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### Visit at McDonald's: some observations

To proceed with the exercise of observing people, architecture, food with all the connected demographic elements, I went to McDonald's at 7.30 pm and stayed a little more than the prescribed hour, leaving at 8.45 pm. I chose a McDonald's I had already been to some five years ago and which I had chosen not to frequent again as the last time I went it was dinghy, dirty and looked unsanitary, in spite of huge French windows which should (technically) have contributed to avoiding the dingy look. In the course of time there has been an evolution or, to be more exact, a standardization of the place: the space was previously more ample and more functional whilst now there have been additions that are for the most part decorative.

These additions in the form of an archway and a column divide the space making it look more confined but at the same time more bistrot like whilst a third column doubles as a cleaning closet leading to a more frequent interaction of back and front region, according to Groffman's definition. The bistrot look is present in most of the McDonald's I have been to in Rome and is a fairly recent thing. The decorations are rather mixed: zebra stripes on one wall; multi-colour stripes on another and in what looks like a smaller room, clashing colours in an audacious mix. Also noticeable are the more design like chandeliers varying between rectangular ones in white and dark brown and bell shaped ones in bright red. I believe this style and the colours cause the Italian McDonald's to be no longer identifiable as a recognizable part of America but as more cut off from their home base.

This is also due to regional menus called McItaly which are hamburgers made to be more regional with the use of more high level food: spinach, sunflower seeds and mozzarella and sweets made from an Italian Christmas cake called pandoro, the brainchildren of a

famous Italian chef, Gualtiero Marchesi. This I have read has caused a great deal of controversy because these dishes seems to deviate from a clearcut and stereotyped vision of what is still considered by many to be a chain of American restaurants (not considering therefore the variations chosen by individual companies).

This in spite of the fact that there are no variations in price between the standard and the unusual which would have been a perfectly understandable reason for protest, making the protest itself rather sterile. Other examples of this variation were the coffee making machine which was a typical American one sitting next to a box of Orzoro, a hot malt drink which resembles coffee and the presence of a Roma beggarwoman and a rose seller. These figures are typical of Italian restaurants and it was the first time I had seen them in a McDonald's but it was taken as a matter of course by others so it could not be considered unusual.

In spite of this, the meals I saw eaten were for the most part the typical and stereotyped ones: hamburger, French fries and coke. Some present partook of the more healthy options present: salad and water. The ones choosing these were older couples and adults whilst the younger generation went for the usual menus with the only modifications being the choice of hamburger or drink. There being present a McCafè where it was possible to have cake which deviated from the usual choices and hot drinks, I saw an older man have cake and a young couple have cappuccinos, in a more Italian bar style, this being in keeping with what I said on variation between original and local McDonalds.

The atmosphere, maybe due to it being past the rush-hour, was very quiet and relaxed with conversations held in low voices and very few children running about. While taking my notes, I noted down various times that many people present were wandering around the restaurant: the most noticeable instance was a couple of young boys walking around with an arm companionably slung over each other's shoulders in a very relaxed manner. Nearly all ages, social classes and ethnicities were present varying between business men with suits and

iphones and young boys in ratty t-shirts. Few really stood out: a young woman wearing a short fur coat and a frilly scarf; a group of young men of probable middle eastern origin who were talking loudly and flipping through a newspaper and an old lady without a coat.

She was my most significant example of back region and front region: she did not wear a uniform but a pale lilac top and a strawberry pink neckerchief. In the course of my observation, she sat in various places in the restaurant; greeted an older man and kept walking around checking everything. She went a few times to clear trays, in one instance folding the paper that covered one of them with great care and yet when I left she was eating something like any other customer. I could not determine what she was doing there yet not one member of the staff intervened to stop her. The more recognizable members of staff with their orange shirts were two members of the cleaning staff who kept wizzing out to wipe down surfaces and sweep the floor. This made for one of the cleanest McDonald's I have ever seen in Italy which shows that the equation QSC+V is not as universal as the McDonald's representative believe.

I believe that this exercise has been helpful to take into consideration aspects of everyday living which I had never thought about before in spite of the fact of having gone to McDonald's for now many years. The element of democracy and variation in the people who go to these restaurants ranging in age, social class and ethnicity is but one of them.