (Yan, 1997). Such an observation reminded me of my cultural experiences with McDonald's in Sullivan County, Tennessee. My parents, raised in the rural Tennessee of the early twentieth century, were profoundly intimidated by the process of ordering at McDonald's. They quickly relegated this job to me. The couple of times my parents tried to order, they became confused and embarrassed by the fast-paced questions and expectations. At the age of eleven I felt a sense of being more civilized than they were, more of a modern than a hillbilly with my ability to negotiate the ordering and other expected behavioral processes. Such feelings set up a cultural chasm between my parents and myself at this point of my life. They were not the adult models I wanted to emulate in my quest for the modern identity. My oppositionality grew.

I was embarrassed by my parents' lack of modernity. One child in Hong Kong who had carefully watched McDonald's TV commercials to learn the McProtocols spoke of his own embarrassment about his grandfather's inability to eat properly at McDonald's thirty years after my own. In one of my interviews in a McDonald's outlet in Johnson City, Tennessee I spoke to an elderly East Tennessee farmer waiting in line with his nine-year-old grandson:

JLK:	You taking your grandson to McDonald's?
Grandfather:	Yep, he loves this stuff.
JLK:	You like it?
Grandfather:	(laughing) Not particularly. I'm not much for it.
JLK:	You enjoy bringing him here?
Grandfather:	(laughing uncomfortably) Not much. I've never quite understood how all this works. He tries to tell me but I'm just too old to get it. He thinks I should be sent out to pasture. I don't know. Maybe he's right.

Even in the specificity and uniqueness of the local situations these larger themes of oppositionality, modernity, alienation, and embarrassment continue to play out.

McDonald's continuously attempts to colonize oppositional characters. After the movie *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* was released, the company designed an excellence campaign featuring a stoned, long-haired, countercultural kid who was used to inscribing his countercultural oppositionality on the Golden Arches. As surfer-valley dude tells the viewers:

> In the past, when ancient old dudes cruised, they used the stars to lead their way. This was not a very excellent system because they were lost all day and ended up living in bogus caves. But luckily we dudes of today have a most excellent number of highways and very many busy streets, and even more excellent than that—they've all been built right next to a McDonald's (Goldman & Papson, 1996, p. 11).

When advertisers engage in this type of subcultural appropriation they have to get it totally correct. If the look or the words is even slightly off target, children and young people will retreat from a positive identification with the product. The company must understand the oppositional ideology that drove the formation of the subculture in the first place. Some advertisers call this practice "lifestyling for children" (duGay et al., 1997).

All of these dynamics encourage a sense of independence on the part of children. We have our own kinderculture that no one else understands, our own

peer group that resists penetration by adults, our own ideology of oppositionality that unites us, our own identity that is even recognized by television executives and advertisers, and our own products that we understand in a way no one else does, let us have our independence, they demand. We are no longer children in any traditional sense, we are a new younger and mutant age category. We are not adults, but we are "adultified." McDonald's savvy sociologists of childhood recognized these social changes early and treated children as adult-like self-determining agents who call for more familial shots than generally assumed.

The adultified child is better coiffured, wears more jewelry and clothing, demands more and better quality entertainment, possesses more economic resources, and is more oppositional to adults than previous generations of children. These changes in childhood have taken place amazingly quickly in the U.S. and around the world. In Hong Kong, for example, children hardly ever ate outside the home. In a little over two decades they not only eat out often but make decisions about when and what to eat (frequently McDonald's) without adult interference. The same fast change has taken place in Japan, as children in this country have gained new eating and consumption habits with all the accompanying cultural modifications. The new childhood is a reality that demands new ways of thinking about teaching, counseling, helping, providing social services, and relating to children. Childhood ain't never gonna be the same (Mintz, 1997; Watson, 1997c; Ohnuki-Tierney, 1997).

Power Relations, Children and Adults, and Food

In Western societies over the last five centuries the process of eating and behavior at the dining table has undergone great changes. In the sixteenth century bodily functions such as spitting, urinating, and gluttonous eating were performed without embarrassment in public. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries these practices began to change, as self-control, eating in moderation, and bodily management during eating came to gain social value. The concept of manners developed in this context and the eating table came to be seen as an important venue for social regulation in general and social training for children in particular. McDonald's, of course, changes this process by colonizing not only what but where and how children eat.

This postsixteenth century change in eating habits served to make the dinner table a primary pedagogical site for young children. Parents, especially middle, upper-middle, and upper-class parents not only taught their child to consume "good" food but to connect eating to important aspects of identity and

personhood. Many elements of socioeconomic class and cultural capital were negotiated at the dining table: "young ladies don't eat that way"; "a gentleman holds his knife and fork this way and sits up straight." In these ways children learned to control their bodies and assume expected social locations. Of course, in these dinnertime cultural rituals particular modes of deportment were negotiated and contested. Dinner was often a power struggle between parents and children, as battles were fought over body management and what types and "quality" of food were to be eaten. With the advent of the new childhood these battles became more frequent and more intense.

McDonald's marketing campaigns directed toward children induced young people to resist the parental pedagogy of the dining table. In the power struggles that ensued, children, buoyed by their desire for "the McDonald's experience," challenged parents' delineation of "good food" and proper dining deportment. Thus, McDonald's and countless other corporate knowledge producers once again came to replace parents' perspectives on the education of children. The pedagogy of dining is merely one more example of the ways the corporate construction of kinderculture imposes a wedge between parents and children and often under the flag of family values exacerbates familial conflicts. Scholars of childhood attempting to make sense of the experience of the new childhood in the twenty-first century must take into account the complex process by which children vis-à-vis various forms of knowledge production reject, oppose, or negotiate parental, teacher, and other adult manifestations of authority. Presently, in the discourses of the various child professions, these complex dynamics are not well understood (Bell & Valentine, 1997; Jenkins, 1998).

The Politics of the New Childhood

Children, adults, parents, and childhood professionals are caught in a <u>Zeitgeist</u> of cultural transition in the meaning of childhood. In various countries around the world these parties are struggling to deal with the lived implications of these complex changes. Many people in these diverse locations have wondered how conceptions of childhood innocence intersect with the specific realities of children's everyday lives in the emerging new childhood. In this complex context we begin to contemplate the politics of the new childhood and its implications for the childhood professions. Entering into this deliberation we must take into account not only the power dynamics raised by McDonald's and other corporate influences but the way issues of childhood are positioned in the public discourse.

Traditionally viewed as a "soft" and feminine issue compared to "hard" masculine political topics such as taxes and national defense, the politics of childhood reflected the traditional gender divide of the feminine domestic space and the masculine public space. Recently with the right-wing trumpeting of family values, childhood politics has taken a more central role. In the U.S. the Democratic party in the 1990s began to challenge the Republican domination of family values issues. Democrats such as Hillary Clinton challenged the Republican role as the protector of our children with a call for public "it takes a village" support for programs that helped children. Regardless of political party, however, both views of childhood politics were grounded firmly on the ideology of the innocent child.

In twenty-first century U.S. politics no one steps outside the discursive universe of innocence ideology and the fetishization of children. This fixation on childhood innocence is typically accompanied by a universalization of childhood, a belief in the similarity of childhood across historical and cultural boundaries. This produces a misleading image of children standing outside of culture, a view of childhood that confuses mythology with reality. In this context the profound differences in children's experience may be overlooked, problems children face may be dismissed, and children's abilities may be discounted. Make no mistake, there are differences between the mainstream U.S. political parties as far as a politics of childhood is concerned. Republicans want to dismantle the public sphere as they focus on the individual experiences of children. The Democrats' vision places the child back in the public sphere, evoking a middle ground between state and private responsibilities (Jenkins, 1998).

Nevertheless, neither party seems interested in reconceptualizing childhood politics in light of the changes in childhood over the past several decades. Children exist perpetually in a "protected space," a realm where the major responsibility of adults involves shielding the innocent child from the corruptions of adult culture. Such viewpoints also support a recovery of patriarchy and the effort to police women who were perceived to be gaining too much power and influence via feminism and the women's movement (see Kincheloe, 2001). With the advent of the discourse of family values, women who worked outside the home for purposes of economic necessity or for personal reasons were placed "under suspicion" for failing to meet maternal responsibilities.

In such a neopatriarchal context women working outside the home were deemed by right-wing observers to be responsible for the decline of family values and the vulnerability of unsupervised children. As the rhetoric of family values re-sentimentalized the bond of devoted mother-innocent child, pressures intensified on women to stay home with children or if they couldn't, to at least feel guilty about their work-time away from them. The innocent child needs constant maternal supervision, the argument goes, and it is not the man's job to provide it. In this context we begin to see the ideological demands of the innocent child: we must return to a traditional society where women understood that care for the domestic space was their central and exclusive concern. A regressive politics of childhood begins to emerge.

In this regressive context an ambivalence toward children becomes more apparent. Adults long for children but are often subconsciously aware that their actual proximity can be annoying, time consuming, and even dangerous (Spigel, 1998). As adults look around them, especially with the ideological support of the right-wing representation of neglectful mothers and adult-like, threatening children, they are frightened by what they perceive as adults in the bodies of children. This ambivalence toward and fear of the "new child" was a central theme of Shirley Steinberg's and my Kinderculture. The regressive politics of childhood, with its image of the innocent child intact views, the new child as an aberration—a worldly smart-ass who is simply too big for his or her britches. Such undesirable children in this ideological context are often easy to hate.

This ambivalence/fear of the worldly child manifests itself more at the subliminal level than in overt public conversation—although in my research it is signaled clearly in many private conversations. As one mother told me:
Children today have no respect for adults. They don't care about anything and would just as soon rob you as look at you. It's the fault of the parents. It's all about families and mothers who don't have time for children. Those women are going to reap what they sow. We're going to have to discipline them kids, show-em who's boss. They don't get that at home. The world's going to hell.

Children with power seem especially threatening to adults. In Kinderculture we argued that one of the best ways to trace this social theme was to examine the cultural unconscious as manifested in movies and other forms of popular culture. In that context Steinberg and I explored numerous movies produced as the new childhood was taking shape that represented children as maniacal killers and

monsters.   The sheer number of such representations indicated to us that something was happening at the subconscious level that reflected adult reactions to the changes taking place in childhood.

The precocious child is a threat to what Valerie Polakow (1992) labels the right-wing order paradigm: a way of seeing that demands pedagogical adherence to the established developmental sequence and reward for the docile and obedient child (see Cannella, 1997).   In the ideology of the innocent child there is something quite disconcerting to the conservative order about a child-savant who learns about life "out of sequence" from television, the Internet, and other electronic media.   Independent and self-sufficient children with an "inappropriate" insight into the adult world constitute the monsters in the evil-children movies.   An important theme of this regressive politics of childhood rears its head in this context: despite their "natural innocence" there is something to be feared about the latent monster in all children.

The conservative concern with order and equilibrium is reasserted in light of these repressed parental fears.   The precocious child must be rendered obedient; the body must be regulated in the it's-for-your-own-good discourse of justification.   Parental fears find legal expression in new laws defining new classes of juvenile crime, making juvenile records public, establishing boot camps for young criminals, outlawing the sale of spray paint to curb graffiti, and eliminating age guidelines in treatment of youth offenders (Vogel, 1994).

Recently published children's books attempt to frighten precocious children who become too adult into not only obedience but a new form of dependency.   Written to counteract too much child identification with Macauley Culkin's precocious, independent, and successful Kevin character in *Home Alone*, Francine Pascal's *Ellen Is Home Alone* (1993) paints a gruesome picture for children who want to stay home alone.   Her message is simple and straightforward: Staying home alone is scary; as a child you are incompetent; if you try to act like an adult you will be severely punished; if you resist parental control you may *die*. Pascal's infantiphobia and the "hellfire pedagogy" she uses to enforce discipline is not unlike Jonathan Edward's imagery of children in the hands of an angry God. The message is clear: the wages of adultification of children in the innocence paradigm and its regressive politics of childhood is death.

 Constructing a Progressive Politics of Childhood and Childhood Education

The purpose of this analysis of the complex politics of McDonald's and the new childhood is not only to understand some of the sociocultural dynamics shaping contemporary childhood but to begin the process of developing a progressive response to these new realities. Without a progressive childhood politics and pedagogy we are left to the mercy of the patriarchal, authoritarian, misogynistic, and child fearing regressive politics of the Right. Our progressive politics not only critiques traditional patriarchal family arrangements and unregulated corporate influences but sets into motion a process of developing new ways that families, educators, psychologists, and social workers might help nurture and raise children. Such new strategies must be connected to conceptions of democratic participation, social justice, and political transformation.

In this context a progressive politics of childhood and childhood education works to create situations that contribute to the empowerment of children. Our vision of a desirable politics of childhood helps children articulate their own agendas and construct their own cultural experiences and facilitates their understanding of the complex dynamics that shape their relationships and interactions with adults and the adult world. Here we support work with children that helps them make sense of and critique their place in the web of reality, while at the same time developing a more mature picture of the society that produces the knowledge that bombards them. The ideology of childhood innocence undermines such an effort to help children make more sense of their lives. The innocent child is passive and can operate in a domain of protection. He or she is objectified by adult fetishization and is denied the right of self-direction. When such innocent children encounter the lived world of the twenty-first century childhood, negative consequences often emerge.

Central to our childhood politics and the pedagogy that accompanies it is the development of a media and power literacy for both adults and children. Since the advent of an electronic hyperreality has revolutionized the ways knowledge is produced in the world and the ways children come to learn about the world, an understanding of this process is a necessity in the twenty-first century. The cultural pedagogy of McDonald's is an informal form of learning that oftentimes is not even consciously viewed as a pedagogical moment by children or adults even as it takes place in front of them. This is why a power literacy is so important to a progressive childhood politics and pedagogy: much of the knowledge children learn in a curriculum of hyperreality is produced by dominant power wielders in a manner that serves their political and economic interests. This point is central in any reconceptualized curriculum of childhood.

In such a curriculum children and adults learn that free market needs set the agenda of corporate information producers. As the market frees children from the protective encapsulation of the ideology of childhood innocence, it ensnares them in the corporate ideology of consumption and market values. With an understanding of the corporate/market curriculum, the phenomenal power it wields, and the profound influence it exerts on children, we can approach issues of children's resistance to adult authority from a very different vantage point. Instead of viewing such actions simply as "misbehavior" or a psychologized "testing of limits and boundaries," we might see the situation in a sociopolitical context. Such a perspective could help us view the event as the adultified child perceives it: "I am not being given the respect I deserve as a knowledgeable agent." In most other situations in the child's life he or she is treated as a self-directed agent. The resistance displayed in this circumstance might be conceptualized as a manifestation of frustration engendered by living in a world with such divergent conceptions of the social role of children (Jenkins, 1998; Hengst, 2001).

When we view contemporary children in this manner, we begin to open new levels of understanding that lead to new avenues of adult-child interaction, new forms of trust and communication. The objective is not to simply conflate childhood and adulthood—there are obviously differences that require adults at times to exercise authority and to protect children. The effort that a progressive politics and pedagogy describes is one that engages both adults and children in the pursuit of a more complex portrait of kinderculture. With this knowledge adults and children can work together for democratic, just, and cognitively sophisticated cultural and educational change. In this manner children's quality of life can be improved in a manner that makes childhood a more happy and beneficial time for both children and adults (Casas, 1998).

Smarter Kids Deserve a Smarter Education

A simple but profound aspect of the new childhood that demands inclusion in a progressive politics involves new and more complex understandings of the cognitive abilities of children. While children are almost as vulnerable as adults to the hegemonic and ideological seductions of corporate knowledge producers, their abilities to discern unique meanings from the information saturation of hyperreality is quite remarkable. Like other individuals who differ from those whose identities help place them near the centers of race, class, and gender power, developmental/cognitive psychology underestimates their abilities

(Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Hinchey, 1999; Kincheloe, Steinberg, & Villaverde, 1999; Kincheloe, 2001). Many argue that because of the new childhood and the sophisticated cognitive abilities that develop within it, the argument that childhood is a preliminary and preparatory stage of development prior to a substantially different, higher phase of adulthood is no longer valid (Hengst, 2001).

In the first decade of the twenty-first century we must accustom ourselves to the argument that kids are much more capable than generally assumed. The smarter our questions to children become and the more we take time to listen to them, the better we understand the sophistication of their efforts to seek self-direction and construct a unique identity. In light of the complexity of the contemporary information environment, children's ability to process it with such speed is remarkable. I am amazed when I watch an eight-year-old surf the Internet, watch television, listen to a music CD, and talk on the telephone while doing her homework—and fully attend to all tasks. One of the goals of a progressive politics and a progressive pedagogy of childhood involves helping adults understand these phenomenal abilities. Not only will adults understand and appreciate children more, but they may learn some valuable lessons (Hengst, 2001; Casas, 1998).

In this social and cognitive context of the new childhood we begin to reassess childhood education. How can schools stay the same when the large percentage of women and men in the workforce combined with the adultifying experiences children encounter have combined to profoundly change the everyday life of children in the new childhood? Such realities have operated to shift household chores and responsibilities, inducing some scholars to argue that mothers and children have switched roles in many contemporary homes (Hengst, 2001). These social, cultural, and economic alterations have set traditional expectations on their head. For example, the comfortable notion that one goes to school and then goes to work after educational preparation is beginning to fall apart. The old ways of thinking about and implementing education are being pressured by changing families, knowledge access, patterns of consumption, sexual knowledge and activity, views of adults, and self-perceptions.

One would be hard-pressed to discover public discussion of these issues or educational policies based on a recognition of them in contemporary U.S. education. The nature and the spirit of standards-based educational reform has so obsessed schooling in the U.S. that little time can be granted to anything

outside the short-term improvement of standardized test scores. What is remarkable in this era of school reform is few people have noticed that schooling plays a decreasing role in the education of children. An increasing quantity of what children know comes from sources other than school. Indeed, the very importance of education-based, academic knowledge is becoming less important to children who see it as rather quaint in the expanding universe of knowledges.

Obviously, corporate-produced kinderculture is a primary source of knowledge in the new childhood. The traditional knowledge of school is viewed as less prestigious, less necessary in the commerce of everyday life. The contention that school knowledge is more important than the practical knowledge of the workaday world is no longer accepted by children and increasing numbers of adults. Such changes portend not only a new childhood but a new era of education where the form it takes will be difficult to predict. Where we can document changes in the everyday lives of children and even some changes in styles of parenting, we see far fewer changes in schooling. Schools cling to the concept of the innocent child who is more dependent and less self-directed than the image of children constructed in the new childhood.

Thus, the work of childhood educators, psychologists, and social workers remains entrenched in prior ways of conceptualizing children. As my co-editor Gaile Cannella has argued in diverse contexts, development psychology, humanistic childhood education, and child-centered pedagogies—as well-intentioned as their practitioners may be—do not always serve the best interests of children. Thus, the point of this analysis of McDonald's and the new childhood and of Kidworld in general is not simply to describe the changes in childhood and some of the forces that shape them, but it is to contribute to the process of rethinking the world of childhood professionals in ways that better serve the needs of contemporary children (du Bois-Reymond, Sünker, & Krüger, 2001; Hengst, 2001; Jenkins, 1998).

A progressive politics and a progressive pedagogy transcend reductionistic modes of education that simply transfer an unproblematized body of academic knowledge to children. At the same time such orientations completely ignore cultural pedagogies such as McDonald's and the increasingly important role they play in the life of children in the first decade of the twenty-first century. In this context childhood professionals devote more attention to truly listening to children, taking into account their perceptions of the world, considering their concerns and desires, and respecting their goals and aims. Of course, a

neoprogressive politics and pedagogy will protect children when they need protecting, nurture them when they need nurturing, create new spaces where they can develop exciting new abilities and modes of empowerment, and love them in smarter ways.

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