



POSTMODERN TOURISM

The Santa Claus Industry

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Abstract: In the 1980s, Finnish tourist authorities launched a new tourism strategy for the province of Lapland. It was designated "Santa Claus Land" and marketing plans and tourist attractions were developed around this theme. The centerpiece of the strategy was the Santa Claus Village in the city of Rovaniemi. This study examines the development of a Santa Claus industry in Lapland, and applies critical theory to develop an understanding of why tourists visit such attractions. It is argued that Santa Claus acts as a marker for the intangible attraction of Christmas, and that Santa Claus has become increasingly commodified, allowing tourists to consume intangible concepts such as Christmas. **Keywords:** Santa Claus, Christmas, commodification, postmodernism, nostalgia, theory, Lapland, Finland.

Résumé: Le tourisme postmoderne: l'industrie du Père Noël. Dans les années 80, les autorités finlandais ont lancé une nouvelle stratégie de tourisme pour la Laponie. On a surnommé la province "la Terre du Père Noël," en développant des plans de commercialisation et des attractions touristiques autour de ce thème. Le point de mire de la stratégie était le Village du Père Noël dans la ville de Rovaniemi. La présente étude examine ce développement et utilise une méthodologie de théorie critique pour comprendre pourquoi les touristes visitent un tel endroit. On soutient que le Père Noël sert de marqueur pour l'attraction intangible de la fête de Noël et que ce personnage devient une marchandise qui permet aux touristes de consommer ce qui est intangible. **Mots-clés:** Père Noël, Noël, commodification, postmodernisme, nostalgie, théorie, Laponie, Finlande.

But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence, . . . *illusion* only is *sacred*, *truth profane*. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness (Feuerbach, Preface to the 2nd ed. of *The Essence of Christianity*, quoted in Debord 1983).

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the world's largest industry, and is often viewed as the key to peripheral development. Planners in Finland and in its northernmost province, Lapland, believe that tourism is a beneficial industry. National and regional tourism authorities have aggressively marketed Lapland's attractions nationally and internationally. Lapland's

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scenic landscape and the indigenous Sámi (Lapp) culture have long been touristic objects, but these attractions were deemed insufficient by tourism planners, who proceeded to develop new marketing strategies in the 1980s. In 1984, the Finnish Tourist Board, in conjunction with regional authorities and businesses, began to market Lapland as “Santa Claus Land”—the home and workplace of Santa Claus. Santa Claus became a tourism industry in Lapland, and Santa Claus himself the ambassador and chief spokesman for the province.

This paper reviews the formation of the Santa Claus strategy and the birth of the Santa Claus industry in northern Finland in the light of critical theory, investigating why tourists want to visit the Santa Claus Village. An answer to this question will serve two functions. The first function is a practical one: an understanding of tourist motivation will aid tourism planners and businesses in Lapland, and help them to market their product more effectively. Second, perhaps more importantly, an understanding of tourist behavior might illuminate a deeper sociological question: what motivates tourists to visit overtly contrived attractions? As it appears, tourists are not seeking authenticity; then what are they seeking?

Postmodernism and Tourism

In postmodern society, objects become representations and are commodified, packaged, and consumed. Consumption, rather than production, becomes dominant, and the commodity attains the total occupation of social life, becoming what Debord (1983) calls “the spectacle.” Society takes on the characteristics of a perpetual present, leading to nostalgia for ideas of the past and even of the present, what Jameson considers as “the failure of the new, the imprisonment in the past” (1983:116). Reality gives way to representation, the real is no longer meaningful or necessary. History, time, and space, as aspects of culture, become commodities.

In postmodern society, tourism becomes a commodity to be consumed. Tourism has always been concerned with the visual and the spectacular: its object is the object of the tourist gaze; the touristic sight becomes a systematic and organized encounter on which one gazes (Urry 1990). The tourist consumes images or representations of a society; and any reality is obscured by many levels of representation. Therefore, the tourist is unable to penetrate any underlying reality, but must consume the representation, the sign, or the image of the touristic object. Consumption refers not to the process of satisfaction of needs—material goods are not the object of consumption—but rather to a process of consuming or manipulating signs: “it is the *idea of the relation* that is consumed” (Baudrillard 1988:22; emphasis original). Whether or not the consumption of representation is itself authentic has been the topic of much debate in the sociology of tourism.

In a seminal work on this topic, Boorstin (1992) argued that contemporary Americans are unable to experience reality, but that they thrive on “pseudo-events,” i.e., on images or illusions that veil the real world. In Boorstin’s view, the tourist is less interested in experiencing another culture than in experiencing his *idea* of it. The adventure and *work* of

traveling have disappeared: tourism becomes a packaged commodity. The tourist desires and is satisfied with contrived events. Stemming from this desire and satisfaction, the local population is induced to provide extravagant displays and pageants for the tourist (i.e., spectacle).

MacCannell (1989) argues that tourists *do* seek the authentic: they are modern pilgrims seeking authenticity in other places and times. The tourist's search for authenticity is confounded, however, by an elaborate front- and back-stage structure. Though the tourist attempts to penetrate the touristic exterior, or "staged authenticity," that obscures the authentic product underneath, he/she often finds that the local culture has established a "false back." It has become a seemingly authentic realm in which the tourist is permitted to wander, but is nevertheless still removed from the real culture. Souvenirs are an important part of such pilgrimages—they serve as reminders of the authenticity available elsewhere, as objects proclaiming the existence of authenticity and reality in some other place or time.

Other authors, such as Cohen (1979), have suggested that touristic motivations differ, that some seek varieties of authentic experience but many are simply seeking entertainment. The search for authenticity varies with the level of alienation in society: those who are highly alienated seek another, authentic, culture center (Cohen 1988). Urry (1990) argues that the search for authenticity is not the basis for tourism. Rather, the tourist is searching for the differences between home and work life. In contemporary society, work has become a mere attribute of society, rather than its center (Urry 1990), and leisure itself becomes a subset of work (Bey 1991). Work is no longer the basis of life or existence, while leisure is viewed as a right, not a reward. The penetration of leisure into the workplace has become common: corporations provide their employees with extensive recreational facilities and sponsor recreational events. Work and leisure, together with other attributes of society, are de-differentiated, they fuse and become aspects of the same whole, they are commodified together.

The question of touristic authenticity has also been addressed by Eco (1986). He argues that authenticity is not historical but visual: if something looks real, it is real. Eco also notes that some tourists perceive reproductions of an object as being more real—and therefore better—than the original. If the tourist views the reproduced object, he has no desire to see the original. Eco also observes the links between fantasy theme parks and shopping and consumption, and curiously makes mention of a Santa Claus Village in the United States (probably one in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California that is no longer extant).

In postmodern society, tourism becomes increasingly concerned with spectacle:

Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities, is fundamentally nothing more than the leisure of going to see what has become banal. The economic organization of visits to different places is already in itself a guarantee of their *equivalence*. The same modernization that removed

time from the voyage also removed from it the reality of space (Debord 1983: para. 168; emphasis original).

Contemporary society is dominated by spectacle. Tourism sights, whether natural or man-made, are spectacular. Some sights are unique scenic attractions (e.g., the Grand Canyon, the Alps) or cultural attractions (e.g., Paris, Rome). Other destinations, such as tropical resorts or folk festivals, are not markedly distinct, but attempt to outdo one another in spectacle. Here the tourist consumes the sign or representation, not the actual sight. On the other hand, some destinations, such as Disneyland, are created purely to attract tourists. These are artificial creations designed solely to attract outsiders to a particular area for economic reasons. Often these creations play on nostalgia, inviting the tourist to step into a historical period (e.g., the "Wild West" theme at several amusement parks) or into a fantastic future (e.g., Space Mountain at Disneyland), which is itself a form of nostalgia (Jameson 1983). Such sights are representative commodities without any former basis in reality. These sights may be representations of representations, or signs of signs (simulacra). Hence, there is a division between natural and semi-natural attractions on the one hand, and artificial ones on the other. The difference lies not in natural vs. man-made, but in whether the attraction serves some original function before it becomes touristic. In both cases, it is the image or representation that is consumed.

Regions lacking spectacular attractions must create them by some other means. The spectacle can be formed by attaching signifiers to an otherwise ordinary sight. Regions proclaim themselves unique, as seen by the plethora of modifiers (e.g., "world's largest . . .," "world's only . . .," and "world's northernmost . . .") used in tourism marketing. Finland, for example, has gone to great lengths to declare itself unique and establish a concrete tourism image; advertising Finland as the home of Santa Claus is another step in this direction. Artificially-created attractions are almost always unique in the sense that there exists no other, though the unique attraction may consist of pastiche and a blend of non-unique forms. Lapland's tourism strategy has attempted to use Santa Claus as something that makes Lapland unique—this in addition to the original attractions in Lapland, the landscape and local culture. Although Lapland is in many ways similar to other parts of the sub-Arctic, it is more accessible and is perhaps better known, especially to Europeans.

Tourism in Lapland

Lapland is the northernmost province in Finland, accounting for almost one third of Finland's total land area but only about 4% of total population (Figure 1). The population is concentrated in a few large centers of 20–30 thousand inhabitants, with the remainder scattered widely in small towns and villages. The southern part of Lapland is flat and thickly forested, while the northern part is hillier and the forest thinner. Areas of high elevation tend to be isolated fells, except for the "arm" of Finland (where Norway, Sweden, and Finland meet) which is the only mountainous part of the country. Lapland lies within the central and northern boreal zone except for the far north, which is



Figure 1. Lapland Province in Finland

classified as tundra. Lapland is one of the few remaining wilderness areas in Europe; this is an appealing feature on a continent that is largely settled and densely populated.

Lapland's natural environment appeals to different kinds of tourists. For some, attracted by wilderness and solitude, Lapland provides a place to escape from a routine and mechanized life and to find solace in the forest. This type of tourist, many of whom come from within Finland, may make minimal use of tourism services other than cottage rentals and indirect services such as transportation and restaurants. Other tourists find Lapland an ideal place for recreational activities. Camping sites are plentiful, and numerous warm, shallow lakes provide good opportunities for swimming, boating, and canoeing. Fishing and hunting are also popular. Several large skiing complexes cater to winter tourists. The largest of these, Saariselkä, is one of Finland's major resorts. Adventure travel also brings tourists to Lapland, with such attractions as snowmobile safaris, ski races and treks, and cruises on ice-breakers in the Gulf of Bothnia. Foreign tourists, especially, see Lapland as a remote, exotic land suited for adventure.

A second attraction for tourists is the indigenous Sámi (Lapp) culture. Indigenous peoples have long exerted a certain mystique in the eyes of metropolitan residents, due to their traditional lifestyle. Anthropological research, children's stories, and magazine articles have

acquainted many with traditional Sámi clothing and customs and with the reindeer economy. The desire to see reindeer, and perhaps see Sámi people living in traditional dwellings and villages, also appeals to tourists. One of the important factors responsible for tourism is the tourist's desire to experience different cultures, and perhaps to find meaning and authenticity in a society that is closer to nature and less corrupted by modernity. It is in part a nostalgic desire to escape to a different culture or historical period. As MacCannell notes, "for moderns, reality and authenticity are thought to be elsewhere: in other historical periods and other cultures, in purer, simpler lifestyles" (1989: 3). According to Boorstin (1992), what is important is the tourist's *perception* of the culture, not necessarily the *reality*.

Tourism in Lapland is highly seasonal. Finnish tourists are primarily interested in recreational opportunities in Lapland, and in its wilderness aspects. The presence of good ski resorts attracts many domestic tourists in winter, who take advantage of alpine skiing at the several ski centers. Domestic tourists also visit in summer, to fish, hunt, canoe, hike, camp, or just enjoy summer at a cottage. Domestic tourists account for about 80% of all tourists in Lapland. Foreign tourists make up the remaining 20%. Table 1 shows the number of foreign tourists in Lapland and Finland during 1982-1992. As the table indicates, Lapland accounts for about 10% of the Finnish foreign tourism market. Summer tourists come mainly from Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, and France, and from other Scandinavian countries. British and Japanese tourists tend to visit more often in winter. It is clear from this fact alone that different groups of tourists are looking for different things. Many of the British, for example, want to experience a "white" winter and see reindeer. The Germans are more interested in outdoor recreation and finding wilderness in summer. Many tourists are simply passing through Lapland on their way to the North Cape, Europe's northernmost point. In this case, tourism authorities must offer inducements for the tourist to linger and make use of services, rather than just pass through.

**Table 1. Number of Foreign Overnight Stays,
Lapland and Finland (1982-1992)**

Year	Lapland	Finland
1982	156,495	2,024,700
1983	147,268	2,060,600
1984	160,919	2,112,500
1985	158,368	2,097,100
1986	159,369	2,021,700
1987	180,132	2,207,500
1988	205,456	2,298,300
1989	230,230	2,517,300
1990	214,662	2,468,100
1991	228,812	2,200,900
1992	169,551	2,174,174

Source: Matkailun Edistämiskeskus (MEK), Matkailun tilastojulkaisu, 1982-92.

Finnish tourism planning is the responsibility of the Finnish Tourist Board in association with regional authorities in Lapland (such as the provincial and municipal tourist offices) and with Finnair, the national carrier. These agencies, in concert, view tourism as a viable industry for northern Finland and work to advance tourism development. As the local tourism authorities have noted:

Tourism is vital. It supports small industries and handicraft workshops. These kind of industries need a developing and dynamic tourist industry. It doesn't make sense to manufacture products and then have no market. (Joulumaa ry n.d.)

The economy of Lapland has become increasingly dependent on tourism and other services. The share of the service sector in the economy has grown from about 45% in 1970 to more than 60% in 1990, while the primary and secondary sectors have declined accordingly (Tilastokeskus 1992). The continuing decline of the primary sector, especially forestry, has prompted a concern among state planning and development agencies—such as the Ministry for Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Labor, as well as the regional development planning authority KERA. These agencies have viewed tourism as a possible replacement industry for the declining resource sector. The Finnish Tourist Board has been especially interested in increasing the numbers of foreign tourists. The number of foreign tourists increased slowly from 1982 to 1989, but began to decline in 1990 as Finland entered its most serious recession since the 1930s (see Table 1). Table 2 shows the unemployment rates in Finland and Lapland. The last two years have seen record levels of unemployment—especially in Lapland—which again points to the concern for developing tourism as a replacement sector for primary and secondary industries.

Table 2. Unemployment Rates in Lapland and Finland (1982-1993, in percent)

Year	Lapland	Finland
1982	12.1	5.4
1983	10.0	5.5
1984	10.7	5.2
1985	10.6	5.0
1986	11.4	5.4
1987	10.6	5.1
1988	8.4	4.5
1989	6.9	3.5
1990	5.7	3.4
1991	10.8	7.6
1992	20.6	14.8
1993 ^a	24.1	18.5

^aApril figures.

Source: Tilastokeskus, Työmarkkinat-työssäkayntitilasto (1982-1992), Lapin läänin työvoimapiiri, Työttömät työnhakijat (1993).

Tourism employs about 6,000 people in Lapland and the industry generated about 1.3 billion Finnish marks in revenue in 1990 (Lapin kansa 1993a). The Finnish Tourist Board expects tourism to increase, due both to a greater absolute number of tourists and a larger share of the Finnish tourism market. According to the board's projections, within 10 years the number of tourism employees will grow to 9,500, and the income generated will grow to 1.9 billion Finnish marks. The Finnish Tourist Board is especially keen on increasing the numbers of foreign tourists, as Finland needs foreign currency to stabilize its current account deficit (Matkailun Edistämiskeskus 1993).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the tourism boards declared that the natural and cultural advantages of Lapland were insufficient in attracting tourists in the desired numbers: "nature itself is passive. The tourist must have something to do in nature, so that he can move around and experience its bounties" (Joulumaa ry n.d.). The Finnish Tourist Board was also developing ways to increase the numbers of tourists visiting Finland in general. As the existing attractions in Lapland were deemed inadequate, a new attraction had to be created. The idea of promoting Santa Claus as an attraction seemed appealing, especially since this concept had been mooted for many years and as it seemed to mesh well with existing attractions.

SANTA CLAUS BECOMES AN INDUSTRY

Though Santa Claus has a longer history of living in Lapland, the idea of using this connection as a tourism marketing tool was realized only in the 1980s. The Finnish Tourist Board, eager to promote Finland's tourism image, wanted to create some new marketing program that would reflect positively on Finland in general and on Lapland in particular. The Santa Claus idea, though focused only on Lapland, would attract tourists in greater numbers and would have spill-over benefits in the rest of Finland, since foreign tourists inevitably pass through Helsinki and might be convinced to visit other parts of the country as well.

Santa Claus Land

The first consideration of using Santa Claus as an attraction was in 1927, when a Finnish radio commentator and producer of children's programs announced that Santa Claus's home had been found on Korvatunturi, a fell on the Finnish/Russian border in Lapland. Korvatunturi, which means "Ear Fell," somewhat resembles an ear in shape, and this was seen to suggest that Santa was listening to the world's children. In old Finnish tradition, a goat delivered the Christmas gifts, and this idea has been retained both in the straw goats used as Christmas symbols and in the Finnish name for Santa Claus, *Joulupukki*, which literally means "Christmas goat." Finnish children believe that Santa Claus is 450 years old (Lapin kansa 1993c). The figure of Santa Claus used in Finland was adopted from the United States, where both the name "Santa Claus" and the depiction of Santa in a red suit originated. The tradition of Santa Claus in America, borrowed from the Dutch "Sinterklaas," began with Clement Clarke Moore's 1822 poem *The Visit*

of *St Nicholas* ("Twas the night before Christmas . . ."), which first suggested that Santa traveled in a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer. The image of Santa was further refined by the caricaturist Thomas Nast, who first used the name "Santa Claus" and depicted him in the red suit characteristic of present-day American and Finnish Santas.

In the years following the "discovery" of Santa's Lapland home, the idea of establishing Santa Claus as a tourism attraction was debated sporadically in Finland, but nothing took shape until 1984, when a Santa Claus Work Group was formed by the Finnish Tourist Board, a state agency. That same year, the governor of Lapland declared the entire province "Santa Claus Land." In 1985, the work group was formalized into the Santa Claus Land Project, under the direct control of the Finnish Tourist Board. The idea behind these declarations and work groups was to use the assertion that Lapland was the home of Santa Claus as a marketing tool to attract more tourists to the province.

An essential element of this strategy was convincing the rest of the world that Finland was the real home of Santa Claus—against rival claimants in Alaska, Sweden, Norway, and Greenland, for example. The political ramifications of Santa Claus have recently become evident in the Norwegian protest against the King of Norway's visit to Rovaniemi and the Finnish Santa Claus. The mayor of Drøbak, home of the Norwegian Santa, asked King Harald and Queen Sonja to cancel their trip, planned for March 1993, on the grounds that visiting Rovaniemi would lend support to Finland's claim (The European 1993). (The royal couple did indeed visit Rovaniemi as planned, but did not visit the Santa Claus village.) As the Santa Claus Land Association has noted, "all those connected with Santa Claus Land have one goal in mind: to tell the world that 'Santa Claus lives in Finland'" (Joulumaa ry n.d.). To this end, the Finnish Santa Claus has made appearances worldwide. He has appeared at a benefit for children with cancer in Beverly Hills, California, at Dublin's millenium celebration where he lit the Christmas tree, at Estonian and Japanese Christmas celebrations, and perhaps most recognizably with the Finnish national team at the closing ceremonies of the 1988 Summer Olympic Games in Seoul, Korea.

In 1989, the Santa Claus Land Project became the Santa Claus Land Association, or *Joulumaa ry*. The association was founded by 16 Finnish companies, including some of the largest firms in the country. This association was connected to the Finnish Tourist Board and was based in Helsinki with a branch office in Rovaniemi. The association's sole function lay in marketing the Santa Claus idea. The association did not own any of the properties or operate any of the Santa Claus Land businesses. Instead it owned the trademark for Santa Claus Land, and licensed its use to individually-owned businesses. The association also operated the Santa Claus postal service, coordinated Santa Claus's visits abroad, and promoted Santa Claus at various international gatherings.

In the early 1990s, the Santa Claus Land Association ran into financial trouble, and in 1991 the association was disbanded and its rights sold to a new company, Santa Claus International Oy. As a privately-owned corporation based in Helsinki, it acquired the rights to Santa

Claus marketing, and is now responsible for promoting Lapland's Santa Claus attractions in Finland and abroad. The Finnish post office once again assumed responsibility for Santa Claus's Post Office and all of its functions. Santa Claus International Oy also operates a small "school" for Santas, which prepares them for their international travels. Recently six Santas graduated from the school (Lapin kansa 1993c).

The Santa Claus Village

During the years of management under the Santa Claus Land Association, the physical structure of Santa Claus Land consisted of nine properties, known as "footprints," throughout Lapland. Each of these properties operated as a private business, but was licensed by the Santa Claus Land Association to use the Santa Claus Land trademark. Each "footprint" had its own distinctive elf, which helped identify the business with Santa Claus but allowed it to retain some individuality. The strategy behind setting up the footprints was to avoid concentrating Santa Claus Land projects in a single locality, and to establish "oases" for tourists in the wilds of Lapland. The footprints would provide stopping places that could be advertised as parts of a larger itinerary. Each of the footprints contained licensed outlets for the sale of handicrafts and souvenirs. After the Santa Claus Land Association was disbanded and the rights transferred to Santa Claus International Oy, the footprint idea was abandoned, although the individual attractions remain.

The showpiece of Santa Claus Land is the Santa Claus Village and Workshop located on the Arctic Circle a few kilometres north of Rovaniemi, Lapland's capital and commercial center. This site was selected because many tourists stop to have their photograph taken at the sign marking the Arctic Circle. Rovaniemi is the jumping-off point for most tourists heading farther north, is a destination in itself (especially for congresses), and is situated on the main north-south road crossing the Arctic Circle. Though Santa Claus's putative home is on Korvatunturi, his workshop and temporary residence are at the Santa Claus Village. The village was opened in 1985, and contains Santa's workshop, where he may be visited during all seasons. Santa Claus's Post Office (discussed later), a reindeer enclosure, several restaurants, and many gift and souvenir shops complete the village. As Rovaniemi also has a large airport, it can handle jet charter flights from abroad. Thus, some tourists visit Rovaniemi in the winter on special one or two day charter packages marketed by both Santa Claus's International Oy and Finnair—the most famous of which are direct British Airways *Concorde* flights from London at Christmas. The number of visitors to the Santa Claus Village increased each year from 1985 to 1989, when the number began to decline slightly due to the recession. Table 3 shows the number of visitors (domestic and foreign) for each year.

The Santa Claus Village property is owned by a real estate company, which is itself owned by the City of Rovaniemi (75%) and the Rovaniemi Rural Commune (25%). The individual businesses, such as the souvenir shops, are privately owned, and rent or lease their premises from the real estate company. Santa Claus International Oy, and formerly the Santa Claus Land Association, together with the Rovaniemi tourism office and the Finnish Tourist Board, are responsi-

**Table 3. Number of Visitors
(foreign and domestic) to the
Santa Claus Village (1985-1992)**

Year	Number of Visitors
1985	225,000
1986	230,000
1987	249,500
1988	266,343
1989	277,180
1990	257,500
1991	244,478
1992	247,800

Source: Matkailun Edistämiskeskus (MEK),
Matkailukohteiden kävijämäärät, 1988 and
1992.

ble for marketing the village and related attractions. Finnair is also active in promoting the village through its package tours and charter flights to the Arctic Circle.

Santa Claus Postal Service

In the 1950s, letters written by European children and addressed to Santa Claus were received by the post office in Helsinki. A small group of volunteers answered these letters, but over the years the numbers grew beyond the capabilities of this small group. The Finnish government established a Santa Claus letter service in Helsinki (funded by the Finnish government), which was later moved to Rovaniemi and then to the Arctic Circle, this being seen as a more appropriate location for Santa to post his letters. In 1976, when the Santa Claus postal service was moved to Lapland, 18,667 letters were received and answered. The number of letters received grew slowly each year until the mid 1980s, after the opening of the Santa Claus Village. The opportunity for tourists to write their addresses in Santa Claus' address book increased the number of letters answered, so that in 1990 over 555,000 letters were sent out. Most of the letters were mailed to destinations in central Europe, though letters were sent to children in 160 countries. "Elves" temporarily employed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Labor (as part of an unemployment-reduction scheme) help with the mailing (Lapin kansa 1993b).

Santa Claus's Post Office was administered by the Santa Claus Land Association during its period of operation. After the rights were sold in 1991, the Post Office service was operated by the Finnish post office with the assistance of a private mailing company, Dianordia Oy (Lapin kansa 1993b). Given the current economic situation in Finland, the Finnish post office can no longer afford to subsidize the costs of Santa's letters. Santa no longer maintains a guestbook where visitors may inscribe their names, later receiving a free Christmas letter from Santa. Visitors must now pay 15 Finnish marks for this service. Letters posted

to Santa will only receive a reply if sufficient funds are available; these funds are generated through the sale of letters to visitors. This means that many of the letters now go unanswered. (The Santa Claus Post Office, nevertheless, expects to post several hundred thousand letters in 1993 (Lapin kansa 1993b)). Santa Claus's Post Office notes that fees are necessary to remain financially sound (personal communication in 1993 with Santa Claus).

Santa Claus as Spectacle

The Santa Claus Village and its related constructions are clearly contrived touristic sights: tourists perceive the inauthenticity of the attraction, yet are nonetheless attracted to the sight. MacCannell's (1989) analysis of the semiotics of tourism is useful here. He argues that a tourism sight can consist both of sight and marker, or of signified and signifier. The marker is a piece of information or representation that constitutes the sight as a sight. The marker confers upon the sight an importance that makes it an object of the tourist gaze. Without such a marker, the sight would be meaningless. MacCannell gives the example of the "Bonnie and Clyde Shoot-Out Area," a piece of barren ground in the United States. The marker—the plaque affixed to the sight as well as other information leading the tourist to it—identifies the sight as something worthy of touristic interest. In such cases, the tourist becomes involved with the marker, rather than the sight. By creating markers, tourist sights are created. The number of potential tourist sights is, therefore, infinite.

The Santa Claus Village is an example of MacCannell's marker-sight relationship. The location of the Santa Claus Village on the Arctic Circle capitalized on an existing sight-marker relationship. The Arctic Circle is invisible, but when marked by a sign it becomes a tourist sight. Many tourists who cross the circle have their photo taken beside the marker. Tourists photograph the Arctic Circle sign (the marker) but not the Arctic Circle itself (the sight). An entire marker-related industry—consisting of such souvenirs as the certificate of crossing the circle, and the crossing ceremony (for which the tourist must pay)—is flourishing.

The Santa Claus Village itself is yet another case of a sight-marker relationship in which the tourist becomes involved with the marker because the sight is invisible or intangible. The Santa Claus Village and Santa Claus (the person) serve as markers for the intangible sights of "Christmas" and "Santa Claus." These markers are visual or spectacular representations of an abstract sight, markers upon which the tourist can gaze. The authenticity of the Santa Claus Village lies in its representational connection to the idea of Christmas and Santa Claus. The relationship might be diagrammed as:

Marker	Sight
(<i>Signifier</i>)	(<i>Signified</i>)
Santa Claus (the person)	"Santa Claus" (legend)
Santa Claus Village	"Christmas"
Arctic Circle Sign	Arctic Circle

In these instances, the object of consumption is the marker, not the sight. The marker represents the sight and transforms it into a commodity, into something that can be gazed upon, packaged, purchased, and reproduced. That the idea of Santa Claus itself further represents an abstraction, and that the idea of Santa Claus is a marker for a still more intangible cultural product, is evidence of the many levels at play in the sight-marker relationship.

What, then, is responsible for the attraction of the Santa Claus Village? One can argue that tourists consume Santa Claus and the Santa Claus Village as markers of a deeper, intangible cultural product, the spirit of Christmas, which itself conjures up memories of childhood. The nostalgia for childhood, to become and remain a child, and to find meaning in a perceived or romanticized happier childhood, is a powerful motivating force. Santa Claus and his village become simultaneously commodity, spectacle, and representation: Christmas is now available in a consumable form. As Baudrillard notes, *"in order to become the object of consumption, the object must become sign"* (1988:22; emphasis original). This is a long way from the time when Marcel Mauss could note that "fortunately, everything is still not wholly categorized in terms of buying and selling. Things still have sentimental as well as venal value. . . ." (1990:65).

The Santa Claus Village is a contrived tourism attraction—built purely to attract tourists. Contrived tourism centers—such as Disneyland and Walt Disney World in the United States, and other such theme attractions—have proven successful in attracting tourists to regions that have limited natural attractions. They combine a variety of nostalgic elements into a postmodern pastiche. Their broad popular fantasy appeal—especially to children and families—has lasted for so many years that they become popular because everyone visits them, rather than for their inherent attraction. They become world landmarks—famous for being famous.

Nostalgia is a key characteristic of postmodernism, and the theme park readily addresses this need. The theme park is a city built entirely of image. The tourist is invited to step into another historical period or another geographical place and suspend notions of his present condition. A theme park such as Walt Disney World—"the leading purely tourist destination on the planet" (Sorkin 1992:205)—is "a machine for the continuous transformation of what exists (a panoply of images drawn from life) into what doesn't (an ever-increasing number of weird juxtapositions)" (Sorkin 1992:232). That nostalgia is an operative element in such attractions is clear from the plans to develop theme parks based on recent history: a Wizard of Oz theme park in Kansas, complete with flying farmhouse, thanks to virtual reality (The Economist 1993), and a theme park based on the old East Germany, with security police, barbed wire, guard towers, and empty stores (International Herald-Tribune 1993). The Santa Claus Village in Finland also incorporates the feeling of nostalgia.

Perhaps, like so much of human behavior, no explanation for touristic behavior can be found. The search for "The Other" is a common theme in western literature. Such a theme suggests an uncertainty, an alienation from society, a need for something from the outside.

Postmodern society is filled with uncertainty and stress. Escape and illusion are strategies for coping. As Enzensberger notes:

The majority doesn't turn away to superstition, sport and entertainment by mistake, because it doesn't know any better, it does so quite intentionally. Escapism is a well-defined strategy. The illusory is systematically and deliberately sought out. Regression is a staple food. [A tabloid newspaper] is indispensable because it is meaningless, not despite being so; for the important things we call history have always confronted us, in our capacity as majority, in only one form: as impositions (1990:147-148).

Tourism, too, may be a well-defined strategy for coping.

CONCLUSIONS

Santa Claus is a western cultural product: a simulacrum, a copied image for which no original exists. The image of Santa Claus is now widely reproduced and consumed. The touristic value of Lapland's Santa Claus is in that he is claimed to be the "original" of a reproduced image. This image, however, is not unique to Lapland, but has been copied and imitated in many countries. Like the originals of famous works of art, the value of the original now lies in its rarity, rather than in the aesthetics of the image (Berger 1972; Benjamin 1968). The success or failure of Finland's strategy lies in convincing tourists that Lapland's Santa Claus is "the original" – and thus worth seeing.

The history of the Santa Claus industry in Finland is the history of the commodification of Christmas: at first the Santa Claus industry was operated by the state, at a later stage by an association, and finally by a private firm. Santa Claus and the Santa Claus Village are features of the postmodern touristic landscape, a landscape marked by spectacle. Santa Claus and his village have been transformed into commodities for consumption; they act as markers for the intangible sights of Christmas. In the case of Santa Claus, tourists consume the marker and thereby consume a nostalgic conception of Christmas. □ □

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