

MCDONALD'S ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

It is 1 pm at McDonald's just outside Termini station. The space inside is packed with customers, the place all around appears chaotic, there are long queues at the counters, the din is deafening. The first impression is one of feverish activity and constant motion.

Although it is lunchtime, and therefore it is the moment of maximum affluence to the place, its closeness to the station makes the flux of patrons constant throughout most of the day. Their nationality is mixed, there are as many Italians as foreigners; all are dressed in a casual way. Customers come from a variety of different social classes: mostly from the middle class, but also beggars who hang around the station very often come here, where they can get a full meal at a relatively low price.

Most people are eating their meal in a quick, distracted way, supposedly before taking a train, or during a brief stop in the middle of their journey. For this reason, they usually have their lunch in a hurry, occasionally chatting with their companion, if they have one. Others stare vacantly in front of them and concentrate on their hamburger while absorbed in their thoughts. Whatever might be the case, nobody lingers on much at their own table after finishing eating.

In a place so crowded, where it is common to share a table with a stranger, the behaviour most likely to be observed, both in the staff and the customers, is characterised by an impersonal politeness to strangers and a lack of personal involvement with what goes on in

the surroundings. People mind their own business, they avoid getting involved in other people's private matters and, for this reason, many avoid eye-contact and keep staring in the void, if their not busy eating or reading.

McDonald's is a convenient place where to eat because of its fast service and the fact that you already know what you are going to get and at what price, without unexpected, often disagreeable, surprises. The architecture and the furnishing of the place is simple, but, at the same time, is a characteristic feature of the place. Surfaces and tables are kept constantly clean, the staff is efficient and well-organized.

It is evident that efforts are made to localize the local, making some changes to adapt it to the habit and standards of the country. Examples of this are McItaly hamburger and a sort of tiramisu called Minuetto. In addition, they offer a large choice of different meals, intended not only for those who would like to have a classic Hamburger menu, but also for vegetarian, who prefer to have a salad instead.

Despite the American origin of McDonald's, few, if any, are the things that remind us of this. In fact, McDonald's presence has a long history in Italy, and most people no longer consider the place as completely alien or foreign. It can safely be said that nowadays McDonald's is perceived as a part of a global, transnational phenomenon, rather than an exclusively American one.

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