

# NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS?

A Working Paper

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A COMPLEX ETHICAL SEASON

4

ENGAGING THE 'SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS'

7

IDENTIFYING AND SUSTAINING CHANGE

11

CREATING NEW TRADITIONS

15

NOTES

18



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# A COMPLEX ETHICAL SEASON

Consumers are faced each year with profound ethical choices about consumption and packaging - choices rehearsed and discussed with friends, family and in the media. Each Christmas sees an increasing overlap between issues raised in debates over the religious significance of Christmas and issues raised in ethical or responsible consumption on a wider scale.

To the average consumer, Christmas and other religious festivals appear to be growing ever more commercial, whilst histories of commercialism and Christmas reach far back. At the same time, it is a season of high consumption when ethical considerations such as the packaging or place of manufacture of gifts are often ignored. It often seems too much to take in, or too much to take care of, how our gifts, cards and wrapping are sourced.

Nevertheless, consumers do increasingly resist the commercialism of Christmas through alternative consumption practices, taking on ethical considerations. Ethical approaches to Christmas are often led by religious or charitable organisations, yet embrace wider issues relating to all consumption which are of growing concern in daily life.<sup>i</sup>

The debates are given wide echo in the media and popular culture, and these become spaces of valuable debate for consumers and scholars.<sup>ii</sup> Television and radio broadcasting often mixes contemporary and 'classic' narrative texts of Christmas celebration and gives these preference over religious or ethical programming. Television channels and film companies establish 'classic' Christmas films and programmes to provide for advertising revenue in addition to their being consumed through on-demand services and DVD sales. Visual material used in broadcasting, advertising and marketing often makes ironic reference to Christmas festivities, including the now-traditional ethical dilemmas! It seems that traditions surrounding Christmas, both religious and secular, are regularly contested and challenged, often within, and



5

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as a necessary part of, the same celebrations.

Scholars have not been slow to recognise the concern that exists over the commercialisation of Christmas. Business studies researchers Sally McKechnie and Caroline Tynan, for example, have studied the frustrations felt by consumers that the social and moral values of gift-giving are undermined, or that social obligations of gift-giving and its related expense are 'out of hand'.<sup>iii</sup> There can be a general assumption that the ethical meanings of, or responses to, Christmas have religious origins or that solutions to the perceived commercialisation are related to religious values. While aspects of this may be true, there are also wider ethical impulses in 'secular' society. All of these might be considered with a view to where they overlap and interact with each other. This is why the roles played by cinema, news media and religious broadcasting are so important. The rituals of Christmas now involve the consumption of film and television, around which new media practices of Christmas are oriented: religious and secular broadcasting at Christmas time involves a high degree of self-awareness, with knowing winks to 'classic' Christmas programming, 'classic' movies, and 'classic' alternatives such as the 'alternative Queen's speech'.

This reflexive nature of consumption at Christmas is expressive of a wider penetration of the economy by cultural interpretation as a consumer practice, akin to what cultural scholars Scott Lash and John Urry once called 'reflexive accumulation'.<sup>iv</sup> Yet Christmas as

a cultural practice is perhaps even closer to what the great sociologist Theodor Adorno had already described as 'ironic toleration', whereby 'the consciousness of consumers themselves is split between the prescribed fun which is supplied to them by the culture industry and a not particularly well-hidden doubt about its blessings'.<sup>v</sup> What this means is that any serious exploration of contemporary ethical responses to consumption at Christmas needs to take into account the role of the debate itself within the public consciousness.

The historian Mark Connelly also stresses the cultural importance of local or national specificity to Christmas, especially when communicated via media and film. Connelly's work traces the gathering effect of references to the Englishness of Christmas, and highlights the depth to which cultural interpretations of Christmas have penetrated tradition and consumption in history: 'the English have made it [Christmas] a season of solid material comfort [and], of good fellowship'.<sup>vi</sup>

Christmas occupies an important and unique place within scholarly understanding of consumption and moral or spiritual values, as well as within consumer debates over the penetration of consumerism into traditional family celebrations and values. Christmas is also one the most important seasons of the Christian liturgical year, yet at the same time many receive the 'message' of Christmas from popular culture. Thus Christmas as a 'season of goodwill' provides a general ethical or moral flatness



I wish we would stop and appreciate the spirit of living trees (hopefully not in our living rooms) and remember to recycle our aluminum cans. More than 61 billion cans get thrown out in the United States every year, even though recycling aluminum takes only 5% of the energy that is needed to produce it from bauxite ore, not to mention the environmental consequences of its mining -- which has uprooted and displaced tens of thousands of indigenous peoples in many parts of the world (such as Suriname, Guinea, and Brazil) and left behind destroyed land. Aluminum smelting is one of the most energy-intensive processes in the world, and is responsible for huge hydroelectric power projects that have been so damaging to remote parts of Iceland, Orissa (India), Southern Africa, and Canada.

So when your life is made easier by the lightweight aluminium in the car or bus you rode in today, the airplane you might fly in on your Xmas holiday, the big trays you cooked your Xmas dinner in, the foil you used to wrap up the leftovers, or the aluminum encased laptop you used to send holiday messages and pictures to your loved ones...do the Earth a favour and remember where the metal came from and make that little effort to get it into the recycling bin - and keep doing it every day of the year.

Mimi Sheller



Image courtesy of ScottieT812, 2008. Flickr Creative Commons.

in social interaction. But this flatness also relates to the wider impact of production, distribution and other economic studies for which Christmas as a season of consumption is a point of connection. This means that Christmas is crucial to studies by Bruce Peter on the shipping of our consumer goods, for example, or for studies such as Mimi Sheller's, which traces the cultural nostalgia for 1960s aluminium Christmas trees out to the environmental impact of smelting.

In their book *Christmas Unwrapped*, US theologians Richard Horsley and James Tracy brought together scholars of religion, culture, history, politics and theology to discuss the American context. They found that Christmas is seen to demonstrate a 'religion of consumer capitalism', with religious authority given to secular behaviour.<sup>vii</sup> McKechnie and Tynan focused on the social meanings of consumption at Christmas in a British context, finding that there was 'little

evidence of religious observance amongst participants', and suggest that comparative work relating to religious observance and non-observance would constitute a fruitful area for future research.<sup>viii</sup>

Whilst Christmas studies in general emphasise the necessity of understanding the festival's relationship with consumerism, the 'uniqueness' with which Christmas is treated separates it from everyday consumption and daily life. In 1993, the anthropologist Daniel Miller, in his

development of a 'theory of Christmas', had earlier identified how Christmas is an inversion of 'normal' family relationships, yet also an embodiment of the values and importance of family in society. This suggests that the true 'value' of Christmas is in its clear illustration of the relationship that we have - or might come to expect - between consumerism and ethical wellbeing.



# ENGAGING THE 'SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS'

Whilst there is much public discussion about the problems of consumption at Christmas, this does not equate to consumers actually 'stopping to think'. Reflection, or 'stop-and-think', is a valuable part of our engagement with consumption, especially where over-laden discussion is not always a beneficial practice.

There is an aspect of cyclical forgetting to Christmas which asks us to question the 'spirit of Christmas' - at least in the social sense - as something truly universal. Perhaps the very nature of the 'spirit of Christmas' as seasonal, rather than universal, gives us an ethical alibi for the remaining eleven months of everyday consumption. The 'spirit of Christmas' is a general background in which Christmas rituals - both sacred and secular - have a high cultural and economic significance. This means that we must consider carefully the cultural and religious practices that validate Christmas, and what the intellectual underpinnings of a shared concept such as the 'spirit of Christmas' might be. How can positive moral impulses, highlighted by Christmas consumptive practices, be sustained in ordinary life?

Cyclical public debates exist around the commercialisation of Christmas, its position in mainstream culture, and what the film scholar Anna Everett once called the 'nested narratives' of the festival, which can exist within even the most apparently savvy of ironic texts.<sup>ix</sup> In 2007, for example, Christmas carols have been described as having an appeal independent of their religious message<sup>x</sup>, and the outspoken secular figure Professor Richard Dawkins once described himself as a 'cultural Christian'.<sup>xi</sup> The annual return of this debate is evidence also of a cyclical 'forgetting', which may be instrumental in understanding everyday ethical consumption. For example, whilst it seems appropriate to consider the ethical implications of Christmas cards and the massive paper waste they create, only a few



It is Christmas time again, what joy!  
All that glitters is gold  
Good cheer is everywhere  
(however forced these days the smile)  
Shop till you drop!  
Buy till you die!  
I consume therefore I am.

But if the Environment could speak,  
If oceans and forests could be heard above the human  
clamour ...

'Christmas is a rubbish tip waiting to happen

All that glitters is toxic to us

You shop, we drop!

Buy till we die!

You consume therefore we are not.'<sup>xiii</sup>

Raymond Bryant



Image courtesy of D'Arcy Norman, 2006. Flickr Creative Commons.

days later one might forget such considerations for birthdays and other celebrations.<sup>xiii</sup> From the perspective of the planet, it could be said that Christmas is an annual disaster, as geographer Raymond Bryant points out. A department store could be re-designated a landfill waiting to happen. He uses this to raise the question: what is alternative consumption? There will be good and bad alternatives, so they should

be examined carefully. Not any alternative is necessarily good.

There is a clear need for rapid progress in shaping critical and consumer approaches to the ethical and spiritual dilemmas presented by Christmas as a time for giving. Consumers resist mainstream consumerism at Christmas through alternative practices of consumption, such as charity donations, charity greetings cards,

Fair Trade and handmade gifts. This gives the debate practical as well as international dimensions, and also the capacity to reach into the future and shape the consumption practices of this and further generations. By developing effective and wide-reaching interdisciplinary connections, this also offers the possibility of developing research into spiritual and ethical approaches to consumption in the everyday, and 'not just

for Christmas'.

And yet the size and scale of the ecological, economic and cultural impact of Christmas can be overwhelming, an aspect developed by Christmas news stories of shopping mall crushes or the annual arrival of container ships at Felixstowe with the season's toy and luxury imports. The impact of Christmas is still a small part of the overall impact of consumption and the



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associated problems of climate change, waste disposal and economic overload which this brings. The role of the individual consumer can seem tiny in comparison, providing yet another potential alibi. A crucial question for this and future research is how we deal with the 'largeness' and otherness of problems relating to everyday consumption without feeling powerless.

One solution is to realise the potential of individual actions within a collective framework, in the same ways that individual acts of kindness and thoughtfulness serve to make up a socially-felt 'spirit of Christmas'. It is perhaps here that religious organizations and charities find a key commonality: they often lead in ethical approaches to Christmas, sometimes for very different reasons, yet they also embrace wider issues relating to all consumption and to the effects of individual actions. This can serve to illustrate how ethical consumers can have tremendous collective power even whilst having varied motivations. As management scholars Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw write:

**E**thical purchasers may, therefore, have political, religious, spiritual, environmental, social or other motives for choosing one product over another and ... they frequently disagree about who is right and who is wrong. The one thing they have in common is that they are concerned with the effects that a purchasing choice has, not only on themselves, but also on the external world around them.<sup>xiv</sup>

Ethical responses, such as Fair Trade,

charity donations, and gift-giving alternatives, may be embedded in shared religious and moral narratives at Christmas, yet they are also conveyed through visual culture, popular media and design choices at Christmas and throughout the year.

Yet the potential for Christmas as a season for experiencing and learning about ethical consumption is considerable in the most part because it is so difficult to ignore Christmas as an event all around us. As both public holiday and Christian feast (holy day), Christmas cannot easily be avoided – from the beginning of Advent and the 'shopping season' through to Epiphany and the January sales.

Put in spatial terms, consumption touches all the spaces we readily associate with Christmas, both public and private, sacred and secular. The high street is of course the obvious public sphere of consumption, decked out with lights and decorations intended to promote among shoppers the 'spirit' of the season. But churches are also public spaces not untouched by consumption. Fair trade and craft stalls may be located within the church hall; friends in the community may give and receive gifts. Cathedrals of significant architecture may charge an entrance fee for 'non-worshippers' to their building at Christmas and other times of the year. In the private spaces of society, homes, like the high street, may be decorated with lights, and wrapped gifts are a central part of family celebrations. The home computer or laptop can also serve as a place of consumption as goods may be purchased online to arrive in time for the day, or even 'shopped for' on the holiday



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itself; when the shopping malls are closed, the online shops remain open for business as usual.

This is not to say that the pervasiveness of consumption in these spaces is entirely negative or damaging. Chris Diamond is a ‘Santa’ every year at a well-known department store, and is quick to point out an aspect of Christmas which, if one takes away any assumptions about what we feel are the pressures of consumption, remains encouragingly fundamental:

The argument against Christmas [in particular] the popular celebration of it, the bit that I’m involved in, is that it has divorced the spiritual aspect from the crassly commercial aspect, but I just don’t believe that that’s true. The expression of it might not take place in a church, but since the whole point of people who come in to the grotto is to give, then whatever reason they have for giving can’t be a bad thing [...] boil away all the concern and the trauma and essentially what you’ve got is people who are giving for the sake of giving - to somebody else.

The question then becomes one of how keep those essential, non-negotiable aspects of Christmas which genuinely transcend debates - and the role of giving is one of them - and how to make them inspire the same in the everyday. How do we ‘keep the feast’ in a way that inspires common good and which avoids any semblance of a puritanical approach to Christmas?<sup>xv</sup> Doing so might make Christmas as much more keenly a reflection on the everyday as much as a celebration of a spirit felt once a year.

Nevertheless the impact of consumption and our role within it should give us pause to consider what is all around us, and not just during the Christmas season. If Christmas day itself now includes ‘everyday’ activities of consumption, such as shopping and using gift vouchers online, then the reverse may also be true: that Christmas practices of consumption, such as ethical consumption, can become an everyday occurrence. The ‘spirit of Christmas’, as an individualised, but pervasive and widely shared notion, might appeal as a starting point for identifying and building upon positive common values within society as a whole.<sup>xvi</sup>



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# IDENTIFYING AND SUSTAINING CHANGE

Consumer resistance to Christmas has become one of the essential rituals of the celebration, suggesting that alternative consumption practices might be more successfully adopted tacitly rather than explicitly or overtly.

The notion of a shared conception such as the ‘spirit of Christmas’ is justifiably thought-provoking. It is certainly interesting to high street sellers as well as scholars and the general public, since it seems to have the purest marketing potential. But why should such an extraordinary potential be left to sellers rather than consumers? Given the vibrant social, religious and even political discussion underpinning the ethical consumer choice, we might ask: has society achieved something that could be built upon for having an ethical Christmas which could be sustained in everyday life?

A key task of future study will be to map individual and collective practices of consumers and organizations, to see how deep in fact the potential for change has been within the Christmas experience. After all, what do people do? And is it that people who are concerned with ethical consumption are just a bit more visible at Christmas?

Of course, ‘what people do’ is highly diverse, and this could take the form of resistance to common cultural practices through means which are ‘infrastructural’ rather than obvious. Consumer movements such as the UK ‘Buy Nothing Day’ address a more deep-rooted concern about the role of money and trade in our lives than even the most heart-felt spirit of Christmas.<sup>xvii</sup> Similarly, for groups such as ALTERnativity, proactive resistance to consumption is not as important as how Christmas can be a soft entry into wider life issues, from reflection on personal practices to matters of global injustice. The point is not to condemn consumption, but rather to respond to people who have said they aren’t happy with the way Christmas is celebrated and offer





The recession has prompted many commentators to attack our consuming lifestyles as responsible for a materialist spirit, environmental degradation, and a rise in unhappiness. The environmental consequences of our resource-intensive lifestyle should be worrying. But the social and ethical realities of consumption are far less selfish or unethical than many writers tend to think.

It is often ignored just how much of our life involves creative acts of consumption: cooking and eating together, gardening, home improvement, cuddling up with the children in front of the television, and also going shopping together.

We are increasingly recognising the importance of time (as well as money) in the way we consume. In the spirit of Christmas, I would recommend taking consumption much more seriously as a practice than we sometimes do. This means for families to spend time together and to learn to enjoy processes of consumption -- such as playing a game, preparing a meal together, or to enjoy a whole film or music programme together.

Frank Trentmann

them alternatives.<sup>xviii</sup> This itself is a resistance to the negative connotations of going against the grain of the period of consumption, the miserliness or thriftiness which is often assumed to lie behind the choice not to buy gifts, cards and wrapping. Positive behaviour itself places value on the social importance of consumption beyond mere purchasing of 'things'.

Consumption involves more than the collection of 'things', but also provides opportunities for us to spend time with loved

ones and give more of ourselves to others.<sup>xix</sup> As design and sustainability specialist, Ann Thorpe notes, 'instead of just "having" (the passive nature of goods and appearances), we need also, "being, doing, and interacting" when we look to find and foster our personal well-being.<sup>xx</sup>

Again, thinking about shared cultural practices, and the potential for shared experiences of consuming, Christmas television programming can create the sense of a national family, gathered around the

hearth of the television, as Jack Kibble-White suggests. It is often in the debate about film and television classics - Wizard of Oz (1939) in the UK, for instance, or It's a Wonderful Life (1946) in the US - that the values or spirit of Christmas, and their turning into acts and wishes, are most hotly debated.

The 'potlatch' scene at the end of Capra's classic, for example, has interested film scholars for decades - scholars such as Linda Ruth Williams and Niamh Doheny.<sup>xxi</sup>







*It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra, 1946). Image courtesy of the Ronald Grant Archive.

“Each man’s life touches so many other lives” says Clarence the angel to George Bailey in Frank Capra’s *It’s a Wonderful Life*, a movie which ensures that anyone touched by it will never hear bells in the same way again (“every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings”). George’s great gift is the chance to see how the world would be had he never lived. Through the indulgence of tears which is the film’s final act, George learns that had he not lived - and lived well - others

would have lived less well, or not at all. The political contradictions of Capra’s movie have been endlessly debated by film scholars like me ever since its release in 1946, but this simple truth lies at the heart of its enduring reputation as the most loved of Christmas movies. Perhaps this is also its message for ethical living. There is certainly something peculiar about the ‘potlatch’ of gold-giving in the final scene – an unusual spectacle for American cinema.

The sight of small-town citizens giving their money away as if it was never theirs in the first place might make even the most sceptical of political readers pause, if briefly. Perhaps I just come over all sentimental at this time of year, and blind myself to the harder discourses running through this film. Perhaps we all just like a good old Christmas wallow.

Consume less, except with your eyes! Watch movies instead of going to the shops! Film making, and film

viewing, will struggle to be as green as other art-forms, but switch to a green electricity tariff, and watch movies with your friends, and you can be a little more relaxed about the environmental impact. Watch *It’s a Wonderful Life* (though perhaps not every day – some things are just for Christmas). And hold on to Zuzu’s flower.

Linda Ruth Williams



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Doheny observes that the film promotes the message that people are powerless without the means to consume, though the community spirit is valued in the 'potlatch' scene. The film can direct our attention to messages of positive charitable giving, but also to problems that arise out of an ideology based on the value of consuming, and the unequal relationships of power which result.

Consumption creates ties between us and others when questions are asked about the ways and means of production. Certainly, 'a little reflection on this interplay may lead to happier and more sustainable consumption', as Frank Trentmann reminds us.<sup>xxii</sup> In terms of sustainability, common concern for the environment can be viewed as part of our concern for the well-being of others, both near and distant (geographically, relationally, and also in terms of time, looking to future generations). The charity ALTERnativity looks for ways to empower groups of people - for example women, who traditionally take the strain of Christmas - in a global context, and to actively investigate sustainable and ethical ways of answering the question: 'How can we celebrate Christmas in a way that recognizes

that half God's children are starving?'<sup>xxiii</sup> Another part of this can be to stop 'take a little time to think about what [we] are doing'<sup>xxiv</sup> when we do purchase 'things', and to ask critical questions:

**D**o ethical labels create a more critical consumer culture, where people in their everyday life start asking fundamental questions about the invisible qualities of products? Or do they make consumers more complacent to rely on ethical labels as guarantors of capitalist goodness? Do consumers go to the supermarket and ask: Who produced this product? How was it produced? Did producers earn a fair share? Did they enjoy human working conditions? How many miles did the product travel before reaching the supermarket shelf? Do consumers even become self-critical and start questioning their own consumption habits? We are at a crossroad.<sup>xxv</sup>

As individual consumers, we can pay attention to the ethics and origins of products, though in choosing alternatives, we must keep our critical heads about us: every, or any, alternative is not necessarily a good alternative.



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# CREATING NEW TRADITIONS

Consumption as a process involving choice and self-identity is critical to any adoption of different beliefs as practices. Consumers can join the ranks of scholars and creative practitioners, especially designers, in taking up the opportunity to provide real everyday solutions to substantial ethical and moral problems that people wish to solve for themselves.

Rather than bemoaning the secularization of Christmas, or a loss of emphasis on the Christian story in society, a Christian faith perspective might more productively recognize that there are no exclusive 'rights' to the celebration of Christmas. As Susan Roll comments:

The massive production, advertising and marketing essential to the retail sector of the economy in developed countries serves as a predominant secular form of the feast, the content of which derives not only from the incarnation in the salvation history of Christian belief, but even beyond Christianity in a complex of climatic change, folklore, custom, art, familial bonding, common values and personal and collective memories. The Gospel story of the birth of Christ secures the base meaning, the original core and point of reference, yet the story does not alone determine what Christmas is. The feast has long since taken on a life of its own.<sup>xvii</sup>

One of the key areas for development emerging from the 'Not Just for Christmas' project relates to how we might think in terms of new traditions which overlay, but do not supplant, existing traditions. Perhaps there is room here for reflecting on a figure like the caganer, an outsider to any traditional, gospels-based nativity. Design theorist Guy Julier prompts:

At this time of year in Catalonia, the caganer finds its way into nativity scenes. This model of a man defecating at the back of the most holy tableau has several functions. It provides light relief.



It is not widely known that there is, in fact, a tiny fragment of text called the Green Codex that features an ancient gloss on the story of the wise men who brought gifts to Bethlehem for the baby Jesus. Bethlehem, prompted by Joseph, had initiated a recycling centre, to which, after the Nativity, he took the wrappings and packaging of the three gifts. The gold had come in a tin, so into the tin unit it went. The frankincense had come in a cardboard box, and it duly went into the receptacle so designated. The myrrh came in a bottle, a green bottle, and it was duly popped into the green bottle hole in the bottle bank. It is known that the Holy Family was green conscious from the beginning, and so should all families be: recycle your waste carefully, and keep our planet clean...

Richard Holloway



Images courtesy of Borkur.net, 2008 (left) and NatalieHG, 2008 (above). Flickr Creative Commons.



It reinforces the human aspect of the Christmas story. It reminds us that everyone performs this basic function. It shows that Christmas (or, more specifically, the birth of Christ) comes, whether we are ready or not. It is not so much a disruption of the nativity as a commentary.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Through the caganer, we might reflect in a different way on a familiar story, focusing on our common humanity. In other ways too, it is possible to playfully, yet

poignantly, tell new stories reflecting present concerns, as in Richard Holloway's account of the content of the little-known 'Green Codex' in which the holy family and the wise men make use of recycling bins.<sup>xxviii</sup>

New traditions can take the form of narratives and practices as the ethical implications of the Christmas season are considered broadly in society. If there is to be a genuine impact on daily life resulting from sustained reflection on, and at, Christmas, then new traditions must take us into a space where 'small' solutions to

global problems allow individual consumers to effect change in the everyday.

We cannot afford an approach to the morality of consumption that only enters into public consciousness at Christmastime. Sustained debate and education is crucial, hence Daniel Miller's suggestion about teaching children about the consequences of consumption.

Here, children are – as in much of our existing Christmas tradition – placed at the heart of a change to established ways of being in society. A new approach to





Images courtesy of Office of War Information/Library of Congress, 1942 (above) and 'Repatriates, Netherlands, 1956', Spaarnestad Photo (right), Flickr Commons.

My belief is that this problem has to be resolved at an even earlier stage than when we are buying things for Christmas. It is a basic problem of what we mean by being educated. Right now children learn about aspects of Chemistry and History they may never use again. But they will all be consumers and they should at least have some awareness that everything they buy has consequences, both for the people involved in making these goods, and for the environment. We should not consider a child as educated if they have not been taught how to find out about the consequences of their own consumption. We need also to make the resources available for them to do this, as a central part of our education system.

Christmas is a time for giving gifts to children. I suggest we give them an education that is more relevant to helping them become moral citizens in the future. <sup>xxix</sup>

Daniel Miller

economics and education is needed. The question can be asked: how can the developed and developing worlds engage in fair and dignified exchange, rather than handouts?<sup>xxx</sup> Again, thinking about building on familiar stories in new ways, this might give us pause to re-examine some of the unidirectional models of Christmas giving which are taken for granted – Santa Claus (and parents) giving gifts to children, and, from a theological perspective, God giving the gift of his son to the world.

Some of the questions raised during

the course of the project clearly require substantial further interdisciplinary investigation. This working paper has alluded to substantial areas for development, with the recognition that overarching questions remain around the ‘largeness’ or ‘otherness’ of environmental and ecological global problems when presented to the individual and their faith. Similarly, more work is needed to address the problem of matching large sociological forces and methods to small consumption practices, in order to better understand their

role on the formation of identity. Finally, the project only began to scratch the surface in considering role that creative practitioners – artists, designers, writers, performers – can play in suggesting and provoking ‘small’ solutions to global problems that will allow individual consumers to effect change in the everyday.





# NOTES

- i These questions form the core of the research project 'Not Just for Christmas' - [www.notjustforchristmas.org](http://www.notjustforchristmas.org) as well as the Arts and Humanities Research Council case study which can be found at: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundedResearch/CaseStudies/Pages/Not%20just%20for%20Christmas.aspx>
- ii Such room for debate is mirrored by the increasing role of research networks and 'sandpits', with funding schemes such as that of the AHRC, which supported this project. See <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/ResNetWork.aspx>
- iii Sally McKechnie and Caroline Tynan, 'Social Meanings in Christmas Consumption: An Exploratory Study of UK Celebrants' Consumption Rituals', Journal of Consumer Behaviour vol. 5, no. 2 (2006), 139.
- iv Scott Lash and John Urry, Economics of Signs and Space (3rd edn; London: Sage, 1999), 60-61.
- v Theodor Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', New German Critique, no. 6 (1975), 15-16.
- vi C. A Miles, 1912, cited in Mark Connelly, Christmas: A Social History (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), 204.
- vii Richard Horsley and James Tracy (eds), Christmas Unwrapped: Consumerism, Christ, and Culture (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 165.
- viii McKechnie and Tynan, 'Social Meanings in Christmas Consumption', 141.
- ix Everett looks at the role of race hidden behind the character of Jack Skellington in Tim Burton's 1993 movie, The Nightmare Before Christmas. See Anna Everett, 'The Other Pleasures: The Narrative Function of Race in the Cinema', Film Criticism, vol. 10, no. 1-2 (1995-96), 26-38.
- x Today programme, BBC Radio 4, 17/12/07
- xi BBC News, 10/12/07: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/7136682.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7136682.stm).
- xii The major events of the 'Not Just for Christmas' project took place over two, two-day workshop sessions in July and December 2008. The theme of the July sessions was 'forgetting Christmas', and the group of participants explored the reasons that, despite the anticipation of Advent and the build up to Christmas in the media, the holiday (feast) is still subject to an annual cycle of forgetting.
- xiii This is part of Bryant's larger poem: <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Raymond+Bryant>
- xiv R. Harrison, T. Newholm and D. Shaw, 'Introduction', in R. Harrison, T. Newholm and D. Shaw (eds), The Ethical Consumer (London: SAGE, 2005), 1-8; here, 2. Emphasis added.
- xv This was developed in workshop with Chris Diamond and Alison Phipps in particular.
- xvi See, for example, K. T. Lacher, K. Patrick Meline, J. Birch, M. Brantley, and T. Carnathan, 'The Spirit of Christmas: An Ethnographic Investigation of the Christmas Ritual', Southwestern Marketing Association (1995), online: [www.sbaer.uca.edu/research/swma/1995/pdf/oc.pdf](http://www.sbaer.uca.edu/research/swma/1995/pdf/oc.pdf)
- xvii Buy Nothing Day: <http://www.buynothingday.co.uk>
- xviii ALTERnativity: <http://www.alternativity.org.uk>
- xix <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Alastair+Macdonald>
- xx <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Ann+Thorpe>
- xxi <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Linda+Ruth+Williams>
- xxii <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Frank+Trentmann+Part+2>
- xxiii <http://www.alternativity.org.uk/about.html>



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## NOTES (CONT.)

xxiv <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Isabelle+Sznigin>

xxv <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Juliane+Reinecke>

xxvi S. K. Roll, 'Christmas: The Mirror Reflecting Us Back to Ourselves', in P. Post, G. Rouwhorst, L. van Tongeren and A. Scheer (eds), Christian Feast and Festival: The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 519-536; here 536, emphasis added. See also S. K. Roll, Toward the Origins of Christmas (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995).

xxvii <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Guy+Julier>

xxviii <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+Richard+Holloway>

xxix <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar%3A+Daniel+Miller>

xxx <http://www.notjustforchristmas.org/page/Advent+Calendar+John+Riches+Part+2>



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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

The research project entitled 'Not Just for Christmas: Consumption, Popular Culture and Religious Observance' was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and led by Damian Sutton, Glasgow School of Art, with co-investigator Karen Wenell, University of Glasgow. The project was part of the AHRC's Interdisciplinary Research Networks and Workshops scheme, which is 'designed to encourage and enable discussion and development of ideas by researchers through establishing new research networks or running a series of workshops, seminars or similar events'.

The project addressed an emerging research imperative provoked by the complexity of debates over the commercialization of Christmas and other religious festivals. The complexity is enhanced by the wider cultural concern with sustainability, fair trade, environmental impact and other aspects of an ethical approach to consumption. The key aims of the project were to instigate informative interdisciplinary discussion on the overlap between ethical consumption, popular culture, and religious observance and to provide scholarly background and critical dialogue on ethical consumption and its relation to visual and narrative culture.

This working paper sets out some of the outcomes of the project, including connections and collaborations between participants in the project (both practitioners and academics from various fields), leading to valuable new directions for future research and scholarship.

**WORKING** pronounced \\wər-kiŋ\  
adj. assumed or adopted to permit or facilitate further work or activity

**PAPER** pronounced \\pā-pər\  
n. (1) a formal written composition often designed for publication  
(2) a paper container or wrapper

(Source: Merriam-Webster)

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