Cultural codes in the iconography of St Nicholas (Santa Claus)

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Abstract. This paper examines some aspects of the cultural codes implied in the iconography of St Nicholas (Santa Claus). The argument posits the iconography of St Nicholas as a vessel for capturing meanings and accumulating them in the construction of public culture. The discussion begins from the earliest developments of the Christian era and proceeds to contemporary depictions (imagology). The study is conducted on the basis of a representative selection of renditions of Saint Nicholas, including 350 pictures of medieval representations (Western and Eastern Christianity), folk extensions and secular representations and it is theoretically grounded in the Tartu School of semiotics.

Introductory remarks

This study considers St Nicholas (Santa Claus) as a travelling referent that does not necessarily keep its meaning and form while moving across space and time.[1] During its journeys the image of the saint is

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[1]   All the translations from Russian, French and Polish are by the present author. The paper is a continuation of my research on the iconography of St Nicholas. Some of the issues omitted from the analysis here (such as syntagmatic / paradigmatic relations, detailed description of the gathered corpus, social rhetoric, a synopsis of St. Nicholas' life and apocryphal events connected with this persona, or a more

received differently and changes its form and meaning according to the cultural contexts it encounters. This discussion aims to uncover some aspects of these changes.

The analytical framework for this study is Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics.[2] As Hartley and McKee (2000: 3) point out

> One of the attractions of Lotman's work is that while he is firmly at the 'textual' end of cultural analysis, his writing is accessible, practical and historical. Thus, his work encourages the pursuit of questions that inevitably lie at the heart of research such as this: the relations between the text and history, between narrative power and social power.[3]

The present paper makes the case that in the past, bodily codes as cultural codes were introduced in a very deliberate way into the images of St Nicholas and were recognized and carried a great deal of symbolic significance for the laity. Nevertheless, the choice of particular codes and the elimination of others is culturally relevant and this is the main focus of the paper: which codes were favoured and which were suppressed, and which were grafted onto the subsequent stages of iconographic representations?

Tartu scholarship is characterized by the conviction that "culture is grounded in semiotic mechanisms, implicated in the production of signs and texts, but also in the circulation and change of these signs

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detailed bibliography on St Nicholas, are given coverage in Haładewicz-Grzelak 2009 and Forthcoming b.

[2]   Responding to a reviewer's criticism, this decision of course, does not mean neglecting the whole tradition of the history of ideas ("paradigm of evidence" as defined by C. Ginsburg). The space limits do not permit the incorporation of more recent methods and approaches to both image production and spread of visual information, such as the works of Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996), works on the so-called "visual culture" (for example, Mirzoeff 1999; Freedberg 1989; see also a graphic case study analysed along the lines of reception theory — della Dora 2005) or the function and pragmatics of icons (Yazdani, Barker 2000). A discussion on some aspects of visual grammar, relational principles (for example, Bateson 1972) as well as applications in a currently developed relational model of semiotic analysis is adduced in Haładewicz-Grzelak (Forthcoming a).

[3]   Other recent applications of Tartu paradigm to analyse cultural phenomena include, for example, Sonneson 2004; Arif 2004.

and texts, and finally, in the introduction of new signs and new information" (Lotman, M. 2002: 13). Tartu notions such as a cultural text, cultural codes and modelling systems are of particular importance in this study. The study of cultural texts was one of the primary interests of Tartu scholars (Uspenskij, B. 1994: 278), and this was a major difference between Jakobsonian structuralism and its Tartu version (Lotman, M. 2002: 15)[4]. The particularity of Tartuvian structural research lies in the fact that it implies not the study of separate elements or their mechanical combination, but determining the mutual relation of elements between themselves and with the structural unity. Above all, Juri Lotman points out the necessity of creating structural models, of both a physical and a mathematical type, useful for studying systems of relations and for modelling a given structure (Lotman, J. 1994: 18).

Tartu semioticians came to the conclusion that language is not only a communicative system but also a modelling system, or better, these two functions are indissolubly connected. Crucially, not only sign-denominations but also sign-liaisons play a modelling role; they reproduce the concept of connections in the described object. As a result, each communication system can fulfil a modelling function and conversely, each modelling system can play a communicative role. Of course, one or other function can be expressed more strongly or not even be felt in a given social usage, but the two potentially exist (Lotman, J. 1973: 43). A central tenet of Tartu scholars is that the dualism of form and content should be replaced by the concept of an idea that is realized in a structure appropriate to it and does not exist outside this structure. A modified structure will convey a different idea to the receiver (Lotman, J. 1973: 40).

The Tartu concept of the text, although it is grounded in Saussurean semiotics, was mainly of an empirical nature: "In other words, there are no a-priori nor objective qualities which turn something into a text — the text is a cultural function: something identifies itself in the

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[4]   "During the second summer school one of the participants was Roman Osipovich Jakobson, taking an animated part in our activities" (Uspenskij, B. 1994: 271).

quality of a text if it occurs in the textual function" (Uspenskij, B. 1994: 275). This 'something' can be a small fragment, as well as a collection of texts of considerable length, for example, of the Bible; it can also be a gesture. Nevertheless, there is one principle that can be helpful in identifying a cultural text: "In absolute isolation, — an object existing only for itself — will, in principle, not be a text: the text is in need of *the other* […]" (Lotman, M. 2002: 18).

This paper proposes to view the iconography of St Nicholas as a 'cultural text' in this understanding of the term. The changes to this text are prompted by the different modelling types of particular cultural codes:

> Таким образом весь материал истории культуры может рассматриваться с точки зрения определенной содержательной информации и с точки зрения системы социальных кодов, которые позволяют эту информацию выражать в определенных знаках и делать достоянием тех или иных человеческих коллективов. Именно эта вторая сторона — культура как исторически сложившаяся иерархия кодов — в первую очередь интересует специалистов по типологии культур, поскольку каждый тип кодирования историко-культурной информации оказывается связанным с коренными формами общественного самосознания, организации коллектива и самоорганизации личности. Задачу типологии культуры можно определить как описание главных типов культурных кодов, на основе которых складываются "языки" отдельных культур, их сравнительные характеристики, определенние универсалий человеческих культур и — в результате — построение единой системы типологических характеристик основных культурных кодов и униерсльных признаков общей структуры 'культура человечества'. (Lotman, J. 2002[1967]: 58)

> In this way, all the material of culture could be seen from the point of view of specific contentful information and from the point of view of the system of social codes, which allow this information to be expressed in particular signs and make it the property of some of the other human collectives. That is, this other side — culture as historically formed hierarchy of codes, is of primary interest to those specializing in the typology of cultures, because each type of coding of historical-cultural information turns out to be connected with the fundamental forms of social self-awareness, the organization of societies and the self-organization of the individual personality. The task of the typology of cultures can [thus] be defined as the description of the main types of cultural

codes, on the basis of which "languages" of particular cultures are formed, but also their comparative characteristics, the definition of the universals of human cultures and — as a result — the construction of a single system of typological characteristics of the primary cultural codes and of universal features of a common structure 'the culture of the humankind'. [*My translation — MHG*]

In order for the act of artistic communication in general to take place, it is necessary that the code of the author and the code of the reader form an ensemble of structural elements that intersect (overlap to a sufficient extent). The parts of the code that do not overlap constitute precisely the domain that is deformed or reconstructed by other means during its passage from the author to the reader (Lotman J. 1973: 58). Each differentiating feature can be conceived of as a new dimension and in this sense we can speak of a multidimensional religious space, having as many dimensions as the differentiating features we have chosen. Hence, the number and mutual relations of differentiating features define the matrix of a religious sphere. Each separate system has its own matrix, which can always be shown as a result of a specific reduction of a universal matrix (Zalizniak *et al.* 1975[1962]: 78).

Tartu semioticians assume that a model of the world which is built on the basis of a given system of signs is usually common to the whole community and it is inculcated into particular individuals, who by virtue of that become members of that community. At the same time, the models of the world instilled at an early age often act (both as models of the world and programmes of behaviour) automatically, regardless of the extent to which they correspond to the conscious models of the worlds an individual constructs at a later age (Ivanov 1975[1965]: 98). Culture, against the background of non-culture, thus appears as a system of signs. The main 'task' of culture consists in the structural organizing of the world. As a generator of structurality, culture creates around people a social sphere, which, as a biosphere, makes life possible: not biologically, but socially (Lotman, Uspenskij 1975: 178).

Considering one of the functions of culture to be a mechanism for organizing and storing information in the collective memory, a key

problem becomes the length of the duration of a particular culture. The Tartu scholars identify two aspects of the problem: the life-span of the *texts* of collective memory and the life-span of the *codes* of collective memory. The life of the texts of collective memory creates inside a given culture a hierarchy usually identified with the hierarchy of values, determined by the constancy of the basic factors of its structure and its internal dynamics, meaning the ability to change whilst retaining the memory of its former states (Lotman, Uspenskij 1975: 182). This axiological aspect will also be discussed in the paper.

Taking culture to be the memory of a society, Tartu semioticians discern three types of memory repletion: 1. The quantitative augmenting of knowledge (filling various hierarchical cells of the system of culture with various texts); 2. Restructuring in the structure of the cells; 3. Forgetting, that is, noting some occurrences that are translatable into the elements of the text and forgetting others. However, the selection of facts to be retained or forgotten always takes place according to the semiotic norms of a given culture (Lotman, Uspenskij 1975: 183).

In Tartu semiotics of culture, the mechanism of culture is triggered by two contrastive tendencies: the tendency for the *growth of heterogeneity* and the opposing force, the tendency for *unification*. The first tendency shows when new constituent parts of a language are created while the homogeneity of its inner organization persists. The second tendency implies the process of unification, which can also be determined by cultural orientation. For instance if one semiotic system begins to have a dominant significance in a given culture, its structural rules begin to permeate other structures, and eventually come to overrule the totality of culture. This implies that there might be particular limits to the capacity of the collective memory, which condition uprooting one type of text by another (Lotman, Uspenskij 1975: 184).

There are two more concepts to which my analysis could be connected: Bourdieu's *habitus* and the notion of *sphericules*. Habitus can be briefly conceived of as a "strategy generating principle" (Bourdieu 1989[1977]: 72). In particular, Bourdieu proposes that

> [t]he structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of class conditions) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions: structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being a product of the obedience to rules. (Bourdieu 1989[1977]: 72)

What follows is that the habitus generates practices which might reproduce the regularities inherent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle. These practices can be explained only by "relating the objective *structure* defining the social conditions of the production of the habitus which engendered them to the conditions in which this habitus is operating , that is, to the *conjuncture* which, short of a radical transformation, represents a particular state of this structure" (Bourdieu 1989 [1977]: 78). These particular states of the structuring of habitus will be seen here as *sphericules*. Following the thought of Bourdieu, particular distinctions in iconographic canons can be treated as oppositions in "*habitus* which have been produced by *different modes of generation*" (Bourdieu 1989[1977]: 78).[5]

The 'public sphericule' as an explanatory model was proposed by Gitlin (1998): "what might be emerging are numerous public 'sphericules': 'does it not look as though the public sphere, in falling, has shattered into a scatter of globules, like mercury?'" (Gitlin 1998: 173). Cunningham further points out that

> Thinking of public sphericules as constituted beyond the singular nation-state, as global narrowcasting of polity and culture, assists in restoring them to a place — not necessarily counter-hegemonic but certainly culturally plural and dynamically contending with western forms for recognition — of undeniable importance for contemporary, culturally plural societies and any media, cultural and communication studies claiming similar contemporaneity […].

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[5]   As can be seen, the understanding of *habitus* adopted here is much broader than *habitus* understood in its restricted, narrow sense as the inculcation of the class-based familial ethos. Precisely because of their unique ontological status, icons transcend class (after all, they are equally venerated and possessed by rich and poor alike.

> The key, as Hartley and McKee identify, is the degree of control over the meanings created about and within the sphericule (2000: 3, 7) and by whom this control is exercised. (Cunningham 2001: 133–134)

With the theoretical underpinnings presented above, the analytical approach adopted in this study consisted in subcategorizing the corpus of collected representations of the persona of St. Nicholas into several threads, which I propose to call sphericules, as "global narrowcasting of polity and [or] culture" (Cunningham 2001: 133). They are understood as code arrangements, functioning as particular semiotic monads, CC (cultural code type), 1–4. The discussion compares CCs of different types both traditional and modern — as between representations of Nicholas as *Saint* and Nicholas as *Santa*. The first section focuses on a more traditional view of iconography (CC 1 and 2), the subsequent sections reveal the cultural codes implicated in the remaining two:

1) CC1 (sphericule 1) Orthodox devotional and sacred representations (icons)[6];
2) CC2 (sphericule 2) Western Christianity: devotional and sacred representations;
3) CC3 (sphericule 3) Slavic secular and folk representations;
4) CC4 (sphericule 4) Pan-cultural hyper-secular representations.

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[6]   With the caveat that icons do not simply 'show' the transcendental, but they make it present, as (unlike Western sacred representations) they are not completely separate from their referents.

1. Some aspects of semiotic value: Sphericules CC1 and CC2

The discussion in this section concentrates on some simple symbols and the representations of corporeality as the carriers of social codes. The iconographic elements of St Nicholas which I have singled out for this study as carrying the greatest load of symbolic value are *attributes* and *hand gestures*. The discussion starts by inspecting symbolic value relations in the religious representations of St Nicholas. This involves mainly paintings, sculptures and icons[7] reflecting the cult of St Nicholas and dated not later than the 19th century. In medieval times in particular, Christian culture did not grant autonomy to the body. According to Schmitt (2006: 67), the body was thought to be a shell (*foris*), and the soul the inside (*intus*); the two communicate only through an intricate web of influences and signs. The body in medieval Christian culture is thus the headquarters of sin, it is responsible for the fall of humanity, but at the same time it is a promise of salvation and can become an instrument of redemption: "Control, discipline, even torture of the flesh is, in medieval devotion, not so much the rejection of physicality as the elevation of it [...] into a means of access to the divine" (Caroline Walker Bynum 1989: 162, quoted in Varga 2005: 213). In this study, however, the focus is not so much on the body itself, as on the body as a carrier of the modellizing concepts.

Table 1 shows the inventory of cult and simple devotional symbols which I have singled out from the collected database of representations of St Nicholas.[8] Their semiotic value is signposted by the division into two planes: *d* (divine) and *e* (earthly).

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[7]   I do realize that such a categorization entails abstraction and generalization. 'Icons' in fact subsume a multitude of schools and standards, for example, Greek or Russian icons; Pskov, Kievian Rus', etc. Only the iconographic canons remain constant but the manner of rendering is subject to diachronic variegation (Beata Wewiórka, personal communication). For relevant studies of Russian icons, see for example Alpatov (1978); Uspenskij, B. (1975[1973]); Uspenskij, L. (1993).

[8]   The data sample for my study consists of 350 devotional, cult and secular images of the figure of Saint Nicholas. This is a selected sub-section of the resources

Table 1. The specification of iconographic attributes in Western and Eastern devotional representations of St Nicholas.

Attribute	Western		Eastern	
	optional	*obligatory*	*optional*	*obligatory*
Nimbus (*d*)	+			+
Mitre (*e*)		+	+	
Stole (*d/e*)	+			+
Bible (*d*)	+			+
Three golden balls (*e*)	+		-	
Crosier (*e*)	+		-	
Blessing (*d*)	+			+
Figures of Jesus and Mary (or metonymically, some letters from their names with tildes (*d*))	-			+

collected by the author in the form of pictures of the representations encountered in fieldwork, (2006–2010), a well as those which were accessible through databases of several History of Art Institutes (for example, *Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur* — Marburg University Database for 2006–2007 (www.bildindex.de), National Library of the Netherlands, French Ministry of Culture, Iconclass Libertas edition, ethnographic resources and the book on Silesian religious painting by Lubos-Kozieł (2004), ethnographic and history of art books and articles (for example, Pośpiech 1987; Kurek 1973; resources at www.stnicholascenter.org; www.focdarley.org; exhibition *Św. Mikołaj w PRL-u* held at Muzeum Śląska Opolskiego in Opole in 2009 and the author's private collection of postcards. To arrive at the compilation in Table 1, a simple test was run: if the attribute occurs in all representations, it is obligatory, if not, it is optional. For a detailed statistical study of St Nicholas' attributes, and for a semiotic commutation test which showed how texts outlived the codes, see Haładewicz-Grzelak 2009. At the end of the references there is a reference list which provides some of the works on Saint Nicholas.

Figure 1. The entrance to the St Nicholas' church in Litohoro (Greece). The icon is placed to the right of the entrance and the people entering the church make a cross sign as well as kiss the icon (source: author).

Figure 2. A detail from the canonical representation. Mary (to the left of St Nicholas) is giving him the bishop's stole. Icon, possibly 17th century, property of Jakub Zaborowski.

It can be noticed that there is an interesting interplay of the obligatory/optional distribution combined with the parameter of earthly/divine power. First of all, it might be observed that all the attributes in the Orthodox (Eastern Christianity) renditions are obligatory. This means that they occur in all iconic representations. There is only one optional element in Eastern Christian representations of St Nicholas — the mitre. The mitre is in turn the only obligatory element in the Western canons.[9] Bearing in mind that the mitre is a symbol of the

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[9]   Plus, in negative terms, the absence of the figures of Jesus and Mary in the gesture of giving the Bible and the stole. That absence, by the way, could be interpreted as a tendency towards contrast: again, without any external verification, it seems that this canon was very deeply grounded in the Orthodox representations and chronologically later Western iconography sought some distinction from the Eastern canons, hence the painters carefully avoided these scenes.

bishop's office and the nimbus or cloud is "a device symbolizing sanctity, usually a radiance or a bright circle",[10] the shift in the canon can be interpreted as a shift of focus from Divine (icons) to Earthly (Western representations). In Lotman's terms, the mitre *versus* nimbus distinctions might be said to fulfil the function of a codal dominant (*кодовой доминанты*) (see Lotman, J. 2002[1967]: 59).

Among the obligatory elements in the icons there is only one that I have classified as 'earthly': the stole. The rest fall under 'divine value'. However, the exact status of the *omorphor* (stole) is hard to establish because it is usually re-written in the main text of the icon in the divine gesture of Mary (see Fig. 2). That repetition might prompt the interpretation that the stole in Orthodox iconography denoted purely divine reference, given directly by the Virgin Mary, and not the power of the institution. On the basis of this analysis we will get only the divine power attributes in Orthodox icons versus the predominance of the earthly dimension of power in Western iconography.

A gesture that is entirely absent from the iconic renditions of St Nicholas is the gesture of holding a crozier. The crozier is one of the most frequently occurring iconographic attributes of St Nicholas in Western Christianity and I have classed it as obligatory. The crozier
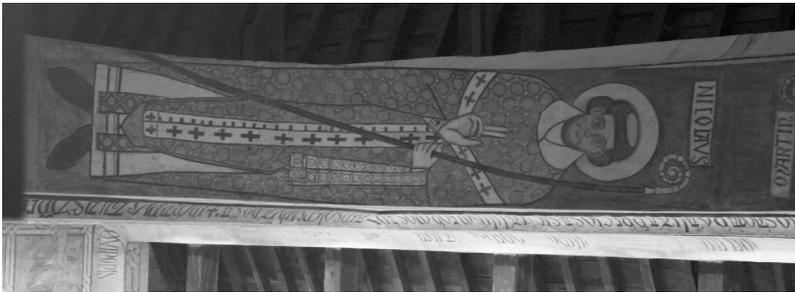

Figure 3. A fresco of Saint Nicholas on a vault, the museum of Councils and Visigoth culture, Toledo, 13th century (source: author).

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[10]   The definition is taken from a web resource, available at www.li.suu.edu/library/humtxt/glossary/glossary.htm

is a hooked staff, shaped like a shepherd's crook, that is given to bishops at their consecration as a symbol of pastoral office.[11] None of the Orthodox representations of St Nicholas I was able to access shows this appurtenance. This complementary distribution might thus be considered a distinctive element in the inventory of the simple symbols present in icons and Western Christian paintings: the crozier occurs quite frequently in Western representations of St Nicholas and is the only attribute that never occurs in Orthodox canons, hence it can be considered another codal dominant.[12]

In this connection it might be observed that the obligatory gesture in Eastern iconography of Saint Nicholas was the blessing, as a transfer of the divine power onto the reader of an icon. Given that the most frequent (but not obligatory) Western iconographic attribute is the crozier, it follows that the most frequent hand shape is a clenched fist. The clenched fist has a very particular meaning: it most usually implies power and control (Schmitt 2006). In terms of dimensions, the crozier is very thin, hence the action of clenching and holding onto it is particularly conspicuous. In terms of symbolic power, by the fact that it is accompanied by the mitre, the crozier is functionally closer to the *skeptron* "that in Homer, is passed to the orator who is about to speak" (Bourdieu 1991: 109), than it is to the crook used by a shepherd.

Juxtaposing the visual texts in Figs. 1–2 with those in Figs. 4–6 brings to the fore the divergent cultural codes behind them. In the latter selection we can see an iconographic strategy to accumulate as much symbolic prestige as possible. For example, in Fig. 4 the left hand is clenched on the sceptre and holds an *omophor* or stole at the same time. The right hand supports the Bible with three golden balls. In Fig. 5. the iconographic (textual) problem (two hands, four attributes) has

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[11]   It represents a shepherd's staff, as the bishop is the shepherd of his people, and as Jesus is the 'good shepherd' (http://stnicholas.kids.us).

[12]   Of course, I do not imply that the gesture of holding as such is altogether absent from Orthodox canons. For example, St George is always shown with the spear piercing the dragon; very often the representations of women saints are shown holding a cross. I claim that this fact does not invalidate my thesis but a detailed discussion is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Figure 4. Bonn 1326/ 1351. Catholic church Saint Sebastian © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

Figure 5. Saint Nicholas about 1864. Painting in the altar in the church of Saint Nicholas in Wleń (Poland). [photo: courtesy of Joanna Lubos-Kozieł (2004)]

been solved by including an angel who is presenting golden balls on the Bible. In this way the Bishop's hands are free for the blessing and for holding the crozier. In Fig. 6, similarly, angels[13] play a crucial compositional role: the action of holding the crozier is 'transferred' to them and St. Nicholas seems to be caught in the moment of being given the crozier. The Bible is slightly tilted, yet, the three golden balls which are

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[13]   Possibly they could be three children whom, according to apocrypha, Nicholas the Wonderworker brought to life after they had been chopped up and put into marinade by a villain butcher.

Figure. 6. Gregorio de Ferrari (1647-1726). Saint Nicholas of Bari. Exhibited at Museum of art in Sevilla. Source: author.

positioned on it, do not fall down. In this way, the "physical" world is subjugated to the artistic world rather than spiritual world: to achieving two diagonal compositional lines which crisscross at the point there the omophor ends. A caveat is in order at this point. Both types of sacred visual texts (Eastern and Western Christianity) symbolically accumulated social prestige under the cover of producing a purely aesthetic effect. Especially in the 19th century the market for icons was booming in Russia. Icons were brought by the cartful from the interior and stocked in workshops all over the country. Specialized teams of artisans concentrated either on renovating the specimens which were in good condition, or, where the original design had been unreadable, skilfully forging icons on boards of much earlier date.[14]

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[14]   Beata Wewiórka, personal communication, November 2007.

Certain Church style pictorial codes emerged over time and later on became institutionalized, and that was true both for Orthodox and Western Christianity. The choice of colours was the most conspicuous way of accumulating symbolic prestige. As Baxandall showed in his seminal study of Italian Renaissance painting (1988: 11ff), art commissioners often requested that paintings include lapis lazuli-based aquamarine dye, which was generally assumed to be the most expensive and difficult to obtain. On the other hand, Lotman points out that if the sky in the texts of the 12th century is never called "azure" or "blue" and if the gold on the background of an icon undoubtedly for the spectator of the time renders the correct colour of the sky it becomes evident that we are dealing with completely different models of ethical space or of colours (Lotman, J. 1973 [1970]: 43).

Bourdieu's (1991) notion of *institution* should be recalled here, conceived of as a durable set of social relations, imbuing individuals with power or status. What follows is that the difference between Eastern and Western Christianity's iconography of St Nicholas can be hypothesized as an emphasis on control and the value of the office (Western), *versus* an emphasis on the transcendental connection (Eastern).[15] Western iconography was thus interpreted to emphasize the institution, while the Eastern canons seem to be more concerned with the *theosis*[16], which of course does not mean to say that either aspect cannot be present in the respective canons, or that these aesthetic canons are the viable measure of what was socially behind them. The results may also imply a structural correlation between the blessing in the Eastern representations and the staff in the Western ones: both tend to be performed with the right hand and are the most frequent carrier of the code.

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[15] Tartu scholars put a great emphasis on the semiotic value. For example, Piatigorskij and Lotman point out a set of oppositions with respect to the ways of preserving a text. One of them is an antithesis of valuable : invaluable with respect to the material on which the text is preserved, a distinction which is extended to the content of the text as such (Pjatigorski, Lotman 1975: 102).

[16] Deification, or the process of transformation of a believer by putting the spiritual teachings of Jesus Christ into practice. See also Uspenskij, B. 1975[1965] for a study of the rules of semantic composition in icons.

2. The non-devotional presence of the bishop of Myra in cultural space (the white Santa): CC 3

This section briefly discusses the secular presence of St Nicholas in Eastern Europe, the type of iconographic canons which might be called "non-devotional".[17] For example, in Russia icons of St Nicholas had a very special status and it was believed that his icons were immanently miraculous (Uspenskij, B. 1985: 34). But apart from the devotional image of a benevolent saint, there has long existed an undercurrent of ludic or dark connotations. Pessel (2001: 50) mentions that in hagiographic medieval tales this hero could often be a villain: the bishop of Myra was connoted not only with the *Civitas Dei* but also with *Civitas Diabolicum*: the world *à rebours* [turned upside down], connoted with waggishness and merriment of a carnivalesque nature. According to Heers (as quoted in Pessel 2001: 50), St Nicholas' day, celebrated at the beginning of December, was, in Mediaeval Europe, the starting point for a few weeks of festivities and liturgical dances, taking place in colleges and cathedrals. According to Topp (2004: 141), in medieval culture the 'serene' St Nicholas appeared side by side with the jester bishop.

Interestingly, the place where these twins met was at school. School was the place where hagiographic performances showing scenes from the saint's life first started to appear. Since the 13th century, St Nicholas had been used to evaluate progress in learning, fluency in catechism and earnestness in complying with God's commandments. More importantly, he inflicted punishment and granted rewards. To this end, Nicholas was assisted by either bad spirits or his own dark alter ego — Father Fouettard, Hans Trapp in Alsatia, etc. (Topp 2004: 140). The process is concisely described by Uspenskij (1985: 15; see also Brock 1972): the Christian saints supplanted pagan gods and hence they were

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[17]   The topic of the folkloric presence of St Nicholas is an intricate one and its detailed analysis falls beyond the thematic scope of the present paper (see Brock 1972; resources at www.stnicholascenter.org ; www.focdarley.org for some aspects of the secular presence in Western Europe).

unavoidably imbued with an array of features of pagan provenance. Topp (2004) shows that 'the Nicholas' (in his secular image, resembling a gnome-like creature) that started to appear on Russian postcards in the 19ᵗʰ century was in fact of western provenance. Maybe it was this alien borrowing that facilitated his transformation into Ded Moroz [Grandfather Frost]: the Orthodox icon cannot on any account transform into a postcard (Topp 2004: 139).

Nowak (2002), Pośpiech (1987) and Boris Uspenskij (1985) provide an exhaustive list of references and analyses of folk customs throughout Poland and Russia connected with St Nicholas. The most recurrent and relevant to the discussion of schemata can be summarised as follows:

1. The most characteristic and universal expression of appeal for special protection and favour with the saint is the custom of giving children the name of the patronus, as well as naming churches or placing shrines near country roads. For example, according to Pośpiech (1987: 23), in the region of Silesia there are over 100 churches, chapels, shrines and hospitals devoted to Saint Nicholas.[18]

2. St Nicholas was the patron of cattle and other farm animals. Most importantly, he was supposed to protect the farm animals from wolves. Quite common was also the custom of rajtanie: riding on horseback around St Nicholas churches. The effigies of St Nicholas were placed not only in chambers but also in cowsheds, pigsties and stables.

3. By further semiotic extension, in some regions he also became the patron of wolves (Nowak 2002: 184). Wolf-hunting was supported by prayers to the wolves' patron. It was also believed that on St Nicholas Day the wolves gather in packs and it was forbidden to spin wool on that day, for breaking this injunction would result in the wolves getting at the cattle and/or getting tangled in the thread. This belief was especially widespread in Russia. Uspenskij reports that the cowboys' greeting was "Nicholas in the herd" (Uspenskij, B. 1985: 76).

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[18]   Pośpiech also mentions that the Silesian town of Brzeg (in Poland) adopted Saint Nicholas as its patron. His day was celebrated officially by refraining from any labour and fasting (Pośpiech 1983: 23).

4. In many regions on St Nicholas' Day (December 6) or its eve, farmers fasted to protect their cattle from predatory animals (see Nowak 2002: 185).

5. St Nicholas was also the patron of bees and beekeepers (Uspenskij, B. 1985; Nowak 2002).

6. Uspenskij remarks that in Russia St Nicholas had a very special status. Sometimes he was even thought to belong to the Holy Trinity or identified with Jesus Christ (Uspenskij, B. 1985: 20ff). Uspenskij also mentions two possible "contaminations" of St Nicholas's persona in Russia: with the Archangel Michael (Uspenskij, B. 1985: 43ff) and also with the eastern Slavic Volos (ibid., 60ff). Volos was reported to be the pagan patron of cattle and, according to Uspienski, the most important cult centres of St Nicholas in Russia were erected where formerly there had been pagan shrines devoted to Volos.

The structural paradigm adopted here allows us to capture the mechanism of semiotic grafting: the cultural codes transform a piece of information from one context, and graft them onto another context, for example, from a maritime tale to a peasant's tale. Figure 7 shows the mechanism of such grafting:
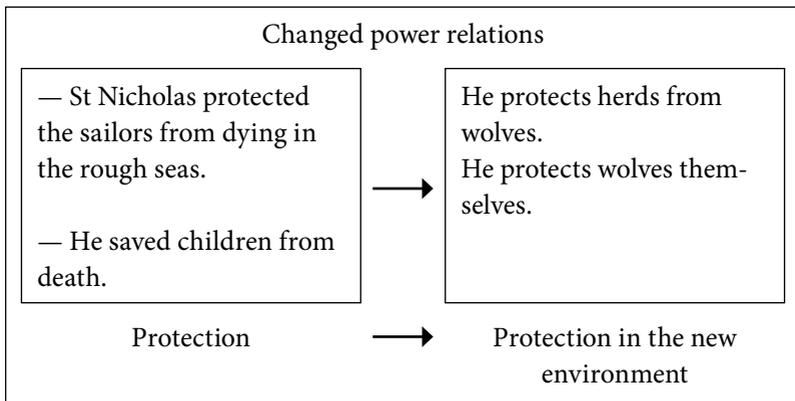

Figure 7. An illustration of the mechanism of apocryphal grafting.

Protecting cattle from wolves invokes the only 'palpable' enemy for a peasant community. Just as in the *Apocrypha* the Bishop was able to provide protection from injustice, from hunger and from rough seas, so in Russia and Poland he kept domestic beasts safe from wolves: the protective aspect was grafted onto the particular social conditions of country life in these regions. Remarkably, the process was further extended to protecting the wolves themselves and imploring their favour. Furthermore, both Uspenskij (1985) and Pośpiech (1987) mention that the effigy of St Nicholas (an icon or a figurine in the respective Eastern and Western representations) could be punished by castigating or burning it if the saint misbehaved, that is, did not grant what was asked of him. This phenomenon can be explained structurally by the violating of the borders of artistic space. As Uspenskij points out, the very tendency to infringe upon artistic space is comprehensible: its function is the maximally close approach of the depicted world to the real world and is a manifestation of a general tendency to abolish 'frames' (Uspenskij, B. 1975[1973]: 221). Finally, the data show the structural necessity of undertaking an effort for moral edification and

Figure 8. Participants in a Nicholas play in the village of Jaworzynka (Beskid Żywiecki, Poland). A ritual contingent on the day of Saint Nicholas. Reproduced with permission from *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* (Kurek 1973: 207, 209).

strengthening the will. In other words, grace and mercy had to be earned by some effort on the part of the supplicant. The effort was usually foregoing something , as in almsgiving or most frequently, fasting.

Figures 8 to 12 provide empirical support for positing the cultural text of the eastern Slavic White Santa as an individual type of cultural code, CC 3. This type of iconographic representation might be called non-devotional; however, it still retains the 'attached' sacred element: the persona is still recognized as a bishop and wears a bishop's garb or a folk stylization of such clothes (see for example the staff in Fig. 10 which sort of came back to the "original": it is a an ordinary piece of wood. While the CC 1 and CC 2 still exist and coexist, CC 3 has completely disappeared from the Polish cultural landscape. The "white" St Nicholas withstood decades of socialist anti-religious indoctrination and resisted the impact of the brotherly nation's Ded Moroz, but was eradicated irretrievably in the 1980s by the red Santa. We can see here an example of Lotman's assumption that the dominant code tends to permeate other cultural structures. Cultural memory seems indeed to be limited. The two secular Santas, the white and the red, could not co-exist.

Figures 9–10. Nicholases from Brenna near Cieszyn, Poland. 1937. Pictures reproduced with permission from Pośpiech (1987: 26f).

Figure 11. Santa's visit to a kindergarten, Opole, Poland, the 1970s. The photos appeared at the exhibition Święty Mikołaj w PRL-u [Santa in the People's Republic of Poland] at Muzeum Śląska Opolskiego in December 2008.
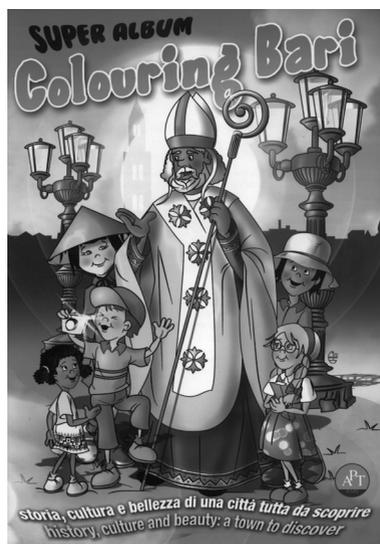

Figure 12. A colouring book on the city of Bari, conceived by Antonio Stornaiolo. Issued and distributed free of charge by the City of Bari (author's collection).

3. The eschatology of moral issues: The *Rute* as an index of axiological values

This section analyzes another aspect of the iconographic canons present in CC 3: *Rózga* (birchwood)[19], which I assume to be the index of axiological issues present in the cultural codes ('the birch wood' is shown as carried by Ruprecht in the graphic in Fig. 15). The axiological dimension of cultural texts was of crucial concern to Tartu scholars: as Lotman points out, the conceptualizing of culture as the non-inherited memory of a collective does not rule out an axiological approach to culture: in fact, for a given collective, culture always appears as a defined

Figure 13. Two Santas and a snowman as a Christmas decoration on a gas station, Opole, Poland, 2008. (Source: author).

Figure 14. A Czech postcard, courtesy of St Nicholas centre.

[19]   The *rózga* or birchwood refers here to a bunch of birch twigs that are bound together from one end, forming a broom-like instrument for spanking children. The translation difficulty arises from the fact that in Anglo-Saxon culture this aspect of Saint Nicholas's activities is nonexistent. The evaluation customs are however still universally known, though no longer taken seriously, in Germany. The German lexeme is "Rute" [Patricia Skorge, personal communication October 2007].

system of values (Lotman, J. 2002 [1977]: 88). Axiology is also an inherent part of the concept of habitus. According to Casey, "habitus as a social figure presupposes a constant dialogue between individuals and communities in order to come into being. Inherent in this dialogue is the production of moral judgments; who is 'right', 'good', 'worse' or 'unnatural'. Habitus thus is a key to understanding moral attitudes produced between nature and culture" (Casey as cited in Setten 2004: 40f). In this sense, the parameter of presence : absence of *Rózga* in the iconography of St Nicholas can be seen as an index of morality issues: according to Luckmann, the fate of morality in many ways resembled that of religion. In archaic societies religion, morality and law had a common basis in the social structure. "At the moral heart of moral order of every society there was a clearly articulated conception of the good life. The overall significance of the moral order was legitimized by the systematic reference to a transcendental sacred universe even when morality and religion were no longer conceived to be identical" (Luckmann 2003: 279).

My interpretation of the changes of the secular iconography of Saint Nicholas and of related customs seems to corroborate all these hypo- theses. Moral evaluation was for example implicated in a folk figure, Knecht Ruprecht (Fig. 15). The text for the picture in Fig. 15 mentions that for pre-Christian cultures Christmas was the time to observe the feast called Jul, where the God Wuotan was honoured. Knecht Ruprecht seemed to be such 'domesticated' God Woutan, who called on the houses, asking whether children were obedient and gave them nuts and apples if so (*Deutscher Hauschschatz in Wort und Bild* 1875/1876: 272)[20].

In Poland it was the persona of Saint Nicholas who evaluated directly the moral conduct of children (see Section 2). The oldest report from Silesia was provided by Hytrek (quoted in Pośpiech 1983: 24) and comes from the second half of the 19th century. Nicholas walks around the village in his bishop's garments, long-bearded. First he knocks at the door with a birch and starts examining children. Those who are

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[20]   Knecht Ruprecht could also be thought of as a servant of St Nicholas (Patricia Skorge, personal communication September 2010).

Figure 15. The German figure, Knecht Ruprecht, visiting children on Christmas. In: *Deutscher Hauschschatz in Wort und Bild* Jahrgang 2, 1875/1876: 269.

obedient and know how to pray are given sweets. Those who have mis-behaved and are lazy are slapped with the birch (Pol. *rózga*) (Pośpiech 1983: 24). St Nicholas' day in Poland thus used to be a trial and a recap of the yearly conduct of children, a sort of micro-judgement day. It was never certain who would be punished and who rewarded. Ziółkowska (cited in Topp 2004) observes that particularly in the Catholic tradi-tion this [pedagogic] function of gift-giving survived much longer. In Poland in the18th century the gifts that were brought by St Nicholas were usually medallions, crosses, pictures of saints, cages with birds *to instil a sense of responsibility towards animals in their care* and for those who misbehaved, birches.[21] However in Protestant circles the custom of

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[21]   An advert from December 1886 issue of *Schlesisches Pastoralblatt,* a Catholic pe-riodical appearing in Silesia, seems to capture a period of transition: both denomi-nations of "Saint Bishop Nicholas" (the friend of children) and "Klausentag" appear. The ad recommends buying a book about "Der heil. Bischof Nikolaus, der liebe Kinder-freund […]. Obiges Büchlein ist das netteste Geschenk für den "Klausentag".

gift giving became most of all a confirmation of the importance of the child in the family as well as the importance of family as such (Topp 2004: 143).

The birchwood disappeared from the visual archeology of Poland in the 80s. Of course, it did not vanish all of a sudden. For some years there existed the 'lenited', commercial version: a small bundle of twigs decorated with glittery golden dye, which could be purchased in shops and given to friends on the 6th December as a humorous gift. However, soon this version disappeared as well, which in semiotic terms indicates the fact that the aspect of moral evaluation has become completely dissociated from the persona of Santa. My mini-study conducted recently among Polish kindergarten children showed that currently most of them do not know what a birch (*rózga*) is, nor when you can get the birch. This implies that the moral judgment concomitant with St Nicholas' day is disappearing in consumerist culture. Basically, as long as you have economic resources (you pay for it), you are sure to get your gift. In pragmatic terms it means that commercial ingratiation tends to supplant moral evaluation.

4. Elenchus: A simulacrum and hyper-reality (CC 4)

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or a reality: a hyper-real. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory — precesion of simulacra *— that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map (Baudrillard 2006: 1).*

This section briefly contextualizes the hyper-real rendition by the rhetoric of simulation. According to Baudrillard (1983), the logic of simulation has no bearing on truth value and the order of action, which leads to the destruction of *sense*. Since the truth conditions cannot be determined with respect to simulacras, ontological choices are redundant, just as they were redundant in devotional iconography. More specifically,

> [t]here is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. There is an escalation of the true, of the lived experience; a resurrection of the figurative when the object and the substance have disappeared and there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us — a strategy of the real, neo-real and hyper real whose universal double is a strategy of deterrence. (Baudrillard 2006: 12f)

In terms of the argument presented *supra,* the persona of Santa can thus be interpreted as an epitome of simulacra: the situation in post-modern society where reality implodes into its signs and the model precedes facts, generating thus hyper-reality. In this elenchus I would like to show briefly how the Santa's simulacrum works.

All Scandinavian countries compete heavily for appropriating the right to lodge Santa's house. According to Pessel (2001: 51) Finnish travel agencies invested millions of markkas to promote Rovaniemi as the birthplace of Santa Claus (the competitors are Drøbak in Norway and Mora in Sweden). Only in Scandinavia, Santa is a money making device churning out thousands of millions of crowns every year (Pessel 2001: 47). This is done in terms of launching Santa-airlines, the creation of Santa-parks and Santa's Villages (for example, Santaworld), where whole families go to experience a hyper-variegated number of attractions. Leppänen and Pietikäinen conclude similarly that

> in marketing the Lapland Christmas, Finnish tourism agencies have created a range of virtual multimodal sites in which Christmas is marketed to and 'pre-experienced' by potential tourists. In this process, the geographical locations have been discursively transformed into a fictional and mythological

Figure 16. Crowds of visitors in Santa Claus Village 2005. Rovaniemi (Finland). Author: Ulla (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rovaniemi_pajakyla_2. jpg). Picture released into the public domain.

Christmasland which have shifting and somewhat ambiguous relations to the Finnish and Sami cultures indigenous in this region.[22]

According to the Tartu semiotics paradigm, the delimitation (border) is proper to a text. In this respect, the text opposes all materialized signs that do not enter its ensemble, according to the principle of inclusion/ non-inclusion. On the other hand, it also opposes all the structures whose limits are not clearly defined. The concept of the border in many ways manifests itself in texts of different types: the frame in the painting, the proscenium arch at a theatre (Lotman, J. 1973: 92f). The juxtaposition of some of the aspects of CC 2 and CC 4 highlights the impermeable nature of the borders between particular monads.

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[22]   Leppänen, Sirpa; Pietikäinen, Sari 2007. Looking for Father Christmas: The post-authentic reconstruction of Christmas on tourism Web sites (Paper presented at International Conference Language ideologies and media discourse: Texts, prac- tices, policies. 3–6 September, Leeds).

Figure 17. The basilica with Saint Nicholas' relics in Bari (Italy). The picture was taken at the peak of tourist season (Source: author).

The Bishop of Myra, Saint Nicholas, died in Myra (Demre, Turkey) on the 6th December (the year of his death is usually given within the span 345–352 A.D) and in 1087 his relics were transmitted to Bari, which marked the beginning of his posthumous journey. According to the study by Pessel (2001: 46), the number of visitors to Nicholas's grave in Bari[23] is extremely small compared to the numbers of people visiting Ravenna Cathedral, not to mention the multitudes of tourists passing nearby on the way to Greece and the Balkans.[24] A remarkable fact is

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[23]   Bari as the burial site of St Nicholas has been disputed. Some argue that his body is in Venice (Chiesa di San Niccolò), others that it is in Myra. Discussion of such issues, just as many others connected with "Western" versus "Eastern" dyad, fall outside the thematic scope of the present paper.

[24]   A guide I was using while travelling in Italy described Bari as "the place of burial of Saint Nicholas, *the patron saint of Russia* [emphasis mine, MHG]." The addition of the second phrase is significant from the point of view of cultural codes and the concept of mental borders. The description was not simply, "the burial place of Saint Nicholas," or "of Santa". If this second phrase ("the patron of Russia") had not been added, as a native speaker of Polish, I would naturally have read it as "the burial place

that Saint Nicholas' relics, which can be visited in Bari, are myroblotic. This means that for nine hundred years they have been transuding a sort of a miraculous balm which is called "manna", extracted yearly by the church officials in Bari and collected in special gourds. This phenomenon is perfectly in compliance with the tenets of the Catholic and Orthodox teaching, which assumes that the state of sainthood affects both the spiritual sphere and the body.[25] If we assume that being myroblotic for nine centuries defies any scientific explanation and touches the domains of the inexplicable, it becomes evident that the simulacrum has overruled and foreshadowed not only the reality but even the spiritual. Hardly anybody in Western cultures knows about the myroblotic relics of Saint Nicholas in Bari but most children in the world know that Santa lives on the North Pole or in Finland.

Santa seems thus to have assumed the status of a simulacrum faith. The belief that Santa will come and bring a gift is practically a unique act of faith expected of all children, regardless of their religion. It is a simulacrum faith because this can be verified on two levels. On one level, the verification is positive and consists in seeing either the results of Santa's visit in the form of gifts or seeing Santa himself. On another level, it is a negative verification because unavoidably this act of faith is doomed to failure. The child sooner or later discovers that Santa / Saint Nicholas (Pol. *Święty Mikołaj*)[26] does not exist; the only thing that exists in the form of alethic truth are representations of Santa.

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of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker", since, in Polish, both Santa and St Nicholas are called *Święty Mikołaj*. The addition of the italicized phrase is sociolinguistically marked; it prevents the default reading and implies a conscious effort to break the connection between the two personae. I interpret this strategy as a mechanism of the CC 4 monad to break the 'umbilical cord' of CC 2 and CC 3, from which it was grafted onto new cultural territory.

[25] "When a man attains sainthood, both his soul and his body are sanctified. And this is why holy relics (the bodies of the saints) have the power to emit divine grace and blessing, why they often excude a beautiful fragrance and have miracle-working powers" [an inscription I found in a refectory in one of the monasteries in Meteora, Greece. MHG]

[26] For example, in Poland there has never been a taxonomic split between the two personae: both Santa and Saint Nicholas are called *Święty Mikołaj,* 'Saint Nicholas'.

While the photos in Fig. 15 and Fig. 16 point to the difference between CC 2 and CC 4 (the sacrum and the simulacrum), the photos in Fig. 13. and 14. capture the difference between reality and hyper-reality (CC3 and CC4). In Fig. 14. St Nicholas has a secular attribute, a bag, yet the drawing still manages to capture the aspect of veneration and an emotional bond, as well as the religious décor, in spite of its non-devotional secular character. The Bishop is rendered as a central figure, surrounded by angels/children. There is a visible element of poverty (an old patched bag) in the focal point of the postcard, which is counter-balanced by the content of the basket carried by one of the angels. The photo in Fig. 13. shows a hyper-secular representation. We can see a visual replication of one pattern, which reinforces the commercial impact. There is a proliferation of Coca-Cola's marketing attributes, the most conspicuous being the red colour.[27] The visual text captures (and maybe perpetuates) the main ideological cornerstones of consumerism: the multiplication and hyper-production of reality and the propagation of opulence.

Conclusions

According to Lotman, the 'reader' would understand the norms which apply on a given level as 'sensible' (having sense) only by applying separate coding structures. Any attempt to apply a different code results in classifying a given message as lacking logic or absurd: the reader cannot decipher it. For example, the norms of behaviour of a knight and a monarch can be contrary on one level, but this contrariety is the opposition within one system. That is why on another level this

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In Greece, on the other hand, St Basil is the one who brings presents to the children, and not St. Nicholas; Santa is perceived as a westernized and commodified corruption, totally separate from the actual saint.

[27] I conducted some mini research, investigating the colours of Christmas. Interestingly, both the internet sources and interviews showed an unquestionable preference for red as the colour of Christmas, because "Santa is in red".

opposition can be reduced to an invariant codifying structure. Hence the structure of the hierarchy of cultural codes is an important aspect of their characteristics, for example, there are possible types that differ in the structure of partial codes but are invariant from the point of view of their co-relations (Lotman, J. 2002[1967]: 58).

Below I propose a model of several coding structures that were singled out from the data. The juxtaposition of the 'cultural monads' along the axis of sacrum reference/ lack of sacrum reference is provided in Table 2.

Figure 18. A relief of Saint Nicholas over the entrance to the orthodox Saint Nicholas church in Korčula, Croatia. Saint Nicholas was the only Orthodox saint who was permitted to have three-dimensional representations. (Source: author)

Figure19. The portal of St Nicholas Chapel. Worms, ca. 1320. © Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

Table 2. A structural breakdown of the 'cultural monads' (CCs) according to the element +/– active and +/– sacred.

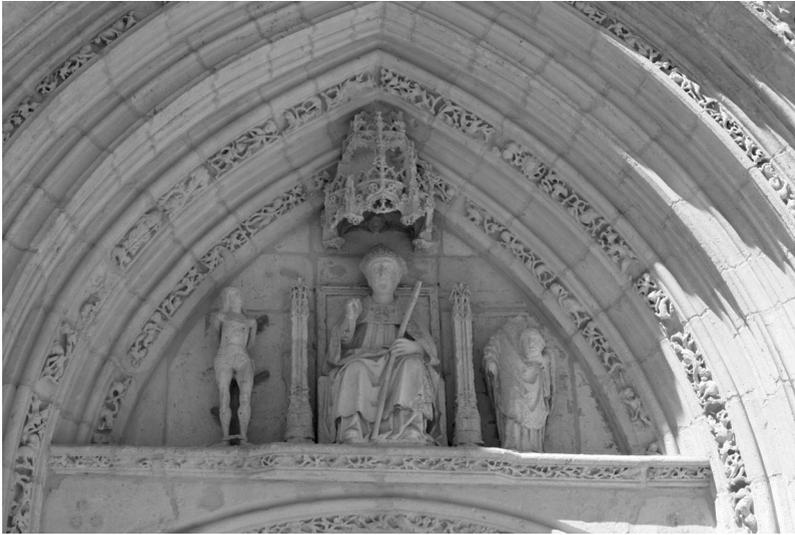|	+ active	– active
+ sacred	- Connection with the legend of the Bishop's caring about the destitute/ reference to providing dowries/ working miracles to those who asked him for help - Imploring the Saint for help and protection through prayer and worship - Moral judgment: distinction between good versus bad deeds. A person worshipping the Saint and seeking his protection was also supposed to pursue the positive values the Saint connoted (benevolence, altruism, etc)	
– sacred	- Connection with the legend of the Bishop's caring about the destitute/ reference to providing dowries/ - Moral judgment: St Nicholas gives presents only to children who deserve them, to those who throughout the year complied with the positive values denoted by the persona of St Nicholas. Conversely, children who misbehave have to reckon with the possibility of getting the birch / a symbolic punishment for their mischief.	- The reference to the Bishop's deeds uncoupled. - The new vantage point: a ubiquitous jolly dwarf giving presents on a particular day (different dates in different countries). - No moral judgment: passive axiology. Whatever a child does, as long as the parents have money, the gift is given by default.

Figure 20. The entrance of the St Nicholas church in Toledo, Spain (Source: author).

The cultural codes are motivated as follows:
1) Hagiography:
    — giving to the poor (providing three dowries)
    — benevolence/ helping these in need/
    — performing miracles
2) Iconography:
    — symbols of office: ornate, mitre, crozier,
    — symbols of deeds: three golden balls, three children in bath, a ship (the least frequent).
3) Folk reinforcements:
    — the patron of cattle,
    — rescue from wolves/ rough seas,
    — giving gifts to those who deserve it: an element of judgement and conscience.
4) Simulacrum:
    — cutting off the element of conscience and judgement: all receive gifts if they can buy them,

— icon for shopping hype
— giving Santa a wife and a house in the North Pole.

A relevant derivation might look as represented in Fig. 21:

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                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │ altruism/ benevolence /giving to those in │
                    │ need/ axiological judgment          │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                              │ semiotic
                              ↓ grafting
 sociocultural      ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
 conditioning       │ giving to those you like if they are well │
 as a lateral       │ behaved / axiological judgment       │
 force              └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                              │ semiotic
                              ↓ grafting
                    ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
                    │ Giving to those who can pay / economic │
                    │ judgment                            │
                    └─────────────────────────────────────┘
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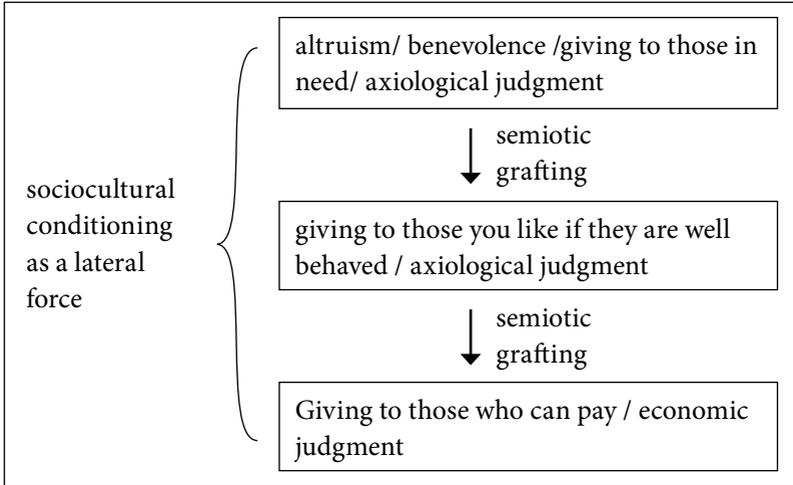
Figure 21. A proposed development of the semiosis behind the particular mapped sphericules.

In terms of reality extension, it might be concluded that:
— icons showed the divine reality,
— Western representations introduced the immediate social habitus,
— secular representations seem to be grounded in mythical reality,
— hyper-secular images derive from hyper-reality.

From the four types of cultural codes that we have singled out, the third (the white St Nicholas) has disappeared or has been supplanted by the red Coca-Cola version of the persona. The article is thus a documentary of this cultural text, which exists currently only in memories and ethnographic materials. The remaining three seem unaffected: the icons are still venerated as well as Western devotional and sacred renditions. The juxtaposition of Figs. 18–20 illustrates my assumption of St Nicholas as a *vessel*, containing different structuring of cultural codes

and carrying the load of societal values. All three photos show reliefs of St Nicholas in tympanums of churches but the three cultural texts were created in two different semiotic monads: CC 1 (Fig. 18) and CC 2 (Fig. 19 and 20). It is still worth emphasizing that these two share [+sacred] coordinates and syntagmatically are much closer to each other than to any of the representations of Santa from CC 4 (see the differences between pairs in Figs. 13 and 14, as well as between 16 and 17).

The present study mapped such transformations and bifurcations of cultural codes: from sacred Orthodox icon in the Balkans to commodified simulacrum in Western Europe via other transformations and showed that in fact there is a pragmatic connection between the stages analysed; between the renditions of Saint Nicholas in Eastern and Western renditions of Christianity and those of secular (non-devotional) and hyper-secular images. In particular, what appear to be simple symbols are in fact the rhetorical transformations of specific threads generated through the code of a particular ideology. If we take a retrospective view, we see that the popular figure of Santa would not be possible without the deeply grounded religious position of St Nicholas upon which it grew in a parasitic fashion (see Topp 2004). The figure of St Nicholas, following the conceptualization of the notion of the cultural text of the Tartu School of semiotics (see also reception theory)[28], was assumed to be a vessel which captures changes in the structuring of cultural codes in the diachronic navigation of the cultural text through the centuries and through its different geographic locations. In the words of Carol Myers from the St Nicholas Centre (Carol Myers, personal communication, February 2007), "it is much better to see Santa as a derivative of St Nicholas, different, of course. But accenting the connection allows people to understand the person behind the Santa phenomenon and to focus there, thereby providing an alternative and lessening emphasis on the consumerist bits".[29]

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[28]   On reception theory, see for example Livingstone (2005). In my opinion, reception theory does not differ much from assumptions on the function of culture that were proposed by Tartu scholars in the 1960s (see the introductory section), hence this primary, earlier source was used directly in the paper.

[29]   I am indebted to anonymous reviewers, Dr Beata Wewiórka, Dr Patricia Skorge and Dr Joanna Lubos-Kozieł for their suggestions, criticism and comments on

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Культурные коды в иконографии Санта-Клауса

В статье рассматриваются некоторые аспекты культурных кодов, применяемых в иконографии Санта-Клауса. Утверждается, что Санта-Клаус является своеобразной кладовой, которая сохраняет и собирает значения, конструируя публичную культуру. Собранный материал охватывает разные изображения Санта-Клауса с начала нашей эры до современных изображений Святого Николая, охватывая 350 средневековых репрезентаций (как западного так и восточного христианства), фольклорный материал и светские изображения. Анализ основывается на семиотике тартуской школы.

Kultuurilised koodid Püha Nikolause (Jõuluvana) ikonograafias

Käesolev artikkel käsitleb mõningaid aspekte Püha Nikolause (Jõuluvana) ikonograafias rakenduvatest kultuurilistest koodidest. Väidan, et Püha Nikolaus on justkui anum, mis talletab ja kuhjab tähendusi avaliku kultuuri loomisel. Arutluskäik algab varastest arengusuundadest kristliku ajaarvamise alguses ning jõuab välja Püha Nikolause kaasaegsete kirjeldusteni (imagoloogia). Käesolev uurimus põhineb esinduslikul materjalikogul Püha Nikolause esitistest, mis sisaldab 350 keskaegset esitist (nii Lääne kui Ida kristlusest), folkloorset materjali, aga ka ilmalikke kujutisi, ning analüüsil tuginetakse Tartu koolkonna semiootikale.