In “Nostalgia and Mass Culture: McDonaldization and Cultural Elitism,” Martin Parker challenges George Ritzer’s- and others-, harsh critiques of- about what has been called “McDonaldization” and it’s impacts. Parker points to the fact that extremists on both sides of the spectrum feel McDonaldization is sure to lead to corruption. Both sides tend to refer to “the masses”, which Parker feels carries an elitist undertone. Parker explains how by describing “the masses”, one places themselves as an outsider of this group, possessing superior knowledge, weakening any “unbiased” argument made. While the right side sees the movement as a suffocation of individual genius and a loss of past culture, the left side argues that “the mass suffocates change because the ruling classes want it to” (Parker 1998:2). To Parker, both sides seem rather extreme, though, challenging capitalistic principals.

For Parker, culture is something that is changing, with the change in the hands of the people. Instead of the idea of “mass culture”, which he feels often implies compliance as well as “limits and pressures” (Parker 1998:6), Parker (1998:6) agrees more with “popular culture”, in which the people form their own cultures based on their own interests and values. This idea seems to be fitting for the ideal capitalistic culture, and of course each person has slightly different values and desires, yet at the same time, the culture one’s born into inevitably plays somewhat of a role in molding specific desires into a group of people. For example, a child raised in a culture that greatly stresses blending in seems much less likely to strive for individuality. That being said, culture still seems to be influenced by the people, including individuals, living in it. Parker also suggests that McDonald’s may in fact be “a site for possible resistance, subversion, and pleasure” (Parker 1998:8). With resistance towards the culture of the past, these resisters ultimately affect the culture of the future as they enjoy their speedily prepared Big Macs.

Parker continues by pointing to the fact that McDonald’s has made adaptations based on the cultural values of the local peoples. This consideration for multiple cultures is what Parker contributes to the corporation’s cross-continental success. By “…avoiding taboos like beef, and customizing its architecture to match native styles” (Parker, 1998:12), a result is that “…the golden arches mean different things for different people” (Parker, 1998:12). With this being said, Parker’s argument that McDonalds is adapting to cultures as opposed to changing cultures seems relatively valid. Parker further validates his arguments by acknowledging that fast food is not completely disconnected from culture, nor do all of the corporations’ decisions seem unquestionable, making it clear throughout his essay that his arguments are not validating every aspect of McDonalds, but rather reasoning against George Ritzer’s overly condescending examinations.

Parker’s decision to not directly choose a side to the argument at times seems to fog his points. At the same time, this very open-ended approach allows for self-inquiry, making the article more of a reflection on and questioning of engrained personal beliefs. In that sense, Parker’s article calls for a sociologically admired thought process leading towards cultural relativism.