European Journal of Cultural Studies

Advertising real beer: Authenticity claims beyond truth and falsity
Carly O'Neill, Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers

>> Version of Record - Oct 8, 2014

OnlineFirst Version of Record - Feb 14, 2014

OnlineFirst Version of Record - Feb 3, 2014

What is This?

Article

Advertising real beer: Authenticity claims beyond truth and falsity

Carly O'Neill
University of Leeds

Dick Houtman
University of Leuven

Stef Aupers
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Abstract

It is a mainstay in the literature on consumer culture that the romantic, countercultural value of authenticity has become a core asset in mainstream marketing. Since there is little research on the particular ways in which commodities are endowed with auras of authenticity, this study analyses registers of authenticity in 153 beer commercials from eight countries. The content analysis distinguishes four strategies of authentication: beer is related to pre-industrial craftsmanship, naturalness, concrete locations and historical roots. Surprisingly, however, such claims are often openly exposed by the advertisers themselves as mass-produced illusions. It is concluded that the appeal of authenticity in consumer culture should not be explained by the fact that people actually believe in the 'authenticity hoax'. Quite the contrary, the acknowledgement that narratives about a more authentic world are myths provides an alibi for consumers to fully indulge in their meaning without the risk of making naive and dupable fools of themselves.

Keywords

Advertising, authenticity, beer commercials, consumer culture, counterculture, myth

Introduction

'I once wore armour', a well-trimmed man ponders as he adjusts his tie. It is the first shot of the Dutch beer brand *Bavaria*'s commercial *Call of men*. The next shot features a supermarket, where a man laments, 'I would hunt animals with teeth as long as my

Corresponding author:
Carly O'Neill, School of Media and Communication, the University of Leeds, LS2 9JT, Leeds, the United Kingdom.
Email: cs12con@leeds.ac.uk

arms'. 'I would chase adventure to the four corners of the world', a third man adds demurely. In a room with posters of the outdoors but no windows, a man behind a desk muses: 'We carried spears'. And while tending to delicate flowers, a fifth man declares firmly, 'We would kill, or be killed'. The last statement, made equally firmly, is made by a man at the hairdresser's: 'And all that mattered, was survival'.

Then a horn sounds, like a call to battle. One by one the men roar, tear their shirts, throw furniture and break flower pots. There is chaos in the streets, with all men purpose-fully walking in the same direction. In the next shot the urban background has changed into a natural setting with an unorganized horde of men, devouring raw meat, wading through a river, catching fish and alligators with their bare hands, all the while roaring and grunting like cave men. To the sound of tension-building music, they make their way through a forest, grow unruly facial hair and bash over trees. Then a clearing appears in the forest, with a small stone building in it. A shot of the inside shows a calm bartender, unimpressed by the stampede coming towards him. When the men reach the bar there is a short moment of silence, in which the bartender looks questioningly at the now savage men. They all shout in unison: 'Bavaria!' The bartender pours the men their beers and the commercial ends with a shot of a roaring crowd.

Call of men inevitably reminds its viewers of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) classical celebration of the 'noble savage'. Primitive man, Rousseau believed, lives a life that is not simply fundamentally different, but indeed much more satisfactory than that of his modern counterpart. For he lives in close harmony with an unspoilt nature, socially embedded in small and close-knit communities, and unconstrained by the alienating behavioural prescriptions of modern civilization. This Rousseauian ideal of authenticity has been central to Romanticism ever since, so that Lindholm (2008: 8) rightly calls Rousseau the 'inventor of authenticity' (see also Ferrara, 1998). This ideal has, indeed, moved centre stage in modern culture generally (Taylor, 1991) and has in the process also become central to consumer culture (Goldman and Papson, 1996) as 'a cornerstone of contemporary marketing' (Brown et al., 2003: 21).

Focusing on beer commercials as a strategic case for reasons to be explained below, we therefore study in this article in what ways television commercials endow beer brands with auras of authenticity. We start with a review of the relevant literature about the transforma-tion of consumer culture in the past half century and about today's obsession with authen-ticity. We then explain why beer commercials constitute a suitable case study, discuss our data collection and present our findings. We conclude with a discussion of their theoretical implications for academic debates about the role of authenticity in consumer culture.

Authenticity in contemporary consumer culture

Half a century ago, the typical advertisement still relied on cheesy jingles and slogans making promises of the type 'You'll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent' to stimulate consumers to aim for an optimum prize–quality ratio (Goldman and Papson, 1996: 55). This consumer culture, characterized by a logic of sameness and conformity (keeping up with the Joneses), came under critique from the second half of the 1960s onwards when what came to be known as the 'counterculture' started critiquing Western societies for being alienating and unfree.

Young people, especially those with middle-class backgrounds, protested against what they experienced as a repressive and alienating 'technocratic' and 'capitalist' system, based on conformist mass consumption. As workers, they maintained, human beings were reduced to insignificant cogs in soulless and meaningless bureaucratic machines, whereas as consumers they were socialized into mindless slaves, prepared to buy virtually anything that capitalism's factories poured out. This imposition of the logic of 'The System' – the notion that signifies the cultural discontents of the period better than any other – the critics felt, robbed people of their liberty and personal authenticity, detracting tremendously from what life could potentially be (Campbell, 2007: 184–249; Roszak, 1971; Zijderveld, 1970).

Whereas most of the political unrest that characterized the 1960s and 1970s has withered away, its basically Romantic cultural logic has meanwhile come to permeate the Western cultural mainstream (e.g. Campbell, 2007; Houtman, 2008; Marwick, 1998). This applies especially to consumer culture, in which the cultural logic of conformist mass consumption is largely replaced by an emphasis on individual liberty, nonconformity and personal authenticity. Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter (2004) even go so far as to maintain that 'the critique of mass society has been one of the most powerful forces driving consumerism for the past forty years' (p. 98). The consumer culture of the 1950s, Thomas Frank similarly notes in his book *The Conquest of Cool* (1998), has meanwhile given way to 'a hip consumerism driven by disgust with mass society itself' (Frank, 1998: 28) – a consumer culture that 'promises to deliver the consumer from the dreary nightmare of square consumerism' (Frank, 1998: 32). Central to this new consumer culture is the ideal of authenticity that previously defined the counterculture as well as earlier manifestations of Romanticism in Western modernity.

Social-scientific sources hardly ever attempt to pinpoint the meaning of this notion of authenticity with any degree of precision, presumably because it is so notoriously difficult to define. They typically opt for a more or less comprehensive enumeration of meanings and connotations instead. 'At minimum', Lindholm (2008) states for instance, '[authenticity] is the leading member of a set of values that includes sincere, essential, natural, original and real' (p. 1). Boyle (2004) posits that it stands for 'natural', 'honest', 'unspun', 'sustainable', 'beautiful', 'rooted' and 'three dimensional', whereas Brooks (2000) suggests 'natural', 'simple', 'honest', 'organic', 'craftsman-like', 'unique', 'sincere' (p. 83). What these meanings and connotations have in common is that they identify with the authentic all that does not reflect the cultural, social and economic routines in modern society. In branding such routines as inferior and less than desirable, while asserting the moral superiority and worthiness of phenomena that escape the established order, the notion of authenticity unmistakably features a socially critical edge.

Such a notion of authenticity has moved centre stage in contemporary consumer culture, in which consumers no longer evaluate commodities primarily on the basis of their use value in relation to their cost, but rather on the basis of what Goldman and Papson (1996) call their 'sign value'. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that authenticity stands out among these encoded cultural meanings nowadays and that 'authenticity is what consumers want', as marketing gurus Pine and Gilmore (2007) put it (see also DeSoucey, 2010; Johnston and Baumann, 2010). Studies of consumers and their motives confirm that the formerly philosophical and academic question 'What is real and what is

not?' has found its way from university libraries and seminar rooms to the aisles of today's supermarkets. Some studies understand the consumer quest for authenticity as an escape from a rationalized and disenchanted modern world, which is understood as fake and unreal (Arnould and Price, 2000; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010). Others identify the ability to distinguish genuinely authentic from fake and artificial as an important status marker and point out that the consumption of commodities endowed with an aura of authenticity enables cultural distinction in a Bourdieusian sense (Kates, 2004; Leigh et al., 2006).

Most studies of the role of authenticity in contemporary consumer culture feature a focus on why, how and with what consequences consumers ascribe authenticity to particular commodities and not to others (e.g. Botteril, 2007; Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Rose and Wood, 2005; Wang, 1999). In what follows, we depart from this typical emphasis on consumer understandings of product authenticity in the research literature. Aiming for an empirically informed typology, we instead study in what particular ways television commercials endow beer brands with auras of authenticity. In doing so, we pay special attention to how advertisers deal with the risk of exaggerated or unfounded authenticity claims backfiring on a brand's appeal.

Data and method

The decision to analyse commercials rather than any other genre stems from the circumstance that advertising is one of the main realms where values and meanings are consciously added to products. Our choice for television commercials is based on their typical combination of image, sound and text, which provides richer opportunities for the creation of auras of authenticity than either print media or radio commercials. We chose to analyse beer commercials specifically because beer is a historically rooted product with natural ingredients, which opens up ample opportunities for romantic framing. Given the combination of the wide global range of beer brands and the latter's often nonetheless striking similarity in taste, selling beer moreover calls more urgently for authenticating narratives to seduce the consumer than many other products do (see Wilk, 2006, for a similar case about bottled water).

We composed our sample by, first, listing the major beer brands of English- and Dutch-speaking Western countries (Australia, Ireland, United Kingdom, United States, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands and Belgium). The decision to restrict ourselves to English and Dutch commercials was, of course, informed by practical considerations: these are the two languages in which we felt we did not risk missing any linguistic subtleties. Second, relying on the resulting beer brands' websites and YouTube, we compiled an overview of the commercials that these brands aired between 2004 and 2012. This two-step procedure resulted in a data set of a total of 153 beer commercials from Australia (36), Ireland (8), the United Kingdom (25), the United States (34), New Zealand (7), Canada (13), the Netherlands (21) and Belgium (9).

In a qualitative content analysis, the first author coded the commercials. The first, primarily inductive phase of 'open coding' was performed by repeatedly clustering data into different sets of categories, until a preliminary typology of the meanings of

authenticity emerged. This framework was at the basis of a second phase of 'selective coding' in which the commercials were analysed in more detail and a more refined, definitive typology was constructed (e.g. Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The commercials that are used as examples in this article have been organized into YouTube playlists. These playlists are accessible through the URL's which can be found in the notes.[1]

Registers of authenticity in beer commercials

A majority of 84, or 55 percent, of the 153 beer commercials in our sample feature an attempt to add an aura of authenticity to the advertised product. Of course, we found various other common themes too, particularly related to masculinity and (male) friendship, but we limit ourselves here to a discussion of the ways in which beers are endowed with auras of authenticity. We found that four different registers of authenticity are used to this end, referring to *craftsmanship, historical rootedness, naturalness* and *location*.

Crafting authenticity

One of the central themes in a large number of the beer commercials is craftsmanship.[2] Beers are presented as the artisanal counterparts of beer brewed in a factory setting. Koontz (2010) and Goldman and Papson (1996) describe how authentic production has long been associated with this type of artisanal or craft production and the implication of high quality. Pre-industrial production has been wrapped in a romantic narrative of unalienated labour. The common assumption is that when labour is self-directed and untainted by the massive machineries of industrialism, the worker cares about the product he or she makes. 'Unalienated labour', Goldman and Papson (1996) comment, 'allows genuine human sensibilities to be communicated' (p. 149). Holt (2002) notes that audiences perceive a product as authentic when they see it as being created by 'people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value' (p. 83).

The US beer brand Samuel Adams is an example of a brand that consistently emphasizes craftsmanship. The commercial that illustrates this clearly is their *Infinium* ad, about a speciality beer that was made in cooperation with *Weihenstephan*. 'As a brewer, of course you know Weihenstephan. It is the oldest brewery in the world', Samuel Adams' founder recounts in the first moments of the ad. The commercial introduces the champagne-style beer that Samuel Adams made in cooperation with the German brewers. Against backdrops of copper kettles and wooden kegs, the brewers explain how the beer was brewed within the confines of 'Das Reinheitsgebot', 'an ancient German beer purity law dating back to 1560, which says you are only allowed to produce beer from hops, water, malt and yeast'. The shots of the brewers that tell the story of Infinium are intersected with images of brewers handling the different parts of the brewing process. They are handling fresh hops, checking what is going on inside the copper kettles and holding samples of beer up against the light entering through the brewery window. The Samuel Adams ad emphasizes the possibilities for uniqueness and high quality that 'real' craftsmanship offers.

Other examples of commercials by Samuel Adams that use craftsmanship in a similar way are *There was no light beer category, Not light on flavour, Bavarian hops, Hop till you drop, Brew crew* and *World inspiration.* The Dutch brand Hertog Jan also uses craftsmanship in the commercial *Personally brewed*, where the brewing process is the main focus. The commercial shows the love and care that the craftsman behind the beer dedicates to the final product, emphasizing the authenticating powers of unalienated labour and personal attention to production. It features soft lighting and images with warm, yellow tones of the man behind the brand, smelling fresh hops, feeling barley by letting it run slowly through his fingers, tasting the beer. The music contributes to the air of personal attention. It is a slow song, with the lyrics, 'Prettier than all the world, and I'm so proud of you. […] Yes, and I'm so proud, believe me I love you. I'm so proud to be loved by you'. Hertog Jan also uses craftsmanship to realize an image of authenticity in their other commercials *Perfect* and *Worth the wait.* The British brand Carling uses it in their ad *Back in the 1800's* and the US brand Michelob uses it in their commercial *Our Malt Man*.

Firmly rooted in history

Invoking a sense of history is the second way of authenticating a beer brand: 'Such tactics of asserting authenticity by saying that the new authentically represents the old are used in selling a wide range of products' (Peterson, 2005). There are many examples of beer commercials that use a register of historical rootedness to invoke a sense of authenticity.[3] Among these are the US brands Coors, with their ad *Banquet stories*, Budweiser with their commercials *Eternal optimism* and *Return of the King* and Dutch brand 'Brand' with their ad *History*.

Apart from the use of music to create an old-fashioned setting and showing sepia or black and white images to conjure up feelings of romantic nostalgia, the brands use different ways of incorporating history into beer marketing. Think of slogans like Brand's 'Real beer, since 1340', or the tactic used by Carling and Australian beer brand James Squire, of associating the brand with persons from the past. James Squire tells an interesting story on two levels. The first story is that of the man James Squire:

> After arriving in Australia, as a first fleet convict, James Squire was a brewer, a baker, and possibly a candlestick maker. But mostly he was a brewer. James Squire, never forsake flavour.

The story is also interesting in a second way. Because notably, and perhaps even ironically, even though the James Squire story is true and he really was a first fleet convict and the colony's first commercial brewer, his brewery was closed in 1834, 12 years after his death in 1822. The beer brand that bears his name today has chosen the affiliation with his name and story freely, purposefully associating the brand with a sense of early Australian history.

The US brand Sleeman's ad *Notoriously good since 1834* also uses persons from the past, but they are less specific. The commercial shows people in period attire from the five generations that have used and handed down the family recipe – visualizing the changes that the surroundings of the product have undergone, while the beer itself has stayed the same.

Authenticity, naturally

The third way of adding a layer of authenticity to a beer is by professing its naturalness.[4] Beer brands use this cue to show how they resist the pressures of the outside world to conform and to add fillers or chemicals that would damage the quality and authenticity of the beer. Samuel Adams uses it in their ads *Bavarian hops* and in *Hop 'til you drop*, and, most illustratively, in their *Samlightenment* commercial:

> For centuries, beer was made with four all natural traditional ingredients: yeast, barley, hop, water. Then came light beer. Today, 98 percent of light beer is made with adjuncts and fillers. Here's to the two percent that isn't. Sam Adams light. The light beer that respects beer.

The lines about the ingredients are accompanied by moving full colour images of the ingredients in their natural, outdoor surroundings. The line about the 98 percent is accompanied by black and white grainy images of factory settings with workers in white coats. The message that the commercial relays is clear: wholesome naturalness means authenticity.

Beer brands can highlight the naturalness of beer by emphasizing that some ingredients, and thus some beers, are only available during certain times of the year due to natural rhythms. Hertog Jan's commercial illustrates the naturalness of their product by emphasizing that nature cannot be rushed in their commercial. *Worth the wait* shows brewers in fields of hop and barley, waiting impatiently for the natural ingredients to grow and malt, accompanied by the song 'Time is on my side'. The US brand Blue Moon and the Dutch brand Grolsch are just a few other examples of the many beer brands that have commercials for seasonal beers, focusing on the natural availability of ingredients.

But naturalness of ingredients is not the only way beer commercials use nature to create authenticity. Moosehead's series of *Outer-self* commercials feature a narrator who shows different domains of everyday life, like an office or a gym, and explains why these settings are unnatural:

> Gym machines? Or contraptions designed to keep you away from your outer-self? Discovered by the good folks at Moosehead breweries, your outer-self is a part of the human psyche that yearns for the outside world. Instead, we have been convinced to row on land and cross country ski on carpet.

The background then changes from the grey gym to a warmly sunlit natural outdoor setting, where people are enjoying a Moosehead beer. The message is that whereas Western daily life is grey and inauthentic (rowing on land), having a (Moosehead) beer outside is natural and authentic behaviour.

Examples of other brands that rely on a register of naturalness include the US brand Michelob, with their commercials *Our malt man* and *Model collection*, and the Dutch brand 'Brand', with their ad *More barley, more taste*.

Location, location, location

Locating the brand in a specific place is a fourth way of adding an aura of authenticity.[5] Place is strongly related to 'origin' and 'rootedness' (Parasecoli, 2008: 136). This

association is used to give the brand a part of its identity; by giving it a place it becomes just a little bit more tangible and easier to imagine it as a real thing. Parasecoli (2008) aptly describes place as important because it 'provides a foundation for identities, individual and social, local and national' (p. 136). The link between physical location and meaning has been the subject of the writings of scholars such as Jones and Taylor (2001: 180) and Florida (2003) who successfully show how places are framed as cultural. Consequently, advertisers have the possibility to use all the different connotations of a place to endow a brand with authenticity. Kelly-Holmes (2000) shows how European advertisers invoke these connotations by using the language of a particular country and, in doing so, create a symbolic link in advertising. Commercials can use the association between rootedness and culture to give the audience an opportunity for distinction in the Bourdieusian sense (Goldman and Papson, 1996: 149), or by reinforcing the target audience's link to their own culture, like Molson does in their *I. Am. Canadian* ads.

Molson has made a series of commercials, positioning Molson as the authentic Canadian beer par excellence. In an iconic ad from this series, a man gets up on stage and takes the microphone, delivering a passionate speech about his Canadian identity:

> Hey. I am not a lumberjack, or a fur trader, I don't live in an igloo, or eat blubber, or own a dogsled. And I don't know Jimmy, Sally or Suzy from Canada, although I am certain they're really really nice. I have a prime minister, not a president. I speak English and French, not American, and I pronounce it about, not aboot. I can proudly sew my country's flag on my backpack. I believe in peace keeping, not policing. I believe in diversity, not simulation and that the beaver is a truly proud and noble animal. […] Canada is the first nation of hockey, and the best part of North America!

In the last shots of the commercial, the man proclaims, 'My name is Joe, and …'. Here the image changes to a glass of Molson Canadian beer 'I am Canadian!' This commercial links Molson beer to Canada to endow it with authenticity. Molson also uses location to create authenticity in their commercials *Made from Canada* and in *Unwritten code.*

Other examples of beer brands that use location as a register of authenticity are the Australian brand Fosters, who present their brand as truly Australian in their 10 *Good call* commercials, in their *Australian for beer* series and in the *Fosters Gold* ads and the US brand Samuel Adams in their ad *World inspiration.* The British–Canadian brand Carling makes use of a register of location in their commercials *Brilliantly British, brilliantly refreshing* and in *Back in the 1800's.* Fuller's is another example of a brand that uses its ties to a location, in this case Britain, to create authenticity in their ad *How do I love thee*, and Scottish brand Belhaven Best does the same with its ties to Scotland in their ads *Best excuse* and *Shout.*

Exposing the myth of authenticity

Needless to say, the registers of authenticity used by advertisers to endow beers with auras of authenticity are ideal types in a Weberian sense, so that they are often mixed and combined in the context of a single commercial.[6] Examples of commercials in which this

happens are Carling's *Back in the 1800's* (all four), Coors' a*d Banquet stories* (historical rootedness and location), Michelob's *Our malt man* (naturalness and craftsmanship) and Molson's *Made from Canada* (naturalness and location).

The four registers of authenticity strikingly echo the Romantic countercultural critiques of the 1960s and 1970s. Beers framed as authentic do after all stem more or less directly from nature, without much technological interference (naturalness), whereas the human labour involved in the brewing process is decidedly of a non-alienated variety (craftsmanship). Authentic beers are moreover not produced in anonymous breweries that may be found anywhere on the globe (location), but are parts of historically grown traditions: they have quenched thirst since times immemorial (historical rootedness). They do as such not satisfy an artificially incited pseudo-need, invented to quench capitalism's thirst for profits, but a long-lasting, time-proven and genuine human need that is part and parcel of a locally rooted tradition.

Indeed, back in the 1960s and 1970s, Romantic longings for authenticity coincided with a deep suspicion of advertisers, the media and the culture industries as playing a major role in manipulating and brainwashing the masses. The state and large corporations, it was felt, had a strong and evident interest in making people believe that they were actually happy and living in a free and democratic society. The popularity of the sociologists of the Frankfurt School back then exemplifies this distrust. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002 [1944]) accused the culture industries of lulling the masses into a state of amnesia to secure complacency and contentment and protect capitalism against political opposition. Despite all pretensions of freedom, democracy and tolerance, Marcuse (1965) maintained, whoever was prepared to take a more critical stance could see that what paraded as 'genuine' tolerance was in fact nothing but its repressive counterpart (Marcuse, 1965). The advertising industry and the mass media, Marcuse (1965) also pointed out, were shaping and manipulating even people's most personal needs, wants and desires.

This distrust of advertising resulted in a deep 'crisis of advertising' (Goldman and Papson, 1996: vi) that gave the impetus to changes from the 1980s onwards. The increased emphasis on authenticity constitutes one major aspect of these reconstruction processes in advertising (Frank, 1998; Heath and Potter, 2004). This strategy does not suffice to solve the problem of distrust, however. More than that, it only increases the risk of alienating potential customers because obviously 'staged authenticity can backfire' (Koontz, 2010: 1984) if advertisements are exposed once again as 'promoting an unreal world' (Goldman and Papson, 1996: 57). Advertisers hence face an awkward dilemma, now that consumers value authenticity more than anything else, yet simultaneously distrust claims to the authenticity of products more than ever before.

No less than 31 (37%) of the 84 beer commercials that rely on registers of authenticity offer a fascinating solution to this dilemma. This solution is to frankly acknowledge the mythical status of the authenticity claims that are made. This apparently aims to reassure consumers that they can safely identify with the product because both their longing for authenticity and their distrust of claims to the latter's effect are sympathetically understood. The exposure of the purely fictional and imaginary status of authenticity claims is accomplished by means of either *overstatement* or *explicit commentary*.

Overstatement

By exaggerating the claim to authenticity tremendously, the advertiser shows that these claims are not expected to be taken seriously. Indeed, Bavaria's *Call of men* commercial with which we opened this article is a good example. It does after all not simply boast a Romantic myth of authentic manhood, liberated from self-imposed civility and soft-mindedness. It also makes sure to present this myth in so over-the-top a fashion as to effectively expose it as fake, made up and without serious intentions – certainly not as something the advertiser expects or intends onlookers to 'believe'.[7] Another example is Boag's Draught commercial *From the pure waters of Tasmania*. Location, naturalness and historical rootedness are used to endow the brand with an aura of authenticity, but these qualities are presented in such a way that it is immediately obvious that they are not intended to be taken as claims about reality. The viewer is carried away to a rugged natural landscape, but its qualities are obviously not authentic. 'These pure waters are special', an older looking bearded man playing a toy guitar recounts. The man is seated on a rock next to a natural water stream 'Something goes in there, … comes out different'. A young man rides a bicycle over a flooded part of the road, and when he comes out of the flood his bicycle has become a motorcycle 'In a good way'. Returning to the guitar player, who has dipped his toy guitar in the water and is now holding a full size guitar, he says, 'Don't know why, suppose it's always been that way'. Three men throw a dingy into the water to see it surface as a motorboat, whereas a man shaves himself and rinses his face with the water to instantly grow a moustache where the water touched his face. Film projector–style images of a man dancing in the water follow, his shoes changing every time they are submerged. 'My old man never wore the same shoes twice', the narrator explains. Switched back to current times, a man cleans a fish by the waterside, rinsing his knife, which reappears as a lightsaber. 'Oh sure, things don't always turn out the way you expected'. The narrator appears with a larger and special looking string instrument 'But nobody's complaining'. In the next shot, a man shares a romantic moment with a woman sitting on a dock, before he pushes her in. Then, a man dunks a crate of random empty glass bottles into the water, and they surface as bottles of Boag's Draught. The payoff is a bottle of beer standing on a rock with water flowing over it, with the tagline 'From the pure waters of Tasmania'.

More examples of commercials that use exaggeration to deconstruct claims of authenticity include Brand's commercial about Limburg, the specific region where the beer is from. It dramatically ties it to this location, when thousands of angry, indignant and insulted inhabitants of Limburg take it upon themselves to prove to a visitor that Brand beer is really still brewed in Limburg. The payoff, 'Brand Beer, the beer that Limburg is proud of'. Other commercials, for instance the UK brand Tennent's Lager's *New Firm, A mad man's dream* and *Hugh's pride*, the Irish brand Murphy's Irish Stout's *Turning Irish* and the Australian brand Cascade's commercials *Water* and *Cans* create authenticity by relying on historical rootedness and location, making use of exaggeration to instantly deconstruct the resulting authenticity claims.

Authenticity claims can also be exaggerated by contrasting the mythical and the actual. They are then fabricated by initially creating a bubble of an ideal world, which is subsequently crudely burst by contrasting it with denotations of 'real' reality. On the one

hand, the contrast highlights the difference with the actual situation, while on the other hand it exposes the 'authentic' as mere fantasy.

To give some examples, Amstel's commercial *1870* starts out with black and white images of workers walking and cycling into the courtyard of the Amstel brewery, in what appears to be the late 19th century. The courtyard features men rolling traditional wooden kegs, a whistle blows and inside the brewery there are men covered in filth, shovelling coal into smoky fires and men filling kegs using the equipment of the time. While a worker stencils the number '1870' onto a keg, a raw and deep sounding male voiceover proclaims, 'Amstel 1870 is a powerful lager that has been brewed according to traditional recipe since 1870'. The maker of this commercial thus uses references to history, to craftsmanship, location and to naturalness to paint an image of the lager '1870' as authentic. But the story does not end here.

The image of authenticity is deconstructed by a contrasting image. In the next scene the workers are distracted from their work by a beeping sound and walk outside to see what is causing the noise. In the courtyard, the stunned workers watch a full colour contemporary truck drive into their black and white world. The truck backs into the loading dock and the driver, full colour and obviously situated in the present, gets out and says while smiling, 'Mornin'! Man, you guys weren't easy to find you know'. The voiceover makes the final statement, over an image of a full colour bottle of lager, against a black and white film background, 'and thanks to all our efforts, 1870 is still, "our beer"'. In the last shots the black and white workers are playing with the lift on the back of the truck, while the contemporary driver observes this and shakes his head. The Australian brand Pure Blond also uses a modern-day truck and driver to create contrast in their commercial *Far more pure*, but they use it to contrast with a pure and natural world instead of with history. Bavaria also uses the strategy in their commercial *Drop*. Authenticity is suggested by showing the naturalness of the product, after which this positioning is directly framed as insignificant, to the effect of harshly deconstructing what has been created in so carefully a manner.

Explicit commentary

This strategy deconstructs authenticity claims by explicitly commenting on the commercial.[8] By reflecting on itself, the structure and the commercial's intentions are exposed. Carlton Draught has a penchant for this strategy: they use it in their *No explanations* ad, where the visual elements are images of copper kettles, hop picking, horse drawn carriages with wooden kegs galloping through water and forests, scientists inspecting samples and finally smiling people drinking beer in a pub. The deconstruction of authenticity comes from the deep and dramatic voiceover, whose lines openly mock the imagery:

> Carlton Draught, brewed with sun ripened barley, individually picked hops, and attractive yeast. Poured down pipes, and fermented in a big. Uhm … Metal thing. Carlton Draught, admired by scientists, put in kegs, and driven around, by horses.

At this point, the narrator pauses for a moment. When another picture of a galloping horse appears, with no carriage, kegs of beer in the shot, he ironically states 'more

horses!' and by doing so reflects on the staged nature of authenticity in the commercial. He then continues, 'Poured into frosty sideways glasses, and drunk in pubs. Carlton draught, made from beer'.

Images of a dramatic fjords, with the text 'Scandinavia, 2004', form the start of Stella Artois' *Vikings* commercial. In this commercial, an aura of authenticity is created by addressing location, nature and history. The following shot features a bar with a man telling a story:

> You know, us Vikings, were a peaceful lot. Living in harmony with nature, drinking beer made from the purest water from our fjords. Aaah, life was bliss. Until, one day, the Belgians came, and stole our beer. So, we went after them. And yes, maybe there was a little violence.

Images of Viking ships and a burning village follow. 'You would burn a village or two for the taste of this'. The pay off is 'Stella Artois, envied worldwide' and is the first suggestion to the imaginary character of the story. The authenticity claim is then deconstructed even more explicitly by the storyteller himself when he asks the bartender, 'Do you think they'll buy it?' 'Not in Belgium', he answers, and the storyteller laughs and looks directly at the camera. The same strategy is used in their commercial 'the Italian' where an Italian makes obviously false claims about the ties of the brand to Italian history.

Carlton Draught has another notable and well-known commercial in this category: *Big ad*. To the sound of 'Oh Fortuna' (the medieval poem set to music by Orff), two groups of medieval style clad groups of men, one in red and one in yellow, storm towards each other on a wide field as if a large battle is about to start. Authenticity is created by placing the brand in a medieval context. But this claim is deconstructed simultaneously. The lyrics are highly reflexive and mock the meta-communication of the commercial:

> It's a big ad, very big ad, it's a big ad we're in. It's a big ad, my god it's big. Can't believe how big it is. It's a big ad, for Carlton Draught. It's just so freaking huge. It's a big ad. Expensive ad. This ad better sell some bloody beer.

By the end of the commercial it becomes clear that the two groups are not waging war, but come together to form a huge figure, reminiscent of England's Long man of Wilmington,[9] drinking a Carlton Draught. With this, the commercial aims to bring about an aura of authenticity by referencing history while also deconstructing this with the text and final image. Another example of explicit commentary used to deconstruct authenticity is employed in the UK brand Newcastle Brown Ale's commercial *Miners*, which ends with the line, 'Because nothing sells beer like old footage of people who had it way worse than you do'.

Conclusion and discussion

That 'authenticity is what consumers want', as Pine and Gilmore (2007) adequately put it, is by now a mainstay in studies on consumer culture. In our analysis of beer commercials, we empirically disentangled four strategies of authentication. Auras of authenticity

are brought about by framing products as the result of genuine craftsmanship, as rooted in a long history and a concrete location and as crafted on the basis of natural ingredients. By combining these elements, producers of beer commercials create narratives of authenticity that strongly resonate with the countercultural discourse of the 1960s. These narratives' widespread deployment in beer commercials confirms that, in a paradoxical and ironical fashion, a romantic longing for a life beyond the modern cultural, social and economic order has evolved into a major cultural driver of the engine of contemporary capitalism (e.g. Arnould and Price, 2000; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Heath and Potter, 2004).

And yet, these findings prove to be only half of the story since claims of authenticity in beer commercials are often openly presented as 'staged' by the advertisers themselves. Theoretically, this indicates the influence of a second, related, but by and large unacknowledged, aspect of the counterculture. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, after all, romantic longings for authenticity were intimately connected to deep suspicions about advertising, the media and the culture industries as playing major roles in manipulating the masses. This suspicion continues to exist among contemporary consumers (Goldman and Papson, 1996) and is today, as the foregoing has pointed out, even reflexively incorporated in advertising. This results in beer commercials relying on registers of authenticity, yet simultaneously making proverbial 'winks' to consumers. These 'winks' communicate a message of the type, 'We know, dear consumer, that you know that we know that you know, that this isn't real; it's advertising!' Goldman and Papson describe this type of hyper-reflexivity as 'an attempt to borrow legitimacy from the subject's everyday life' and pose that 'self-reflexive modes of address admit that ads usually operate on the basis of false assumptions' (Goldman and Papson, 1996: 74). By acknowledging that narratives about authenticity are not true, or real in a more empirical sense of the word, producers of beer commercials evade the potential critique that they are misleading or manipulating their audience.

The bigger question remains, why are authenticity claims still so prominent in today's advertising when consumers and producers are both aware of, and indeed frank and open about, the former's largely fictional character? The continued presence and popularity of such claims are especially remarkable against the background of the common suggestion that, once unveiled as myths, authenticity claims will gradually lose their appeal because 'every new bogus claim of authenticity erodes the credibility of such claims' (Goldman and Papson, 1996: vii–viii). Likewise, academic critiques of the 'authenticity industry' (Mestrovic, 1997), the 'authenticity hoax' (Potter, 2010) and the 'fake real' (Boyle, 2004) appear informed by a similar assumption that the exposition of false and unfounded authenticity claims helps liberate consumers from a deceptive authenticity hoax.

But does it? One may indeed wonder why after all these years of critique, from the Frankfurt School to the present, consumers have still not been liberated from these illusions. One interesting answer to this question is that consumers may be well aware of the largely fictional status of authenticity claims in advertising, but do nonetheless – and perhaps precisely due to this – appreciate these authenticity myths. This line of reasoning has been brought forward by Colin Campbell (2007) who has argued that the West increasingly features a 'mythopoeic culture' (p. 328–329). In such a culture, fantasy gradually replaces realism, whereas myth 'assert(s) its superiority to historical

narrative'. Indeed, movies like *Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, The Chronicles of Narnia* or *Game of Thrones* are nowadays massively produced and eagerly consumed in popular media culture. Much like the beer commercials analysed in this study, such mythical stories feature authentic worlds beyond modernity – simple societies with a concrete sense of place, a strong historical awareness, pristine nature, craftsmanship and honest values (e.g. Curry, 1998). Obviously, the popularity of such fantasy narratives does not stem from the circumstance that they are taken to be 'true'. Quite to the contrary, an engagement with myth is based on the assumption that such narratives reveal archetypical and perennial wisdoms – allegorical stories that have been told in many forms, in different times and various places (Aupers and Houtman, 2003; Hanegraaff, 1996). Myth, in this particular meaning, is not so much an 'illusion', but rather a 'poetic truth' providing meaning and consolation (Curry, 1998: 131): it can be 'true' in the same way that a novel can be deeply 'true', even though it is rightly classified as 'fiction', not 'fact' (Caputo, 2001: 112). Myth, Campbell (1987) summarizes aptly, is an 'illusion which is known to be false but felt to be true' (p. 78).

On the basis of our findings, in short, we hypothesize that the obsession with authenticity in contemporary Western societies does not automatically mean that people actually believe that authenticity myths are true. We rather suggest exactly the reverse: that most people are well aware that these authenticity myths are not true. Successful commercials do not succeed in inciting consumers to buy a commodity because they manage to make them believe in authenticity claims, but because contemporary consumers have a cultural craving for myths about authenticity and do not care much about the latter's fictional status. Indeed, one of us has argued elsewhere, precisely the acknowledgement that authenticity claims are *not* true may provide an alibi to fully indulge in their meaning without the risk of making a naive and dupable fool of oneself (Aupers, in press). We think this theory about authenticity myths merits further empirical exploration and testing in future research, if only because it allows for critical empirical scrutiny of widespread academic notions of authenticity myths as 'harmful illusions' and of contemporary consumers as duped and brainwashed by the culture industries. Not only may these notions simply be beside the point but also the blunt modern binaries of 'true versus false', 'fact versus fiction' and 'reality versus myth' that inform them may actually be becoming gradually obsolete in the real world.

Notes

1.   The full playlist can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL89FCE99D137 9AA51

2.   The 'Crafting authenticity' playlist can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=
     PL0F505BC63E93221F
3.   The 'It's how we've always done it' playlist can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/play
     list?list=PLB5C891A47C245BA6
4.   The 'Authenticity, naturally' playlist can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/playlist?lis
     t=PLE356BC06F48F80C0
5.   The 'Location, location, location' playlist can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/playli
     st?list=PL689907AA049DF794
6.   The 'Putting it together' playlist can be accessed at: http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=P
     L0D0D40809F52E214
7.   The 'Overstatement' playlist can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL215
     065008C3694CC
8.   The 'Explicit commentary' playlist can be accessed at http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=
     PL1062E5DAB3110320
9.   http://sussexpast.co.uk/properties-to-discover/the-long-man

References

Arnould E and Price L (2000) Authenticating acts and authoritative performances.In: Ratneshwar
     S, Mick DG and Huffman C (eds) *The Why of Consumption: Contemporary Perspectives on
     Consumers' Motives, Goals, and Desires*. New York: Routledge, pp.144–163.
Aupers S (in press) Spiritual play: Encountering the sacred in World of Warcraft. In: Frissen V,
     De Mul J and Raessens J (eds) *Homo Ludens 2.0: Play, Media and Identity*. Amsterdam:
     Amsterdam University Press.
Aupers S and Houtman D (2003) Oriental religion in the secular west: Globalization, new age, and
     the reenchantment of the world. *Journal of National Development* 16(1/2): 67–86.
Beverland MB and Farrelly FJ (2010) The quest for authenticity in consumption: Consumers'
     purposive choice of authentic cues to shape experienced outcomes. *Journal of Consumer
     Research* 36: 838–856.
Botteril J (2007) Cowboys, outlaws and artists: The rhetoric of authenticity and contemporary
     jeans and sneaker advertisements. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7: 105–125.
Boyle D (2004) *Authenticity: Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life*. Hammersmith:
     HarperCollins Publishers.
Brooks D (2000) *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There*. New York:
     Simon & Schuster.
Brown S, Kozinets R and Sherry J (2003) Teaching old brands new tricks: Retro branding and the
     revival of brand meaning. *Journal of Marketing* 67(3): 19–33.
Campbell C (1987) *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumption*. London: Blackwell
     Publishers.
Campbell C (2007) *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the
     Modern Era*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
Caputo J (2001) *On Religion*. London; New York: Routledge.
Charmaz K (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative
     Analysis*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA; New Delhi, India: Sage.
Curry P (1998) *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity*. Hammersmith:
     HarperCollins Publishers.
DeSoucey M (2010) Gastronationalism: Food traditions and authenticity politics in the European
     Union. *American Sociological Review* 75: 432–455.
Ferrara A (1998) *Reflective Authenticity: Rethinking the Project of Modernity*. London: Routledge.

Florida R (2003) *The Rise of the Creative Class*. New York: Basic Books.

Frank T (1998) *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Glaser BG and Strauss A (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine de Gruyter.

Goldman R and Papson S (1996) *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising*. New York: Guildford Press.

Grayson K and Martinec R (2004) Consumer perceptions of iconicity and indexicality and their influence on assessments of authentic market offerings. *Journal of Consumer Research* 31: 296–312.

Hanegraaff WJ (1996) *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Leiden: Brill.

Heath J and Potter A (2004) *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

Holt D (2002) Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of Consumer Research* 29: 70–90.

Horkheimer M and Adorno TW (2002 [1944]) *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Houtman D (2008) *Op jacht naar de echte werkelijkheid: Dromen over authenticiteit in een wereld zonder fundamenten*. Amsterdam: Pallas Publications.

Johnston J and Baumann S (2010) *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape*. New York: Routledge.

Jones S and Taylor B (2001) Food writing and food cultures. The case of Elizabeth David and Jane Grigson. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4(2): 171–188.

Kates M (2004) The dynamics of brand legitimacy: An interpretive study in the gay men's community. *Journal of Consumer Research* 31: 455–464.

Kelly-Holmes H (2000) Bier, parfum, kaas: Language fetish in European advertising. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3: 67–82.

Koontz A (2010) Constructing authenticity: A review of trends and influences in the process of authentication in consumption. *Sociology Compass* 4(11): 977–988.

Leigh TW, Peters C and Shelton J (2006) The consumer quest for authenticity: The multiplicity of meanings within the MG subculture of consumption. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 34(4): 481–493.

Lindholm C (2008) *Culture and Authenticity*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Marcuse H (1965) Repressive tolerance. In: Wolff RP, Moore B and Marcuse H (eds) *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, pp.95–137.

Marwick A (1998) *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Mestrovic SG (1997) *Postemotional Society*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA; New Delhi, India: Sage.

Parasecoli F (2008) *Bite Me: Food in Popular Culture*. London: A & C Black Publishers Ltd.

Peterson R (2005) In search of authenticity. *Journal of Management Studies* 42(5): 1083–1093.

Pine J and Gilmore J (2007) *Authenticity*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Potter A (2010) *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Get Lost Finding Ourselves*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Rose R and Wood S (2005) Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality television. *Journal of Consumer Research* 32: 284–296.

Roszak T (1971) *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition*. New York: Doubleday Publishing.

Taylor C (1991) *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wang N (1999) Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience? *Annals of Tourism Research* 26: 349–370.

Wilk R (2006) Bottled water: The pure commodity in the age of branding. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 6(3): 303–325.

Zijderveld AC (1970) *The Abstract Society: A Cultural Analysis of Our Time*. New York: Doubleday Publishing.

Biographical notes

Carly O'Neill is a PhD Candidate at the School of Media and Communication at the University of Leeds. Her research interest lies with the commodification of morality in consumer culture. This article is the end product of her research internship at Erasmus University Rotterdam, where she was supervised by Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers.

Dick Houtman is Full Professor of Sociology of Culture and Religion at the Center for Sociological Research (CeSO), University of Leuven, Belgium, and faculty fellow at Yale University's Center for Cultural Sociology (CCS), where he was a visiting fellow during the academic year 2012-2013. His principal research interests are the spiritualization and revitalization of religion and the culturalization of politics in contemporary modernity.

Stef Aupers is an Associate Professor at the Centre for Rotterdam Cultural Sociology (CROCUS) at Erasmus University Rotterdam. His principal research interest is cultural change in Western societies, and he has published on religious change and spirituality, online computer games and play culture, Internet culture and conspiracy culture.