

Consumption, ‘coca-colonisation’, cultural resistance—and Santa Claus

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At least four of the seven deadly sins against which Christianity once railed are now seen by some to be venerated in Christmas celebrations: avarice, gluttony, lust, and envy. The conflict is by no means uniquely American ... but America has contributed the uniquely American Santa Claus and has become an arbiter of Christmas celebrations around the world, primarily because of its part import of European emigrant traditions and its present export of popular culture. (Belk 1993, 75)

In what ways has the iconography and practice of Christmas been shaped, understood and consumed as an American experience? This chapter explores explains and questions the ideological valence of Christmas in part as an *American* socio-economic and cultural (export) practice. I do acknowledge the fact that Daniel Miller has identified a number of the international strands of influence operating transatlantically on Christmas from the mid-19th century on whereby ‘[t]his syncretic modern form extracts the Christmas tree from the German tradition, the filling of stockings from the Dutch tradition, the development of Santa Claus mainly from the United States, the British Christmas card’ (Miller 1993, 4). It is telling that the two American artists responsible for the most influential visual representations of Santa Claus had strong European backgrounds: in the 19th century, cartoonist Thomas Nast (born in Germany in 1840), and in the 20th, advertising illustrator Haddon Sundblom (Sweden). I recognise too the shifting relationship America has had with Christmas, it being historically sometimes hugely antagonistic: in early modern America Christmas was actually banned by the Puritans (Miller 1993, 3), though by the late 18th century some Americans were celebrating St Nicholas in part as an anti-British sentiment (Carrier 1993, 66). Yet overall there are a cluster of issues around (American) consumption in relation to seasonal advertising, the global or hemispheric spread of secular and commercial Christmas, and some gestures of resistance towards this spread, which are important if debatably residual national aspects of Christmas, even as it has become ‘today *the* global festival’ (Miller 1993, 5; emphasis original). Following close on in the American calendar of ‘festivals of consumption’ from Halloween (candy, beer) and Thanksgiving (turkey) is ‘the festival of festivals, the only festival to achieve transcendental status—Christmas’ (Twitchell 1996, 172). Rather than ‘his evil twin Scrooge’ (Twitchell 1996, 176), the key visual figure here is Santa Claus, born (kind of) in the United States in the 19th century.

Christmas shopping, department stores and Santa Claus: the festival of consumption

Modern Christmas brought together a cluster of practices and innovations in social and commercial life alike, and indeed these became intertwined through developments in western capitalism in both domestic and public urban spheres. These include the fact that the production/consumption economy was facilitated by the

increasingly common practice of gift-giving (and *vice versa*: gift-giving—moving into gift *exchange* (Fowles 1996, 247)—pushed on the economy); the development and then rapid expansion of the department store made a new shopping leisure experience and consumerist lifestyle possible; advertising became a dominant mass media form of public communication and persuasion, predicated in large part on shifting the new products available from the ‘cathedrals of consumption’ (Crossick and Jaumain 1999).

Christmas, the season of both gift-giving and ‘intensive shopping’ (Miller 1993, 21), was relatively rapidly recognised by store owners for its potential impact on increasing sales. This was capitalised on in various ways until the now familiar seasonal spike in sales and turnover was established. On Christmas Eve 1867, for example, R.H. Macy first extended the opening hours of his New York department store until midnight, and in doing so ‘set a one-day sales record of more than \$6,000’ (Twitchell 1996, 173). An 1874 promotion in Macy’s of \$10,000 worth of imported dolls led to ‘Christmas window displays of manufactured goods [becoming] a part of the promotion of Christmas buying and gift-giving’ (Belk 1993, 90). The offering of Christmas bonuses to department store employees at the end of the 19th century—even if it was for no more munificent reason than to avert industrial action at Woolworth’s in the first instance—would effectively introduce a further mechanism to swell the seasonal marketplace (Twitchell 1996, 173).

Besides its emphasis on materialism, consumption and display, the rise of the department store in 19th and early 20th century America and Europe could have wider social resonance. Meg Jacobs has noted that ‘department stores legitimized public loitering.... Their free entry policy along with their grand physical construction and accessible lay-out of merchandise encouraged shopping as a leisurely activity. Even if one could not afford to purchase, looking was free.... *[D]epartment stores democratized desire...*’ (2001, 228; emphasis added). There was too a compelling gendered perspective around issues of consumption and the act of shopping and its adjacent new social opportunities available inside department stores. ‘[T]he many non-shopping activities that stores offered [ranged] from afternoon tea and classical music to public libraries to public debates over women’s suffrage. Breaking from an older ideology of separate spheres that had confined them to private arenas, women now moved in many commercial public spaces’ (Jacobs 2001, 228). (A note the caution is introduced by Hosgood with regard to Christmas shopping, in which ‘women’s role as Christmas shoppers promoted a healthy new image of the woman shopper’ in the popular imaginary: ‘while shopping did enable women to escape the domestic sphere, it did not automatically empower them.... Indeed, it left them open to the taunt from men that they were simply parading and massaging their petty vanities’: 1999, 103, 99.)

In 1939, the dominance of Christmas within the American seasonal marketplace would be confirmed by the introduction of the character ‘Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer’ as a marketing tool by the Chicago-based department store chain Montgomery Ward. Over two million copies of the story of ‘Rudolph’ were sent out with Montgomery Ward catalogues that first year alone (Twitchell 1996, 175), in spite apparently of concerns from executives that a Bardolphian red nose was not the symbol for a family business to align itself with (Mikkelsen and Mikkelsen 2004). A decade later, the eponymous song sung by Gene Autry, based on the Montgomery

Ward character, became a major hit. It remains one of the most popular of Christmas songs, a key part of the sonic landscape of the season, even if with a provenance that is, in Twitchell's term, signalling the imbrication between advertising and popular culture generally, 'pure Adcult' (1996, 175). In fact such a provenance confirms its centrality in the Christmas festival landscape.

This is the case even more with the figure at the heart not only of Christmas but of the profound transformation of this festival season, the overweight and elderly superhero, the "deity" of materialism' (Miller 1993, 20), known as Santa Claus, with his amazing sackful of magic powers—flight, shape-shifting, time travel, omniscience... For, as Twitchell has observed, 'You can keep Christ out of Christmas but not Santa' (1996, 174). His preferred locations—in representation, in a snowy landscape of Norway or the North Pole, in 'reality', ensconced in the grotto of the department store—illustrates for us the centrality of myth and marketing, which I will look at further in due course. In his 1952 essay entitled 'Father Christmas executed', Claude Lévi-Strauss points out that '[t]he variety of names given to the person who distributes the children's toys—Father Christmas, Saint Nicholas, Santa Claus—shows that it is a result of a process of convergence and not an ancient prototype preserved everywhere intact' (1952, 42). While to an extent the syncretic hero matches the syncretic season of Christmas itself, there are also more specifically national contributions to be considered. For example, Russell Belk has contrasted what he calls the modern 'American Santa Claus' with other traditional (mostly European) Christmas figures, identifying the following key differences:

1. Santa Claus lacks the religious associations of such gift-bearing figures as Santa Lucia, Saint Nicholas, Christkindlein....
2. Santa Claus lacks the riotous rebelliousness of figures such as Saturn and Knecht Ruprecht.
3. Santa Claus lacks the punitive nature of Sinterklaas (with his companion Zwarte Piet)....
4. [W]ith his many appearances on street corners, in stores and shopping malls, and in homes, Santa Claus is a more tangible character than his predecessors and counterparts.
5. Santa Claus is a bringer of numerous and substantial gifts, not merely the fruits, nuts, and simple homemade toys of [tradition]. (Belk 1993, 78)

A normative whiteness—the caucasian appearance, white hair and beard, white fur trim—and reassuring masculinity—unthreatening, paternal (*Father* Christmas) or avuncular—can be understood as being embodied by representations of Santa Claus. This is so from the early popularisation of a visual image in January 1863 (marking the Christmas 1862 season—perhaps we can say that Santa Claus was also born at Christmas) and following by political cartoonist Thomas Nast, at a period of social crisis in the USA. In Nast's drawings in the magazine *Harper's Weekly*, collected and published in book form within a few years as *Santa Claus and His Works* (1869), Santa is introduced as a stabilising figure. After all, as Carrier reminds us, 'it was during the [American] Civil War that the modern image of Santa appeared' (1993, 68). Even from these early familiar times, then, Santa was already ideologically located: constituting part of the Union imaginary during the Civil War, the implication was that Southern children would be made to wonder why Santa was not

visiting them (see Whyte 2005). Santa commented on some of the ideological terrain he has found himself implicated in in a 2005 interview:

When, for example, the Ku Klux Klan used my image, it was their way of recognizing the fact that I stand for benevolence and decent human behaviour, even though that's hypocritical on their part. When the Viet Cong threw down propaganda brochures to be found by American troops in Vietnam to weaken their morale, it was acknowledgment of just how big a role I play in the fabric of American families. So, while I certainly am not happy to see myself used by the Nazis, nonetheless it's kind of a backhanded compliment (quoted in Whyte 2005).

The strange man mysteriously breaking into the house in the middle of the night, often visiting children in their bedrooms, unseen by all, came to evoke not nightmare but dream and desire. Portly rather than obese, jolly and rosy-cheeked rather than inebriated (even after several whiskies, as in figure 2), Santa is predominantly a domesticated rather than saturnalian festival figure. Interestingly, in spite of his distinctive appearance and dress and the consistency of the claims of his American origins, Santa is not in fact easily visibly identifiable as an American figure—most obviously, clothing is red and white rather than (starred) red, white and blue, for example. The one pivotal exception to this is that first Santa of Nast's, from 1863: the cover illustration of *Harper's Weekly* shows Santa at a troop camp, standing beneath the stars and stripes flag with stars on his jacket and striped trousers. Overall though, is it rather in the products (gifts and merchandise) and his locations (stores and advertisements) that we must recognise and seek to understand his Americanness?

The historical antecedents of Christmas advertising in the USA show that, as long ago as the mid-19th century, a Father Christmas-style character had been employed for seasonal marketing: in Philadelphia in 1841 a performer dressed as a character named 'Criscringle' publicised a local store's merchandise to passers-by. A standardised visual amalgamation—white, white beard, portly, jolly, wearing an identifiable fur or fur-trimmed uniform—developed through the century. It was this image that was most famously exploited by the Coca-Cola Company from the early 1930s on, in the corporate company colours of red and white, as part of its campaign to increase winter sales of its soft drink. It is widely recognised that it is from this long-running campaign that Santa's place and most familiar representation has been concretised in the contemporary Christmas imaginary. Twitchell, for example, argues that '[t]he jolly old St. Nick that we know from countless images did not come from Macy's department store, neither did he originate in the imagination ... of [Thomas] Nast.... *He came from the yearly advertisements of the Coca-Cola Company*' (1996, 175; emphasis added). Indeed, the Coca-Cola Company was itself so confident of this that it re-introduced Santa in an international advertising campaign during Christmas 2006 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Coke Claus. This was accompanied by a range of official Coca-Cola merchandising, including glasses and trays, but also Christmas tree baubles, showing favourite Sundblom Santa images. Such a revival speaks to the sense of *historicity* of the advertisements and of the figure himself. It is clear that these advertisements, appearing most years over three decades, and featuring over 40 different Santa images painted by Sundblom, were very influential in the dissemination and popularisation of the visual figure of Santa Claus—and of the connection between Christmas, Americana, advertising and commerce—but

intriguingly there was at least one major precedent here. I want first to look at that before moving on to discuss the Coke Claus.

White Rock mineral water, produced by the beverage company established in Wisconsin in 1871, first used Santa Claus in its seasonal advertising in 1915. Monochrome newspaper advertisements depicted Santa delivering children's presents in a wintry landscape, while also taking the opportunity to deliver crates of White Rock (see figure 1). This campaign developed so that from 1923 to 1925 each December colour advertisements appeared in *Life* magazine, with Santa in now familiar garb and setting: fur-trimmed red and white clothing, white beard, portly and jolly, in comfortable and warm domestic Christmas settings (usually contrasting with a winter scene outside, visible through a window). The further familiarity of course is that the images are *advertisements*, that Santa exists in the meta-context for material commercial transaction, that he is pimping his product. Together the three advertisements tell in order the important stages of Santa's annual narrative of activity, so there is a neat and presumably considered continuity to the series. In the first from 1923 (figure 2) he is at home reading through wish-letters sent to him by children, a third of the way through an open bottle of whisky, with White Rock mixer; in 1924 (figure 3) he is shown in the act of delivering presents to a house—while also gratefully consuming the present the household has left for him, a bottle of White Rock (and accompanying uncorked bottle of liquor); in 1925 (figure 4) he is back at home after a hard night's work delivering presents, sitting by his ice-box enjoying one of several bottles of White Rock (with no hint of alcohol this time). In the social context of 1920s USA these advertisements are fascinating, as Bob Beckerer of the White Rock Collectors Association explains.

This was the middle of Prohibition [1920-1933]—no booze and no ads for booze. Yet, here is a group of ads showing a liquor bottle. White Rock became so popular that its name became synonymous with soda water. Much like today, where some people ask for a 'Coke' when they mean any 'cola'. Being primarily a mixer, during Prohibition a request for 'White Rock' took on a secondary meaning as a coded request for a mixed [alcoholic] drink. (personal correspondence, 20 March 2007)

A bucolic Santa in the White Rock advertisements, aimed firmly at parents, the struggling present-buyers and -givers of the season, recognised and confirmed the adult encoding only too well.

It is though the soft (drink) Santa, the Coca-Cola Claus, depicted in a long-lasting series of colour advertisements illustrated by Haddon Sundblom from 1931 on, that has maintained a central place in the public Christmas imaginary (and, judging by collectors' enthusiasms and websites, possibly too in the public's affection). The seasonality of sales is a key issue for chilled products—sales peak in hot weather and drop in cold. The Christmas Coke adverts were intended to boost sales at the annual flagging time of the year. Some products have an articulated seasonal marketing strategy—the gift-giving period of Christmas being most important for sales of wristwatches, cosmetics, children's toys, for instance, as well as for the business of advertising itself. Coca-Cola wanted both to raise sales figures at a notoriously quiet time *and* to tap into the spending spike becoming associated with the consumerist celebration of the festive season. Twitchell describe the process:

‘Thirst knows no season’ was their initial winter campaign. At first [Coca-Cola’s advertisers] decided to show how a winter personage like Santa could enjoy a soft drink in December.... They started showing Santa relaxing from his travails by drinking a Coke, then showed how the kids might leave a Coke (not milk) for Santa, and then implied that the gifts coming in from Santa were in exchange for the Coke. Pay dirt. Santa’s presents might not be in exchange for a Coke, but they were ‘worth’ a Coke. Coke’s Santa was elbowing out other Santas. *Coke’s Santa was starting to own Christmas*. (1996, 175; emphasis added)

To what extent, over the succeeding decades, did Sundblom’s Coca-Cola Santa figure in the construction and cementation of the (American) experience of Christmas itself? As with the White Rock advertisements, the innovation in the widespread use of colour in the print images of popular media (which included not only magazines but also seasonal greetings cards, though this was more of a European practice) was significant, and the red-clothed (rather than white, or green) Santa became the definitive one. This was a gesture of powerful but simple branding, since such colour coding became and remains part of the enduring transnational, extra-linguistic, and possibly even subconscious recognition of Coke brand identity: ‘[t]he eye decodes what stymies the mind, hence ... the red of Coca-Cola’ (Twitchell 1996, 22).

‘Coca-colonisation’ and Santa

Apparently some of our friends overseas have difficulty distinguishing between the United States and Coca-Cola.

An approving Coca-Cola Company official

The Yankee, more arrogant than the Nazi iconoclast, substitutes the machine for the poet, Coca-Cola for poetry, American advertising for *La Légende des Siècles*, the mass-manufactured car for the genius...!

French poet Louis Aragon, 1951 (both quotations in Kuisel 1993, 52, 41)

In the 1943 Sundblom Coca-Cola Christmas advertisement, Santa is shown trudging happily through the virgin snow with a heavy sack of presents over one shoulder and a bottle of Coke in the other hand. His boots are covered in snow, so it’s a long journey. The slogan ‘Wherever I go’ (itself in quotation marks—his speech) refers both to his current journey through the snow to unseen houses *and* to the ambitious global reach of the company’s business plan. For behind his image, in the direction he is walking, floats a globe, on which America, Africa and Europe can be easily identified. Further, the globe is marked as a seasonal gift, wrapped with ribbon and a label. The label, covering the United States on the globe, has the ‘Coca-Cola’ logo. The previous decade the Coca-Cola Export Corporation had begun to market the drink outside the United States, employing a franchise system in which the home company in Atlanta, Georgia ‘supervis[ed] quality and advertising’ while each local producer made drink and profits. Within a few years in Europe business was considerably enhanced by the presence of so many GIs drinking bottles of Coke, ‘mostly at government expense’ as part of the war effort (Kuisel 1993, 53). One publicity slogan

from 1945 went: ‘Whenever you hear “Have a Coke”, you hear the voice of America’ (Digger History, 2007).

After the war, Coca-Cola plants were established in many western European countries, to the extent that a 1950 *Time* magazine cover depicted the globe drinking a bottle of Coke—effectively little more than a finesse of the company’s own 1943 advertisement. While ‘almost everywhere in postwar Europe Coca-Cola’s arrival provoked opposition’ (Kuisel 1993, 54), it was in France in particular that what became known as the ‘Coca-Cola affair’ illustrated and dramatised the tensions within the easy embrace of American popular culture, and where the phrase ‘coca-colonisation’ occurred in both left-wing and mainstream print media. From 1949 until 1953 a battle raged in Communist circles, within the French and later American governments, and in the French agriculture and viniculture industries, about national culture and identity—against a backdrop of the Cold War and the Marshall Plan. *Le Monde* expressed it sardonically in 1950: ‘We have accepted chewing gum and Cecil B. Demille, *Reader’s Digest*, and be-bop. [But i]t’s over soft drinks that the conflict has erupted. Coca-Cola seems to be the Danzig of European culture. After Coca-Cola, *holà*’ (quoted in Kuisel 1993, 65).

Over the decades many of the Sundblom Santas were depicted in domestic environments—by the roaring fireplace, or the decorated Christmas tree, or, most favoured, by the refrigerator (which contained chilled bottles of Coke). Such adverts seem designed to confirm Miller’s view that, while ‘Christmas may be everywhere ... the only true Christmas is within one’s own home’ (1993, 30). They also though imply the valorisation and acceptance of models of domestic consumption: that the fridge was an essential item of American everyday life (even in midwinter) was normalised. This could have curious repercussions. In France, for example, Communist-led anti-Americanism actually attacked the fridge as a symptom of Americans’ excessive and redundant consumption. According to Kuisel, ‘The Frigidaire, militants were informed, was a useless gadget most of the year, except for making ice cubes for whiskey cocktails. It was usually cool enough in France so that a traditional *garde-manger* “placed on the window keeps the leftovers of Sunday’s lamb until Wednesday”’ (1993, 40).

In what ways can iconic advertising figures like the Coca-Cola Santa help us to address questions of the Americanisation of Christmas? Can we consider Santa, and his load of presents, as a global emblem of American-modelled or -led consumption? In Blek’s view there can be a connection: ‘[t]his diaspora of the American Santa Claus is not unlike the diaspora of Coca-Cola as an emblem of American modernity’ (1993, 82). In general, external forms of American popular consumption (or the consumption of America) have inscribed within them variously power, pleasure, and fear. Exported American popular culture is criticised for its homogenising effects. Through this process of Americanisation, cultural dopes and dupes are produced, who value novelty over tradition, nostalgia over history. There is little room in this dismal analysis for originality or individualism: mass media and commodification deny us agency in our own cultural choices, nor is there recognition of the subversive potential of the appropriation or localised reinscription of cultural meaning. Admitting to the pleasures of Americana is merely proof positive of one’s dopey-ness (signifying infantile, ignorant, narcotised). As Twitchell casually articulates it, ‘[p]roducts that symbolise America cross borders with ease. Coke,

Hershey bars, Levi's jeans, Marlboro cigarettes, Nike shoes, and Wrigley's gum are bought worldwide simply for being American. The packaging is the ad' (1996, 246). The critical, sometimes pejorative, terminology employed here is, as we have seen, 'Coca-colonisation', of course, but also 'McDonaldisation' (Ritzer 1996), 'Disneyisation' (Bryman 2004)—and even, in the context of consumption, 'Wal-Martisation' (explained and challenged in Wrigley 2000, 232-36). The 20th century, for instance, was punctuated by regular moral panics around the latest pop cultural craze emanating from America, which would generally also involve youth pleasure and autonomy and a generational disruption. European elders railed against the symptoms of what they perceived as a febrile, vacuous, immature export culture, whether in the form of hot jazz, gangster films and gun culture, streamlining, soft drinks, comic books, juvenile delinquency, rock 'n' roll, pop art, LSD, fast food, video nasties, gangsta rap and gun culture, both jogging *and* obesity ... all happily attriting away at Old World social consensus and cultural hierarchy through the century (see Hebdige 1988, Kuisel 1993, Campbell *et al* 2004, McKay 2005). Though each alone may appear a relatively minor novelty, and some are demonstrably more dangerous in perception or practice than others, reactions to them contributed to a current of distrust of the United States and its pop cultural pleasures from significant sectors of European society, and, importantly, across the political spectrum. A 1957 Sundblom Coca-Cola Christmas advertisement shows Santa by a blasting (?) rocket: a fairly direct statement of the alliance of Coke, Christmas and the Cold War, merging the space race with a politics of pleasure and plenty. In Kuisel's view,

in retrospect the war over Coca-Cola was a symbolic controversy between France and America. Its emotional energy derived from French fear of growing American domination, in a political, economic, and cultural sense, during a bleak phase of French trade and a tense moment of the Cold War (1993, 68).

This is not simply a historic phenomenon, for in some European countries a class-centred aesthetic and practical seasonal struggle continues to take place precisely in this frame of the national popular: 'A recurrent theme in middle-class narratives has to do with the constant threat of the invasion of an "Americanised" Christmas, the ultimate vulgarity with blinking red, green and yellow lights, plastic trees, canned Santa Polyester Snow, taped muzak carols, and "Christmas Home Memories Fragrance Spray"' (Löfgren 1993, 230). Further, in the twin contexts of Coke and Christmas, a minor but telling international controversy over the Sundblom Santa paintings occurred when they were exhibited in Canada in 1991, precisely because of their links with Coca-Cola (the company lent the paintings for the exhibition and had numerous promotions tied in for those attending). One local critic thundered: 'It is sad that an august institution like the Royal Ontario Museum would put its imprimatur on junk food ... This further links the birth of Christ with Santa Claus, with consumption' (quoted in Belk 1993, 76).

Conclusion: fulfilling each other's needs, or greeds

I want to return to the starting point for much of this chapter: the issue of Christmas as the season of consumption, and, in particular, the charge that such consumption is not only excessive but also undercuts the traditional religious tenet of the festival. There

are contrasting views on this. Mary Searle-Chatterjee, for example, suggests that the commercialism of contemporary Christmas is a major problem identified by many of its practitioners. Indeed, this is so much the case that, in her view, '[b]elievers *and non-believers alike* lament the commercialism of the Christmas season.... The festival is "sacred" in so far as it can be profaned by commerce'. She contrasts Christmas with '[t]he summer holiday season [a]s a time of equally extravagant and commercialised expenditure yet no one deplors this fact for nobody expects the summer holiday to be sacred' (Searle-Chatterjee 1993, 182-3; emphasis added). On the other hand, considered historically, and compared with earlier versions of the festival, for Jib Fowles,

[t]he charge of 'commercialism', with the implication that Christmas used to be less so and now is more, is not profound. The holiday was not much celebrated in the English-speaking world for the two centuries before the arrival of the production/consumption economy in the 19th century. As the holiday re-emerged, it used as gifts the goods that were at hand—in this case, manufactured ones. (1996, 251, n.7)

Michael Schudson has taken this kind of pro-'commercialism' argument further. In his view, in contemporary society '[t]he prevalence of gift giving suggests that people very often buy things not because they are materialistic but because they are social.... We have not forsaken traditional family values for material consumption; we consume materials very often to preserve families' (1993, 139).

Such qualifications as these are helpful in delineating the grand and dismal narrative of 'coca-colonisation' in the Christmas context, enabling us to move beyond that most obvious of deconstructions: Santa/Satan. How far should the Santa figure, even with a full sack, let alone the ideologically overloaded thing that is the *soft* drink of Coke, (continue to) bear the weight of too much meaning and power? Yet is the case that a later Coca-Cola advertising campaign would demonstrate even further the company's ecumenicism—the *counterculture lite* pop and youth idealism of the early 1970s's 'I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony' (see Falk 1997) can be viewed as a relatively early, not to say brazen, articulation of what Naomi Klein sees more critically as 'the equalising promise of the logo-linked globe' (2000, xvii). In a contemporary world of transnational mediation, according to Charles Acland,

[f]rom the IBM commercials of quaintly remote locations (a convent, an Middle Eastern desert, etc.) to Microsoft's 'Where do you want to go today', from Benetton's racially obsessed images of diversity to Coke's vaguely neo-hippie multiculturalism and Pepsi's dance internationalism of 'Generation Next', a dominant representation is that of geographic and cultural borders being transcended by commodity forms that draw the interest of young people. Such images construct a form of fetishism—affixed to both commodities *and* young people—that carries a magical 'one worldness', in the end a pure ideological reverie of individual empowerment. 'One worldness' is seen as a determining characteristic of a unique generational phenomenon. (2000, 45)

By historicising Coca-Cola and Christmas consumption via its advertisements and the key figure of Santa Claus from the 1930s on, I have suggested that in some ways it confirms the argument that the 'association of materialism and Christmas is often

viewed ... as part and parcel of a global “Americanisation” of popular culture, which has promoted materialism under the umbrella of other forms and values’ (Miller 1993, 18).

Finally, those twins I mentioned at the top of the chapter, Scrooge and Santa, reappear in campaign groups and movements dedicated to the contestation of and opposition to Christmas consumption. It is in such activist spaces that the ideological struggles of Christmas can be clearly seen. Some have sought to campaign against what they view as the rampant materialism of Christmas—in one critique, Christmas gifts help us to ‘fulfil each other’s greeds’ rather than needs (quoted in Belk 1993, 93)—though from different political positions. For instance, a campaign group called SCROOGE was founded in the United States in 1979—the Society to Curtail Ridiculous, Outrageous, and Ostentatious Gift Exchanges. According to Belk, SCROOGE ‘encourages “sensible spending” at Christmas and gives suggestions such as buying gift certificates for self-improvement classes, smoke alarms, and first aid kits’ (1993, 96). More politically radical perhaps, working under the umbrella of the Canadian-based anti-advertising and creative anti-capitalist group and magazine *Adbusters*, the so-called ‘brand wars’ have targeted Christmas in part precisely because of the festival’s connections with advertising and consumerism. For groups like *Adbusters* the fact that certain ideologies of Christmas have been promulgated via massively influential (therefore successful) advertising campaigns is justification as well as rationale for their campaigning counterblasts in the form of what have been called not advertisements but subvertisements. An annual global day of action—an alternative Thanksgiving—was launched by activists rejecting consumerist consumption. Known as Buy Nothing Day, from the 1990s on it has become one of the regular events in the activist’s calendar. Since at least 2001 an offshoot has targeted the subsequent seasonal ‘festival of consumption’ specifically with the Buy Nothing Christmas campaign. As some of the 2006 BNXmas publicity put it:

Dreading the holiday season? The frantic rush and stress? The to-do lists and sales hype? The spiritless hours trapped in malls? This year, why not gather together your loved ones and decide to do things differently? With the simplest of plans *you can create a new rhythm, purpose and meaning* for the holidays. Why not try a Buy Nothing Christmas? If that’s too extreme for grandma and the kids, maybe try a Buy Less Christmas. Or a Buy Fairer Christmas. Or a Slow-Down Christmas. Whatever you decide, ‘tis the season *to reclaim our celebration from the grip of commercial forces*. (*Adbusters* 2007; emphases added)

To state, or reinstate, the possibility of the carnivalesque irruption of festival was the aim, to be achieved by stepping out of the social frame of consumerist culture and practice. In malls and shopping streets, Zentas rather than Santas began to appear, the idea being for the anarchist—robed for the day in red and white rather than red and black—to project an ironic zen-like calm rejection of frantic consumption, with the handy extra activist practicality that adopting the position of cross-legged meditation was also effectively a sit-down protest blockade. At Buy Nothing Christmas actions, Santa/Zenta Claus reaffirmed his place in ideological and social debates, just as he had been in Nast’s Civil War illustrations of 150 years before, or, as I hope to have shown, in Sundblom’s Coke-fuelled domestic American utopias of 50 years back.

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Figs. 1-4 © Bob Beckerer/White Rock Collectors Association. Used with permission. I am grateful to Bob Beckerer and John Boucher for making these images available to me, and to Bob for illuminating aspects of the social context of Prohibition and White Rock. Further information about WRCA is available at www.whiterocking.org

Fig ? Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekly, 1863. © Ohio State University Cartoon Library. Used with permission. I am grateful to Jenny *** for arranging this.

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