Provenance as a filtering and framing device in the qualification of wine

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This research examines how provenance – where a product was produced, by whom, how and when – features in the work of cultural intermediaries in the Australian premium wine market, at two different stages in the career of a wine. First, evaluations of provenance attributes (in terms of sincerity, tradition and transparency) serve as filters through which wine promoters identify market-worthy wines; second, those attributes are strategically deployed to frame the wine as a worthy choice for consumers (focusing on the use of the winemaker as a framing device). The article offers a distinctive account of the qualification of wine, and makes the case for a cultural economic conceptualization of provenance as a negotiated, accomplished quality. In foregrounding wine promoters’ emotional attachments to provenance attributes of wines they choose to promote, the research highlights the affective dimensions of markets, which are made, in part, through the consuming passions of cultural intermediaries.

Keywords: authenticity; attachment; cultural economy; cultural intermediaries; provenance; qualification; wine

Introduction

Consumers want authenticity: this has become a common refrain in today’s marketplace (Gilmore and Pine 2007; Holt 2004; Postrel 2003). Provenance is one way in which authenticity is offered to today’s consumers, through quality claims that emphasize such elements as a product’s origin, mode of production and heritage. Marketing research identifies provenance as an effective positioning device, for differentiating brands across a range of markets (Iversen and Hem 2008; Keller 2003; Lim and O’Cass 2001; Moor and Littler 2008; Piron 2000). And yet, provenance itself is a highly variable construct within the marketplace: while some provenance claims are highly regulated (as in the case of Country of Origin (COO), Protected Designation of Origin and Appellation d’origine controlee products), others may be stylized (if not altogether fictional) marketing messages with varying degrees of congruence with actual conditions of production.

A recognition of the socially constructed nature of provenance is echoed in recent discussions of the cultural meaning and production of authenticity (Grazian 2003; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Peñaloza 2000; Zukin 2009). Research in this vein has highlighted, on the one hand, the role of service workers and cultural producers in strategically embedding particular goods, services and practices within a framework of “authenticity” in order to add economic value (Arnould and Price 1993; Beverland and Luxton 2005; Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003; Fine 2003; Johnston and...
Baumann 2007; Lewis and Bridger 2001; Peterson 1997, 2005); and, on the other, consumers’ varied understandings of, desires for, and willingness to pay a premium for, “authentic” products and services (Arvidsson 2006; Beverland 2006; Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008; Holt 1998; Leigh, Peters, and Shelton 2006; MacCannell 1989; Sassatelli and Scott 2001; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). Despite such research making clear that authenticity and provenance claims are not transparent and should be treated as the outcomes of complex processes of cultural production and consumption, there remains a lack of grounded, empirical research on how cultural producers’ perceptions and representations of provenance materially shape markets.

Wine is a provenance product par excellence: a product for which the origin and story of its production are strategically framed as key distinguishing features. Origin- and heritage-based quality claims are typical in the wine market (Beverland and Luxton 2005; Thode and Maskulka 1998), in which a long-established “Old World” notion of terroir asserts an intrinsic, crucial link between a wine and the specific place and conditions of its production. However, terroir is neither a transparent, nor exhaustive account of a wine’s provenance. First, far from being an inherent, objective quality of wine, socio-historical research reveals how notions of “Old World” terroir have been strategically constructed and articulated as part of “ruralist and protectionist” discourses (Guy 2001, 164; see also Trubeck 2005), which responded to economic imperatives (such as non-local competitors) and employed cultural capital (such as local traditions and personalities, invented and otherwise; see Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983); and wine marketing research has acknowledged the elasticity of the term, which draws variously on notions of cultural and regional heritage, personality and authenticity (Charters 2006; Vaudour 2002). Second, articulations of uniqueness based on the place and process of production have become increasingly common for “New World” wines in the past decade (Pinney 2005; Resnick 2008), adding other articulations of place (e.g. regionality) and production methods (e.g. biodynamic viticulture, boutique wineries and celebrity winemakers) to the vocabulary of provenance.

This article brings these concerns to bear on a consideration of the role of wine promoters in Australia’s premium wine market. The research focuses on how wine promoters’ perceptions of provenance inform their identification of market-worthy (Old and New World) wines for promotion, and their positioning of those wines as “worthy choices” (Johnston and Baumann 2007, 170) for consumers. Working from a cultural economy perspective (Amin and Thrift 2004; du Gay and Pryke 2002), the article offers a distinctive account of the “qualification of products” (Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002, 196), by addressing both the selecting and staging of goods for the market.

Provenance qualities are articulated and accomplished not only within the market (e.g. when wine promoters use family heritage to add symbolic value to a winery), but also – crucially – beforehand, when wine promoters’ personal preferences inform how they select wines to promote.

Thus, the article is concerned with two stages at which provenance is used to qualify wine. First, perceptions of and preferences for particular aspects of provenance serve as filters through which wine promoters identify – from the thousands of available options – those products that they will bring to market through their various promotional vehicles. Second, provenance attributes are selectively and strategically highlighted to position the wine as a premium product, using various framing devices; here, the focus is on the use of the winemaker as a promotional tool. Before considering the findings, the article first proposes a conceptualization of provenance
from the point of view of cultural economy, and then provides a brief overview of the research design.

A cultural economy of provenance

The term provenance developed from the thirteenth century French *provenir*, meaning to derive from or come from, which in turn developed from the Latin *provenire*, meaning to come forth, spring into being, be produced or progress (OED Online 2010). Issues of origin and derivation continue with present day usage, with a particular emphasis — such as in the case of works of art, antiques and fine wine — placed on the lineage of an item, tracing its journey from owner to owner. This is reflected in marketing research on provenance associations, which shows that consumer perceptions of authenticity, quality, trustworthiness and prestige arise not only from a product’s place of origin and means of production, but also from the stereotypes (correctly applied or not) that consumers hold about the culture, traditions and style of the place of origin (Iversen and Hem 2008, 608; Mintel 2010; Samiee, Shimp, and Sharma 2005). Other research has identified a range of cues or criteria that consumers often associate with authenticity, such as economic disinterestedness and anti-commercialism, nature and tradition, and the hand-crafted, rural and local rather than the mass-produced and industrialized (Beverland 2006; Beverland and Luxton 2005; Fine 2003; Holt 1998; Johnston and Baumann 2007; MacCannell 1989; Sassatelli and Scott 2001; Zukin 2009). For provenance goods, such authenticity cues are explicitly rooted in a product’s origin, derivation and/or lineage.

Broadly speaking, then, provenance refers to a story of how (which may include where) something was made and its career from creation to consumption. This story can then be employed as a sign of quality and source of value. For example, in February 2007, a jeroboam (equivalent to six bottles) of 1945 Mouton Rothschild sold at a Sotheby’s auction for just over (US) $310,000. The value of the wine reflected the bottle’s provenance, which was articulated not only in terms of its origin and derivation (Château Mouton Rothschild is considered one of the greatest Bordeaux producers; 1945 is a very highly acclaimed vintage), but also its lineage: the bottle had come from the private cellar of Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, the Château’s current owner, and thus bore considerable added prestige as well as an unassailable record of ownership (Sokolin 2008, 60).

However, provenance may have a markedly flexible relationship with the actual conditions of production. Like authenticity, provenance should not be taken as a primitive or intrinsic attribute, but rather explored as a negotiated, accomplished quality that is socially constructed by specific evaluators relative to their particular contexts and goals (Beverland and Farrelly 2010; Cohen 1988; Grayson and Martinec 2004). Conceptualizing provenance in this way offers two distinct advantages. First, it is a more adequate approach than the typical operational definition employed in consumer research on, say, COO products, which has tended to treat provenance as an objective quality that is more or less accurately understood by consumers, and can be read off of product names and labels (despite evidence that consumers regard labels with ambivalence if not outright suspicion; see Eden, Bear, and Walker 2008; Mintel 2010). Such research tends to take for granted which products “have” provenance or ethical dimensions (e.g. artisanal cheese and fair trade chocolate) and which consumers are interested (e.g. self-defined ethical consumers). Second, understanding provenance in this way casts a wide net with regard to what “counts” from the culture of production in
shaping the product’s character and market value. As a story about where and how the wine was made and its career from vineyard to consumer, provenance may include traditional elements of terroir (soil, climate and topography), but these are neither sufficient nor necessary; with regard to derivation and lineage, provenance value may also be constructed from such aspects as the philosophy of the winemaker, history of the winery, traditions of the region or peculiarities of the vintage – a range of details that make the production of the wine appear knowable and credible. Thus, this approach takes for granted neither that wine is a provenance product, nor what aspects of a wine’s origin and production will be framed as values within the market.

What is needed, then, is a theoretical framework that takes seriously the processual, accomplished nature of the value of a good. A “cultural economy” approach is particularly well suited to the task, and may be understood as an “analysis of the steps through which economic quantities and qualities are formed. . . . [I]t is an attempt to identify the varied impulses and articulations through which value is formed, added, and circulated” (Amin and Thrift 2004, xiv–xv). Drawing on anthropological and sociological research on the market and market practices, such an approach is concerned with the dialectical relationship between culture and economy (du Gay 2004, 101; McFall 2004, 79).

Given its emphasis on processes and material practices, cultural economic analyses tend not to focus on either production or consumption, but rather examine the “relational work” (Cochoy 2003 cited in du Gay 2004, 100) that takes place between the two. Cultural producers – or, to use Bourdieu’s (1984) term, cultural intermediaries – are of particular interest in this regard. Research has focused on the “devices and dispositions” (du Gay 2004, 100) that constitute the promotion of consumption, including the various tools, criteria, practices, rationalities, motivations and preferences that cultural intermediaries draw upon in order to contextualize products and mobilize consumer conduct (du Gay 2004; Miller and Rose 1997). A growing body of case studies in fields such as advertising and branding (Cronin 2004; McFall 2004; Moor 2008) and fashion design and retailing (Entwistle 2006; Pettinger 2004; Skov 2002) explore ethnographically and historically how various occupations are implicated in the mediation of production and consumption. Most of this research treats cultural intermediaries in occupational isolation; Méadel and Rabeharisoa’s (2001) research on the “career” of fruit juice is an exception, examining how a succession of actors – tasters, buyers, sales managers, marketers and so forth – transform a product, each working with and adjusting the qualifications articulated by their predecessors in the commodity chain in order to identify, refine and highlight the attributes deemed to be most likely to yield consumer attachment and thereby, success in the marketplace. Likewise, this article examines various cultural intermediaries involved in the wine market, so as to uncover shared definitions of provenance as an economic quality.

From a cultural economy perspective, an object has a repertoire of real and potential material and symbolic properties, from which only some are singled out by various market actors; the consumer will evaluate the relative fit between those singularized properties and his or her various needs, anxieties and aspirations, with a good fit ideally leading to attachment, selection and desire (McFall 2009, 271). Thus, the cultural production of provenance may be understood as a process involving a host of market actors and intermediaries (including, ultimately, consumers themselves), through which particular properties (such as the how, where, by whom or when of production) are disentangled from the actual conditions of production and singularized as opportunities for attachment. While the focus has typically been on consumer attachment, this research instead foregrounds the attachment of products to cultural
intermediaries. Specifically, the focus in this article is on wine promoters at two different stages in this process: first, in terms of filtering – that is, their attachment to the particular wines they choose to promote through their various promotional vehicles (such as magazine articles, PR events, wine lists and so forth); and second, in terms of framing – that is, their contextualizing the chosen wines for attachment by others.

**Studying wine promoters**

The discussion emerges from semi-standardized interviews with a sample of 45 individuals involved in the promotion of wine, be it increasing the visibility, legitimacy, market value and/or perceived quality of specific wines, wineries or wine in general. In terms of their primary roles, 14 are involved in the wine market as sommeliers and/or retailers; 11 as publicists or marketers/marketing consultants; seven as wine writers; nine as winemakers or winemaking consultants; and four as distributors/importers. The article is specifically focused on those respondents involved in the Australian premium wine market: 25 are based in Melbourne, 5 in Perth and 3 in Sydney.

All of the research respondents interact with small-scale wineries on a professional level, working either directly or indirectly (but rarely exclusively) with boutique wineries or wines. This is significant regarding the theme of provenance, as small-scale wine brands often have production elements (e.g. a single vineyard or a family-owned and -run operation) that mark them as different from the large-scale brands against which they compete, and may be more likely to yield resonant – and lucrative – quality claims. Like authenticity more generally, provenance “is better understood as an assessment made by a particular evaluator in a particular context” (Grayson and Martinec 2004, 299); thus, it is helpful to situate the wine promoters in their particular market context.

There were over 2000 wineries in Australia in 2008, with only 14 winemakers accounting for 70% of the grapes crushed – meaning that the industry is a mix of a small number of large producers and a very large number of small producers. Australia is the world’s fourth largest exporter of wine, a reversal from 25 years earlier when the country imported more than it exported. This success has been attributed in part to the use of straightforward varietal labelling and eye-catching packaging (such as “critter wines” depicting animals on the labels), which have made (some) Australian wine accessible to a wide range of consumers, but have also attracted complaints of bland, homogeneous mass brands. Divisions within the industry also exist with respect to price, as Australian export figures illustrate: 85% of what was exported in 2009 was “basic” wine, priced at less than (AUD)$5 per bottle; nine per cent was “premium” (priced between $5 and $9.99); and only two per cent was “super-premium,” priced at $10 per bottle or more. A leading international wine writer and critic suggests how these scale and price divisions intersect:

> [T]he problem is that Australia’s 2000 small-scale winemakers (many of them every bit as artisanal as Europe’s best, incidentally) have been ignored while the handful of large companies that dominate Australian wine production have been allowed to tarnish its reputation with cheap blends that are now mere cannon fodder for supermarket discounters. (Robinson 2010, np)

Various marketing and branding strategies of the past 10 years have attempted to increase the profile, prestige and average price point of Australian wine, many of
which focused on the specificity of place (a system of Geographic Indications was adopted in the early 1990s; more recently the promotional emphasis has been on “regionality”) and production (such as an emphasis on the heritage of winemaking families and the personal stories of winemakers).

Three implications of the above merit highlighting. First, the wine promoters operate within a market in which geographic specificity and small-scale production are already understood as benchmarks of the premium, and more so the super-premium, market. Second, and related to this, articulations of provenance are often associated – implicitly if not explicitly – with a critique of the lower-priced, high-volume mass brands. Third, the official promotion of Australian provenance is relatively recent, and explicitly linked to a goal of premiumization. These points help to place the wine promoters’ perceptions of provenance and small-scale producers in context. Furthermore, all of the respondents are located at the smaller-scale end of the industry spectrum, in that they do not work for the major supermarkets and retail liquor chains (that stock wines often at discounted prices), thus underlining some of the particular competitive relations that help to make provenance attributes more likely to be opportunities for wine promoters’ attachments.

The research occurred in two phases. Phase one, in 2007, began with eight interviews at a Melbourne trade event for New Zealand wineries; these “flash” interviews (cf. Chapman 1999) lasted 5–15 min and involved an informal discussion about the particular wine brand. A further 21 respondents, recruited from personal contacts and snowball sampling, participated in hour-long semi-standardized interviews, following a two-part question guide that revolved around individuals’ work practices and consuming preferences: what do you do in your work to add value to wine? As a consumer, how would you describe your wine preferences?

The second phase of 16 interviews was conducted in Melbourne in 2008. The notable difference was the inclusion in the interview guide of a third main question: how do you choose the wines that you promote? This forms a major focus for the present article. The probes accompanying the question revolved around a respondent’s role, be it to organize a restaurant’s wine list, select the wines to sell in a retail store, decide which wine to write about for a newspaper column, accept a winery into a distribution portfolio and so forth. This line of questioning reflected the nature of the respondents, all of whom have a relatively high degree of autonomy over their promotional labour, in that they have responsibility for choosing (within the constraints of their budgets, audience and so forth) the wines to promote. Thus, the interviews were intended to reveal how and in what ways wine promoters draw on provenance attributes not only in terms of the strategies used for adding symbolic value to wines for the on- or off-trade, but also before the contextualization of a wine for competitive exchange takes place.

The analysis adopts an interpretive stance towards the data, with the interviews understood not as transparent reflections on practices and preferences, but as active moments of self-production and cultural production: a narrativizing of both the self (Giddens 1991) and the category of provenance. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and field notes was approached both deductively and inductively (Crabtree and Miller 1999; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006; King 2004). In brief, deductive coding reflected the interview guide, with responses coded for professional strategies for distinguishing a wine within the marketplace, criteria for selecting wines for personal consumption, and criteria used for choosing wines for promotion; inductive coding within the categories then identified themes within and between responses,
which were then the basis for further deductive coding. For example, deductive coding for “choosing wines to promote” identified relevant passages within each transcript, within which inductive coding identified “small-scale producers” as a repeated theme; mentions of “small-scale producers” were then coded deductively in the other transcripts, allowing an analysis of all references to small-scale producers with regard to the particular context of use (revealing, e.g. a repeated emphasis on the perceived sincerity of small-scale producers, as discussed below with regard to the findings).

The discussion of findings is organized around two different stages of the wine promoters’ involvement in the career of wine. First, wine promoters select wines to bring to market; here, the thematic label of “filtering” has been used in recognition of the promoters’ use of provenance-related heuristic devices to help narrow the range of possibilities down to those wines that best suit their market-oriented goals. These responses emerged primarily from the questions about how wines are chosen for promotion, but also overlapped with promoters’ discussions of their personal preferences and what they looked for in the wines they drank in their personal life. Second, wine promoters then contextualize the chosen wines in order to add symbolic value in the eyes of their intended (on- or off-trade) audience; here, the thematic label of “framing” is used to reflect the role of promoters in disentangling and foregrounding selected aspects of a wine in order to influence its perception by others (cf. McFall 2009, 270). These responses arose primarily from questions about practices for adding value to wines; among the various strategies mentioned – including designing labels, offering educational services, and showcasing wines with high-status, third party reviews – the winemaker was repeatedly cited as a valuable framing device and is the focus of this analysis.

Filtering wines
Cultural intermediaries play a role in the formation of value through the ways in which they bring goods to market. For example, Entwistle (2006) examines how fashion buyers utilize assessments of relatively objective elements, such as a garment’s shape, colour, texture and price, alongside their subjective understanding of aesthetics, fashion and the tastes of their target customers, in order to determine what to select for their store. In the case of the wine promoters, respondents assess objective elements (including the quality of the wine in the glass, specific price point and implications for identifying direct competitors) in combination with subjective preferences and experiences to identify potential wines to promote and evaluate their market viability. In this role as gatekeepers to the marketplace, wine promoters employ heuristic filtering devices to sort through and identify those wines well suited to their promotional context (e.g. their readership or restaurant clientele).

The use of filtering devices is crucial, as the wine industry is crowded and promoters face a daunting field of choice. For example, the wine writer respondents regularly receive unsolicited cases of wine from wineries and distributors hoping for a favourable review: Judy receives 3–4 cases a week; Dan, six; Liz between 8 and 12. As Judy explains: “That’s typical for wine writers. And why do they do it? Because they know that there are two and a half thousand producers out there and they know they have to get noticed.” Provenance attributes – where a wine was produced, by whom, how, and when – were frequently cited in the responses to questions about
how wines are chosen for promotion, and were grouped around three concerns in particular: sincerity, tradition and transparency.

**Sincerity**

The first of the themes in the wine promoters’ discussions of how they choose wines for promotion was the perceived sincerity of the producers themselves. The defining criteria here were the issue of economic disinterestedness, which echoes findings more generally about associations of authenticity with anti-commercialism (Beverland and Luxton 2005; Holt 1998; Johnston and Baumann 2007). Almost all of respondents expressed a tendency towards selecting wines from “passionate” winemakers, whose perceived intrinsic motivations for making wine were felt to eclipse – or at least mediate – concerns with profits. Sincerity also arose in terms of its absence: many respondents were disinclined to select large-scale brands, whose overarching corporate concern with profit meant that sincerity as a wine’s saleable property was felt to be lacking.

For example, James discusses how he selects wines for his two restaurants. He tends to list smaller producers and feels that, “Supporting smaller producers is very much a part of what we do. . . . We’re proud to have them as a badge.” Beyond the objective qualities of the wine in the glass, its unit price, the other wines he lists, and his perception of clientele taste, James also places significance on the winemaker him or herself: “When you talk to them about their wine, they’ve got to be passionate, and extremely devoted to what they’re doing.” Ray, a sommelier for a restaurant with an extensive Italian-oriented wine list, also highlights the motivations of producers as a key factor in selection for his list:

> If you’ve tasted the product, you’ve met the people involved and you’ve seen the cellar hand and you’ve met and spoken to someone out in the vineyard, and you actually believe these people actually, really give a damn about what they’re doing, and it’s really important, and that’s all that they want to do . . . well you’ve got to believe this is a good thing, and you taste it and it makes sense, it tastes like where it’s from. That’s great.

Here, assessments of market-worthy provenance blur the issues of the “who” and “how” of production: a passionate, sincere winemaker is assumed to be more likely to deliver a premium product, be it a New World, Victorian producer (for James) or an Old World, Italian producer (for Ray).

Assessments may combine particularized notions of sincerity with a broad-based critique. For example, Liz juxtaposes the sincerity and devotion of the smaller producers with the corporate ethos of the big brands. She tends to focus on the smaller producers for her articles, which appear regularly in major Australian newspapers and travel magazines:

> I’m not going to follow up on something just because it’s part of a large company . . . but if I had a choice . . . I would much prefer to support someone who’s making a great product and who is also doing all the right things, working the land, who’s generous. For the big companies, it always comes down to the bottom line. And that affects how they do things. They have these enormous marketing budgets. Some of them send you a press release every day, or they have a PR person bugging you every day. They’re selling you something all the time. But with the smaller producer, they want you to judge them on their wine, and that’s it.
Perceptions of sincerity are thus intertwined with a rejection of commercial interests and economic instrumentalism. Such assessments tend to reinforce the divide – noted earlier – between large- and small-scale producers in the Australian market.

Perceived sincerity establishes a point of difference for the specific wine, which resonates with James, Ray and Liz’s ethical preference to support smaller producers, and their strategic assessment of what makes a saleable entry on a wine list or interesting subject for a wine column. However, the broader range of goals and motivations lying behind assessments of sincerity must be borne in mind, because filtering devices reflect the respondents’ location at the small-scale end of the industry spectrum. Respondents’ disinclination to select large-scale brands is not only a matter of judgements of sincerity, but also fundamentally about their competitive context: respondent sommeliers, distributors and retailers cannot compete with supermarkets and large-scale wine retailers on price for large-volume wine. Their “taste” for small-scale, passionate producers transforms these market constraints into personal preferences; their support for smaller producers is presented not as a necessity but as a virtue (Bourdieu 1984, 175). Furthermore, all of the respondents benefit from the prestige, “badge” effect of listing, distributing, selling or writing about smaller producers. Just as for the judgements of tradition and transparency discussed below, assessments of sincerity not only establish a point of difference for the wine (helping to separate it out from other products vying for the promoters’ attention), but for the wine promoter as well.

Perceived sincerity adds value for the wine promoter, as it offers a device for resolving a dispositional conundrum that Bourdieu (1984, 358–60, 365–66, passim) identifies for cultural intermediaries generally: charged with promoting goods, which brings with it lower-class associations of the shopkeeper and economic instrumentalism, cultural intermediaries adopt a vocational mentality and identify instead with the more culturally esteemed “therapeutic” professions, such as medicine and teaching (369). For them, selling is converted into preaching. As such, wine promoters do not sell, so much as sell their own beliefs, making them honest brokers and sincere mediators (Bourdieu 1984, 365; Smith Maguire 2008; Zukin 2004). What is at stake for Liz and the other respondents is not only the passion and sincerity of the wine producer, but also – by virtue of choosing to write about and sell such wines – their own passion and sincerity as wine promoters.

**Tradition**

Tradition is the second theme in the promoters’ accounts of choosing wines for promotion. The defining criterion was a link with a longer history or lineage, which reflects both the increasingly common attempt to extract economic value from brand histories (Gilmore and Pine 2007; Peñaloza 2000), and the wider cultural association of rustic simplicity with authenticity (Johnston and Baumann 2007). Respondents drew on their specialized cultural knowledge (in addition to the strategically presented PR information created by other wine promoters) to parse the historical dimensions of a wine, in terms of the vineyard, winemaker, winemaking techniques, region or grape variety.

Responses included both particularized and generalized assessments of tradition. In the case of the former, consider the following two examples. Hilary is a wine writer for an upscale Australian financial magazine. She explains what she looks for in a wine as a potential subject:
A lot of it is about if you see the place and the people who made it. If you’ve got a family business making fabulous wines for 15 generations, that is still on the same plot of land and you can talk to the people and you can taste the wine, then you can get a sense of that continuity of style that’s developed over 300 years. That gives it a bit of cultural credit. The sense that people have a real connection to their product. I think in a lot of cases, you can taste that in the wine – or you imagine you can taste it. And I have a tendency to champion the small, passionate producers rather than the big, impressive companies.

Here, traditional continuity takes the form of both family heritage and a fidelity to a particular style that remains consistent over time. This resonates with past research on representations of authenticity for such diverse products as Converse shoes (Botterill 2007, 122) and Trappist beer (Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008).

In comparable terms, Graham – a sommelier at a high-end restaurant – highlights family tradition as a guarantor of quality. He favours small producers, and has recently moved from listing a grande marque champagne to a small-scale grower champagne. He reflects on the rationale for this choice, like Hilary, in terms of the importance of a personal (family) connection to the business of winemaking:

I think it’s good to make comparisons between these small guys, what they’re doing, and why I’ve chosen that over a mass-produced thing. This is where the extra value in buying from these smaller producers comes from. . . . They have the ability to care for it, because it’s plots of land they know very well, their families have been caring for it every year, it’s not just processing the fruit. . . . There’s more integrity in doing that, because that’s what I believe in, that’s what I would drink, that’s what I believe is better.

This emphasis on tradition is in keeping with Old World notions of terroir, which typically privilege local know-how, developed over generations, in making wines that best express their place of origin (Wilson 1998, 6). Hilary and Graham’s accounts are examples of how wine promoters disentangle elements of production such as family heritage from the actual conditions of production – including non-family involvement in the winery – as a precursor to “attaching” themselves to the wine and selecting it for promotion.

The privileging of tradition may also take a more diffuse form, couched in terms not of individualized details but of a general nostalgia for an earlier time. For example, Anthony (a sommelier/restaurateur) provides a rationale for his Old World-focused wine list by referring to his own preference for Old World (typically Italian) wines over Australian producers:

I think the New World are like green winemakers, and the Old World are brown winemakers. I’m using that as a metaphor, green meaning clean, technical, stainless steel, very structured; brown meaning chickens running around the vineyards, sort of rustic. What has happened with the green style winemaking, we’ve become so green, that our wines in Australia are suffering this homogenized effect. In my perspective and having an Italian background, it’s simple: food, wine, and earnest conversation. . . . So, [the Old World] is incredibly romantic to me. . . . It’s age-old, and it’s been there forever, so there’s this beautiful romanticism.

Positive evaluations of tradition are not restricted to Old World producers. For example, wine writer Judy draws a similar comparison within Australian producers, comparing the “romance” of small-scale producers to large-scale Australian wine, which is “manufactured wine. It came from marketing. That’s not romantic, that’s not passionate and that’s not interesting. Wine is one of those last, great things that you still have some
romance about it.” A preference for the rural and the rustic is not confined to the field of wine nor the tastes of wine promoters. Indeed, MacCannell (1989) suggests that it is part of modern, Western consciousness, which quests for an authentic “other” in an imagined, romanticized past.

Perceived tradition – be it in Hilary and Graham’s particularized form, or Anthony and Judy’s diffuse nostalgia – serves as a device for identifying market-worthy wines. Looking back at the issue of sincerity, it is clear that these themes can intersect (and may, in cases, overlap). The division between small- and large-scale producers may line up with the division between traditional and industrial production, but this is not necessarily the case. The use of traditional methods may be emphasized in the favourable assessment of a large-scale winery; or, a small-scale virtual winery (which has no vineyard or winery of its own) may be deemed a crass, commercial invention. Thus, provenance cannot be deduced solely from scale, means or location of production, but is rather a negotiated evaluation through which particular properties are identified by wine promoters as meaningfully sincere or traditional (with regard to their own preferences and those of their intended market), and disentangled and singularized as opportunities for attachment. Rather than focus only on how cultural intermediaries frame goods to facilitate attachment by consumers, this research calls attention to the attachments (emotional, instrumental, cultural and economic) that wine promoters themselves make in bringing goods to market.

Transparency

Many of the respondents also referred to the transparency of production, such as an identifiable, concrete link to a specific person or place. Without necessarily also referring to sincerity or tradition, these evaluations of geographic and biographic specificity emphasized the tangibility and materiality of a wine’s production as a useful criterion in identifying market-worthy wines. This harks back to the emphasis on documented origin and lineage in the traditional meaning of provenance, and echoes other research demonstrating that making a production process seem knowable and tangible is a strategy for engendering experiences of authenticity and trust (Beverland 2006; Sassatelli and Scott 2001).

Like sincerity and tradition, transparency creates a potential point of difference for a wine, to which the promoters – relative to their roles and goals – can attach themselves. Tangible details about a wine’s production make a wine knowable to the promoter and thus, in turn, facilitate the promoter’s ability to make a wine knowable (and desirable) to another. Transparency facilitates the storytelling of wine promoters, making such wines more available for attachment. For example, Gavin, the co-owner of a specialist wine retail shop, contextualizes his tendency to list site-specific, smaller Australian producers by comparing them with large-scale, blended wine:

In Australia, it’s unusual in that a lot of big companies are big into multi-regional blending. Sometimes it’s difficult to get the story, because there is no story. Or it’s a different story. You don’t have that connection to a certain space. And that’s quite different from the rest of the world, because the rest of the world doesn’t do multi-regional blends anywhere near as much as we do here. So if you look at any of the big . . . brands, . . . they’re all big blends from wherever.

Richard, one of Gavin’s business partners, suggests a further way in which value can be realized from this form of provenance:
You can’t sell wine at this [super-premium] level and not know it. It just doesn’t work. . . . It’s not just tasting it. It’s not just taste; it’s the whole, it’s going there, it’s talking to the people. You can’t just talk about the wine in the bottle. It’s talking about the producers, the vintages. It’s having the whole gamut of knowledge.

Transparency – particularly that which he has personally verified – is crucial to Richard’s own credibility, and thus wines for which he can personally vouch are more likely to be selected.

Wine writer Judy highlights the importance of transparency for facilitating her creation of a successful narrative, and this is accompanied by a general juxtaposition with less-transparent producers:

It’s not always the small guy, but the small guy tends to impact more on you because you ring them up, you get on to the guy – he probably answered the phone! (laughs) – and he tells you, directly, how the wine is made. It’s immediate. You get that insight into their sense of ownership. With the big companies, you ring up the winemaker and often, they’ll say, “Have you OK’d this with the media people?” So you have to go through the media people, and you might speak to the brand manager, before you finally get to speak to the winemaker. And over all that time, all that excitement that you had has worn off!

Along the same line, James (sommelier) emphasizes the importance of personal interaction with winemakers when choosing wines for the restaurants’ wine lists: “That connection with the person is so important. In terms of winemakers, it means you can ask them direct questions and get direct answers . . . rather than having to go through another intermediary. It’s direct.” The emphasis on transparency is, to put it another way, a critique of the mediated nature of production – to which, the wine promoters, themselves, contribute.

Judy and James’ accounts highlight the potential conflicts between different types of mediators and modes of mediation in a commodity chain. The issue of transparency is especially pertinent for provenance products in a global marketplace, as longer chains involve greater layers of mediation, and a possibly more obscured view of the origin. However, the transparency of a wine’s provenance – or that of any other product – should not be taken at face value. For example, as Moor and Littler (2008, 705–6, passim) observe of American Apparel’s branding strategy, transparency can be an aesthetic effect, produced by a range of strategic visual and material cues, and not necessarily matched by transparency regarding the actual conditions of production (e.g. information on company profits or employee salaries). Perceptions of immediacy or transparency may be the effect of “thick” mediation (as for American Apparel) or “thin” (as for Judy), but in either case are partial, contingent and temporary accomplishments. That is, transparency is a product characteristic that will be evaluated as present and credible by some market actors working in relation to their specific positions and motivations; thus, because transparency is neither objective nor fixed, there will be other actors (with other positions and motivations) and/or the same actors (with changed positions and motivations) who will judge the same product as lacking transparency (or, for that matter, sincerity or tradition). Thus, any branding strategy is, simultaneously, an opening up of potential attachments for some market actors (producers and/or consumers) and a closing off for others.

Three tensions can thus be identified within the articulations of provenance with regard to the selecting of wines for promotion: first, the issue of sincerity and criteria
of economic motivation creates a tension between the passionate producer and the corporate brand; second, the issue of tradition and criteria of historical continuity poses a tension between rural heritage and modern industry; third, the issue of transparency and criteria of geographic and biographic specificity raises a tension between small-scale, place-specific production and generic, mass production. However, these tensions should be treated as neither rigid nor neatly aligned. Different provenance elements may be weighed against each other in the overall assessment of a wine as market-worthy or not. In making such assessments, wine promoters draw on their own ethical mentalities, aesthetic sensibilities, forms of cultural capital, and experience of and sensitivity to the tastes of others in order to successfully identify market-worthy wines and, as discussed below, then frame those wines as worthy choices for others.

Framing wines

Cultural intermediaries play a role in the formation of value by contributing to the contextualization of products. The use of framing devices is endemic to an “economy of qualities,” what Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa (2002) term the contemporary service economy. From this perspective, the qualities of goods are understood not as intrinsic, but as the outcomes of an ongoing process of qualification and requalification, undertaken by a range of actors including various market professionals and consumers. Classifying and positioning goods is central to the dynamic organization of, and competition within, today’s consumer markets; hence, the interest in the “real professionals in product qualification and the profiling of goods” (Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002, 212).

For example, returning to Entwistle’s research, fashion buyers make use of the “pedagogic role of store placement” (2006, 715), adding value by placing new items in proximity to established prestige goods and thereby encouraging particular perceptions on the part of consumers. Similarly, in the case of the wine promoters: once market-worthy wines have been identified, they must then be framed for consumers as worthy choices through a variety of promotional strategies, such as designing logos, packaging and other promotional material, and securing endorsements and high-status affiliations. In this regard, provenance acts as a framing device, as when the context of production is strategically deployed via the choice of product names and design of labels (Smith Maguire 2010, 274). Here, the discussion focuses on the use of the winemaker as a promotional tool.

Despite the fundamental work of winemakers in the wine market, their role in brand identity has been largely the focus of journalistic attention rather than scholarly research. An exception, Beverland and Luxton (2005, 111) note how winemakers travel and taste widely, in order to engage with buyers, consumers, winemakers and critics, thereby representing their brand while getting a broad feel for consumer tastes and their competition. This fits within research (Beverland 2005, 2006; Beverland and Luxton 2005) on how luxury wine brands may substantiate authenticity claims (based on affiliations with specific geographical places, historical traditions and long-standing stylistic consistency) by decoupling their brand image from the highly technical, industrial and, indeed, commercial realities of wine production, and by downplaying or disavowing their commercial strategies and promotional expertise. By being “in the market” (Beverland and Luxton 2005, 111), the winemaker is simultaneously performing his or her intrinsic passion for winemaking (thereby substantiating the brand’s authenticity) while engaging in an unacknowledged form of market
research and promotion, decoupling or disentangling wine-as-craft from wine-as-commerce.

Recalling the discussion of filtering: respondents are attentive to a winemaker’s philosophy (e.g. small-scale, passionate producers), accessibility (e.g. answering one’s own media calls) and biography (e.g. winemaking family traditions). The winemaker was also a recurring figure in the respondents’ accounts of how they frame wines; that is, the winemaker was identified by other wine promoters as a key promotional tool for the qualification of wines. This typically took the form of either an iconic or indexical provenance cue (cf. Beverland, Lindgreen, and Vink 2008; Grayson and Martinec 2004).

In the case of iconic cues, the winemaker is used as a symbolic figure, intended to be representative of a wine’s provenance. The emphasis in framing wine in this way is not on the winemaker’s material role in the creation of the wine, but on his or her personality or biography. For example, Paul, a sommelier/restaurateur, discusses how personal interactions with winemakers provide fodder for narratives in his customer service role, helping to contextualize the wine and “bring it to life” for the end consumer:

People love a story. Quite often, someone will ask me about a wine and I’ll start telling them about the winemaker or the winery or whatever, and they’ll buy the wine before I even get to talk about the wine. ... Here’s an example: I remember, years ago, going out to meet R [a highly-regarded Victorian winemaker], and he served us this rabbit he’d shot himself, and here we are, eating this rabbit with him and picking out the buck shot, and he’s telling us this story of how his wife unpacked a case of Riedel glasses and put them straight into the dishwasher and they all broke. These are the sort of stories you bring back to the restaurant and tell people about. People ask about a particular wine, and you start telling these stories and they love it. It adds to the theatre of what we’re doing. I guess they’ll also see my enthusiasm for the wine, just by me telling those stories, and that’s often enough to convince them.

Ray also discusses the value of talking to customers about his trips to Italian wineries and experiences in meeting the winemakers:

If you can put a context to it, and make it real and living, and not a marketed product but more of an experience of something that is real and living and organic, then that’s when people can really get excited about something. Then they don’t look at it as a product but as an experience.

Paul and Ray’s selections of wines for their wine lists have already been shaped by provenance-related filtering devices, such as transparency (they have first-hand knowledge of the winemakers), sincerity (as a counterpoint to “marketed” products) and a generic notion of tradition (the rabbit dinner evoking authentic rusticity). At the stage of contextualizing the wine for the end consumer, they translate their personal knowledge of winemakers into iconic cues to authenticity. Through these winemaker stories, a wine is singularized and personalized, framed as authentic and positioned as a premium product. The winemaker’s presence in the story provides a symbolic, mediated link rather than direct connection to the wine’s provenance, while simultaneously positioning the promoter as an indexical cue: it is Paul and Ray’s experiences that provide the factual, material connection to provenance.

Within the respondents, the second and more common use of the winemaker is as an indexical cue: the winemaker provides a factual or causal link to a wine’s
actual production (Grayson and Martinec 2004, 298). This may, like the examples above, take the form of a promoter’s narrative about the winemaker. It may also involve the winemaker directly in the promotion of his or her wine. For example, Cameron is a wine importer/distributor specializing in wines with “pedigree.” He discusses the value of having the winemakers he represents talk to clients, such as restaurateurs:

Generally most of the producers are fairly competent marketers … You have to sometimes remind them to take their dirty jeans off and wear something appropriate when they’re coming to see top clients, but in a lot of ways people don’t mind necessarily seeing that. As long as they’re not uncouth, I think people don’t mind seeing the raw, guts-and-all producer. Their hands are still filthy from the red ferments, you know, they’re bleary eyed, they’ve been working fourteen-hour shifts for ten weeks straight: people can understand and empathize, and you know, it sort of brings it back home … it keeps it real.

Here, the winemaker serves as an indexical cue to the wine’s provenance, providing — indeed, embodying — an actual link to the creation of the wine for the audience. To be effective, then, a winemaker must not allow too great a gap in appearance and behaviour between his or her “production” self (stained hands and bleary eyes) and “promotional” self (appearing before clients).

Although Cameron’s account suggests an unmediated link to provenance, the use of the winemaker as indexical cue is far from transparent, as the following two examples suggest. First, consider Kim, a wholesale distributor specializing in “artisan” brands, who also makes strategic use of the winemakers she represents:

The people behind the label – the winemaker and the viticulturalist – we really rely on our principals to come out and educate our staff and to spend time in the trade, to visit the restaurateurs and retailers, and try to have an influence over the consumer as well. So we might organize master classes around areas in which our principals are experts. It really helps. If you’ve got a wine maker who understands the trade, it can really make a difference. But of our 40 [wine making principals], only two or three really get it. So we try to educate them too.

In the second example, Ella (a publicist for a luxury hotel, who makes use of winemakers in the wine events she organizes) is even more explicit about the educational or promotional work that goes into the use of winemakers:

What I do is brief the winemakers and say, “Look, don’t tell us something that we could learn from reading the bottle or going to the cellar door. Share with us some anecdotes like, you know maybe it was a disastrous vintage and you were really worried whether or not the grapes would come through or not, or maybe something happened that you know, during vintage that was hilarious or maybe something bad happened or something really good happened.” … What I don’t think people want to hear is a sales pitch. … I think they just want to hear anecdotes and personal stories about the winemaking process and about the winemaker and how the vineyard’s going.

The personal narratives of winemakers are intended to frame wines as sincere by masking the economic instrumentalism that has put the winemaker on show in the first place. In addition, reference to the vagaries of vintages reinforces the notion of transparency, framing the wine as a natural, agricultural product, more “real” than high-volume (typically blended) wines. The winemaker and the wine are juxtaposed
with crass commercial technocrats and their homogenized products – an implicit critique of the traditional mass market.

This critique is central to the allure of provenance goods. Like fair trade coffee, “slow food” and cruelty-free cosmetics, provenance-oriented wines offer a “gestural unmasking of the purported articifce of commodified goods and services with the aim of recovering an intrinsic humanity or naturalistic sociability they are believed to conceal” (Binkley 2008, 602). Through the use of winemakers as promotional devices, wine promoters offer a link to more “authentic” forms of human relations that, through the hazy lens of nostalgia, appear to have been annihilated by the mass market. Wine’s potency as a provenance good lies in its ability to facilitate a (mediated and strategically managed) connection to the culture of production and thus to the social context of goods, and in the potential experience of connectedness lie opportunities for consumer attachment, and thus for generating economic value (cf. Arvidsson 2006). In this way, provenance serves as a tool for the re-enchantment of consumer goods, not through spectacle or simulation (Ritzer 2005) but through personalization and particularization. Producers and consumers can emotionally invest in singularized properties that have been selected and framed as points of attachment (e.g. the irrational passions of the winemaker) while the benefits of the rationalization of consumer goods – such as predictability and calculability – are maintained: consumers are still assured that the wine will be a good choice.

In summary, wine promoters use winemakers in different ways: as a centrepiece for their narratives, a source of personalized knowledge, a guarantee for the quality and authenticity of the wine and a key agent in its promotion. The winemaker – and especially their personal biography – may be mobilized as a way to add heritage or tradition, to personalize the product, or to evade the impression of promotion per se. Narratives about winemakers, wineries, vintages and varieties all help to contextualize the product, mediating between the actual material production of a wine and its reception in the marketplace (cf. Jack and Phipps 2005, 55). However, at the same time as speaking to a distrust of economic instrumentalism, the respondents highlight the highly managed nature of seemingly authentic, unmediated interactions: winemakers are primed (by their promotional handlers and/or by virtue of their own marketing where-withal) on the value of their “realism” and what aspects of the winemaking process are most likely to yield marketable results.

The interview data suggest that wine promoters convert indexical cues into iconic ones (they translate their first-hand experience into representative narratives), and thereby transform themselves into indexical cues that link the consumer to the wine’s origins and derivation. This complements and extends past research on how consumers convert iconic cues of authenticity into indexical ones, including strategies such as “placement” (intentionally travelling to “authentic” settings), “motivated reasoning” (selectively privileging information that confirms authenticity) and “reduction” (focusing on a “core” meaning or “essence” of a brand) (Beverland and Farrelly 2010, 852). In bringing goods to market, wine promoters actively construct authenticity in much the same ways. Making trips to vineyards to meet winemakers, working from assumptions about the motivations of winemakers who answer their own phones compared with those who do not, and reducing the story of a winery to focus on family lineage are all examples of wine promoters “taking personal ownership of experiences” (854) and thereby authenticating a particular wine. This highlights the various regimes of authentification that revolve around such goods; consumers’ placement, motivated reasoning and reduction strategies are working from an already essentialized framing of a product’s properties.
The framing work of wine promoters may be understood as a process of selectively disentangling provenance attributes and offering them as praise-worthy qualities, in order to mobilize consumer attachment (McFall 2009; Miller and Rose 1997). This process is contingent upon wine promoters’ place in the market, their stocks of cultural capital (knowledge of wine, experiences touring vineyards, friendships with winemakers) and, especially, their taste for provenance.

**Taste and provenance**

Representations of provenance provide not a clear view of the origins of a product, but a partial window that reveals some aspects of the conditions of production (anecdotes from the “hilarious” or “disastrous” vintage) while disguising or ignoring others (the day-to-day financial and technical realities of making wine). Wines are thereby embedded in a particularized and personalized account of production, intended to increase consumers’ trust in, and willingness to pay a premium for, the wine. Research on consumer perceptions of COO, ethical and fair trade goods suggests that constructions of provenance add value for the end consumer. In addition, provenance presents a number of value dimensions (Holbrook 1994) for wine promoters as well, including the extrinsic values of efficiency and quality (in assisting in the filtering and identification of “good” wines); and intrinsic aesthetic and moral values (in the appreciation of, and satisfaction of championing, small-scale, artisan producers). For wine promoters, provenance is both a device for identifying marketable wines that suit their intended market, and an expression of a disposition that values sincerity, tradition and transparency. The respondents demonstrate how the selecting and staging of goods to bring to market hinges on personal taste: it is their taste for provenance that underwrites the devices they employ to filter and frame wines for promotion. Thus, devices and dispositions are inextricably intertwined.

Wine promoters use their own tastes and experiences in making the cultural and economic calculations involved in bringing goods to the marketplace. For example, they use cultural knowledge as a tool to achieve economic ends, as when wine publicists use winemakers’ “authentic” stories as promotional tools. At the same time, wine promoters use economic logic to achieve cultural agendas, as when wine writers use their columns to promote small-scale producers ahead of their corporate competitors. Economic ends are embedded in the cultural activities of wine promoters, as when touristic visits to wineries provide sommeliers with experiences to draw on when (up)selling to the end consumer. And, cultural knowledge is embedded in wine promoters’ economic calculations, as when wine distributors use their interpersonal knowledge of winemakers to identify the most promising wines to add to their portfolio. In their personal preferences and professional practices, the respondents identify and objectify the sincerity, tradition and transparency of a wine’s provenance, both before and within the marketplace.

Wine promoters, like cultural intermediaries more widely, are exemplars of, but not exceptions to, their cultural context. The provenance attributes the respondents value – including sincerity, tradition and transparency – are in keeping with past research on consumer perceptions of authenticity. Thus, it is not that wine promoters’ taste for provenance is necessarily different from that of others. Rather, the distinctiveness of wine promoters lies in their ability to produce economic value from their tastes, converting such dispositions into value-adding devices.

Two further dimensions of wine promoters’ taste for provenance merit highlighting. First, wine promoters project their tastes onto their intended market, not as a didactic
(and impossible) imposition but as an empathetic diagnosis of others’ needs and desires. For example, Kim (wholesale distributor) makes sense of the popularity of her “artisan” wine brands in terms of what she perceives to be consumers’ desire for “bespoke” goods: “Like, a hand-made shirt: that’s what people want. It used to be, they wanted the brands – Gucci shoes and Prada handbags. And now, no, that’s not cool anymore. What you need is what’s been made for you especially.” Similarly, Ella (publicist) projects her own interest in provenance onto consumers generally:

It’s like anything: if you wear a dress, which was designed by someone that you met, you feel closer to it; if you buy a painting from an artist that you’ve met, or you have your house decorated by someone that you’ve met … I think that people just like to have connections with the people with whom they do transactions. . . . People really want to feel that they have a connection, so they have wine in the fridge that they can pull out and say to friends, “Oh I met the winemaker and he was delightful,” or, you know, “He was an irascible character,” or whatever it may be.

These two examples highlight the role of cultural intermediaries’ own tastes in mediating between the attributes of products and the tastes of the market (Bourdieu 1984, 230). Wine promoters are effective insofar as they can identify – if not identify with – the needs and desires of the targeted consumers. While wine promoters must, as a matter of livelihood, insist on the distinctiveness of their own tastes (and thus their unique ability to mediate between the realms of production and consumption), they must also be credible “proxy consumers” (Ennis 2005 in Moor 2008, 422), employing their knowledge of the tastes of their intended market in order to better frame wines for attachment.

Second, wine promoters make an affective investment in the wine they promote. Almost uniformly, the respondents describe their personal involvement with wine as one involving “passion,” “enthusiasm,” “commitment” or “love.” For example, Richard (wine retailer) discusses how his personal taste shapes his occupational experience and expertise:

At the end of the day, you’re selling a product, but it’s a product that I love. I couldn’t do it otherwise. I couldn’t be in retail if I was just selling some commodity. But with wine, it’s something more, it’s something I love. I’m a very good salesman if I’m talking about something I love.

This is not to suggest that the respondents only sell what they love: Richard, for example, acknowledges that he stocks wine that he does not like because of customer demand. Rather, the point is that wine promoters sell best what they love and thus – within the constraints posed by their place in the market and the nature of their intended audience – they are predisposed to selecting goods for the market for which they have a personal affinity. As a result, constraints upon their promotional labour may be resolved into a matter of taste (Bourdieu 1984, 175): choices of necessity (“I cannot compete with distributors of mass brand wine”) become choices of virtue (“I like to champion small producers”). In turn, this affective investment enriches the wine promoters’ promotional capacity, adding sincerity and credibility to their role as indexical cues to a wine’s provenance, and empathetic insight to their role as proxy consumers when framing a wine’s provenance attributes as points of attachment for their intended (on- or off-trade) consumers. Thus, this research highlights the significance of attachment on the part of the market professionals.
Conclusion

In an idealized sense, provenance refers to the actual source and history of a good – an exhaustive account from the farthest point upstream in a commodity chain through various stages of production and distribution until it reaches the final consumer. However, from a cultural economy point of view, which recognizes that goods undergo complex and ongoing material and symbolic transformation, there is no inherent, ideal provenance of a product that is revealed through its presentation and representation. Rejecting the view of conventional economics that treats product categories as self-evident, fixed and natural, cultural economic research demonstrates that product definitions and market definitions are intertwined, and are the outcomes of “lived social practices” (Slater 2002, 61, 67). Thus, provenance is not something to be revealed, but to be made real through an ongoing process of qualification and requalification (Callon, Méadel, and Rabeharisoa 2002).

In this process, the wine promoter is involved in the disentanglement and singularization of some elements (e.g. the how, where, by whom or when) of a wine’s production that then serve as opportunities for attachment for the wine promoter, and, in turn, on- and off-trade consumers. And, at the same time, the wine promoters are simultaneously calling into being both the provenance consumer (for whom the promoter is a proxy: a consumer defined by his or her valuation of sincerity, tradition, transparency) and a provenance market (a market defined by competition between goods based on such dimensions as sincerity, tradition and transparency). That is, in defining some wines as boutique, artisanal, small-scale and/or pedigree wines, these wine promoters not only place the wines into competition against other wines, but also against artisanal beers, ethically sourced salmon, locally made furniture and other goods that offer sincere, traditional and/or transparent points of attachment to consumers in search of authenticity. Just as research on ethical consumption is increasingly cognizant of the need to explore the ethical dimensions of everyday consumption rather than privileging particular “ethical” goods (Adams and Raisborough 2010), so too must research on COO and terroir goods recognize that all goods have potential provenance value, in order to more adequately grasp how and why some goods come to be understood in, and compete on, those terms.

Further research is needed on the cultural production of the provenance market as an accomplishment of lived practices. This may take the form of examinations of the successive definitions of a provenance product along single commodity chains (as in the work of Méadel and Rabeharisoa 2001). Given the processual, accomplished nature of provenance, one would expect the disentanglement and singularization of attributes to develop as a wine “moves” along its career between different market intermediaries. For example, a winemaker’s experience of the provenance of a wine (through hands-on participation in its creation) may be transmitted through a narrative (itself partial and strategic) for the distributor, who will then select attributes to highlight in training restaurant staff on a wine’s provenance story. Similarly, a wine promoter’s personal experiences and evaluations of a wine’s origins and history are used to identify marketable goods, without any necessary requirement for those notions of provenance to then carry downstream to the end consumer. Future research could follow the progressive qualification of wine, tracing the ways in which notions of provenance are written, rewritten and overwritten by successive cultural intermediaries as a wine moves from production to consumption along commodity chains of various lengths (how and to what effect do long and short chains entail thick and thin regimes of mediation?), and how that differs between market contexts (how and to what effect is provenance valued...
and qualified by wine promoters in Old World markets, or at the larger-scale end of the industry spectrum?).

Further research should also take the form of examinations of the continuities and discontinuities in provenance-related product definitions between various market actors who are loosely connected, if at all, by specific commodity chains (as in this research), in order to explore the constitution of a provenance market more generally. Coupled with the recognition that no product inherently has provenance (as a fixed, objective property), and that all products theoretically have provenance (properties of their context of production that can be singularized as points of attachment), this is therefore a call to look beyond wine, food and other “obvious” candidates. As a source of economic value, provenance is linked to the perceived shortcomings of contemporary cultures of production – including increasingly long and inscrutable commodity chains and mass, impersonal relations of exchange; failures in trust and security; and emotionally deadening rationalization and predictability (Binkley 2008; Lury 2004; Ritzer 2005; Sassatelli and Scott 2001) – and thus is unlikely to be a property exclusive to a narrow range of product categories. Provenance goods are a selective response to such conditions – e.g. an emphasis on the personal and knowable origins of products or non-instrumental social relations, but (typically) with some assurances of predictability and calculability. Hence, quality claims based on sincerity, tradition and transparency are increasingly to be found in sectors including fashion, cosmetics, home furnishings, automobiles and hospitality. What do the continuities in such quality claims tell us about provenance and authenticity as contemporary cultural values?

Finally, this research also contributes to our understanding of the affective dimensions of the marketplace. The focus here has been on wine promoters and their perceptions of, attachments to and promotional framing of particular aspects of provenance. As such, the findings offer a crucial complement to existing research that has thus far disproportionately focused on consumers and their affective investments in and attachments to products (Arvidsson 2006), and evaluations of authenticity (Grayson and Martinec 2004). In exploring the selecting and staging of wines for promotion, the research calls attention to the strategic work that occurs before goods reach the end consumer, through which provenance-related aspects are separated out from a product’s actual conditions of production and held out as valuable qualities worthy of attachment. Thus, the end consumer confronts not the provenance of a wine per se, but a highly selective account that hinges upon the tastes, desires and attachments of various wine promoters. More broadly, then, the research highlights that the governmental work (Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody 2008) that attempts to mobilize and direct the “creativity or adeptness of consumers in finding authenticity in the postmodern world” (Beverland and Farrelly 2010, 854) is itself contingent upon the affect and perceptions of various market actors. Wine promoters’ definitions of desirable product attributes are shaped by both their anticipation of consumer desires, and their own consuming passions. The wine promoter is but one example of cultural intermediaries who, more generally, employ cultural capital and economic logics to “re-enchant” particular goods as authentic, not (simply) as an expression of instrumental rationality with the goal of increasing sales, but also (at least in part) as an expression of love.

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Notes
1. “Premium” refers to wine priced at (AUD) $5 per bottle.
2. Sources of information on the Australian wine market: number of wineries and share of total crush data from “Industry Overview” and “Winefacts”; export and import data from “Wine Australia Fact Sheet: Industry Growth – A Story of Achievement” and “Global Wine – Australia in Perspective”; wine export price category data from “Australian Wine Sales At A Glance – 2009”. These are all available from the online site (www.wineaustralia.com) of the industry’s major trade body, the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation. Examples of provenance-oriented marketing strategies include Regional Heroes (“wines that are from somewhere rather than wines from anywhere”), one of four main “personalities” in the “Wine Australia” brand message (see, for example, “Why Australia?,” also available on www.wineaustralia.com); the “A+” campaign launched June 2010, which promotes the specificity of regional origin and the personal narratives of winemakers (see www.australiaplus.com); and the “Australia’s First Families of Wine” initiative, launched in 2009, that highlights the 12 most prominent and longstanding winemaking families in Australia and their “over 1200 years of winemaking experience” (see www.australiasfirstfamiliesofwine.com.au).
3. Respondents are identified by their pseudonym.

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