

Escaping the Everyday: The Loi Evin's Paradoxical Sanctioning of Appeals to Travel and Intoxication

Abstract: France's Loi Evin (1991) was designed to mitigate the normalising role that advertising can have on alcohol consumption. The law, based on a purely denotative understanding of visual semiotics, has nonetheless afforded advertisers adept at connotative play the necessary scope to reinforce the link between their products, escapist pursuits and ostensibly dangerous but increasingly popular 'foreign' consumption patterns predicated on alcohol consumption as a marker of leisure time. A visual semiotic analysis of recent French advertising campaigns for spirits and beer reveals layered signification of escapist themes in advertisements drawing on the origins and packaging clauses of the law, all in defiance of the spirit but not the letter of the Loi Evin.

Keywords: Loi Evin, alcohol advertising, escapism, drinking cultures, visual semiotics, advertising regulation

In 1989 a group of clinicians and public health scholars dubbed *les cinq sages de la santé publique* delivered a report to Health Minister Claude Evin (Berlivet, 2013). This report, broadly concerned with preventative and public health, aligned the relatively tolerant French approaches to alcohol with those of countries (such as Britain and

Finland) with more regulatory or prohibitionist views. The report criticised the educative function that advertising can have on children (Dubois et al., 1989) and in turn became the basis of the Loi Evin (Gouvernement de France, 1991), a highly restrictive code governing (amongst many other provisions including interdictions on roadside sales of alcohol and a ban on tobacco advertising) the advertising practices for alcoholic beverages.

Both at its inception and nearly three decades later, the law is predicated on two theories that speak to the perceived dangers facing French society with regard to alcohol. The first, common in public health circles and overt in the report, concerns the danger alcohol advertising poses to the public, particularly young people. Although there have been questions about the assumed efficacy of advertising (Cronin, 2004), the majority of scholars in public health and related disciplines maintain that alcohol advertising drives consumption, especially among young people, by normalising and even glamorising its use (Smith and Foxcroft, 2009).

The second theory relates to an apprehension of a changing drinking culture in France and the need to guard against it. Although this supposition remained mostly implicit at the time of the law's promulgation, it has subsequently become a rallying cry for its champions. These proponents of the law, who regard alcoholic beverages as drugs rather than foodstuffs or agricultural produce, argue that France's erstwhile lauded sensible or 'wet' approach to drinking is increasingly giving way to a 'dry'

drinking culture more associated with the excesses of binge drinking. A core concern about this shift is a de-normalisation or a making alien of alcohol, for in dry cultures, alcohol is not typically considered part of everyday life, but is rather associated with exceptional circumstances – festive events – and drunkenness is courted as an end unto itself.

These two framings of the dangers that must be guarded against underpin the Loi Evin's central restriction, a *de facto* ban on lifestyle advertising and its connotative potential. Lifestyle advertising, which has been the dominant format or style of advertising since the 1960s, depends on the rich visual and textual semiotic interplay of person, setting and product to create and sustain consumer demand (Leiss et al., 2005: 194). The Loi Evin claimed to ban advertisements predicated on anything but marketing the product itself, a logic that would exclude both people and settings from the suggestive trio. Excluding people would, it was thought, remove models of consumption that normalise drinking, a phenomenon that led to the 'dehumanisation' (ANPAA, 2003: 12) of advertisements, and barring representations of alcohol-associated spaces – bars, clubs, sporting events, holiday destinations – would break the link between alcohol and festivity, a hallmark of dry drinking cultures.¹ Advertisers

¹ There are a few exceptions to this dehumanising trend. Those who can be readily identified as producers or distributors (brewers, winemakers, sommeliers) are allowed in the advertisements, although the heavily litigated meaning of ready identifiability had seen most advertisers avoid this concession.

have been largely unable to circumvent the prohibitions on showing consumers in their advertisements, but they nonetheless succeeded in keeping the connotative power of setting in play. The product-setting modified lifestyle format they have perfected exploits legal loopholes to leave the long-standing product meanings of alcoholic beverages, the deep cultural associations we have with classes of products (Domzal and Kernan, 1992: 49), intact. Advertisements ingeniously emphasising settings have thus become one of the hallmarks of the post-Evin period and appeals to travel, made via connotation-rich signifying chains, have emerged as a noticeable trend despite the intention to allow only a focus on the product.

Where travel takes us out of our everyday life, routines and banal settings – a trait that echoes patterns of drinking in dry cultures – it signifies not only a geographic displacement, but an invitation to experience and do things differently, to escape and to forget, at least for a while. Travel then, is remarkably similar to escapism, an affordance, albeit not always a healthy one, of intoxication. Evin-compliant travel themed advertisements accordingly beckon consumers with promises of two kinds of escapism, one readily achievable, the other less so. Where the constraints of the law were meant to authorise largely denotative advertising, these advertisements have maximised the signifying play and pushed the connotations of a narrow range of permissible product-signifieds into territory now regarded as equally (if not more) worrying than the norms-giving potential of people. Appeals to travel consequently

surpass facile meanings to invest products with connotations that include breaking with both routine and the very strictures of reality, an affordance of intoxication.

This paper argues that the dual concerns underpinning the Loi Evin, the promotion of new and foreign norms around alcohol consumption and the reasons for drinking, have led to a paradoxical situation in which attempts to act upon one perceived threat promoted situations in which the other was ignored. Specifically, as the Loi Evin attempted to circumscribe product meanings centred on conviviality by mitigating the connotative potential of two pillars of lifestyle advertising – people and settings – it largely forbade representing alcohol as part of everyday life. By necessity then, advertisers turned away from the power of people and thus overt signifiers of conviviality in lifestyle advertising to instead focus on settings. In doing so they built an association between their products, the foreign styles of drinking increasingly favoured by the valuable young market demographic, and the established escapist and festive product meanings long-attributed to spirits (Domzal and Kernan, 1992: 62). Advertisers zeroed in on the exceptional, non-everyday qualities of consumption common in dry drinking cultures – festivity and spirits drinking – to market their products as routes away from banality and routine and used settings, specifically the suggestion of travel – escapism – in their advertisements to do so. Escapism accordingly re-emerged as a multiply-signified product meaning in post-Evin advertising campaigns, as themes of travel and intoxication became increasingly prominent and slippages between layers of

escapist signification became both more common and clever in advertisements for beer and spirits alike.²

A series of case studies that illustrate how advertisers have manipulated the visual semiotic facets of their products that are permitted as advertising signifiers – notably provenance and packaging – reveals how escapism has remained central to product meaning and even taken on new connotations related to festivity, foreignness and conviviality. This manipulation of ostensibly product-focussed advertisements attests not only to the creativity of marketers, but to the power of escape in the consumer imaginary.

The Loi Evin and the transmission of norms

Article 18 of the *Loi no 91-32 du 10 janvier 1991 relative à la lutte contre le tabagisme et l'alcoolisme*, better known as the Loi Evin, reads as follows:

La publicité autorisée pour les boissons alcooliques est limitée à l'indication du degré volumique d'alcool, de l'origine, de la dénomination, de la composition du produit, du nom et de l'adresse du fabricant, des agents et des dépositaires ainsi que du mode d'élaboration, des modalités de vente et du

² Wine is not advertised on the same scale as spirits and beer and thus does not feature in this study.

mode de consommation du produit. Cette publicité peut comporter en outre des références relatives aux terroirs de production et aux distinctions obtenues.

The strictures are defined such that anything that is not specifically permitted is excluded. The law's enforcement also extended its scope, for legal challenges most often resulted in interventionist stances that made the code even more restrictive (ANPAA, 2003: 12-13). The list of permissible content remained unchanged until 2005 when viticulturists at last succeeded in their pitch to include organoleptic qualities and modes of production (Ferry-Maccario, 2008: 144).

The law's framing reveals both sophisticated and naïve understandings of the power of advertising on the part of the public health community that pushed for it and that now serves as a watchdog body for the law's enforcement. The ANPAA, the Association nationale de prévention en alcoologie et addictologie, has a keen appreciation of how advertising allows the alcohol industry to become norms givers with regard to drinking (Rigaud and Craplet, 2004: 5; Dubois et al., 1989: 13). Where advertising is acknowledged to set norms for standards of beauty (Bordo, 2004; Wolf, 1990) and race (Giroux, 1993), its ability to set norms for behaviours, which are much more malleable, is well supported by public health research (Anderson et al., 2009; Gordon et al., 2010).

The ability to depict behaviours, to frame and to have them accepted as normative is a core process of cultural change and is accordingly an important part of both advertising strategy and the Loi Evin. McCracken and Pollay's (1981) argument that advertising had become the chief vector for the transmission of 'beliefs, values, and behavioural codes' (Leiss, 1983: 14) attests to the culturally normalising potential of advertisements (see also Rettie et al., 2014). Leiss (1983) contends that this potential is at its strongest when advertising aims to communicate more than just information about a product – ostensibly the only scope permitted by the Loi Evin – to instead focus on more symbolically mediated forms of messaging about product use, as is typical in lifestyle advertising.

Lifestyle advertising relies on the potent combination of people, place and product working together to connote not only the desirability of a particular product in given situations, but to create a sense of naturalness around its use (Leiss et al., 2005). In the case of the advertising trading on the notion of a product being the drink of choice for happy hour, the presence of cheerful, socialising people in a given setting (which could be signified by a location or the clothing and body language of the people featured) and the presence of the product implies that the product facilitates conviviality. By prohibiting one of the key pillars of lifestyle advertising, the people, who can through representations of their body language, dress, and facial expression most readily convey the affective message of the advertisements, the Loi Evin

neutralises, or at least claims to neutralise, the power of lifestyle advertising. Where the Loi Evin effectively bars people from appearing in advertisements, it denies the alcohol industry its embodied signifiers of normative behaviour, notably in situations where alcohol is cast as an almost indispensable part of the scene and especially when the situations depicted are those of everyday sociability with alcohol. The Loi Evin thus limits the normative potential of advertising (Robert, 2015).

For all the insight about advertising's normative power to create norms and Loi Evin's emphatic response, the law fails to grapple with the subtleties of visual semiotics, especially as they concern that other element of lifestyle advertising: settings. Like any restriction on the content of advertising, the Loi Evin seeks to control the signifying process and therein alter the meanings the public confers upon products. Where it is not possible to legislate against for or against the meanings people derive from a given text or image, restrictions generally target signifiers as a proxy for the meanings they are likely to generate. It is for this reason that most laws and voluntary codes governing advertising explicitly state what cannot be shown or stated (Hill and Casswell, 2004) and that the presence of people in most French alcohol advertisements now stands as one such interdiction.

At the time the law was being drafted, however, advertising scholarship – to say nothing of public health scholarship – was only just starting to move away from denotation-dominant understandings of visual semiotics (Scott, 1994: 260). Thus,

despite the desire for ‘une publicité très neutre, strictement informative, excluant tout amalgame valorisant l’alcool en l’associant à diverses activités’ (Dubois et al., 1989: 15), the Loi Evin authorised certain signifieds – product origins, composition, production methods, serving suggestions and packaging – but did not explicitly bar any signifier. This departure from convention banned many elements from featuring in advertisements, but also gave advertisers great scope to signify these allowable concepts in ways that traded upon the connotative function of the images and copy used to signify them.

By the admission of even the law’s staunchest proponents (Rigaud and Craplet, 2004) advertisers mobilised signifiers superficially denoting one of the allowable signifieds to also connote meanings, such as escapism or festivity, that the law was put in place to prohibit, a phenomenon that has led Beucler and Favreau (2003) to describe the law as a *contrainte féconde*. Indeed advertisers have been so successful operating within these constraints that French work-arounds have been adopted in other markets with much more permissible regulations.³

³ The 2002 French Campaign for Gordon’s London Dry Gin produced by Leo Burnett seized upon the product’s logo, a boar’s head, as the basis for their Evin-compliant advertisement. The boar was anthropomorphised as a cartoon and featured in a series of advertisements where he was attempting to get home after a night of clubbing in London. In 2014 Gordon the Boar, a CGI London sophisticate, featured in a more lifelike series of British television commercials for this same product.

Wet cultures drying out: The dangers of escapist drinking

The framing of the root causes of France's contemporary issues with alcohol reveals a lingering faith in the notion that countries have identifiable national drinking cultures. In the broader alcohol studies literature the distinction is that of the *wet* and *dry* models. Wet drinking cultures are thought of as convivial, centred mostly on the consumption of wine, and alcohol is seen as an everyday commodity, even a foodstuff, that requires little regulation. Such patterns are most associated with the Mediterranean regions, especially those with a tradition of viticulture and wine production. By contrast, dry drinking cultures are most often attributed to Northern and Eastern Europe, including the British Isles. Popular thinking holds that these drinking cultures are binge-prone, anti-social, oriented more towards spirits (and to a lesser extent beer) and drunkenness can often be the intent for drinking. These traits in turn lead to a tougher regulatory stance (higher legal drinking ages, higher taxes, state monopolies on retail distribution), for alcohol is seen as a dangerous commodity that requires regulation.

The wet-dry distinction is increasingly criticised by scholars engaged in cross-cultural studies of drinking and alcohol (Room, 2010a; Burki, 2010) and even by those looking more deeply at the heterogeneity of drinking practices within a given context (Demossier, 2010; Savic et al., 2016). That said, those working from within wet cultures such as France and Italy (Burki, 2010), are still more likely than their peers elsewhere to

put some faith in the fading distinction (see also Beccaria and Rolando, 2016; Beccaria and Guidoni, 2002; Craplet, 2005). The condemnation of the habits of dry cultures nonetheless remains more emphatic than the defence of wet ones and Craplet's condemnation of the dry influence is echoed by other prominent members of the French public health community, who have in turn adopted the public health stance toward alcohol that is more typical in dry cultures. Roger Nordmann (2007) and Georges Picherot (Bonal, 2008) have repeatedly excoriated Europe's dry cultures and pointedly singled out Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries as unenviable leaders among binge drinking nations. Their insistence on the nationally-branded wet-dry cultural classification establishes these other countries and regions as sites of potential contagion leading to a disastrous new drinking culture for France.

The crux of the issue for groups such as the ANPAA and members of the public health community was – and still is, according to more recent sources (Basset and Rigaud, 2015) – young people and city dwellers 'refusing to follow the habits of their parents and grandparents' and who instead model their behaviour after those in Northern Europe who drink not to accompany meals, but instead at 'parties, football matches and rock concerts' (Craplet, 2005: 1398). The public health community has thus found itself almost yearning for 'sensible' daily drinking, the kind that would take place at a family dinner table or among friends for an *apéro*. This stance, curiously given the ANPAA's vaunting of the Loi Evin as having had a perceptible but not

isolatable effect on rates of annual per capita alcohol intake in France (ANPAA, 2003), implicitly celebrates the convivial aspects of social drinking even though the law's ban on showing people prevents advertisements from reinforcing this disappearing norm.

While matters of place, setting and contagious cultural influence had not been part of the original discourse supporting the Loi Evin, questions of locality have become the new pivot point in the French critical discourse around advertising. Public health officials deplore the non-French ways while advertisers embrace them for all they connote (Robert, 2014). Special occasions and facets of life that mark themselves as different from the everyday have traditionally called for a drink in dry cultures and increasingly do so – or do so to a greater degree – in wet ones. These occasions, moreover, are readily represented via the rich semiotic potential of the visual lexicon of settings that are associated with binge drinking: party environments and holiday destinations. These images evoke an escape from the everyday and all that it represents and do not necessarily rely on the presence of people in advertisements to communicate it. By association, alcohol becomes – perfectly within the bounds of the Loi Evin – that which can transport the would-be consumer away from the concerns of the everyday, an appealing prospect in a social context marked by staggering youth unemployment and populist political divisions.

Escapism, for all its currency in our collective cultural imaginary, defies easy definition. Yi-Fu Tuan (2000), who comes closest to offering a ready definition, argues

that ‘what one escapes to is culture – not culture that has become daily life, not culture as a dense and inchoate environment and way of coping, but culture that exhibits lucidity, a quality that often comes out of a process of simplification’ (23). Tuan’s definition emphasises the incommensurability of escape and daily life. Furthermore, everyday definitions of the term generally touch upon notions of imagination, entertainment, and distraction in addition to stressing its episodic and time delimited nature. Andrew Evans notes that there is a spatiality to the core notion of escape, one of ‘going from somewhere we don’t want to be to somewhere we do’ (Evans, 2003: 55), although escapism is more about a state of mind that can be achieved through relaxation, distraction or chemical alteration than it is about geography. Little wonder then that alcohol and other intoxicants, which can temporarily alter our perceptions of reality, have long been associated with escapist impulses (Domzal and Kernan, 1992). Escapist pursuits such as relaxing on a beach or taking the time out from a busy workday to have a coffee are generally regarded as healthy escapist activities, whereas drug use is (more often than not) labelled an unhealthy escape.

The negative associations of leisure, alcohol and escapism are deeply tied in with temperance sentiments because Anglo-American temperance movements begat the association between drinking and unproductive leisure time activities (Walton, 2001). When temperance movements plummeted in popularity, the link between drinking and leisure time was reassessed as unproblematic and in those areas where support for

temperance had been high, those who persisted in upholding discredited moralistic stances were derided for their views and enforcement efforts (Room, 2010b). Where the global fields of alcohol studies and public health (vis-à-vis alcohol) are dominated by scholars and practitioners from dry cultures with a history of large-scale temperance movements (such as the United States, Britain, Australia and Finland), many of these attitudes have come to underpin policy and scholarly stances. This means that even in France, where cultural touchstones such as Zola's *L'Assommoir* painted wine as the fortifying drink of the industrious working class and criticised only the spirits-drinker as unproductive and a symptom of a great social ill, 'dry' orientations regarding alcohol have become increasingly prominent. This drying of attitudes thus explains how even the public health community in a 'wet' culture like France came to adopt a law so clearly representative of dry ideals. Accordingly, even as there is a begrudgingly nostalgic view of alcohol as part of everyday life in the current French public health discourse, the wariness of drinking as a leisure-time activity, especially among youth, has grown. Conversely, the alcohol industry, always working against the temperance-based discourses lingering in the public health community of dry cultures in particular, has sought to reinforce the link between alcohol, the unhealthy escape, and leisure, its healthy, socially-sanctioned alternative.

The dual valence of healthy and unhealthy escapism passes almost unnoticed in contemporary alcohol advertising, something made abundantly clear in, for instance, the

now iconic advertisements for the Mexican beer Corona®. A perennial motif in their advertising is the image of people sitting in beach chairs with a beer in hand as they look out on a pristine blue ocean. This classic example of lifestyle advertising brings people, place and product together in an inspiring and enviable combination that offers ‘a sense of escapism’ but does not veer toward the transitory, event-based escape of a party (Ladner, 2014: 153). The tropical setting, more so than the bar down the street from the office however, offers escapism on a grander scale. The product is featured in such a way that it provides far more than a momentary distraction or reprieve before work resumes. Instead, the symbolic interplay of product and setting removes any trace of daily life and the product by association surpasses the notion of the drink being merely a way of coping. Where ‘reality is boring, the advertisements tell us we should escape whenever we can’ (Kilbourne, 1999: 226). Transportation more than intoxication then is the fantasy on offer and the product is framed as the means to a destination more than to a state of mind. In practical terms though, the healthy escape via the vacation remains largely inaccessible and the unhealthy escape from the everyday, intoxication via the featured alcoholic beverage, becomes the readily available substitute. Despite the restrictions, French alcohol advertising has been successful in emulating the message and effect of these escapist lifestyle advertisements.

Escaping the strictures of the Loi Evin

Alluring settings, already established as an important part of lifestyle advertising and alcohol advertising in particular, are not specifically proscribed by the Loi Evin. Their use as signifiers of escape, however, must overlap with the signified traits of an alcoholic product that can be featured as part of the information-only style. Marketers have consequently exploited two key affordances within the law, the clause permitting advertising addressing product origins (*des références relatives aux terroirs de production*) and packaging (*des modalités de vente et du mode de consommation du produit*), to market the dual escapism of drink and destination. To wit, the beach (or other alluring setting) must be, or must be at least plausibly be, a signifier of product origins, packaging or other permissible factor, rather than of escape, festivity or conviviality.

Origins

Within the context of the Loi Evin, advertising based on a product's origin or *terroir* was intended to be a concession to the nation's powerful wine and viticulture lobby to reinforce the regional and domestic provenance of French agricultural products. This clause has nonetheless opened the door to escapism and images akin to those one might find in a travel brochure for both domestic and imported products. Where a product's

terroir is genuinely an alluring or picturesque location, such as rolling hills planted with vineyards, there is a neat fit that keeps the important aspect of setting in play in the advertising campaign. More often, however, actual *terroirs* must cede way to looser interpretations of the concept.

Réunion-based rum Distiller Charette®'s advertisements show the slippage from *terroirs* to the broader, more idyllic notion of origins. Advertisements quite faithful to the spirit of the Loi Evin feature alongside those that edge ever closer to the banned mode of lifestyle advertising. In one campaign (Rhum Charette, 2015), the tropical blue sky and fluffy clouds invite the viewer to the island that produces the rum. A closer look at the lush greenery that frames the bottle in the centre of the image nonetheless reveals that the leaves are not those of palms and rain forest plants, but of sugar cane, the raw material from which the rum is made and that in the earlier days of settlement on Réunion, would have been the basis of an economy of unfree labour. Associations that are faithful to the ingredients and origins clauses, however, are literally evacuated from the frame in the product's other advertisement (Rhum Charette, 2008), which features a canopy of greenery framing a mossy pedestal upon which sits a glass of rum garnished with a wagon wheel (a nod to the product's name) disguised as a slice of lime. Here the greenery is less distinct, less identifiable as a particular variety of plant, and acts more as a background to the shot. The visuals are less authentic in the second, but the escape evoked – to a mossy tropical grotto – is more enticing and is, moreover, in line with an

emerging trend toward ecotourism in Réunion's tourism marketing strategy (Germanaz and Sicre, 2012).

For Martiniquan rum *Trois Rivières*®, the escapist quotient is expansive, the notion of *terroirs* all but absent and the origins clause, only tangentially, is what keeps the advertisement on the right side of the Loi Evin. The campaign, in one iteration, plays up the Caribbean link in a modern way (Figure 1, Rhum Trois Rivières, 2013b), and in the other (Figure 2), combines the old style 'sun, sand and palms' advertising with the new emphasis on the island's natural environment beyond the beach (Rhum Trois Rivières, 2013a; Burac, 2006; Baver and Lynch, 2006).



Figure 1



Figure 2

The images share a colour scheme - vibrant yellow hues backlighting the deep turquoise of the seating arrangement in the foreground – and premise; the sun is setting, illuminating two comfortable seats and a table on a dock. In the first iteration, some fine print provides a clue about the location: 'servi au bar Le Mondrian, Miami'. The origins

identified are those of not just Martinique as a whole, as in the second iteration that features the classic scene, but of the entire Caribbean, as denoted by the obligatory but hidden indication that the water featured is likely the Caribbean Sea (even though the Mondrian technically overlooks south Florida's Biscayne Bay). These images are seemingly as far away from the cane fields and distilleries as one can get, but their idyllic character and sense of distance from any concern or anyone else connotes a genial escape.

The example of rum advertisements aptly illustrates the difficulty lawmakers would face in trying to legislate the signifiers of product origins. The sanctioning of origin-signifying advertisements leaves ample scope for interpretation and consequently allows signifiers, such as sun and palms, that more readily connote travel, escapism, or holidaymaking than they do a product's country of origin. To ban these particular signifiers on the grounds that what they connote is too enticing would nonetheless unfairly disadvantage products from picturesque or desirable locations and open the law up to legal challenges on the basis of discriminatory application.

Products that cannot so readily capitalise on the lure of tropical destinations have also replicated the tactic of using visual signifiers readily associated with tourism to speak to product origins. Alsatian brewer Kronenbourg®'s long-running 1664 'le goût à la française' campaign (Kronenbourg 1664, 2010a; Kronenbourg 1664, 2013) transcends its regional heritage by using iconic landmarks from around the country – the

base of the Eiffel Tower, the Mont Saint Michel, the harbour in Marseilles – and scenes that could represent any number of locations – a hilltop view of a picturesque village – to market their French beer to a domestic audience through nods to almost stereotypical tourist imagery. The signifiers in these images, far from representing mundane facets or settings of French life that might be used in advertisements focused on conviviality, are reminiscent of the visuals in the tourism brochures used to attract foreign visitors (Tabeaud and Lysianuk, 2009; Díaz, 2011). If nothing else, it is the France that even the French seek to find when they leave homes and work behind and set off on a local vacation. Escape then becomes even easier to access, for one need not travel far to get away from it all, a welcome message for those valuing the kind of easy escape available in a bottle. The 1664 campaign also uses the implication of sociability whilst on holiday – signified by the presence of two or more glasses or bottles of beer at a table or around a platter of food – to further inflect these escapist themes with connotations of sociability and festivity. France is accordingly cast as the place one travels to in order to reunite with friends or family.

Packaging

Where the origins clause offers a relatively predictable avenue for settings to feature prominently in alcohol advertisements and to facilitate lifestyle-based appeals, the

packaging clause is a less obvious way to tap into the lures of escapism and travel.

Heineken®'s campaigns have nonetheless made the Dutch beer an inducement for the French to travel not to a neighbouring country, but to destinations further afield.

Heineken's iconic green bottle, along with cans, kegs, cases and the accoutrements of service – namely a bottle opener – are artfully arranged in advertisements to reproduce iconic, postcard-like scenes from places near and far – Paris, New York, Rio De Janeiro – and beckon the viewer to those locales. A likeness of Rio's iconic Christ the Redeemer statue, for instance, features in the *For a Fresher World* campaign (Heineken, 2008) – a campaign whose slogan rather than its visuals were ultimately deemed illegal.⁴ The statue of Jesus with his arms extended is made out of a winged corkscrew and the city it towers over is a detailed assortment of beer containers positioned to replicate Rio De Janeiro's urban sprawl. The colour scheme, based on the green of the bottle and the golden colour of the beer itself (packaging and product signifieds-turned-signifiers that are permitted by the Loi Evin), evokes the sensual pleasures of Brazil in sun-dappled hues that also represent the colours of the Brazilian flag. Where an online image search for Rio brings up virtually identical

⁴ Heineken's *For a Fresher World* campaign was not the only one to run afoul of the Loi Evin thanks to its slogan. Kronenbourg's 1664 campaigns featuring French landmarks initially bore captions such as 'C'est un peu plus qu'un rond point' (while featuring an image of the Arc de Triomphe) and a corresponding statement 'C'est un peu plus qu'une bière'. After a 2009 decision against them, however, the visuals were redeployed without the offending copy.

images, of course not made out of Heineken packaging, the intent of the campaign to replicate common tourist imagery for these popular destinations appears quite clear.



Figure 3

The brand's *Open your world* campaign, which is informatively but less concisely translated as 'Ouvrir une Heineken c'est consommer une bière vendue dans le monde entier,' uses both image and copy to incite wanderlust. At first glance the image (Figure 3) presents a plate of sushi and a glass of beer, a scene that one could readily imagine being used in the promotion of a Japanese brew. Upon closer inspection, the pieces of sushi reveal themselves to be neat cross sections of a bottle of beer: the green glass of the bottle doubling as nori, the white foam in the bottle's neck serving as rice and the golden liquid of the beer itself acting as the principal ingredient. The advertisement could well be promoting Japanese gastro-tourism or, at the very least, a form of gustatory escapism from the conventions of everyday French fare. Where neither Heineken nor sushi are the food and drink of the traditional French

consumer, the brand suggests that something new or unexpected should be on the menu.

What these images do, but arguably shouldn't according to the spirit of the law, is imply that we can go, in Evans' words on escapism, 'from somewhere we don't want to be to somewhere we do' (2003: 56). Wanting to be somewhere and being able to get there, are two different prospects though and in the economy of substitutable desires that lifestyle advertising depends upon, the drink becomes the one that can be obtained at relatively little expense and with comparably less effort.

Fantastic escapes

For as much as the idyllic settings of the above advertisements beckon and reinforce the idea of the beverage as a means to escape to such surrounds, they also challenge our sense of reality and thereby reinforce the imaginary, fantasy aspect of the promise of escapism. A common tactic in these advertisements, like in advertising for any number of products, is to present an optimised and fundamentally unreal scenario. The 1664® advertisements featuring the bright red café seating for two at the base of the moonlit Eiffel Tower (Kronenbourg 1664, 2010b), for example, changes a familiar location into a scene of pure fantasy. The transformation of the space at the foot of the tower from a crowded square packed with tourists into an eerily deserted scene makes this familiar

landmark almost alien, something that is reinforced by the monochromatic blue tint of sky, clouds, steel and pavement. Domzal and Kernan (1992: 62) argue that peaceful settings and idealised venues – such as prime tourist spots devoid of (other) tourists – are classic signifiers of escapism. To be able to enjoy a quiet beer in such a location with only the companion of one's choice, as the seating arrangement in the image suggests, challenges all sense of probability or reality and calls upon the viewer to associate this idyllic setting with the product. Where life can be hectic, as the location depicted normally is, the product provides a respite from it all and suggest that a different experience of even such a familiar place is possible thanks to the beer. The setting of the advertisement is thus not (just) tourist themed, but also summons the affective pleasures and hope-filled promise of the escape from the inevitable.

While unrealistic optimism for an unattainable ideal reinforces the escapist quotient in some advertisements, others distance themselves from the maligned connotations of the everyday by totally breaking with reality. The Heineken sushi-themed advertisement (2013) offers the common pairing of beer and sushi, a meal that in some settings is almost banal, as a surreal experience. At first glance, the eye is drawn to the golden colour of the beer – in the glass (the conventional element of the image) and in the sushi (the surreal element) – in contrast to the dominant green tones in the image, which come from the counter, the plate, the chopsticks, the background and the nori/bottle of the sushi itself. This first look leads one to realise that there is

something peculiar about the sushi and this realisation in turn solicits a deeper engagement and processing of the image to figure out what is amiss. Only upon closer inspection is one likely to notice the printing on the outer layer of the pieces of sushi, which identify them as cross sections of the Heineken bottle.

This visual riddle of sorts acts as a break with the expected, but also serves a purpose from a marketing point of view. The longer and more intently one must engage with the advertisement to make sense of it, the more the message is likely to influence attitudes and behaviours, a phenomenon noted by both consumer behaviour and public health scholars, but appreciated in quite different ways (Agostinelli and Grube, 2002; Scott, 1994). This process of making meaning, of registering the signified of packaging transformed into a signifier of exotic cuisine and then to a sign of travel-based escape, solicits a deeper engagement with the advertisements. One is not just led to think, as in the rum advertisements, that it would be nice to be there, but is also prompted to think about what part of the ideal of the advertisement is even possible. The answer is inevitably the product itself and the escape left on the table (often quite literally given the visual presence of bottles and glasses) is not travel or surrealism, but intoxication.

Conclusion

In theory, France's adoption of the Loi Evin forbade any attempt by the alcohol industry to dictate social and cultural norms about drinking and made denotative, 'information only' campaigns the obligatory mandate of alcohol advertisers. Prohibiting the seductive lures of lifestyle advertising by supposedly barring references to or representations of people and settings and presumably forcing advertisers into factual rather than imaginative advertisements was thought to be a way to lessen the social and epidemiological damage of drinking, especially among young people who were increasingly adopting the binge drinking ways of their foreign, 'dry culture' counterparts. The law was considered a significant victory by the public health lobby at the time of its passage and continues to be a source of pride for this same group today.

In practice, however, the law's inability to control the connotative potential of visual signifiers left just enough room for creative license to capitalise upon the escapist desires that often inspire people to seek out intoxication. Marketers accordingly played with the affordances of the law and its signified-based allowances (rather than prohibitions on signifiers) and stoked the imaginations and wishes of consumers by taking advantage of the clauses permitting advertising based on a product's place of origin, appearance or mode of distribution (i.e. packaging). The result was a multivalent visual semiotics of escape that in many cases reinforced advertisers' messages not only of travel, but of breaking with convention and the constraints of reality, to say nothing of the banality of everyday life. Alcohol advertisements – even under the Loi Evin –

accordingly promote escapes of many kinds, but most notably intoxication and travel, the most accessible and desirable escapes from the quotidian on offer.

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