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Communicative Anosmia and Poetics of Storytelling in Perfume Commercials

Abstract

Analyzing contemporary short-film perfume advertisements it becomes clear that it is not enough to use the paradigms of social-communication and media studies alone to grasp the complexity of the used techniques. The commercials are deliberately composed to achieve complex artistic effects so as to stimulate the prospective consumer wish to buy the product. Using sensual and aesthetic appeal of the videos allows perfume companies to achieve their marketing objectives without exerting any direct pressure. They rather opt for creating subtle, multimodal narrative effect of the campaign that works in tandem with the target addressee's intersubjective engagement. It is the purpose of this article to discuss the range of aesthetic techniques and poetic (literary) patterns applied in construing attractive or intriguing, intertextually allusive adverts of olfactory products. The devices from the literary and non-literary storytelling are intended to compensate for the fact that smell is impossible to transmit directly in the used audio-visual media. The article will overview the compositional relations and arrangements of perfume commercials using methodology of literary studies informed by theoretical insight of other relevant disciplines.

Keywords: palimpsestic narrative structures, advertisement textual aesthetics, literary and cultural motifs, synesthetic effects, literary-studies perspective.

Komunikacyjna anosmia i poetyka opowieści w reklamach perfum

Streszczenie

Kiedy analizujemy współczesne krótkie filmy reklamowe, staje się jasne, że nie wystarczy użyć samych paradygmatów nauk o komunikacji społecznej i mediach, aby uchwycić skomplikowane środki użyte w tych tekstach. Reklamy audiowizualne perfum są celowo komponowane w taki sposób, aby osiągnąć wyszukane efekty artystyczne, które mają stymulować chęć zakupu produktu u potencjalnego konsumenta. Budowanie zmysłowej i estetycznej atrakcyjności filmów pozwala firmom perfumeryjnym osiągnąć swoje cele marketingowe bez wywierania jakiegokolwiek dodatkowej presji na klienta. Optują one raczej za tworzeniem subtelných, multimodalnych narracyjnych efektów danej kampanii reklamowej, które działają w powiązaniu z intersubiektywnym zaangażowaniem docelowego adresata. Celem tego artykułu jest ukazanie zakresu technik estetycznych i poetyckich (literackich) w budowaniu atrakcyjnych bądź intrygujących, intertekstualnie aluzyjnych reklam perfum. Zabiegi z dziedziny literackiego i pozaliterackiego *storytelling* mają rekompensować fakt, że zapachu nie da się przekazać bezpośrednio w użytym medium audiowizualnym. W artykule zostaną ukazane rozmaite kompozycyjne zależności

i uporządkowania tekstów reklamowych za pomocą metodologii literaturoznawczej poszerzonej o ujęcia teoretyczne zaczerpnięte z innych pokrewnych dyscyplin.

Słowa kluczowe: palimpsestowe struktury narracyjne, estetyka tekstu reklamowego, motywy literackie i kulturowe, efekty synestetyczne, ujęcie literaturoznawcze.

Introduction

The contemporary audio-visual advertising texts deploy a variety of traditional and innovative transmedial and palimpsestic storytelling patterns. They boost viewer's involvement in the filmic storyworld and their enjoyment of the multimodal text. Stimulating the prospective customers' emotions is perhaps the most efficient way to affect their spending decisions. Consequently, a researcher of perfume commercials should broaden their perspective with the paradigms of the disciplines that deal with complex textual aesthetics, namely literary and film studies, informed by narratological scholarship and cognitive studies. The aim of this article is to demonstrate how olfactory product promotion is accomplished through stimulating the addressee's aesthetic and poetic engagement with the filmic and literary narrative patterns that compensate for communicative anosmia by definition proper to the audio-visual media. To do so, we will use combined methodology of narratology, literary studies and film studies enhanced by some interdisciplinary fields like cognitive studies. We will apply the semiotic and rhetorical analytical procedures supported in particular by post-formal narratology insights, hoping that this approach will allow to disclose the complex multisensory, intersubjective poetics of narrative structures in perfume commercials. In course of exploring the diverse storytelling patterns in selected contemporary ads considerable attention will be devoted to tracing the deployed combinations of cultural references, elements of oral and/or written literary traditions as well as, the established cinematic and media-story patterns.

Communicative anosmia and targeting narrative immersion

To understand the reasons behind applying these complex narrative devices in perfume commercials one has to notice that the addressee of any perfume commercial is by definition reduced to a communicative equivalent of the condition called anosmia, that is sensory deprivation of capacity to perceive smell. This situation is the more acute as the campaign launch often precedes product presence in the market and therefore it is impossible for the viewer to rush to the shops to buy this product instantly. Additionally, even once the perfume is already in the shops there is still a time lapse between the viewers' contact with the commercial and their access to the advertised perfume.

As the common practice demonstrates, the directors of the commercials do not even try to describe the advertised perfume or to communicate product features in any

direct way. Their strategy is instead to compensate for the smell absence by heightening the target viewer's intersubjective immersion in the filmic storyworlds. This is done by prompting the audience's recognition of the story patterns, and inducing cooperation through 'adopting of various perspectives (spatiotemporal, cognitive, emotional, sensual), separate from the one [they] currently use'¹. Inducing viewer's engagement by operating with story perspectivization is crucial for achieving commercial addressee's immersion. It involves sense making though cognitive (re)construction of the storyworld in commercials. All this aims at making them incorporate the message of product desirability. Perfumes invariably bring associations with the luxurious and the outstanding². As it has been pointed out, '[i]t is only in the last hundred years that perfumery has moved from the exceptional to the commonplace and from elite to mass market. And even then it is still more clearly associated with a life of leisure than one of labor'³. We will see in the discussion of particular adverts in this article that many contemporary advertisements play with this idea of the common and lowly versus elite and the luxurious component associated with wearing some scent. The consumer is prompted to believe that using the given perfume will be his passport to the world of delights.

Meaning of multi-modal signs and transcending semiotic limitations

As it has been pointed out by Gunther R. Kress, ultimate 'genesis of signs lies in social actions'. The scholar's theoretical statement about multimodal aspects of sign use in social interactions explains how meaning arises out of sign-complexes and how deliberately ambiguous meanings are created in communication rather than just used. These multimodal signs become functional in the adverts and they constitute a case of 'fusion of form and meaning'⁴. It is true of any perfume commercial what Kress says of 'social-semiotic account of meaning' when he argues: 'individuals, with their social histories, socially shaped, located in social environments, using socially made, culturally available resources, are agentic and generative in sign-making and communication'⁵. Obviously, the medium related modification in the filmic adverts, compared to the printed magazine ads, is that they have a dynamic storytelling potential, while the function of verbal and auditory element is to unite the central idea of the composite message. Some of the ads use the lyrics of some known and popular songs to reinforce their idea. However, many of them still present the single commercial slogan.

¹ M. Rembowska-Pluciennik, *Narrative Modes of Intersubjectivity*, trans. M. Skotnicka, "Teksty Drugie" 2012, Vol. 2, p. 202.

² J. Reinartz, *Past Scents: Historical Perspectives on Smell*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 2014, pp. 145–146.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 146.

⁴ G.R. Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*, Routledge, London 2010, p. 54.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

The examples of the campaigns discussed below will clearly show that a particular story told within short-film perfume commercials frequently transcends particular modalities within which it is narrated. The creators of short-form cinematic texts take advantage of the fact that a story always works across various media combining and transcending limitations of 'the particular semiotic substance and the technological mode of transmission of narrative. Its categories are language, image, sound, gesture, and, further, spoken language, writing, cinema, radio, television, and computers'⁶. Activating this narrative propensity for transcendence allows for exploiting multiple, mutually complementary, and sometimes competing cultural archetypes.

The Louis Vuitton 2019 Coeur Battant commercial directed by Romain Gavras is focused on the ambiguity of the heroine played by Emma Stone. She is styled in the non-descript way which allows for seeing her as an innocent freckled schoolgirl. She is simultaneously Alice-in-Wonderland type, a temptress, a *femme-fatale* archetype, a goddess figure. This is not the end of the evoked associations as some film shots show her through mermaid imagery while others allude, paradoxically, to the pin-up-girls stylistics of female body presentation with bare arms and attractively displayed long legs. Chanel No 5 Little Red Riding Hood protagonist from 1998 commercial is likewise an equally ambiguous figure, she is not just a girl crossing a dangerous place to deliver her basket and she is definitely not a child although her fashion-designer red dress has some vestigial traces of juvenile dress code. The character played by Estella Warren is definitely a catwalk seductress, an Aladdin-style trespasser, and an independent woman who can take what she most craves. Both commercials build their effect by alluding to literary sources – oral and printed fairy-tales and literary texts.

Palimpsestic narrative patterns and poetics of composition

The chief strategy in perfume marketing is to create aesthetic filmic plot structures that are highly formulaic but attractive because of engaging the viewer in new motif combinations. The commercials' appeal is ensured by creating palimpsestic (that is rooted in more than one narrative) stories of cognitive, sensory and emotional immersion of characters shown in some liminal or transformative moments. The narratives allude to the patterns of action that the viewers recognize from the treasury of cultural narrative resources of legendary, mythical, feature-film, media story, and literary types. The mechanism of this transition of meaning has been named in the context of fairy-tale structures:

⁶ M.-L. Ryan, *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 2004, p. 1.

[h]earing, seeing, and knowing someone else's situation, their very different situatedness, may yet allow for their very similar humanity and life situations. This is one great reason for keeping and sharing the fairy tale, to acknowledge and transform social division⁷.

Recognizing the patterns of character position, the viewers automatically engage in some sort of identification with the protagonists and thus situate themselves as intersubjectively and cognitively engaged in the new context of perfume-inspired fictional world.

What is central in all the adverts is that they work with some known narrative patterns to make the addressee fill in the gaps, activating their cultural associations as well as working with their personal systems of values. Tom Zelman discusses symbol formation in scent marketing by enumerating the constitutive meaning-generating patterns used in the USA for product promotion: '[p]erfume advertisers in this country have long marketed their scents by tying them to elements of the American dream – macho outdoorsmanship, financial ostentation, gauzy romance, and sexual gratification⁸. This shows just some of the multiple options chosen by perfume companies. It is a fact that not just contemporary urban or national myths are the core of storytelling in contemporary advertising. Linking the story told therein to multiple allusions to ancient myths, oral traditions of storytelling, as well as to influential works from the history of world literature is equally widespread. It happens through working with carefully tailored compositional elements.

Aesthetic effect through compositional patterns

The contemporary commercials are made primarily as artistic texts, dominated by highly intricate aesthetic strategies of organizing the used multimodal signs. Some of them might seem random but on closer analysis they turn out to be very deliberate choices with purpose-oriented objectives. This strategy brings to mind the dominant communicative function in aesthetic texts, that is poetic function as defined by Roman Jakobson. Its core strategy is purposeful application of the principles of selection and combination for creating equivalences⁹. The ads that prevail in the contemporary marketing practice are featured with avoiding the 'direct reference to the odour' and 'instead [juxtaposing] sensuous images with an enigmatic strapline or slogan that evinces some abstract notion of the brand'¹⁰. On the visual side, they frequently

⁷ J.T. Rudy, *Overview of Basic Concepts: Folklore, Fairy Tale, Culture, and Media* [in:] *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-Tale Cultures*, eds. P. Greenhill, J.T. Rudy, N. Hamer, L. Bosc, New York, Routledge 2018. https://books.google.pl/books?id=jnl-TDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (accessed: 27.09.2022).

⁸ T. Zelman, *Language and Perfume: A Study of Symbol-Formation* [in:] *Advertising and Popular Culture: Studies in Variety and Versatility*, ed. S. R. Danna, Bowling Green State U Popular Press, Bowling Green OH 1992, p. 109.

⁹ R. Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics* [in:] *Language in Literature*, eds. K. Pomorska, S. Rudy, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1987, p. 71.

¹⁰ Ch. Hackley, *Advertising and Promotion: Communicating Brands*, Sage, London 2005, p. 47.

suggest connection of scent and perfection or harmony, implying that using the given perfume allows one to reach some higher order of existence. But there are many subtle equivalences created to communicate this message in different ads.

The advertisement of Rihanna Reb'l Fleur fragrance from 2011 starring Rihanna herself and produced by New York Droga5 agency in is an example of this practice in product promotion. The short film incorporates palimpsestic narrative elements from mythical and literary traditions that work towards creating visual equivalents of the olfactory fruity, musky and flowery notes and accords¹¹. Suggesting perfume appeal happens through ensuring aesthetic craftsmanship of the advertisement. The intriguing plot follows the events of woman's emergence from a huge flower center and her way through a sensual garden, there and back again to the place of her origin. The commercial builds associations with the story of cyclic renewal denoting immortality and perfection. It is conveyed by the used narrative motifs as well as through the compositional choices of storytelling. The video follows the structure of palindrome¹². It can be played forwards and backwards and it makes sense both ways. Rihanna's emergence from the rhythmically moving fire-like structure made of colored ostrich plumes brings to mind the ancient myth of phoenix and its birth from the ashes.

Starting the film with the scene of lady's awakening creates associations with innocence. The sense of order and propriety is reinforced as she moves through the French-style geometrical garden. There are emotions involved ranging from delight in the birth scene to perceivable suggestion of nervousness in her searching for something. Tensions accumulate as the new Alice figure reaches the mirror that she crosses so as to get to another world, an intertextual reference to a Victorian novel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1872) by Lewis Carroll. The literary allusion provided by this reference to the sequel of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) motivates the presence of breaches of logic and the principles of topsy-turvy reality. There is also deliberate strategy of contrasting as Rihanna gets through the boundary. Her dress becomes black while the single tuxedo-dressed male figure visible in the bright garden becomes multiplied, suggesting numerous love affairs in the dark garden. The allusion is made to transposition of motifs of innocence into those of corruption, bringing to mind another Victorian Gothic story of doubles *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The novel by Robert Louis Stevenson published in 1886 metaphorically represents the good and evil aspects of human nature, while Rihanna's commercial argues the point about their equal attractiveness. The point is emphasized by the fact that in the original campaign as it was launched, you could play the commercial in two ways – forwards and backwards. The effect

¹¹ *Reb'l Fleur Rihanna for women*, Fragrantica, <https://www.fragrantica.com/perfume/Rihanna/Reb-l-Fleur-10554.html> (accessed: 27.09.2022).

¹² A.A. Newman, *For Rihanna's Perfume, A Video Meant for Rewatching*, "The New York Times" 9 Feb. 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/10/business/media/10adco.html> (accessed: 27.09.2022).

of this technique on the viewers was described as ‘mind-boggling’ and it was recognised as deliberate in a review in *The New York Times*¹³.

The whole message of combination of good and evil being attractive is reinforced by the two versions of the verbal slogan projected on screen during the two moments of Lady’s crossing through the mirror. Her first transition from the peach-colored world to the dark reality is verbally commented upon through the projected caption ‘Bad Feels so Good’. As she returns from the sphere of darkness into the realm of bright colors the message turns into ‘Good Feels so Bad’. Thus the filmic and story modalities consistently come back to the idea of perfume perfection and paradoxically combine it with suggestion of foulness. Thus the aesthetic appeal works in tandem with raising ethical issues, especially the values of good and evil. This duality is also present in the perfume name ‘Reb’l Fleur’ which suggests rebellion and rejection of values.

Synesthetic legacy of symbolist poetry

The axiological conflict present in this campaign reaches back to the deliberately scandalizing aesthetics of the French literary symbolism presented in the poetic collections such as *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). Charles Baudelaire’s famous poem ‘Correspondences’ provokes reader’s heightened insight into the issues of spiritual elation and provokes their conceptualization in terms of synesthetically represented olfactory experience.

There are perfumes as cool as the flesh of children,
Sweet as oboes, green as meadows
— And others are corrupt, and rich, triumphant,
With power to expand into infinity,
Like amber and incense, musk, benzoin,
That sing the ecstasy of the soul and senses [...].¹⁴

The poem explores the linking between the patterns of multisensory perception and the motifs of transcendence. The phrase concluding the second stanza ‘ecstasy of the soul and senses’ expresses possibility of attaining some blissful state. The method of representation is synesthetic in the sense that access to perfection is recognised in the multisensory impact of the Anthropocene, involving not just sense of smell but also senses of touch, taste, hearing and sight that define smells.

This message of combined bliss and corruption in associations raised by olfactory experience is the lasting legacy of symbolist-poetry aesthetics used for merchandise of perfume as a commodity. This can be seen in frequent allusions to the stories of temptation or urban corruption in adverts, as for example, in Dior Homme 2019 fragrance commercial starring Robert Pattinson, with a remake of Leonard Cohen’s

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Ch. Baudelaire, “Correspondences”, trans. W. Aggeler [in:] *The Flowers of Evil*, Academy Library Guild, Fresno, CA 1954, p. 34.

'I'm your man' song. Music and the meaning of lyrics reinforce the story's impact on emotions and strengthen the message. Tokyo nightlife sensuality and its excitements are the focus of 2018 Yves Saint Laurent Black Opium perfume commercial with Zoë Kravitz done to the lyrics of 'The Hills' by the Weeknd and subsumed with the perfume slogan 'Do you feel the call?' The plotline focuses on illustrating this point by momentary insight into a nightlife of several characters centered around the heroine. Nothing much happens but there is expectation that something might as the group of people abandon their occupations and walk through the town searching for something.

Storytelling and suspension of disbelief

As we have seen above, fragrance commercials try to achieve their effect by telling most engaging stories so as to use the narrative contract's automatic effect on the reader – the mechanism of what the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge identified as 'willing suspension of disbelief'¹⁵. This effect is evoked so as to compensate for the fact that that the viewers recognize these pieces as advertisements and automatically predict what might be communicated as well as apply relevant 'strategies for interpretation'¹⁶. The orientation on aesthetic effect of storytelling can thus be seen as a complex compensating strategy that prevents customers' adopting a distanced attitude in reception. Everything is tailored to fulfill very precisely-defined objectives of dazzling the short-film ads viewers.

When the companies employ not just random, good-looking professionals but A-list stars, like Nicole Kidman and Rodrigo Santoro starring in Chanel No 5 2004 campaign directed by Baz Luhrmann, they do so with very clear objectives in mind. Kidman earned \$3 million fee for the three-minute commercial, while the production of this piece cost \$33 million. The perfume companies are willing to pay such exorbitant sums of money even despite the fact they risk the vampire effect¹⁷. They evidently capitalize on the multiple, polyphonic intertextual associations activated in addressee's minds by seeing their favorite actresses or actors starring in a given film. Chanel No 5 campaign resonates with Kidman's other love-story roles, especially Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) but also *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) created by Stanley Kubrick, and other films in which she appeared.

The fact that the desired effect is achieved shows in the enthusiastic reviews. One of the reviewers of the cinematic story-telling done in the discussed Chanel campaign focuses on what she names informally as 'eyeball-grabbing' effect 'owing to the cinematic scope of this production'. She also draws attention to the commercial's effect of setting 'new standards and new ways of presenting a scent' as, according to her, '[i]

¹⁵ S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), <https://web.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/biographia.html> (accessed: 27.09.2018).

¹⁶ Ch. Forceville, *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising*, Routledge, London 1996, p. 67.

¹⁷ T. Kuvita, M. Karliček, *The Risk of Vampire Effect in Advertisements Using Celebrity Endorsement*, "Central European Business Review" 2013, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 16.

t broke the shackles of cliché perfume ads and turned the whole thing into something larger than a commercial'¹⁸. This comment demonstrates the success of ensuring viewer's enjoyment through the filmic storytelling technique.

Narrative appeals/perils of (a)sensual body

The staple feature of perfume marketing is linking the fragrance to bodily attractiveness, expressed in multiple ways. The most frequent method is suggesting sexual appeal of the perfume user. What Mayer Taylor writes about perfume advertising in 1970s in British magazines for women still rings true of contemporary short film commercials:

[s]exual content in perfume advertising is usually shown in the following ways: models showing chests and breasts, open shirts, tight fitting clothing, touching, kissing and embracing. These scenes of sexual content are often woven into the promises to make the wearer of the perfume more sexually attractive, more likely to engage in some type of sexual behavior or simply 'feel' sexier.¹⁹

An example can be Rive Gauche Perfume commercial by Yves Saint Laurent from 1979 where the female protagonist who is directly named as an 'independent woman' is filmed driving her car which becomes an opportunity to show her long legs in silhouette shoes. Her bodily beauty is compared to the beauty of creation in the image of sunset that provides closure to the last scene.

There are recurring patterns of alluding to the ideals of mythical and natural beauty, and to bodily ecstasy in perfume commercials. Sometimes the adverts even go too far in this direction and they get banned or restricted in some countries following allegations of encouraging promiscuity or promoting illegal actions. An example can be the 2011 commercial of YSL Belle d'Opium. The short film directed by Romain Gavras, with Melanie Thierry who performs the sensual temple-dance choreography of Akram Khan, was accused of suggesting the act of drug taking and its effects, which resulted in its being banned from UK television. Another example is broadcasting time restriction imposed in the same country upon Jake Nava's Heat perfume commercial (2011) showing very sensual walk of Beyoncé performed to her version of 'You Give Me Fever' song, that many concerned viewers found too sexually suggestive.

However, there are also adverts which deliberately subvert the tradition of perfume advertising through suggesting sensual appeal of female body. The Kenzo World 2016 perfume commercial with Margaret Qualley directed by Spike Jonze defies this

¹⁸ N.T. Sharma, *Made in 2004 for \$33 million, this Chanel No 5 ad starring Nicole Kidman is still the most expensive ad ever made*, "Beauty" 27 Nov. 2020, *Luxurylaunches*, <https://luxurylaunches.com/beauty/made-in-2004-for-33-million-this-chanel-no-5-ad-starring-nicole-kidman-is-still-the-most-expensive-ad-ever-made.php> (accessed: 27.09.2022).

¹⁹ M. Taylor, *Perfume Advertisement*. M.A. Thesis 2012, University of Kent. Grin Verlag 2014. https://books.google.pl/?uid=114584440181414684107&hl=pl&source=gbs_lp_bookshelf_list (accessed: 27.09.2022).

erotically-underpinned pattern. The dance choreography, the work of Ryan Heffington coupled with Qualley's improvising, makes the woman character non-feminine and non-sensual. Her body seems to be in convulsions, with vigorous arms wriggling and leg kicking, accompanied by facial grimace patterns.

In the narrative told within this commercial, the heroine evidently adopts a range of roles, including masculine ones. This shows, among others, in her assaulting a man talking on the phone, in her licking a bronze masculine bust, as well as in her jumping in James-Bond or Tarzan style through the eye structure made of flowers that reminds one of Kenzo bottle. She is the modern-day Eve who rebels against her socially imposed role and shows her inspired, energetic and powerful self. She is, moreover, like a priestess of the new order. The implications come from her modern ballroom-dress design marked with ancient overtones, suggested by the cross-styled top, but facilitating expressive modern dance. There is also the significance of the implications of emerald-green color – both a fashionable hue and the color of magic in Celtic myth. There are thus created subtle allusions to medieval chivalric-romance tradition like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. In this literary genre, a knight prototypically goes through some trials to learn about his weakness which became his strength. Here the lady finds out that her inability to conform is her power. There are multiple allusions to looking and being looked at, communicated through her gestures and through the environment full of mirrors and reflections. The eye motif proves to be crucial as Kenzo perfume bottle shown in the end of the film has this shape. The perfume commercial uses narrative patterns to stimulate perceiving Kenzo fragrance as something completely new and, consequently, attractive.

Narrative desire, emotional impact and awareness of campaign objectives

In most successful perfume reels, the storytelling appeal of the artistically done films works against the potential customer's awareness of the campaigns orientation on stimulating their intention to buy the product. It does, on the other hand, work in tandem with the customer's need to get some information about the product which is necessary to reach the decision about the purchase²⁰. The narrative implication is sometimes very abstracted but it provokes the addressee to draw conclusions from the recognizable *storytelling* patterns. This is to ensure product perception as something unique following the fact that the story is told in a unique way.

Obviously the choice of fragrance is a highly complex and personal process, as Nigel Groom states in the *The New Perfume Handbook* '[d]ifferent types of perfume suit different personalities and different occasions. The selection of what is the most suitable fragrance for a particular person is very much a matter of personal preference

²⁰ J.R. Rossiter, L. Percy, *Advertising and Promotion Management*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1987, p. 3.

and taste²¹. It is formulaic in fragrance merchandise to create a need in the customer for a new scent based on the fact that ‘consumers are attracted to perfumed products because they are capable of influencing their image, mood or even their personality’²². This argument is treated as fundamental in a book *Perfume Engineering: Design, Performance and Classification*. Further on, there comes another key statement: ‘the power of the sense of olfaction [...] surpasses frontiers that other senses cannot reach’²³. These surpassed frontiers are, among others, the boundaries of emotional perception and the options of redefined self-identification. Undoubtedly the narrative patterns and cultural allusions in commercials work to create a rich sphere of associations and prompt perspective taking until the customer incorporates the story told in the commercial as part of their own narrative heritage. All this is done to stimulate in the client-to-be a desire and interest in the promoted fragrance, suggesting that it might suit him or her.

Diffusive fragrance as bodies and elements in movement

As fragrances advertised in commercials are to be applied on the human body, it is the body that matters in the commercial aesthetic design. The addressee is provoked to engage in intersubjective perception of what it might feel like and/or look like to use the perfume, considering attractiveness of the body (in) movement. The characters are to represent all this: being rarely immobile, being ideal in terms of their bodily features, constantly transcending beyond their reality, and searching new dimensions to discover their new identity. There are various stories of going through some liminal process in a constantly changing, dynamically shifting ambient. The movement of the body is shown against the movement of other elements, often in the form of reflected or transposed images. All these dynamic elements become equivalents of the diffusive properties of perfume. The mobile vigorous action scenes become the commercial means of implying the permeating quality of fragrance and of asserting the way it affects the person wearing it (or confronted with the perfume user).

This is so in the surfing love-story told in Chanel No 5 film (2014) directed by Buz Luhrmann and starring a Brazilian top model Gisele Bündchen. The opening underwater shots of breaking turbulent waves result in picturesque rendering of the model’s shapely body spiraling upwards through air and water turmoil. The alternating deep-sea shots of Gisele’s faultless figure coming to the surface introduce siren-narrative associations. There are, moreover, some ballet-dance overtones, that quickly become changed into more athletic implications as the model starts surfing. The director was evidently looking for ways of showing the company logo in the film as the surfer crosses the huge

²¹ N. Groom, *The New Perfume Handbook*, Blackie Academic, London 1997, p. 254.

²² M.A. Teixeira, O. Rodriguez, P. Gomes, V. Mata, A. Rodrigues *Perfume Engineering: Design, Performance and Classification*, Elsevier, Amsterdam 2013, p. 1.

²³ *Ibidem*.

C-like waves, while she also leaves the C-shaped trails on the ocean surface, thus showing her power to conquer the elements.

Sign-story relations, sensory modalities and montage strategy

The perfume-related meanings arise always through a multiplicity of modalities connected with particular sign choices and their combinations. These signs are never connected to just one medium. Water is not only a visual sign, it is part of the viewer's daily experience, it awakens multiple cultural associations, and it has a vast metaphorical potential. The addressee is prompted to interpret the signs used in the ads in the way similar to the reading process proper for poetry reception – each sign informs about itself as well as it illuminates the interpretation of another. The addressee infers composite senses from the motif juxtaposition. Seeing images of sprinkling water over the body or entire human figure submerged in water and spiraling upwards has its sensual and symbolic implications.

What is striking is a very intense montage strategy that alternates the dynamically moving low-angle shots with sky views of water surface, and later of New York skyscrapers. There is introduced a seemingly unconnected story line of a bar performance of Lo-Fang, which becomes relevant firstly through the meaning of the song lyrics and secondly as a way to introduce the place of heroine's personal conflict resolution. The lyrics tell of intensity of sensory perception that effects emotions: 'I've got chills / They're multiplying / And I'm losing control'. The poetic message is about the 'electrifying' power of a woman that leads a man to despair. Some alternating close-up shots of the streets of the city opportune showing the outsized neon logo of Coco Chanel passed by the running female figure in whom we identify the central heroine of the story.

Active stance for the viewer is evidently provoked as one of the effects of storytelling strategies. It is derived from the way of necessitating interpretation of all the story details in their reverberations on many visual, auditory and other sensory levels. Intertextual references are also used for that end and they rely just on little scene detail or particular way of composing the particular film shot. Allusion to *The Great Gatsby* novel from 1925 by Francis Scott Fitzgerald appears prominently in the moment of transition from the world of surfing freedom linked to her holiday villa to the world of cityscape. As she drives the car over the famous New York bridge from 1909 the visual scene is reminiscent of the fragment from the Fitzgerald's modernist novel emphasizing liminality of character situation 'The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world'²⁴. In the context of the heroine's transformation it suggests the promise

²⁴ F.S. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*. Project Gutenberg ebook, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/64317/pg64317.txt> (accessed: 28.09.2022).

and the mystery of her renewed romance relationship, and her fighting to save her love by following her man to the city. She is the woman who controls the world. The independent woman image, conveyed by driving the car, or earlier by her riding the perfume-logo marked surfing board, makes the multisensory impact on the viewer who can imagine how it feels to be riding the waves, or how it feels to be caressed by the sea breeze and the rush of air in car movement.

Stories of seduction in subtle remakes

There are indeed many seducer- or seduced-Eve narratives, told through conventional and unconventional patterns in perfume commercials. Compared to those we have discussed above, perhaps the most subtle version of the garden of Eden story comes in Miss Dior fragrance commercial released in 2019. It makes the garden images condensed just into the flowery ballroom dress that the character played by Natalie Portman swirls around in subsequent scenes. Much prominence is given in this short film to the verbal message recited by Portman as though it was a poem. 'A breath of spring, swirling in the air, rose petals in a breeze, the essence, the essence unfolding just for me. Rose is a rose is a rose'. Significantly, the last part of this recitation, is a quotation from an avant-garde poem 'Sacred Emily' (1922) by an American poet Gertrude Stein, which expresses idea about identifying objects through what they really are. The poetic expression 'Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose. / Loveliness extreme' links idea of essential rose to ecstatic states²⁵. There is prominence granted to scent through poetic way of stressing emotional impact of things suggested as present on top of the cognitive impact. In the discussed commercial, this strategy works to present the advertised product as something innovative but also traditional and well established. The Miss Dior perfume bottle is also displayed in the film to suggest intensification of perfume power even when just its image is projected. Patterns of circular repetition appear a lot. Portman in her twirling dress and the perfume bottle are filmed in analogical shots at the background of revolving translucent glass inscription of Stein's multiplied fragment that is swirling over or under the two revolving images. The female figure and the bottle thus become identified as one. Perfume properties are consequently evoked visually and verbally though associating the fragrance with identity and essential quality of being who one is.

Conclusions

There is richly layered palimpsestic semiotic mode emerging from synesthetic method of telling stories in short films that work as part of product campaigns. Creating multi-modal narrative equivalents of the advertised scent by means of multiple non-olfactory

²⁵ G. Stein, *Sacred Emily*, <https://www.oatridge.co.uk/poems/g/gertrude-stein-sacred-emily.php> (accessed: 25.08.2022).

elements and literary or cultural allusions constitutes the framework of the modern aesthetics of scent marketing in short-reel films. We have seen that although the applied patterns are most often to some degree repetitive, they are combined in ever new ways, creating fresh variations of some known narrative paradigms. There are multiple aesthetic and poetic patterns of remediation that work to suggest appeal of having a scented body without explicating the nature of the advertised fragrance more directly. They serve to activate the mechanism of cultural identification in the addressee, who recognizes the advertised perfume as part of formative stories of his identity framework. Multi-sourced plot structures opportune showing the pleasures of using senses of sight, touch, hearing and proprioception that are to suggest the appeal of perfume using. The strategy of operating with symbolic multiplicity of meaning dictates transmission of aesthetic devices from one artistic storytelling medium to another, with the ultimately multimodal effect of the commercials. They are often highly artistic texts in themselves, which additionally serves their marketing effect.

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