

Is Mecca Cola post-modern, post-colonial or post 9-11?

In the year 2002, a new product challenging the design, ideology and symbolism of Coca Cola appeared on the European market. This new product is the Mecca Cola. This multicultural product can be seen as the outcome of dynamic changes, and as an example of cultural expansion and the introduction of new norms.

The founder of Mecca Cola, the French-Tunisian radio journalist Tawfik Mathlouthi, is reacting against the American domination. He says, "Coca Cola has become a symbol of American politics, and I can imagine there are a lot of people out there who would like to try something else. People who buy this drink (the Mecca Cola) are making a political statement".

In France, Mecca Cola has become a cult object, especially in small Muslim-run stores, where most bottles are sold. Since introducing Mecca Cola in November 2002, Tawfik Mathlouthi claims to have sold more than 3.5 million bottles.

The drink's red and white label, which appears to be a direct play off of Coca Cola, calls on the consumer not to drink like an idiot but to drink with commitment. Mathlouthi has politicized the product by donating 20% of all profits to charity and political causes. 10% goes to the Palestinian intifada and another 10% goes to European NGOs.

It is interesting how the cultural war has been fought via

commodity and commercial objects. While Coca Cola has always been associated with imperialism, soon the Mecca Cola will be branded as a terrorist object.

Mathlouthi says: "I had the idea to launch this new engaged beverage; it's a new concept, its economics serving ideology and politics, a little gesture against US imperialism and foreign policy." Coca Cola has dismissed Mathlouthi's move, saying he has "identified a commercial opportunity which involves



the exploitation in Europe of the difficult and complex situation in the Middle East." That is exactly Mathlouthi's intentions, and he is making progress.

If his product will generate more anti-Americanism sentiments Tawfik Mathlouthi said: "It is not my problem, it is the problem of the US administration. If they want to change anti-US sentiment they must change their policies and their double standards on human rights and politics".

Tawfik Mathlouthi is a second generation Tunisian immigrant to France. In a way, his product is a copy aiming at beating the original. Rather than calling it a copy one could characterize his product as a paraphrase,

or as a design expansion of a multi-cultural nature.

Mecca Cola has become the Arab world's answer or more likely the European immigrants' answer to the American Coca Cola, and in very short time, it has become a cult object in France, Germany, Holland and Belgium. Mecca Cola has become a design object of communication, which also is for members only, and only for those who know the ciphers of the game.

Coca Cola is being sold as a universal and multicultural product. Mecca Cola, on the other hand, is much more than a commercial product, as it has been made explicitly to serve a political agenda. Muslim activists around the world, in particularly after the 9-11 events, are circulating different information in order to influence young Muslims to boycott American goods.

To Tawfik Mathlouthi, Mecca Cola answers the need of the world's citizens by contributing to the fight against American imperialism.

Mecca Cola is a 'multi-post-ism'; it arrived as a reaction to the monopoly of cultural objects and political domination. Born and sold in the French ghettos, this political commercial cult object is gaining identity and one can not analyze it without including the post-colonial and post 9-11 loop.

Khaled D. Ramadan



Foto: Kristina Ask

There is a war...

"...Og så har du klistermærkerne, som inden for de sidste 3-5 år virkelig er begyndt at tage overhånd. Det er dem der "There is a war and this is a weapon" - det er ud over det hele - og "Anti social behaviour" og hvad der ellers er, det er jo meget sjovt; de siger selv hvad det er de laver, men der er ikke nogen forskel, det er for så vidt lige ulovligt..."

- Søren Pind, Bygge- og teknikborgmester i København (V).

Fra radioprogrammet En Pind i Hjulet, produceret af Kasper Opstrup, Liselotte Urfe og Andreas Holst-Olesen. (Programmet har endnu ikke været sendt).

"...Gerningsmændene bag det klistrede hærværk køber typisk mærker på internettet, eller gennem danske og udenlandske graffiti magasiner. Det gør det let at tæppebombe storbyerne med et budskab... Det er klistermærker hvor der står, "Der er en krig og dette er et våben", hvilket vel kun kan tolkes på en måde..."

- Lennarth Faust, Graffiti konsulent i Københavns Kommune. Fra Jyllands-posten, JPKøbenhavn, 23.12.02

Cirkulationer

En fransk filmmager foreslog engang, at man ikke skulle lave politisk film men der imod gøre filmen politisk. Hvad er det for en forskel han fremhæver med dette udsagn? Og har det nogen relevans for kunst eller anden kreativ praksis? Hvad er forskellen på at lave politisk kunst og at gøre kunsten politisk?

Det første kan vi læse som det, der sker når kunsten kan ses som et direkte indlæg i den politiske debat, dvs. på betingelser og i et sprog defineret at den aktuelle politiske diskurs. At gøre kunsten politisk handler der imod om en transformation af kunsten selv med henblik på samfundet og det sociale. Dette handler om at rette den kreative aktivitet og forestillingsevnen mod det mulige i det sociale. Dette var avantgardes målsætning, hvordan har den relevans i dag?

I en tid hvor politik gradvis erstattes af social adminis-

tration (en post-politisk tidsalder), hvor et monoværdisystem lader andre værdier i stikken og etik bliver reduceret til Emirens ord for Godt og Ondt, i en sådan tid har vi brug for at forbedre tænkningens og handlingens infrastruktur.

Som kulturelle producenter kan vi give form til andre økonomier, og med andre økonomier også andre cirkulationer.

Hvordan kan vi forestille os andre økonomier i den menneskelige udveksling?

For nogle få år tilbage fandt en række projekter sted i London, der på forskellig vis søgte at organisere, hvad de kaldte "skill exchange" - udveksling af kunnen, som regel knyttet til helt almindelige daglige opgaver, der ikke desto mindre volder problemer, hvis man ikke kan løse dem.

Få lappet din cykel mod skulder-nakkemassage, eller få hemmeligheden bag en indisk curry mod

beskæring af et frugttræ. Skønt kunstprojekterne er ovre, eksisterer et par af projekterne endnu som ekspanderende netværker med stadig flere 'færdigheder'.

Kunne man forestille sig kunsten som en cirkulation, ikke kun af æstetiske objekter, ikke kun af holdninger, men også af insisteren på det mulige, af grænseløs 'finpåsomhed', af sensibiliteter, der binder ét menneske til et andet, til flere?

Kan vi se kunsten som kanalgraver, der forbinder isolerede punkter, by-passer bureaukratisk ulogik eller tillader intuitionen at strejfe om i landskabet?

Det kan ikke være tilfældigt at REAKTION og KREATION er gjort af det samme materiale!

Judith Schwarzbart

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