

# AM I LOVIN' IT? TOURISTS AND THE MCDONALD'S EXPERIENCE ABROAD

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Global organisations offering food and drink, and often other informal benefits such as clean toilets, air conditioning and wifi are recognised anecdotally as playing a part in the tourist experience of many travellers. It seems likely that their contribution goes well beyond “convenience”, influencing the tourist gaze and impacting also upon the perception, the otherness and the constructed authenticity of the tourism “product”. However, this phenomenon has not been investigated from a research point of view. The present study sought to assess tourists’ experience of McDonald’s and the ways in which they interacted with this organisation and its services whilst travelling abroad.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **McDonald’s: A Global Player**

Food is an essential part of the tourist experience, contributing not only to the ‘otherness’ of the tourist experience, but also to the environmental ‘bubble’ that surrounds, and perhaps protects, tourists in foreign destinations. Indeed, tourists often eat the same food, in the same type of surroundings as they would at home: English tourists with pubs and fish and chips and German tourists with sausages and Bierkellers (Richards, 2002). Parallel to the growth of tourism, but not specifically related to it, a global industry has emerged dedicated to the service of fast food. McDonald’s is regarded by many as the iconic leader of this movement. The company began its expansion abroad in 1967 (Curtis, 1982) and by 2008 was franchising more than 31,085 outlets in 118 countries (Schaefer, 2008). The Big Mac is so ubiquitous that it may be used as a standard to compare the relative values of different currencies (Richards, 2002).

Richards (2002) notes that while many tourists rely on the uniformity and cheapness of McDonald’s, its ubiquity is often blamed for diluting the tourist experience. However, franchisers are confident of the attraction that fast food holds for tourists (Alva, 1985). It seems likely, as Ritzer (1993) implies that McDonald’s is widely used by American tourists abroad, and this alone represents a large market. According to Baedeker (2007) approximately 63.7 million U.S. residents engaged in international travel in 2006, 30 million of whom visited international destinations beyond Canada and Mexico. In addition, fast food franchises are frequented by locals, presumably as a “tourist visit” away from their national cuisine (Alva, 1985; Richards, 2002).

### **The Tourist Experience**

MacCannell (1973) notes that tourism is often driven by a search for authentic experience in times and

places outside tourists' normal day-to-day experience. He considers that modern Western populations feel alienated within society and as a result tend to seek reality and authenticity by looking back into the past, or in other cultures with less sophisticated lifestyles. Realising that authenticity is a key issue, local entrepreneurs seek to enhance it, and the profitability of attractions, by emphasising features that are most different from the tourists' day-to-day lives (and hence most "authentic") or by interpreting them in a way that makes the differences more magical or mystical. MacCannell referred to this as "staged authenticity". Most tourist experiences are staged in some form or other, in order to support the needs of visitors and to enhance the impact, either by making an attraction more visible or by interpreting it. Cohen (1989) differentiates between communicative staging, which consists of artifacts and activities designed to market, merchandise or interpret a tourist attraction, and substantive staging, which he defines as the "actual tampering with the site of an attraction or the outright creation of contrived attractions" (Cohen, 1989: 32). "Tampering" is a harsh word: Arnould et al. (1998) point out that substantive staging includes the provision of portable sleeping quarters and toilet facilities on wilderness tourism excursions, so the "tampering" may be minimal, and often justifiable.

The nature of authenticity in tourism is a complex issue (e.g. Cohen, 1988; Hughes, G.) but there is general agreement that it is a socially-constructed quality rather than an absolute one, and at best falls within a range from "cold" to "hot" authenticity (Selwyn, 1996: 21–28) from something that is original and relies on knowledge to be appreciated to a facsimile, a "genuine fake" (Brown, 1996), that may have supplanted the original that it represents (e.g. Baudrillard, 1983; Eco, 1986). The question of authenticity thus transcends the concept of staging, since the interpretation of an object or event always is the object or event to some extent. For the modern tourist "authenticity" must be regarded in opposition to familiarity, since it represents the reality in which a refuge is sought from the alienation of everyday experience. Although authenticity is invariably socially constructed, the ideological basis of this process is seldom clear and it is therefore legitimate to ask how, and by whom it has been constructed. Various studies: of heritage sites (Ehrentraut, 1993), tourist souvenirs (Shenhav-Keller, 1993) and travel books (Dann, 1999) have addressed this issue.

Since the "reality" that tourists seek by definition lies outside their normal every day existence, authenticity is experienced in terms of an "otherness" that contrasts with their normality (MacCannell, 1976). However tourists may desire to balance or perhaps "dilute" the otherness of their experience and the feeling of strangerhood (Dann, 1996) with familiar things (Gottlieb, 1982) especially in mass- or highly-staged tourism (e.g. Gnoth and Zins, 1999). An alternative way in which otherness may be moderated is through communicative staging and through the social construction of an attraction's authenticity. Thus interpretation may serve to make a spectacle seem less alien, and so may the process of facsimile and sign production that frequently forms a part of commercial tourist offerings. According to Boorstin (1964) contemporary Americans cannot experience "reality" directly but require "pseudo-events" in which presentation and interpretation define the experience, rather than the event itself. Occupying a region between the everyday and the "other" the world of the tourist represents a liminal state, which may draw on myth and magic to build its experiences (Johns and Clark, 2001). However the relationship between this state and other aspects discussed above, such as staging, authenticity and hyperspace is not clear.

Urry (1990: 12) identifies different aspects of seeing (the "tourist gaze") that contribute to the experience of otherness:

Unique objects, such as the Eiffel Tower or the Empire State building, that indicate one's presence in a particular country.

Particular signs, such as bowler-hatted men in London or street cafes in Paris, representing the "typical" that signifies the country one is in.

Unfamiliar aspects of what previously seemed familiar – the Chinese writing in McDonald’s, foreign foods or alternative burger versions in McDonald’s

Ordinary aspects of social life that seem “extraordinary” when undertaken in unusual contexts, for instance common tasks carried out by locals in an Asian or Middle Eastern country.

Carrying out familiar tasks in an unfamiliar background, for instance swimming in a pool in the Alps with a panoramic view of snow-covered mountain peaks.

Signs that indicate an object to be extraordinary, even if it does not seem so at first sight. For instance, to non-specialists, a piece of moon rock is just another piece of rock unless a sign reveals its extraordinary nature.

## METHODOLOGY

Comments from sites on the Internet were used for this study, located by searching respectively for McDonald’s, tourism, abroad and visiting abroad using commercially available search engines including Google and Yahoo. This process yielded one discussion site, three blog sites and one other relevant comment on a personal web site. The total breakdown of comments was as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Blog sites used in the study

Address of site	Description	No. items (no. usable)
<a href="http://travel.news.yahoo.com/b/rolf_potts/20060605/rolf_potts/rolf_potts5166">http://travel.news.yahoo.com/b/rolf_potts/20060605/rolf_potts/rolf_potts5166</a>	Slumming the Golden Arches, article by Rolf Potts, from e-magazine Travel News, 06 Jun 2006. Comments posted from 07 Jun 2006 – 05 Oct 2007.	261 (182; 70%)
<a href="http://www.thedvdforums.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-502574.html">http://www.thedvdforums.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-502574.html</a>	The DVD Forums, sponsored comment site, topic “McDonald’s tastes different abroad”. All comments dated between 26 Feb and 01 Mar 2008.	49 (22; 45%)
<a href="http://action.publicbroadcasting.net/theworld/posts/list/451814.page;jsessionid=93CAF2A5E16805FD6B1383E51D94D133">http://action.publicbroadcasting.net/theworld/posts/list/451814.page;jsessionid=93CAF2A5E16805FD6B1383E51D94D133</a>	PRI’s The World; sponsored comment site; brief introduction by anonymous writer, topic “When you travel abroad do you get the impression that everything looks more and more like home?” Comments posted 10 Oct 2007–27 Jun 2008.	10 (7; 70%)
<a href="http://blog.geckogo.com/2008/08/best-foreign-experiences-that-i-could-have-just-done-at-home/">http://blog.geckogo.com/2008/08/best-foreign-experiences-that-i-could-have-just-done-at-home/</a>	“Visiting a McDonald’s” The only relevant blog on this site by Gecko, posted 07 Aug 2008.	1 (0)
<a href="http://www.grieger.net/fs/fs-insidefly.htm">http://www.grieger.net/fs/fs-insidefly.htm</a>	Personal web page of Eiko Grieger: Flying Hawaii – Nur Fliegen ist schöner. 30 Nov 2002	1 (0)
	Total comments	322 (211)

Of significance was the relatively small number of sites offering such comments on the Internet overall. All those relevant to the present study commented upon the experience of visiting McDonald’s at home or abroad as a tourist, traveller or expatriate. Blogs which commented upon other aspects of McDonald’s or travelling (for instance commenting about working at McDonald’s, or train travel itself) were excluded. Scurrilous comments and those using offensive language were also excluded. The 211 usable items were

then analysed for comments: basic statements pertaining more or less to the subject under study. These were categorised in themes and sub-themes according to the principles of grounded theory.

Using Internet data in research is a relatively new approach, which brings both advantages and disadvantages. For instance the use of email “interview” material introduces issues over and above those usually discussed in relation to qualitative research (Meho, 2006). In the present study two possible sources of error were noted, the leading question that was offered to solicit the comments and the possibility of mischievous or malicious postings. To the former category belong the article: Slumming the Golden Arches (Potts, 2006) which suggests among other things that “fast-food franchises ruin the fantasies of otherness that are an inherent part of travel” offers the experience of being: “able to stretch a Big Mac Meal into three hours of Zen-like oblivion” and notes that McDonald’s “creates a smoothly standardized absence of place and culture”. This commentary undoubtedly influenced the comments posted on the site, yet despite this they showed great richness, and reflected a wide range of agreement and disagreement.

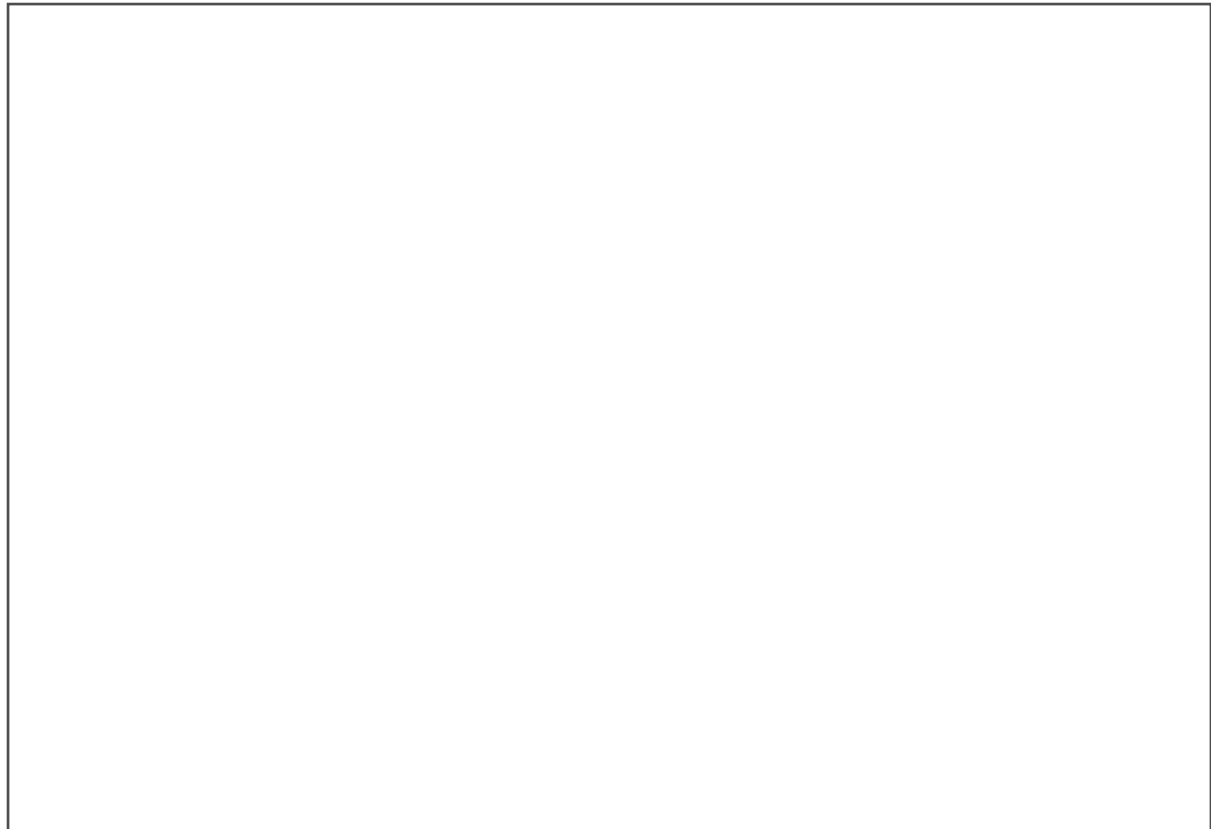
Overtly mischievous comments were relatively easy to spot and were ignored in the identification and analysis of data. However, it is never possible to allow for this effect completely. The following comment was included in counts of theme frequency, but was not used as an exemplar for any points. It may well be genuine; certainly it describes the Anglophone expatriate experience accurately, but it seems too ideological to be true:

*We've been living in France for the past 7 years and have been extraordinarily blessed to have 3 McDs in our neighborhood, so that we always can enjoy Big Macs and all the other culinary delights they afford. We've also been lucky to find enough Americans, Brits, Canadians, etc. so that we never have to cope with a strange language. Also we can get TV shows like American Idol and Desperate Housewives, plus many films in English. And we're totally uncontaminated by French Culture since we've met so many Country Club Anglican types who enjoy marmite, mushy peas, fish & chips, and all those foods we truly cherish...but not as much as McDonald's. Could life be better? No way!*

## **RESULTS**

Comments were sorted into main and sub-themes, which are shown in table 2, together with the numbers of comments in each category.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes identified in blog data



The relationships of comments between and within categories are identified and discussed below.

### **Convenience and Shame**

One fifth (20%) of comments were perceived as matters of convenience. Comments predominantly mentioned toilets, cost and cleanliness and convenience also included the number and frequency of McDonald's units, which also meant that they could be used as landmarks for orienting oneself in respect of hotels and sightseeing venues. Local bus timetables were available in one unit and values including hygiene, non-smoking and wifi were maintained:

*the main reason we go to McDonald's when travelling in Europe is because I have small children. It's one place to go in a hurry where you know they'll have high chairs and a changing table in the Ladies' room and you won't have to settle down to a 4-hour meal.*

*I frequently go to McDs everywhere to write postcards, use restrooms and to sample local variations in McDs cuisine. I know that I will find friendly people, clean tables and chairs and a no-smoking environment.*

McDonald's presents an easy target for detractors and several comments spoke negatively about the company and the product, often in highly emotional but unsubstantiated statements. Occasionally American "imperialism" was weighed against benefits:

*McDonald's is everything it's made out to be. Imperialistic, cheap, an easy target for anti-globalisation activists (fairly & unfairly), and clearly - heaven sent when in nature calls.*

And there were unashamed positive comments about the company and its products:

*The sun never sets on the Golden Arches - Long live the king, Ronald MacDonald, and (in*

*countries where it is suitable) his queen.*

Like your article, Rolf but I don't understand why you guys (most) aren't proud of your own country's product. *Tried McD in Australia, Paris and US. Of course they taste slightly different than the other, but enjoyed every bite of it.*

### **Authenticity and Familiarity**

The truism that "all main streets look the same" due to the presence of global brands was reflected in bloggers' comments, several of which expressed the idea that this affected the authenticity of overseas destinations:

*The idea of these American icons opening shop in the Latin Quarter starkly contradicts the very uniqueness of both thought and expression which make this area of Paris so special.*

Despite this, an occasional retreat to familiarity was also welcomed as a respite from the main purpose of travel:

*While it is occasionally nice to be able to retreat to a "known" quantity at certain times, it is not why I personally travel the world. I enjoy getting the local culture and flavor.*

Many comments (57; 17%) mentioned this retreat aspect and the familiar feel of the McDonald's experience. It represented a place to escape to:

*McDonald's is something familiar like your family living room or your Mom's kitchen when you are far away from home in another city or state or country. It relaxes you to sit and eat some place familiar.*

This was true even for people who would not eat at McDonald's in their own country; the need for familiarity could engender a change in normal behaviour:

*I don't eat it in the US ever. But it's the familiarity of the food and environment that draws you in. I travelled solo for 14 months, and a Value Meal can do wonders for the occasional backpacker's loneliness syndrome.*

Four comments claimed the food was good, but a more typical comment is exemplified by the following:

*I've been to the Mickey D's in many countries, and yes, for the respite more than the food - I never go to US McD's.*

In some regions the McDonald's product may be the best approximation to Western food, but even that is not always the case:

*trying to get any other western food is a waste of time, it's all wrong, way too sweet usually. But a Big Mac is a Big Mac. I've since stopped even the twice a month indulgence.*

The power of McDonald's brand name cannot be denied:

*It's really interesting to be in a food court in a mall or airport in the US and see a long line at McDonald's and short or no lines at adjacent franchises or "express" versions of locally-based restaurants.*

Eighteen comments (5%) stressed the essentially American qualities of McDonald's, as defined by its premises, products and company values. Four (ca 1%) said they needed a "fix" of fast food every so often and 5 (ca 2%) mentioned Starbucks as alternative, seemingly interchangeable refuge of Americana.

*when everything else seems to make no sense, you have no control over what is going on, and you can't speak a lick of the new language you can always get a meal the "familiar" way at McDonald's. Yeah, sometimes I shake my head in shame--I mean, how much more stereotypical American can we get?*

The authenticity of McDonald's as American culture appealed to locals as well as Americans:

*Don't forget that some locals like McDonald's more than Americans! I lived in Barcelona for a year and the only time I ate at McDonald's was when my Catalan friend Jose insisted.*

### **Otherness and Reality**

The familiarity of McDonald's represented a refuge from the alien environment in which travellers found themselves:

*I went to McDonald's in Tokyo precisely because I was tired of trying to learn to enjoy Japanese food. Being sick of foreign cuisine, a respite of familiarity, is probably the most common reason for foreigners to visit. (My girls did the same in the USSR as far back as 1989.*

Several comments noted that other foreigners (from Japan and Europe and well as from the USA) would also use McDonald's as a refuge.

*I remember going to McDonald's the first time I went to Moscow (which is a city in my country) ... just because the big city was too much to handle at times. And McDonald's wasn't even all that familiar to me back then.*

*... even my Chinese wife admits that sitting in McDonald's is a useful mind-clearing exercise after an overstimulating adventure on Chinese trains and subways...*

This may be explained by the standardised qualities discussed above: the lighting, air-conditioning, toilets and general standardisation:

*McD's is a sterile escape from regional worlds.*

... the lack of culture allows you to decompress.

The hyperspace might be so associated with a travel experience that just going into a McDonald's evoked the foreign environment again:

*During the months I lived in Japan, I ate more Big Macs than I had in five years. The funny thing is that going to McDonald's is now, for me, a treat I give myself when I'm feeling homesick for Japan!*

Two other aspects offered by McDonald's were food hygiene standards and the English language. Not all comments agreed about hygiene but the restaurants were always regarded as

oases of English:

*You know what to order so there's no nasty surprise for your stomach when hungry, and [it] is so fast when you have so much left to discover. Not to mention that after a while you might wonder about how safe the food in one country or another is...*

*McDonald's helps you to learn the word "diarrhea" in multiple languages ...*

*... a brief break from feeling lost and confused in a place where you don't speak the language and can't figure out who to ask. There's always someone who speaks English!*

An interesting set of comments identified McDonald's as a source of mediated, even "pseudo" experiences. Almost as if it were unnecessary to experience the foreign world outside, the food wrappers and some of the foods themselves were perceived as exotic, while being offered in a familiar and "safe" environment:

*When I went to China for two weeks, I stopped at a McDonald's to get a bite. I kept clean napkins, tray liners, nugget containers, Coke cans - anything with the Golden Arches ... my wife's kid brother and sister ... got a real kick out of seeing the McDonald's logos and characters with Chinese text.*

*At the McDonald's in Jamaica steamed fish and jerk burgers were on the menu*

*... in Barcelona, Spain ... the hamburger was more of a sausage patty burger and not very good. However, the chocolate shake was the best thing I had ever tasted! I stopped by every day for the rest of my stay for a shake.*

Some comments indicated a kind of "fast food tourism", undertaken in its own right:

*I've enjoyed visiting McD's in Europe mostly because they offer the regular fare but they you can also get food indigenous to the different countries. Had beer and bratwurst in Cologne, Germany; Rome offered raw oysters and other fish in a glassed in area separate from the regular food line.*

Other comments mentioned Starbucks and Burger King as alternative opportunities for "fast food tourism" abroad.

## DISCUSSION

### Convenience and Shame

Many tourists said they visit McDonald's for the convenience it offered, especially the toilets, the English language and increasingly the wifi. However, the relative paucity of comments about eating in McDonald's abroad acknowledges a kind of shame that the responsibilities of "true" tourism have been renounced: *"Yeah, sometimes I shake my head in shame--I mean, how much more stereotypical American can we get?"* McDonald's, along with other global brands is seen as a form of American imperialism that jeopardises the authenticity of tourism experiences. American tourists often choose McDonald's for a variety of reasons, including convenience, familiarity and nostalgia for America. The McDonald's experience acts as a brief respite, especially for the inexperienced traveller, from the often stressful realities of an authentic travel experience.



The convenience aspect equates in many ways to the “staging” of tourist experiences (Cohen, 1989). For instance, Arnould et al. (1998) describe the “substantive staging” of a river rafting experience as follows:

Wilderness tourism requires human intervention ... *providing [the customers] with a cocoon of civilization through which to experience the wilderness...each outfitter distinguishes their servicescape through some substantive staging ... for example one guide claimed that his company had better toilet facilities than other companies.*

This is analogous to tourists’ use of air conditioning, toilet and wifi facilities at McDonald’s whilst in the “wilderness” of a foreign culture. However, the McDonald’s experience is experienced as shaming, partly because it denies the “true” tourism experience of immersion in foreign culture and partly because McDonald’s is seen as threatening some of the culture and heritage the tourists come to see. This is not usually the case with substantive staging, which is usually organised such that a suspension of disbelief is possible. For instance Arnould et al. (1998:109) quote a tour guide:

*And it’s just like we take everything out you know. We leave nothing behind at all ... And people will sit there and go: “how do people camp here?” [Yet] they realise these are designated campsites...*

### **Authenticity and Familiarity**

Tourists themselves tend to attribute visiting McDonald’s to a need for familiarity, describing the restaurants as “like your family living room or your Mom’s kitchen”. The McDonald’s experience is tacitly accepted as typically American by both Americans and foreigners, although many comments indicated that McDonald’s burgers abroad were different to those available in the USA. The American authenticity of McDonald’s products seems questionable where an “apple pie” is in fact a deep-fried pastry tube containing reconstituted preserved apple, especially ironic since apple pie is a touchstone of authenticity: “as American as apple pie”. However, it is also possible that the relationship between American-ness and McDonald’s is metonymic, and the true referent of authenticity is the brand. Hence the ubiquity of the prefix “Mc” in the names of food items, which effectively supplants “the way America does it” with “the way McDonald’s does it”. The fact that McDonald’s is a well known global player and a signifier for “American imperialism” provides the metonymy: “what McDonald’s does *is* American”. In addition to the standard menu, McDonald’s outside the USA increasingly offers versions of local food specialities. Thus at the same time one may find a product so severely modified that it fulfils the criteria for pseudo-authenticity (Brown, 1996) as well as apparently authentic local products within the inauthentic surroundings of a McDonald’s restaurant. This suggests that McDonald’s outside the USA offers what Cohen (1989: 32) calls “staged tourist space” in which locals and visitors alike can experience a pseudo authentic “exotic” meal. In this context, Manning and Cullum-Swan (1998) cite McDonald’s development of the ‘Happy meal’, the golden arches, rainbows, clowns and playgrounds as creative attempts to provide an illusion of a familiar and comfortable space, displacing attention from possible negative associations attached to the visit.

### **Otherness and Reality**

Many comments identified in this study saw McDonald’s as offering tourists a refuge from the otherness of foreign cultures. This was considered to take place from a vantage point located in a “real life” that reflected the food, language and values of home. However, various comments about the McDonald’s experience stressed blandness, rather than competing cultural “flavours”. In this context Lyotard

(1984) and Ritzer (1996) have suggested that McDonald's outlets possess characteristics of *hyperspace* (Jameson, 1984), a condition where place, space and time are presented in such a neutral way that places, climates and seasons are indistinguishable. Manning and Cullum-Swan (1998) add that the physical and spatial characteristics of McDonald's, together with the "professional education" given to employees to maintain fast and brief customer interactions, attempt to create a "pseudo-*Gemeinschaft*" environment where customers are treated equally. There are no preferred seating areas, no waiters, no tip and no a la carte menus. Hence, the neutral space offered by McDonald's restaurants minimises not only aesthetic but also social dimensions of culture. It is interesting to speculate whether this sterile environment contributes to the liminal state of tourism, or even brings an alternative state (Shields, 1991) in counterpoint to the liminal feelings of being in, but not of, a foreign culture. This possibility is implied by the commentator who went to McDonald's in his home country when he was missing some aspects of his stay in Japan.

Several commentators said they made a point of visiting McDonald's outlets abroad, not only to escape the surrounding indigenous culture but as a kind of "McDonald's tourism" undertaken in its own right. One motive for this was: "to see if there was much of a difference to the McD's back home", but several comments referred to trying indigenous dishes consumed at McDonald's rather than in local restaurants. Urry (1990: 12) notes a number of "different kinds of seeing" by tourists, which correspond with some of the comments obtained in this study, and may contribute to the "McDonald's tourism" experience:

*Particular signs* – where tourists "typical" semiotic signifiers of the country they are in. For example the Eiffel Tower signifies Paris. In stark juxtaposition, McDonald's in foreign streets signifies America; its *lack* serves to signify the country in which it finds itself.

*Unfamiliar aspects of what previously seemed familiar.* An example of this is Chinese characters on an otherwise recognisable McDonald's menu or food wrapper, and foreign foods or alternative "exotic" versions of some of McDonald's meals.

*Ordinary aspects of social life undertaken in unusual contexts.* To actually find a McDonald's outlet in certain foreign contexts must seem extraordinary, as must the consumption of, say, a Big Mac, in a distant Asian country, or an obviously Middle Eastern dish in a McDonald's in Cairo or Lebanon.

It is also worth recalling Boorstin's (1964) comment that contemporary Americans cannot experience "reality" directly but thrive on "pseudo-events". More than forty years after this was written, it seems that many tourists from developed nations may prefer "pseudo-events" across a wide spectrum, from the subtle staging of visits to remote and relatively unWesternised peoples (e.g. Cohen, 1989) on one hand to the creation *ab initio* of new "genuine" attractions on the other. The McDonald's tourism experience seems to fall within this span.

## CONCLUSIONS

McDonald's undoubtedly provides a service of convenience which amounts to substantive staging, for many travellers. The exact number and proportion could not be determined, but is probably significant. However, visiting McDonald's abroad may be accompanied by feelings of guilt about globalisation and unsustainability both from seeing the outlets everywhere and from a feeling of reneging on one's touristic duty of experiencing culture "as the locals experience it". A substantial number of individuals, including American tourists and visitors from the local country admire McDonalds' for

its achievements and its atmosphere of progress and modernity.

McDonald's interprets the culture both of its homeland, America and of the countries where it establishes itself and both seem inauthentic. McDonald's offers the familiarity not of home but of a neutral hyperspace, centred around the McDonald's brand. This allows tourists from anywhere a respite from cultural overload and may actually contribute to the liminal nature of the tourism experience, since it fulfils three of Urry's (1990) types of tourist gaze: specific signs of the foreign country (or, for locals, of America), unfamiliar aspects of what previously seemed familiar, and ordinary aspects of social life undertaken in unusual contexts.

Of the big global brands, currently only Disney (predictably) seems aware of its potential for interpreting and staging the tourist experience. It would seem worthwhile, especially in the current economic climate, for fast food companies and coffee houses (at least) to investigate this area, since correctly managed it would stimulate sales and strengthen brands. This path is of course beset with potential pitfalls: some of these companies are already clichéd targets of anti-globalist feeling. However, it would doubtless benefit these companies to be more aware of the role their brands play in providing culture-free respite, shaping the authenticity of destinations and providing a moderated tourism experience in their own right.

Although its results have proved to be significant, the present study cannot be regarded as more than a reconnaissance into what promises to be an interesting field of tourism research. Further work is clearly needed to quantify its results, to broaden the study to other global brands and to examine the nature of the tourist experience in global outlets and the ways in which it may change our current perception of tourist activity.

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