

## **The good, the bad and the jolly: taste, image and the symbolic resistance to the coca-colonisation of Denmark**

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### **Telling fairy tales**

And accordingly Jack the Dullard was made a king, and received a crown and a wife, and sat upon a throne. And this report we have wet from the press of the head clerk and the corporation of printers—but they are not to be depended upon in the least.

(Hans Christian Andersen 1855/1995)

‘Once upon a time there were three brothers,’ the narrator begins while we are shown a parchment map of Denmark. ‘The two oldest considered themselves rather attractive...’, two brothers appear, one cruising in a convertible another on a motorcycle, both wearing heavy make-up and Baroque garments, ‘...but of course they had been to America and now they wanted to marry...’, we see a princess on a screen, ‘...the lovely Princess Tina’. The camera zooms out and we discover that the screen is mounted on a traditional Danish mobile hot-dog stand (*‘pølsevogn’*) where a ragged dork is completely dazed by her beauty. The stiff squeezes a half-litre bottle of cola of the ‘Jolly’ brand down in his right front pocket and sets off. While we see him driving his moped set against the parchment map, the narrator explains, ‘The youngest brother was called Prince Jolly...but no one really counted on him. Nevertheless he also headed for the castle where Princess Tina was inspecting all her suitors.’ A camera suspended from the ceiling moves over the line-up of hopefuls including the fancy older brothers of Prince Jolly. The wooers appearing on her monitor clearly do not excite her. ‘In the middle of the ceremony,’ the narrator goes on, ‘Prince Jolly walks in and shouts “Hey, aren’t you the one with the ripe fruits?” The princess looked down at him and she looked closer.’ The camera moves down the body of the Prince and stops at the bulge in his trousers. The princess is clearly intrigued and steps down from her throne and approaches him. Prince Jolly, now in courtly attire, is seen holding the hand of his bride in front of a castle, both smiling

blissfully. This image of the happy couple then appears on a photo. Another picture next to it shows three children. Between the family portraits is a half-full bottle of Jolly Cola. The story ends: 'And then they lived happily ever after. And if you think that it was his big Jolly Cola she fell for, think again. But it was good for the thirst... afterwards...'

This pastiche of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale *Klods Hans* (in English *Jack the Dullard*<sup>1</sup>) is one example in a series of advertising efforts to reinvigorate the image of the Danish soft-drink Jolly Cola and reclaim the strong market position it had enjoyed throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Something of an anomaly in Europe, Jolly had managed to defend its home turf against the American cola-giants and remained the dominant cola until it began to loosen its grip on the market in the early 1980s, plunging to a mere 6 per cent market share in the late 1990s. The advertising fairy tale is a thinly veiled allegory. In Hans Christian Andersen's story, Jack the Dullard succeeds through limited means, making good use of whatever he comes across (a billygoat for transportation, a dead crow, a wooden shoe and a pocketful of wet clay). The prepared speeches and rehearsed wit of the older two brothers let them down in the strange scenario that the fussy and demanding princess has staged. Jack's improvised, bold and crazy repartee, however, paves the way for an absurd interplay that wins her over. The commercial appears to be a projection of management's dream of outwitting the forceful, fancied and fanciful American contenders and winning the Danish consumer... and, of course, living happily ever after. The allegory, in fashioning the brand personality after Jack the Dullard, would suggest that Jolly was in a bad shape image-wise. And besides, as H.C.Andersen concludes his tale, it 'is not to be depended upon in the least'.

This chapter examines the efforts of Denmark's once favoured national cola, Jolly Cola, to resist the advancement of Coca-Cola and, to a lesser degree, Pepsi. In moving our looking glass to the struggles of this obscure Danish product, we seek to move the debate on globalisation, consumption and culture home to our own 'back yard'. From here, we offer a refreshing story, drawn from our local narrative tradition and woven together with advertising imagery, about the 'symbolic' resistance to the Coca-colonisation of Denmark. The story is partially inspired by Baudrillard's (1976) observation that each term in a disjunction excludes its other, its opposition, whereby the opposition becomes the imaginary of the former term. Hence, the American 'other' becomes the central imaginary against which references to Danishness are constructed. One of our key arguments is that marketing forms a central part of this particular imaginary whereby 'Americanness' becomes a particular element in the Danish approach to imagining marketing. This imagination takes it outset both in the very real representations of Coca-Cola's and Pepsi's marketing efforts and in the supra-sensual imaginations (Wunenburger 1991), formulae of intuitive and creative genius that are believed to be the secret behind the success of the American marketing magic. We will look further into the seemingly futile marketing efforts to end and reverse the decline of Jolly Cola, a product which of course also represents a piece of Danish popular culture and commercial history. The purpose is not to perform a premature autopsy of Jolly, but to explore further the symbolic meanings of cola in

relation to globalisation and consumption through the story and advertising imagery of an ailing local cola.

Initially, we will elaborate on the point and scope of the inquiry into cola symbolism, by offering a counterpoint to the study of Jolly Cola in Denmark, namely a recent ethnographic study of Coca-Cola in Trinidad by Daniel Miller (1998). This will be followed by an argument for the role of Coca-Cola in relation to the twentieth-century *Zeitgeist* and against what we see as Miller's attempt to 'banalise' Coca-Cola as a consumer object. We then turn to a discussion of the story of Jolly Cola faced with the intruding global competitors: the complexities of the symbolic battles between Americanness and Danishness in the initial advertisement responses by Jolly and the subsequent references to a specific US-based marketing imaginary countered by Danish 'anti-marketing' imaginations. We conclude by discussing the story of Jolly in the light of various conceptualisations of globalisation, using the case of colas in Denmark as one particular example of the global-local nexus of marketing and consumption processes.

### **The symbolism of coke**

Coca-Cola is frequently invoked in debates on globalisation, culture and consumption. The ubiquity and uniformity of the product appears to support what has been called the 'global homogenisation paradigm'. According to this view, cultural differences are increasingly being eroded through the world-wide replacement of local products with mass-produced and internationally marketed goods (Howes 1996:3). The influx of (Western) consumer products, it is argued, tends to serve as a catalyst for cultural and political change. Social and cultural critics see this as a new type of commercial and cultural imperialism that is sometimes conveyed in the catchy figure of Coca-colonisation (Hannerz 1992). In a polemic against this outlook, Daniel Miller has recently argued that Coca-Cola seems to have acquired the status of a meta-symbol,<sup>2</sup> which means that it may 'be filled with almost anything those who wish to either embody or critique a form of symbolic domination might ascribe to it' (Miller 1998: 170). Because of this flexibility and the powerful expressive and emotive foundations on which they operate, it is very difficult to subject meta-symbols to analysis and refute what they are claimed to stand for (ibid.). The figure of Coca-Cola thus contributes to perpetuate clichés and dubious claims in discourse on global homogenisation, Americanisation, commodity power and imperialism. Miller sets out to refute the meta-symbolic status of Coca-Cola. He first comments on the existing literature on the company, arguing that 'irrespective of whether it is enthusiastically in favour or constructed as a diatribe against the drink, acts to affirm the assumption that the significance of the drink is best approached through knowledge of company strategy' (ibid.: 171). Miller suggests that this is an error in that it presupposes that the company controls its own effects and ignores the local contextualisation of global forms by consumers and local producers. The title of the article, 'Coca-Cola: A Black Sweet Drink from Trinidad' alludes to the distinction made in Trinidad between sweet red and sweet black drinks, and the local production and export of Coca-Cola and its

syrup. The title and the ethnography itself illustrates poignantly how local categories that are imposed on global products alter their original meanings in a process of domestication and recontextualisation. This approach represents what David Howes defines as 'the creolization paradigm' (1996:5) in cultural anthropology. Drawing on linguistic sources, the concept of 'creole' suggests cultures that are intrinsically of mixed origin, the confluence of different historical currents, which interact in a centre/periphery relationship (Hannerz 1992:264).

There is an ironic twist to the idea of cultural creolisation, when applied to the relationship between Europe and the United States. Over the past century, the centre seems to have moved across the Atlantic and the main direction of cultural flow the other way. Now it is the European cultures that are being creolised as they appropriate American cultural forms (Kroes 1996).<sup>3</sup> The 'paradigm of creolisation' and its application to a European context (rather than the more 'exotic' realms it is conventionally applied to) obviously have implications for the way we conceive of Americanisation and Coca-colonisation. As Kroes (1996) suggests, even 'in the case of a clear and undeniable impact of American culture [. . .], the word Americanisation is unduly alarmist'. It reduces the complex processes of cultural influence, borrowing, imitation and reception, to a zero-sum game where any degree of Americanisation would imply an equal degree of de-Europeanisation (*ibid.*: xi). So it is clear that it is necessary to be on guard against certain symbolic meanings attributed to Coca-Cola. But in his analysis, Miller in his attack on the premises of 'global homogenization paradigm' comes close to reducing Coke to just 'a particular soft drink' (Miller 1998: 170). He does not question Coke's 'ability to objectify globality' but in order to 'plunge us down from a level where Coke is a dangerous icon' (*ibid.*), Miller seems to play down the rich complex, contradictory symbolic meanings with which Coca-Cola is imbued. Rather than aiming to dissociate Coke from certain concepts that have polarised its meaning, we might explore them as a part of the varied mythology Coke supports. Rather than engaging in a kind of iconoclasm against cola as a 'meta-symbol', we would like to approach it as what Barthes called a 'totem-drink' in his essay on the symbolic meaning of wine in France: 'Like all resilient totems, wine supports a varied mythology which does not trouble about contradictions' (Barthes 1993:58). The fact that John Pemberton before inventing Coca-Cola produced a forerunner called French Wine Coca perhaps justifies the analogy (Pendergrast 1993: 24). Just like Jolly, French Wine Coca was a direct imitation product (*ibid.*) (or is it appropriation?). We will first examine the special symbolic properties that has enabled Coke to transcend cultural boundaries and become a 'sign of the times', an icon of modern life. Then we will proceed with our appropriation of Miller's idea of going local with cola in the pursuit of insights into globalisation, culture and consumption, where the scope includes the cultural history of Coke as an icon identified with America in anti-American discourse.

### Cola and the spirit of the age

It has been suggested that one of the dominant indications of contemporary (post) modern consumer culture is the aestheticisation of everyday life (Featherstone 1991: 65–82), referring to at least three different cultural processes: the rapid flow of signs and images in contemporary life worlds, the effacing of boundaries between high art and popular culture, and the project of turning life itself into a work of art—a stylised performance of whatever would constitute ‘the good life’ for the individual. Featherstone sees these processes as inherent in a society of mass consumption; a point already made by Morin (1962) in his clairvoyant treatise on the characteristics of the new cultural form of mass culture. Metaphorically speaking, few products symbolise these new times better than the industrially produced, often artificially flavoured, bubbly, happy and nutritionally utterly superfluous product of ‘soda pop’.

As Witzel and Young-Witzel (1998) demonstrate, the soft drink or soda pop as a category underwent a transformation from a product claiming medical benefits to one of the product-emblems of twentieth-century pop culture. This is particularly evident in the story of the particular type of soda called ‘cola’ (Pendergrast 1993). The advertising and merchandising of soft drinks in general and cola in particular reveals the mythology of youth, of leisure, of happiness and of functionalism (in terms of refreshment), which are central to modern consumer culture. Hence, Cola epitomises what Morin (1962) saw as *l'esprit du temps* where the individual in contemporary mass culture is qualified as a consumer consuming her or his personal existence. This kind of personal existence—of which the colas are general exponents—is spun up in a modern mythology built on two principles. The first is one of generalised sympathy: of love, happiness and happy endings, and—what are usually seen as—feminine values. The other principle is that of leisure: of youthful adventure and excitement, of sexuality, and pop stars are those who realise this mythological life to the fullest. They are in Morin’s eyes ‘the new Olympians’ (ibid.: 143). Coca-Cola and Pepsi at present seem to represent those two aspects of modern consumer mythology, albeit with different emphases. Coca-Cola is ‘democracy in a bottle’. It is the self-designated carrier of the hope of universalisation of the mass cultural mythology, as expressed in the now-classical Coca-Cola song containing the line ‘I’d like to buy the world a coke and keep it company’—in short, it is *the* symbol of global friendship and community (Witzel and Young-Witzel 1998:105). Pepsi, on the other hand, takes on the role as the challenger, the youthful innovator of values and styles based mainly on (teeny) pop stars representing the style of the future: ‘Generation neXt’. As such, Coca-Cola and Pepsi become a sort of global set of communicating vessels, the term Morin (1962) uses for the dedifferentiation processes in modern mass culture. The universes of colas, the mythological elements used in the marketing communications, become part of the ‘new, cosmopolitan folklore’ of global mass culture. According to Morin, the cosmopolitanism of this mass culture is of a double nature. It is on the one hand anthropological: an appeal to some of the emotional preconditions in a ‘universal fantasy person’, not too different from the child or the archaic human being but nevertheless always present in the modern *Homo Faber* (Morin 1962:224–5). But,

on the other hand, it is also the result of the promotion of a new type of human being created and socialised through the mediation of mass culture itself. The mutual support of these universalisms, anthropological and modern, is the prime carrier of the spreading of the modern consumer culture, 'coca-colonisation'. Coca-Cola's marketing efforts in particular are exponents of this aspect of mass culture: the hope for progress and salvation for the world's population in what Morin called a terrestrial religion of salvation (ibid.: 234). Its strong mythological and magical universe linked to profane, mundane and easily accessible products reflects exactly the inner contradiction of modern mass or consumer culture—a contradiction that according to Morin is both a weakness and a strength. He writes, '[Mass culture] maintains and develops religious processes about the most profane and mythological processes about the most empirical. On the other hand, it establishes empirical and profane processes around the basic idea of modern religion: individual salvation' (ibid.: 235). The cola-products are world-wide missionaries for the *leitmotifs* of harmony and change that are dynamic forces in the modern consumer environment. But their country of origin is the United States of America.

### **Ambiguities of Americanisation: the coca-colonisation of Denmark**

After a series of angry protests against Coca-Cola in France just after World War 2, the company's local representative suggested that 'the best barometer of the relationship of the US with any country is the way Coca-Cola is treated' (Pendergrast 1993:243). The identification of Coca-Cola with the interests and cultural values of America is essential to the product and has played a crucial role in its global expansion. The special bond between America and Coca-Cola was firmly established during WW2, where the soft-drink company and the US Army joined together in an openly co-operative arrangement to supply the soldiers with the drink wherever in the world they were fighting. The Coca-Cola Company's patriotism and opportunism not only forged enduring emotional ties to war-weary soldiers with the sweet taste of home, but also opened the door to the world for the drink. By the end of the war, Coke had been introduced to millions of people around the world, and the company had gained valuable experience in supplying it. At the end of the war, America found itself in the position as the preeminent military, economic and political world power. American administration and rebuilding efforts after the war paved the way for a massive cultural and commercial influence that eventually provoked the rise of anti-American sentiments and accusations of American imperialism. The terms 'Americanisation' and 'Coca-colonisation' surfaced in the ideological debates in cold-war Europe and have floated in social and cultural discourse ever since (ibid.: 242). But what does Americanisation actually mean? In a broad sense, of course, it refers to the impact of American culture abroad. But considering the complexity of American culture we are clearly dealing with a very diffuse concept. The impact and assessment of American culture abroad is of course highly situated. Obviously, a distinction needs to be made between the West and the rest, given Europe's role in the formation of

modern American civilisation. But even European countries have their unique experiences of Americanisation and concepts of what constitutes the American, depending on factors such as religion, language, political traditions and institutions, social stratification, extent and time of emigration to America. The history of Jolly reflects the changing and ambiguous reception of American culture in Denmark as well as the country's economic and political relationship with the United States.

Coca-Cola came to Denmark in 1938 but only for a brief spell because of the shortages and rationing of sugar during the war. A high special tax on cola was imposed to protect the Danish market and this meant that Coke did not return until 1959. By the time the cola-tax was removed, sixteen Danish breweries and soft-drink bottlers had joined forces to produce a Danish version of the American soft drink and prevent an American invasion. The name 'Jolly', with its rhyme on by-then popular names such as Tommy or Johnny, seems to have been chosen as a reference to the still vivid images of the merry Anglo-Saxon 'Tommies'—liberators of Denmark after the German occupation during WW2. Furthermore, its meaning was a direct reference to the leisurely values of the rising consumer society, inspired by the above-mentioned missionaries of new consumer values, but in the hope that a local carrier would be able to hold the intruding strangers at bay. With an efficient and strong distribution system already in place, Jolly Cola quickly established itself and was advertised heavily in cinemas and popular weekly magazines. In the early 1970s, Jolly Cola was still the dominant brand. Its advertising campaigns featured groups of male and female teenagers relaxing and having fun together in the Danish summer, rowing canoes, splashing together in the sea on an inflatable mattress or strolling down a country road. The image of Coca-Cola and Pepsi (that entered the market in 1971) seemed to suffer from the Marxist current in Danish youth culture in the 1970s. Danish playwright Nils Schou's piece *Marx and Coca-Cola* (1982) looks at this period in retrospective and suggests just how ideologically loaded the soft-drink was at the time. Both the title and the role of the product in the plot—the protagonist, a hypocritical young revolutionary, betrayed by his preference for the brown fluid, turns out to be a bourgeois in disguise—show how antithetical the product was to 'politically correct values'. America and its mass commodities were identified with imperialist capitalism. Anti-American feelings were also fuelled by the Vietnam War and years later Danish marketers would joke that it would take another Vietnam War or something of that order to help Jolly Cola rebound. From the late 1970s the cultural mood seems to have changed. New generations had less use for unambiguous, security-giving relations to the nation, the people, the Danish language or 'psyche', that sustained, and was sustained by, the patrolling of the nation's economic and cultural borders. As the restraining factors weakened, the American colas quickly gained ground. Media development became an important factor in the 1980s. The monopoly of the Danish state television was broken in 1988 and a new national network, TV2, began airing TV commercials for the first time in Denmark. Satellite and cable channels followed quickly. Coca-Cola made the most of the new advertising opportunities and at one point bought a whole commercial break and showed a range of its international Christmas ads. Confronted with such an

overwhelming marketing attack, the dwindling local brand had to mount some kind of 'symbolic' defence of its remaining market share. The ad campaigns we describe were produced in the face of this bleak marketing reality. One of the commercials dealt very explicitly with the identification of Cola with America.

A young, blond woman approaches US customs and is stopped by a gruff US customs officer. The dialogue is in English but with Danish subtitles. The officer says in a brusque tone, 'Hey you!' Somewhat confused, the woman points to herself, 'Me?' 'That's right lady. Where do you come from?' In a clear, crisp voice with a Danish accent, the woman replies, 'Den-mark'. 'Let's see your luggage. Open it up!' He examines her bag and discovers a Jolly Light and exclaims, 'What the fuck is this: Jolly Light! What the hell is wrong with you, trying to bring a Danish light cola into the United States? Don't you realize that United States of America, ma'am, is the home of cola?' Unintimidated, the woman suggests, 'Why don't you taste it.' He opens the bottle, gulps a big mouthful and hesitates a moment. 'Hmmm. Not bad! We'll have to keep the rest for further investigation.' Cut. We see a huge storage room with confiscated items. On one shelf we see three empty bottles of Jolly Cola appear.

Product—country images are especially powerful narratives about the meanings and values transferred by products from their origin to their destination (Askegaard and Ger 1998; Bell and Valentine 1997). Contrary to the widespread belief that country images lose significance in a market increasingly driven by strong brands, uniform technology and production standards, imagery linking products and places are as strong as ever, not least because of the tendency of consumer culture to become culture consumed (Firat 1995).

Confronting the product-country image with respect to cola, the advertisement projects quite different images of America than Coke and Pepsi commercials do. Bosscher *et al.* (1996:1) explain that the Americanisation of Western Europe 'thrive in part on the appeal of cultural forms which were experienced as clearly sensually expressive, shrill, unvarnished, enthralling and overwhelming'. We find such expressions in campaigns like Coke's 'Can't Beat the Feeling' and recognise the skill with which a range of powerful human emotions and sentiments are engaged. Representatives of European high culture would label such American cultural forms 'vulgar' and 'superficial', but this hardly discourages young consumers, on the contrary. Jolly could try to replicate the feeling in the Coke ads but could hardly match the American resources and talent in this respect. Besides, playing at being American and keeping a straight face might not have been easy or credible anyway. Instead, Jolly engages in a sort of negative advertising that plays with aspects of the European repertoire of images of America. The choice of representative of American culture in the ad is rather conspicuous. The coarseness of the customs officer represents a different kind of vulgarity. He looks more like the archetypical bad cop, reminding us that beneath America's ideals of freedom, justice and equality is a reality of corruption, bigotry and brutality. The face of America in the ad, the officer, also contradicts the stereotypical values attributed to America in the standard commercial vernacular namely individualism, antiauthoritarianism and youth. In fact the visual

imagery, mood and symbolism of the ad is reminiscent of Apple Computers classical '1984' commercial, which dramatises old fears of the totalitarian and authoritarian consequences of technological and social modernisation, which is part of what Americanisation has represented to Europeans. As Duhamel wrote in his 1931 book with the emblematic title *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life in the Future*, 'no nation has thrown itself into the excesses of industrial civilization more deliberately than America' (Duhamel, quoted in Bødker 1999:92). The question is, however, whether Danish youth care about Americanisation while they sink their burgers with a Coke at one of the many new McDonald's or Burger King franchises that have mushroomed in Denmark in the past decade. They have a taste for American mass culture and in appropriating it they are increasingly asking for (or perhaps just being served) the real thing. It has become difficult to see America and its popular cultural forms as alien *per se*. Younger Danes seem to have a 'double cultural citizenship' or at least find it increasingly irrelevant to draw a clear line of distinction between Danish and American culture. It is typical of nations to affirm their own identity through a focus on the differences in relation to others (Morin 1984). Arguably, Danish national identity formation has shifted during the last decades. The EU and various immigrant group have taken on the role as 'the Other' against which a national 'Self-hood' is defined. The paradoxical nature of the popular fear of the so-called 'Islamisation' of Danish society is so much more obvious as there is hardly a single minaret or real mosque in Denmark, but lots of temples for American consumer culture. A look at the names of even local companies or shops in the inevitable pedestrian shopping area of even the smallest provincial towns will provide ample evidence of the extension of the *lingua franca* of modern commercial culture.

The contrasting and contesting images of Danishness and Americanness in both this and the Jack the Dullard commercial illustrate the complex relationship between the local and the global analysed by Robertson (1995) and Pieterse (1995) among others. Images referring to the national folklore (blond women, 'pølsevogn', the Danishness of Andersen's fairytale, etc.) as well as 'global folklore' (the fairytale narrative, the reference to the USA as the land of know-how, performance and excellence, the myth of the meek that will inherit the world) join to constitute a new commercial folklore, making explicit the fact that advertising is the new format of the fairytale with the product in the role of the helper in classical narratological analysis (Heilbrunn 1998). This commercial folklore is addressing the same kind of cosmopolitan *anthropos* that we saw Morin (1962) refer to in his analysis of mass cultural phenomena.

### **'Coca-Kotlerization': cracking the cola-code**

Coca-Cola has become the sacred canopy of the marketing imaginary. Its position as one of the exemplar products of mass consumer culture, hedonism and happiness does not only make Coca-Cola a multi-dimensional consumer icon visible and accessible in most parts of the world. It also seems to have obtained a status as a standard example of marketing excellence and a most beloved case as such in various marketing and consumer textbooks. Not a single textbook with aspirations of being taken seriously

can avoid at least a few references to the marketing practices of this global product-icon. Consequently, Coca-Cola itself can be understood in terms of Brown's (1998) notion of 'Coca-Kotlerization'. Brown (1998:63) wrote: 'After all, the most pernicious and pervasive form of colonialism in marketing [. . .] inheres in the whole Coca-Kotlerization process, the absolute and seemingly unbreakable dominance of American marketing scholarship in general and the Kotlerite model of analysis, planning, implementation and control in particular'. Marketing is God and Kotler is his prophet—for academics and teachers all over the world. However, for many practitioners, the global success story of Coca-Cola has won it a similar position as world exponents for 'good' marketing practices, in both senses of the word. In terms of practice, the prophet is Coca-Cola! (Perhaps a couple of others count too.) The universe of Coca-Cola is absolutely good, from its sponsoring efforts in connection with world celebrations of sports events like the soccer World Cup or the Olympics, to its (re)invention of the modern Santa Claus, the cuddly ice bears, nice family gatherings in the garden, happy spontaneous outbreaks of musical energy, or a world united under the colours of Coca-Cola. The unification of the world in itself symbolises the success and the marketing excellence of the Coca-Kotlerite approach, and underlines one more time the point of Usunier (1996), that the first cross-cultural thing to note about (modern) marketing is that (modern) marketing is inherently an American phenomenon.

Reverting to the Jack the Dullard theme, this slick professionalism and overwhelming 'know-how'—a term that also rings an American bell in Danish, since in its original English form it is a part of colloquial speech—occupies a certain position in the Danish context. At the same time admired and frowned upon, it represents the efficiency and profitability of 'business American-style' as well as the intrusion and the aggression of this foreign element in the calm and consensus-driven little garden-kingdom called Denmark. Confronted with such powers, few Danish advertisers would obtain any credibility in seeking to play the same game or even to beat the intruding giants in a marketing cacophony. Leaving the loud marketing screams to Pepsi's pop music kings and queens, Jolly instead provided yet another answer that revealed the company's acceptance of the Coca-Cola mastery of marketing magic and simultaneously gave it an ironic twist. Jolly took to the possibly most fundamental icon of the icon: the unique, curvaceous bottle, the shape of which had become so synonymous with the product that the Coca-Cola Company in the 1990s decided to put a picture of the bottle on the Coca-Cola cans! A campaign was run, featuring a test lab, where a voice-over presents the spectator with the fundamental marketing problem: that Jolly Cola does well in blind tastes and compares also in price but that the fundamental problem must be that the product comes in an ordinary Danish soda bottle. Hence a series of mock tests is shown with consumers commenting on a prototype for a new Jolly bottle: 'Problem: It quenches thirst magnificently, but is perceived as unoriginal. Cause: It sounds and tastes like the foreign colas and the bottle is a non-sexy Danish soft-drink bottle.' A bottle of Jolly Cola is opened in front of a microphone and poured over a glass full of ice cubes. Then the picture suddenly changes. Through a test observation camera picture with an on-screen green frame, digits and status messages we look into a laboratory setting where two scientists in

white coats are preparing a test experiment. 'But we are now testing an alternative.' A very phallic bottle (awkward-looking, long necked, and curved; not unlike those heat-twisted Coca-Cola bottles found in souvenir stores) is presented to various test subjects. 'It looks like...uhmm...' a young man wearing sunglasses says. Another tilts backwards on his chair in sheer astonishment. A reappearing character, a long-haired guy wearing a big hat, howls and makes odd gestures, and finally starts dancing, using the bottle as a maraca singing 'la cucaracha'. Two young women are delighted, and one of them turns to a researcher and asks him if he (his) had been the model. An older woman is disgusted and calls the researcher a pig. The narrator continues, 'Conclusion: the bottle provokes exciting responses. However, the idea has been dropped in favour of a new light bottle that simply contains twice as much.' 'Neither original nor sexy. But good against thirst.' The final slogan (Neither original...) appears on the screen.

In this parody on marketing research, Jolly Cola simultaneously acknowledged the indisputable fact that there is something 'magic' about the marketing icons such as the Coke's hobbleskirt bottle and logo. But on the other hand, it invited (Danish) consumers to turn their back on the marketing magicians and go for the (stereo) typically Danish, down-to-earth, no-nonsense (functional) approach to what constitutes a suitable product. The fetishism attached to the Coca-Cola bottle further underlines the extremely strong symbolic values attached to the product—maybe best underlined by what Pendergrast (1993) has termed the largest business blunder ever in history; the disastrous launching of the New Coke at the height of the cola wars in 1986. Now it stands as a classical example of poor application of marketing research and a company's lack of comprehension of the character of its own product and consumers' 'co-ownership' of a brand.<sup>4</sup> This evidence of the primacy of image over taste (or an extended product definition over a narrow one) was corroborated in the Danish context. Jolly Cola at one point in time decided to alter the taste slightly in order to bring it closer to the taste of the big colas. In spite of the fact that tests demonstrated consumers' appreciation of the new taste, it did not help much. And what is perhaps more depressing, no public outrage followed as in the case of the new Coke. A more recent campaign made direct references to the American cola wars and, more explicitly, to the Pepsi Challenge campaign. When Pepsi in the early 1990s ran a Danish version of the Pepsi (taste) Challenge, inviting loyal Coca-Cola drinkers to pick their favourite cola in a series of blind taste sessions led by MTV-hostess Maiken Wexø, Pepsi at the time concluded that, '52.6 per cent preferred Pepsi', a number that was insignificant to all but the totally innumerate in the audience. Would pseudo-scientific evidence in a format that looked like a revival of a patent medicine hoax really be taken seriously? Not by Jolly, who offered the following spoof on the blind-test in a recent ad: a blindfolded man is trying to find his seat at a table in front of the picture. We are in a large storage area with Jolly Cola boxes stacked to the roof. In the background three blindfolded women from the national Danish handball team are sampling the drink. The man is introduced on the screen as 'Tage Stilling, Jolly's head of advertising' (in Danish the name is a pun meaning 'decide', 'to decide' or 'take a stand'). 'Ooops. Well now it is not that we want to be invisible, but we are

actually conducting a blind test of the new Jolly with professional assistance from the Jolly-girls,' he says making a gesture backwards towards the handball players. The Danish female national handball team have been the whole nation's favourites by winning the gold medal at the (Coca-Cola) Olympics in Atlanta, 1996. They were known as the 'Metal-girls' then. Jolly had only recently taken over the sponsorship from the Danish (overwhelmingly male) steelworkers' union. Blindfolded, Tage Stilling turns the glass the wrong way around and spills Jolly Cola out on the table as he tries to pour from the bottle. He discovers the mistake and manages to fill his glass. After having tasted the drink he exclaims, 'mmm...Yes...it's now proven that Jolly tastes good. Even in the dark. Isn't it girls?' He turns around, disoriented and unable to locate the women.

### **Structuring the common differences**

We are now better able to understand the powers the modern Danish cola-version of Jack the Dullard is up against. The hegemony of Coca-Cola (and Pepsi) on the world market lie not only in their overpowering marketing machines and their relative control over distribution systems around the world, but also as much, if not more, in the sheer fact that symbolically they have set and are setting the scene for the so-called battle over the consumers' minds (Ries and Trout 1981).

Since the big colas stepped up their efforts in Denmark around 1980, the constant representations of a global youth culture by the major colas and the growing influx of 'global food' (represented first and foremost by multinational fast food chains) has fundamentally changed the situation for what already appeared like an oxymoronic phenomenon: the 'national' Jolly cola. This is not to argue that Coca-Cola and Pepsi are entering the Danish market as true global products. As pointed out by Pieterse (1995) and Robertson (1995), among others, the global always transforms to a hybrid or glocalised phenomenon by the local context. And both Friedman (1990) and, as discussed earlier, Miller (1998) demonstrate how Coca-Cola takes on locally contextualised meanings. As one Coca-Cola slogan goes, 'We are multi-national, we are multi-local' (quoted in Bell and Valentine 1997:190). This has also been the case in Denmark. The presence and, indeed, once dominant position of Jolly Cola surely has shaped the particular market context and the significations of all present cola brands. On the other hand, to claim that Coca-Cola is 'a remarkably unsuitable candidate for [the] role as the key globalized corporation' (Miller 1998:171) is probably to underestimate the significations Coca-Cola carries beyond the specificities of one or the other market context.

In many ways, we believe that 'cola', and in our particular case the constellation of the two giant American Colas together with Jolly Cola, constitutes a phenomenon that could be characterised much like Wilk (1995) characterises the global institution of the beauty pageant. Cola, like the beauty pageant:

presents the basic paradox of globalisation in an especially clear form; in each place the [cola] is made into a local institution, embedded in specific social

relationships, invested with meaning by unique groups in a particular historical context. But at the same time, in some ways, the [cola] also creates larger relations of uniformity, casting local differences in ways that, on a global scale, are predictable and surprisingly uniform.

(Wilk 1995:110)

The situation of the very local Jolly Cola is caught up in those 'global structures of common difference', a term proposed by Wilk (1995), defined by the global strategies and imagery of Coca-Cola and Pepsi respectively. It is difficult, if not impossible, for Jolly to 'change the script' (as Pepsi's slogan would have it).

Ritzer is 'hard pressed to see McHuevos [Uruguay] or McLaks [Norway] or elegant dates at fast food restaurants as significant local variations on the homogenizing process of McDonaldization' (1998:86). Similarly, the situation of Jolly reminds us of the unequal distribution of power between the global and local players in the market. As Ritzer points out, neither the continued distinctiveness of local markets, nor the deterritorialisation of global products and consumption patterns (Appadurai 1990) annihilates the continued relevance of the territory from which the global product emanates, largely the United States. In accordance with Ritzer then, and without denying the complexities of the globalisation process, the story of Jolly demonstrates that the West in general and the United States in particular today holds the upper hand in the global exchanges of consumer imagery and products.

The structures of common difference, then, rest on the powerful imagery attached to the 'territory of origin' and of the global marketing of the cola companies but these efforts would be in vain if it was not for the willingness of the local audience to engage in and perpetuate the myths of the 'always the real thing', a.k.a. the 'all-American drink' or the 'choice of a new (global) generation'. The advertising efforts of 'Jolly Cola' showed us the field of significations in which the positioning battle of the colas in Denmark that are played out against each other are set by the local 'Americanness' of the two giants, their references to world culture, their wars against each other, and the whole mythology created and maintained in the interplay between (especially) Coca-Cola, the product, and Coca-Cola, the icon of consumer culture. This way, paradoxically, the local character of Jolly Cola has only one point of gravity: the globality of the competitors. The 'tragedy' for the local company is that all these efforts have not led to a stronger national identification. Hence, Jolly's resistance has, for the last decade, been symbolic in the double sense of the word: it has been played out in a register of symbolic images copying and countering the marketing imagery of the global competitors. This, however, has been largely in vain, generating some sympathy in terms of the communication efforts, but constantly trailing the competitors in terms of number of exposures and having had no positive impact in raising the market share of the brand.

The mere existence of a 'national cola' is in itself a result of the global structures of common difference, as is witnessed by the introduction of the product in 1959 as a response to the opening of the Danish market for Coca-Cola. As phrased by Wilk, 'while different cultures continue to be quite distinct and varied, they are becoming

different in very uniform ways' (1995:118). Jolly Cola may be Danish, but it is still a cola (and its name is suggestive of the foreignness of this product). Furthermore, Jolly Cola has altered (adapted) its taste with reference to the taste of American colas, it has altered its bottle types according to its American competitors, and it has consistently throughout the last fifteen years positioned itself against the symbolic universes of Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Thus, the uniform ways in which cultures differ in this case seem to be totally designated by the global forces rather than the local ones, which is exactly the kind of hegemony that arises also from Wilk's analysis.

### **The ugly...**

The story of the good (global harmony, family values, etc.), the bad (challenging youth culture, Michael Jackson, etc.) and the jolly (numskull, village fool) cola in Denmark elucidates one of the problems of a local producer trying to 'outlocal' global producers (Ger 1999). Jolly Cola whether playing with or against the 'Coca-Cola commercial vernacular' can never become much more than the equivalent of a spaghetti-Western: a diverting imitation but never really 'it' and never, never 'the real thing' that defines the category. Recently, the rights to Jolly Cola were bought by the regional brewery and bottler Albani and thus became even more local. The company believes that the previous ownership, dominated by Carlsberg, who in the meanwhile had started a Nordic collaboration with Coca-Cola, had neglected the brand. A current ad begins with Tage Stilling confiding in the audience, 'I might as well say it as is, we need to sell some more Jolly C...C...C...', he cannot pronounce cola, smiles apologetically and goes on to explain, 'that not many know it but Jolly has got a new taste'. It also seems to have lost the 'cola' tag, which does not appear on its new label. The advertisement borrows ideas from some of the most successful national ads of the past year, for instance Tuborg's ad for its strong domestic 'Squash' brand of orange soda. In this ad the protagonist has tried to ask for a 'Tuborg Sq...Sq... Squa... Squaaaa...' in a drugstore for a decade without being able to pronounce the English word 'squash'. Whether it helps to lose the cola, as if to avoid comparisons to the credible colas, is questionable. Some might say it is the 'jolly' that ought to be lost instead. When was that word part of the popular idiom anywhere? But of course then what would be left? Albani is situated in Odense, the Alma Mater of Hans Christian Andersen, where they—we—keep retelling his world famous tales, especially the one about the ugly duckling who, in spite of the trials and tribulations, grew up to become a beautiful swan.

### **Notes**

- 1 In English, the fairy tale is known under the titles: Clod Hans, Clod-poll, Clumsy Hans, Numskull Jack, and Simple Simon.

- 2 A term introduced in Malcolm Quinn's (1994, quoted in Miller 1998:186) analysis of the history of the swastika. The word 'swastika' derives from the sanskrit 'svastika', which means 'conductive to well-being', the essence of Coke's core brand identity.
- 3 The picture is of course more complex, since the USA is not the only source of new cultural forms affecting Europe. The global cultural flows are immensely complex, and creolisation perhaps a general cultural condition.
- 4 Of course, ultimately Coca-Cola rebounded impressively after the blunder, reestablishing much of their reputation and regaining their market share and more. Miller fails to note this in his first argument against seeing the Coca-Cola Company role as a key example of a globalised corporation. His second point, that Coke is based on a franchise system and therefore not representative, is equally dubious (consider McDonald's, Avis, etc.).

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