The City and the Chain:
Conceptualizing Globalization and Consumption in Japan

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The rise of globalization and development of transnational consumption practices have generated new socio-economic and cultural geographies. One of the most prominent manifestations of this process is the proliferation of global chains "interlocking" world locations on both operational and symbolic levels. This article deals with new developments in urban consumption culture in Japan focusing on global branded chains. The chains are viewed as material flows of commodities, images and cultural representations, which forge new connectivities between world locations. Using the example of the Starbucks coffee chain in Japan, I examine how consumer appeal is generated, and how the socio-spatial demands of the Japanese consumers are addressed through the consumption experience offered by the chain. What determines the relevance of a global brand in the local context? What new subjectivities are generated through the encounter between the brand and the consumer? By looking at various components of the consumption experience and tracing their social and cultural meanings, I try to draw conclusions on the process of subjectivity creation and identity formation in contemporary urban Japan.

Keywords: cities, consumption, cultural representation, brands, identity, public space, globalization, connectivity, Disneyfication, virtualization

Introduction: Global Chains, Cities and Consumption

I used to be afraid of airports. Born and raised in the Soviet Union, where going abroad felt similar to going to the moon today (not entirely unthinkable, but hardly achievable), I had no opportunity for foreign travel until my family was able to emigrate. For a long time afterwards, airports, with their endless sequence of passage rites, posed a major threat to my equanimity. It took many flights to realize that every airport has its rather simple spatial logic, and—the most exciting discovery—that most airports in the world are organized along similar spatial principles. Once you know one, you know them all. I still get a sting of anxiety when reaching a new terminal, but now I know my "comfort zones." So, I look for Starbucks. I will not necessarily stay there, but I enjoy knowing that it is all there—Shiseidō and Häagen Dazs, Versace and Pizza Hut, branches of the global tribe of commodities that infiltrate markets and create a novel kind of space, allowing for consumption, recreation and,

most importantly, reassurance that the world has become more familiar, accessible, and user friendly. Certainly, there are still clusters of non-globalized, non-commercialized, relatively "untouched" spaces, but most of the world's large urban centers have come to provide a stage for globalized standardized actors, often reminding us, inevitably, of the airport terminal.

The major tendencies which are transforming the face of our world today are characterized by several key processes: the emergence of global cities as major sites of socio-economic change; the rise of new connectivities between world locations; the consequent surfacing of new spatial characteristics in the organization of urban space; and, finally, the growing virtualization of the public sphere. One interesting manifestation of this transformation is the proliferation of global commercial chains "interlocking" the world locations. These chains, I believe, are to be viewed as both the symptom and one of the major agents of the ongoing transformation. Japan, with its highly urbanized space, its growing presence of transnational commodity chains, and its increasing virtualization of communication and consumption, represents a fascinating case for exploring the rapidly changing realities of world interconnectedness.

In order to grasp the nature of these changes as well as their driving forces, several approaches can be employed. The geospatial approach, examining world city networks (WCN) formation and intercity relations at the global scale, occupies a growing niche in contemporary urban research.[1] The global commodity chains (GCC) approach to economic globalization focuses on the process by which economic activity is coordinated across the various nodes of the chain.[2] Theories on the effect of information technologies on urban economic development are also widely discussed.[3] In this essay, I draw on several of these works, mainly, on Manuel Castells' theorization on "space of flows" and "space of places," and Ben Derruder's analyses of shifting connectivities in city networks.[4] However, unlike the macro approach employed by previous research, I focus on everyday consumption practices as a lens for comprehending large-scale socio-economic phenomena. Among the everyday practices, the role of consumption cannot be underestimated. Seen on the macro scale, consumption represents a driving force in the economic history of the industrial and post-industrial world. Seen from a socio-cultural perspective, the rather simple act of buying is responsible for molding the material setting for new forms of private and public life, and shaping new identities associated with these forms.

The connection between consumption and urbanism also deserves mentioning. The emergence of "conspicuous consumption" in the European context was closely linked to industry-driven, urban environment.[5] Since the turn of the twentieth century, shopping for goods and services has become the central element of a genuine urban experience. Symbols and images as well as material goods have come to occupy the core of the process in which identities, both personal and collective, are formed and negotiated through consumption. This may well be described in terms of the so-called "post-need order," whereby consumer desire has become no less relevant than consumer need.[6]

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1 For example, Alderson et al. 2010; Derruder et al. 2010; Derruder et al. 2003.
2 For example, Bair 2008; Gereffi and Korczenewics 1994; Mahutga 2011; Powell 1990.
3 For example, Calhoun 1998; Castells 2004; Mitchell 1996; Moss 2000.
4 The "space of flows" refers to accelerating domains of trans local and transnational technological movements; the "space of places" denotes "real" geographic locations (Castells 2004).
5 Veblen 1899.
6 Simon 2009.

In Japan, cities had emerged as centers of conspicuous consumption already during the Edo period (1600–1867), when the country entered the early phase of urbanization. It was in this context that the emerging urban class began to engage in practices and choices indicative of its social standing and taste.[7] Today Japan is one of the most consumption-oriented and urbanized societies, where image and style have become major market commodities. In the Japanese city, consumption patterns evolve against the backdrop of transnational practices and trends, transmitted primarily via global brands and their products. According to Japan Market Resource Network's estimate, in 2011 Japanese consumers accounted for one quarter of worldwide expenditure on the global luxury branded goods market. While an evident downturn compared to the 40 percent recorded by JMRN in 2007, it is still a rather high rate compared to Europe's expenditure of 22 percent, and North America's 20 percent.[8]

The power of global brands as carriers of culture is widely recognized. By virtue of generating cultural imageries and shaping consumer experiences, however, they serve not as mere "carriers," but as active agents forging consumer positions and identities. What determines the relevance of a global brand in a local context? What new subjectivities are generated through the encounter between the brand and the consumer? This study attempts to answer these (and several other) questions by focusing on the Starbucks coffee chain in Japan. Certainly, brands and their performance have been extensively studied and theorized upon. Aaker's cross-cultural study of several international brands explored the way in which various "brand personality" dimensions correspond with values and beliefs of the Japanese, Spanish and American cultures.[9] Cayla and Eckhardt's comprehensive research on Asian brands sheds light on the connection between branding strategies and the shaping of subjective regional identity.[10] Simon's recent book on Starbucks in the U.S. used the chain as a lens through which American consumer tastes, political views and personal choices can be observed and comprehended.[11] A photo-elicitation study of Starbucks in Beijing provides an interesting perspective on the brand's role in the creation of new experiences and identities of urban Chinese consumers.[12] The present study, however, takes a different perspective by looking at global brands as generators of new spatial relations based on symbolic rather than physical proximity. It seeks to determine how, if we use Castell's conceptualization, a global brand, representing a "flow" of symbols, images and cultural connotations, generates new connectivities between real "places."

The Starbucks coffee chain in Japan is particularly interesting for two main reasons. Firstly, the local coffee-drinking culture evolved around coffee as a foreign commodity associated with Westernization and modernity. Secondly, the nature of the local consumption has been largely shaped by the process of incorporation and commodification of foreign products. Consumption of these products can be viewed as part of a wider process of constructing the imaginary West, which, in turn, serves as means of building the notion of "Japanese-ness."[13] Starbucks is a transnational brand that exploits a wide range of socio-

7 Francks 2009.
8 Japan Market Research Network survey, published in *Nikkei Weekly*, October 2011.
9 Aaker et al. 2001.
10 Cayla and Eckhardt 2008.
11 Simon 2009.
12 Venkatraman and Nelson 2008.
13 Goldstein-Gidoni 1997; Iwabuchi 2000.

cultural images to structure consumers' experience of the interaction between the global and the local. It thus embodies the concept of hegemonic brandscape.[14]

However, Starbucks can and should be regarded not only as a global brand exerting influence over the local milieu; it also constitutes an everyday experience affecting people's everyday lives. This is well-exemplified by the following excerpt, taken from a blog published on the BBC news site a few days after the tragic events of March 2011. It belonged to an American residing in Japan. The blog read: "Mitaka station has some trains running but all the shops there are closed including the bakery and .... Starbucks! So this is really a national emergency now. (…) Prime Minister Kan was right, this IS just like the Second World War."[15]

For many, Starbucks has become more than just an omnipresent coffee shop chain. It represents the very flow of a mundane, everyday, normal life. The closure of a Starbucks store at a time when a giant wave, an earthquake and a nuclear threat joined forces to strike Japan was another, very sensible manifestation that something had gone very wrong with people's lives.

The aim of this study is to determine, using the case of Starbucks in Japan, how global processes can be comprehended through the prism of everyday consumption practices. By tracking down globalization to the point where a commodity meets the consumer, it aspires to shed light on the relationship between the global and local in contemporary urban Japan. The article is organized along the following lines. First, the theoretical framework at the base of my argument is outlined. The city is conceptualized as a node in the network of transnational connections; then, the nature of novel urban spaces is characterized in terms of both standardization and commercialization of fantasy. I then move to defining the role of global chains and their product in the process of creating new subjectivities. In the second section, the findings of the research conducted on the Starbucks chain in Japan are introduced. The third part discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework.

Places, Spaces, Products: The Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the cultural and symbolic aspects of the interconnection between the city and the global agents of consumption, transnational branded chains, I operate with three main concepts: the city, representing a physical site, the chain, representing a trans-national flow, and the consumer experience of the brand product. Due to their connection to multiple physical sites, chains function as multi-focal linking entities, enabling the flow of commodities, capital, knowledge and images and thus forging new forms of connectivity between the world locations.

1. Conceptualizing the Role of the City: From a Hub to a Node

Globalization is closely linked to the development of big cities and urban regions. Due to their concentration of human activity, services and operations, cities became focal points of ongoing changes.[16] Global cities function not as fixed containers of human activity, but as nodes in multiplex transnational urban networks, defined mainly by circulation of goods, information and capital.[17] As opposed to the historical function of the city as a hub of

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14 Thompson and Arsel 2004.
15 From Susan Barton's online blog, 13 March 2011.
16 Sassen 2003.
17 Derruder and Witlox 2010; Alderson et al. 2010.

exchange of resources and commodities, which determined the cities' position as defined by their "centrality," today we witness a shift in cities' position towards "connectivity."[18]

As a result of these newly emerging regional and global connectivities, new networks are being formed, sometimes fitting within and sometimes cutting across national and regional boundaries. The function of transnational networks reveals an increasing degree of disconnection from traditional urban geographies. As networks are based less on physical space and infrastructures, and more on informational, material and cultural flows, cities remain "spatially embedded"—but not necessarily in geographical proximity. Along with new connectivities, new modes of proximity are emerging, forged by common experiences, shared cultural imageries, and consumer identities. This article explores the way in which one pattern of such proximity is constructed via local consumers' experience of a global brand.

2. Disneyfication of Public Space: Standardization and Commercialization of Fantasy

The shift in cities' role from hubs to nodes is manifested through new urban strategies. A comparative study that analyzed novel trends in the design of public space in Tokyo and New York detected several such strategies.[19] One of them, particularly relevant to this inquiry, is the extended use of "theme park" simulations, which break the connections with local history and geography. These urban public spaces take their cue from amusement sites such as Disneyland, and are designed to transport visitors figuratively to distant places or different times.[20] A similar pattern is discussed by Castells in the context of communication technologies and the consequent transformation of urban spaces into theme parks where multiple symbols create a "life-size, urban virtual reality."[21]

This type of spatial strategy employs cultural referencing and representation as its main tactic, and thus can be regarded, as Cybriwsky mentions, as an attribute of the "Disneyfication" of public space.[22] The term stands for the symbolic "taming" of the environment in order to make it clean, safe, and enchanting. It is used more broadly to describe the process of stripping a real place of its original character and "repackaging" it in a sanitized, beautified format filled with cultural references.[23] The principles of a "Disneyscape" are described by Bryman as follows: themed environment, merchandising, emotional labor, and de-differentiation of consumption, referring to broadening the scope of consumption activities to include more elements.[24] Warren adds three more elements to the scheme, when she describes the structural features of a Disneyfied city: organized and controlled space, separation of production and consumption (i.e. removal of every hint of production and blanketing consumption with layers of fantasy); and emphasis on consumption as the most meaningful activity.[25]

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18 Derruder and Witlox 2010, p. 2.
19 Cybriwsky 1999.
20 For example, Yebisu Garden Place has at its center a replica of a Louis XV chateau and a miniature version of a Versailles courtyard; the Tokyo City Hall is meant to resemble Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, St Peter's Square in the Vatican, Edo Castle, a computer's microchip and Manhattan (Cybriwsky 1999, p. 228).
21 Castells 2004, p. 84.
22 Cybriwsky 1999, p. 228.
23 The term has been recently used to address a broader process in which the principles of Disney theme parks dominate more and more sectors of society (Bryman 1999).
24 Bryman 1999, p. 29.
25 Warren 1994, p. 92.

Urban consumption sites, such as shopping centers, malls, recreation zones and department stores, serve as "Disneyscapes" with their uniform spatial logic and extensive, albeit standardized, array of cultural images referring the visitor to "other" times and places. As such, they represent a self-contained total space, capable of redesigning the symbolic boundaries between "here" and "there," local and global, representation and reality. The element of consumption, which constitutes the key activity in a Disnified space, allows for reproduction of this reality by generating consumer desire and reinforcing identities acquired via consumer experience. This trend corresponds with a broader phenomenon of the virtualization of urban space, which affects not only urban design, but also the very nature of sociality found in cities.[26] One of the manifestations of this process is the disappearance of sites that can reassure the connection between space and place, such as local shops, markets, indie cafés and more. In Japan, one visible outcome of this process, which has attracted a high measure of concern, is the disappearance of traditional shopping arcades (*shōtengai* 商店街) in favor of large outlets and malls. Growing virtualization of consumption by means of online shopping represents another aspect of this trend: according to recent surveys, Japanese consumers occupy one of the highest positions in the world ratings of online shopping.[27] The propagation of virtual forms of consumption and communication in Japan has drawn scholarly attention, and terms such as "thumb tribe" (referring to text messaging as a replacement for face-to-face communication), "cell phone youth," "technoculture" have come to dominate the literature on social change in Japanese society.[28]

These trends have inspired a rather prevalent argument that postmodern cities are becoming a "nowhere-ville," that is a proliferation of spaces replacing real geography and history with the imaginary, and thus contesting the connection between space and place.[29] This notion has been widely discussed, from Webber's "non place urban realm" and Foucault's "heterotopia," to Ritzer's "non-place" and Carosso's "countersite."[30] Building upon these insightful conceptualizations, I make the case for the emergence of a "somewhere-ville," or, in other words, a space which, despite its characteristic of displacement, nevertheless possesses cultural and social relevance. Global chains are to be viewed, I believe, as major agents in this process. By virtue of their transnational organization and their use of cultural representation as a marketing strategy, chains function as the driving force in the replacement of physical spatial proximity with the symbolic. The change inflicted by global chains revolves around value creation and distribution, when this value is determined not merely by the objective characteristics of a commodity (e.g. cost or quality), but also by its cultural and symbolic properties. By examining transnational chains, it is possible to determine what content is transmitted through the networks of production, distribution and consumption, and how this content is incorporated into the local context.

The kinship between Disneyscapes and global chains can be exemplified by the concept of McDisney.[31] The term denotes a fusion of principles of McDonaldization and distinctive features of Disney-like environment, implying that theme parks and global chains tend to

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26 Calhoun 1998; 2004.
27 A Nielsen Global Consumer Report, February 2008.
28 Daliot-Bul 2007; Ito and Okabe 2005; Rheingold 2002.
29 Carosso 2000, p. 65.
30 Webber 1964; Foucault 1984; Ritzer 2004; Carosso 2000.
31 Bryman 1999.

bear each other's features. As suggested by this hybrid concept of McDisneization, cultural representation is being both commercialized and standardized.[32] The commercialization and standardization of fantasy represent one of the most recognizable aspects of a Disneyscape.

3. The Brand Product: Creating New Subjectivities

Global branded chains' input into the socio-cultural aspect of consumption can be seen to generate new subjectivities, drawing upon the symbolic dimension of the marketed commodities. This symbolic dimension refers to the ways in which brands' "stories" are built and interpreted, and in which the social and cultural "baggage" is attributed to the brand product. Moreover, similarly to the printed media discussed by Benedict Anderson (1983), global brands forge new webs of interconnectedness through the construction of "imagined communities." By emphasizing common consumer experience and infusing it with relevant cultural meanings, branded chains forge a sense of belonging to a sphere larger than the immediate environment of the consumer. This empowers them to shape collective identities beyond the nation state, and to generate regional or global consciousness.

On the regional scale, brands can forge regional imagination by situating their product in terms of a region and not a specific country. Research on several Asian brands has demonstrated how they construct regional cultural proximity by means of "Asianizing" and de-territorializing their goods. The consumer is no longer notified of the origin of the brand, which becomes irrelevant when the sense of shared experience is the core value of the product.[33]

While the branding strategies of these companies employ regional markers of identity, their focus remains largely on cities**.** Extensive use of urban imagery (e.g. skyscrapers and avenues with passing crowds) to evoke the contours of a shared imagined space of "Asianness" demonstrates once again the close connection between transnationality and urbanism. Interestingly, this urban imagery is taken not necessarily from the Asian context; New York serves as one accessible source of cosmopolitan visual metaphor.[34] If a global city can provide a relevant vocabulary for the regional brand, what kind of vocabulary is employed by global brands in a local context? What kind of connectivity is being generated through consumer participation in the brand experience?

It is important to note that there are two major agencies in this process: the first is the brand-builders responsible for structuring the "catalog" of identities offered by the brand; the second is the consumers negotiating their position in relation to these identities. The two are interconnected parts of the same process of an ongoing dialog on culture.

Starbucks Coffee Chain in Japan

Starbucks is an archetype of a global chain connecting world locations through diffusion of its brand product, namely, coffee and the coffee-related experience. Having structured its brand experience around coffee as a cultural commodity, and employed cultural representation as part of its branding strategy, Starbucks can be conceptualized as a Disneyscape. It is important to note in this context that, since its foundation, Starbucks has

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32 Ritzer and Liska 1997.
33 Cayla and Eckhardt 2008, p. 220.
34 Cayla and Eckhardt 2008, p. 222.

been positioning itself as an urban experience, beginning with its alleged place of origin, Milan, leading to its promotion as a hip, urban, middle class experience.

The connection between coffee and the city is not by any means new. The first coffee houses in the civilized world were established in big urban centers, and were closely associated with the newly emerging urban public space.[35] They provided a stage not only for new sociability and civil engagement, but also for the enactment of cultural fantasies. For the European city dwellers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, coffee was associated with the exotic Orient. Coffee establishments exploited this association by employing Oriental imagery in order to evoke and maintain consumer appeal. The role of Starbucks as a Disneyscape is, then, hardly original; however, it demonstrates that coffee shops represent a valid (and indeed time-honored) case for the study of urban culture.

The treatment here of Starbucks as a global

Figure 1. "Sutābakkusu no nai fūkei wa Shibuya ja nai" スターバックスのない風景は渋谷じゃない, Starbucks in Shibuya, Tokyo. *Starbucks Coffee Japan 10th Anniversary Magazine*, 2007.

servicescape in a local context draws on Bitner's study of the role of physical environment in consumption settings (1992), and Venkatraman and Nelson's research on Starbucks Coffee in China (2008). Servicescapes connote a physical setting designed to shape consumer behavior and experience; they surpass the material features of the product, and encompass its spatial (e.g. layout, décor) and socio-cultural (e.g. interactions, symbols, meanings) characteristics.[36] Servicescapes provide material for a consumptionscape created by consumers, when they use its resources to construct their own experience.[37]

Starbucks Japan operates more than nine hundreds stores nationwide; most of its outlets are concentrated in the highly dense Kanto and Kansai metropolitan areas. Since its arrival in Japan in 1996, Starbucks has become one of the most prominent markers of urban culture and one of the most recognizable consumption icons. Japan was the first destination of Starbucks outside North America, and is one of the locations where the company still thrives. Despite the recent downturn and the company's concerns over its brand image, in Japan Starbucks' product seems to be appreciated as much as ever.

The brand's immense popularity with the Japanese consumer has been largely attributed to the assertion that Japan, widely recognized as a tea nation, lacks good coffee. This claim is no longer viable; in contemporary Japan, coffee occupies a massive niche in everyday life and consumption. Japan is among the largest importers of coffee beans in the world; the Japanese coffee scene features a variety of establishments, ranging from

35 Habermas 1989.
36 Bitner 1992.
37 Ger and Belk 1996.

neighborhood coffee shops to trendy espresso bars, manga cafés and coffee-and-cake parlors. The Japanese coffee drinker is not only brand-driven, but also highly informed, trend-aware and aesthetically sophisticated.

Starbucks did not introduce coffee to Japan; neither did it pioneer the modern coffee shop culture. Moreover, it arrived more than a decade after the first local coffee chain, Doutor ドトール, was established. However, Starbucks managed to implement new tastes and expand the local market, encouraging other chains, both foreign and Japanese, to enter the coffee shop scene. If it is not necessarily the coffee *per se*, what is it that created such a big demand for Starbucks' standardized havens among Japanese consumers?

The research I conducted between the years 2006 and 2009 determined that the major reason for Starbucks' success in Japan is that it has constructed a space charged with social and cultural meanings. Culturally, this space offers the consumer the experience of a "coffee theme park"; socially, it provides a novel type of public space allowing for anonymity, a sense of communal belonging and individual control. In the course of the research, I examined the two agencies engaged in the process of value-creation: the brand-builders, as represented by the brand narrative and the modes of its implementation, and the Japanese consumers, as represented by their response to the brand experience. In order to proceed with the discussion on Starbucks chain in Japan as a force forging a new mode of connectivity, I will first summarize the relevant findings of the study.

Here I focus on the Starbucks brand performance, that is, on the "story" and its appropriation; it is nevertheless necessary to note that in Japan creating a theme park-like environment around coffee was made possible largely due to its "baggage," i.e., the particular circumstances of its incorporation as a cultural commodity. Coffee and coffee shops infiltrated Japan at the end of the nineteenth century, and soon gained popularity as symbols of modernity and Westernization. The early Japanese coffee shops served as entry points for foreign products, shaping new fashions and trends and resonating with the wider international context.[38] The early Japanese coffee shops provided a space for displaying new identities, generated by Japan's new image as a modernizing country. As happened in European coffee houses, a large part of the attraction of these places stemmed from their association with foreign culture. As opposed to Europe, however, where the Orient provided the material for exotic fantasies, in Japan it was the Occident that possessed the appeal. Despite the fact that an elaborate coffee culture has developed in Japan, coffee still acquires the cultural "flavor" of a foreign commodity.

The Brand Narrative: A Tale of Passion, Mission and Education

Texts comprising the Starbucks narrative are essential for comprehending the foundation of the Starbucks brand concept and the guidelines for its marketing strategy. My analysis was carried out by examining several texts written by Starbucks brand-builders; it revealed a number of recurring motifs.[39] One is the notion of Starbucks as a total experience**,** that

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38 The coffee shops symbolized modernity, internationalism and the spirit of liberation, and were perceived as ranking in significance with establishment of the Diet (Tipton 2000, p. 119).

39 Namely, Howard Schultz's *Onward* (2011) and *Pour Your Heart into It* (1997) and Scott Bedbury's *A New Brand World* (2002), as well as a number of printed materials, issued by Starbucks Japan, specifically, several types of brochures, leaflets and *Starbucks Japan Anniversary Magazine*.

is, an overwhelming emotional and sensual experience transmitted at every moment of the consumer's exposure to the brand product, and corresponding to the notion of Starbucks as a holistically structured servicescape.[40] One aspect of this experience is the cultural role of Starbucks. Despite its American and rather recent origin, the Starbucks rhetoric presents the company as part of the five hundred year old European coffee house legacy. Having modeled its brand concept on Italian espresso bars, Starbucks positions itself as a successor of the Italian coffee tradition, and a passionate educator.

To provide this narrative with substance and generate consumer enchantment, Starbucks brand creators have formulated an entire mythology, starting with the brand name, intended to evoke the romance of early sea travel via the reference to a character from *Moby Dick*, and the logo, featuring a Siren (bare-breasted in the original logo) which suggests the seductive and irresistible nature of its coffee experience.[41] The narrative of travel builds a link not only to remote times but also to the magic of remote places. Both the "other times" and "other places" are being romanticized and exoticized to provide opportunities for storytelling and grounds for romantic imagery.[42]

One of the core values of Starbucks is the emotional bond between the brand and its customers, which provides "the feeling of warmth and community."[43] Starbucks positions itself as a "third place," a warm and friendly environment, which is neither home nor work.[44] The communal nature of the Starbucks experiences is further promoted by the rigorous effort to create a virtual brand community through the Starbucks website, which provides what the founder and CEO Howard Schultz nonetheless insists is a "genuine" opportunity to connect.[45]

Although the Starbucks experience is depicted as highly subjective and emotional, it is also highly regulated. Almost every aspect of employees' behavior, from clothing and the veto on perfume to the nuances of in-store performance, is scripted.[46] The message is that coffee in general, and the Starbucks coffee experience in particular, is a complicated matter, which necessitates precision, knowledge and skill. The mission of Starbucks employees is to educate coffee drinkers on the features of the coffee experience—from the type and quality of the beans to the way liquid sugar is to be added. In pursuit of this mission, the company requires its "partners" (i.e. Starbucks employees) to undergo special training. A new employee who completes the course is given the title of "barista," meaning he/she is now an expert in coffee preparation, and possesses a comprehensive understanding of coffee.

Demanding expertise from employees is not unique. However, Starbucks distinguishes itself from its competitors in assuming that the consumption of the product also requires qualification. In his book, Schultz confides that he does not intend to "just give the customers what they ask for, [but to] give them something so far superior that it takes a while to develop their palates." In the end, "if you have a great product, you can educate your customers to

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40 Bitner 1992, p. 65.
41 Schultz 1997, p. 33.
42 While the "regular" branding focuses on creating a need, which the product addresses, the focus of emotional branding is on desires (Bedbury 2002, p. 3).
43 Schultz 1997, p. 245.
44 Oldenburg 1999.
45 Schultz 2011, p. 126.
46 The restriction on wearing perfume, as well as Starbucks' anti-smoking policy, is explained as a means to preserve the coffee aroma.

like it."[47] While in the U.S. and Europe this educational message remains on the rhetorical level, in Japan Starbucks enacts a series of educational events, which have become highly popular with the local consumers. Starbucks "coffee seminars" represent a good example.

The coffee seminars are initiated and operated by Starbucks Japan; the contents and the structure are determined by the company's headquarters in Tokyo. The seminars teach participants the basics of "coffee science" and the ways to make coffee; they are conducted at three levels: beginners, intermediate and advanced. Someone who completes all three levels is given a certificate stating that he/she is a Starbucks seminar graduate. The taught procedures are fairly simple (such as using a coffee hand drip device), and are accompanied by detailed instructions by the baristas. The central idea is that the correct performance of coffee-related procedures enables the customer to enjoy an adequate coffee experience and to acquire the taste for it.

Communicating the Brand Concept in Japan: The Starbucks Press and the Internet Community

The Starbucks press is issued by Starbucks Japan headquarters and comprises several sources of information distributed for the Japanese market: Starbucks Japan brochures, placed in each store and providing basic information on the product; Starbucks Japan free newspaper and leaflets that introduce new products and events; and *Starbucks Coffee Japan Magazine*.[48] While the Starbucks Coffee Company issues informational materials in all its world locations, their format and contents vary considerably. Compared to the materials issued in the U.S., for example, the Japanese content is characterized by a fairly large amount of didactic information on coffee and coffee-related issues. Comprehensive advice is also given on the various ways of enjoying the Starbucks experience, both in the stores and at home.

Figure 2. Detailed explanation on the use of condiment bar in Starbucks stores. Starbucks Press free paper, January 2007.

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47 Schultz 1997, p. 35.
48 The materials used here are: "Starbucks Press" free paper, issues of November 2005 and January 2007, "More About Coffee" leaflet of February 2008, "Great Food For Great Coffee" leaflet of September 2008, and the 10th Anniversary issue of *Starbucks Coffee Japan Magazine* titled "Sutābakkusu daikaibō: Sutābakkusu no suggoi shinjitsu, oshiemasu" スターバックス大解剖・スターバックスのすっごい真実、教えます, March 2007.

Although the main taglines and product categories used in these texts are dictated by the Starbucks headquarters in Seattle, their translation into Japanese is often modified to fit the local mindset. For example, the 2008 Christmas global campaign slogan "To You From Us" was displayed with the Japanese translation "Warming Up The Heart" (*kokoro kara, attaka ni* こころから、あったかに). According to Nagami Akira 長見明 of the Starbucks Japan marketing team, as the company strives to generate maximum consumer response, communicating its brand concept sometimes necessitates adaptations.[49]

Textual analysis of the printed materials issued between 2005 and 2009 reveals several themes corresponding to the motifs articulated by the brand narrative. A motif widely exploited throughout the print is that of "my Starbucks" (*mai sutābakkusu* マイ スターバックス). A collection of Starbucks merchandise is presented as "my collectable Starbucks" (*MY korekutaburu sutābakkusu* MY コレクタブル スターバックス); a personal Starbucks cup is "my cup" (*mai kappu* マイカップ). An article about Ishikawa Jirō 石川次郎, an editor and reading enthusiast, and "his" Starbucks, provides a good example of this appropriation. Following his passion for books, Mr. Ishikawa chose as "his" Starbucks an outlet combined with a bookstore; there, he has not only "his" usual drink, but also "his" seat, referred to as "my seat" (*mai shīto* マイシート).[50]

Throughout the Starbucks press, the brand is depicted as symbolically connecting the Japanese customer to the world outside Japan. This is achieved mainly through exposing the Japanese consumer to Western traditions, often linked to special occasions (such as Halloween, Christmas, and Valentine's Day) and related customs. Starbucks assumes the role of a cultural guide, not only offering its customers items attributed to these traditions (Halloween pumpkin scone or Christmas coffee blend), but also providing explanations of their cultural contexts. For example, the promotion of chocolate timed with Valentine's Day in 2007 was accompanied by a detailed account of the romantic connotations of the holiday, the way it has been perceived in the West, and some advice on the psychological aspects of romance and intimacy. A leaflet dedicated to Christmas items in 2005 featured, in a section titled in English "Virtual Trip to the World," a lengthy description of the holiday and the ways it is celebrated in the U.S. and Finland (the land of Santa Claus).

It is important to note in this context that the contemporary Japanese consumer is sufficiently exposed to the foreign traditions introduced by Starbucks; however, the meanings attached to traditions differ. Valentine's Day has long been a highly recognizable consumption icon, but its Japanese interpretation represents a curious cultural translation whereby only women give presents to men. Valentine's is widely perceived as the one occasion when women are allowed the greatest amount of personal expression.[51] Representations of Christmas as well have undergone some visible transformations corresponding to broader trends occurring in Japan.[52]

The items offered in Starbucks stores are "authentic" products associated with other cultures, and bring the genuine taste of other cultural traditions. The reader is constantly referred to "other" times, represented by old traditions, and to "other" places, i.e., the lands in which these traditions supposedly evolved. The brand product is romanticized through

49 From his interview to *Netto kōkoku gaido* ネット広告ガイド, February 2009.
50 *Starbucks Coffee Japan 10th Anniversary Magazine*, 2007.
51 Creighton 1991, p. 687.
52 Plath 1963; Creighton 1991.

depictions evoking the magic of remote lands. For example, a new bread roll offered for sale in 2008 was romantically depicted as a traditional product born in Italy, like the espresso itself, and brought to the Japanese customers from New York, where the Italian community preserved the old ways of its preparation.

In a 2008 leaflet dedicated to an overview of the Costa Rican coffee industry, a diagram titled "the triangle of deliciousness" (*oishisa no toraianguru* おいしさのトライアングル) illustrated the connection between the Costa Rican farmers (represented in a photograph as a group of tanned people against the background of coffee plantation), Starbucks coffee (the Starbucks logo), and the Japanese consumer (represented by a picture of a young neatly dressed Japanese woman sipping from a Starbucks cup). Such representations depict Japan as part of the international framework of coffee production, distribution and consumption, symbolically connecting it to other nodes in this network. Starbucks functions as an intermediary between the authentic worlds of coffee and the Japanese coffee drinker. The increasingly dominant rhetoric of fair trade, recycling and other environment-oriented initiatives work to underline Starbucks' position in a network of global interconnections.

One important means of enhancing the sense of interconnectedness and communicating the brand concept is the internet. Starbucks Japan has built an elaborate online network connecting the brand with its customers and "partners." Along with its regular website and the one designed for mobile phone users, Starbucks Japan has launched an email magazine with the English title *Siren's Mail*. Today it has about 300,000 subscribers, constantly reached either via email or mobile phones. The internet service runs online programs, offers new product sampling kits, and distributes invitations to public events. Recently Starbucks has also started using social networks for facilitating and evaluating consumer response. In October 2011, the Starbucks Japan page on the Facebook website collected several hundred thousands favorable responses (clicks on the "like" button), taking the ninth place in the Facebook ranking for that year, and indicating Japanese consumers' favorable opinion of the brand.

Notwithstanding the importance attached to the internet, Starbucks Japan relies on in-store operations as the core of its marketing strategy. According to Mr. Nagami, a large share of the marketing budget is set aside for in-store advertising. Seasonal advertisements, promotional banners, as well as the fact that all items in the Starbucks stores are manufactured by and for Starbucks, serve to communicate the brand philosophy.[53]

The In-store Experience: Implementing the Narrative

In the course of one year, I conducted observations in five Starbucks outlets in Kyoto and Tokyo. Two of the stores were situated in busy downtown areas, one in a neighborhood shopping mall, one in a central business area, and one in a major transportation hub. The observations were conducted at different times of the day and on different days of the week, with my main focus placed on the in-store "trajectories" of the customers and the staff, their interaction patterns, as well as on the elements of décor and space structuring. Here, I focus on the attributes of the servicescape rather than on the behavioral patterns of the customers; the consumer perceptions of the servicescape are then traced from their verbal accounts.

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53 From his interview to *Netto kōkoku gaido* ネット広告ガイド, February 2009.

One highly visible characteristic of the Starbucks stores worldwide is the abundance of cultural references, transmitted primarily via visual elements comprising the décor; the structural elements of a Disneyscape are constructed through "staging" the experience.[54] The visual references symbolically "wrap" the world of coffee. The elements depicting the "other" time refer the customer to the past, evoking the ambiance of the old days associated with the roots of the coffee culture. This commercialized nostalgia is visualized via numerous retro motifs. Photographs on the walls are for the most part in sepia or black-and-white. Despite the fact that coffee-related procedures require high-level technological equipment and today are fairly mechanized, the photographs depict the old, traditional ways, involving natural materials and manual labor. The pictures of bare hands stroking the beans, of old but

Figure 3. Evoking the old romance. Cover photograph of *The World of Coffee: Stabākkusu no kōhi mame gaido* スターバックスのコーヒー豆ガイド 2004.

tasteful equipment and of burlap coffee bags create a nostalgic air of the rustic past, when humanity was still connected to the fruits of its labor. This "pseudo-production" imagery not only conveys a romanticized visualization of the past, but also contributes to the separation of production and consumption, characteristic of a Disnefied space. In the coffee context, this backward-looking gesture is exploited quite often, supposedly sending the consumer back to the "good old" days prior to the era of mass production.[55] It is important to note, however, that in Japan, the visual lexicon used by Starbucks refers its customer to the past that has no connection with Japan. Moreover, it is not quite an American past either, since Starbucks weaves itself into the European coffee tradition.

Similarly to the "other" times, "other" places are constructed mostly by means of visual representation, photographs and posters, which typically feature unidentifiable urban scenes or landscape compositions reminiscent of the coffee-growing countries of the third world. The vague ambiance created here is described by Naomi Klein as a "Third World aura."[56] None of the pictures carry an indication of the exact location it depicts—the visual lexicon used by Starbucks refers its Japanese customer to a set of nearly virtual locations, which nevertheless carry an air of exoticism. Most of the in-store wall-art features abstract patterns with sentences and words disconnected from their context, such as calendar dates, names of world cities or airport flight displays. Some posters are designed as old-style marine maps, evoking the romance of early sea travel embraced by the Starbucks mythology. The sea imagery builds a narrative of traveling and symbolic interconnectedness; images related to air travel convey a similar message. The idea is that in order to travel, the customer does not
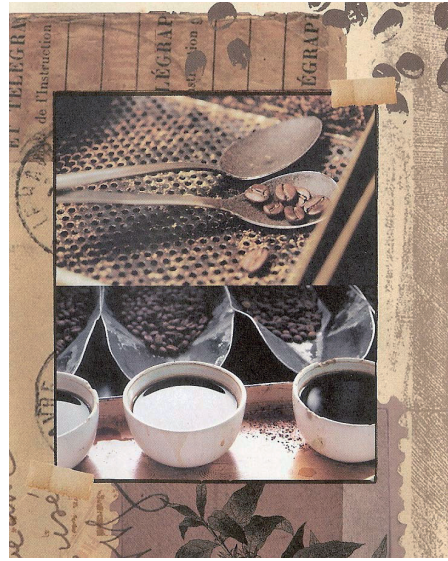
54 The notion of Starbucks as a themed environment is reinforced by the fact that the former Disney creative executive was recruited to conceive the design of Starbucks stores.
55 Roseberry 1996, p. 764.
56 Klein 2000, p. 112.

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figures 4–6. Posters in Starbucks outlets, Kyoto.

have to leave the store; by exposing its consumers to various aspects of the coffee experience, Starbucks sends them on an exciting journey.

The range of cultural references employed by Starbucks in Japan provides vague yet enchanting scenery; however, it is a manipulated landscape. The choice of sites reflects the contours of the map serving Starbucks to generate the appeal of coffee as a cultural commodity. While most of the world's coffee is grown in Vietnam and Indonesia, for inspiration Starbucks refers its customers to Italy and Finland. There is hardly a representation of Japanese or Asian tradition in Starbucks' cultural menu. Christmas and Halloween are celebrated annually; however, there is no attempt to mark Japanese traditional holidays. While the background music features some ethnic music, besides light jazz and blues, there are no Japanese or Asian tunes played. What determines the appeal of the product in such a simulated context? How is the Starbucks servicescape translated into a meaningful consumptionscape or, in other words, how do Japanese consumers use the stores and negotiate meanings prescribed by the brand builders?

In order to comprehend how the Japanese consumer appropriates the Starbucks experience, I conducted a survey of thirty Starbucks customers and in-depth interviews with twenty five respondents, twenty customers and five baristas at several Starbucks outlets. When asked about their perception of the Starbucks space, my respondents described it as "stylish" (*oshare* おしゃれ), "cool" (*kakkoii* かっこいい) and "possessing charm" (*miryoku*

no aru 魅力のある).[57] Many described it as a "different space" (*betsu no kūkan* 別の空間), which differs not only from the space of other coffee shops, but also from everyday life. Respondents often attributed this "coolness," or "charm" to the fact that Starbucks is foreign; its product thus possessed a certain positive "air" (*fun'iki* 雰囲気) often associated with foreign products. When asked about the source of the "air," however, few defined the atmosphere in terms of a particular locality. One of my customer interviewees, a young female office clerk, referred to the appearance of the Starbucks products as evoking images of abroad. The plastic cups with the green logo reminded her of American movies; even the sandwiches looked "not a *konbini* style."[58]

The food items represent an interesting example of how the product is twisted in order to fit the local palate while still looking "authentic." According to Barbara Le Marrec, Chief Retail Officer at Starbucks Japan, the food products sold in Starbucks stores represent the "Japanese idea of an American food experience, with the same form factor, but with different ingredients."[59] Although most of the product development is done in Seattle, there are also domestic products conceived and produced locally; some of them, such as Sakura Tea Latte, are only sold in Japan, while others, such as Green Tea Frappucino, find their way into foreign markets. Apart from the food components, there are also slight size variations. The Japanese tend to consume smaller amounts of food and beverage; therefore, the volume of pre-packaged foods and containers has been adapted accordingly.[60]

The Starbucks' narrative depicts coffee as a complicated matter. Throughout the Starbucks Japan press, the ability to navigate through the in-store experience is also presented as an acquired proficiency, often requiring close assistance and advice. Even the most basic procedures, such as placing an order or picking it upon preparation, are structured in a way that allows for little improvisation. The ordering procedure forces the customer to use the Anglo-Italian vocabulary concocted by Starbucks; the customer is assisted by a barista until he or she is able to formulate the order. There is a basic knowledge required even to choose the size of the beverage: as opposed to the common scale of small/medium/large, Starbucks introduces another scale of sizes, ranging from "short" to "venti." For experienced customers, Starbucks offers a range of customizing options. After placing the order, the customer is directed to a separate counter where the order is delivered; it is marked by red lamps. As reported by several respondents, these procedures can be rather complicated. A person not familiar with the structure finds him/herself at a loss and embarrassed, whereas a regular can perform smoothly. The "science" is more easily grasped by the younger generation; having more experience with foreign words than their parents, they have less difficulty pronouncing "Tall Orange Brûlée Frappucino" (トール オレンジ ブリュレ フラペチーノ). The demonstration of the knowledge itself becomes a source of consumer satisfaction. This fact might explain the popularity of the coffee seminars, which aid the consumers in their acquisition of the coffee expertise.

The last aspect of the Japanese in-store experience discussed in this section has to do with its social characteristics. Based both on observations and interviews, this segment of

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57 The respondents were asked to name five or more adjectives describing their impressions of the three components: the product, the setting, and the general atmosphere in the stores.

58 A *konbini* is a Japanese convenience store.

59 From her interview to the *American Chamber of Commerce Japan (ACC) Journal*, October 2010.

60 For example, Japan is the only market that offers a Frappucino in a "short" size.

research aimed to determine, what kind of social space Starbucks provides to its customers, and how it answers the local spatial demands. When asked about the general atmosphere of the Starbucks space, the vast majority of my respondents characterized it as "open" (*hiroi* ひろい), "easy to enter" (*hairi yasui* 入りやすい), "safe" (*anshin dekiru* 安心できる), "fresh" (*shinsen* 新鮮) and "relaxing" (*yukkuri dekiru* ゆっくりできる). This description corresponds to Schultz's vision of Starbucks as a "third place"—an accessible social setting, which is neither work nor home. The need for such places appears to be especially evident in Japan, where the small size of the dwellings, as well as the perception of home as a private space, encourages people to search for other, more neutral spaces to fill their social needs. The characteristic of "easy to enter" was usually linked to the predictability of Starbucks, which most of my interviewees found helpful and reassuring. For many interviewees, "easy to enter" more often than not meant "easy to enter alone." For women in particular, the ability to go alone appeared to be especially valuable. In this context, local coffee shops (*kissaten* 喫茶店) were described by female respondents as men's spaces, uncomfortable to enter and unpredictable.

Starbucks provides an easily accessible social space; however, it also allows for sufficient privacy. Several respondents defined their sensation of Starbucks as "alone but not lonely" (*hitori de iru kedo sabishiku nai* 一人でいるけど寂しくない), feeling part of the community but not forced to communicate with anybody, including the staff. This sensation is partly explained by the service system, involving a set of procedures that eventually require minimum communication between the staff and the customer. Once the customer receives the order, she or he is freed from any negotiation on the conditions of the stay in the store; this contrasts with traditional establishments, where the customers have to negotiate with the staff from the moment they are seated until they pay the bill. As noted by one barista interviewee, Japanese customers tend to display a mode of interaction based on silent recognition rather than on impulsive communication. When it comes to negotiation on the occupation of time and space, there seems to be a contract between both the customers and the store, and among the customers themselves, which involves almost no verbal communication.

The sensation of being private in a public space and of possessing individual control in terms of time and space was formulated by several respondents as "my time" (*mai taimu* マイタイム) and "my space" (*mai spēsu* マイスペース). The expressions resonate with the narrative of "my Starbucks," promoted by the company. The concept of "my" (*mai* マイ) in relation to consumer goods has a history in Japan, and expressions such as "my car" (*mai kā* マイカー) or "my home" (*mai hōmu* マイホーム) have become catchwords for items of individualized consumption.

The communal aspect of participation in the brand, as reported by respondents, can be conceptualized in terms of a "community of silence" (*chinmoku no shakai* 沈黙の社会).[61] The term, used by Molasky in the context of the Japanese jazz café, refers to a community in which the communal feeling is created by virtue of mere participation in a common experience, and requires neither articulate rules nor communication.

However silent and subtle the Starbucks community is, affiliation is marked via visible material objects. Starbucks merchandise, on display in every Starbucks store, assures that these material signifiers are easily acquired, and adds another layer to the experience—that of shopping. In addition to coffee-related goods, the displays feature Starbucks mugs, phone straps, sweets, toys, CDs, and other branded items. The "perfectly simple" (according to the

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61 Molasky 2005.

English caption in an explanatory leaflet) prepaid Starbucks card makes acquisition easier and by itself can serve to mark membership in the Starbucks community. The ability to customize not only your own beverage, but also your own display of membership in the brand "tribe," corresponds to the appropriation of Starbucks as "my" Starbucks, mentioned before.

Most of the specialized merchandise, such as coffee-related household appliances, are produced and distributed by Starbucks International; the majority of the designed goods and souvenirs are produced by Starbucks Japan for the Japanese market. Among these products, Starbucks tumblers occupy a special niche. The tumblers are manufactured in Tokyo and often feature traditional design patterns, such as cherry blossoms and maple leaves; or they carry names and pictures of various locations in which they are sold. Every year new designs are offered for sale, some are based on designs created by Starbucks customers. The tumblers have become popular collectable items representative of their owners' taste, lifestyle, traveling trajectories, as well as their keenness to invest in Starbucks paraphernalia. Tumblers from Starbucks locations abroad constitute yet another source of consumer satisfaction, indicating membership in the Starbucks' international community as well as one's traveling experience.

The role that the Starbucks space fulfils for the Japanese consumers shapes the ways in which it is used. According to Mrs. Le Marrec, there is a basic difference in customer dynamics between the U.S. and Japan. Consumers stay longer in stores in Japan: while U.S. customers typically order drinks to take out, the Japanese tend to drink and eat their purchases within the store.[62] To meet this demand, Japanese stores are made more spacious. The spatial layout of the Starbucks servicescape also reflects the local particularities. On learning that different types of seating are in demand during different times of the day or week, Starbucks Japan head office introduced flexible seating arrangements, allowing for multi-purpose use of the store space.

The communal aspect of the Starbucks servicescape appeals not only to the customers, but also to the baristas. Some stated that the sense of belonging and community was among the reasons they chose to work for Starbucks. Several reported that, compared to other workplaces in Japan, the Starbucks' working environment tended to be egalitarian and to allow for expression of individual opinion. Conditions of employment at Starbucks were also frequently mentioned. Starbucks' employment policy provides health benefits and career opportunities to its "partners" worldwide. These conditions differentiate Starbucks from the majority of jobs available for part-timers in the Japanese retail sector, and are especially relevant for young people who lack full time employment and are usually labeled and marginalized as "freeters" (*furītā* フリーター). As a result, the employee turnover rate tends to be much lower in Japan than in the U.S.

Branding of Global Culture or the Culture of Global Branding?

When a global brand enters a local scene, it inevitably faces challenges posed by the particularities of the local context. Prior to Starbucks' arrival in Japan, doubts were expressed as to the measure of its compatibility with Japanese consumption patterns. The company's non-smoking policy, its extensive use of paper cups and the "take-out" concept were deemed incompatible with the Japanese lifestyle. Nevertheless, Starbucks refused to alter its in-store format and to

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62 From her interview to *Japan Today*, May 2011.

"water down" its "authentic experience."[63] However, while the format of the coffee experience has been meticulously preserved, its content was gradually modified to fit local needs.

Numerous studies on the process of "glocalization" of global brands in local contexts have demonstrated how they adapt to local preferences and are consequently domesticated (or rejected) by local markets.[64] The notion of glocalization, however, assumes not only the adaptation of the product by the brand agency, but also the attachment to it of relevant meanings by the consumers. In the case of Starbucks in Japan, the very appropriation of the branded experience altered its shape: aiming to win consumers' loyalty, the company has been adopting slight variations of the product, while simultaneously appealing to its authenticity.

According to Bitner (1992), the perception of the servicescape enables the consumer and employee to classify the firm. "Environmental cues" serve as shortcut devices enabling customers to distinguish among types and ranks of establishments.[65] It is therefore not surprising that, despite similar environments, Starbucks is categorized differently in Japan and in the U.S. or Europe. Japanese Starbucks is generally perceived, both by local and foreign observers, as more up market than its overseas counterparts. It is also consistently ranked higher than all other coffee chains, both local and imported. According to a recent survey, more than 75 percent of the respondents who reported going to coffee shops prefer Starbucks (compared to 61 percent preferring Doutor, 23 percent preferring Tully's, and 6 percent preferring Ueshima 上島).[66]

Similarly to a theme park, Starbucks exoticizes "other" cultural contexts by "packaging" them as a consumable commodity. This "packaged" experience is reconstructed through visual, spatial, audio, olfactory and other environmental elements to comprise a holistic servicescape. Consumers' perception of the Starbucks servicescape reflects several broader consumption patterns and trends. Corresponding to the notion of coffee as a foreign commodity, the link between "cool" and "foreign" can be discussed in the wider framework of incorporation of foreign products in Japan. According to Clammer, foreign products possess in Japan a certain "aura," which facilitates a consumer demand and generates re-enchantment of everyday life. One effective means to reinforce the foreign cultural aura is the narrative of virtual travel. Simon compares Starbucks in the U.S. to "National Geographic without the text:" the marketed experience represents a packaged virtual touring, accessible yet exotic, when "drinking a cup of coffee made from Sumatra beans can be like traveling to a far-off land."[67] Moreover, travel and discovery fit into the upper-middle class lifestyle agenda, and therefore acquire a subjective value when translated into cultural capital.

Starbucks creates an environment that refers the Japanese consumer to a set of double references, in fact creating a "second-hand" experience. The extensive use of "faceless" cosmopolitan urban imagery or rural scenery possessing the "Third World aura" evokes a sense of geographical vagueness, disconnecting the experience from "real" geographic locations associated with its origins. The real geography is substituted with a semi-virtual topography of consumer enchantment, based on images and cultural representations rather than on attributes of real sites. A similar technique was described by Cayla and Eckhardt

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63 From his interview to the *Marketing Magazine*, February 2010.
64 Caldwell 2004; Ger and Belk 1996; Watson 1998 and more.
65 Bitner 1992, p. 62.
66 Trend watch survey, October 2010.
67 Simon 2009, p. 150.

(2008) in the context of Asian regional branding, where brand origins were blurred in order to generate a regional identity reaching across national boundaries.[68] One interesting recent development supporting this notion is the removal of the English text from the Starbucks global logo, suggesting the intention to de-territorialize the brand and make it more accessible transnationally.

Starbucks education provides both the didactic and the entertaining aspects of the consumer experience, allowing for the hybrid practice of "edutainment."[69] Acquiring expertise also can translate into acquisition of cultural capital. Moreover, obtaining knowledge, a key asset for adequate appreciation of the Starbucks experience, can also mark membership in the brand community. The membership is reinforced through material acquisition of Starbucks paraphernalia, "my" mugs and tumblers, prepaid cards and other copyright items. In this context, it is useful to mention the role of educating in Japanese consumption. Providing guidelines and prescriptions concerning various aspects of consumer behavior constitutes an integral part of the contemporary Japanese marketing industry. Numerous magazines, guidebooks and newspaper advice columns target their audience and "tell their readers what to do and what not to do," in a language that can be seen as "almost patronizing and condescending."[70] The educational aspect of the Starbucks strategy therefore finds a rather favorable environment in Japan, where coffee is still regarded as a commodity that an average consumer has to be familiarized with, and where educational messages are accepted as a normative feature of marketing and advertisement.

When examined as a social space, Starbucks appears to provide a consumptionscape allowing both for a sense of anonymity and community. Recently, an expression has been used in Japan in relation to the individual experience in public sites of consumption, "*Ohitori sama*" (お一人様, Mr/Ms Alone), referring to a person who enjoys her or his consumer experience alone.[71] According to the interviewees' responses, the Starbucks chain successfully addresses this need in an accessible private experience in a public setting. The brand's positioning as a "third place" corresponds to the growing need for such kinds of spaces. According to statistical data collected by an independent survey in 2010, only 35 percent of the respondents recalled experiencing a "third place" setting; more than 50 percent stated that they had no—or insufficient—comfort time (*seishinteki yutori* 精神的ゆとり) provided by such settings.[72]

It is not only the brand that shapes the consumer experience of its Japanese patrons. By prescribing various components of the branded experience with their own needs and connotations, the consumers modify its shape and content. Starbucks' spatial layout, its marketing strategy, even the foodstuffs have undergone transformation as a response to local demand. Similarly to the mutated custom of Valentine's Day, Starbucks' "authentic" product remains in demand while being invested with a set of relevant meanings. The ability to personalize the different elements of the experience, from drink customizing and use of personal mugs to utilization of space, points at another aspect, that of individual

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68 Cayla and Eckhardt 2008.
69 Creigton 1994; Hendry 2000.
70 Tanaka 1998, p. 117. See also Bardsley 2011; Moeran 1995; Rosenberger 1995 and more.
71 This is also the title of a popular TV drama series about a career woman trying to succeed on her own.
72 According to the Marketing Support Ltd. Do House (*Māketingu shien no kabushikigaisha Do Hausu* マーケティング支援の株式会社ドゥ・ハウス) survey, April 2010.

appropriation and control over the experience. Contrary to the traditional function of coffee shops as public spaces allowing for sociability, this setting resembles more a take-out coffee bought at a train station while browsing a smart phone – a semi-virtual consumer experience that allows for maximum control. This tendency is discussed by Castells in the context of changes emerging in the "information age," where the nature of social relationships is characterized simultaneously by individualism and communalism.[73] Castells describes a society where virtual and physical communities develop side by side; I would add to this another dimension: that of the two communal forms intersecting and borrowing each other's features. In the Japanese context, this notion is reinforced by the vast dissemination of virtual consumption and communication, as well as the proliferation of virtual communities.

A brand community is defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand."[74] The nature of interpersonal bonding in such a community is determined merely by participation in a common consumer experience; membership is marked by material objects carrying the brand's stamp. In case of the virtual brand community promoted by Starbucks, these bonds are even feebler. The marketed experience itself provides ample material for virtualization: the narrative of virtual travel creates a sense of connectedness without the actual need to move; the de-territorialization of the brand and vague yet exotic cultural representations shape non-geographically bound consumption space. In the contexts of both community and brand experience, the absence of clear geographical ties represents a resource for consumer appeal rather than a drawback. Personal control and anonymity on the one hand, and a regulated and structured environment characterized by a disconnection from "real" history and geography on the other, generate an experience reminiscent of that created by a virtual space.

There seems to be a measure of contradiction between de-territorialization and certain localizing practices employed by the brand, such as introducing locally produced merchandise or altering the taste of the product. These modifications indeed undermine the idea that global brands are, like Disneyland discussed by Raz (1999), "the same everywhere" and thus function as black ships "spreading cultural homogeneity and consent."[75] Global actors shape a new kind of virtualized consumption space; however, this space can be infused with a variety of images, signs and symbols, creating a colorful collage rather than dull homogeneity.

The final product of the Starbucks brand strategy, from the brand narrative to its transformation into a consumptionscape, can be therefore defined as a standardized semi-virtual environment, which nevertheless acquires social and cultural relevance and carries consumer appeal. At this point, I disagree with Castells on the characteristics of contemporary urban space. While he regards this space as organized along Bipolar axes (the global and local, the individual and communal, the space of flows and space of places), depicted as conflicting logics tearing cities from the inside, I argue that these dualities represent less a source of tension, than a resource for the transformation of the urban fabric.[76] Castells mentions the role of architecture as a means to insert symbolic meaning into the fabric of the city; I suggest that this function is carried out by commercialized urban sites, and particularly by global chains. By constructing uniform consumption

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73 Castells 2004, p. 83.
74 Muniz and O'Guinn 2001, p. 412.
75 Raz 1999, p. 12.
76 Castells 2004, p. 85.

practices around a regulated, culturally manipulated and socially relevant space, these sites create networks of physical and symbolic connections between world locations. While Castells in his "space of flows" refers exclusively to electronic linkages, I expand the meaning of the "flow" to include images, practices, knowledge, as well as the cultural capital drawn from them. This "space of flows" connotes a setting which allows for the successful transformation of a servicescape, constructed by the chain, into a consumptionscape, constructed by subjective consumer experiences.

Conclusion

Throughout the world, global chains are becoming more prevalent, dominating the contemporary urban scene and creating new consumption spaces capable of constructing new consumer experiences and generating new subjectivities. Clearly, Starbucks coffee chain is not the only company in Japan that employs the principles of Disney in prescribing consumer experiences. Neither is Japan the only country where the Starbucks product evokes a favorable consumer response. In 2007, the chain successfully entered the Russian market; recently, China has been targeted as the company's key market in the Asian region. Starbucks represents an archetype of a global actor in a local context, and provides us with valuable insights into the changing character of the globalized world.

The purpose of this essay was to draw, using the case of Japan, a conceptual framework for comprehending the role of global chains in forging new subjectivities and to shed light on the everyday expressions of globalization. An understanding of the dynamics of development in a given place demands research on how sites are being affected by their insertion into "spaces of flows" of commodities, and how, at the same time, places and their socio-cultural fabric are affecting these flows. Incorporation of global products in Japan represents one aspect of this transformation.

What forces shape our everyday lives, determining our priorities and opportunities for self-identification and self-expression? What contents draw our attention, evoke imagination and generate a need? After all most of us seek commodities that make statements about ourselves. We determine their value based on how well they fit our self-perceptions and desires, whether for comfort and predictability, discovery and individuality, or belonging and communality. These desires are addressed, reproduced and addressed yet again by agents of consumption. Analyzing the encounter between the desire and its satisfaction, the consumer and the product, grants us deeper understanding of how the world of commodities changes us, and how we change this world.

Starbucks-like standardized public spaces bring the consumption experience closer to a virtual experience, while still providing consumers with a relevant social space. Given the new relations between "spaces" and "places" forged by the global actors, the world might soon be turned into an airport terminal, engulfing us with surrogated, standardized albeit user-friendly spaces stripped of their authenticity. Or again, these changes may signal the emergence of a new space, defining "places" in terms of consumer value and infusing them with new meanings. This remains to be seen; what is evident from the case of Starbucks in Japan, however, is that such spaces are capable of generating new subjectivities, translating them into new geographies of connection and cultural identifications.

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