From aura to jargon: the social life of authentication
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Abstract

Purpose – Authenticity has emerged as a prevailing purchase criterion that seems to include both real and stylised versions of the truth. The purpose of this paper is to address the negotiation of authenticity by examining the means by which costume designers draw on cues such as historical correctness and imagination to authenticate re-enactments of historical epochs in cinematic artwork.

Design/methodology/approach – To understand and analyse how different epochs were re-enacted required interviewing costume designers who have brought reimagined epochs into being. The questions were aimed towards acknowledging the socio-cultural circulation of images that practitioners draw from in order to project authenticity. This study was conducted during a seven-week internship at a costume store called Independent Costume in Stockholm as part of a doctoral course in cultural production.

Findings – Authenticity could be found in citations that neither had nor resembled something with an indexical link to the original referent as long as the audience could make a connection to the historical epoch sought to re-enact. As such, it would seem that imagination and historical correctness interplay in impressions of authenticity. Findings suggest that performances of authentication are influenced by socially instituted discursive practices (i.e. jargons) and collective imagination.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to the literature on social and performative aspects of authentication as well as its implications for brands in the arts and culture sector.

Keywords Authenticity, Cultural branding, Cinematic artwork, Costume design

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

We are said to be living in a culture of authenticity increasingly obsessing over concerns such as genuineness and the real thing (Laermans, 2018) which is evident both in regard to how media reports are being framed and when it comes to the field of artistic expression (Fine, 2003; Newman and Bloom, 2012). It is also the subject of a growing body of academic work within the field of marketing and brand management (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Rose and Wood, 2005; Beverland et al., 2008). Brand authenticity increases purchase likelihood (Ballantyne et al., 2006) and has now overtaken quality as a prevailing purchase criterion (Gilmore and Pine, 2007). It is thus crucial for brands to signify authenticity if they are to succeed in an increasingly standardised marketplace (Thompson et al., 2006) yet confusion surrounds the nature and use of the term (Beverland, 2005).

Brand authenticity generally means that a brand sticks to the same ethos or values over time, and seems to inhere at least one of the four modalities of continuity, credibility, integrity and symbolism (Morhart et al., 2015). Similar dimensions such as originality, naturalness, quality commitment, sincerity, consistency, individuality, nostalgia, clarity, social commitment and legitimacy have also been identified (Bruhn et al., 2012; Napoli et al., 2014, Schallehn et al., 2014; Fritz et al., 2017). In total, brand authenticity seems to include both real and stylised versions of the truth (Beverland, 2006). This paper addresses the negotiation of authenticity by examining the means by which costume designers draw on both historical correctness and imagination to authenticate re-enactments of historical epochs in cultural productions.

A recent special issue of Arts Marketing: An International Journal suggests that authenticity also is an increasingly important marketing concept in the arts and culture sector (see Baumgarth et al., 2014). Record companies tend to use the label of authenticity for the purposes of commercial gain (Wilson, 2011). Art organisations have shown a growing
interest in the marketing concept (Ulker-Demirel et al., 2018). Film tourism, i.e., when consumers travel to the distant locations they have seen on screen in their favourite films and TV shows, has exploded over the last years (Tzanelli, 2007). According to Wohlfeil (2018), there are more than 160m cinematic tourists every year. Schroeder (2005) suggests that awareness of the interconnection between the arts, culture and marketing can provide a better understanding of branding as a strategic signifying practice. Visual re-enactments of historical epochs therefore provide a fruitful research context for studying how historical correctness and imagination interplay in the negotiation of authenticity (Chronis et al., 2012). More specifically, it emphasises reiterative and citational aspects of the institutionalisation of authenticity (Scott, 2001).

As obviously staged claims to authenticity can backfire (Koontz, 2010) there is a need to examine how to project authenticity as a cultural branding technique (O’Reilly, 2011). For instance, it has been suggested that audiences draw on objective facts such as historical correctness to undermine the pure authenticity of a citation (Beverland et al., 2008). It has also been said the audiences might be willing to suspend disbelief if the citation has an approximate or moral link to the original referent (Beverland et al., 2008). Grayson and Martinec (2004) distinguished between indexical and iconic signification to describe how consumers were able to imagine authenticity in fictitious settings such as The Sherlock Holmes Museum. Yet another approach has studied how viewers in the blatantly artificial setting of reality television programming are able to endow the experience with personal authenticity by blending the fantastical with indexical elements connected to their own lived experiences (Rose and Wood, 2005).

Empirically, this paper examines how costume design contributes to images of authenticity. Understanding how authenticity is derived from re-enactments of historical epochs is important as it elucidates the interplay between real and imaginary elements in the negotiation of authenticity. This study contributes to the emerging research on performative aspects of authentication (Knudsen and Waade, 2010; Zhu, 2012; Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Harwood and El-Manstrly, 2012). The aim is to elucidate what brands and other practitioners can do to project authenticity drawing on both real and imaginary cues. While costume designers are part of the mise-en-scene they also watch films made by others. Thus, they could simultaneously be viewed both as co-creators and audience.

This paper is structured as follows. First, a brief review of the nature and usage of authenticity is presented. Then the qualitative methods employed are outlined. The paper focusses on the context of costume design in cultural productions that seek to re-enact historical epochs for the reason that it helps elucidate how historical correctness and imagination, i.e., factual and cultural aspects, exist in tension with each other in the social process of authentication (cf. Peterson, 2005). The Findings section focusses on how images of authenticity are projected, and has both theoretical contributions and practical implications. Finally, the paper closes with a concluding section.

The nature of authenticity
Despite the plethora of academic articles written on the topic of authenticity, the term remains elusive (Appadurai, 1988). Because of its heterogeneous usage there is a lack of consensus regarding what authenticity actually means in relation to the market (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). At one extreme, authenticity is intrinsic to the object. From this perspective, there are museum-like, objective criteria used to measure authenticity (Trilling, 1972). Thus, even though the consumers themselves think they have gained an authentic experience, this can still be judged ad inauthentic if the commoditised objects are in fact contrived. An example is the notion of staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973) where cultural traditions are staged to attract tourists searching for romanticised versions of indigenous culture. However, in the marketing literature authenticity is more often seen as a
contrivance rather than a reality (Brown et al., 2003). From this perspective, authenticity is
impression based and its social connotations are not given but negotiable. As such,
authenticity or inauthenticity is a result of interpretations (Peterson, 2005; Hartmann and
Ostberg, 2013). Furthermore, new cultural practices can evolve and eventually become
hegemonic in what is regarded as traditional culture in the reiterative process of emergent
authenticity (Cohen, 1988). This has implications for how the past is cited and reimagined in
the context of costume design in cultural productions as the historically correct can be
forgotten through the stylised reiteration of images.

Yet another approach has studied how consumers feel about themselves. Wang (1999)
introduced the term existential authenticity to denote a state of being when tourists at exotic
locations feel as if they reveal their true inner selves. From this perspective, experienced
authenticity has nothing to do with the issue of whether objects are original but whether
individuals feel as if they are in touch both with a real world and with their real selves
(Handler and Saxton, 1988). Arnould and Price (2000) suggest that authenticating acts and
authoritative performances are primary drivers of postmodern consumer behaviour[1]. As
such, authentic brands serve as credible cultural and symbolic resources for self-construction
(Holt, 2002). Authentication is thus subjective and highly contingent on personal goals and
motives (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010).

It has been suggested that the existential approach may have the most explanatory
power to examine authenticity under the postmodern condition where anything could be
reproduced into infinity (Baudrillard, 1983). Reisinger and Steiner (2006) take this argument
one step further, suggesting that scholars should abandon the notion of object-based
authenticity altogether because of its heterogeneous and ontologically problematic usage.
For example, Bardhi et al. (2010) noted how American tourists had negative experiences of
the genuine Chinese cuisine, which did not conform to their expectations and mental image
of it, and instead turned to “Americanised” dishes they more easily could connect to.
However, while the notion of object-based authenticity is problematic, as there continues to
be a lack of consensus regarding how it is conceived, it continues to be relevant for the
marketers as the concept in practice is deeply embedded in the minds of consumers. As
Belhassen et al. (2008) note, we cannot eschew a concept that continues to play a significant
part in lived consumption practices.

The review above suggests that scholars have distinguished between authenticity, i.e.,
items that genuinely existed in the time sought to re-enact, and experienced authenticity, i.e.,
items that the audience, irrespective of whether they are staged or not, experiences as
genuine. Recently the notion of performativity has started to pervade the literature on
authenticity in an attempt to elucidate how consumer objects and social discourses often
exist in dialogue with experiences of state authenticity. Harwood and El-Manstrly (2012) use
the term The Performativity Turn to encapsulate this trend. Performativity is a term that is
used to explain the act through which something is authenticated and draws upon John L.
Austin’s (1975) conception of utterances that do something rather than merely describe
reality. In contrast to constatives, i.e., statements that report on reality (e.g. the sky is blue),
that can be said to be either true or false, performatives suggest that in the utterance its
evoked act is performed (e.g. the bride saying “I do” during a wedding). For a performative
act to be valid it needs to live up to some conventions. In regard to historical re-enactments it
means that the audience must be able to make a connection to the previous circumstance
that is cited (Derrida, 1988). As such, there is room for imagination and boundaries can be
pushed as far as possible as long as audiences still manage to make this connection.
Through the theoretical lens of performativity, Knudsen and Waade (2010) suggest that the
search for authenticity is neither a thing nor a mental state but, as Zhu (2012, p. 1496) points
out, an “instrumental embodiment aroused through the dynamic interaction between
individual agency and the external world”. Cohen and Cohen (2012) further advocate the
shift from authenticity to an emphasis on social processes of authentication, by outlining two co-constituting modes of authentication, namely, those of “hot” and “cool”. Cool authentication is akin to a singular performative speech act made by an authenticating agent who because of he or she is recognised as “meeting certain predetermined standards or qualifications” is acquired with the credentials to perform such an act (Morrison et al., 1992, p. 33). As such, cool authentication is related to issues of who has the institutional power to authenticate or endow an object, site or experience with genuineness; or as Bruner (2005, p. 150) wonders, “Who has the authority to authenticate?” Hot authentication, on the other hand, does not involve a clearly defined authenticating authority but could rather be described as a gradual, reiterative and socially produced process that often is embedded in the flow of everyday life. Whereas cool authentication often is evidence based and has affinities to the broader stream of object authenticity, hot authentication is diffuse, based on belief and closer related to the stream of experienced authenticity. However, as noted by Cohen and Cohen (2012), these two modes of authentication often intersect or exist in tension with each other, e.g., individual performances can “hotly” either sustain or subvert “coolly” authenticated objects, sites and experiences (Bell, 2008).

Costume designs in cultural productions that seek to re-enact historical epochs are stylised reiterations with indexical or iconic links to historical events. While there may be some elements of truth in these projections, images of authenticity are often fabricated (Beverland, 2005). While advertisers often expose the audiences to the phantasmatic status of the authenticity promoted, either through explicit commentary or overstatement, showing that the claims are not meant to be taken seriously, and as such, providing an alibi for audiences to indulge in the advertisement without the risk of being deceived or led astray (O'Neill et al., 2014), such ironic exposure is less common in cultural productions that re-enact historical epochs as the commercial motives already are downplayed, typically in favour of a narrative or an aesthetic experience (Holt, 2002). Furthermore, Bendix (1989, p. 132) notes that traditions always are defined in the present, which raises questions of how and by whom the past is authentically reimagined. Because of their presumed competence, it could be argued that the costume designers in this study assert powers to “cool” authentication when reimagining the past in retrospect (Cohen and Cohen, 2012). These “coolly” authenticated cultural artefacts then have the potential to stimulate continuous and reiterative performances of “hot” authentication. The distinction between “hot” and “cool” authentication is useful as it expands on Austin’s (1975) conceptualisations of illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect, i.e., what the speaker is attempting to do in uttering the locution and the actual effect the speaker has on the interlocutor by uttering the locution. As noted by Butler (2010), the “cool” utterance can set into motion a set of actions that bring further performances of “hot” authentication around.

The above review suggests that authenticity is an elusive concept that contains both elements intrinsic to the object, site or experience; and self-referential elements related to the consumer’s personal goals and motives. Therefore, it would seem that images of authenticity in cultural branding often are partly true and partly rhetorical (Beverland, 2005). Recently, scholars have emphasised the notion of authentication as a performative and social process (cf. Cohen and Cohen, 2012). From this perspective, interplay between historical correctness and imagination could serve as a means to help create, orchestrate and maintain impressions of authenticity “hotly” and “coolly” (Brown et al., 2003).

**Method**

An extended case design was chosen for several reasons. First, it seeks to uncover the macro foundations of a micro sociology (Burawoy, 1998). As such, it illustrates how context-specific performances of authentication are shaped by wider socio-cultural structures. As noted by Knudsen and Waade (2010), films and television series play an important role in the performative approach to authenticity. To understand and analyse how different epochs were
re-enacted required interviewing costume designers who have brought reimagined epochs into being. Also, costume designs play a significant, often unnoticed role in films and television series. Alongside other creative personnel in the mise-en-scène such as directors, scenic designers, hair stylists and make-up artists, the costume designers typically seek to enhance the gestalt of the period through the visual design of garments and accessories. Finally, narrative interviews with professional costume designers allow the informants to articulate their experiences in their own terminology. The narratives provided in the interviews constitute social texts, complex cultural, social and psychological products, which construct a particular version of an individual’s experiences (Moisander et al., 2009) and through which people enact and reveal cultural meaning (Denzin, 2001).

The questions were aimed towards acknowledging the socio-cultural circulation of images that practitioners draw from in order to project authenticity, i.e., the conventions that audiences should be able to connect to in order for an act of “cool” authentication to be considered to have been performed successfully. The chosen method allowed an elaboration on how historical correctness and imagination interplay and co-constitute the organising ideas of authenticity in the contexts of cultural production and historical re-enactment.

This study was conducted during a seven-week internship at a costume store called Independent Costume in Stockholm as part of a doctoral course in cultural production. On over 1,600 square metres they carry more than 100,000 costumes from all historical eras, which according to their website makes it the largest collection of costumes for professionals in Scandinavia. Altogether for this study, five costume designers were interviewed. Each informant was contacted via e-mail and given a detailed outline of the study prior to the interview. All interviews sans one were then conducted on the site of Independent Costume and they lasted from 40 min up to an hour.

The interviews were part of an extended case design, also including daylong backstage tours at three national museums as well as collected images from the Swedish Film Institute database. The questions were organised temporally around the various steps of the informants’ own work processes to create narratives of how they dealt with issues of authenticity while re-enacting a historical epoch. In order to also capture some of the performances of “hot” authentication, the informants were asked to discuss films made by others that re-enact historical epochs. As such, interviewer and informant discussed the questions in a collaborative manner (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). Each interview began with a summary of the research project before asking the informant to guide us step by step through a recent production they had been working on.

In total, I ended up with 82 pages of transcribed text and these were interpreted through narrative analysis (Riessman and Quinney, 2005). The goal of such an analysis is to gain an understanding of the different ways in which authenticity is discursively orchestrated in the context of costume design in historical re-enactment. This analysis is partly based on Hirschman and Holbrook’s (1993) approach to aesthetics as understood through the study of signs. Holbrook and Grayson (1986) also draw on semiology to investigate the use of consumption symbolism in cinematic artwork to help convey the meaning of artistic creation. From this perspective, cinematic artwork is treated as signifying chains of connotative relationships between signifiers and signifieds to interpret the audience encoding habits. Following Beardsley’s (1979) distinction between so-called dominate (e.g. the historical epoch, literary original, etc.) and subordinate (e.g. the cinematic representation) illocutionary actions, good style consists of combining these layers to compose a coherent overall impression. Building the theoretical framework upon performativity literature is useful for elucidating how a subordinate cinematic performance may transform the dominate image of the historical epoch re-enacted, which has implications for the negotiation of authenticity (Table I).
Findings
The findings are presented around a number of key themes. Briefly, authenticity could be found in citations that neither had nor resembled something with an indexical link to the original referent as long as the audience could make a connection to the historical epoch sought to re-enact. As such, it would seem that imagination and historical correctness interplay in the negotiation of authenticity. This aspect needs to be taken into consideration if performances of authentication are to be successfully initiated. In turn, findings suggest that performances of authentication are influenced by socially instituted discursive practices, from here on referred to as jargons, and collective imagination. An elaboration of these findings is presented below.

How to do things with clothes
As noted in Austin’s (1975) lectures, in contrast to constatives, so-called performative utterances cannot be said to be either true or false. Rather, they succeed under felicitous circumstances, i.e., circumstances that happily live up to some sort of conventions. For example, while the bride saying “I do” during a wedding is imperative for the performance, it is not the only thing necessary for the marital act to be considered to have been performed successfully. The presence of a priest or another equivalent legitimate witness is required during the act for the marriage to be considered authentic. As Austin (1975, p. 14) says, “There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect”, for the performance to be felicitous.

This distinction between constative and performative utterances has implications for the negotiation of authenticity in artistic representation. First, one informant, Kersti, mentioned how the signifying chain of the historical re-enactment inevitably is an interpretation and not a factual report on the bygone era:

It can never be a different time than the one we live in. Authenticity is already ruined, so to speak. It is an interpretation no matter what. […] Anything you do is an innovation of a historical era. It is a mystery, albeit an incredibly fascinating one, how you make it as authentic as possible. Even the bodies are different today, so capturing the silhouette of a bygone era can be an incredibly difficult task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cilla Rörby</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Has been working as a professional costume designer since 2001. She created the look for Lisbeth Salander in <em>The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo</em> from 2009 as well as the following movie adaptions of Stieg Larsson’s <em>Millennium</em> trilogy. Her filmography includes more than eighteen movies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katja Watkins</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Has been active as costume designer since 1987 when she worked on Colin Nutley’s feature film <em>Nionde kompaniet</em>. Other notable works include the Swedish crime drama series <em>Beck</em>, and <em>Sommaren ’92</em> about the Danish men football team when they went on to win the European Championship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kersti Vitali</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>One of Sweden’s most acclaimed costume designers. She has been working professionally since 1977. She has also successfully worked with costume, mask and wig for the Opera and the stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kicki Ilander</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Debuted as a professional costume designer in 1987 when she worked on Bill August’s award-winning film <em>Pelle Erövraren</em>. Other notable works include <em>Borg vs McEnroe</em> (2017), <em>Arn: tempelriddaren</em> (2007) and <em>Monica Z</em> (2013). She has also worked with stage design for both films and the theatrical stage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanna Nystrom</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Former textile teacher who has been working professionally as a costume designer since 2011. Her works mostly include commercials and TV series. She has also been working with stage costumes for Jay Z and Kanye West’s collaborative <em>Watch the Throne</em> tour as well as Swedish musicians such as Veronica Maggio, Sofia Talvik and Niki &amp; The Dove.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table I.** List of informants

Source: For more extensive details about the informants, one may visit www.nordicwomeninfilm.com or www.svenskfilm databas.se
Thus, as a re-enactment by nature reimagines the historical epoch, it can in a constative sense be said to be false or inauthentic. Following the indexical approach, there are objective criteria by which to undermine the authenticity of such a re-enactment, as it is subsequent interpretation of a time gone by and thus situated in the present rather than the time it represents. This was further illustrated by another informant, Cilla who had been working on a biopic about Swedish author Astrid Lindgren that was supposed to take place in the 1920s:

> After all, there is access to actual things [from that time], which counts for something. But there are not so much clothing around anymore that you can use. [...] Even if it were, people would still not have been able to wear them today. They would just fall apart. I did have some original clothing but I had to spend so much time repairing them it made me sick. It was much easier to find something that resembled it.

Due to difficulties of finding garments with a factual or indexical link to the time they were supposed to represent, some of the fabrics that were used in the past may no longer even exist, it is perhaps better to view them as symbolic or material representations that bring about its intended impression of authenticity if the circumstances are felicitous. This could be the case if authenticity is imitated through iconic signification, which previously has been suggested by Grayson and Martinec (2004). Iconic signification can, in turn, be divided into what Beverland et al. (2008) call approximate and moral signification depending on whether the designs resemble the time or place they seek to represent; or are representative for what they believed and how they lived their lives. Cilla continues to describe the aims and driving questions of her work:

> What were the people thinking of? How did they live and what did they do? What did they dream of? That is what you want to achieve. In order to make a choice to twist some aspect, I think it is important to know what is was actually like. [...] I want to know what it was really like, and then I can make a decision. There is actually a lot of modern clothing in that film but I do not think anyone would notice it. As long as you know what it actually looked like it almost becomes a sport, a game [of subverting the facts].

Austin (1975) further distinguishes between illocutionary and perlocutionary performatives to denote the distance between intentions and consequential effect of an act. The illocution is thus what the costume designers try to achieve with their productions, whereas the perlocution is what is actually achieved. The projection, which could be treated as an act of “cool” authentication, alone does not necessarily bring the illocution of experienced authenticity around, but might under felicitous circumstances inspire a set of perlocutionary forces, i.e., acts of “hot” authentication, that bring the illocutionary effect around. More specifically, what the costume designers actually produce is the locution, which could be compared to the bride saying, “I do” during a wedding. The intention is typically (but not necessarily) for the design or historical restoration to be deemed as authentic or as truthful to the original as possible, or in the case of the bride, the marital act to be performed successfully. However, the perlocutionary forces are what under felicitous circumstances bring the illocutionary effect around, i.e., the circumstances need to live up to some sort of conventional procedure, otherwise the performative act will misfire and be deemed infelicitous. This could, for instance, be the case if it turned out that, in fact, the priest was no priest but a bandit. Then the marriage would have been considered inauthentic even if the bride said, “I do” with the sincerest intention for the wedding to have been performed successfully.

In total, previous literature has distinguished between multiple types of authenticity. While indexical (Grayson and Martinec, 2004) and pure (Beverland et al., 2008) authenticity are in the mode of constative utterances as such claims can be said to be either true or false, other conceptualisations such as iconic (Grayson and Martinec, 2004), approximate and moral (Beverland et al., 2008) authenticity are better seen as
performative as they achieve their illocutionary effect of authenticity through perlocutionary force under felicitous circumstances. An aspect of the performative mode of authentication is that experienced authenticity is socially informed and connected to collective imagination, i.e., collective imagination is a perlocutionary force that often needs to be employed in order for acts of authentication to be successfully initiated. The following section will expand on the notion of collective imagination as a perlocutionary force initiating processes of authentication.

Cleopatra’s blue eye shadow

Another fundamental feature of the suggested framework built around the notion of performativity is what Judith Butler (2011) refers to as the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains. More specifically, reiteration is what over time enables collective imagination to be an authenticating element. Following her, what Austin (1975) would call a “conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect” achieves its materialisation through the very reiteration of these conventions. While the focus of Butler’s (2011) investigation is how gender norms are materialised, her thoughts are useful to interpret other social phenomena as well. Particularly, she notes that performativity should not be understood as a singular or deliberate act, but rather, as a reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. In the context of costume designs in cinematic artwork re-enacting a bygone historical epoch, a particularly noteworthy example of this process is shown in how history is created in retrospect in the 1960s film Cleopatra starring Elizabeth Taylor.

The real Cleopatra is often believed to have worn blue eye shadow. However, this image is largely built upon Taylor’s portrayal of her in the 1963 film adaption. Archaeological evidence suggests that in ancient Egypt, eye makeup was most commonly green or grey because of the minerals malachite and galena that were used to make it (Hernandez, 2011). Therefore, it is likely that Cleopatra’s makeup was not blue at all. However, the indexical link becomes less relevant in the performative mode of authentication, for by creating a gestalt of a historical epoch, costume designers also reiterate and "coolly" authenticate the conventions for how that epoch is collectively reimagined. One costume designer, Sanna, mentioned how she had to authenticate the artistic representation by conforming to how the time is collectively reimagined rather than to historical correctness:

In reality people often wear clothes from a mixture of times. In the 60s, people often wore clothes they had kept from the 50s too. But if we are making a film and it is supposed to portray that time, we have to dress all the [actors and] extras in costumes from that particular time.

While Sanna’s statement above is akin to what Grayson and Martinec (2004) would call an iconic imitation of a bygone era, it would also seem that the imitation of the historical epoch is a stylised reiteration (Butler, 2011) that not only “hotly” authenticates the citation but also reinstitutes how the time it seeks to represent is posited in collective imagination. If the circumstances are felicitous, the representation is endowed with authenticity even if it is contrived. Therefore, as noted by Goffman (1959), asking, “What are the ways in which an impression can be discredited?” is not the same as asking, “What are the ways in which an impression is fake?” If there is a crash with what people expect to see, even if the costumes in fact are indexically authentic, the performative can still misfire and be deemed infelicitous, and therefore inauthentic, if the audience fails to make what Derrida (1988) would call the citational connection to the previous circumstance. Even if in reality people wear clothes from different eras, a re-enactment might need to enhance the gestalt by only including clothing from one period in order for the audience to make the right connection.

Furthermore, the discrepancy between materiality and symbolic signification of a signifying chain creates the opportunity for play and creativity. In order to authenticate its
symbolic signification, costume designers might need to contrive material aspects of the signifier. Yet another aspect of this relation is that we are so used to seeing timeworn documents, photographs and clothing from a certain epoch. For example, as mentioned by Cilla, when the historical epoch sought to re-enact precedes the advent of colour photography, they tend to make the costumes in softer or paler colours than actually might have been the case:

Once I worked with a director who had never done any historical films before. She had just been looking for pictures on Google. [We had] read that there actually were a lot of colours, but she had only seen black and white photos. For her, the world was black and white. It was almost as if she could not accept anything different. [...] But there are written documents, advertisements for things you could order, where it says what colours were in vogue this season. [The documents are] black and white, but it says what colours were the latest fashion.

Since audiences are so used to seeing historical films from that time where the colours are softer or paler, that image is so instituted that had the costumes in fact been the accurate colours of that time, the audience would have had a hard time making the citational connection to the previous circumstance. Consequently, in contrast to Rose and Wood’s (2005) conceptualisation of personal authenticity, where viewers of reality television programming resolve paradoxes between the real and imaginary by blending the fantastical with indexical elements connected to their own lived experiences, it would seem that imagination as posited in the social is more fundamental in the process of authentication than previously has been acknowledged. Thus, collective imagination is often the discourse or referent that is cited, and which the audience must connect to in order to endow objects, sites and experiences with authenticity. Cilla’s comment while working on a TV show about alternative lifestyles goes in line with this:

When we made this series, it took place between the years of 1965 and 1975, depicting the lives of alternative people. When you look at real people of that time, Palestine scarves were very common. But this was in 2006 and Palestine scarves were in vogue at that time as well. So early on, we decided not to include any Palestine scarves in the series. It was too much in the present. You probably would not notice if you watched the series, but it was an active choice because I did not want the viewer to be pulled back into the present.

Thus, it would seem that authenticity in the context of costume designs in cinematic artwork and other cultural productions that seek to re-enact historical epochs are not only a performative (in the sense that it posits a reiterative power to produce the collective image of the time) but also a citational practice (in the sense that the audience must be able to make a connection to the previous circumstance or referent in order for the citation to be endowed with authenticity). Therefore, citational authenticity is suggested as a supplement to aforementioned conceptualisations of authenticity. The details of the theme of citational authenticity are outlined in the following section.

**Citational authenticity**

While an audience may draw on objective sources of information to undermine the indexical authenticity of a representation, Beverland et al. (2008) suggest that they might be willing to suspend disbelief if there is an approximate or moral link to the original. For example, had Elizabeth Taylor’s re-enactment of Cleopatra used green or grey eye makeup, which actually existed in ancient Egypt, or if blue eye shadow somehow embodied the moral beliefs of the ancient empress, it could have been endowed with approximate or moral authenticity. Following Rose and Wood (2005), the audience would have needed to resolve this paradox by blending the illusory with indexical elements connected to their own lived experiences in order to gain a sense of personal authenticity. These views neglect social elements of citationality and the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains.
As such, they fail to consider the profound influence of the widespread socio-cultural circulation of images on experienced authenticity. However, it could be suggested that audiences are able to endow a representation with citational authenticity if they make a connection, in this case to the myth of blue eye shadow, popularised and “coolly” authenticated by Elizabeth Taylor and deeply embedded in collective imagination, which spurs continuous performances of “hot” authentication.

Furthermore, while the mise-en-scène typically strives for an indexical or iconic linkage to the historical epoch sought to re-enact, the director might strive for something more informed by aesthetics, and, consequently, de-emphasise the importance of historical correctness in projecting authenticity:

We were working on this production for the 80th anniversary celebrations of the Swedish Radio. So we re-enacted the radio symphony orchestra’s very first performance back in the 20s. It was great fun and the director really cared about the period. He was going on about all these wonderful hairdos the women had back then. But then I had to be a bore and go tell him that there would not be any fancy hairdos. For all women who went to church in the 20s, it was mandatory to wear a hat. I could never compromise on that. On the other hand, no men wore hats; they had to remove their hats. That was a real problem because the women had much fancier hairdos back then, whereas we had to shave off the hair of each man. It was a difficult task but I just had to find photos and convince the director.

As Kersti’s above statement suggests, there might be a clash between historical accuracy and imagination. There also seems to be different attitudes towards this matter in different cultural contexts that have inherited their own distinct jargon. As noticed by another informant, Sanna, in some regions they tend to invest in historians so that even the smallest details are as historically accurate as possible, whereas in other regions, they tend to have a more commercial or stylised approach, consequently trying to update the garments and other material aspects to make the film more appealing to a contemporary mass-audience:

I think in British movies [...] sometimes in BBC productions I think you can see that they have done a lot of research and it is more detailed. I think Downtown Abbey is a good example of that. They have historians at every level and they put a lot of effort into the smallest detail. You can see that. It is more truthful to that time. It makes a difference when you try to access the right fabrics and the right material that was available then. You do not take an 18th century dress and put on synthetic ribbons like they do in some American versions of 18th century films. We have Dangerous Liaisons starring Glenn Close in the American version and Annette Bening in the British [sic]. There is a big difference in the clothes there really. The one with Glenn Close looks much more like the 80s. If it is an American blockbuster, you also want to sell more. Then it is not as important that it is the right fabrics. It is more important that it looks good to the audience.

Similarly, in the 2013 film adaption of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel The Great Gatsby starring Leonardo Di Caprio in the lead role, they kept the male outfits close to the original, whereas the women’s dresses were updated to appeal to a contemporary audience. Thus, it would seem that certain aspects of an epoch might be amplified or reimagined to make it easier for contemporary audiences to understand, i.e., make the citation to connection to what it signifies. Modern counterparts can be representations that we today understand better than a garment that actually existed back then. This was illustrated by Sanna who mentioned the film Marie Antoinette by Sofia Coppola:

She sneaked Converse in there to signify something that we can relate to today. We do not have the same frame of reference as people who lived back then. For example, up until the 80s there was a bit of a taboo for women to wear trousers. Should we see a movie from the 30s where women wore trousers, we might not comprehend the gravity of the situation; then we have to use something else for us to understand. For us it is obvious that both men and women can wear pants just the same but historically, for a long time that was not the case. I am guessing Sofia Coppola though the 18th century seemed slightly out of date, and for us to understand that this was supposed to represent the progressive youth and not some 45-year-olds out partying, she had to sneak that in.
Sometimes, rather than having what Grayson and Martinec (2004) would call an indexical or iconic link to the original referent, historical materials need to be reimagined in order for the audience to make the citational connection to the previous circumstance or the symbolic meaning they signify. In turn, as stylistic reiteration regulates and produces the phenomena that it names, the perlocutionary forces of jargons and collective imagination are not fixed but loci of change and re-institutionalisation as boundaries of what is regarded as conventional procedure are in constant flux. Due to this recursive flow of citational authenticity and re-institutionalisation of collective imagination, seeing the present is akin to seeing the frames that blind us to what we see (Butler, 2016) which is an incredibly difficult ideological task. Thus, when future audiences look back at cinematic artwork from the present that is supposed to re-enact a bygone historical epoch, they will likely think that it looks like the time of production rather than the time it represents because the production cites a contemporary snapshot of collective imagination instead of an anticipation of future ones.

Conclusion
In the context of cinematic artwork meant to re-enact historical epochs, it is self-evident that images of authenticity consist of both real and imagined elements. Therefore, images need to be projected in reference to wider institutional and macro-social structures. Authentication is thus understood as a citational and reiterative practice where so-called “hot” and “cool” authenticating elements intersect. As such, a main contribution of this study is that it adds to the stream of literature emphasising the shift from authenticity to social processes of authentication, hence the title “From Aura to Jargon”. Furthermore, authentication is a both interactive and reiterative process that, when successful, adds to the wider structure of collective imagination. Authoritative agents (e.g. Elizabeth Taylor reimagining Cleopatra) sometimes assert power of “cool” authentication but it also consists of a diffuse and interactive process embedded in the flow of everyday life.

The findings suggest an intertextual relationship between citational authenticity and collective imagination that manifests itself in the process illustrated in Figure 1. First, a performance cites an image from the cultural discourse of collective imagination in order to make a performative claim for authenticity, as indicated by the citation arrow. This could, for instance, be Cleopatra’s blue eye shadow or the Converse shoes worn by Marie Antoinette. Then, under felicitous circumstances, the audience who inhabits a position deeply influenced by jargons will make a connection, as indicated by the connection arrow. By making this connection they in turn reiterate the foundation of the jargon, as indicated by the reiteration arrow.

**Figure 1.** Recursive flow of citational authenticity and re-institutionalisation of collective imagination
By doing so, they remerge the reiteration into collective imagination and thus endow the performative utterance with authenticity, as indicated by the authentication arrow. As such, the flow of citational authenticity reinserting collective imagination is a recursive process. This model is useful as it shows that collective imagination is the subject of constant change, which allows boundaries of what is validated as authentic to change over time. As noted by many of the informants, an example of this becoming of authenticity is the representation of gender roles that in reality have changed drastically over time.

Costume design and historical re-enactment are particularly convenient contexts for studying performative aspects of authenticity, as the claims made through the artistic representations cannot be said to be either true or false. Rather, imagination and historical correctness interplay in an intriguing way; as long as audiences make the connection to the time sought to re-enact, the performance can be endowed with authenticity. As such, the important question is how this connection is successfully made, i.e., what are the socio-cultural factors underpinning the process of connecting? It would seem that jargons and collective imagination are two prevailing components in the negotiation of authenticity. By continuously making this connection to images of the past consisting of both real and stylised versions of the truth, audiences contribute to the “hot” authentication of images of the past as it is commonly understood in the flow of everyday life.

As expressed by most of the informants, it is often difficult to find garments from the past. Instead the past has to be reimagined. By reimagining a bygone era, costume designers take on the role of authoritative agents asserting power of “cool” authentication. However, as long as they know what the past actually looked like, one informant mentioned that it almost becomes a sport to subvert the facts. This raises questions of what responsibility costume designers ought to have in preserving the historical knowledge of the past. Is there a value in remembering historical epochs as they actually were? Should imagination be privileged over historical correctness? To what degree can the factual be subverted? What other perlocutionary forces are at work besides jargons and collective imagination in the everyday process of “hot” authentication?

These findings have both theoretical contributions and practical implications. First, by emphasising the role of the perlocutionary forces of jargons and collective imagination in performances of authentication, it would seem that Rose and Wood’s (2005) view of consumers having to resolve paradoxes of the real and the imaginary by blending the fantastical with indexical elements connected to their own lived experiences in order to authenticate neglects social aspects of collective imagination as both instituting and instituted. As such, images of authenticity are often a mixture of the real and the imaginary. Second, the notion of jargons reiterating their own collective imagination gives rise to a plurality of cultural imaginaries within a society that, in turn, institutes different sets of justification and latent authenticities. This embodiment of various jargons reiterating their own impressions of authenticity could involve, but are not limited to, psychographic and demographic aspects such as level of cultural capital (Holt, 1998) or present life situation (Goulding, 2000). For example, it emerged from the findings that different cultural traditions (e.g., European vs American cinematography) seem to reiterate authenticity in their own terms. As such, rather than “coolly” striving to project an aura of authenticity, practitioners are recommended to engage in the “hotly” interactive process of embodying jargons of authenticity. The notion of citationality allows practitioners to privilege imagination over historical correctness as long as they cite a jargon that the audience can connect to.

The findings have a number of limitations. Further research is, for instance, needed to apply the proposed model of citational authenticity to a more strictly commercial context. For example, how brands such as Gillette can be said to authenticate their recent advertising depicting a transgender man’s first shave drawing on the model of citational authenticity. Citing images embedded in collective imagination of the transgender man realising his true
inner self in front of his supporting father through the symbolism of his first shave, the
performative claim was felicitous among many jargons whereas it, predictably, triggered a
backlash among more conservative ones who failed to make the connection. As such,
jargons and collective imagination could be seen as ideological formations that link social
structures to acts of “hot” authentication. Also, the data collection has relied perhaps too
heavily on expert interview in the realm of illocutionary effect and “cool” authentication, and
could thus be supplemented by data concerning performances of “hot” authentication.
Despite these limitations, this paper contributes to the literature on performative aspects of
authentication (Cohen and Cohen, 2012; Knudsen and Waade, 2010; Zhu, 2012) as well as the
rich literature on brand authenticity (Beverland et al., 2008; Grayson and Martinec, 2004).

This paper also contributes to previous research on authenticity in the arts and culture
sector in a number of ways. Studying the mediating role of authenticity discourse in
historically informed performance of music, Wilson (2011) suggested that the discourse
surrounding authenticity has overlooked the broader market context of those involved,
consisting of social, cultural and political dimensions. Furthermore, he notes that far from
“slavishly following the dogma of performance practice” (p. 160), many performers of early
music are in fact breaking new ground. Specifically, “the ‘scholar-performer’ is parodied as
someone more interested in preserving the past according to rules laid down in a dusty old
treatise, than in bringing a long-forgotten piece of music back to life” (Wilson, 2011). It
would thus seem that there is an ongoing negotiation between authenticity and the
experiential, and that authentication consists of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations such as
performance ideology and market-based practices, which somewhat corresponds to the
framework of collective imagination and jargon proposed in this study.

Furthermore, Wilson (2011) employs an institutional perspective (see Santoro, 2002) similar
to the proposed model for recursive flow of citational authenticity and re-institutionalisation
of collective imagination to elucidate how relevant social institutions and agents involved are
transformed in the process. Applying the musical metaphor of false relation, Wilson (2011)
looks at the contradictory relation between performers and the business-side of the industry,
which could be compared to the relation between the costume designers in the mise-en-scène,
often striving for authenticity, and the director, more prone to appealing to a contemporary
audience, when it comes to misremembering the past (see Peterson, 1997). Consequently, this
negotiation leads up to a constantly evolving image of authenticity. Drawing on Frith (1996), it
is also of importance to acknowledge the mediation of authenticity across different jargons
(e.g. avant-garde, ethnic or mainstream justification), as pluralities of influences co-exist in a
mutually symbiotic relationship.

Authenticity has notably been the subject of debate in film business. Ulker-Demirel et al.
(2018) found that certain elements of the movie marketing mix such as promotion, actors
starring in the movie and accessibility through the array of distribution channels all have a
positive effect on people’s purchase intention. The findings of this report suggest that the
dimension of authenticity should be added to the movie marketing mix. While Ulker-Demirel
et al. (2018, p. 93) noted that “audiences prefer to watch movies with authentic scripts”, they
never touch upon its material relevance for cinematic artwork that re-enacts historical epochs.
Another aspect of authenticity in relation to the film industry that has received increased
scholarly attention in recent times is the notion of cinematic tourism (Wohlfeil, 2018; Tzanelli,
2007). Film locations, theme parks and studio tours are often promoted as tourist attractions
similar to museums and heritage sites (Epstein, 2012). Film-induced images also have an effect
on how consumers experience the authenticity of these locations (Gkritzali et al., 2016; Zhang
et al., 2016). Wohlfeil (2018) distinguished between authenticity and experienced authenticity
in the setting of guided film studio tours to find that the so-called backstage, which according
to MacCannell (1973) is where the indigenous people prepare or stage authenticity, often is the
real deal, i.e., where scenes of the movie indeed were filmed, whereas the simulacrum, i.e., the
staged reproduction, is the experience itself. However, it would seem that the reason why the visitors in Wohlfeil’s (2018) study found the experience inauthentic was their justification; they were all film-enthusiasts who ended up feeling alienated rather than included in the film industry due to the lack of community once the tour was over. In order to authenticate the experience, it would have required that the visitors felt a more substantial relationship with the professionals. In order to strengthen the visitors’ experienced authenticity, Wohlfeil (2018) suggested that the feeling of community could be sustained by maintaining the dialogue either online or in a series of local meetings, which could help build a more long-term consumer–brand relationship.

Smits (2018), studying film agencies in the distribution business, sought to investigate how values are ascribed to cultural commodities at festivals, sales markets and other competitive events where industry professionals gather to network. Taking the social hierarchies of the market into consideration, various forms of screenings can add to the value creation process by generating buzz, word of mouth and reviews, providing a context from which the film benefits from the attention. However, in contrast to his discussion, this study has focussed on re-enacting authenticity in the production rather than the later stages of promotion and/or distribution. Having said that, his study still has some relevance for the present as screening a film at a prestigious festival may increase the experienced authenticity among a specific jargon where that festival is part of collective imagination. Finally, as noted by Baumgarth et al. (2014), brands in the arts and cultural sector are often based on networks and their contributions to the brand. It could thus be said that artists, performers, costume designers, as well as curators, art critics, gallery owners, etc., all play a role in arts and cultural brand development as well as the social life of authentication.

Note
1. Authenticating acts are defined by Arnould and Price (2000) as those self-referential behaviours that reveal one’s “true” self, whereas authoritative performances include those cultural traditions and rituals through which consumers find coherence or stability in their “true” selves.

References


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