

KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY  
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UNSETTING THE STANDARDS OF FEMALE BEAUTY:  
AN EXAMINATION OF CONTEMPORARY IMAGES OF WOMEN IN  
ADVERTISEMENT

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OF CONTEMPORARY IMAGES OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENT

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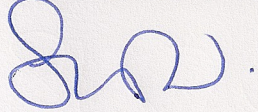
UNSETTING THE STANDARDS OF FEMALE BEAUTY: AN EXAMINATION  
OF CONTEMPORARY IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE MASS MEDIA

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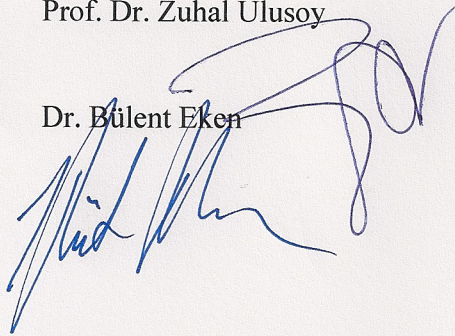


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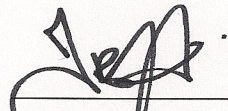
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has been indicated in the thesis.”



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IRMA ZMIRIC

## ABSTRACT

### UNSETTING THE STANDARDS OF FEMALE BEAUTY: AN EXAMINATION OF CONTEMPORARY IMAGES OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENT

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Master of Arts in Design Program

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May, 2014.

This study examines the representations of female beauty as a myth in print advertisements in contemporary popular culture. Within many different types of physical beauty that are made popular by mainstream advertisements, this thesis explores the types of beauty myths as well as the models embodied by each. Through in depth analyses of select mass media advertisements the thesis intends to explain the myth of beauty. The thesis argues that the idea of beauty as a myth should be explored in a multilayered context affected by the patriarchal ideologies, rather than just focusing on a single dimension of understanding beauty as a flattering attribute. While emphasising the similarities and differences in the types of beauty, the thesis also aims to link particular types of beauty with the categories of product promoted in the selected advertisements.

Keywords: beauty, myth, image, gender, fetishism, ideology, advertising.

## ÖZET

### KADIN GÜZELLİK STANDARLARININ KALDIRILMASI: REKLAMLARDA GÜNCEL KADIN GÖRÜNTÜLERİNİN ARAŞTIRILMASI

#### YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

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Bu tez çalışması, basılı reklamlarda kadının “güzel” gösterilişinin, popüler kültür çerçevesinde bir mit olarak incelemektedir. Bu çalışmada fiziksel güzelliğin bir çok türünde revaçta olan reklamlar aracılığıyla popülerleştirilen güzellik mitlerinin çeşitlerini ve bunların şekillendiği modelleri araştırılmaktadır. Seçilmiş basılı reklamların derinlemesine incelenmesi ile güzellik mitinin açıklanmasına çalışılmaktadır. Bu tez, bir mit olarak güzellik fikrinin, sadece övücü ve şımartıcı bir nitelik olarak tek boyutlu bir anlayışla açıklanması yerine, ataerkil ideolojilerden etkilenmiş, çok katmanlı bir bağlamda incelenmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Değişik güzellik türlerinin benzerlik ve farklılıkları vurgulanırken aynı zamanda seçilen reklamlardaki ürünler ile bu ürünlerin tanıtımında kullanılan güzellik türleri arasında bağlantı kurulması amaçlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: güzellik, mit, görüntü, cinsiyet, fetişizm, ideoloji, reklam.

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## **CHAPTER 1:**

### **Introduction**

Beauty. Even before we try to conceptualize or define it verbally, our mind gives us an instant answer in the form of vision. Many things are generally accepted as beautiful, things we would not deny or oppose, such as the cliché of the beauty of watching the sunset, Gustav Klimt's 'The Kiss' in a museum perhaps is an example of a beautiful painting, a photograph, like the ones taken by Annie Griffiths impress us with their beauty...When it comes to beauty of women, as the most important example for this study, let us make use of a rhetorical form of tautology, the one that Barthes, perhaps, would not prefer: a beautiful woman is beautiful for being beautiful (Barthes 1991, p. 154). This tautology suggests a significant point to focus on: beauty and woman and female beauty. There is something regarding female beauty that cannot escape the frames of identification and stand on its own, as an individual. That is persistently imposed in life through advertisements that convince us at least a part of woman's identity should be recognized as beautiful. How do we understand female beauty? There are possibly many ways we could try to define it, by using already existing definitions and differences. There is a great chance that any of these definitions or descriptions would not correspond to how to understand female beauty. We could however, try to imagine female beauty, together with the concept of beauty, as a part of something greater, as a part of a mythology, and perhaps, then we might see that the concept of female beauty is actually a myth in

and of itself. Myth embraces many different concepts, including female beauty as well. We cannot say for female beauty that it is an object or an idea; it is more a form that has its own mode of significance. What defines beauty is not the key object of the myth's message, but the way that the same object declares the message, the very meaning. That is why we have different types of myths regarding beauty that use different objects in conveying different types of messages.

### **Beauty as an Agency**

From a historical point of view - mythical speech has normalized female beauty. Female beauty myth is deeply rooted within societies, no matter the time, geographical or the cultural background. Different myths had an effect on female beauty throughout history, in different historical contexts. Let us just think of *Venus of Willendorf* and with its own myth of female beauty representation from ancient times (McDermott 1996, pp. 227 - 275). History and art history in particular, has a very important role when it comes to the myth of female beauty. The founding myth was its own illusion of myth, converted into speech, into the messages that found their way towards the future. Even today as we look at some print advertisements displaying women, we are actually looking at the outcome of a historiography of the representations of female beauty through time. However, there is also an additional understanding in the case of the contemporary female beauty myth within the ads of popular culture: a distinct modern phenomenon which is closely related with consumer culture and the new forms that the heterosexual patriarchal ideology has assumed.

Those same advertisements did not evolve suddenly out of their own nature; they are the result, the consequence of the evolution of representation throughout history.

That same fact also proves that the female beauty myth did not stop only at the level of just speech.

Therefore, whenever we try to decode a myth, be it the female beauty myth or any other, we should keep in mind that someone before us had already worked on that same myth and has used it in a version of communication (Barthes 1991, pp. 107 - 109). There was certainly a need to depict and represent the myth in the form of images. Those messages in the form of images found their way to evolve further in time into what we know today as advertising, shows, cinema, photography, etc...

If we wish to learn how to read the myth of female beauty hidden within advertisements, from a semiological point of view, before going directly to its signification process and how do they relate within the sign, we should know that we are actually in a very limited field. In the case of this thesis' topic female beauty shown in advertisements, in order to be decoded and turned into a myth, will have to be reduced of all of its representational material into a signifying function. Even the most successful advertisement, with all its elements will turn into the state of plain language, once it has been decoded and, once it has become a myth (Barthes 1991, pp. 113 - 117).

## **Looking at the Ads**

At first glance an advertisement might look as if it is composed of a set of innocent imageries, until we dig deeper to get the concept or the meaning out of the representation. The concept is never abstract; the situation that follows it makes it possible for us to decode the hidden message. Without concept there is no myth, and in order to invoke a myth we have to find a name for the concept that constitutes that myth. To understand female beauty myths through advertisements, the content, depending on the advertised product, could be following the idea of loveliness, sexiness, pureness or seductiveness. All of the mentioned concepts and ideas, however, use only one method in order to reach the wished representation: they objectify and degrade women, while representing them as “beautiful”.

The attempt to decode an advertisement and convert female beauty into a myth is actually not a straightforward action and it requires an intervention of the unconscious. The female beauty myth, just as any other myth, does not hide anything from us. One of the things a myth does is distortion, but at the same time every element is on a silver plate and it is only up to us to do the decoding in the right way. The meaning of the ad is important, but the way that same meaning is reached is what matters the most. While looking at an advertisement with a beautiful woman in it, the meaning appears in front of us, presented in the advertisement's very form (Barthes 1991, pp. 110 - 123). It is only up to us to decide whether to accept the offered imagery of some advertisements as affirmative and true.

## **Aim**

The aim of this thesis is the examination of advertising that uses women and different types of female beauty as their main asset. In order to decipher those

advertisements and explore myths out of their representation we should not have an analytical approach. Utilizing an analytic approach the myth is at risk of being destroyed. A myth's intention is not necessarily always an obvious one. The concept of the ad, as important as it may be for the myth, should not fill the form without ambiguity. There should always be some space left for understanding the distortion in order to get the further meaning. The key is to get focused on the whole of the meaning and form, to invoke the myth in a dynamic way (Barthes 1991, pp. 127 - 30).

### **Objective**

Throughout this thesis we will focus on female beauty and the idea of myth that radiates from it. While examining different print advertisement we will explore what the myth behind the ideal woman and beauty is, as well as the differentiated types of beauty that are being used in order to sell more products.

The questions this study tries to answer are directly related to women: If a woman is considered to be beautiful, according to whose criteria do we define woman's beauty? Are there any ideological rules for beauty standards when it comes to representing the face, race, body, or sexuality of a woman? What is the position of a woman in a society that portrays her more as an object rather than human being? How does gender define the roles for both women and men? Are women commodities too? Is advertisement distorting the reality when it comes to representation of women? Are women supposed to perceive themselves in the same way men perceive them? Is female beauty just a mythical creation of an ideology?

Throughout the thesis we will be recalling the myth and its function of emptying reality. What we should seek, as Barthes suggests, is “a reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge” (Barthes 1991, pp. 157 - 160). Myths, as in the case of female beauty, harmonize together with the world in the ways the world creates itself, and not in the way the world actually is.

### **Review of the Literature**

The main idea of this study is to analyze the ideological beauty standards of a woman according to four criteria: the face, the race, the body, and the desire in order to be able to respond to the imposed beauty standards and show them to be myths. Select visual examples are taken from contemporary advertisements, as we follow Roland Barthes' theorization of the myth in his essay “*Myth Today*”. The aforementioned four criteria form a unity from which we could learn more about the standards set by the capitalist patriarchal society in defining female beauty. The study is divided into four chapters, with the aim of explaining the main problem with unsettling the standards for female beauty in terms of the female face, race, body, and desire.

The first chapter is on face about the feminine beauty myth, and it starts with Roland Barthes' essay titled “*The Face of Garbo*”. The main aim of this part is to represent Barthes' writing on a beautiful face of a woman from a male writer's perspective. As a starting point this chapter considers what are the ideal values for a beautiful face from a male gazer's point, a face that reflects the preferred representations of the



male dominated patriarchal ideology. With a male determined standards of a facial beauty of a woman, the chapter moves into the question of gender and of being female and looking feminine.

With the theory of Iris Marion Young in her *On Female Body Experience: Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* the chapter argues against Barthes' notion of what is beautiful and feminine. Young's theory on femininity is enforced by Luce Irigaray's *This Sex Which is Not One* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* that note further on femininity and gender. Throughout Irigaray's writings we understand how the male system of representation imposes femininity upon women, making femininity a role that women are expected to play. In order to understand gender, Butler explains it as a culturally rooted and imposed form of appearance. In the works of Young we see that female and the feminine are two entirely different concepts, and that patriarchy is the one who sets the standards of femininity and represents them as universal. The aim of the chapter on female face is to explain that women are imposed to be gender-constructed by the rules that dominant patriarchal ideology defines, using the advertisements as a theory reinforcing visual example.

The second chapter poses another important issue which is registering woman as beautiful lies in her race, ideologically. Throughout the chapter James Snead's and Adrian Piper's works are evaluated together in displaying how race represents a limited set of freedom and opportunities for the people of colour. Snead's writings are originally based on the racial coding in Hollywood cinema in his *White Screens Black Images*. His key methods of understanding the racist ideology within film are mythification, marking, omission, and the distortion of the real (Snead 1994, p. 4).

Thought Snead's writing is based on Hollywood cinema example, it can be applied in the same way within the selected sample advertisements in this study such as the Nine West shoe brand. Piper's writings complete the idea of the black race being submissive to the white one. In her two-volume *Out of Order, Out of Sight* she calls for attention on stereotypes, racism, xenophobia, and the fantasized truth they create. The imagery advertisements help support the idea of white race being more dominant and desirable, and by the constant repetition of those values it just carves deeper the fantasized value in the psyche of the society. Once the rules of the beauty mythification of the women's face and the race are set, their bodies come to question. The chapter on body follows the theory of Luce Irigaray's proposed in "*This Sex Which is not One*", which opposes the patriarchy's ideal of perfect, impossible bodies which advertisement industry promotes as standard and normalized. In this chapter Irigaray's theory is supported by writings by Susan Bordo, Lorraine Tamsin, and Rosemary Betterton, who together claim that in the modern patriarchal capitalist society female bodies are in the position of highly sexualized commodities who do not manage to go further than being the object that is looked at.

Within the chapter of the body the concept of relationality between the body and the image is presented. The concept of female body being a mere commodity, the concept of becoming is introduced. The process of becoming follows the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, which Rebecca Coleman explored in her article "The Becoming of Bodies: Girls, Media Effects, and Body Image". The part of the becoming in the chapter on female body has the aim to represent bodies and images as inseparable, as interconnected, and depending on each other's relationship. In order to understand

the idea of the body and the way it is depicted, we need to understand the concept of dualism of the body and its image.

Finally, the fourth chapter discusses the concept of desire through the myth of sexual beauty. The idea behind the chapter on desire is to represent it as a part focusing on both male and female audience and the way sexuality is depicted for them in different advertisements. The chapter describes the service advertisements provide for the pleasure of the viewer. Advertisements that target the male audience follow the concepts of voyeurism and fetishism as an activity of looking. John Ellis describes the concept of voyeurism and fetishism in his work *Visible Fictions. Cinema: Television: Video*. Ellis' writings derive their source from the examples from cinema, which are applicable the same way to the advertisements, since they both target the experience of desire of the audience.

In terms of advertisements that target the female audience, Ellis' theory is followed by juxtaposing advertisement with the cinema and their aim of starting a narcissistic identification process between the female gazer and the image on the display, as it is shown in the Opium advertisement launched by Yves Saint Laurent (figure 5.2). Advertisement targeting the male and the advertisement targeting the female audience have in common to represent female beauty as objectified, passive, and submissive.

The female face, race, body, and sexuality are all parts of a complex idea of beauty. Advertisements are the ones who have an important role in spreading myths about the female beauty. Through the categories of the female face, race, body, and desire,

this study aims to figure out what the original source of the myths that objectify women is and determine whether she is going to be considered as beautiful or not.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **The Face: The Feminine Beauty Myth**

#### **2.1 The Deified Face**

The role of the face has a crucial meaning when it comes to contextualizing female beauty. The female face may not always directly relate to the concept of sexuality. The female face is one of the most important indicators of femininity itself. The very design of a beautiful face has nothing direct or exceptional, except only for being designed as a beautiful face of a woman (Wolf 1991, p. 76.). The face of a woman holds a certain type of a power (Johnson 2008, pp. 108 - 109). In his essay “The Face of Garbo” Roland Barthes writes about the fascination with beauty of the female face. Through the Bathes' example of Greta Garbo's face we see one more myth emerging, together with ideal features of a female face. The way Barthes describes the facial features of Garbo, he suggests the reader an idea of divine features and supernatural attributes within a human being.

Barthes describes all the features and the effects a female face can have, and that Garbo's face has the power to plunge the audience into deepest ecstasy. Her face is a part of the “Courtly Love, where the flesh gives rise to mystical feelings of perdition” (Barthes 1991, p. 56). He calls her face “an admirable

face object” (Barthes 1991, p. 56). Barthes' journey on the “deified” curves of Garbo's face where he calls the relation between Garbo's nostrils' curve and her eyebrow arch as a “human relationship” (Barthes 1991, p. 57). Her face is the face of harmony and essential beauty: it is a divine, yet human, a mortal's face of flesh and blood. He describes her light make up as a tool she uses in order to hide imperfections of her face, and to make her expressionless eyes look more vivid. What Barthes considers to be divine in Garbo's face is the presence of something warm and human, despite the perfection that her face is supposed to represent. Her face is not a mask or a direct synonym for vanity. Hers is an attractive face of a woman, which is at the same time “sexually undefined” (Barthes 1991, p. 56).

Garbo's face, according to Barthes is an “Idea” (Barthes 1991, p. 57) as her facial features are approved by him, by a man. On the contrary women only have the chance to look at the female face which has already been described as beautiful, and all that is left to do for women is accepting the beautiful face description while trying to achieve the same standards for their own faces (Wolf 1991, p. 76.). Garbo's facial features fit perfectly in the frames of the dominant middle class ideology, the patriarchal ideology. Just like any other ideology, the one of the ideal facial beauty reflects the representations of the interests of power (Rose 2001, p. 70). It is the ideology where women “appear” as pretty faced object, chosen once again by men who “act” (Berger 1972, p. 47).

## **2.2 The Female and The Feminine**

By working at the level of affecting our own subjectivity, the “beautiful face” ideology tends to justify social inequalities (Rose 2001, p. 70). A “beautiful face” is

generally an attribute attached to woman, which describes a female person who owns the features of a face that is considered to be feminine, pretty, and attractive.

However, when we think further about the relationship between female and the idea of the feminine, we will see that they are two very different concepts. The word feminine is a set of “normatively disciplined expectations imposed on female bodies by male - dominated society” (Young 2005, p. 5). What feminine does is hiding the very essence of the embodiment, and on the example of the female face we can see it most clear.

Female face, as a part of a woman's body, is being made up to look “prettier” and feminine by applying make up to the facial skin, lips, and eyes. While feminine refers more to the gendered social conventions, the concept of female is more referring to “living out materialities of bodies” (Young 2005, p. 6). Femininity is a product of patriarchy, and it follows the norms which put women in a devaluated position and teach them how to become and live as feminine (Young 2005, p. 11). The lived face, together with the body is secondary. As long as the appearance of a woman fits the patriarchy's frames of femininity standards, the woman as a being is targeted as insignificant. In the dominant discourse of the capitalistic patriarchy, a woman should be all about the appearance, while the fact that she is also a human being living in space and time is totally disregarded. The fact that a woman, just like any man, is an owner of a face and body with certain features, colour, size, shape with its own aesthetic properties. Yet, these specifications still do not win the battle against the imposed femininity standards (Young 2005, p. 16). The example of Garbo's face suggests a proof that a woman's face is not important as a face of a human being, or as a part of a human body. What matters in Garbo's facial features is

that it fits the ideological expectations of patriarchy, and therefore is considered to be attractive and feminine. Her face is a myth of an ideal beauty, of genuine femininity. The fact that a man wrote about it just reinforces the idea that what men prefer and accept as beautiful is supposed to be universally accepted by everyone.

### **2.3 Face, Image, and the Gender**

The female face is one of the most obvious indicators of a women's engagement into following the femininity requirements of the capitalist patriarchal ideology.

According to those expectations, a woman is the one who should preserve and maintain her femininity, because that is what supposedly determines her value. The patriarchal system of representations imposes the femininity upon women, which brings to conclusion that femininity is nothing but a role that women play, an image they create out of themselves, a set of values that finds its sources back in the masculine world (Irigaray 1977, p. 84).

Advertising industry just confirms the established roles where men set femininity rules while women try to apply it on themselves. Advertisements are suppliers and carriers of ideological codes and its patterns, if not generators, and the way they do these are via arranging the elements of discourse which are calculated to establish “certain” images (Johnson 2008, p.3). Those “certain” images are promoted in advertisement for cosmetic products, where women are represented as mere objects in desperate urge for makeup in order to be accepted as feminine and attractive.

Advertisements promote femininity by advertising cosmetic products which have ads located in every corner: magazines for women, television, Internet, public spaces, drug stores and shopping malls. The advertised cosmetic products promise to women



femininity that will enhance their attractiveness, repair the imperfections on their faces, and transform them into “real, feminized” women (Johnson 2008, p. 106).

Female face, in order to achieve femininity often becomes a make up canvas. The face bears a hard role within the gender play: it is the one that represents the essential beauty itself. A woman's face is supposed to represent wholeness, and that we could name also as a process of producing gender (Johnson 2008, p. 111). When thinking of gender, we should keep in mind that it is not related to a biological sex of a person, but to socio-culturally constructed values (Butler 1999, p. 9). Butler writes:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being (Butler 1999, p. 44).

Butler suggests that we could understand gender as a culturally required and imposed appearance. The fact that both men and women generally accept those requirements, while constant repetition in time makes those “gender rules” even more grounded and rooted into culture. Advertisements are a good way of understanding the “correct appearance” of a gender. In the advertisement launched by Tom Ford (figure 2.1) the visible gender difference between the two sexes is significant. The ad itself is a representation of the two great extremes, or the contrast: a woman and a man. If we start from the very title “Tom Ford Beauty” we will by default link it to the image of the woman in the ad, because, as the patriarchal ideology has taught us, woman is the one supposed to represent beauty and appearance. A female face painted with heavy make up holds the central position of the ad. Her face is stylized as it fits the frames of regulation of the leading ideology. Her skin is flawless, with her cheekbones enhanced by the blush. Her eyes wear heavy green shadow which make a great

contrast with her brown eyes, making them more expandable and noticed. Her slightly opened lips are painted in red, symbolizing passion and seductiveness, making her looking more attractive. Defined heavily through make up her face is reconstructed in a way that would make her rather “desirable” to the opposite sex. Indeed, the ad confirms it straight away: the man on the left side of the ad is apparently attracted to the woman. When we look up on his appearance, we will notice that his facial appearance was not enhanced by any make up product. On contrary, he has a short beard, which adds up to his masculinity and manliness.

Justifying the idea that the man in the ad does not need make up to be attractive because he is the one supposed to be attracted to the woman for the reason she uses make up products. Even though it might seem at first glance that a woman has an active role as the “attractor”, it is the opposite. She might have had put make up on her face to appeal attention, but the last move is left again to the man who decides whether she is attractive enough to approach her. The ad depicts that situation as well: from the body posture of the models we see that the man is the active participant of the scenario as he is trying to get closer to the woman, to make property out of her. He is in a movement, directed his gaze towards his “target” and his hands touching the neck of the woman, trying to divert her in his direction. Meanwhile, she confidently looks towards the audience, not trying to resist the man in her vicinity. She is aware of her beauty and her potential of seductiveness. Those are her only “weapons” despite being the passive counterpart. In this ad the male model is in the role of the predator, while she is a beautifully stylized pray.

The female model on the ad conveys the myth of beauty through her own self: she is the myth, just like Greta Garbo in Barthes' essay. Her stylized beauty is supposed to be seen as something that comes naturally. The makeup she wears help her keep the myth alive, communicating with the masses that make up is what a woman needs in order to be beautiful and attractive to the opposite sex.



Figure 2.1 *Tom Ford: Beauty Ad Campaign (2011)*

Another example where femininity is portrayed in a way that represents women as passive while being objectified, fragile, and appearance is Mac Cosmetics' ad campaign. In its ad campaign, Mac Cosmetics promotes the Barbie doll appearance for women. Barbie dolls circulate the market for more than fifty years, and are considered to be world's sweetheart in the category of dolls. Barbie has the face and the body "to die for". To this day Barbie holds the title of the most popular fashion doll ever created. This doll is present in the life of little girls, making it possible for

them to play make-believe with Barbie, imagining the doll in different roles (Korbeck 2001, pp. 25 - 35). Barbie's impact on little girls obviously is not supposed to end up in childhood.

In the Mac Cosmetics' ad campaign "Barbie Loves Mac" (figure 2.2) Barbie firmly stays in the lives of the little girls who eventually grew up. Since the famous doll is a synonym for femininity and the ideal appearance, Mac Cosmetics promotes that idea by advertising its products. It promotes the Barbie lifestyle, the Barbie way of looking and dressing, and at the same time it implies that young women should not move further from the childhood spot where they used to play with their Barbie dolls.

If we look at the model used for this advertisement, we will first notice that she doesn't look like a human being at all. Everything on her looks unnatural and synthetic: her bleached her, porcelain white skin, painted thin eyebrows, fake eyelashes, the colour of her eyes with the excessively white eyeballs, her retouched nose, a white block of teeth, and her pumped up lips. Her dump gaze looks empty, confirming her passive role. The model on the ad is not even the famous Barbie doll, she is just an imitation of it. As an imitation of a doll, she agrees that her purpose is to be controlled by someone else, most probably a man. According to this ad, femininity is easily within reach by imitating an image of a doll, rather than trying to look like a female of flesh and blood. For the Mac Cosmetics and the myth they try to convey is that being beautiful and attractive means becoming a doll, an object, and they have all the products needed for that purpose.



Figure 2.2 *Mac Cosmetics: Barbie Loves Mac (2007)*

The beauty of the female face is one more indicator that women are “scarce commodities essential to the life of the group” (Irigaray 1977), of the society. Women are “a mirror of value of and for men” (Irigaray 1977). The value of a woman and her participation in society requires from her to submit her face and body to ideology that transforms her into a value-bearing object which responds to the authority of patriarchy (Irigaray 1977, pp.170, 177, 180). From the economic perspective in the patriarchal societies men are those that have the power to buy and own commodities. Femininity itself is a product of gender's that has nothing to do with the idea of the female. Femininity is a patriarchy-produced “masquerade”, where women risk losing themselves while trying to follow the set up rules (Irigaray 1977, p. 84). In terms of gender and its socially, politically and culturally established structures, the “gender rules” are present throughout a very long span of time where

they have set up the conditions of an individual and her or his actions and consciousness (Young 2005, p. 25 - 26). In case of a woman, the gender is the one that constructs her and stylizes her body (Butler 1999, p. 43). Women of the dominant capitalist society, who accept to live in accordance with patriarchy's rules, are “physically inhibited, confined, positioned, and objectified” (Young 2005, p. 42). Woman and her body can be understood as a tool, as an instrument of a cultural need, constantly judged by the dominant male gaze (Young 2005. pp. 74, 77).

In this big carnival of femininity and gender, advertisement has a very important role in promoting the ideals and standards of patriarchy. Advertisement portrays women as objects, as lower range human beings, as those who cannot see themselves without seeing themselves being seen (Young 2005, p. 63).

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **The Race: The White Beauty Myth**

#### **3.1 The Myth and the Stereotypes of an Ideology**

There are many social issues in which inequality sets the limits for a human being. In this big set of limitations, inequalities regarding racial identity by far have not surpassed inclusive of constraints freedom and opportunities applied to a person or people (Folbre 1994, p. 21). When it comes to race, stereotypes play an important role within the social conventions and everyday's rituals. According to Barthes, we could understand stereotypes as one of the major categories of narrative codes: cultural codes that the text appropriates from an outside source (Snead 1994, p. 2).

It is within the big contrast between the white and the black race where stereotypes happen the most. The Western cultural history mostly denies the black race, and depicts it generally as race of former slaves or savages (Snead 1994, p. 3). Through the relationship of two races, the black and the white, we can understand in a very clear way a connection based upon two opposing contrasts, where the white race is the dominant one. It is a power relation of master and slave, civilized and primitive, good and evil, which is broadly accepted and has its own place in the subconscious of society (Snead 1994, p. 2, 3). These relationships of power regarding racial identifications are a part of an artificially constructed mythology which denies

history where the white race dominates the black one and where the black race is portrayed as savage, unchanging, and unchangeable.

Just like a woman, a person with coloured skin is seen as the “threatening Other” (Piper 1996, p. 206), a stigmatized alien, and all because of her or his skin colour which does not fit the frames of the dominant ideology. In terms of race and racial identification, the role of a myth is to precisely depict social divisions by subordinating a particular group of society and to expose political fantasies (Snead 1994, p. 3, 4).

Film industry is one of the media that uses mythification of the races most frequently. However, the same methods film industry uses are widely seen in advertisements. Both industries tend towards showing people of coloured skin “as objects of acrimony and contempt” (Piper 1996, p. 243). The mythification of races within advertisement constructs interrelations between the visual elements of ad and audience. The message it tries to convey mostly is glorification of the white and underestimation of the black race. When it comes to the representation of a woman of coloured skin and her situation amongst women of white skin, the situation still doesn't change, and mythification works with its full potential.

One of the “mythified” ads is belonging to the Nine West shoe brand for women (figure 3.1) At first glance the ad seems to portray a very innocent, everyday setting: three modern women sitting on a bench of a city. However, when we look better, we will see that the relationship between three women appeals for ideology which works on the principle of “elevation” (Snead 1994, p. 4) and “demotion along the scale of



human value” (Snead 1994, p. 4). Even though they are dressed in the same fashion, and probably belonging to the same social status, there is a certain separation between the women on the ad. The two women with white skin are sitting closer to each other, and they directly look back to the audience. Their gaze is direct and confident: their posture is relaxed. At the same time their posture excludes the third woman in the ad: the woman in the middle has turned her back to the women of coloured skin, symbolically excluding her from the group, making her not belong in the same picture with them. Just like the white female movie stars would employ the coloured skin maids to make them look more “authoritatively womanly” (Snead 1994, p. 5), the two white skin women in the ad use the women of coloured skin for the same purpose.

When we look closer at the woman of colour in the ad we will see that her posture is not so relaxed: there is some kind of anxiety in her posing, while her semi-envious look seems to be revealing a wish to be like the other two women. Her gaze is not directed towards the audience like in the case of the other two women: she looks at them instead, as to her own point of reference. However, we read certain ambiguity in her gaze: apart from the semi-envious look, the woman of colour sees the other two women from a point they will never be able to see themselves: from the eyes of the Other. Together with mythification, “marking” (Snead 1994, p. 5) is present as well in the ad: the women with coloured skin do not have a piece of white cloth on herself, while the other two women do, which emphasizes the third woman's “blackness” in the ad and its subordination to the “white pureness”. This example demonstrates how “blackness” turned from its natural condition into a man-made signification of something that is less worth or appreciated in comparison to

“whiteness”, which is always represented to be of greater advantage (Snead 1994, p. 5). However, the woman of colour in the ad still tries to be devoted to the other two women, she is their faithful retainer. We understand it the best from her “modified” appearance: her skin was obviously brightened in the postproduction, so she could look more desirable and whiter.

The hairdo of the woman in the ad also follows the typical style of a white woman. We could even say for the women of coloured skin to be “acting white” (Piper 1996a, p. 277). In this omission, which “excludes by reversal and distortion” (Snead 1994, p.5) the natural features of a dark skinned human are replaced with the Caucasian features, which confirms the myth of the white being more beautiful, desirable, and accepted. The Caucasian women are represented as authority figures, while the woman of coloured skin is the one who is represented as subordinated and unwanted (Millard and Grant 2006, pp. 659-73). With lacking of dark skinned human's natural features, such as wider nose or curly hair, most widespread method of racial stereotyping occurs (Snead 1994, p. 5). The lack of those features proves that the skin of colour is not ideal for the representation of the beautiful, and that it should be concealed and omitted.



Figure 3.1 *Nine West: Fall Winter Ad Campaign (2013)*

### **3.2 The Distortion of the Real**

Images produced by the mass media have ideological, psychological and political effects on the audience's actions and beliefs. Just like film industry, advertisements convey a statement, which is both social and political, on the very nature of things. What advertisement does is creating a group that is linked together by the beliefs advertisement spreads to the audience. The "truth" advertisement aims to convey becomes the "truth" of the masses, a general truth that is "assumed" to be accepted by everyone. Advertisement distorts reality: just like the camera of the movies, it only shows a small part of the complete, historical truth. Most often advertisements are based on representing fantasies, rather than historical truth, and the differences between the two are huge. It is the "white man-made" visual artefacts that position themselves into being the privileged, photographic truth. This photographic truth, despite its distortions and fantasized representation, still remains the stable

representation of reality which the audience accepts as default (Snead 1994, pp. 132-135).

Advertisement and the movie industry exist to convey a different, post-produced history. That version of history is the history from the American and European white race society's point of view. People of coloured skin have always a submissive role in the white people's version of history: they are mostly depicted as stooges, servants or maids, thieves and uncivilized ones (Snead 1994, pp. 138-139). However, all of racial ideologies, where the white race is superior while the black one is inferior, are a product of the white race: it is thanks to stereotypes of the white race's ideology that the white race manages to keep its authority over the black race. These stereotypes represent the black race as submissive and less valuable, unchangeable, and savage. For the white race point of view it is important for those same stereotypes to remain intact and unchanged, not only for people of coloured skin when perceived as never changing, inferior part of society, but also for the white race to keep their superb perception about their own selves. Therefore, advertisements have a very important role in supporting the white race ideology: advertisements take care of the stereotypes in order for them not to disappear, by constantly repeating them through selling different products (Snead 1994, pp. 139 - 140).

### **3.3 Being the Other**

In the culture dominated by the white race people of coloured skin are represented as objects of fear and loath (Piper 1996a, pp. 201, 208, 236). The racial identity is something that brings issue in the white male dominating world. The racial identity of a person of coloured skin is immediately perceived, as if it was the only pervasive

feature of a person's body. Just like in the gender relations, where a woman doesn't think of her "being a woman" until someone doesn't bring it to her attention; the black race faces a similar problem (Piper 1996a, p. 233). Because of the stereotyped conceptualization, racism and xenophobia are born, threatening singularity and subjectivity of a person (Piper 1996a, p. 242). Piper notes, "Racism and xenophobia flourish against a background of socially sanctioned habits of mutual segregation, ignorance, fear, and rejection of the other as human being" (Piper 1996a, p. 245).

In terms of advertisements, together with other mass media, it establishes rules for desirable behaviour, relationships models, roles, and race. Advertisements may not be directly claiming that they represent the actual "truth", but they also don't emphasize on their using of the "mythification" method, which makes them sometimes even more powerful than the truth itself. What ads present are not verifiable facts, but rather "implicit models of belief and action" (Snead 1994, p. 141).

An example of an ad based on mythification is the one of "Dunkin Donuts" (figure 3.2) The content of the ad is a woman of white race whose skin was painted in black and set against black background. Starting from the ad's daring usage of the word "charcoal" that at first glance seems to be referring to a donut, we see from the visual elements its referring to the person on the ad. The usage of the word "charcoal" does not seem to be used as a positive attribute, since charcoals associate with darkness, dirt, and also the worker in coal mines. The next thing the viewer realizes about the women in the ad is not her beauty, or the donut she holds in her hand, but her body painted in black and the excessive usage of the black colour within the entire ad. Her

being painted in black as a woman of pale skin reminds of the “The Littlest Rebel” movie from the 1935 where the child actress Shirley Temple disguised into a person of coloured skin by painting her face with shoe paint (Snead 1994, p. 47). Being painted in black as in the 1935 movie scene is not the only element that connects this ad with the 1930s: the bright pink lipstick and the beehive hairdo reminds of the blackface caricature makeup style that white race used to represent a person of coloured skin and imply racial stereotypes (Varro 1996, p. 59). The power of this ad is that its essence is in what it tries not to show. The racial stereotypes are omitted, at first glance there is even no trace of a racial conflict: there is a smiling face of a woman painted in the colour of dark chocolate, which is the same colour of the donut she holds. However, when we look deeper into the ad we will see that it works for the myth where it elevates the white race while degrading the black by representing it as a caricature of the 1930s. Even when not present, a person of coloured skin is represented as less human, as a caricature. This kind of portraiture helps only the members of the white race who wish to believe in their superiority and feel better about themselves (Snead 1994, p. 139).

Subjectivity itself is brought into question with this ad. Subjectivity is supposed to be defined by the person's possessing of her or himself and its objects. However, in this case the subjectivity of a person of coloured skin is troubled by its actual not being present in the ad, and by dispossessed force objects, such as the black paint on white skin person. This brings to the point that somebody else possesses the person of coloured skin. The black race in this ad is being deformed, caricaturized by the colour of the skin it actually naturally possesses (Moten 2002, p.1).

From this ad we actually see how mythification works by marking and omitting the black race group in order to represent the white one more positive and superior. As long as the omission of the black is present and depicted in places such as advertisement, there will be stereotypes (Snead 1994, p. 146-147). This kind of an ideology is based on degrading and stereotypes in order to protect itself, “and its consequent capacity for self regeneration in the face of the most obvious counter evidence” (Piper 1996b, p.48).



Figure 3.2 *Dunkin Donuts: Charcoal Donut (2013)*

## **CHAPTER 4:**

### **The Body: The Perfect Body Myth**

#### **4.1 The “Impossible” Images**

The myth of the perfect body could be understood through examining advertisements from both fashion and car industry. If we focus on fashion products, which apart from having a function of covering the body, possess a symbolic characteristic: they appeal and communicate the customers' attitude and lifestyle (Saviolo and Testa 2002, p. 8). Fashion products have the “power” to speak in the name of the person who wears them. Fashion advertisements, just like advertisement in general, do not depict how we actually behave and look as men and women, but how we think men and women should appear and behave. This sort of depiction serves the social purposes of convincing us that there are certain sets of rules of how both women and men should, want, or are supposed to be (Gornick 1979, pp. i - iv).

The most common source of fashion ads, available to both women and men, are found within pages of popular culture's magazines, such as *Vogue* or *Elle*. Fashion magazines fill their editorial pages with latest designs and trends and how to wear them in outdoors. In these magazines women “learn” what is the right way to combine clothes, colours, and fabrics, (Nelson and Paek 2007, pp. 64 - 65) while also relearning how their own body is supposed to look like.



Female fashion magazines attract both women and men, however, for different reasons. Men see fashion magazine as a source of lusting over beautiful women that are represented as sex objects within fashion ads. On the other hand, there are women who in a way fantasize their image on to the image of women in the ad. The images fashion industry uses for presenting their products are images of slim, beautiful female models (Ward, Merriwether and Caruthers 2006, pp. 703 - 714) that look unrealistic and remind more of perfect dolls than actual women of flesh and blood. The kind of images media and fashion industry promotes are “impossible images” of women's bodies which make the real women of flesh and blood feel depressed and uncomfortable in their own bodies (Coleman 2008, p. 173). This is where the problem of understanding and experiencing the female body through the images in advertisement rises.

#### **4.2 Female Body as a Commodity**

The myth and the ideology of a body within advertising have its imposed meanings. Just like Roland Barthes explains in his writings on mythologies, commodities are intertwining with the sets of meanings in advertising (Barthes 1991). The image of the female body in advertisement follows the same pattern: it is trapped within an ideology and its system of signs. Through that kind of pattern female body comes to stand in front of a meaning that all female bodies should look in the way ads portray them. As Barthes explains the use of red roses to represent love and passion (Barthes 1991), we could say that female bodies in advertisements represent an ideal image of how a woman's body should look like. Additionally to the idealized body in an ad, there is always a commodity that follows it, such as clothes. This kind of ideological

thinking leads to an understanding that it is not enough for a woman to look in a certain way, but also to purchase a certain object in order to complete the idealized image.

Print advertisements, together with television ads, use images of thin female bodies to sell products, and women all over the world see this kind of ads. The pressure that media has on women has always been in regard to standardized western beauty. The need to consume images of perfect bodies has become omnipresent and daily based. What advertisements try to do is sell the myth of the beautiful body, which people in media have successfully stereotyped (Poorani 2012, pp. 1 - 9). In a way, media normalizes the processes in which humans and women's bodies in particular turn out to be a commodity itself. Woman's body has been equated to the elementary form of capitalist wealth within the patriarchal societies. The kinds of processes of normalization also dictate that female body is a product to be used and exchanged by men. The use and consumption of these bodies are highly sexualized and depicted as such amongst media and advertisement only to confirm and underwrite social order: a woman is never a "subject". The extensive use, consumption, and circulation of the images of female bodies keep alive social life and the dominant culture, despite the fact that women represented as such are neglected in that same "infrastructure" of social life and culture. Men are those that dominate the culture industry and production by producing further avenues to commodity images of women or women as products of cultural capital (Irigaray 1977, pp. 84, 171 - 172).

One of many examples that show the woman's parable with products and commodities is an advertisement launched by the fashion brand Sisley (figure 4.1).

In this ad, Sisley advertises clothes for women using exclusively female body in order to sell a product. The ad depicts very little of the product itself: we cannot clearly see the advertised piece of red cloth. We can only assume that it is a kind of a shirt being advertised, and that its colour is red, a colour that is generically symbolic for passion, love, and desire. There is no effort in showing the shirt's characteristics, its cuts, or any other properties in sense of fashion. In this ad the concept or idea of fashion itself is not present at all. The actual commodity that is being advertised is the female body.

In Sisley's ad, body is the commodity, and that is even more reinforced by the absence of the model's head as it is cropped from the frame, hidden behind the black glass, which leads us to claim that she is decapitated by design. In this advertisement the place where the image is shot is insignificant, except for the dark background that gives a high contrast between the immediately perceivable female bodies, semi covered with a red piece of cloth. The focal point of the ad is the "headless" female body. It is a thin, toned, sexualized, semi naked body of a woman that is used as a product in order to sell clothes for a fashion brand.

The myth of this ad tries to convey the message to women that this is how their body is supposed to look like, and all it should do is imply sexuality for male pleasure. All that matters for a woman is to have a fit, thin, attractive body in order to fit the patriarchy's ideology frames. The head and the face are unimportant features; the woman is again represented as an object, with no mind or personality, existing only to please the main subjects of the patriarchy, the males. That is what even a female

targeting brand tries to convey, it encourages women to perceive themselves only as bodies, as objects.

The crumpled position of the body emphasises the curves of the woman's body, making it look more sexualized, yet passive. The shiny reflection coming from the mirror on the image just adds up more to the attention to the body: just next to the reflection there is the back part of the body, which makes the viewer perceive the same female body in time, from different angles, provoking more pleasure in the male gazers.



Figure 4.1: *Sisley: Fall/Winter Ad Campaign (2009).*

#### **4.3 Blood and Flesh Vs. the Creation By the Image**

Our bodies have social significance and we are forced to deal with that situation.

Bodies are a part of our identities, they influence the way we behave. When it comes

to women, their bodies are influenced by the Western culture, which tends in representing women as less human by displaying their bodies in a reductionist way, as it was shown in the Sisley's ad. Just like an object, the female body is reduced to being seen as a complex formation of a human being. Rather, she is only displayed as nothing but a body within the ads. Women are more identified with their bodies, contrary to men's bodies. The dualism between body and mind turns out to be harmful and detrimental in the representation of a woman within popular culture advertisement. The understanding of the body directly affects the knowledge which informs one's self-understanding and her or his conceptions of what is desirable.

The contemporary culture we live in is branched by sexual division of labour where body and the “natural” are attributed to the feminine, while the “cultural” products are characteristics of the masculine. This kind of branching contains serious ethical implications, which directly affect on the feminine subjectivity (Tamsin 1999, pp. 1 - 4).

The female subjectivity and the relationship between the female body and its image represented by media which objectifies the feminine, is again an inherently masculine distinction. If we think of the same concept from a female point of view, “the subject who looks” and “the object looked at” collapses from a position of a woman. However, due to the pervasiveness of images of the female body in visual culture that is controlled by the capitalist patriarchal ideologies, women are again constituted as objects (Betterton 1987, pp. 4 - 22).

These kind of omnipresent, pervasive images of female bodies make the shift in perception of the “real” bodies that are not a part of an advertisement. Because of the ads, the “real” bodies are expected to be “filtered, smoothed, polished, softened, re - arranged”. The boundary between the bodies and the image is blurred, and displays bodies as “creation”, and “hybrid”. The images that advertisements present teach us how to see and perceive, and what to expect from real flesh and blood (Bordo 2003, p. xvii).

However, advertising has gone so far that, in order to insinuate body and sex, that comes with the female body by default does not even need to use the image of the body anymore. An example for an ad like that is the advertisement for used cars by BMW (figure 4.2) In the BMW ad there is no displaying of body at all, there is only a face of a young woman. Her body is absent in the image, but the usage of her face and the message in the ad insinuate sexuality, sex, and the equalization of a woman with an object, which is the car in this case. The model in this ad is a very young woman, representing more a young "Lolita" like character rather than a mature woman. The young woman is apparently naked, and with her innocent look and hand gesture she shows herself as available for the male gaze, for male himself. She lies naked on her back, as if she was in the privacy of a home, which automatically sets the gazer looking at her from a dominant position. In fact, he is in a dominant position, the ad sets him in the same setting with the model, just as if they are about to have a sexual intercourse. The sentences in the ad just confirm it. Even though there is no image of the model's body, it is more than present within this ad, together with the sexual insinuations. The body, and the objectification of it and the woman is interpreted through the model's face. The slogan in the ad “You know you're not the

first. But do you really care?" is supposed to be referring to the BMW used cars. Instead, there is an image of a very young woman, that is compared with a used car, as she was a vehicle herself, not a human being. The ad gives no value to her humanity and persuades the potential customer to do the same, by directly telling them not to care about women. In this ad, she is just like a second-hand car, she is used and existing to be exchanged by men, as if she was not a female human being with her own values, attitudes, or own sexuality. Even though only her face is displayed, she's just a body, a sexual object, and ready to be used by the assumingly wealthy BMW driver. The myth behind this ad speaks to the male audience that the BMW ad aims for. It spreads the patriarchal ideology in which men, in this case the second hand BMW car user, should not care if the car was used before or not. Parallel with that, he shouldn't care about the woman that he is being with, because she is just like a car that he would use: beautiful, available, and ready to be used and serve his, or any other man's needs. The man, the BMW driver, is portrayed in a dominant, active fashion. He is the driver, the one that shouldn't care. BMW communicates with him by telling him that even a used BMW is a symbol for wealth, and it will bring him a woman who will fall for him because of his luxurious car.



Figure 4.2: *BMW: Premium Selection Used Cars* (2008).

#### 4.4 The Becoming Beauty

The images on the ads are a specific type of photographic images that produce particular knowledge, experiences, and understanding of the body (Coleman 2008, p. 170). There is an approach in which we could understand closer the becoming of the body through images. This kind of understanding of the becoming of the body can be traced to Gilles Deleuze's philosophy. For Deleuze, becoming is a process, an inter-connectivity, and relationality. Becoming in a Deleuzian sense suggests to “get outside the dualisms” (Coleman 2008, p. 168) of the body and the idealized image of it, which is conventionally governing the nowadays society. Becoming in this sense



is more of a process of movement, multiplicity, and variation, on the opposite of a more static understanding of world and its subject-object, or body-image formations. According to Deleuze and Guattari, bodies themselves do not need to refer to human bodies at all, but to a multiple and different streams of connections which get together within certain moment in space and time (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). It is through these multiple different streams of connections that we should understand the body. The key concept in understanding the becoming, in this case, female bodies, is to consider the relation between the bodies and the image that idealises them as two interlinked concepts. In Deleuzian sense, bodies are not bounded subjects separated from the images. On contrary, the connection between the human body and the images makes the constitution of the body itself (Coleman 2008, p. 168).

The body “is never separable from its relationships with the world” (Deleuze 1992, p. 628), and this is how we can understand the becoming of the body through its connections with diverse and multiple things. Bodies are not about relations between pre-existent entities of bodies and images, or subject and object. In fact, they are processes which become through relations, and the entities of bodies and images are constructed through that same relation as well (Fraser, Kember, and Lury 2005, p. 3). What we conclude is that a body does not have relations with images as a human subject, but that body itself is the relationship between human subject and its perceiving of images.

The focus is on relationships between bodies and images, rather than bodies and images alone, while the body is the result that is being produced from that

relationship. The very accent is on the relationship and in the ways they constitute and make the becoming possible for both bodies and images. That is why, before we attribute a certain ad's representation of a female body as “good” or “bad”, we should think about the type of relationship between that same body and the image. This relationship can both limit or extend the ad's meaning: it can teach us further about understanding and experiencing the body that is produced through images. What we conclude is that image itself does not reproduce a negative meaning of the female body. The relationship between the body and the image is the responsible one for a negative interpretation, as it was the case with the Sisley's and BMW's ads. Bodies and images are not separate. Bodies become through images (Coleman 2008, pp. 168 - 175).

Popular advertisement makes us experience and recognize the female bodies directly through images. The media effect is unavoidable when it comes to understanding relations between the body and the image, the subject and the object. The Western cultural depictions of female bodies have been homogenizing the image of female bodies while generalizing these images as representations of the young, white, thin, attractive, and heterosexual. A new kind of “alternative femininity” is being created via the appearance, body modifications, and clothing. Media implies and tends towards establishing atypical standards of appearance by representing them as a social norm which women are supposed to follow (Coleman 2008, pp. 163 - 166).

These kind of media implications lead to stereotyping of the female gender itself. The gender stereotyping is very present within representation of a woman and her body. Regarding the advertised fashion product itself, its power lies within the

ideology that a certain product can give a person a better status in society, and that it has the power to emphasise one's femininity or masculinity (Poorani 2012, pp. 1 - 9).

The methods in which advertising projects stereotype and influence society are popular mostly in fashion and car ads. From the fashion magazine advertisements we understand how women are generally stigmatized as weak, inept, passive and unskilled. Advertisement depicts women and their bodies as just one more commodity within the capitalist society. As a product of men's "labour", women turn out to have only one value: the market value. Woman as a commodity splits into a "natural" body, a body which the patriarchy demands from her (Irigaray 1977, pp. 175, 180). Female identity in advertising is defined exclusively in terms of sexuality (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998, p. 168). Women within advertisement are not shown as whole characters, or individuals. Most likely, individual segments of a female body are shown, not a whole person. Women are represented through their legs, breasts, faces, or hair, and that makes women reduced to a less than a human state and without individuality. These images of women do not cast or at least refer to women's faculties of intelligence or activities either. Instead they are constantly represented as attached and submissive to men (Iijima and Crum 1994).

Deleuze's theory suggests an opportunity to address how the becoming and the perception of the body through ads and images in a specific way. To really fully grasp the idea of the, the dualism that surrounds the idea of the body and the way in which in which a particular body is depicted within an image should be rethought. The body should be understood through the relationship of the body and the image that displays the body. Bodies become through images. The body and the image are

not separated, they are linked to each other, and those relationships are the ones that make the body perceived in a positive or negative way. The body itself is the relationship between human subject and its perception through images.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **The Desire: The Sexual Beauty Myth**

#### **5.1 Advertisements in The Service of The Viewer's Desire**

One of beauty myths that this thesis aims to explain is the sexual beauty myth within advertisements. These kinds of ads insist upon the expressing of female sexual beauty, and aim for provoking pleasure in generally male viewers.

In the case of advertisement, ideology stands for a general process of the productions of meanings and ideas. We use ideology as a term that describes social production of meanings. At the same time, ideology is also “a system of illusory beliefs, false ideas or false consciousness, which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge” (Fiske 1990, p 165). The system of beliefs creates ideology, and they are characteristic of a particular group of people. This is the same way Roland Barthes used ideology when speaking about the signifiers of connotation as “rhetoric of ideology” (Barthes 1991). If we recall again the idea of myths, we will see that they are actually under the control of ideology that uses myths as its own method of manifestation. Ideology happens actively when both reader and advertisement she or he gazes at produce together a preferred meaning. This is a kind of relationship between the reader and the ad where the reader is incorporated as someone with a specific set of relationship to the dominant culture and its value system (Fiske 1990,

pp. 165 - 166). As the engine of consumer culture, advertising has one of the crucial roles in the circulation of ideological codes (Johnson 2008, pp.1 - 3).

## **5.2 Male Oriented Advertisement as a Form of Display**

Just like the cinema, we could consider advertisement as a form of display and entertainment. The images represented within ads are publicly displayed, and are prevalent in society. It is a kind of a elliptical relationship between advertisements and its audience: the audience expects a display of a certain set of images, while advertisement expects its viewers to keep the demand alive for the kind of images they display. When it comes to the images that represent sexual beauty within ads, we could describe it as a way of reverse dreaming: here images come from an outer source, the source of advertisement. The image of the ad is the one that dominates the seer and the process of gazing. In most of cases, while looking at an advertisement, the viewer produces a series of identification within himself or herself. An image in advertisement, whether aiming for female or male audience, tends to represent its idealized form, it is always pointing out the perception of something more perfect, more coordinated.

In the case of advertisements aimed for the male audience, image has one central aim: the aim to be an image and an object of desire. It targets the sense of experiencing desire for the looker, and those desires are presented over and above their certain fantasy roles. This type of ads aims for awakening the elements of narcissism in viewers, and it does it via constructing a type of looking that sets men in the role of main subjects, the “controllers” of the look. The one that is being “controlled” is the woman on the image, set as the object of the male gaze. Here men

are spectators who are invited to look at an image of a woman that generally does not look back at them. That is the moment when the processes of voyeurism start to take place. However, the activity of looking at a woman in an ad while she does not return the look back implies a certain distance between the gazer and the woman on the advertisement. Women in sexually charged advertisements acknowledge their roles in this process. Even though a woman doesn't look directly back at the gazer in a sexually charged ad, she approves the direct participation of the person that looks at her. This case is more about performing of fetishism as an activity of looking, than of voyeurism. What we can understand is that in any act of gazing at an ad that aims for male audience we will find a tension between voyeurism and fetishism. Voyeurism is more about separation between the gazer and the object of his gaze, while fetishism targets to nullify that same chasm (Ellis 2001, pp. 38 - 47).

One of the examples for advertisements that use the female beauty within the sexual context is the JBS advertisement for male underwear. In this ad (figure 5.1) we see a typical example of a fetishistic gaze. The central figure is a beautiful young woman, dressed up in a French maid costume, which anyhow stands for a fetish *per se*. The element in the ad that first demands for attention of the viewer's eye is the JBS logo, juxtaposed with the model's garter, which makes the starting point of gazing at her body.

The model is seated on the bed of her master, whose room she was cleaning. In her hands she holds her master's most probably used underwear as she brings it to her face. Her body is exposed and it is the central point: she owns a body exposed to be looked at and to be desired for in the fetishist gaze of the one who looks at the ad. This kind of representation strips the woman from her identification of human being.

Her *persona* is absolutely neglected. She is nothing more than an object in this ad. From the settings of the room, wrinkled sheets, model's dishevelled hair and clothes, the toppled lamps and her own underwear on one of them, creates an assumption that she just had a sexual intercourse with her master. Her master is not on the image, but his underwear is enough for her to keep on the sexual pleasure all by herself, despite his absence. From that example we see also how the ad deals with dealing with solving the male spectator problems of insecurity and weakness by covering them within the fantasy narrative.

As a fetishistic gaze, this ad is a display of longing and demanding for disappearing of the distance that separates the looker from the setting of fiction. Its aim is to invoke desire in viewer for the depicted room scene to become real, to go out of the frame of the image. The maid pretends not to be seen, while all the time she has been actually constructing herself for the viewer. No matter how abstract it might be seen at the first place, both the maid which seems to be mentally absent in her own sexual pleasures, and the present viewer gaze at each other. This ad is direct with its viewer, it implies equality, directness, and probably a certain level of frustration of the male audience. There is no further suggested change or action in this ad. A voyeuristic, curious look would demand to see more, to inquire further, however a fetishist gaze is fascinated by what it sees, not longing to find out further. In terms of myth, the ad significantly favours the male gaze. It implies to the viewer that he can actually go out from the fetishist-voyeuristic position, and become the active male. He could become "the master" himself, and the woman in a French maid suit will subordinate herself to him, by being both his sexual and housekeeping object. The only condition the viewer should fulfil is buying the underwear from the JBS brand. Actually, we could consider this advertisement to be a myth within a myth, since inside of it we



find mythic historic events which are performed in a condensed and idealized version (Goffman 1979, p. 1) of the male gender: a subordinated, objectified woman solely exists for both sexual and housekeeping service of the dominant, active male.



Figure 5.1: *JBS Men's Underwear: Maid.*(2009)

### 5.3 Female Oriented Advertisement as a Form of Display

Advertisements that promote sexual beauty express themselves as an exhibition form for female gender targets, just with a slightly different method. Just like cinema does with its apparatus, advertising aims to run a kind of narcissistic identification process between female gazers and the image on the ad. What advertisement aims at is the experience of perception of female gazer as an image that she gazes at. The gazed image of an ad is an image separate from the body of female viewer; it is the

idealized image, just embodied within the image on the ad. The main difference between the images who target males and the one who aim for females is within the concept of desire. In the ads aimed for the male audience, the image is the one that becomes the object of desire. The ads aimed at the female audience invoke desire within female viewers for being perceived in the way image of another woman on the ad is being perceived (Ellis 2001, p. 38). Both of the cases end up to the same point: the male audience is supposed to get pleasure both by images on advertisements as well as women that surround them in real life. Just like in the case of the JBS advertisement for men, the ads which target women follow the same pattern which tends to equalize the “male” with the “active” and “female” with the “passive” (Ellis 2001, p. 44).

Female sexuality, or the female sexual beauty within advertisement is often connected with the term “objectification”, and it is no exception with the advertisements that promote products for women. One of examples is the advertising campaign for the perfume fragrance *Opium* (figure 5.2) launched by Yves Saint Laurent. Once more, a woman is represented as a “thing” that submits to patriarchy, while both her sexuality and gender are shown in a hostile way towards other women (Atwood 2004, p. 3). The model in the *Opium* advertisement is placed in the centre. She lies on black satin covers, her shoes are golden and her jewellery is massive - associating her lifestyle with luxury and wealth. Her porcelain white body, ginger hair and green make up are creating a great contrast against the black background. The central position and the high contrast have the role of making the model as exposed as possible to the gazer. Her body is very sensual and sexually charged, provoking a question of the source of her pleasure. The viewers who look at this

woman are put in position of the voyeur. Women put within the voyeuristic attitude are brought up to question of the female desire, which patriarchy represents as “problematic”, on contrary to the male “unproblematic” one.



Figure 5.2 : *YvesSaintLaurent: Opium.*(2000)

Woman is again the one behind the scenes, wishing to be desired, but unable to desire it actively (Ellis 2001, p. 48). When it comes to the sexual beauty myth, from this example we can see that it is equalized with a highly eroticized image of female body. Woman's humanity is secondary. What matters in this advertising is her objectification as a mere body, a “porn-body”. At first sight this advert might not be considered as pornographic, however, hidden by the codes that associate art, fashion and high aesthetic, pornography is one of the elements within this ad, as well. If we just look at model's splayed legs, closed eyes and opened mouth we will see that those are characteristics of the soft-core pornographic imagery (Attwood 2004, p.7).

What makes this ad additionally pornographic is “a realm of transgression that is, in effect, a counter-aesthetics to dominant norms for bodies, sexualities, and desire itself” (Kipnis 1996, p. 166), or in a more direct way, we could say for pornographic to be “the depiction of women as sexual objects” (Kendrick 1987, p. 231). The model's body reminds of the blow up dolls made for adults, and she does not seem to mind it at all. On contrary, she enjoys being the doll. Once more, a display like this advert constructs sex and gender in a way hostile to women, who are the main target of this perfume advertisement. What does the sexual beauty myth say here is the opposite of its message to the male audience of sexual beauty, as represented in the JBS advertisement. For the female audience myth has a different message: women are supposed to accept the idea of being objects, and that is how cultural norms want them to be. It is enough for a woman to be a beautiful sight, existing only to be looked at, and all above that her role is to be passive. She is nothing but body and sex, a signifier for the other gender's pleasure (Attwood 2004, p. 9).

Women within advertising are depicted as objects, far from the values than a human being has got.

## **CHAPTER 6:**

### **Conclusion**

Female beauty goes hand in hand with myth. It is myth that gets appropriated of female beauty and defines it according to its own values and sets of standards. On the other hand, myth is a part of a larger group, lead by the white race patriarchal capitalist society. The ideology of the male dominating world expresses its power through myths, which are accepted as the universal, absolute truth. Those kind of truths make women “defined exclusively in her relation to man” (De Beauvoir 1952, p. 132).

It is the patriarchal society that seems to overtake the right of a woman over her own body: it defines the beauty of a woman in many of its segments, such as a woman's face, race, body, and sexuality.

When it comes to the face of a woman and the important role it plays for the concept of femininity, most probably it will be described and adored from a male point of view, as it is in the case of Barthes' essay on facial beauty of Greta Garbo. Men are again those who choose whether a female face is considered as pretty and attractive. The idea of feminine itself is a concept delivered by the capitalist patriarchal ideology, and advertising industry promotes patriarchy's beauty values on a global scale. In order to reach feminine, many women tend to hide their own essence of

embodiment, and they do it most often with applying cosmetic products on both their bodies and faces. Women tend to look “prettier” by applying make-up on their skin, eyes and lips. By doing it, they tend towards keeping alive the idea of the ideal beauty myth, and to fit into frames of the ideological expectations of patriarchy, where women are objectified into bodies in need of make-up in order to be beautiful and attractive to men.

Race, too, is one of the most significant issues when it comes to the inequality and sets of limitation that disables freedom and opportunities for a human being. The black race is ideologically defined to be subordinated to the white one, and is often depicted as a denied race of former slaves and savages. Stereotypes are playing a very important role within social conventions and in creating the “fantasized” truth. Those stereotypes work hand in hand with the synthetically created mythology which deforms historical truth. Another very important role is the one that advertisement has in this reconstructed truth: they help to keep the myth of the black race as less valuable, by constant repetition of the ads where the white race is represented as glorified and pure.

Advertisements are the source of images which have ideological, psychological, and political effects on the society's beliefs. The truth advertisements convey becomes the truth of the masses, supposed to be accepted by everyone, no matter how they are depicted in the ad. Racial ideologies are a product of the white race: by using stereotypes white race manages to sustain its dominance over other races. In order for those stereotypes not to disappear, and to sustain the power of the whiteness,

advertisements constantly repeat degradation of the black race by visual elements while selling different products.

A person of colour is perceived as someone who is constantly brings of attention to a person does not belong to the white race. The kind of attention which is within the radar “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (Bell Hooks 1984, 1992) is also responsible from racism and xenophobia. Just like in the case of tending towards the representation of women as objectified and subordinated to male domination, advertisements help support the idea of racism and xenophobia by establishing borders of the most desirable skin colour, behaviour, roles, and relationships.

Just like the ideal face and race, the idea of the perfect body is another product of myth. Fashion magazines are one of the sources where this myth conveys its ideas and requirements. The myth of a beautiful body is about “impossible images” where bodies' look unrealistic, over sexualized, and far from standard female body of flesh and blood. The myth throughout the advertisement creates a kind of “alternative femininity”, by modifying body's appearance and making it a stereotyped social norm. Because of this ideological representation of a female body, which is set as normal and sold to audience by advertisements, the female body itself turns out to be a commodity of the male dominated capitalist culture. The way women perceive their bodies are highly influenced by the Western culture, which represents them very often in an objectifying, reductionist way. Through the body images offered by advertisements a certain knowledge and understanding of the body is being produced. Following Deleuze's theory of becoming of the body through images, we get to the point where the very connection between the female body and its image

create the structure of the body. We should understand bodies as processes that come out as a product of a relation between the body and the image. Bodies and images function as one, they are inseparable. The way to understand the body derives from the image.

Female beauty, as well as the female identity, within advertisements is strongly connected with sexual desire. The desire within this kind of advertisements intertwines with the notion of beauty and defines it as an object which's aim is to give pleasure to viewers. The very important role within sexually charged advertisements is the role of ideology with its systems of illusory beliefs and false ideas. The sexual beauty myth in advertisement is as well under the control of an ideology that uses myth in order to manifest itself.

Advertisement follows the patriarchal capitalist ideology for both male and female target audiences. Men targeting advertisements aim to provoke desire and narcissism in viewers. The way it does it is by making men being the main subject who is “controlling” the look, while the woman is the “controlled” one. That's why in male-targeted ads we find the performance of voyeurism and fetishism as a looking activity. The representation of women in the advertisements aimed for men are following the pattern of the dominant male, and this is why we find those women being represented as subordinate, objectified, and deprived from human being characteristics.

For advertisement aiming female audience, the same men-pleasing ideology is followed. Only the method of fitting the patriarchal ideals is slightly different:



women are supposed to experience themselves as gazed objects. The women desire, they represent and offer it. The women in advertisement are objectified as desire itself, with the aim to please men, while the female target audience is supposed to follow the example of models in the ads in becoming nothing but a controlled object of pleasure. The female sexuality itself is objectified and there is no room for representing it in advertisements, even in the case when a product for women is advertised, like in the case of the *Opium* perfume.

In order to make the female beauty myth perceived in the way desired by the patriarchy, advertisements play a significant role. Advertisements are the messengers and one of the influential media that convey the myth of beauty as the absolute truth, as the way that should be agreed by everyone. Advertisements, together with other mass media, make it possible for the patriarchal ideology to reach the state of reality, to make the myths “turn history and society into nature” (Fiske 1990, p. 183).

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