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## **‘Desidero Ergo Sum (I Desire Therefore I Am)’: Towards a Psychoanalytic Reading of the Advertising of Perfume**

**Eugene O’Brien (Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick)**

Raymond Williams, in his iconic *Culture and Materialism*, suggested that it is impossible ‘to look at modern advertising without realising that the material object being sold is never enough’. He went on to speak of examples of beer advertisements, wherein the product was associated with ‘being manly, young in heart or neighbourly’, and of the suggestion that purchasing a particular washing-machine would imply that we are ‘forward looking’ and how this purchase would make us ‘an object of envy to our neighbours’ (Williams 2005, 185). The associations of the products with indefinable qualities are the focus on Williams’ attention, and he continues:

But if these associations sell beer and washing-machines, as some of the evidence suggests, it is clear that we have a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings which in a different cultural pattern might be more directly available. The short description of the pattern we have is *magic*: a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical

systems in Simpler societies, but rather strangely coexistent with a highly developed scientific technology.

(Williams 2005, 185)

As Stuart Ewen tellingly puts it, ‘in a seductive mix of words and images’, advertising, the creator of the ‘magic’ of which Williams speaks, was beginning to make connections between goods and ‘the emotional lives – the needs, cravings, aspirations, and fears – of the consumers to whom it spoke’ (Ewen 1996, 112). This ‘magic’, was analysed as ‘commodity fetishism’ by Karl Marx. For Marx, the commodity fetish worked as a form of quasi-religious experience. In the famous ‘table’ example from the first volume of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, he makes this point programmatically:

The form of wood, for instance, is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing, but as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.

(Marx 1990, 163-164)

For both of these writers, advertising provides, not just an account of the qualities of the product, what Marx would term its use-value, but also a

sense of its transcendent qualities, which almost suggests a religious dimension to advertising. Sut Jhally's essay, 'Advertising as Religion: The Dialectic of Technology and Magic', takes up both Williams' notion of magic, and the Marxian idea of the commodity fetish, to suggest that advertising is almost a form of fetish religion, one that fulfils 'a sacred role in secular life' (Jhally 1989, 199). Williams' view of advertising as 'a system of organized magic' (Williams 1980, 185) is really a broader way of explaining the commodity fetish, whose core function is to separate the division of producer and consumer, and to remove the passivity and lack of control of the consumer thorough the creation of a magical aura around the product. This point is crucial to any understanding of what might be termed the 'real' of advertising:

the fetishism of commodities consists in the first place of emptying them [*commodities*] of meaning, of hiding the real social relations objectified in them through human labour, to make it possible for the imaginary/symbolic relations to be injected into the construction of meaning at a secondary level. Production empties. Advertising fills. The real is hidden by the imaginary. (Jhally 1990, 50)

The real of which Jhally speaks, namely that the consumer is epistemologically passive in that he or she has a limited choice of products, is often occluded by the sheer dazzling nature of the images, signifiers and narrative structures used to advertise these products. The value that is

actually 'endemic to the process of human production and labour' is given to and embodied in the object 'through the image-making process of advertising' (Sheffield 2006, 118). This fetishism, through sleight of hand, makes the passive consumer seem active, and full of agency, as he or she chooses and purchases this product which will make him or her a more full and complete and self-actualised person. Rather than buying a commodity, the consumer is engaging in a process of self-improvement; in some magical way, the product brings the consumer nearer to the ideal-I, to a perfectible version of themselves.

It is here that the discourse of psychoanalytic theory can help to further develop our understanding of what is at stake in advertisements, and how they relate at such a deep level, to human consciousness and indeed, to the unconscious. Advertising attempts to make the consumer more active and more creatively involved, and it attempts to make the choice of the item to be purchased and consumed as active and creative as possible. In this essay, I will look at two perfume advertisements, one for Calvin Klein's *Euphoria*, and the other from Chanel's *Coco Mademoiselle*. Perfume is probably the 'magical' commodity fetish *par excellence*, as it is essentially sweet-smelling water. The actual material nature of the fragrance, and the fact that 'these fragrances smell different is, by contrast, of minor importance' (Van de Ven 2000, 157). As Judith Williamson puts it 'the function of differentiation rests

totally on making a connection with an image drawn from outside the ad world' (Williamson 1978, 25), and this connection can only be constructed through advertising.

Because of this, perfume is an ideal example through which to analyse the modality of advertising in terms of its connection to human desire; as a product, it fulfils no need, and yet it is still a significant consumer item, which generates huge cash flows. Perfume advertisements are especially popular around Christmas on television, when consumer spending is at its annual peak. Given the generic similarity of the actual use-values of the commodities – both liquids in bottles that smell nice – advertising is an epistemological discourse that demarcates these two products. Hence, advertising looks to make the choice of product seem as important as the mode of production of the product in the economy of the exchange: it seeks to form a bond between the consumer and the product, as a way of avoiding a sense of alienation in a world of increasing consumer durables. Marketers position products to differentiate them from 'competitive brands that share the same basic attributes' (Goldman 1992, 44).

Describing such notions of alienation, Jacques Lacan speaks of what he calls the '*vel*', or the 'forced choice'. For Lacan, desire, a topic that we will discuss in more detail later in the essay, is mediated in society by what he terms the Symbolic order of language. Our early narcissistic wants are gradually

mediated by parents, education and the rules of society, and the notion of delayed gratification becomes gradually engrained in the developing subject. Lacan expresses this at a more basic level, noting that most of our choices in life are actually forced choices: we have the ability to choose this or that, but the range of choices is strictly limited by cultural, contextual, financial and societal factors. For example, if we wish to purchase a car, the amount of money in our account will naturally rule out a significant range of choices, but consumer culture occludes this limitation by offering us a myriad of choices within our given parameters of expense. This is so effective that those parameters very often disappear from our consciousness, and we will obsess over whether a Nissan with air-conditioning is a better purchase than a Toyota without air-conditioning but with electric windows. Our focus on this filters out the fact that we can never aspire to a Mercedes or a Bentley, so the seeming choice and power of the consumer is, in fact, a forced choice. It is also forced because a car is now necessary for much modern living, in terms of the commute between home and work.

Lacan defines this forced choice as meaning that one must choose A or B; one cannot choose both, with the 'or' being what 'the Latins called *vel*' (Dunker 2011, 180). For Lacan, the *vel* is indicative of the forced choice because, by its very nature, it is reductive and it delimits choice, agency and participation, thereby causing a sense of alienation. 'Alienation consists in

this *vel* (Lacan 1977, 210), as our connection with the world is limited by each choice we make: ‘I go *either* there *or* there – if I go there, I do not go there, I have to choose’ [*italics original*] (Lacan 1977, 210). This restricted choice is carefully disguised by notions of desire, and Lacan goes on to pun in French, noting that the ‘*vel* returns in the form of a *velle*’ (Lacan 2006, 715), where the ‘Latin *velle*—in French *vouloir*—means to will, to desire, to want, or to wish’ (Lacan 2006, 842). This means that some form of desire or wanting occludes the forced nature of the choice, and provides a ‘magical’ sense that the individual is actually choosing to purchase a product whereas in fact, it is very much a forced choice: as Slavoj Žižek puts it ‘you are free to choose—on condition that you make the right choice’ (Žižek 2006, 96). Desire is a way of not facing that reality because even though the choice is limited, our unconscious nature will always be driven by the *velle*, by the sense of wanting more, though we often feel a sense of guilt for this eternal dissatisfaction: ‘if a subject chooses desire, he falls prey to guilt for having failed to comply with the law, but in opting for the law, he is left to mourn his desire’ (Grigg 2008, 105).

Advertising, then, attempts to fetishise a product in order to make us feel a sense of freedom and agency as human subjects; through its use, the fetish attempts to heal our sense of alienation with a commodity, which will, in some way, integrate us in society and make us seem connected to society and

the Other. A good example of this can be seen in the case of John B. Watson, who worked as a psychologist in Johns Hopkins University, edited the *Psychological Review* and founded the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, from 1908 to 1920. However, he went on to work for the U.S. advertising agency J. Walter Thompson, ‘where he has been credited with, among other things, inventing the concept of the coffee break in a series of magazine ads’ (Cordón 2012, 479). Here the forced choice of work or leisure, the *vel*, is displaced by the *velle* of desire for a pleasant drink, in a period where one is free from the demands of work. Coffee has become fetishised, and is now a displaced metonym for control of one’s time and by extension, one’s life. It is an example of how a magical quality is adduced to a commodity in order to appeal to our unconscious desire for self-actualisation and pleasure.

This essay will probe how this fetishisation and displacement works in two perfume advertisements, and will probe the way that the *vel* and the *velle* are embodied in these advertisements. Interestingly, Robert Goldman makes the point that, while ‘perfumes are packaged fragrances’, very few advertisements for perfume ‘attempt to describe either the scent or the material properties’ (Goldman 1992, 23); instead, they concentrate on the product’s sign value (Goldman 1992, 24). The aims will be to provide a better understanding of how, and why, these seemingly oblique advertisements enculturate people to buy the products being marketed, and

also to use these practical examples as a way of understanding aspects of the human being's unconscious need for fantasy, phantasy and pleasure.

Television advertisements embody the same codes and narrative structures as film. Using diegetic and mimetic techniques, such mini-films rely on the audience's experiences of the different codes of film in order to achieve their aim, and in many ways, the structural relationship between the potential consumer and the mini or micro-filmic advertising text, parallels that of the film and its audience. Laura Mulvey has spoken very pertinently on this relationship:

Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the suppressed desire on to the performer.

(Mulvey 2009, 17)

This twin sense of looking in at a private world, and of the projection of desire onto the filmic performer, is at the core of the power of visual narrative, and of how it can affect the viewer and the potential consumer: ultimately it brings pleasure to the viewer, and in our two chosen advertisements, access to seemingly private moments is crucial to the success of each advertisement. For Mulvey, the effects of film are operative

on both the conscious and the unconscious, and in the study of the effect of film on the senses, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, paraphrase her work, and set out the ‘fascination and power’ of film in terms of its connection to two central human drives. The first of these is ‘the pleasure in looking’, which Freud, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, has termed ‘scopophilia’ (Freud and Gay 1989, 251). This sense of looking at something private when we are in a cinema is underscored by the darkness and silence of the cinema, and by the occlusion of the cinematic modes of production, which are also hidden. There is a real sense of pleasure in looking at people who are deemed attractive, even if there is nothing in reality to be gained from this. Freud associated ‘associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze’. His particular examples centre on the ‘voyeuristic activities of children, their desire to see and make sure of the private and forbidden’ and its focus is on ‘the human form’ (Mulvey 2009, 17). Some advertisements create a scene wherein we seem to have access to such private moments in the lives of the characters. This explains the presence of so many beautiful people in advertisements, as well as the sexualisation of products in order to attract consumers. We gain pleasure in watching these attractive images at an unconscious level through the scopic drive: ‘many more viewers gain pleasure from advertisements than buy the products being promoted’ (Fiske

1987, 104), and all of the actors in the *Euphoria* and *Coco Mademoiselle* advertisements are good looking.

The second drive to which Elsaesser and Hagener refer is that of identifying with the characters on the screen. By this, they do not mean that as I watch *Star Wars, The Force Awakens* that I would consciously like to be Han Solo, but that at an unconscious level, I am looking for elements of my ideal self in aspects of the characters on the screen. Watching a film, as we will see, is ‘a regression to an earlier stage of development, namely the mirror stage’, a moment of recognition which is ‘is always already a moment of self-miscognition’ (Elsaesser and Hagener 2010, 94). It is to the mirror stage, or to give the essay its full title – ‘The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience’ – that our discussion now turns.

Jacques Lacan, set out the theory of the mirror stage at the Fourteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress at Marienbad in 1936. In his essay, Lacan outlines what he terms ‘the function of misrecognition that characterizes the ego’ (Lacan 2006, 82). He postulates that at some stage, between six to eighteen months, a child becomes fascinated by its own reflection in a mirror. He realises that many primates exhibit the same traits, but points to the sustained interest of the human child in its reflection, and sees this as a structural matrix through which the individual

child's subjectivity is formed. He sees the child's fascination with its specular image as highly significant, as it is fascinated by its specular image as it aspires to the totality of that image:

It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context *as an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes [*assume*] an image [*italics original*]. (Lacan 2006, 72)

In other words, the child, who is at a very fragmented state of development, sees its specular image in the mirror as a whole individual, and as such as something to be both identified with ('it's me'), but also to be aspired to ('I wish I had such bodily wholeness and integrity'). The image is both recognized as the self, but also misrecognized, as it is in advance of the self – it is an 'ideal-I' (Lacan 2006, 72). For Lacan the 'jubilant assumption of his specular image' by the paralinguistic child, is paradigmatic of how subjectivity is bound up in 'the dialectic of identification with the other' (Lacan 2006, 72). Lacan sees the mirror stage as the *locus* where the subject 'anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage', and this symbolises 'the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination' [*italics original*] (Lacan 2006, 76). Hence, alienation is inaugurated at the coming into being of the subject; the image in the mirror is alienating because it means that the image of subjective unity is actually

outside of the subject, and therefore it suggests that there is a lack at the core of the subject; there is a *vel* between self and other, and this is displaced by the *velle* of the attitude of the subject to its misrecognized ideal-I:

one sees one's image in the mirror, and the image offers an illusion of wholeness (an illusion that covers over the fragmentary state of the real body). This illusion prompts the infant to love the image and to take the image as its ego. The ego is thus an imaginary other that the subject showers with love in exchange for the illusion of wholeness.

(McGowan 2004, 66)

This love of the image, and this desire to identify with the image, is at the core of our subjective identity, and I will argue that it is also how advertising works, and this will be clear when we look at the objects of desire that are set out as images in the chosen advertisements under discussion.

Having set out the unconscious connections between watching film and watching advertisements, our discussion now turns to two specific perfume advertisements, which have appeared regularly on Irish television, but especially around Christmas time each year. Traditionally, perfume is a luxury item, whose use value, to use the Marxist term, is to make one smell nicer and therefore to be more attractive to potential sexual partners. It is conventionally aimed at women, though more and more men are now buying

perfumes as opposed to aftershaves, and the whole notion of metro-sexuality has become imbricated in the use of male scents (interestingly, the word 'perfume' still has strong feminine associations, and has been usually replaced with 'scent' in the marketing of perfume to men). These specific advertisements have been chosen as they embody the elements of desire and imaginary identification of which we have been speaking, and both the commodity fetishistic logic and the magical aura are strongly foregrounded in the way that what are essentially bottles of sweet-smelling liquid are narrated and turned into objects of desire.

Chanel has traditionally been seen as a luxury item, especially its iconic *Chanel Number 5* brand, and the advertisements have always stressed this quality. In the advertisement under analysis, the brand was seeking to reach out to a younger audience, with a perfume called *Coco Mademoiselle* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRV-2 Un-kk>), but the customer base was a similarly affluent one. The advertisement, consequently, set out very high production values, in keeping with previous examples of the genre, which featured such movie stars as Nicole Kidman and Brad Pitt.

This advertisement featured Keira Knightley and the Argentinian actor Alberto Ammann, and was directed by Joe Wright, who had worked with Knightley on *Atonement* and *Pride and Prejudice*, and the advertisement has a very strong narrative base. The 3 minute and 20 second 'film' begins with

Knightley, chastely covered in sheets, lying in bed and staring at the camera. She then reaches to her night table and takes up her bottle of *Coco Mademoiselle*, which she then applies to her neck for some 6 seconds, all the time facing the camera with a clear-eyed stare. So far, so expected, as she is a beautiful woman who begins her day by putting on her expensive perfume before she even puts on her clothes – *Coco Mademoiselle* is a mediating point between her body and her clothing; between nature and culture; between private self and a sense of her public self, and we as viewers are privileged and intimate spectators at this part of her day. Robert Goldman makes the point that this is a strong constituent of the perfume advertisement genre, noting that ‘beauty products are part of getting dressed’ (Goldman 1992, 43). Clearly, there is a scopophilic pleasure here in watching this seemingly private moment, and her stare at the camera inducts the viewer into the scene. As she goes to work, an appointment that she must keep, the perfume is her element of choice and individuality; it is part of herself, like an olfactory mirror stage: a *velle* that mitigates the *vel* of her forced choice of going to work.

In what could be seen as a postmodern gesture towards metanarrative structure, we discover that looking into the camera is actually the job of the Knightley character, whose work for the day will be a photoshoot with Ammann’s photographer. There is a long focus on her journey to the

photoshoot, with a cut from her standing in her sheet in her bedroom, to one of her striding purposefully, in a beige leather cat suit, towards a Ducati 750 Sport motorcycle. Given the highly stylised and romanticised images that are normal in the genre of the perfume advertisement, this act defies expectation, as one would expect the mode of transportation to be a chauffeur-driven limousine, but it is clearly part of the message that the wearer of *Coco Mademoiselle* is a different kind of woman to the norm. She speeds away from other motorcyclists, and jumps the Ducati down a flight of steps, before stopping at the chateau where Ammann is waiting for her: clearly, she is late. The colour coordination is striking with everything – chateau, cobbles, Knightley and the Ducati – all in different shades of beige. An almost ethereal, archetypically feminine, white lace dress is seen being carried downstairs before she arrives in the chateau, but the photoshoot is carried out in her beige leather cat suit, while she sits and kneels on the bed, again stressing her *velle* as in some way triumphing over the *vel*. Gradually the chemistry between them intensifies and the professional relationship of his taking photos of her body threatens to become more personal, as he ushers everyone else out of the studio, and begins to unzip her suit as she lies on the bed, and he lies above her. There are a number of scenes where she is wrapped in a sheet (analeptic of our opening view of her, and suggestive of a fusion of the private and public personae of this woman), and various parts of her body, notably her shoulders, are bared to the camera,

being wielded with increasing urgency by Ammann. Here the spectator remains in the scene, and the scopophilic pleasure at looking at the private and the intimate becomes more overt and voyeuristic, as she turns her back and coyly reveals her shoulders.

From the opening scene, where it was Knightley and the viewer of the advertisement involved, now it is something of a threesome, with Knightley, Ammann and the viewer involved as she becomes increasingly naked. He touches her behind the ear, a traditional part of the body where perfume is placed, and her response is to lie back on the bed, quite suddenly. Here we seem to be in an almost clichéd seduction scene as, with one touch on his hand, the woman is rendered powerless and collapses on the bed, ready to succumb to his charms. Just as it seems they will have sex, she stops the process by raising her finger to her lips, inches away from his hovering face. She motions him to lock the door of the room. He does, and turning back, he sees an empty bed and an open French window, and on looking out, he sees Knightley, on her Ducati, leaving. Perhaps the most interesting thing about this advertisement, from the perspective of this essay, is that the perfume features for some 6 seconds as it is put on in the morning, and as Knightley mounts her Ducati to leave, she puts the bottle of perfume inside the cat suit (about 1.5 seconds) and in the final shot, the bottle and label appear (2 seconds). It would seem odd that, having spent so much on a top quality

director and two such popular actors, that the actual product would not feature more fully in the film, but here, the narrative is more mimetic than diegetic – there is very little telling at work here, mostly showing. However, the key is the 1.5 seconds as she leaves the chateau, as the perfume bottle serves as a fetish of her own individuality: it is as if she avoids the forced choice of being seduced or not being seduced by choosing the perfume, and hence a form of freedom. Rather than being an aid to seduction, the perfume is now seen as a different mirror, which reflects the Knightley character's individuality and her sense of choice: her *velle* is now seen to triumph over the *vel*, and this is due to the emancipatory nature of *Coco Mademoiselle*. The advertisement speaks to our desire for unity and agency in a very effective manner.

The second perfume advertisement is more direct and less oblique. It is an advertisement for Calvin Klein's perfume, entitled *Euphoria*, and features what seems to be an original song with snatches of lyrics such as: 'Open up like a wild flower' and 'Burning up like a wildfire' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=becqg-Gnx00>). It is 30 seconds long and features the 39-year-old American model Tyson Ballou, and the Russian model Natalia Vodianova, who wears a very long dress, which is purple in colour. In this advertisement, the initial focus is on Vodianova writhing on her own in bed, and clearly dreaming, and this is followed by the dream

scenes in which she and Ballou are entangled in the kind of stylised and idealised sexual embraces that could be called ‘perfume sex’, so replete is the perfume advertisement genre with such scenes. The camera moves almost erratically from different shots of embraces, and diverse parts of the body, all highly suggestive of sexual climax. The fantasy of a perfect sexual experience, and a natural one, which is suggested by the metonymic images of a flower that bursts open (which is colour-co-ordinated with Vodianova’s dress), as well as by the crashing waves breaking around her body on the beach, is sustained throughout the dream, which is the filmic context of the narrative. Later in the video, she is lying on her back, on the sand, with her dress billowing around her and she arches her back as the waves break around her. The lyrics ‘open up like a wildflower’, are sung, as she simulates autoerotic orgasm, and her arching body, combined with the opening flower and the crashing waves, create a strongly overdetermined set of images which equate the perfume *Euphoria* with the state of sexual euphoria.

The advertisement finishes with the slogan ‘Free the Fantasy’, and interestingly, Vodianova is never seen putting on the perfume in the advertisement, and the brand name ‘*Euphoria* – Calvin Klein’ appears, again at the end of the clip, for some 4 seconds. The fantasy, which is the satisfaction of desire, is freed by the perfume; on her own, the woman

experiences a sense of euphoria without the need for her partner. She is an object of desire, but she is also the subject of desire. She desires sexual pleasure, and her agency is so strong that she can attain it by just wearing the perfume, which heightens her sense of selfhood to such an extent that she can achieve autoerotic climax, as her black and white dream becomes a colourful reality. In a manner that parallels that of the Knightley character's narrative, her *velle* is now seen to triumph over the *vel* of either looking for the man involved, or else relying on attenuated, black and white memories, and *Euphoria* is the agent of this emancipation.

Given the huge cost of the making of such advertisements involving film stars, supermodels and very high production values, it would seem almost counter intuitive that the name of the actual product would appear so little in the filmic narratives (5% in the Chanel advertisement and 13% in the Calvin Klein one), but that would be to misread what is actually happening in these filmic texts. The advertising industry, we are told, 'is essentially built around the intention of awakening, or manufacturing, wishes that will eventually be integrated into the social structure of collective desire' (Gay 1985, 108). It is important to note, however, that the desire in question here is not the cognitive, reasonably rational imperative that tells us that we need a new phone because the old one has broken. The desire, which is addressed by such advertisements as this is unconscious, and indeed is

probably the strongest unconscious drive of them all, which has been the subject of much work by Freud and Lacan. Through the agency of desire, according to Arjun Appadurai, the consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows into a sign, and into a ‘mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production’; he terms this ‘*the fetishism of the consumer*’ [*italics original*] (Appadurai 1996, 52). Accessing desire is a complex operation, but it is central to the effect of advertising as an agent of change on consumers, and, indeed as a way of shaping them ideologically.

For Lacan, desire exists as the final element of a triad – need, demand, desire. The initial need of the child is for biological necessities: milk when he or she is hungry, for example. The cry of a child is looking to satiate this need, and it seeks the mother’s breast, or a bottle, to provide the nourishment it requires. However, with the development of language, need is replaced by demand, which initiates a particular relationship between self and other: ‘demand already constitutes the Other as having the “privilege” of satisfying needs, that is, the power to deprive them of what alone can satisfy them’ (Lacan 2006, 580). In other words, the need for milk becomes a demand for love, and the cry of the child changes from a signal to a sign: ‘the sound acquires a human meaning [*and*] is not simply a *signal*, “Milk now!”, but a *sign* to another person: “Milk now because you love me!”’ (Easthope

1999, 92). The milk has changed from the domain of the real world, a substance the infant body requires to sustain and develop its own life, into a sign in the symbolic order of language. To use Lacan's terms: in the 'real', milk is a thing; in the 'symbolic', milk has become a sign and children, as they get older, start to look for items of food and drink, not just to sustain life, as is the case with most animals in nature, but rather as a sign of something else – what Lacan terms 'proof of love' (Lacan 2006, 580).

However, as we all know, love is almost impossible to quantify, so we look for more and more signifiers of love in order to convince ourselves that we are loved. This is because all of the objects that we desire are just links in an endless chain that can never be fulfilled. We can never be our ideal-I, no matter how much we try; that reflection in the mirror will always be like the self, but ultimately other. The 'perfect abs', the 'chiselled glutes', the 'perfect meal', the 'happy ever after relationship', are all attractive precisely because, in essence, they are unattainable. This is because our desire is essentially predicated, as was demand, on the other: 'man's desire is the desire of the Other' (Lacan 1977, 235). By this, Lacan means that we desire to be desired by another person: even as we are a desiring subject, so we also want to be seen as an object of desire. Hence our ideal-I is that image of ourselves which will be most desirable to other people. For Lacan, this is crucial, and he makes the point that 'desire is the desire of the other' no less than

eighteen time in his seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. He sees desire as going beyond demand: just as need cries for milk, and demand cries for love and sees milk as a signifier of that love, so desire is that which will keep the child, and later the adult, desiring more, but which will also leave the child and the adult never quite satisfied. The child identifying with the ideal image of itself in the mirror, but never achieving this identification, is thus the paradigm for our behaviour throughout our lives. Lacan sees desire as intrinsically connected to demand: ‘*Desidero* is the Freudian *Cogito*’ [*italics original*] (Lacan 1977, 155). Rene Descartes’s formula for finding a point of certainty in the thinking self, expressed in the formula “I think therefore I am” (in Latin, *Cogito ergo sum*) was to be replaced by Lacan’s psychoanalytic axiom of the uncertainty of human desire, *Desidero ergo sum*, “I desire therefore I am” (Levine 2008, 70).

This seems to be a huge claim, as the Cartesian *Cogito* has often been seen as the ground work of the thought-process that brought the modern world into being; however, for Lacan, desire has the same shaping function in the postmodern world, and he sees it as the engine that has driven humanity, both as individuals and as groups, towards constant improvement, but also towards an inbuilt sense of dissatisfaction with these improvements throughout history. For him, our identity is necessarily fictive and subject to

change: 'the ego is governed by fantasy, and modes of identification, and introjection, which make it amenable to the desire of the other' (Grosz 1990, 31). The fact that the ego is oriented in a fictive direction, and that it is governed by fantasy, is significant to the current discussion as, at an unconscious level, Keira Knightley and Natalia Vodianova, and the opulent and upmarket lifestyle that these women embody in the Chanel and Calvin Klein advertisements, act as images of a possible ideal-I for viewers. Goldman makes the point that consumers know that by buying perfume, a woman does not 'acquire the qualities of being gorgeous, sexy and young':

No, she acquires a sign of being gorgeous, sexy and young. It is the *look* we have come to desire; and, the look we desire is the *object of desire*. People thus become a kind of *tabula rasa*, a slate filled with desired attributes by the objects they consume; the object becomes an active agent capable of doing all the things that a gorgeous, sexy and young person can do. The act of consumption establishes a relationship between the product (the signifier) and what the product means in terms of social relations (the signified).  
*[italics original]* (Goldman 1992, 24)

When a female viewer sees Knightley's character controlling the sexual encounter by being the active participant while Ammann's character has become the more passive voyeur, there are significant unconscious identifications going on, as a viewer imagines herself in similar control of her own relationship situations, and Coco Mademoiselle is the magic elixir

that will allow this to happen. The unconscious desire here, in the twenty first century, post-feminist world, is as much for control as for attractiveness, and this advertisement offers both, as the *velle* replaces, for a time, the *vel*.

There is also an identification with the characters in terms of their attractiveness. A female viewer may fantasise about being an object of attraction to men as handsome as Ammann and Ballou, and also may well imagine being a participant in the highly charged, and highly stylised scenes of passion in both advertisements. Desire, in the Lacanian account, 'is of the other—the other constitutes the intersubjective ground of individual being so that desire is both for the other (not the self) and from the unconscious other and difference (not conscious identity)' (Easthope 1991, 146). If desire is, indeed, the desire of the other, than the fantasy of being desired by two such handsome men is very much at the core of the power of these advertisements, and indeed of most advertisements, where the actors are generically attractive. It is noteworthy that there are no scenes of domesticity at all to be found in either advertisement. Both women are independent, in control, and crucially, not connected in any way with children or with roles as mother or carer. There is nothing diurnal about the relationships: the Chanel advertisement is about a very glamorous workplace liaison that does not quite happen, whereas the Calvin Klein film

is about an oneiric recollection of a sexual chemistry so intense that it turns black and white into colour, and the memory is so strong that it brings about scenes of autoeroticism.

To be able to control the desire of the other, which both women do in the advertisements, is a significant factor in the success of these two narratives. I would argue that it is by accessing this sense of ownership of desire that the actual product transcends its materiality and becomes a signifier of a different type of life, a gateway towards identification with the ideal-I. The advertisements, as we have seen, are carefully structured to create a fantasy world, and this world is accessed by the two drives of which we spoke at the beginning of the essay – the mirror phase and the scopic drive. By making the films attractive in terms of people, setting and music, there is pleasure to be had in looking at the advertisements.

The fact that both begin with the female character lying alone in bed, stresses the intimacy of the scopic scene, as we are essentially adopting the role of a voyeur, gaining a forbidden glimpse of what is essentially a private and intimate part of the person's day. Generally, to see someone in bed is to assume a relationship of intimacy with them, and this early locus of the gaze establishes a sense of the forbidden, and the illicit in the viewing experience. It is as if we are looking at them unseen, which is the classic definition of the scopophilic drive, as we gain 'pleasure in using another person as an

object of sexual stimulation through sight' (Mulvey 2009, 18). Because we see these women in such an intimate setting, and because they are both looking out directly at us, Knightley more so than Vodianova, there is also the desire for 'identification with the image' (Mulvey 2009, 18) that we see, and thus the two drives, scopic pleasure and identification, are combined in these images:

Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like. The first is a function of the sexual instincts, the second of ego libido.

(Mulvey 2009, 19)

That sex is intrinsic to the unconscious drives is now taken as an axiom in psychoanalytic thinking. In these advertisements, we are both looking, and taking pleasure, in intimate scenes, as well as unconsciously identifying with the actors and characters in these scenes. As has been noted, in perfume advertisements, the sexual scenes are stylised, idyllic, very passionate and always full of orgasmic images. In the current context, the *Euphoria* advertisement is perfume sex *par excellence*, with metonymic images for orgasm of waves crashing and flowers bursting open. It is easy to identify with this, and the metonymic chain of association is such that that the whole 30 second film is a dream-recall. It creates an unconscious desire

in the consumer suggesting that perhaps the gift of this perfume will cause the same effect on a woman, as it seems to have done to Vodianova in the advertisement. The identification is with the perfume as the fuel for passion, and as a trigger for memory. Euphoria is now the state of mind that can be attained through its commodity fetish, *Euphoria*.

Similarly, in the Chanel advertisement, one can identify across gender with the Knightley character, whose quintessentially feminine strip-tease movements towards the end of the photoshoot certainly cause one to see oneself as an ideal-I and to identify with the photographer, while at one and the same time both envying him and feeling a certain satisfaction in his failed seduction at the end of the film. The scopic fantasy allows us all to daydream ourselves into the place of Ammann, as we see Knightley from his perspective and through his eye and lens, which strengthens the imaginary identification. Given her very masculine straddling of the Ducati, there are also blurred fantasy lines at work here as in some ways, unconsciously, male viewers may identify with the Knightley character as well. Clearly for female viewers, the perfume is seen as empowering, and as allowing Knightley to be both the traditional alluring *femme fatale* as well as taking on a more active agency in her own life. The woman who identifies with *Coco Mademoiselle* is in charge of her own life, and is empowered. Instead of being under the control of Ammann, as he lies on top of her, it she who

bestrides the Ducati; instead of being the passive one lying on the bed, it she who arrives and departs from the scene, whereas Ammann remains static.

In contrast to the more intimate scenes in the Calvin Klein advertisement, in this one there is an element of strip tease and of teasing and control to be found in the advertisement. From being the object of the male gaze, as she is photographed, and from being the object of an increasingly eroticized male gaze as the public studio is transformed into a private bedroom as all of the other people are ushered out from the room, the Knightley character become empowered by raising her finger, exercises control over the event, and leaves when she chooses. There is a chiasmatic reversal here, which is imaged in her sudden movement from the vertical, to the horizontal and back again to the vertical. In the final scenes, instead of her lying on the bed with a man on top of her, she is riding away, astride her Ducati. Whereas Vodianova wears a very feminine dress, Knightley is wearing traditionally male motorcycle leathers, albeit ones which are very flattering to her body.

All of these images act on our unconscious in terms of the scopic and identificatory drives, drives that are repressed by the rules of the symbolic order. Indeed, it is with the acquisition of language, with all of its societal constraints on desire, that the unconscious is formed. As Elizabeth Wright puts it:

Society's injunction that desire must wait, that it must formulate in the constricting word whatever demand it may speak, is what effects the split between conscious and unconscious, the repression that is the tax exacted by the use of language.

(Wright 1984, 109)

In this context, it is interesting that neither of our advertisements makes any use of conversation between the characters, or of any form of verbal narration. This is not accidental, as visual images tap into our unconscious sense of identifying with reflections, and, more crucially, of identifying, or more correctly, of projecting, images of ourselves onto an ideal-I figure. Thus, seduced by the images and the strong musical themes that are consonant with each advertisement, the viewer (and I am postulating a female viewer in this case, as this is the target audience for the product), can jubilantly assume a connection with the two beautiful women involved, Chanel's Knightley and Klein's Vodianova, and unconsciously see themselves as playing the roles of the two women involved, with the perfume functioning as the fuel for these fantasies.

The driving music in the *Coco Mademoiselle* advertisement, the Jazz song 'It's a Man's world', sung emotionally by Joss Stone, acts as a theme for the quest narrative undergone by the female character. Traditionally in literature and culture, quests are undertaken by male characters, with the female often cast in the role of the prize awarded for the successful

completion of the quest. As already noted, despite her obvious femininity, Knightley is clad in a traditionally male outfit, motorbike leathers, as well as adopting a classic male straddling pose on the Ducati, stressing elements of masculine dominance that have, it is implied, been liberated by her choice of perfume. It is no accident that she slips the bottle of perfume, which has been unseen in the photoshoot scenes, into her suit in the area of her cleavage, prior to speeding away. It is as if the perfume has been an empowering talisman, which has allowed her to change from object to subject; from the being sexually desired to being sexually in control; and from being passive on the bed to being active on the Ducati. While the music tells us 'this is a man's world', the filmic action, again enacted without language, shows us that by wearing *Coco Mademoiselle*, it can also become a woman's world.

The same is true of the fantasy in the *Euphoria* advertisement as the perfume, unseen from the start of the film, is the agent of empowerment that makes her dreams colourful and vibrant to the degree that they bring her to a form of auto-arousal. The highly stylised perfume-sex scenes, so often are such scenes replicated in this advertising genre, are shot in vivid colour, whereas our initial image of Vodianova in bed are in black and white. Thus, again, the fuel for the fantasy of someone whose erotic life is so

intense that it can be recalled in colour, is clearly implied to be perfume: in this case, euphoria is caused by *Euphoria*, and the fantasy is sustained.

Thus, the two advertisements connect with their viewers at unconscious levels, and they provide pleasure to viewers through scopophilia and identification, which makes a strong connection between the product, the viewer and deep levels of fantasy. Both filmic texts provide the space, the phantasy, which allows for 'the transfiguration of the commodity into enchanted object is the sign that the exchange value is already beginning to eclipse the use-value of the commodity' (Agamben 1993, 38). We are back to the 'magic' of which Raymond Williams spoke at the beginning of this essay. Now, perhaps, we have a clearer idea of why companies like Chanel and Calvin Klein spend millions of euro on advertisements, with only 5% or 13% of the advertisement actually depicting the product in question. To show the product *qua* product is to materialise the product as a thing in the real world; to place it as a narrative agent in a mini-filmic advertisement is to appeal to drives that have been active in human beings since we lived in caves, and wanted more: 'the persistent desire for something other remains my permanent condition' (Levine 2008, 71).

In these advertisements, the desire to be like the characters in these imagined worlds, to take pleasure in looking at their intimate life-stories, and to identify with them unconsciously is enough to make the two products,

*Coco Mademoiselle* and *Euphoria* radiate that magic of which Williams speaks, and to make us fall under its spell. The proof of this, in a capitalist context, and this is the globalised and mediatised context in which these advertisements have their being, is irrefutable: Chanel is worth some \$6.8 billion, while Calvin Klein is worth \$10.93. Both companies have the financial clout to make any kind of advertisement that they wish, and in both of the examples discussed, the advertisements are focused on the core unconscious drives of the pleasure of looking and the unconscious desire to identify with aspects of our ideal-I. They produce narratives and signs through which this ideal-I can be enunciated, and through which, for the duration of the narrative, the *vel* can, in some ways, be overcome by the *velle*, as advertising teaches the consumer 'to consume signs' (Goldman 1992: 39). There is no longer any doubt that, in this case, as in so many others, '*Desidero* circumscribes the *Cogito*' (Ragland-Sullivan 1986, 84-85).

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