"Share a Coke with Christ"

An interdisciplinary case study on the re-use of Coca-Cola visual culture within Evangelical Protestantism in the United States.

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Preface

During my studies, I came across an image of a Virgin Mary statue holding the Pokémon Pikachu. French artist Soasig Chamaillard restored damaged Mary statues it in a unique way: she blended religious icons with contemporary kitsch. What I find especially interesting in this artwork is the way the boundaries between religious art and secular or modern art seem to flow into one another. The public can interpret the Pikachu to be a substitute for baby Jesus Christ, and therefore consider Pikachu to be sacred, or the Virgin Mary can be interpreted as a Pokémon Trainer, which would make Mary profane. This artwork made me curious about other works of art where religious imagery was merged with secular or contemporary imagery, and how these where received by the public.

During my search, I found images of Coca-Cola slogans which were transformed into religious slogans. That a religious movement uses a capitalist brand to promote their church, surprised me. Does the use of contemporary imagery not distract readers from the intended religious message? I wanted to get to the bottom of this and decided that these slogans would be the topic of my master thesis.

I could not have succeeded my thesis without the support of many. Firstly, I want to thank my first supervisor, dr. Andrew Irving, who did not only give me extremely detailed feedback on my chapters, but also took the time to talk with me about my doubts and fears. Secondly, I want to thank my second reader, prof. dr. Todd Weir, with whom I had many meetings at the start of the process, which helped me to narrow down the topic. I also want to thank my parents in law for their feedback regarding spelling, style and structure of my thesis. Also, a great thanks to my roommates, with whom I discussed every chapter extensively. Finally, I want to thank my parents and boyfriend who always believed in me. Thank you for your love and support during my studies.

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Abstract

The use of secular products by Evangelicals is commonly interpreted as simply a tool to communicate the Evangelical message to the broader public. I argue that the common interpretation is insufficient as regards the use of *Coca-Cola's imagery* by Evangelicals in the United States, because the meaning of Coca-Cola's imagery cannot be adjusted, or 'Christianized,' by Evangelicals. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the complexity of this specific use of imagery by approaching the case from different angles.

The use of theories about identity and sacrality allows me to analyse Coca-Cola's identity extensively. It is created both by advertising campaigns and the consumers. Where advertising connects the brand to specific values, consumers consider the brand to be sacred in various ways. I show how Coca-Cola's multi-layered identity is transferred to the Evangelical identity.

I conclude that Evangelicals who use Coca-Cola's imagery aim to control which elements of Coca-Cola's identity they will re-use to complement their own religious identity. But Evangelicals cannot freely determine or change the meaning of Coca-Cola's imagery, and this decreases their control when it comes to both forming and communicating their own identity, which is partly created with elements from Coca-Cola. This specific re-using of secular imagery brings a new dimension to the identity of Evangelicals: a sacred dimension that is recognized globally due to the Coca-Cola identity.

However, whether Evangelicals desire Coca-Cola's sacredness to be part of their identity as well, needs to be researched further.

Keywords: Coca-Cola, Evangelical Protestantism, United States, visual culture, religious sacrality, secular sacrality, totemic religion, identity, pick and choose, bricolage, poaching, appropriation.

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1. INTRODUCING THE TOPIC

God is like Coca-Cola

He's the Real Thin*g*.[1]

With the above slogan, Kurtistown Assembly of God, an Evangelical church in Hawaii, advertised its God.[2] The text itself is part of a poem written by a schoolteacher who got her inspiration from her pupils trying to describe God with concepts they knew. That the pupils used every day and ready-made concepts as analogy for God is not in itself very strange: it is a fundamental human instinct to attempt to describe an intangible concept within the limits of the surrounding world and human language. What *is* surprising, however, is the particular analogy made by the children, and the use deliberately made of it by the religious group: here, an Evangelical church embraces both the analogy and slogan of Coca-Cola and *chooses* to use this to advertise its God.

This thesis will focus on the phenomenon of the use of Coca-Cola's imagery and slogans by Evangelicals in the United States. Although Evangelicals' use of secular media is well known, their use of the visual culture of Coca-Cola is particularly complex and rich example. It is not my intention here to argue that Evangelicals have a 'secret agenda' when they use secular imagery; rather, this research will explore different approaches to how we may understand more precisely what is happening when they do.

1.1. EVANGELICAL COCA-COLA MERCHANDISE

Let us begin by considering three examples that illustrate the complex relation between Evangelical Protestantism and Coca-Cola. The examples discussed here are not intended to constitute a comprehensive collection of the various ways that Coca-Cola imagery is used within Evangelical and apostolical spheres in America. Rather, they serve to illustrate patterns

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1 Poem by Mary McGarity, "What God is Like," accessed April 13, 2018, https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/what-god-is-like/.

2 "USA Hawaii Kurtistown - Sign at a church with the slogan: God is like Coca-Cola: He's the Real Thing," Gettyimages, accessed April 13, 2018, https://www.gettyimages.ca/detail/news-photo/hawaii-kurtistown-sign-at-a-church-with-slogan-god-is-like-news-photo/548139777#hawaii-kurtistown-sign-at-a-church-with-slogan-god-is-like-coca-cola-picture-id548139777.

of appropriating popular and successful Coca-Cola marketing symbols and slogans by Evangelical or apostolical individuals or organizations.

1.1.1. Outreach Media's 'Share Your Life with Jesus' Campaign

One of the most popular and widespread uses of the Coca-Cola brand's marketing strategy and slogans, is the re-use and adaptation of a version of the Coca-Cola multi-national marketing campaign called 'Project Connect,' but commonly referred to as 'Share a Coke' (2011). In March 2012, directly after Coca-Cola's own summer's campaign, Outreach Media, an organization

Image 1: Christianized phrase of the Coca-Cola campaign: Share a Coke (2011)

based in Colorado, USA and specializing in Christian marketing, created a poster to be distributed to churches (Image 1).[3] The poster 'Christianized' the Coca-Cola slogan by transforming the phrase 'Share a Coke' to 'Share a can with Jesus' and 'Share your life instead.' The poster was intended for the launch of a new website called 'Share Your Life With Jesus,' in 2012.[4]

The poster illustrates several aspects of what has been called the "Christianization of popular culture". As for the intention of the marketing firm responsible for the poster, Outreach Media's stated goal is to "promote the Christian Gospel through various media channels and to assist churches and Christian groups to raise the profile of the Christian message." The means of pursuing this goal is "creating and distributing posters to churches." With respect to the intended audience of the advertisements, the company's website states that Outreach Media "target[s] an audience that do not regularly attend church" and that "the posters are designed to convey a Biblical truth in a catchy and thought provoking way."[5] The company's poster archive runs from August 2006 till October 2018, so it is still active today.

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3 Although it is not said on the website which kind of churches the posters are distributed to, the organization states that they follow a statement of faith (creed) of eleven points. They have a button on the webpage 'about Christianity,' but it is still in progress. They have posted two links to inform the reader, which both link to an Evangelical explanation of Christianity.

4 ShareYourLife.org does exist, but it is a website for lifesaving transplants.

5 "About us: Overview," Outreach Media, last modified 2014, http://outreachmedia.org.au/about/overview.php.

Outreach Media's advertising campaign provides an illuminative example of a negotiated engagement with, and creative reworking of the visual culture of Coca Cola's marketing campaign. Instead of using Coca-Cola and its popularity without criticism and in a positive way, the Christian campaign introduces disapproval, in order to set up a polemical contrast that serves to highlight the superiority of the product (i.e. belief) the church is advertising. The message of Outreach Media's campaign is the following: as Coca-Cola is "manufactured," its promises of "connecting" and of having a wonderful experience when drinking a Coke are also "manufactured", which makes the experience Coke offers therefore not as pure (i.e. non-manufactured) as the experience of sharing God's creation.[6] To offer the consumer pure sharing and, therefore, a real connection instead, Outreach Media draws on Coca-Cola's visual language, but changes both the original idea and the original goal: a can of Coca-Cola, being the key to sharing and to human connection, is replaced with a human being's life as such, which should be shared with Jesus instead of with another human being.

1.1.2. Hanson's 'Jesus Christ "The Real Thing"'

In the above example, the brand Coca-Cola is seen as a product that is worldly and that, therefore, sells illusions and fake promises, whereas the promise offered by Jesus Christ is real. In our second example, Coca-Cola is appropriated in a similar way, but this time the polemical strategy is not directed against Coca-Cola, but against certain wanting forms of Christian belief (referred to as "imitation Christianity") that are to be rejected. On July 12, 2018, Pastor Jeff Hanson of Janesville Apostolic Ministries in Janesville, Wisconsin, posted a blog on the church's website called "Jesus is The Real Thing," appropriating the famous 1968 Coca-Cola campaign 'It's the real thing.'[7] In the blog posting, Hanson claims that the rejection or dislike of Jesus in one's life is similar to the rejection of a new recipe of your favorite drink. The Coca-Cola Company changed its formula in 1985, but after massive protest of their costumers, they changed it back. Pastor Hanson points out that the costumers were angry because they were used to the old formula and did not like the change. He proposes people should respond similarly when they get a 'taste' of imitation Christianity:

> The problem is that many have grown up with not the real thing and sometimes when the Real thing is shown to us, we reject it because it doesn't taste like what we are used

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6 "Poster Archive: March 2012," Outreach Media, last modified 2014,
http://outreachmedia.org.au/posterArchive/march2012.php.

7 Pastor Jeff Hanson, "Jesus is The Real Thing!," published July 12, 2018,
https://janesvilleapostolicministries.org/2018/07/12/jesus-is-the-real-thing/.

to. There is only one way to Jesus Christ the Real Thing! (…) Don't be satisfied with imitation Christianity, seek Jesus Christ the REAL Thing![8]

Again, it is not Coca-Cola *an sich* that is appropriated here, but one of the slogans that are created by their marketing team. In contrast to the first example, here the popularity and the claims of Coca-Cola are used without contradiction in support of the claims of the Christian message: Hanson acknowledges that Coca-Cola *is* the Real Thing when speaking of soda drinks. Subsequently, Hanson borrows the language of "brand authenticity" that is used for Coca-Cola for Christianity, and thereby connects the two. Therefore, people who agree with Hanson on Coca-Cola being the Real Thing, are also more likely to find his statement on Christianity persuasive.

1.1.3. Kerusso's 'Jesus Christ: Eternally Refreshing'

A third example shows how Coca-Cola is used to introduce and actively communicate the sacred in the profane world. *Kerusso*, founded in 1987, is a company based in Berryville, Virginia, and claims to be one of the original pioneers of T-Shirt Evangelism. "Kerusso" is Greek for "to herald (the Divine Truth); their mission is, therefore, clear from their name. The Footer page on their website asserts that the average T-Shirt is read over 3000 times before it is tossed aside; this means that the love of Christ that is propagated through the T-Shirts is also shared 3000 times. The company's goal is "heralding, preaching and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ through Kerusso Christian T-Shirts."[9] Kerusso's President and CEO, Vic Kennett, states that "Message is number one, and if you can mesh that with current trends, that's what will draw people's attention."[10] This is why, next to Christian verses that are taken from the Bible and religious key-words as *blessed*, *hope*, or *love*, Kerusso 'borrows' popular phrases and imagery from the non-religious world.

Kerusso claims that "pop culture offers an opportunity for Christians to start conversations about Jesus in a way that is relevant and fresh." [11] Popular media and entertainment do not always have to be avoided, for the shared connections and interests with non-believers can "turn hearts" and "win souls for Christ."[12] The company's website provides

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8 Idem.

9 "About Kerusso," Kerusso, last modified 2018, https://www.kerusso.com/pages/about-kerusso.

10 Idem.

11 The Kerusso Blog Team, "Popular Culture can be Good News," published at Kerusso, last modified September 13, 2017, http://blog.kerusso.com/popular-culture-can-be-good-news.

12 Idem.

several examples of its playful "meshing" with "current trends," from a Christianization of the Star-Wars phrase "May the Force be with you" to "May the Lord be with you," to the redeployment of Heinz' tomato ketchup logo in the T-shirt "Catch up with Jesus," and the use of the title of the popular TV-series The Walking Dead in the T-shirt "The Son of God is WAKING the DEAD." Not surprisingly, Kerusso also attempted to 'borrow' the visual and verbal language of Coca-Cola by transforming Coca-Cola's distinctive cursive trademark to "Jesus Christ" with the tag line "Eternally Refreshing." Right under Kerusso's new slogan was a reference to John 4:14: *Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.*" Although Kerusso was forced to modify its red Coca-Cola T-Shirts due to complaints of The Coca-Cola Company that the design was too similar to the registered trademark of Coca-Cola itself, the appropriation of Coca-Cola is still obvious. Here, the popular imagery is used as a portal between the sacred and the profane. The implication is that one should embrace popular culture and find common interests with non-believers. Since both believers and non-believers are part of the same cultural world, Coca-Cola can be used as an instrument with which to approach people who are familiar with Coca-Cola, but not as much with Jesus.

In sum, these examples present three different ways to use (or appropriate) Coca-Cola imagery. Outreach Media rejects the fake promise of Coca-Cola's slogan about sharing a soft-drink, but makes use of the same slogan, by changing its message to promote the sharing of your life with Christ. Pastor Jeff Hanson appropriates Coca-Cola's exclusivist assertion of authenticity as a means of distinguishing between "real" and "fake" Christianity: there is only one "real" Christianity in the same way there is only one "real" Coca-Cola. And finally, Kerusso uses Coca-Cola as stepping stone to share the gospel with people who are not yet accustomed with Jesus in their lives.

The three examples show different intentions and opinions behind the use of secular imagery, which suggests that the relationship between Evangelical Protestantism and secular culture is not as straightforward as one might at first glance think. In fact, the complex relationship between religion, media, and popular culture has been investigated in several studies on the promotion of Christian belief by Christian visual media. In this thesis I intend to review a number of these studies which have, in my opinion, a bearing on the subject matter introduced by the three examples above, and to challenge some of the assumptions that have been presented in them.

1.2. REVIEWING THE FIELD

One of the most influential works in the wide field of study that investigates the relationship between religion, media, and popular culture is Robert Laurence Moore's *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (1994). Moore's work discusses on the one hand various forms of Christian merchandise, such as t-shirts, bumper stickers, and books, and on the other hand the consumerism of Christian heritage in the form of Christian-themed parks or shops, and even Christmas. Moore states that these marketplace-phenomena have their origin in the nineteenth century, when religion and commercial culture were already entangled.[13] The book discusses how both religious leaders and businessmen can 'borrow' techniques from each other's practices to get products on the market. Religious celebrations become mass-entertainment through tele-evangelism, and non-religious corporations use religious icons to identify their products. Thus, Moore's argument is built around the idea that religious leaders borrow from secular culture to *promote* their church. Moore's point that Christian cultural products can be effective as propaganda, would seem to find support in the motivation of people who wear Christian T-Shirts, as is researched by Kerusso:

> It's not just because they're cool or because they love the designs; it's overwhelmingly because they want to share the Gospel. They see the act of putting on that T-shirt as a step in the process of fulfilling the Great Commission: telling the world about God and the relationship available with Him through His son Jesus. They are T-shirt evangelists![14]

A second critical approach to Christian 'borrowing' from popular or secular culture is described amongst others by Mara Einstein and Colleen McDannel, who argue that religious commodities are purchases to "create and maintain spiritual ideals."[15] Jerry Z. Park and Joseph Baker make a similar argument when they write that "Americans are 'getting religion' in many other ways besides going to church." In other words, for Park and Baker, Americans *consume*

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13 Robert Moore, *Selling God: American religion in the marketplace of culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.

14 Kristal Kuykendall, "The story behind T-Shirt Evangelism," accessed October 4, 2018, http://blog.kerusso.com/the-story-behind-t-shirt-evangelism.

15 Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and popular culture in America* (New Haven, Conn., etc.: Yale University Press, 1995), 6. See also David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

religious material goods such as religious greeting cards, religious music or religious jewelry.[16] This consumption is itself an act of identity formation: "Religious material goods contribute to one's identity in the way that they often originate from a specific theological perspective and as such can be identity-affirming and reinforce religious practice."[17] Furthermore, according to David Morgan, the consumption of Christian products confirms identity, since they serve to *remind* the purchaser of the spiritual commitment that has been made.[18] Park and Baker argue that the importance (concerning identity formation) of religious material goods within American religion can be explained in a sociological manner that indicates the ambivalent nature of their consumption: "Consumable religious goods can enhance attachment to a particular religious culture and they can reflect mastery of that culture."[19] In other words, forms of consumption can signify two ways of belonging to the Christian culture.

In addition, Einstein argues that the American religious culture is an "autonomous, self-oriented religion," where religious practice is individualized and "increasingly fueled by a commodity culture."[20] The (cultural) market is organized with driving personal preferences in mind and advertises all the various choices through all kinds of media. Einstein claims that "this proliferation of advertising and marketing has changed the way we see the world"; it has created the idea that you can buy the American Dream instead of working for it.[21] As a result, individuals expect to be able to buy their identity not only through the purchase of cultural commodities, but also through *religious* commodities. In the same way that other cultural products need to be distinguished through a brand identity, religion needs a similar identity of its own, as well as a suitable promotion strategy. Consequently, "people are free to find their faith whenever and wherever they choose, which may or may not be in the confines of a

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16 Jerry Z. Park and Joseph Baker, "What Would Jesus Buy: American Consumption of Religious and Spiritual Material Goods," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46.4 (Dec. 2007): 501-517 at 501.

17 Ibid., 504.

18 Morgan, *Visual Piety*, chapter 6.

19 Park and Baker, "What Would Jesus Buy," 502.

20 Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 6. For more information about the link between religion and commodity culture see J. Carrette and R. King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005); V.J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), and Moore, *Selling God*.

21 Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 9-12.

religious institution. We shouldn't be surprised then that religion – whether in the form of a film or a church – is being marketed in the current commercialized culture."[22]

A somewhat different approach is offered in Heather Hendershot's *Shaking the World for Jesus* (2004). Hendershot agrees with Park and Baker that cultural products can contribute to or even trigger the maintenance of commitments to a certain religious culture but claims that most Evangelical media are not purposely designed to convert people. Rather, they are produced for Christians who, assumingly, have been saved already. For the unsaved, these media serve merely to introduce them to the Truth in a way that triggers their curiosity.[23] There is, in other words, no promotion strategy that is expressly intended to increase aggressively the market-share behind the offering of Christian consumer goods on the cultural market. Their presence on that market, though, will have an effect regardless, for media or popular culture will function as instruments of communication to interact with the world:

> Examination of Evangelical media reveals the complex ways that today's Evangelicals are *both* in and of the world. This is not a negative value judgement; Evangelicals have not simply 'sold out' or been 'secularized.' Rather, Evangelicals have used media to simultaneously struggle against, engage with, and acquiesce to the secular world.[24]

After all, as Hendershot observes, "a completely isolated culture could not be Evangelical, that is, it could not spread "the Good News", since if isolated it could not reach out to share it with others."[25] For Evangelical culture, its very identity precludes isolation; therefore it will interact on the cultural marketplace, where it cannot but offer its Christian consumer goods. According to the 'complexity assumption,' one of the views within the field that studies religion and the marketplace, "the two spheres can be neatly separated neither by the people in whose lives these spheres intersect, nor by scholars on the observational or explanatory level."[26] Religion and the secular always interact with each other, and new cultural phenomena force both to re-shape their ideologies and rethink their position relative to the other. Moreover, as Einstein has

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22 Ibid., 9.

23 Heather Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus: Media and Conservative Evangelical Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

24 Ibid., 11.

25 Idem.

26 Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker, "General Introduction," in *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*, ed. Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker (Oxford Scholarship Online: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-32 at 12.

observed, "religious presentation and promotion has become widely acceptable within our culture."[27] Indeed, since Gutenberg's invention of the printing press, for example, bibles and other early printed material such as sermons and missals were printed and sold to advertise the church, its beliefs, practices, and products. Hendershot's argument that Christian cultural products are intended for the maintenance of faith for Evangelicals as well as for planting seeds in non-believers, fits perfectly in this worldview.

In general then, studies on the use of secular media by Protestant groups, mostly Evangelicals, refer to the propaganda of religious ideas or worldviews, the creation of religious identities, the promotion of conversations about Jesus with non-Christians, and the planting of seeds which may lead to future conversion, assuming that promotion strategies used by Evangelicals on the cultural market (either deliberately or, as Hendershot argues, unintentionally) are essentially similar to the strategies used by secular entrepreneurs. However, in my view, the use of Coca Cola imagery by Evangelicals presents a case that is different.

According to the existing literature, Evangelicals would simply use or borrow *any* type of secular media because it would provide a convenient communication tool for reaching consumers, both Christian and non-Christian; but in my opinion the Evangelical's use of Coca-Cola imagery is more complex than that. Evangelicals do not choose or use just 'any form of secular imagery' for their 'religious products.' They specifically select and use icons that are not only 'popular,' but also symbolize specific worldviews and are very closely connected to a person's identity. To 'simplify' the reasons of Evangelical use of secular imagery is to overlook or *neglect* the identity-related power of the secular icons that are appropriated.

Moreover, it seems to me that Evangelical Protestantism experiences a *necessity* in using specific secular icons. In the past, staying within their 'religious borders' did not pose problems for religious institutions; today, however, Evangelicals obviously feel that the old confines no longer adequately serve to hold one's religious identity, and secular icons are needed now. As religious imagery is not sufficient anymore to communicate the Evangelical message, the question must be asked what it is that makes popular secular imagery a good or even necessary alternative. The only way to understand how specific secular imagery can serve to successfully complement religious icons, is to shed light on the phenomenon from different angles by means of an interdisciplinary approach.

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27 Einstein, *Brands of Faith*, 4.

A principle that helps to understand the phenomenon better, is found in the theories on identity forming. According to these theories, the products one consumes are part of one's identity, which implies that the consumption of Coca-Cola imagery contributes to the identity of Evangelicals. It is therefore necessary to explore the different layers of identity of Coca-Cola's icons, for they are directly connected to the identity that Evangelicals try to create. In the second chapter, we will therefore explore the identity of Coca-Cola icons.

One theory that reveals an important aspect of Coca-Cola imagery and its identity, and that is neglected in the studies on secular media use above, is the understanding of Coca-Cola images as *sacred* icons. Coca-Cola's icons do not only embody the Company's values and its way of understanding the world, but the icons bear a sacredness in them that is created and embraced by the consumers. This accepted sacredness is a key to the understanding of how The Coca-Cola Company can communicate their message successfully all over the world. This approach will be discussed in the third chapter.

In the fourth chapter, theories on identity forming will be discussed and applied to the Evangelical subculture, and their use of Coca-Cola icons. Significant here is that Evangelicals do not use Coca-Cola's imagery as presented by Coca Cola: they use only those aspects that will make their own case stronger. The differentiation between the original meaning of the icons and the newly created meaning is essential when trying to understand what kind of identity Evangelicals create when they appropriate Coca-Cola's imagery.

A final idea that will be discussed in chapter five will shed light on the complexity of communicating this new message. The message one intends to communicate does not always corresponds with the message one interprets, for an object or artwork can evoke different associations or actions in different contexts. Further research about the agency of art, pop-art and icons, entanglement, and post-secularism as way to understand the Evangelical advertisements is recommended.

1.3. TERMINOLOGY

For this research, I will conduct a micro-study on the phenomenon of the use of Coca-Cola imagery by Evangelical organizations and individuals by means of an interdisciplinary approach. Some key terms in this research need a little unpacking before moving on to the sub-questions. However, although the dichotomies secular/religion, sacred/profane and secular/post secularism are fundamental concepts in this research, I will not attempt to discuss those

concepts in detail here already, as throughout the research it will appear that the relations between them are complex and variegated, which makes it difficult to define these concepts either unambiguously or without a specific context. Instead, every chapter will provide a brief theoretical framework to the matter in question, which will help to understand the relation between Evangelical Protestantism and Coca-Cola more and more. Some other key terms do need a brief exploration beforehand, though, which follows below.

1.3.1. Coca-Cola imagery

John Pemberton, the inventor of Coca-Cola (1886, Atlanta), had promoted his drink only as a 'patent medicine,' like other drinks that utilized wine, coca plants, and/or kola nuts in combination with 'healing' carbonated water. In 1885, Frank M. Robinson changed this image by creating a campaign that led to instant acknowledgement of the drink as being a both a patent medicine, and a social drink.[28] Robinson created a red and white logo that depicted the official name, 'Coca-Cola,' in Spencerian handwriting. When Asa Candler bought the company from Pemberton in 1887, he was keen to address the company in one specific manner: *The* Coca-Cola Company, spelled with a capital T; similarly, the name of the beverage was henceforth to be capitalized and hyphenated: Coca-Cola.[29] In 1941, due to the rise of Pepsi-Cola, The Coca-Cola Company fought for the exclusive rights of the nickname *Coke*, while they had initially spurned the idea of using an abbreviation for their product. Afraid that Pepsi-Cola would claim Coca-Cola's status by appropriating its commonly used nickname, Coca-Cola began an ad campaign to connect the names *Coke* and *Coca-Cola* and stimulated the interchangeable use of both names.

Over the years, The Coca-Cola Company invented other products alongside Coca-Cola, such as Fanta, Sprite, Monster Energy and Fuze Tea. In this research however, when I refer to the visual culture of The Coca-Cola Company, I only focus on the imagery of the beverage of Coca-Cola. According to the official website of Coca-Cola in the Netherlands, "The Coca-Cola Company, Coca-Cola, Coca-Cola zero, Coca-Cola light, Coca-Cola life, the Coca-Cola script logo, the design of the Coca-Cola contour bottle, and the Coca-Cola red disc icon are registered trademarks of The Coca-Cola Company."[30] For the purpose of this research, I will also include

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28 Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola. The Unauthorized History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes It* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 32 and 66.

29 Ibid., 63.

30 Homepage of The Coca-Cola Company of the Netherlands, accessed March 16, 2017, https://www.cocacola.nl/nl/home/.

the familiar advertising slogans when talking about the 'visual culture' of Coca-Cola. In the remainder of my thesis, I will use the terms *The Coca-Cola Company*, *Coca-Cola* and the nickname *Coke* synonymously, unless indicated otherwise.

1.3.2. Evangelical

Evangelical Protestantism "derived from a theology that focuses on the act of evangelism or 'sharing the world' and sees modern media of communication as logical tools for this process."[31] Religion is placed at the center of their lives, and Jesus can be served through the most ordinary acts such as doing your homework, spending time with your family or friends, and being a good person. [32] Evangelicals do not just come from one denomination however; according to Frances FitzGerald, "white Evangelicals [today] are a very diverse group that includes, among others, Southern Baptists, Mennonites, Holiness Groups, Pentecostals, Dutch Reformed groups and a number who belong to nondenominational churches."[33] There is not one specific group of Evangelicals that forms the main focus for this research. Rather, every person or organization who claims to be Evangelical, or implies to share the same values – to share the Gospel with the world – can be included in this paper.

In this research, I will use the terms *Evangelicals*, *Christian(s)*, and *religious* as synonyms, unless noted otherwise. In so doing, I do not mean to infer that Evangelicals are the only Christian movements who borrow from popular culture. Indeed, as Steward Hoover argues, "both Catholic and Protestant churches eventually came to an accommodation with the emerging media realm,"[34] Nonetheless, given the fact that Evangelicals are the largest religious group in America,[35] and given their countless attempts to "discern religious needs and desires in the wider culture and then appropriated resources in the wider culture to meet them," their Christianized cultural products are far more accessible than those of other religious groups. [36]

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31 Stewart M. Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 78.

32 Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus*, 4.

33 Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York, at all.: Simon and Schuster, 2017), 2.

34 Hoover, *Religion in the Media Age,* 7.

35 "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, last modified May 12, 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

36 Grant Wacker, "Billy Graham, Christian Manliness, and the Shaping of the Evangelical Subculture," in *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*, ed. Jan Stievermann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker (Oxford Scholarship Online: Oxford University Press, 2018), 79-101 at 80.

1.3.3. *Using and re-using visual culture*

The visual aspect of culture cannot be understood on its own: an image is always related to an ideology, an interpretation of what it means in a certain context. Indeed, as Swiss linguist and one of the founding fathers of semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) argues, a *sign* is 'a combination of a concept (*signified*) and a sound-image (*signifier*).'[37] This means that the sound-image or word (signifier) 'tree', for instance, stands for the concept or idea of a real wooden tree (signified). The signifier and signified together form the *sign*, because without a concept or idea to point, the sound-image has no meaning at all. This semiotic rule applies to all the images that are observed and interpreted in everyday life: they only have meaning because they are linked to a concept or idea. Arthur Asa Berger agrees with De Saussure, and defines meaning as something that a sign does not have by itself; rather, meaning stems from relationships, from the context in which the sign is found, or from the system in which it is embedded.[38] This implies that a sign can have different meanings in different contexts, but also that the meaning of a sign is created by its context.

It seems simple: as soon as one understands the context in which the sign is made, one can interpret it in the correct way. However, cultural contexts change constantly, and consequently the meaning of signs changes as well. Moreover, according to Marghanita Laski argues, worldly organizations have 'borrowed' religious signs regularly for non-religious advertisements, although advertisers could not directly quote the Bible or use religious figures such as Mary or Jesus. What they did use, were "vague forms of sacred symbolism," which sought to "transform the product into a 'surrogate trigger' for producing those life-enhancing feelings that consumers avidly pursued."[39] Indeed, religious imagery functions in the same way as other icons for all icons bring their specific associations with them. Christian religious themes and symbols are deeply connected with the consumers on an emotional level, according

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37 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: The Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959), 67.

38Arthur Asa Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics* (Wisconsin: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1999, 2nd edition), 242.

39 Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream. Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986), 264 - 265. See also Neil Postman, *Technology: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 164, in which Postman argues that our current cultural milieu is such that it even accepts to use religion to sell non-religious products. He paints a picture of a future advertisement for wine with Jesus standing in a desert oasis, with the following text: "When I transformed water into wine at Cana, *this* is what I had in mind. Try it today. You'll become a believer."

to Valerie Taylor, - but the method is the same with other, non-religious icons.[40] This merging of imagery of different sources in ads attract consumers: familiar imagery is eye catching and stimulate the purchaser to look *and* buy, whether these images are religious or secular from nature. [41]

For Evangelicals who use Coca-Cola icons, this means that the Coca-Cola signs or icons can mean one thing in their original context, and another thing in the new, Christian context. The question that follows it whether the associations of Coca-Cola icons can as easily be connected to the Evangelical message when used in an Evangelical advertisement, as the sacred status of religious imagery is connected with worldly products. Before this question can be answered, it is important to know what associations Coca-Cola imagery evokes, which we will explore in the next chapter.

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40 Valerie A. Taylor, Diane Halstead, and Paula J. Haynes, "Consumer Responses to Christian Religious Symbols in Advertising," *Journal of Advertising* 39.2 (summer 2010): 79-92 at 79.

41 For more information on the reception of religious icons within secular advertising, see Taylor, "Consumer Responses," 79-92; Rick Clifton Moore, "Spirituality that Sells: Religious Imagery in Magazine Advertising," *Advertising and Society Review* 6.1 (2005), n.p., Project MUSE; and Martyn Percy, "The Church in the Market Place: Advertising and Religion in a Secular Age," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15.1 (2000): 97-119.

2. COCA-COLA'S IDENTITY

Together with the products that emerge from the American capitalist consumer culture, capitalist ideas seem to reach the 'uninitiated' more quickly and effectively than does religious belief. Adam Heather, an Evangelical Christian missionary from the religious organization *24-7 Prayer, Prayer, Mission and Justice* paraphrases a conversation on his blog on evangelization between a missionary in India and a head of one of the tribes:

> "Have you ever heard of Jesus Christ?" asked the missionary,

> "Jesus? No, I have not heard of Jesus, I have heard of Coca-Cola and Pepsi," replied the head of the village.

Interestingly enough, Heather does not see this development as a threat, but rather sees an opportunity to "tell of Jesus" using the existing fundaments. Christians do not have to "spice up the message," and do not have to "sell Jesus," but they can "share-a-Coke" with Jesus, and then share Jesus while they are at it, according to Heather.[1]

Both (American-centered, Protestant, Evangelical) Christianity, and American capitalistic imperialism or, as it has been called, Coca-Colonization have a multinational narrative, and a strong relationship with global mission: both want to reach as many people as they can. Remarkably, Christians already thought of utilizing this similarity when Coca-Cola went international for the first time. Asa Candler's brother, Warren Candler, was a Methodist bishop and strongly believed in the "twin virtues of capitalism and religion."[2] Therefore, it is not surprising that soon after Bishop Candler spread the Word to Mexico and Cuba, Coca-Cola followed, and wherever Coca-Cola went, its Protestant virtues of industrial harmony followed.[3] The same strategy can still be discerned in contemporary Evangelical appropriation of the familiar slogans of Coca-Cola's advertising campaigns. In this way, Evangelicals use the contemporary channels created by The Coca-Cola Company to reach the people who are still unfamiliar with Christianity, but who have accepted the capitalistic products of America. However, a consequence of this strategy is that, as Bishop Candler already understood, Coca-

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1 Adam Heather, "'Share-a-Coke' with Jesus," 24 Prayer. Prayer, Mission and Justice, last modified September 4, 2013, https://www.24-7prayer.com/blog/2083/share-a-coke-with-jesus.

2 Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola*, 94.

3 Ibid., 95.

Cola and Christianity come to be linked together when the same fundaments are used to reach the people. What associations does Coca-Cola imagery brings along when used in Evangelical advertising?

2.1. COKE'S CONNOTATIONS

Coca-Cola's identity is created to a great extent by means of advertising: advertisements aim to create specific associations for the viewer and consumer. The associations evoked by a specific symbol do not arise spontaneously, but must be taught, and implanted. This concurs with American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's definition of a symbol as a sign that is "conventionally tied" to the object[4] With respect to advertising, Juliann Sivulka has shown how advertisers take a mass-produced item, scale down the package, and then ascribe a personality and product information to it so as to make the item essential to one's life.[5] Different techniques are employed to achieve this end: *brand-name packaging* links favorable moments to a product in order to make it desirable at those times; a *rational approach* provides information about the product in order to win over the consumer on the basis of evidence of superlative qualities; *atmospheric advertising* focuses on the feeling that a product creates.[6]

The Coca-Cola Company invites its community to "Be the Brand," which, according to the Company's website, means "to inspire creativity, passion, optimism and fun."[7] The Company's advertising campaigns succeeded in creating an association between Coca-Cola and each one of these characteristics. In 1985, almost hundred years after the invention of Coca-Cola, the Company changed the original formula for three months. In an article reporting on this change, *Newsweek* magazine identified the soft drink as "the American character in a can."[8] This "American" character of Coca-Cola, and thus also of its clan, grew stronger with every advertisement campaign, which all were linked to typical American people. Let us now examine how this association was constructed.

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4 Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture*, 14.

5 Juliann Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising* (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998), 50.

6 For more information on different advertising techniques, see Tricia Sheffield, *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).

7 The Coca-Cola Company, "Mission, Vision & Values," Coca-Cola Journey, accessed April 4, 2018, http://www.coca-colacompany.com/our-company/mission-vision-values.

8 Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola,* 361.

2.1.1. *Coca-Cola's portrayal of America*

Already in the early days of Coca-Cola, when Frank Robinson (1845-1923) oversaw advertising, a major amount of money was reserved for advertisements in papers, posters, billboards, and, of course, merchandise. Coca-Cola was the first soft drink to enter the national American market, and Asa Candler needed to promote the drink with aggressive marketing.[9] He distributed Coca-Cola merchandise such as clocks and calendars for pharmacists, and soda fountains, and gave away coupons of a free glass of Coca-Cola.[10] The cumulative effect of these initiatives resulted in Coca-Cola was what Sam Dobbs has called the "single best-advertised product in the United States by 1912."[11]

Moreover, the Company did their best to keep up with and adapt to the times by adjusting the image of the drink to the popular cultural trends of the moment. The pharmacist John Pemberton had started out with an image of the drink being a perfect patent medicine containing multiple narcotics, alcohol, cocaine and caffeine. When the public changed their opinion of these ingredients, the Company transformed its image into that of a social drink to be consumed together during one's work break. Later advertising campaigns depicted strong and independent women in order to connect with female consumers, influenced by women's movements. The Company also sponsored multiple sports events, notably the Olympics, ensuring that Coke, especially the 'Diet Coke' variant, would be associated with a healthy lifestyle. In this way, the Company made sure that Americans of every period and lifestyle could identify themselves with Coca-Cola and with all the good things that America had to offer, such as diversity, inclusion, and especially freedom.

Diversity, inclusion and freedom became more synonymous with Coke during the Cola-wars with Pepsi-Co in the 1980s, which encouraged the Company to create an image that would go even further beyond the drink's nature. With commercials like 'I'd like to buy the world a Coke' (1971), 'Tomorrow's People' (1987), and 'Can't Beat the Feeling' (1989), the Company soon was associated with peace, brotherhood, diversity, and happiness.[12] For Americans, Coca-Cola was part of all happiness in their lives, and the global message was that anyone could be

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9 Kathryn W. Kemp, *God's Capitalist: Asa Candler of Coca-Cola* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 47.

10 Coca-Cola Journey, "Our Story 1893-1904: the early years," accessed April 3, 2018, http://www.coca-cola.co.uk/stories/history/heritage/our-story-1893-1904-the-early-years.

11 Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola*, 91.

12 Ibid., 388-389.

part of this happiness by 'sharing a Coke' (2011). While colonizing the world, the company "inaugurated 'pattern advertising,' using the same illustrations and message everywhere - all portraying middle-class white Americans, and all making sure that people all over the world would desire to be exactly like them, and to be part of America."[13]

2.1.2. Religion, capitalism & patriotism

According to Pendergrast, Asa Candler, the man who really launched Coca-Cola, specifically linked three aspects of America to his drink: religion, capitalism, and patriotism.[14] Obviously, Coca-Cola is one of the world's largest capitalist corporations. The Company's website presents a dramatic narrative of the growth of the popularity of the soft drink: in the early beginnings, it recalls "just nine drinks a day were served," but Coca-Cola "has grown to be the world's most ubiquitous brand." Now, the site reports, "1,9 billion servings of Coca-Cola Company products [are] served every day."[15] Moreover, as Kathryn Kemp notes, Candler was himself deeply involved in capitalist business activities, buying real estate and organizing the Central Bank and Trust Company.[16] Thus, The Coca-Cola Company became wealthy not only because of good advertising: Candler made sure to invest as much money as possible in the name of Coca-Cola, to make sure the Company would profit the most from it.

Candler's capitalist impetus came from a religious background, which Pendergrast implicitly describes as influenced by the Protestant work ethic and the Gospel of Wealth.[17] The fact is that Candler was a devout Methodist, and a believer of the principle of Christian stewardship. Kemp explains:

> Several of the great capitalists of the gilded age shared this principle, which holds that God gives wealth to individuals not for their personal enjoyment, but rather to be used for the advancement and improvement of His kingdom on earth.[18]

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13 Ibid., 247.

14 Ibid., 15.

15 Coca-Cola Journey, "Our Story 2000 to now: 130 years later," accessed April 4, 2018, http://www.coca-cola.co.uk/stories/our-story-2000-to-now-living-positively-125-years-on.

16 Kathryn W. Kemp, "Capitalist," in *God's Capitalist: Asa Candler of Coca-Cola,* ed. Kathryn W. Kemp (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 63-81.

17 Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, 14-16.

18 Kathryn W. Kemp, *God's Capitalist: Asa Candler of Coca-Cola* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 84.

Candler believed that he did not hold absolute ownership of the properties and resources of The Coca-Cola Company, as first and foremost it was part of God's kingdom. Because of this belief, a business offer would at the same time be a Christian act of devotion. As Candler's relative, Elizabeth Candler Graham stated: "Methodists of Asa's day were taught to 'work as hard as you can so you can make as much money as you can, so you can give as much as you can."[19] Candler believed strongly that his fortune was given to him by God, and he had the duty to use it to improve the economy of not only Atlanta, but also of the United States. Kemp observes: "He served his church while he also devoted himself to building a sizable personal fortune. For Asa Candler, the two interests, linked by the concept of Christian stewardship, were as one." [20] For Candler, Coca-Cola was indeed a religious product, then, and it did have a religious sacred nature. Candler's successors, however, had different ideas about the link with religion. This shift eventually led to an official statement on the website of Coca-Cola, claiming that the Company does not promote any specific religion whatsoever.[21] It could perhaps be argued then that while Coca-Cola had a religious nature in the past, whether this nature persists in its contemporary icons is questionable.

As for the link between patriotism and Coca-Cola, this relation between a consumer product and loyalty to the American nation runs deeper than just Coca-Cola *qua* drink. The Company sponsored the American soldiers during World War II by sending Coca-Cola men with the drink into the battlegrounds. Coca-Cola

> became the most important icon of the American way of life for US soldiers during World War II; it represented an extraordinary sacred time—the "pause that refreshes"— that was redeemed from the ordinary post-war routines of work and consumption, and from the 1960s it promised to build a better world in perfect harmony.[22]

This not only resulted in "the almost universal acceptance of the goodness of Coca-Cola," but also fostered Girardian mimetic desire, for "Anything the American fighting man wanted and

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19 Elizabeth Candler Graham and Ralph Roberts, *The Real Ones: Four Generations of the First Family of Coca-Cola* (New Jersey: Barricade Books, Inc., 1992), 93.

20 Ibid., 107.

21 Coca-Cola Journey, "Does Coca-Cola promote any particular religion?," accessed November 9, 2018, https://www.coca-cola.co.uk/faq/does-coca-cola-promote-any-particular-religion.

22 David Chidester, "The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock 'n' Roll: Theoretical Models for the Study of Religion in American Popular Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64.4, Thematic Issue on "Religion and American Popular Culture" (1996): 743-765 at 750.

enjoyed was something [others] wanted too."[23] René Girard has suggested that people desire things, not for their intrinsic value, but because they are desired by others.[24] This 'mimetic desire' is used by advertisers to influence people to buy their product. This means that people who want to belong to a certain group will desire the products that the people in that group consume, not for the product itself, but for the community it represents. The drink was a direct connection between the soldiers, the families at home, and the great America that brought freedom. The physical bottles distributed during that time even became relic-like: untouched bottles were brought home by the soldiers and were a physical connection with the sacred America.[25] To purchase and drink Coca-Cola meant that one was proud of one's country, and willing to fight for its most important value: freedom.

Moreover, Sheffield has shown that after World War II, the freedom to consume was directly related to patriotism in America: when the US government used advertising to remind people about their duty to consume to maintain economic stability.[26] The Coca-Cola Company made sure people had something to consume which would directly remind them of their duty to their America.

2.1.3. America

Obviously, there are also negative connotations with the brand: during the cold war, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics tried to frame the drink as dangerous due to its capitalist nature. To drink Coca-Cola meant, in this view, to allow America to colonize the world and dominate your culture.[27] The USSR's attempt to make Coca-Cola a symbol of American imperialism succeeded, and it made the connection between Coke and America and anti-Communist values even stronger.[28] With The Coca-Cola Company's going abroad, and colonizing new countries with their capitalistic American thoughts, Coca-colonization soon became synonymous with Americanization: it is difficult to think of a twentieth-century world without either of them.

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23 Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, 216.

24 René Girard, *Mensonge romantique et vérité Romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1978), cited in Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture*, 34.

25 Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, 211.

26 Sheffield, *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising*, 71.

27 Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, 240-241.

28 Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 2.

For The Coca-Cola Company, using already existing associations with American life – freedom, diversity, capitalism – helped to create new meaning for Coke's own icons. Coca-Cola became not only linked with those values that the Company itself helped to create; it was now linked with American identity as such. It can be argued, then, that the Company's advertising strategy can be defined as 'metonymic appropriation': Coca-Cola not only builds upon the existing associations with America (with which Coca-Cola shares core values) but appropriates national and cultural characteristics as though the Company were identical with America. By means of these deliberate strategies, the brand itself received new meanings desired and accepted by the collective, the American (or would-be American) consumer. In this sense, Coca-Cola is not merely a soft drink anymore, and its advertising is not merely communication about a product: it is the icon of America, and indeed the "American character in a can.

3. COCA-COLA-SACRALITY

It is clear from the previous chapter what associations and identity are brought along with the use of Coca-Cola icons in Evangelical advertisements. Many scholars, however, argue that secular icons like Coca-Cola, can be understood as *sacred* icons. This means that Coca-Cola icons gain power also from their sacred nature, next to their American nature. To understand the complexity of this sacredness, we first need to understand what it means for any image, religious or secular, to be sacred. Can we even speak of sacred secular images, or is "sacred" a distinct religious category that can only exist within religious spheres? Let us first look at religious icons and their sacrality.

3.1. CHRISTIAN SACRALITY

3.1.1. Connection to the divine

The English word *icon* is derived from the Greek *εἰκών*, which denotes an image, resemblance or reflection. The earliest icons within the Christian tradition were literally resemblances: the martyrs, apostles, the Virgin Mary, and Jesus Christ were portrayed in panel paintings and in wall frescoes as a means to commemorate, and venerate these holy figures.[1] In the Byzantine world, it was believed that with an icon "the image itself was essentially transparent, a window through which the viewer looked to communicate with the person represented."[2] Perceived in this way, the icon gains sacredness, not only because it resembles a sacred figure, but because it establishes a direct connection with the person that is represented. Rather than claiming that the image and the prototype are the same, an icon serves, then, to venerate the figure that is represented by providing a means by which the worshipper can look through the image and commune with the divine.

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1 Virgil Cândea, "Icons," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 7, 2nd edition, ed. Lindsay Jones (Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 4352-4354 at 4352, Gale Virtual Reference Library. For more information on the history of icons, see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and Thomas F. Matthews and Norman E. Muller, *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Paintings and Icons* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016).

2 Leslie Brubaker, "Introduction: The Sacred Image," in *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 1-24 at 4.

In addition, relics were (and are) the object of religious devotion, that give people "access to the power of the holy."[3] Relics are the "venerated remains of venerable persons," such as bodies, bones, hair or ashes, but also "objects that they once owned and things that were once in physical contact with them."[4] They are considered to be extremely powerful due to the fact that they offer a direct and physical connection to the sacred person, unmediated by human production, whereas sacred images are connected to that person by resemblance only, although that resemblance may be miraculously produced. The sacredness of an icon or relic lies thus in its special connection with the holy, both visually and physically.

What is thought-provoking about religious icons and their sacredness is whether this sacredness exists in every image with a unique connection with the holy; but, obviously, I am not able to discuss here in length how Christian images become sacred or explore what requirements an image must meet to be regarded and experienced as sacred for the Church. Furthermore, what is important for this research is whether icons that are already accepted as sacred, can be duplicated, along with the sacredness, which is a necessarily when it is argued that advertising icons, that are duplicated by nature, bear sacredness in them in the same way Christian or religious icons do. Let us turn to two scholarly views on the topic of reproduction of holy images.

3.1.2. Reproducibility of icons

Walter Benjamin famously claims that "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: the presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."[5] An icon can never be reproduced and at the same time have the uniqueness, or "aura", of the original. Benjamin understands aura in terms of contemplation, distance, uniqueness, individuality, and authenticity, where the latter is only guaranteed when the artwork is made with the human hand, rather than with technological instruments. A work's aura is thus lost in mechanical reproduction, because the authenticity of the work is at stake when artworks are mass produced: "The whole sphere of authenticity is outside reproducibility."[6]

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3 Ibid., 11-12.

4 John S. Strong, "Relics," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol 11, 2nd edition, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 7686-7692 at 7686, Gale Virtual Reference Library.

5 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 217-253 at 219.

6 Idem.

In an article on icons and the nature of aura in the Burgundian Low Countries during the fifteenth century, Jean Wilson has argued, however, that the authenticity or 'aura' can be preserved even while it is reproduced. In the case of relics, the power is limited to the relic itself (and only to a lesser degree to objects that have had physical contact with the relic), according to Wilson. A copy of a sacred image on the other hand, is almost as powerful as the original work, since it preserves the "authenticity" of the original that lies not in the physicality of the image itself, but in the status of what it represents. To illustrate this claim, Wilson discusses the relic-icon *Notre-Dame de Grâce*, that was donated to the Cathedral of Cambrai in 1450 by Fursy du Bruille, who claimed that the image of the Virgin and Child was painted by St. Luke himself. The Cathedral decided to copy the painting fifteen times between 1454-1455 for other churches, but those copies no longer could claim the authenticity of the original painting of St. Luke. However, "they nevertheless may have been seen as preserving the saint's vision and thus could claim to some degree a measure of 'authenticity' independent of their actual authorship."[7]

According to both Benjamin and Wilson, iconic sacredness cannot be entirely transferred to a copy: there is some diminution. For religious icons this implies that when they are reproduced time and again, the aura will gradually dissolve at some point in this reproduction process, since the source of the sacred – viz. the connection with the sacred original – becomes more and more distant. The degree of sacredness is related to authenticity: it matters by whom, when and where something is made. This condition of sacrality is at odds with the conception of *secular* sacred images.

Martin Kemp for instance, even went so far as to define the Coca-Cola bottle as an iconic image par excellence.[8] However, as Kemp observes, modern media applies the term icon to "too many examples." It is applied to "figures or things of passing and local celebrity" to such an extent that the term "has tended to become debased."[9] Even so, Kemp argues that while it is difficult to describe an iconic image with a definition that is valid for all icons, it is

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7 Jean C. Wilson, "Reflections on St. Luke's Hand: Icons and the Nature of Aura in the Burgundian Low Countries during the Fifteenth Century," in *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 132-146 at 141.

8 Martin Kemp, *Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon* (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2011), 2, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost).

9 Ibid., 3.

nonetheless possible to define that an image (religious or non-religious) only receives iconic status when:

> it achieves wholly exceptional levels of widespread recognizability and comes to carry a rich series of varied associations for very large numbers of people across time and cultures, such that it has to a greater or lesser degree transgressed the parameters of its initial making, function, context, and meaning.[10]

For Kemp, the term 'icon' is thus not at all linked exclusively to religion or authenticity and is applicable to all kinds of images; his book is entitled *Christ to Coke* for a reason. But how exactly, then, are we to understand secular sacrality?

3.2. SECULAR SACRALITY

In contemporary academic debate, many scholars are exploring how the sacred can be found within the secular. For these scholars, 'sacred' is not merely a religious category, but can be applied to secular things as well. Veikko Anttonen for instance argues that "people participate in sacred-making activities and processes of signification according to paradigms given by the belief systems to which they are committed, whether they be religious, national, or ideological."[11] This implies that, for Anttonen, although the sacred certainly describes something more than ordinary, every-day life, the sacred can exist in both religious and non-religious spheres.

In this view, Anttonen follows the classic definition of Emile Durkheim who defines the sacred as something that is set apart. "The sacred thing," writes Durkheim, "is par excellence that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity."[12] For Durkheim, the sacred and worldly or profane are absolute categories, strictly opposed to each other; therefore, under normal circumstances there can be no such thing as a sacred image in the profane world. However, this does not mean that an object, image, or person that seems profane in the first place cannot, on this ground, be 'sacred' at all. Indeed, for Durkheim, the sacred emerges when meaning is created by the collective that creates and accepts the "totemic principle" and

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10 Idem.

11 Veikko Anttonen, "Sacred," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), 271-281 at 281.

12 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 37-38.

transmutes it into a symbol. The "totemic principle" is a symbolic manifestation of the people of a clan or society and all principles they stand for. In this way, argues Durkheim, "a rock, a tree, a spring, a pebble, a piece of wood, a house, in a word anything, can be sacred."[13]

Kim Knott agrees with Anttonen that the sacred is not an exclusively religious category, but she goes a step further when she argues that the sacred does not stand against or opposed to the secular, in contrast to Durkheim's argument. According to Knott, the secular can also produce or 'host' the sacred, and therefore, the assumed gap between the 'sacred' and the 'secular' does not actually exist. "Rather," she claims,

> those forging social identities in secular contexts − who draw on nonreligious commitments and beliefs including atheism, humanism, and secularism − mark as 'sacred' those occasions (such as marriage), persons (a lover), things (a ring), places (a registry office), and principles (equality and justice) that they value above all others, and that they see as set apart and inviolable: those things that may be deemed to be both secular and sacred.[14]

In this sense, Knott's understanding of 'secular sacredness' is in agreement with Anttonen's argument that sacredness is used "in non-theological contexts to have some reference to some supreme principle of life such as love, freedom, equality or justice." [15] This contrasts with the way in which we understand religious sacredness, which has some reference to "the culture-specific conception of the category of God."[16]

3.2.1. *Coca-Cola as secular sacred icon*

Thus, sacredness can be understood as a category that may cross the dichotomous boundary between secular and religious, although it does not erase that boundary. The religious and secular character of sacredness can still be distinguished regarding what kind of principles or concepts it symbolizes or represents. For Coca-Cola icons, sacredness is not at all linked to a connection with the divine, but with the brand itself. Indeed, the brand of Coca-Cola, and the images that symbolize this brand, is created and strengthened by advertising agencies of The

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13 Ibid., 35.

14 Kim Knott, "The Secular Sacred: In-Between or Both/And?," in *Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Abby Day, Christopher R. Cotter and Giselle Vincett (New York: Routledge, 2016), 145-160 at 157, http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/62456/1/Revised_Knott_The_secular_sacred_with_bibliography.pdf.

15 Anttonen, "Sacred," 281.

16 Idem.

Coca-Cola Company. To be successful as capitalistic company, they need to ensure that those images will be recognized wherever the consumer is, which consequently means that the images must be diffused as widely as possible, and therefore they also need to be reproducible.[17] For Coca-Cola then, this distinctive and standardized brand recognizability is an important aspect of its iconicity.

Following Kemp's definition of icons discussed above, we may deduce that the power of the secular icon of Coke lies in its recognizability, and especially in its potential to evoke associations other or stronger than those originally intended. In this sense, it is helpful to consider secular icons as icons not in the sense of their likeness to real persons or objects, but as widely recognized symbols evoking strong associations created by advertisements. We already discussed those associations in the previous chapter.

Moreover, for The Company it is necessary that their icon's or symbol's connotations are communicated and received in the same way everywhere. This serves to create a global community of consumers and potential consumers who respect the same values and principles that are transmuted into the symbol of Coke, and the product itself. Coke's product branding attempts to fully control the meaning of their symbol, even if in some places one aspect stands out more than others. In the history of Christian visual culture, the same kind of centralized control of possible meanings of icons may have been attempted and promoted at times by the Christian church, but the appropriation by different religious cultures blurred this meaning. Thus, for icons of Coke, practices of publicizing, advertising, reproducibility, and global familiarity with symbolism are determinative in the development of sacrality. Interesting to note here, is that the sacrality of the icon is thus directly linked to those who see it: without the spectators, the essence of the icon's sacrality is lost, for it needs to be recognized and associated with.

Can this argument on Coca-Cola sacrality be pushed still further? Can we say that Coca-Cola not *only* receives an iconic or a sacred status from advertising, technological reproducibility, and a global familiarity with its symbolism, as argued by Kemp, but that this sacred character is *also* further developed within holy spheres? How does the sacredness of Coca-Cola change when Coca-Cola itself is understood as a religion?

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17 Sheffield, *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising,* 55–59.

3.3. RELIGIOUS COCA-COLA ICONS

Several scholars have argued that Coca-Cola is a religion; if their argument is valid, Coca-Cola imagery would be 'iconic' in a more directly religious sense. A principal proponent of this thesis, Mark Pendergrast, devoted the last chapter of his historical biography of The Coca-Cola Company to an exploration of this statement:

> There is no question that this fizzy, syrupy beverage means much more [to the world] than the Coca-Cola men would have us believe. Certainly, it means more to them - it is a way of life, an obsession. (...) 'Coca-Cola is the holy grail, it's magic,' one Coke man told me. 'Wherever I go, when people find out I work for Coke, it's like being a representative from the Vatican, like you've touched God.' (...) Coke has achieved the status of a substitute modern religion which promotes a particular, satisfying, all-inclusive worldview espousing perennial values, such as love, peace, and universal brotherhood.[18]

The anecdote recounted by Pendergrast raises the question of how to understand Coca-Cola as a modern religion, for these reactions to and feelings about Coca-Cola are claimed to stem from the fact that Coca-Cola is a "substitute modern religion."

3.3.1. Coke as a Christian-like religion

Pendergrast's claim that Coca-Cola is a religion rests on a definition of religion not as an institution, but as defined in anthropological terms by Clifford Geertz. For Geertz, a religion is

> (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[19]

According to Pendergrast, Coca-Cola icons are then the sacred symbols that establish the feeling in Coca-Cola employees and consumers that, by drinking Coke, they can truly bring peace and love into the world.

After a brief paragraph on how Coca-Cola is indeed a Geertzian religion, and how Coca-Cola, as a sacred symbol, "induces varying 'worshipful' moods, ranging from exaltation to

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18 Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola*, 399-400.

19 Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-124 at 90.

pensive solitude, from near-orgasmic togetherness to playful games of chase," Pendergrast continues his argument by claiming that "most religions relied on a drug-laced drink of one sort or another." The implication is therefore that Coca-Cola may serve in a similar way at the base of a religion. He concludes however, that "the most powerful Coca-Cola appeal has not, ultimately, been sexual or physiological, but communal: if you drink Coke, the ads suggest, you will belong to a warm, loving, accepting family, singing in perfect harmony."[20] Pendergrast explains his choice to use religious terminology in his last chapter by noting that his respondents phrased their experiences in a "religious way."[21] While he does provide quotations in support of his argument from relevant figures, such as the son of Asa Candler and Coca-Cola agents, that explicitly show that they use terms associated with a religious organization, in fact throughout the book, Pendergrast himself constantly uses religious terminology to elucidate the image he has of the Company and the drink, without explaining why he himself thinks it is appropriate to use such terms.

In his last chapter, Pendergrast attempts a concluding defense of his thesis that Coca-Cola is a religion. In fact, the defense amounts to little more than a paraphrase of his own chosen words. He repeats the phrase "Coca-Cola men really are missionaries," which he used first in Chapter 6 in relation to Candler's brother, who was a bishop, a missionary, and at the same time a Coca-Cola man.[22] Now, however, the phrase is adduced in a general way to support his argument regarding the religious nature of Coca-Cola, without explaining why all the Coca-Cola men can be considered missionaries, or why this would necessarily imply that Coca-Cola is a religion. Instead of a cogently structured argument, one is left with the impression that Coca-Cola can be called a religion simply because Pendergrast uses religious vocabulary to describe it. The reader is left to wonder whether this amounts to a definition, an explanation, an analysis, or merely a suggested but vaguely defined analogy.

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20 Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola*, 400-401.

21 David Chidester agrees with Pendergrast that Coca-Cola can be understood as a religion in the Geertzian sense. Moreover, according to Chidester, Pendergrast's method of defining Coca-Cola as a religion is not in any way forced. Chidester writes: "[Pendergrast] allows the major actors in the drama to evoke their religious moods and motivations in their own voices. See: Chidester, "The Church of Baseball," 749. However, Pendergrast does not leave much room for the reader to interpreted the data in another way than the modern religion explanation of Pendergrast himself, for he constantly makes a reference to the Christian faith to explain the data to the reader.

22 First mentioned in Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, 94, and later paraphrased on 399.

Chidester cites Pendergrast's claim, without criticism, and indeed goes even further. He claims in his research that Coca-Cola indeed counts as a religion, precisely because familiar Christian words can in fact be used to describe Coca-Cola's influence.

> [Coca-Cola] evokes familiar metaphors - the religious institution of the church, the religious desires attached to the fetish, and the religious exchanges surrounding the sacred gift - that resonated with other discourses, practices, experiences, and social formations that we are prepared to include within the ambit of religion.[23]

When we include these metaphors in the broader definition of religion, Coca-Cola should indeed be called a religion. Moreover, Chidester explores another way to apply Pendergrast, namely, how Coca-Cola can function as a fetish commodity of modern capitalist society that is animated by advertising.

3.3.2. *Coca-Cola as totemic religion*

Chidester draws a connection between Coca-Cola imagery and the theories concerning advertising as religion, according to which the commodity is a fetish object,[24] and therefore desirable.[25] In making this connection, Chidester builds on the work of Sut Jhally, whose thesis that advertising in general functions as a fetish religion has found broad acceptance.[26]

> In a capitalist society, the identifying relation between products and producers does not exist anymore – products are stripped of meaning, because they are separated from their producers.[27] Advertisers generate a new meaning for the products, which they express through advertisements with help of advertising icons. This new meaning is an element that is desired by the consumers; it makes the product desirable, for the product is the bearer of this new meaning; the advertising icon serves to add the new meaning to the product and henceforward symbolizes both the product and its meaning. In Jhally's reading, advertising icons are, in this

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23 Chidester, "The Church of Baseball," 760.

24 The term 'fetish' is defined by some scholars positively as an object with supernatural powers of enchantment, and by others negatively as an object of false belief. See: "Fetish / Fetishism," in *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, vol. 2, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad, et al. (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 731-733 at 731, Gale Virtual Reference Library.

25 Chidester, "The Church of Baseball," 751-752.

26 Sut Jhally, "Advertising as Religion: The Dialectic of Technology and Magic," in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, ed. Lan Angus and Sut Jhally (New York: Routledge, 1989), 217-229, http://muse.jhu.edu.proxy-ub.rug.nl/article/2938.

27 What is meant here is that the purchaser no longer knows who the maker of the product is: there is no connection between the producer and the product, which would provide meaning in pre-capitalist societies.

way, powerful fetishes that can be used for personal gain to make consumers feel good about themselves. [28]

In her study of the "religious dimensions of advertising," Tricia Sheffield draws not on the theory of fetish, but on another important concept in the study of religion: the Durkheimian understanding of the totem. Durkheim argues that

> the totem is not merely a name and an emblem under which the clan and its members unite. They are used during religious ceremonies and are part of the liturgy: Thus, while the totem is a collective label, it also has a religious character. In fact, things are classified as sacred and profane by reference to the totem. It is the very archetype of sacred things.[29]

Sheffield applies Durkheim's theory of sacred things to her ideas on advertising products within a consumer society when she argues that the community "vibrates" with the essence of the consumer-totem.[30] According to Sheffield, advertising has the "ability to create ever-evolving images for an object so that people will want to possess the item." [31] This object becomes the bearer of these desired images, and therefore, by purchasing the object, one purchases the associated images. In this way, the object becomes a 'totem' of a certain group of people who identify with the image or status of this object. Sheffield's notion of a "vibration" within the community is thus not primarily about the actual totem: it is about what the totem represents to the people who are called by its name and who wear its emblem. This representative aspect is the true power of the totem.

For Sheffield however, advertising should not be understood as a (totemic) religion, but as containing religious dimensions, that is, "totemic dimensions that make it a culturally potent force."[32] Sheffield distinguished three dimensions within advertising:

1) the dimension of a *"divine" mediator figure*, in the sense that advertisements distribute knowledge to consumers regarding what to consume in order to become a part of the religious belief system that is built around the cultural totems;

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28 Jhally, "Advertising as Religion," 217-229.

29 Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 118.

30 Sheffield, *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising*, 43.

31 Ibid., 48.

32 Ibid., 3.

2) a sacramental or *transubstantiation* dimension, insofar as the objects are transformed from mere products to symbols of how to act within the culture of consumer capitalism; and

3) the dimension of bearing "*ultimate concern*," insofar as advertising communicates to the individual what is of ultimate concern in the culture of consumer capitalism.[33]

If we understand Coca-Cola icons as *religious* icons in the Geertzian sense, their sacredness derives from the fact that the symbol can "establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations." For Pendergrast, Coca-Cola icons are sacred because they make people believe certain ultimate concerns. If one applies Sheffield's understanding of advertising totems to Coca-Cola icons, however, one can further argue that consumers who purchase Coca-Cola become part of a so-called 'Coca-Cola clan.' Coca-Cola distributes the identity of the clan through its advertising campaigns, but the collective of consumers accepts and maintains this created identity because they want to be part of this 'clan' with its unique associations. Coca-Cola icons become the embodiment of Coca-Cola's principles, and are therefore extensions of the company itself. All people or things that wear the totem of Coca-Cola become sacred, for Coca-Cola icons themselves are sacred. This totemic sacredness then, derives from the fact that the collective urges to uphold the sacred status of the image, because it is the only way to secure the existence of their own clan, and thus also their identity, for there is no clan without a common link, viz. a totem, between its members.

We conclude that in contemporary Western societies, iconic images no longer exclusively originate in religious and distant spheres, but also in secular and capitalist consumer spheres where reproducibility and recognizability through advertising are the key terms to understand this iconic dimension. We argued above that both religious and secular sacredness can be attributed to Coca-Cola icons, although this status does not spring from a connection with the divine. Furthermore, this sacredness is directly connected to the observers of the icons and is therefore experienced in varied ways and therefore also in varied degrees. The remaining question is whether the types of sacredness can endure when the clan in which they are accepted and preserved, changes. Can the sacredness be connected to Evangelicals as well when they use Coca-Coca icons? If so, what does this mean for the identity of Evangelicals.

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33 Idem.

4. THE USE OF COCA-COLA ICONS WITHIN EVANGELICAL CULTURE

The examples discussed in the introduction remind the viewer of both Christianity and Coca-Cola. The linguistic term for this phenomenon, viz. the use of associations to generate meaning, is *metonymy*. In metonymy, information about one thing is transferred to something else, or one thing is used to refer to something that is associated with or related to it. The metonymic use of the logo or slogans of Coca-Cola by Evangelicals serves to help consumers or viewers to link the new product (Evangelical Christianity) to the old (Coca Cola), as the logo or slogans will generate the intended associations anew, and will communicate Coca-Cola's [desired] ideas and attitudes without having to spell these out in detail.[1] The question is, however, whether the Evangelicals aim to link their brand of Christianity with the whole identity of Coca-Cola, or with just a few elements. Moreover, do they really use the Coca-Cola icons because of Coca-Cola and its identity, or do they merely see the Coca-Cola icons as any secular image that is popular and recognizable? The latter is quite common within the Evangelical subculture, and if Coca-Cola were indeed used simply for its status in popular culture, the question concerning the Evangelicals' aim would not be about identity at all. For this reason, the Evangelical subculture must be discussed here in more detail, before the question on the transference of the Coca-Cola identity can be answered.

4.1. EVANGELICAL SUBCULTURE

Evangelical Protestantism and its use of products and media that remind non-Evangelicals of their secular culture have been studied extensively. According to media-studies scholar Heather Hendershot, Evangelicals understand "secular culture" as "full of people who are not Evangelical or religious at all, and all media that does not reflect the Evangelical perspective on life is a part of this 'secular, dominant culture.'"[2] She claims that "American Evangelicals know what they are, at least in part, because they know what they are *not* – members of the secular, morally bankrupt world."[3]

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1 Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture,* 34.

2 Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus*, 218n17.

3 Ibid., 25.

And yet, the Evangelical subculture does not seem to abandon or reject the secular culture of capitalistic products and media. Indeed, Evangelicals give the impression of having a "vast appetite for worldly ideas and practices – sports, therapy, sex manuals, politics, glossy magazines, television, Disney special effects – which they appropriated selectively and Christianized with great skill and zeal," according to Susan Friend Harding. [4] Moreover, Quentin J. Schulze notes that American Evangelicals embraced

> every imaginable form and medium of communication, from Bible and tract printing to tent revivals, gospel billboards, books, religious drama troupes, radio and television broadcasts, parade floats, motorcycle evangelism, periodicals, and even Rollen Stewart … who holds up Scripture signs ["John 3:16"] in front of the TV network cameras during sport events. American Evangelicals were often leery of new media, especially those that provided "worldly entertainment" such as the stage, and later, film. But they also pioneered one form of mass communication after another.[5]

Although Evangelical responses to new media may seem contradictory – being both "leery" and pioneering – Hendershot has shown that this is not quite the case. She argues that Evangelicals undo the connections between the secular products and their meaning: "Evangelicals seem to say that these [secular] forms [such as science fiction, heavy metal, or hip-hop] are not inherently secular but, rather, neutral forms that can be used to meet Evangelical needs."[6] The forms in themselves do not define the content: rather the content can be distinguished from the form, and therefore the form can be used and appropriated for every thinkable message. If this is indeed the case, it would mean that every cultural item or paradigm could be Christianized, irrespective of its modern or secular connotation. It would also mean that every cultural item or paradigm could be used to create a personal Christian identity, including products that seem secular in the first place. Is this also the case with the Coca-Cola icons that are being used? Are they merely neutral images, stripped from their original meaning, and transformed into Christian icons?

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4 Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell : Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2001), ix, https://www-fulcrum-org.proxy-ub.rug.nl/epubs/q237hs56b?locale=en#/6/18[xhtml00000009]!/4/1:0.

5 Quentin J. Schultze, *American Evangelicals and the Mass Media: Perspectives on the Relationship between American Evangelicals and the Mass Media* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1990)¸ 25.

6 Hendershot, *Shaking the World for Jesus*, 28.

In my opinion, they are not. Coca-Cola icons do not have a neutral form. One may take a can, the font, the red color, or words from Coca-Cola campaigns, but when used separately, these items are no longer Coca-Cola icons, nor would they be recognized as such by the public. It is the specific combination of those elements, as used by Coca-Cola, that make the images Coca-Cola icons. Coca-Cola icons are advertising icons, which are necessarily the sum of their associations. The content, therefore, cannot be separated from the form, for the form is the embodiment of the associations: there is in fact no neutral form of Coca-Cola icons to be Christianized. The Coca-Cola icons that are selected and used by Evangelicals are not Christianized cultural products like any other, as the Coca-Cola identity is not lost in the re-use of the icons.

Durkheim argues that the meaning that is transferred to the totem is the identity of the collective. Therefore, the question arises whether the appropriation of Coca-Cola's imagery is a way for Evangelical Protestantism to identify themselves with the brand's identity and with the Coca-Cola clan-members. Can it be argued that once Evangelicals use Coca-Cola icons, they automatically belong to the group of people who identify with Coke? Should the use then be understood as an attempt by Evangelical Christians to become, in some way, 'Coca-Cola-men'? Can the Coca-Cola identity be transferred to the Evangelicals as well?

4.2. IDENTITY FORMING

From studies on the process of creating identity it appears that this process is different for individuals on the one hand and for groups or companies or even countries on the other. We have seen that The Coca-Cola Company created an identity by launching advertising campaigns in which different characteristics and values were propagated and connected to the brand. The Company took elements that it wanted to be part of its identity, and put them together, such as freedom, friendship and diversity. This type of identity-creation is described by Sheffield as 'pick and choose' identity forming.

4.2.1. Pick and Choose

Sheffield and others state that identity-creation is brought about by complying to secular advertisements in which it is claimed that an object of a specific brand is a mark of a certain lifestyle or group of people to which one can belong when one purchases the right product.[7]

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7 Sheffield, *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising*, 48.

According to Sheffield, by purchasing specific items, "individuals form into consumption clans and gain a sense of identity."[8] Thus, the identity of a brand automatically contributes to the identity of a group or individual who purchases the brand's products. As a consumer can 'pick and choose' products from different brands and will do so based on personal choice, his or her identity will be uniquely individual; but as each product will contribute automatically to the identity of the consumer, his or her identity will not be *just* uniquely individual. The 'pick and choose' identity is an active process, in that an individual actively collects, by purchasing them, products that he or she *wants* to collect as elements of his identity. However, part of the process is also passive, in that, with the purchased products, automatically the icons and their identity are added as elements to the purchaser's identity; and exactly as they are, without change. The individual's identity may well change by more picking and choosing, but the icons and their identity will stay intact regardless, for only the undamaged icon, or totem, represents the identity of its clan. Therefore, even as an individual purchaser's identity-creation will be a unique process, each unique identity will contain and represent also the separate, original identities added, in this process, by the icons that have come with the purchased products.

4.2.2. Bricolage

Sheffield's theory builds on *The Savage Mind* (1962), in which Claude Lévi-Strauss introduced the terms *bricolage* and *bricoleur*. Lévi-Strauss used these terms as an analogy for two different ways of thinking to gain knowledge: the *bricoleur* is a craftsman who 1) collects components from the existing cultural and linguistic culture, and 2) (re)constructs these to create a new narrative of knowledge. The *bricoleur* can adapt or change the components in every way that seems necessary to fit his own vision. However, the *bricoleur* cannot create every outcome imaginable, because he is limited by the materials which he has found, and which inevitably influence the meaning of the new creation.[9]

Lévi-Strauss argues that the practice of *bricolage* contributes to one's identity: "the assembling of signs and symbols conveys identification with and difference from others."[10] British media theorist and sociologist Dick Hebdige agrees that appropriation of objects indeed

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8 Ibid., 59.

9 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. J. Weightman & D. Weightman (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966).

10 Ronald L. Jackson and Michael A. Hogg, "Bricolage," in *Encyclopedia of Identity*, ed. Ronald L. Jackson and Michael A. Hogg (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), 72-73 at 73, http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412979306.n27.

develops ones identity, and argues that identity emerges from the unique composite of materials which "acquire fresh meaning as they are brought together."[11] The resulting *bricolage-identity* is, then, not only the sum of the separate components, in the way a pick-and-choose identity is, but transcends this "fragmented identity" to create a new, unique meaning, or identity.[12] Both Lévi-Strauss and Hebdige agree that identity in this sense is never "finished," and that the bricoleur will always keep (re)arranging the old materials with new ones to refine his own identity.

For Michel de Certeau, *bricolage* is a form of a "tactic" which "does not obey the law of a certain place, for it is not defined or identified by it."[13] De Certeau argues in his influential work *The Practice of Everyday Life* that users, or consumers, are not as passive or as guided by established rules as is often assumed. Consumers make something from or do something with the information they receive, and this results in various ways of using certain information. "As unrecognized producers," De Certeau explains, "consumers produce through their signifying practices something that might be considered similar to the 'wandering lines' drawn by the autistic children:[14] 'indirect' or 'errant' trajectories obeying their own logic."[15] Consumers always choose what to do with the information they acquire. They can accept it just the way it is presented, they can reject it, transform it, but also subvert it from within.[16] The bricoleur does so by not passively accepting the elements that are around him, but actively adapting the elements and their meaning to fit his vision. If we apply this to Evangelical use of Coca-Cola imagery, it would suggest that the meaning of the Coca-Cola icons is not automatically and straight-forwardly transferred to those who use them, for the users can change the meaning of the icons if they wish to.

In his analysis of the difference between the ways in which icons are used by the dominant culture on the one hand and by "the others" on the other, De Certeau distinguishes between "tactics" and "strategies."

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11 Idem.

12 D. Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

13 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 29.

14 As studied by Fernand Deligny, in *Les vagabonds efficaces* (Paris: Maspero, 1970).

15 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xviii.

16 Ibid., 33.

I call a 'strategy' the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment.' A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generation relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles,' 'targets,' or 'objects' of research).[17]

A "tactic" on the other hand is defined by De Certeau as "a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other."[18] As a design for behaviour, a strategy adheres to localized fixed rules and symbols, whereas a tactic does not, as it is more flexible, allowing the "purchase" of what one wants or needs without adhering completely to the local strategy. According to De Certeau, "many everyday practices and 'ways of operating' are tactical in character: victories of the 'weak' over the 'strong,' clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, etcetera."[19]

4.2.3. Poaching

De Certeau tries to explain these tactics with the help of the French phenomenon of *la perruque*, a term that literally means "wig", but which is used to refer to work that one does for oneself under the guise of doing it for one's employer. He argues that 'everyday life' consists of acts of la perruque, or *poaching*, "in countless ways on the property of others."[20] De Certeau argues that poaching

differs from pilfering in that nothing of material value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time' or as complex as a cabinet-maker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room.[21]

De Certeau defines poaching using the distinction between work and leisure. Where poaching is a "way of using" the dominant culture within the company, bricolage acts outside it, according to De Certeau.[22] In the act of poaching one does not leave the dominant culture, but

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17 Ibid., xix.

18 Idem.

19 Idem.

20 Ibid., xii.

21 Ibid., 25.

22 Ibid., 29.

merely subverts the rules, applying them in ways that were not intended by those who laid down the rules. The consumer manipulates the dominant culture in order to create a new space which fits his ideas and views, and in so doing, deflects some of the authority of this strategy. This dominant culture can also be the capitalistic culture, or the culture of a company.

De Certeau's theory of *la perruque* seems to fit the practice of Evangelical appropriation of Coca-Cola's visual culture perfectly: they do not create something totally new, they merely bend the rules just enough for them to adapt the icon's associations to their wishes, which are obviously different from those of The Coca-Cola Company. Evangelicals try to move tactically within the dominant culture of capitalism, or to be more precise, Coca-Cola, and to poach from it whatever they think can be used as an Evangelical symbol as well. The new icon or icons that are created in this way still contain the associations intended by Coca-Cola, even as they are changed to fit the use to which they are put by the poachers; their new meaning is influenced by the old meaning, which is still recognizable for those to whom the new meaning is communicated.

4.2.4. Appropriation

Willem Frijhoff defines the practice of using pre-existing ideas or texts while bestowing new meaning on them as appropriation.[23] The verb "to appropriate" derives from the Latin noun *appropriare*, meaning 'make one's own.' At present it is used for the act of taking something for your own use, usually without permission.[24] When we speak of *cultural appropriation*, it means one takes things, rituals, or symbols from a culture that is not one's own, often without preserving the original meaning of the appropriated item.

According to Frijhoff, the meaning of the word has changed over the years, from an act of 'possessiveness' to 'meaning-making.' Since 1980, 'appropriation' is understood as the merging of symbols and signs that were once strangers to one another.[25] Through this merging, a new meaning emerged, and with this new meaning, the old meaning is inferior, and therefore no longer a threat to the new meaning.[26] This means that through the act of appropriation, other than through the act of bricolage or poaching, the new meaning will replace the old meaning of

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23 Willem Frijhoff, "Toe-eigening als vorm van culturele dynamiek," *Volkskunde* 104.1 (2003): 4-17 at 14-15.

24 "Appropriation," The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus (Cambridge University Press, 2019), https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/appropriation.

25 Willem Frijhoff, "Toe-eigening van bezitsdrang naar betekenisgeving," *Trajecta, Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van het katholiek leven in de Nederlanden* 6.2 (1997): 99-118 at 101.

26 Frijhoff, "Toeëigening als vorm van culturele dynamiek," 9.

the icon in this new context. Thus, the identity that is created through appropriation is not the sum of the elements, or a unique merging of parts of the elements. The original identity is often lost completely, and the new identity can be anything one wants it to be, for it is not limited by the original meaning in the way it is with bricolage.

4.3. USING COCA-COLA ICONS TO CREATE AN IDENTITY

The question is now how we can understand the use of Coca-Cola icons by Evangelicals in the light of these theories of identity. The three examples discussed in the introduction are perfect cases to which to apply these theories. In the following brief reflection, we will try to identify which parts of Coca-Cola icons are used by Evangelicals, and how these Coca-Cola elements influence the new or rearranged identity of the Evangelicals. Let us look at the cases one by one.

In the first example, Outreach Media connects Christianity with Coca-Cola with the phrase: "Share a can with Jesus, share your life instead." Here, the identity of Coca-Cola is precisely the element that is rejected, for 'sharing a coke' is not enough for Christians. 'Sharing your life' on the other hand, is what is required. It is the Coca-Cola value of 'sharing' that is re-used in this poster, but, while the act remains, the meaning and the form change completely. This use can be understood as an act of appropriation: the Evangelicals appropriate Coca-Cola's value to share, but they change the meaning of the value and transfer it to a new context where Coca-Cola is not dominant any longer. For Evangelicals, Coca-Cola's concept of sharing is wrong, and therefore inferior to their understanding of how one should share instead. One needs to share a can, *not* Coke, with Jesus, and with that, share one's life, and not just connect with another human being. Moreover, 'sharing' is already a Christian value as well, which makes it even more difficult to recognize the original concept of Coca-Cola's sharing here. Outreach Media leaves no room at all for the original Coca-Cola identity, and therefore we can conclude that neither the Coca-Cola identity, nor elements of it, are transferred to the Evangelicals who are intended to see this poster and those who made it.

In the second example, however, Pastor Jeff Hanson does not reject Coca-Cola or its identity at all. Hanson even embraces Coca-Cola and acknowledges that Coca-Cola is 'The Real Thing' of fizzy drinks. For Coca-Cola, 'The Real Thing' is a way of showing consumers that Coca-Cola is the real Cola-drink, in contrast to other cola-drinks, like Pepsi-Cola. It is a way to assure a status of being better, or at least purer or more authentic than others. This is the key aspect of Coca-Cola's identity that Hanson is using in his blog. Hanson uses a part of Coca-

Cola's identity that is recognized in the dominant culture of capitalistic America, and transforms it to serve his own goal, without abandoning this dominant culture. He needs the original meaning of Coca-Cola's 'The Real Thing' to be preserved, for using this phrase as he intends would be meaningless otherwise. His use of Coca-Cola's identity is a tactic in that Hanson moves within the dominant culture and takes symbols and slogans that can also fit his ideas when adapted a little. Furthermore, it seems to be a form of poaching, or *la perruque*, in that Hanson not only stays within the dominant culture, but also evades being influenced by it. He merely uses part of it for his own benefit, without losing his own identity at all. The key aspect, Coca-Cola's identity of being 'The Real Thing', is changed and transferred to Hanson's Christianity, while the rest of Coke's identity stays untouched. It is only the status that is added to the Christian identity, without linking it further to Coca-Cola.

In the third and last example, Kerusso uses Coca-Cola's iconic slogan next to Jesus Christ in the phrase: "Jesus Christ, Eternally Refreshing." This example differs from the other two in that the relation with Coca-Cola seems to be one of equality, while both Outreach Media and Hanson think of Coca-Cola as inferior to their Christianity. Kerusso *seems* to take icons simply as they come, to complete the image of his form of Christianity; therefore, his use of Coca-Cola icons looks like a pick and choose identity. Indeed, Kerusso uses a lot of iconic visual culture, of other brands and popular media as well. If Kerusso would not want Christianity to be linked to a certain image, then, obviously, he would not establish the link at all. However, appearances are somewhat deceptive, here, for although Coca-Cola and Christ appear as equals in his phrase, Kerusso did in fact adapt the original slogan by replacing Coca-Cola with Jesus Christ. For a pick and choose identity, we concluded that the brand icon needed to remain intact completely, for the iconic dimension would be lost otherwise. This third example, then, should be understood as an act of bricolage, as Kerusso takes elements of Coca-Cola together with elements of Christianity. His new phrase communicates a new message, as well as the two already existing messages that are still linked to the iconic signs of both Coca-Cola and Christianity.

4.4. CLAIMING AN IDENTITY FOR ITS SACRALITY

We must conclude that the degree of transference of the identity of Coca-Cola differs in every case. Outreach Media does not claim Coca-Cola's identity, but rejects it completely and, moreover, does not use Coca-Cola icons, but separate elements which reduce the iconic value, and therefore also its identity. Pastor Hanson's use takes over a part of the Coca-Cola identity:

the status. It is just a small part, however, and it is uncertain if it suffices for people to recognize the Coca-Cola identity in the new Christian identity. Kerusso, in contrast, takes over a large part of Coca-Cola's identity, for he made minimal adaptations to the original slogan, and places Christianity on a level equal with Coca-Cola, instead of on a higher one. This way, it is easy for consumers to recognize both identities in the T-shirt, and still be able to receive the new message as well.

While Evangelicals try to connect themselves in one way or another with Coca-Cola (why would they otherwise choose Coca-Cola?), caution is to be exercised in concluding that this means they wish to be in some way Coca-Cola men. We should not overlook the fact that Evangelicals do *transform* the icons, even if the resemblance with the original icons is still strong enough for people to recognize them. This practice of adaptive use suggests that Evangelicals do not try to claim or connect with Coca-Cola's identity as a whole. Rather, we see a strategy of combining the iconicity of *the* ultimate American image, the Coca-Cola image, with their own Christian identity. Through their new, own images, different parts or factions of Evangelical Protestantism attempt to (re-)claim the ultimate American national identity, appropriating Coca-Cola's ultimate American identity. It is thus not simply the case that Evangelicals want to become part of the 'Coca-Cola clan:' they want to be associated with the same profile as Coca-Cola: they want to be seen as American.

But what about the sacredness that is closely connected to the identity of Coca-Cola? Is this also partly transferred to the Evangelicals, or will it be reduced when the resemblance to the original is less strong? I think the latter is in fact the case. Since this sacredness is created through associations and the clan's identity, it is therefore necessary for Evangelicals to maintain the essence of Coke's identity to appropriate and hold onto its sacrality too. In the third chapter, we already explored how sacrality could be transferred within Christian icons. they are hand-made, and the maker and/or the resembled figure transfers its sacrality to the icon. We may argue, however, that the theories of Benjamin and Wilson on authenticity do not apply to secular icons, because contemporary art or icons are no longer primarily made by hand, but often with the help of technological instruments. If an icon was never hand-made in the first place, the authenticity of the icon would not depend either on whether copies are hand-made or not.

Perhaps we should interpret Benjamin's and Wilson's theories more broadly, and think about aura as transferable, provided that the same techniques and material are used for

reproduction, which is exactly what the digital media is capable of. For Coca-Cola icons, this would imply that digitally produced icons only remain sacred if they are duplicated within the digital media, and that printed icons only remain sacred when printed. If it is true that the same sacredness adheres to every correctly duplicated image of Coca-Cola, then it follows that the Coca-Cola imagery used by Evangelicals does also bear within itself secular sacredness.

However, agreeing with Kemp's definition in that the iconic value of images depends on its recognizability and variation of strong associations, we must conclude that 'being an exact duplicate' cannot be essential for the preservation of the sacredness within an icon. Exactness is not required. In fact, if people recognize characteristics of the reformed icon as belonging to the original sacred icon, they will have the same connotations with the changed icon as they have with the original, with the consequence that the sacredness also exists in both versions of the icon. Therefore, it can be argued that Outreach Media obtains the smallest amount of secular sacredness in their new icon, for in it they preserve the smallest amount of association with Coca-Cola. Conversely, for Kerusso, the amount of secular sacredness would be the highest, since the Coca-Cola identity is fully present in the new, merged identity.

This chapter presented an insight into how Evangelicals control their identity-creation process by different ways of using Coca-Cola icons. The question is however, whether this process can be controlled at all. So far, the theories involved in acquiring the insight mentioned above, are those written from the perspective of the creator (of the new icons), although Levi-Strauss mentioned that a new product is always influenced by the original meaning of the used elements. But is it achievable to use a part of Coca-Cola icons and at the same time fully control the meaning of the new icon? Are Coca-Cola icons not in fact linked to their original meaning to such a degree that one cannot possibly remove that meaning, ever? Are not the icons unchangeable influencers, no matter what new and changed form is given to them?

5. REFLECTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The aim of this research was to shed light on the complexity of the phenomenon of Evangelicals to re-use Coca-Cola icons, and although many new insights are given and explored, even more question arose. In this last chapter, I will briefly discuss some other relevant issues that touch upon the topic but should (in my opinion) be further explored elsewhere.

5.1. ENTANGLEMENT

According to Archeologist Ian Hodder, humans and *things* are connected, or *entangled*, where things are "entities that have presence," by which he means that they have "a configuration that endures."[1] According to Hodder, things do not exist as isolated entities, but depend on other things and humans to function.[2] However, one should not think of things merely as mediators or tools for humans to use for representation, power or exchange. Rather, as Hodder argues, "things have lives and temporalities, and they depend on each other and on humans."[3]Entanglement is then "the dialectic of dependence and dependency,"[4] which is as much between human and things, as it is between things and things and humans and humans.

Coca-Cola icons can be understood as *things* which, as Ian Hodder argues, "appear neat and distinct when you look at them from in front but (…) all connections of things are often hidden away."[5] The icons are linked to their past, present and future, and to everything that is connected to that. Think about the history of every person involved, of the ingredients and how they were able to purchase those, of the social and political situation in the United States, etcetera. When Evangelicals use Coca-Cola icons, and transform their meaning to their liking, the Evangelicals 'use' Coca-Cola icons in a new way, and therefore create a new connection between Coca-Cola icons and Evangelicals. However, Coca-Cola icons were never isolated from other things, so when Evangelicals connect to Coca-Cola, they connect to the whole web of connections in which the Coca-Cola icons function. Even when Evangelicals are determined to control their relationship with the Coca-Cola icon, they cannot control the connections

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1 Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationship between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 7-8.

2 Ibid., 3-4.

3 Ibid., 89.

4 Idem.

5 Ibid., 11.

between the icons and other things and humans, and therefore, they will always be influenced by those connections as well, for the Evangelicals are now part of the icons' web, or network, of relations. It would be helpful to explore this further, and unfold how this dependency, or entanglement between the Evangelicals and the Coca-Cola icons works exactly.

5.2. AGENCY OF THINGS AND ART

Both Hodder and anthropologist Alfred Gell argue that humans and things have agency, defined by Hodder as "simply the ever-present force of things: the life force of humans and all organic things, and the forces of attraction, repulsion, etc. of all material things and their interactions."[6] For Gell,

> An agent is defined as one who has the capacity to initiate causal events, in his/her vicinity, which cannot be ascribed to the current state of the physical cosmos, but only to a special category of mental states: that is, intentions. [7]

Things, however, cannot be agents in this sense, according to Gell, because things, or artworks, cannot themselves have intentions. The agency of an artwork is the channeled agency of the artist who created the artwork. However, Gell argues that although an artwork can be intended and received in a certain way, its agency can also initiate other, different events in various contexts.[8] This certainly is the case when an artwork evokes meaning in as much as it has "political, religious and other functions which are 'practical' in terms of local conceptions of how the world is and how humans may intervene in its workings to their best advantage." [9]

This is an interesting point of view as concerns the Evangelical advertisements, in that the style of Pop art resembles the technique of the Evangelical advertisements: the use of brand icons (Coca-Cola), mixed with other icons (religious icons) to create new meaning. Let us take a look at the work of Soviet Pop Art artist Alexander Kosolapov (1943-) whose paintings and sculptures "conflate symbols of American consumerism with those from the Soviet Union and Russian Orthodox Church."[10] His work *This is my Blood* (2001) juxtaposes Coca-Cola's script logo with a Russian Orthodox image of Jesus Christ, together with a quotation from the words

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6 Ibid., 215.

7 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An anthropological theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19.

8 Ibid., 66.

9 Alfred Gell, "Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps," *Journal of Material Culture* 1.1 (1996): 15-38 at 36.

10 "Alexander Kosolapov," accessed November 26, 2018, http://www.artnet.com/artists/alexander-kosolapov/.

of Jesus in the Gospels 'This is my blood' (Matthew 16:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20) (image 2). [11] The German Museum for New Art explaines the work as an "ironic commentary on consumer culture, where products become fetishes and advertising becomes the Bible." [12]

Image 2: Acrylic on canvas (78.7x70.8"), named "THIS IS MY BLOOD," made by Alexander Kosolapov in 2001, courtesy Guelman Gallery.

Moreover, Kosolapov "used the binary opposition of Capitalism-Socialism, USSR-the West."[13] In Russia, the artwork even contributed to the debate of censorship of the arts and freedom of expression.[14]

It is worth noting that, although the artist creates an artwork with a certain motivation, receivers of the work of art can understand it differently. But, if the intention of the creator cannot completely determine the meaning of the work, how can one control the meaning of the work at all? Is it even possible for Evangelicals to control the meaning of the advertisements, then? How is it that those advertisements are not offensive, but Kosolapov's work is? How does this agency of icons, the role of the audience and influence of the artist work in both cases? I think this should be researched further, as this will shed light on the way the Evangelical advertisements are understood by the public and will unfold the complex message that is send through these merged images.

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11 Alexander Kosolapov, "This is my blood / This is my body," SotsArt, last modified June 18, 2012, https://www.sotsart.com/2012/06/18/this-is-my-blood-this-is-my-body/.

12 "Alexander Kosolapov," Museum für Neue Kunst, accessed November 26, 2018, http://www06.zkm.de/zkmarchive/www02_religion/mediumreligion/index_com_content_article_83_alexander-kosolapov_53-2.html.

13 Alexander Kosolapov, "Biography," accessed March 18, 2019, http://www.moscowart.net/artist.html?id=AlexanderKosolapov&ch=biography.

14 "Russian curators prosecuted for showcasing banned art: media round-up," Art Radar: Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond, posted on August 2, 2010, http://artradarjournal.com/2010/08/02/russian-curators-prosecuted-for-showcasing-banned-art-media-round-up/.

5.3. POST-SECULARISM

Throughout the research, I was constantly aware of the need to define 'secular' and 'religion,' for this research constantly plays around with these terms. I decided however, to discuss it briefly and only partly where a paragraph needed explanation of the terms. Here, however, I have some room to discuss one explanation of secularization.

There are three distinct well-known definitions of secularization. The first definition, put forward by sociologist Peter Berger, states that secularization is "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols, which is expressed through a separation of church and state."[15] The second definition is related to the individual, rather than to society, and states that secularity is "the notion of declining religious belief and practice, often thought to be an inevitable consequence of modernity."[16] A third definition was introduced by Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in his famous work *A Secular Age* (2007), in which secularism is understood as "the changing conditions of belief:"

> The shift to secularity in this sense consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.[17]

For Taylor, secularization is the possibility for people to choose for themselves where they want to find their references of meaning, whether that be in religious or non-religious institutions. He argues that while Europe is mostly secularized in the second sense, the secularization of the United States can be understood in the third sense, because there the separation of church and state coincides with the highest rates of religious belief and practice.[18]

Philosopher and socialist Jürgen Habermas agrees with Taylor that religion does not disappear. He argues that the West, by which he means mostly Europe, is now living, not in a

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15 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967), 107.

16 Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, "Editors' Introduction," in *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age,* ed. Michael Warner, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, and Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1-31 at 8.

17 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

18 Ibid., 2-3.

secular, but a *post-secular* age, where the society needs to "adjust itself to the continued existence of religious communities in an increasingly secularized environment."[19] According to Habermas, post-secularism is about a "change in consciousness" of the role of religion within a secular society, where both religious communities and secular institutions need to open up to the possibility to learn from each other, as equal communities, without undermining each other.[20]

Although the new (post-)secular society is characterized by industrialization, urbanization, technological development, the rise of science, and by an independent market economy that emphasizes the importance of hard work, efficiency, and speed, people still need an outlet for their everyday troubles and a means by which to make sense of their existence. Taylor's secularization theory implies that people can choose both from the traditional institutions of meaning-making (religion), and from secular institutions that present their versions of meaning in life. All promise the good life, and a meaningful existence. It is, perhaps, not entirely surprising then that religious imagery is to be found within the "united marketplace" of both religious and secular institutions.

However, when we closely examine our three examples of Evangelical advertisements employing Coca-Cola imagery, we see that it is not only the case that *religious* imagery is moved out of the religious spheres and into the general marketplace. Indeed, while placing themselves next to secular meaning-makers, Evangelicals appropriated *secular* imagery as well, in such a way that the religious imagery is intertwined with the secular imagery. The fact that, as Habermas explains, religious language is not accessible for all, makes it necessary to 'translate' the Christian message to a 'general' language that all people, religious and non-religious alike, can understand. [21] According to Habermas, this general language is the secular language, using secular signs, symbols and icons. How can the appropriation of Coca-Cola icons by these groups be understood in the light of the separation of secular and religion? Can the use of Coca-Cola icons be understood as an act of post-secularistic thought?

19 Jürgen Habermas, "Secularism's Crisis of Faith: Notes on Post-Secular Society," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25 (2008): 17-29 at 19

20 Ibid., 28.

21 Idem.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to explore different approaches to how we may understand the use of Coca-Cola icons within Evangelical subculture in the United States.

In the introduction, I argued that the existing explanations or ways of understanding the use of secular culture by Evangelicals were, in my opinion, not sufficient, for Coca-Cola icons are not neutral cultural products that can simply be Christianized. I argued that it was necessary to explore the identity of Coca-Cola icons, for this identity will be connected to Evangelical Protestantism when the Coca-Cola icons are used in Evangelical advertisements. It was found in the second chapter that Coca-Cola icons evoke associations that are connected with the brand through advertising campaigns. One can think of associated ideas like optimism, fun, freedom, equality, diversity; but the main idea here is "America".

In the third chapter, the sacred aspect of Coca-Cola icons was explored. For many people, the brand Coca-Cola is sacred, and their icons are therefore sacred symbols. This sacredness can be understood as both religious and secular sacredness. Coca-Cola is *secular* sacred in that the brand is unique and valuable above other brands of soda and bears a message of some supreme secular principle of life such as freedom and inclusion. Moreover, the brand is globally recognized and, in different regions, also evokes associations other than the intended ones. Coca-Cola is *religious* sacred in a Geertzian sense where the icons evoke the powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations that Coca-Cola men can change the world by consuming Coca-Cola. Coca-Cola is also *religious* sacred as totem of the Coca-Cola-clan.

It is clear that Coca-Cola icons do not only evoke the intended associations of The Coca-Cola Company, but that the identity of the icons is much more complex when they are accepted as sacred icons of American consumer culture. When those icons are then used and re-used by Evangelicals for their advertisements, it is the question whether these associations, and the sacrality of the icons is transferrable to the new product. In the fourth chapter, the Evangelical subculture was explored, and we found that Evangelicals often use 'neutral' cultural products to Christianize and consume for their Christian identity. Coca-Cola icons, however, do not have a neutral form, and therefore, the identity of Coca-Cola will also be connected to their icons. The examples explored in the introduction and chapter four are different attempts of Evangelicals to create an identity with the help of Coca-Cola icons, without claiming Coca-Cola's identity in total. The sacredness of the Coca-Cola icons is closely connected to its

identity, and therefore, will be transferred in the same amount to the Evangelicals as the identity of Coca-Cola is. This act of re-using Coca-Cola icons should be understood as an attempt to claim characteristics of the brand to form a new identity through appropriation, poaching or bricolage, and to (re-)gain (secular) sacrality. When approached in this way, secular images bring a new dimension to the identity of religious communities: a sacred dimension that is recognized globally due to the Coca-Cola identity; religious images, however, do not do the same.

With this research, I did not focus on *why* Evangelicals would use Coca-Cola icons, but merely what happens when they do use them. Even when Evangelicals gain Coca-Cola's sacredness, the question remains whether they actually want this sacredness to be part of their identity as well. To answer this question, qualitive research needs to be done about the motives of those specific Evangelicals who use the Coca-Cola icons. Moreover, it is difficult without further research to draw any conclusions about how this new identity of Evangelicals as communicated through the advertisements is received by the wider public. In the last chapter, I recommended further research that touches upon this topic, but even with such research, it would be problematic to detect a change in the way Americans think of Evangelicals, as so much depends on theoretical concepts that are extremely hard to make concrete and operational. Theoretically speaking, the appropriation of Coca-Cola icons transforms the identity of Evangelicals in many ways, but it remains questionable whether this could be demonstrated in actual everyday fact and, therefore, also to what extent this transformation would be noticed by anyone outside the academic world.

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