

MPC MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

THE VISUAL SEMIOTICS OF FRAGRANCE BRANDING:
EXPLORING JEAN PAUL GAULTIER'S "LE MALE"

Brian Tran

Supervisor: Dr. Janice Fung

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ABSTRACT

This major research paper (MRP) examines the visual semiotics of Jean Paul Gaultier's "Le Male" fragrance for men and how this brand appeals to gay male audiences. It seeks to address the following questions: *How do product packaging, print advertising, and video advertising use visual semiotics to appeal to gay male audiences? What image of masculinity is being communicated? And how is gay male desire being commoditized?* To answer these questions the study examined three artefacts through a compositional interpretation and a visual semiotic analysis: the fragrance bottle, a print advertisement, and a video commercial. The research demonstrates that "Le Male" appeals to gay male audiences through three strategies: (1) sexual objectification of the male body; (2) use of gay iconography, especially depictions of homoeroticism among sailors and homage to the illustrated erotica of Tom of Finland; and (3) gay-coded visual polysemy. Furthermore, it depicts attractive men with ambiguous sexual orientation as objects of worship. Jean Paul Gaultier's "Le Male" integrates the idealized male form into its cologne bottle design, print and video advertisements. Its carefully crafted homoerotic fantasies resonate with a queer aesthetic, but do so within a minimal set of superficial values reflected in the fleetingly beautiful body. This study is relevant to how professional communicators can weave a coherent, visual story through a deeper understanding of rhetorical signs and symbols that resonate with specific subcultures. Findings from this MRP will be discussed along with suggestions for the brand to retain its success among gay consumers. The study also initiates further research in the areas of empirical confirmation, feminist gaze theory, intercultural theory, and multi-sensory branding.

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INTRODUCTION

Fine fragrance producers meet a formidable challenge: how do they communicate the value of an arrangement of scents when the experience is deeply subjective and branding and promotional strategies need be communicated visually? Men's fragrances, in particular, present an interesting area of investigation because of the market's worldwide sales growth (Bird, Caldwell, & DeFanti, 2008) and the changing social attitudes towards men in relation to personal hygiene and beauty products (Harrison, 2008). This study examines the visual semiotics of fragrance branding. Specifically, it presents a visual case study analysis on Jean Paul Gaultier's "Le Male" fragrance for men. This study is interested in how "Le Male" as a brand is crafted to appeal to gay male audiences through the use of persuasive visuals.

French fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier built his luxury brand empire in the 1970s on his provocative aesthetic sensibilities to span haute-couture, ready-to-wear fashion, and fine fragrances (McDowell, 2000). He is famous for his androgynous, gender-bending collections that reflect his outlook on sexuality. Beginning in the 1980s, Gaultier became known for his homoerotic runway shows and navy-inspired clothing. Gaultier released his first men's fragrance, "Le Male," in 1995, in collaboration with Beauté Prestige International, a subsidiary of the Shiseido Company. "Le Male" reflects Gaultier's idiosyncratic sensibilities. The flacon, or fragrance bottle, is shaped in the likeness of a man's muscular torso made to resemble a sailor. The accompanying advertising collateral was also highly nautical themed. The company describes the product on its website as:

The tough guy with a soft heart! "Le Male" Eau de Toilette by Jean Paul Gaultier, a fragrance that's 100% seductive, 100% scoundrel. With its perfect balance between virility and sensuality, "Le Male" turns traditional lavender upside-down by combining it with sexy vanilla. An Eau

de Toilette that holds its own in a body-shaped bottle dressed in the designer's emblematic sailor's jersey (Jean Paul Gaultier, n.d.).

This positioning statement clarifies that this fragrance pushes away from traditional gentlemanly virtues; its wearer is a scoundrel, a seducer, a man who is tough yet sensitive. “Le Male” has been a hit since its launch. To this day, it remains one of the world’s best-selling men’s colognes (Burr, 2008). The success of this fragrance suggests that the “Le Male” brand resonates with consumers and that the fragrance is a pleasing scent on an international scale. The olfactory qualities of “Le Male” are irrelevant to this study; rather, it is concerned strictly with how this fragrance has been marketed by way of its visual presentation. This paper is concerned with its appeal to one specific target market: gay men.

Gay men represent a large market often coveted by marketers and advertisers eager to tap into this demographic (Lukenbill, 1995). While there is debate on the size and wealth of this demographic, the validity of categorizing a market segment based on sexual orientation, and the socio-political implications of this categorization, the “pink dollar” or commercial interests of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals still matters (Greenlee, 2004). This continues to be true in the contemporary Western context, where discrimination against LGBT people has waned due to decades of hard-fought social and legal battles. Tapping into this demographic, however, requires understanding this subculture, which Oakenfull (2004) argues has “distinct social practices, community formation, and identity” (p. 373) and communicates through “codes” including in-group language and symbols. It would be valuable to employ visual semiotics as a means to excavate the significance of these codes and how they might apply to “Le Male”. Visual semiotics can also assess the brand’s salience to gay men and how the brand can retain its current success.

The value of studying gay male sexuality and visual communication in this context reflects the unique communication challenge of fine fragrances. First, there exists a need to translate sensory information from one physiological perception to another—smell to sight. While not all producers promote their fragrances using visual media, such as print or video advertisements, those who do must struggle with this challenge when determining their fragrance's brand characteristics. Fine fragrance marketers imbue their product with a number of aspirational associations and make emotional or sexual appeals rather than attempt a literal or utilitarian description of their scent (Bird, Caldwell, & DeFanti, 2008). Fragrance producers rely on crafting brands that are loaded with symbolic value (Williamson, 1978). Examining fragrance advertisements, therefore, presents a rich exercise in semiotics, a discipline concerned with the communication of signs.

This study meets the intersections of three research areas: (1) visual semiotics, (2) fragrance branding, and (3) gay male sexuality. While there has been interest in academia and industry to examine the changing nature of men's consumption patterns for beauty products, minimal work has been done to interpret the visual semiotics in advertisements for a gay male audience. Considering that social stigma around homosexuality has declined in many parts of the world and the significance of this demographic in a burgeoning global market for men's beauty products, visual semiotics can be a tool for gaining insights for professional communicators, especially promotional strategists, marketers, advertisers, and product designers. As such, this exploration is novel and significant within the field of professional communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is concerned with understanding the semiotic appeals targeting gay male audiences in fragrance marketing. I review the literature of three scholarly fields to cover the interdisciplinary nature of my research topic: (1) marketing and advertising communications; (2) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) studies; and (3) visual semiotics. First, I discuss the work of notable semioticians to position this paper within a coherent theoretical framework. Next, I discuss three themes that emerged from my literature review: the first is sexual objectification of the male body; the second is the use of gay iconography; the third is visual polysemy.

The Semiotic Landscape in Advertising

Roland Barthes's work in semiotics is foundational. Barthes was concerned with the ideology behind appearance and reality. Barthes views semiotics as "a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content" (1972, p.110). In *Mythologies* (1972), he articulates the central role of myths in mediating our understanding of the world. He understands myths not in the sense of Ancient Greek folklore and heroic tales, but rather as unproven, fictitious, or illusory beliefs that hold cultural currency. Barthes maintains that signs envelop society and it is the semiotician's role to unravel and analyze signs, their significance, and the power structures that support them. He argues that signs have two central components: the signifier and the signified. For example, the dove is a sign whose signifier (denotation) is the image of the *small white bird* and whose signified (connotation) is the concept of *peace*. This distinction between sign, signifier, and signified is a core tenet of semiotics.

Barthes's work has been highly influential for numerous semioticians. In *Introducing Social Semiotics* (2005), Van Leeuwen builds upon Barthes' legacy by developing a semiotic theory

focused on social situations and practices. Van Leeuwen and Jewitt (2004) argue that “images can be perceived at different levels of generality, depending on the context, depending on who the image is for, and what its purpose is” (p.5) in their work on social semiotics. Kress and Van Leeuwen are significant contributors to the field of social semiotics through visual analysis. Their work *Reading Images: A Grammar of Visual Design* (2006) provides a theoretically rich methodology for interpreting and analyzing signs in visual contexts ranging from art to advertising. Complementary to Kress and Van Leeuwen’s work, Rose (2012) develops an approach to visual semiotic analysis in her *Visual Methodologies*. She argues that visual semiotics “confronts the question of how images make meanings head on. It is not simply descriptive...Instead, [it] offers a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning” (p. 105). To varying degrees, all the above theorists validate advertisements as elements of culturally significant signs used for meaning-making in specific contexts.

Other scholars apply semiotics to marketing and advertising as their principle focus. While written more than 30 years ago, Williamson’s (1978) *Decoding Advertisements* remains a seminal work in the critique of visual advertisements within a broader system of capitalist sign creation and dissemination. She argues “advertisements are constantly translating between systems of meaning, and therefore constitute a vast meta-system where values from different areas of our lives are made interchangeable” (p. 25). Williamson analyses perfume advertisements, observing that fragrances are highly undifferentiated products. Advertisers, therefore, create differentiation in the eyes of consumers through the images they convey in their branding elements.

Advertising as Communication by Dyer (1982) builds on Williamson's work on fragrance semiotics arguing that since perfume manufacturers are not able to market the chemical properties that make their scents appealing and different, they must rely on complex signs and unique images. Dyer further explains that advertising semiotics does not germinate in a vacuum. The audience is always critical to the production of meaning and that "his or her own knowledge, social position and ideological perspective is brought to bear on the process of the construction of meaning" (p. 116). Furthermore, Dyer maintains that advertisements are not discrete sign-bearing entities; they exist within specific cultural contexts that imbue them with meaning.

Goldman (1992) provides insights that support Williamson's and Dyer's analyses of fragrance advertisements. He argues, "advertisements for perfume rarely attempt to describe either the scent or the material properties of the perfume. Rather, they concentrate on the product's sign value" (p. 23). More specifically, fragrance manufacturers invest in specific signs that convey moods, fantasies, emotions, and lifestyles. Intense industry competition means that advertisers position their fragrances within carefully crafted sign values. Goldman relays his findings back to a broader view of advertising in society, namely that it composes meanings that are contextual and relational and transfers them to products.

More recently, Oswald (2012) infuses marketing theory with semiotics from the position of the practitioner rather than social theorist and focuses primarily on branding. In *Marketing Semiotics* (2012) she argues "brands have value for the firm and for investors to the extent that consumers associate the brand with meaning or 'semiotic' value" (p. 2). In contrast to Williamson, Dyer, and Goldman, Oswald focuses on the business function of marketing to identify and satisfy consumer needs over advertising, which serves as the vehicle for communication. Rather than specific

advertisements, Oswald is more concerned with branding. He states, “a brand is a sign system that engages the consumer in an imaginary/symbolic process of need-fulfillment, differentiates the brand from competitors, and adds measurable value to a product offering” (p. 44).

From this initial exploration, I have noted that the use of semiotics has been a recognized method of inquiry within the field of marketing and advertising, and more relevantly in the analysis of fragrance advertising. Having discussed theoretical frameworks that position this research paper, the next section of this review continues to examine literature across three scholarly disciplines and probes their intersections: (1) marketing and advertising communications, (2) lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) studies, and (3) visual semiotics. Three themes emerged: the first is sexual objectification of the male body; the second is the use of gay iconography; the third is visual polysemy.

Theme 1: Sexual Objectification

Numerous authors explore the eroticization of male bodies from different perspectives. In Rohlinger’s (2002) work on the depiction of men in advertising, she discusses how the sexual objectification of the male body has been occurring for decades. Schroeder and Zwick’s (2004) work on masculinity confirms Rohlinger’s findings. These authors argue that advertisements are aesthetic as well as socio-political artefacts that create, reproduce, and circulate meaning, “Representations do not merely ‘express’ masculinity, [but rather] play a central role in forming conceptions of masculinity and help construct market segments” (p. 22). Harrison (2008) discusses the increasing pressures on men to look attractive. She maintains “the concept of masculinity is undergoing significant social change as many men re-evaluate their appearance, re-position themselves as consumers of fashion and style products, and ultimately re-construct their

idea of what it is to be male” (p. 56). Her visual semiotic analysis of men’s cosmetics, a product category under which fragrances are traditionally placed, provides an informative case study on how visual and textual strategies are used to tap into this market. Patterson and Elliott (2002) contend that the “advertising industry has long made particular use of the symbolic properties of bodies, both male and female, in compelling audiences to consume” (p. 234) but that the heightened interest in men’s sexualized bodies is a result of “increasing participation in the public sphere by women;...the decreasing importance of the productive role to masculine identities and its substitution by body-related consumption, and; the decreasing stigmatization of gay men and the emergence of the stereotype gay macho bodybuilder” (p. 235).

There is a wealth of scholarship that examines the objectification of the male body and specifically its impact on gay men. Soldow (2005) asserts that the physical beauty of male models in advertising is an important element to marketing to gay men. Beyond just a preference for attractive models, Soldow maintains that the ubiquity of such models reflects an obsession with perfection of the male form among Western gay culture. Duncan (2010) supports Soldow’s position and cites the rise of bodybuilding culture and physique magazines in the 1960s that nurtured a gay subculture that fetishized the developed male physique. However, Duncan’s (2010) research points to the negative consequences of a culture that strongly values physicality, such as the development of a “body hierarchy in gay social life with a muscular but lean, hairless, tanned body ideal at the top” (p. 4) and that “gay men are more socially acceptable provided they adhere to a stylized, heavily mediated form of masculinity” (p. 8). Lanzieri and Hildebrandt (2011) argue that gay men’s obsession with beautiful physiques reflect a cult of hegemonic masculinity that reinforces patriarchal norms. Their work supports Duncan and Soldow’s

scholarship and maintains that many gay men exhibit body worship that reflects an obsession with physical manifestations of traditional masculinity.

Other authors discuss the objectification of men's bodies in fragrance advertising, though not specifically concerning gay men. Reichert (2003) traces the evolution of fragrance advertising through the second half of the twentieth century. He argues that the 1990s saw the rise of *beefcake* imagery, or photographs of nearly nude muscular men, in cologne advertisements. The hairless male physique, specifically the abdomen, became a popular image evident in Davidoff's *Cool Water* and *Zino*, Paco Rabanne's *XS*, and Ralph Lauren's *Polo Sport* (Reichert, 2003). Goldman (1992) argues, "Advertisers often invest perfumes with the features essential to being human. Fragrances are said to embody the essence of femininity or masculinity" (p. 31).

Theme 2: Iconography

There is considerable scholarship on gay male visual culture in the Western context, especially within American culture. Certain imagery has special resonance for gay men who inherit a queer cultural legacy that developed in the twentieth century. Beaver (1999) puts it elegantly:

The homosexual is beset by signs, by the urge to interpret whatever transpires, or fails to transpire, between himself and every chance acquaintance. He is a prodigious consumer of signs—of hidden meaning, hidden systems, hidden potentiality. Exclusion from the common code impels the frenzied quest: in the momentary glimpse, the scrambled figure, the sporadic gesture, the chance encounter, the reverse image, the sudden slippage, the lowered guard. In a flash meanings may be disclosed; mysteries wretched [sic] out and betrayed (p. 164).

Beaver argues that semiotics, the creation and consumption of signs, has always formed an important part of defining gay subculture, which has long been marginalized and accessible through subtext and in-group knowledge. This idea will be explored further in the next theme.

Several authors cite specific imagery that has an important place in the canon of gay visual culture and that reverberates in contemporary media. The homoerotic illustrations of Touko Laaksonen, better known under the pseudonym *Tom of Finland*, are prominent. Tom of Finland's work, produced largely in the 1960s and 1970s, often depicts exaggeratedly muscular and endowed men in form-fitting uniforms in sexually charged situations set in hypermasculine locations such as stables, military barracks, and locker rooms (Weinberg, 2004; Steele, 1996). His influence on gay visual culture has been enormous and set an aesthetic precedent in a number of ways. Cooper (1994) writes, "Tom of Finland's highly skilled drawings epitomize work that is about gay fantasy for a gay audience...They are flawless images of male sex objects...The drawings are now regarded as classics of their own kind" (p. 236). His large repertoire of artwork influenced not only other gay visual artists, but also aspects of gay culture more broadly. Lahti (1998) states:

Tom's drawings repeatedly display the images of men in leather and uniforms—bikers, policemen, cowboys, soldiers, sailors, and lumberjacks—all of which have become icons of gay male subcultures. These images have for their part provided gay men with a style to follow, and a model for building their bodies and adapting their body languages and wardrobes (p. 192).

The popularity of Tom of Finland's work, which straddles a fine line between art and erotica, reverberates in the world of fashion, influencing major international labels such as Versace, Vivienne Westwood, and particularly Jean Paul Gaultier (Bordo, 1999; Cole, 2000; McDowell, 2000). Samples of Tom of Finland's work have been included in Appendix A.

The visual depiction of uniforms is also significant within gay visual iconography. Hicks (2003) argues that World War II was instrumental to the development of modern gay culture because it provided "social and sexual contacts never before available to millions of gays" (p. 231) and that this led to images depicting active duty to become iconic to the gay community. Within this

canon of gay iconography, several authors, including Hicks (2003), Steele (1996), and Cole (2000), confirm the sailor's significance. Lee (2009) elaborates on why the mythological sailor is so resonant: he represents working-class brawniness and freedom yet is also sensationally homoerotic, "sexualized by tight-fitting trousers, which emphasize his buttocks and groin" with a reputation for loose sexual morals (p. 322).

Theme 3: Visual Polysemy

The third theme in my literature review is the importance of polysemy in visual signs. An image is *polysemous* when it can be interpreted in more than one way. In practice, almost all images are polysemous to a certain extent. However, understood in a stricter and more academic context for the purposes of this MRP, I have framed polysemy as a culturally significant multiplicity of meanings that alters the interpretation of a sign in a non-trivial way. The use of semiotics in advertising and LGBT literature speaks to the importance of gay-coded signs having an implicit "reading" rather than an explicit one. That is, visual signs with meaning to gay men rarely convey their signification directly. They rely on their audience to possess in-group knowledge to decode meaning and derive value in the message.

Many authors write about the prevalence of visual polysemy in communicating to gay male audiences. A history of stigma, marginalization, and legal discrimination has long necessitated covert in-group communication. Weinberg's (2004) survey of homoerotic American art shows that much art that can be considered "gay-coded" does not have explicit homosexual elements such as sexual contact. Rather, visual clues suggest queerness recognizable to those immersed in queer culture, such as bodily posture, eye gazes, subject positioning in the composition of an artwork, etc. Weinberg argues that subtlety is an important feature in queer work because of

societal prejudice for much of the twentieth century. Lee (2009) finds that “identifying a queer presence in art demands the detection of certain subtleties, which often only appear in an indirect reference or exaggerated detail. To ‘read queerly’ in modern American art thus means learning how to read between the lines” (p. 320).

The advertising literature affirms the significance of visual polysemy for communicating to gay male audiences. Branchik (2007) writes that since gay men do not possess obvious physical traits that distinguish them from straight men, defining a “gay image” is subjective practice. Because of this subjectivity, “gay depictions in advertisements have often been implied through subtle cues of clothing, grooming, pose, and so on that may not carry connotations of homosexuality for most viewers. Rather, the viewer notes implicitly that there is something queer about the image” (p. 147-148). Empirical studies conducted by Bhat, Leigh, and Wardlow (1998) and Puntoni, Vanhamme, and Visscher (2011) find that straight audiences have a more negative attitude toward advertisements openly depicting homosexual relationships than heterosexual relationships. Advertisers, therefore, risk alienating heterosexual audiences by running explicitly gay advertisements in mainstream publications. Furthermore, Oakenfull and Greenlee (2005) find that marketers are strategically better off placing gay-coded advertisements in mainstream magazines, rather than placing explicit gay-targeted advertisements in gay-oriented magazines because only a fraction of gays and lesbians in the U.S. read gay-oriented publications. Researchers found that while “gay and lesbian consumers will have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with implicit gay and lesbian imagery than those with mainstream [heterosexual] imagery” (p.428) there is no statistical difference in these consumers’ attitudes towards advertisements with implicit and explicit imagery. Therefore, marketers have every

incentive to advertise to both heterosexual and homosexual audiences through images with gay subtext provided that these are sufficiently subtle among heterosexual audiences (Puntoni, Vanhamme, & Visscher, 2011).

Opportunities for Research

This review points to gaps in the literature that reflect opportunities for further contribution. Within the advertising literature, scholars frequently debate the value of the “gay and lesbian market” as a cohesive demographic (Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999; Rohlinger, 2002; Oakenfull, 2004; Greenlee, 2004). Empirical studies seek to observe relationships between explicit versus implicit imagery in advertising and audience response (Bird, Caldwell, & DeFanti, 2008; Putoni, Vanhamme, & Visscher, 2011; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). Other scholars critique the commodification of gay male sexuality and argue that it is exploitative (Hicks, 2003; Drummond, 2005; Duncan, 2011; Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). The objective of this body of research, however, has been to establish normative trends that relate to aspects of the gay and lesbian demographic rather than to conduct interpretative close reading of particular advertisements that yield semiotic insights.

The visual semiotic and advertising literatures frequently tackle fragrance advertising as a symbolically rich product category (Goldman, 1992; Williamson, 1978; Dyer, 1990; Danesi, 2008; Reichert, 2003; de Gregorio-Godeo, 2008); however, little research addresses semiotic signification of fragrance advertisements to gay male audiences. Conversely, the LGBT literature documents a rich history of art and iconography that have semiotic importance to gay men (Cole, 2000; Waugh, 1996; Weinberg, 2004; Cooper, 1994; Lee, 2009; Saslow, 1999), but this has not been extended to fragrance advertising.

A number of writers intersect LGBT and advertising studies to examine advertisements that draw upon gay iconography in their visual compositions (Arning, 2009; Bordo, 1999; Branchik, 2007; Soldow, 2005). Branchik (2007), for instance, illustrates numerous examples of advertisers using homoerotic iconography for diverse products, including Ivory soap (groups of undressed men in the showers), Cannon towels (groups of off-duty, seminude, military men), and Diesel jeans (groups of sailors back from duty, two of whom are seen embracing). These accounts tend to lack descriptive detail and in-depth interpretation. However, these examples add to the subtle, yet perceived understanding of gay encoded imagery in an advertising context. A few writers discuss Jean Paul Gaultier's "Le Male" advertisements and remark on its use of gay iconography and visual focus on the male body (Januário, 2012; Klara, 2013; McDowell, 2000). These, however, prove to be cursory and lack argumentative rigour. They also do not draw upon the scholarship across LGBT, advertising, and visual semiotic research that would provide theoretically grounded observations. Finally, they do not provide a structured visual semiotic analysis necessary to produce a compelling case study. The next section of this paper will address research questions that help address some of these research gaps through a visual semiotic framework.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Application of visual semiotic methods will be used to examine and understand advertising strategies for gay male audiences. This paper looks specifically at the branding strategies used in Jean Paul Gaultier's "Le Male" fragrance for men. From the literature, commercial fragrances are known to be rich terrain for semiotic exploration. There are countless men's fragrance brands in

today's saturated market, all suitable for study. Gaultier's "Le Male" was selected because it has been a worldwide hit since its launch in 1995 (Burr, 2008; McDowell, 2000) and has had numerous, distinctive advertisements produced to promote the brand. Its enduring popularity and longevity indicates that the brand is successful in the marketplace for men's fragrances. This success makes it an interesting brand worthy of closer examination. This study addresses three research questions:

- (1) *How do product packaging, print advertising, and video advertising use visual semiotics to appeal to gay male audiences?* With this question, I am interested in examining how the flacon (cologne bottle) and two examples of advertisements work together to craft a visual story about "Le Male." The current semiotic literature analyzes single fragrance advertisements and does not contextualize them within other sets of marketing-communications collateral. In this study, I examine three artefacts that paint a more complete picture of the "Le Male" brand. Furthermore, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the flacon. This study's inclusion of a physical package design will provide a more complete look at the "Le Male" brand's narrative.
- (2) *What image of masculinity is being communicated?* There is limited study in the literature of the ways masculinity is communicated to gay male audiences and how these representations are visually conveyed. The literature that exists on masculinity in men's fragrance advertisements compares different brands from a heterosexual male point of view, whereas this study looks at one specific brand in detail and focuses on the perspective of gay male audiences and their reading strategies of the brand's signs.
- (3) *How is gay male desire being commoditized?* Finally, I explore how marketers tap into the wants and needs of gay male consumers and how the "Le Male" brand attempts to satisfy

these demands. Drawing from the literature that addresses how the gay male market has been created and shaped by advertising, this study examines how gay male desire is commoditized through fragrance branding from a visual semiotic lens.

METHODOLOGY

Visual semiotic theories frame this study methodologically. This paper also draws extensively from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and advertising literature to provide greater context to semiotic interpretations. I examine three “Le Male” artefacts using two strategies of disciplined inquiry: (1) compositional interpretation based on the elements and principles of design, and (2) visual semiotic analysis. The former strategy entails describing artefacts in terms of their visual composition. The latter strategy identifies visual signs and examines their meaning and significance within the context of the fragrance’s brand.

Theoretically, I adopted the analytical framework developed by Gillian Rose (2012) as presented in her text *Visual Methodologies* for the examination of the “Le Male” brand. Rose derives her methods from the work of prominent theorists within the semiotic tradition, particularly Barthes and Pierce, as well the work of Williamson who has done extensive research on the semiotics of advertising. Rose provides a well-articulated guide for careful observation of visual artefacts. As such, Rose’s work has helped to define the parameters of my data collection.

According to Rose (2012), compositional interpretation begins with description. This includes examining content, colour, spatial organization, montage (in the case of video), light, and expressive content, also known as “mood” or “atmosphere.” I record my observations for each of the above categories in a table to systematically describe my artefacts. This stage is critical to an

effective visual analysis. Rose (2012) maintains that a compositional interpretation aims to record accurately what is seen and reflects the earnest attempt to take the image seriously. It is at this stage that “the power of the visual is acknowledged” (p. 51).

After my compositional deconstruction, I proceed to a visual semiotic method. In this phase, I am concerned with identifying signs and decoding the systems of meaning behind each sign. I examine my artefacts through four modes of representation described by Rose (2012) and influenced by Dyer (1982) that focus on human depictions:

- (1) **Bodies:** as a record of the physical representations of subjects, such as age, gender, race, hair, body, size, and appearance.
- (2) **Manner:** as a record of emotional or mental states of subjects that are suggested through mannerisms, expressions, eye contact, and pose.
- (3) **Activity:** as a record of active and passive subjects and power relations communicated through motion, such as through touch, body movement, and positional communication.
- (4) **Props and settings:** as a record of the significance of objects and spatial environments.

Through these representations I tease out recurring visual elements that will address my main research questions. I conduct a semiotic interpretation for each of my artefacts separately and attempt to identify similarities and differences. This comparison is especially important in answering my third research question: How is gay male desire being commoditized? The work with signs and signification is also critical to answering the first and second research questions: How do product packaging, video advertising, and print advertising use visual semiotics to appeal to gay male audiences? And, what image of masculinity is being communicated?

Figure 1: Fragrance flacon



Source: www.jeanpaulgaultier.com

The first artefact that I examine is the fragrance flacon (Figure 1). The artefact selected for examination disregards the container to the left in the visual. The product's design is distinctive and has remained unchanged since its launch in 1995. The majority of visual semiotic work in marketing communications focuses on advertising collateral (Rose, 2012). Figure 1 is included in this study because of the highly symbolic nature of fragrances. The flacon for "Le Male" is an important element of its total brand expression and warrants critical examination. Applying

semiotic methods to the flacon also addresses a gap in the literature, which often neglects looking at a product's physical or package design as a site of semiotic value. Bloch (1995) argues:

The form or exterior appearance of a product is important as a means of communicating information to consumers. Product form creates the initial impression and generates inferences regarding other product attributes in the same manner as does price...form may be required to evoke a particular meaning that supports a brand positioning, company reputation, or anticipated promotional themes (p. 16).

Given the importance of a consumer's experience with physical products that have high symbolic value, this paper's contribution to new knowledge will be the systematic examination of the flacon and how it supports the branding expression of the "Le Male" brand. I have studied the object from three different planes: the front, the back, and the profile to generate a compositional interpretation and a semiotic analysis of representations of the body. Due to my focus on visual significance, I have omitted haptic and olfactory qualities and focused solely on visual analysis for the purpose of this study.

Figure 2: Print advertisement



Source: *Vogue*, 1996.

This study examines one of the brand's first print advertisements (Figure 2) that ran in 1996 in print publications (Advertisement: Le Male, 1996). When selecting a print artefact, I considered the three themes that emerged from the literature review: (1) sexual objectification of the male body, (2) use of gay iconography, and (3) visual polysemy. Figure 2 was selected because it is *prima facie* the highest yielding in representations of masculinity and visual iconography from the "Le Male" brand. More specifically, it depicts two male models interacting with one another where other print advertisements depict only one. First, I generated an account of the advertisement's basic visual components through a compositional interpretation. I then described the visual through four modes of representation: manner, body, activity, and props and setting.

Figure 3: Video advertisement



Commercial can be viewed on YouTube at: <http://youtu.be/OjynuL3h2mw>

The third artefact is a thirty-second video commercial released in the year 2000. Figure 3 depicts a group of men exclusively, whereas other video advertisements launched by Jean Paul Gaultier depict women in addition to men (searchable on YouTube.com). This study is most interested in representations of men and masculinity and, therefore, a video consisting of only male models

presents the “purest” artefact for investigation as well provides the richest dataset for such an analysis. I initially described the basic visual components of the video, starting with its narrative structure and technical presentation, and then described its representations of bodies, manner, activity, and finally props and settings. Rather than do a frame-by-frame analysis, I focused on viewing the video as a cohesive narrative. I watched the video without sound and restricted my observations solely to visual elements. For an in-depth interpretative study, a defined sampling procedure would have been inappropriate and infeasible because of the statistically small number of videos that has been produced to date for the “Le Male” brand. My intent, however, is not to derive a statistically relevant study or define theory. Rather, I seek to construct a relevant case study focusing on the “Le Male” brand and its use of visual semiotics to appeal to gay male audiences today. In this context, Figures 1, 2, and 3 were selected because of their applicability to my overarching research objectives.

Methodological limitations

This study is positioned as an interpretive exploration of visual semiotics salient to gay male audiences. While it aims to develop an illustrative study of the “Le Male” branding strategy, there are a number research questions that are outside the scope of this project. First, it does not seek to determine branding intentions of Jean Paul Gaultier’s marketing representatives nor does it seek to capture empirical observations about how the “Le Male” brand is perceived by gay male audiences. It is further restricted to understanding “reading strategies” by gay male audiences and excludes others, including those of lesbians, bisexual men, heterosexual men and women. While the study aims to construct a descriptive visual reading strategy for gay male audiences grounded by literature, it cannot claim that this strategy is normative without further empirical observation.

Furthermore, Jean Paul Gaultier has released numerous print advertisements to support its branding and promotional strategy. It is beyond of the scope of this project to examine all marketing and advertising collateral developed for the “Le Male” brand. While this would provide the most complete picture of the consistency or variability of the brand’s expression, this study aims to provide a valuable contribution to existing literature on semiotics and advertising by examining three specific media: the fragrance flacon (Figure 1), one print advertisement (Figure 2), and one video advertisement (Figure 3).

FINDINGS

This section presents findings of the compositional and visual semiotic interpretations for three marketing artefacts produced by Jean Paul Gaultier: (1) the flacon, (2) the print advertisement, and (3) the video advertisement. Critical observations are presented for each artefact individually and then discussed holistically to address my research questions. I frame my discussion within the three themes that emerged from the literature review: (1) sexual objectification of the male body, (2) gay iconography, and (3) visual polysemy.

Key Visual Observations

Figure 1: Fragrance flacon

I examined the fragrance flacon as a three-dimensional object using three visual perspectives or planes at eye level: front, back, and side. The fragrance flacon is anthropomorphized; the shape of the bottle resembles a male torso wearing a sailor jersey, indicated by white horizontal stripes printed on the bottle. The stainless steel spray top or atomizer is positioned where the head would appear anatomically. The torso is depicted from the base of the neck to top of the legs. On the back plane, “GAULTIER” is embossed below the neck. The bottle is a blue hue, more

specifically teal or aqua. The horizontal stripes printed on the bottle are off-white as a lighter tint of blue above the bottle's base colour. The top-half of the bottle is visually dominated by the depiction of broad shoulders and developed pectoral, abdominal, and lean back muscles. This visual dominance of the top half of the bottle is anchored by two distinctive protrusions on the bottom half: the genital area and the buttocks. From the side plane, both buttocks and genital area are visible and remarkably large in relation to the physical size of the cologne bottle (see Appendix B and C for detailed observations).

The flacon is sexually evocative. The viewer sees a stylized, semi-nude bust that is muscular, lean, hairless, with pronounced glutes and genital area. From the front, back, and side planes there is a recurring visual emphasis on musculature. The flacon's design recalls the depictions of the men in Tom of Finland's illustrated gay erotica, whose physiques and endowments were highly exaggerated and idealized (Appendix A). The flacon, like the men in Tom of Finland's work, reflects a fetish for the male body as a sexual object. The headless, limbless body presented by the flacon forces the audience to engage with an incomplete, and highly eroticized, silhouette of the male body. This fetish is understood in the original sense as a totem that is believed to possess power and is irrationally worshipped (Steele, 1996). Within the context of being a consumer object, the cologne bottle is the physical embodiment of masculinity. The product's power—the scent it carries—is ready to be released through its fountainhead. The suggestive appearance of the flacon is heightened by nautical motifs that, as discussed in the literature review, carry strong sexual connotations within gay culture.

Figure 2: Print advertisement

The print advertisement illustrates a perspective from the outside of a naval vessel where the viewer looks through a porthole with a voyeuristic gaze to find two sailors arm wrestling (Appendix D). One has an arm tattoo of a tiger. The other has an arm tattoo of the word “LOVE” set within a heart. The sailors appear to be in their early to mid-twenties. They are both white with Mediterranean features, such as olive skin, dark hair, and dark eyes. Both sailors possess blemish-free skin, healthy-looking, muscular bodies, defined facial bone structure, and an overall attractive appearance. The subjects, in fact the same model, are positioned as near symmetrical reflections down a central axis in the composition. They could be intended to resemble twins or a reflection of the same man. This mirrored representation might signify narcissism and self-involvement. Their flexed muscles are accentuated by shadows and light. Their eyes are fixed on one another. The sailor on the left is holding a polished tin can that has the words “Jean Paul Gaultier” imprinted on it. The other sailor has a bottle of “Le Male” beside him, placed at a $\frac{3}{4}$ perspective from the viewer with shadows accenting the muscles and genital area. The dominant colour scheme in the image is blue (that is, teal or aqua). Colours in the image are highly saturated. This is most apparent in the sailors, whose skin tones appear vivid and tanned.

The narrative structure of the advertisement is polysemous. It can be interpreted as aggressively masculine because of the depiction of arm wrestling, a crude contest of strength. Their muscles are flexed and the visual gaze between both men is intense. However, this advertisement can also be interpreted as possessing a certain flamboyant aestheticism and sexually subversive subtext that makes it camp (Sontag, 1964). That is, masculinity is over-exaggerated with Grecian-like

models that are muscular and virile-looking yet adorned with clichéd tattoos, tilted sailor hats, ear piercings, and tight-fitting matelot shirts that expose the stomach and shoulders. In this second reading, the exaggeration of masculinity becomes a performance. Each model stares intensely at the other, eyes locked; the eye contact can be perceived to be aggressive and confrontational or coy and romantically intense. Alternatively, the arm wrestling can appear to be a romantic embrace mixed with passion and consensual attraction. In both representations of manner and activity, one can compare this print advertisement to Tom of Finland's artwork. In addition to iconographic representations of muscular tattooed sailors, instances of Tom of Finland's illustrations in Appendix A visually represent exaggerated performances of aggression and sexual play. The print advertisement's narrative structure, however interpreted, is visually evocative and occurs between two men in the homosocial realm of sailors and the connotations associated with this iconography.

The nautical theme is also prominent. The setting, models, clothing, and colour scheme all evoke stereotypical sailor imagery (Appendix E). There is a long tradition of depicting sailors engaged with other sailors in sexually ambiguous compositions, straddling heterosexual and homosexual interpretations. As such, an alternative "gay" reading can be denoted by the imagery used for this print advertisement. The sailors are presented as virile, powerful, and masculine; yet their earrings, skin-tight outfits, tilted caps, and pouting lips also suggest an affected, effeminate manner. The sailors' bodies and activities allow for a straight or gay reading, the latter informed by exposure to 20th century gay visual iconography.

Figure 3: Video advertisement

Over the course of thirty seconds, the audience is exposed to five young sailors in a locker room changing from nautical uniforms into business suits. The men exchange glances, touches, and laughter while spraying themselves with a shared bottle of Jean Paul Gaultier's "Le Male." In the final seconds of the advertisement, the men are dressed and lean against a row of sinks posing for the viewer in relaxed, confident postures. The models appear to be in their early to mid-twenties. They are all white; some have Mediterranean features that recall the model in the print advertisement, while others have blond hair and blue eyes. Each model is lean, muscular, and slim built with defined abdominal muscles and toned pectorals (Appendix F). The subjects' body depictions and movements are very sensual. Within the first second of the video, the audience sees a model remove his trousers behind a frosted glass pane, revealing his tight white briefs in one smooth motion.

A voyeuristic lens is established (see Appendix F "Shots"; Appendix G "Pose" and "Body movement"). The camera moves rightward to show a second model removing his sailor cap in one hand and lifting up his striped shirt with the other. A third model lifts his shirt with both hands, revealing his muscular torso. A fourth model, who is already shirtless, approaches a hand dryer and turns the machine on and enjoys the air blowing across his face. The camera cuts to show a close up of a hand picking up the fragrance bottle of "Le Male" and passing it around in the foreground, with exposed torsos in the background. A blond model walks over to a locker to grab his suit and looks back over his shoulder, stealing a glance at someone the audience does not see. The model who used the hand dryer now looks at himself in the mirror and applies "Le Male" before patting his hand behind the neck of the model beside him, handing off the cologne

bottle with his other hand. The model with short hair and olive skin smiles and receives the bottle from him in a sort of communication or ritual. The camera zooms in on the cologne bottle as it passes between hands. One man gently pats his hand on another man's lower back. The models are all in very close physical proximity. They are presented as equals engaging in fraternal friendliness. This feeling of fraternity is reinforced by their uniforms, age, and, by inference, naval rank. They share the fragrance, suggesting that the men are on intimate terms.

The camera films the models closely, depicting a small, private space and intimacy between the characters on screen and the viewer. The video captures specific moments rather than multiple actions occurring concurrently. The angle is shot low so that the viewer looks up at the models symbolizing a sense of reverence or glorification for these "figures of perfection." The lighting is soft and emanates from multiple directions, casting a haze that is heightened by the camera's soft focus. Shadows accentuate the models' bodies. The video contains a blue-teal tint consistent with the brand and likely the result of post-production editing. For the first half of the video, the five models do not exhibit much facial expression. Beginning in the second half, once they apply the "Le Male" fragrance, the models become gregarious and charming.

Similar to the print advertisement, the video is polysemous. The close shots of muscular, lean torsos demand the attention of the audience. The soft lighting, shadows, quick camera movements, and close-up shots suggest that the viewer is observing something usually hidden from public view, perhaps a behind-the-scenes, intimate reveal into the lives of "sailors." One interpretation of the video suggests that the men are friends, teammates, or otherwise close companions enjoying each other's company in a highly masculine environment. Another interpretation suggests that the video depicts strong homoerotic undertones. This is due to the

all-male social group, exclusively male physical environment, fraternity-like bonding, and intimate (but not overtly sexual) touching particularly of the lower back. Furthermore, a gay reading of this video advertisement is enriched by the physical setting: the locker room can be seen as a mundane environment for heterosexual men, but it can be a highly eroticized and fantasized location for gay men because of its homosocial and hypermasculine connotation.

Analysis

Research Question 1: How do product packaging, print advertising, and video advertising use visual semiotics to appeal to gay male audiences?

The three selected artefacts work together to present a coherent brand for “Le Male” in ways that reflect the themes that emerged in the literature review: (1) the sexual objectification of the male body; (2) the use of gay iconography in visual compositions; and (3) polysemy in images that enable gay-coded readings. Across the three artefacts, these three themes become promotional strategies and are further discussed in the below sections.

1. SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION. The fragrance’s name, “Le Male,” French for “the male” is the first crucial indicator of what this brand represents. Goldman (1992) writes:

The advertising form encourages fetishized meanings. This is obvious in the link between fragrance names and positioning concepts. Names such as Scoundrel, Macho, Trouble or Beautiful invest the fragrance with the human qualities evoked by their positioning concept, simultaneously naming both the photographic imagery and the product (p. 51).

We can infer that “Le Male” positions its concept of the fragrance around *maleness* or masculinity. While fragrance manufacturers often brand their colognes to emphasize some quality associated with masculinity, such as athleticism (*Eau de Lacoste*), gentlemanliness (*Dior Homme*), or strength and vitality (*Acqua di Gio* by Armani), “Le Male” by Jean Paul Gaultier

emphasizes the erotic male body as the main selling feature. The sexual objectification of the body is seen literally in the fragrance flacon, shaped to resemble a man's torso. By anthropomorphizing the bottle, the marketers at Jean Paul Gaultier create a fetish object (Appendix C). The flacon fetishizes the male physique through the depiction of idealized muscles, broad shoulders, narrow waistline, rotund buttocks, and protruding genital area. These features are exaggerated and, therefore, have high visual impact. To reinforce the importance of this fetish object, the flacon is visually prominent in both the print and video advertisements.

In the print advertisement, men are presented as pin-up models (or "beefcake"), beautiful men who ornament their bodies with tattoos and earrings to draw attention to them as sex objects. In the video advertisement, the men remove their clothes seductively for the viewer, presenting their bodies as objects of lust. This is supported through the ritualistically representative flacon, a fetish object that is depicted to have sexual power. Kendrick (1994) writes: "Gay men are familiar with the condition of simultaneously desiring and desiring to become a sex object; for gay men, the subject and the object of desire can easily be the same" (p. 2). Jean Paul Gaultier's strategy is, thus, to exploit this condition and place a product in the fragrance market that takes the literal step of objectifying the potent male body and transform it into a product popular with gay or straight men across the globe.

2. GAY ICONOGRAPHY. The use of distinct sailor imagery in the "Le Male" branding across all three artefacts serves a strategic purpose. As one cannot visually convey the olfactory experiences of the fragrance directly through a visual medium, every sign of the fragrance's brand becomes crucial to understanding how marketers want the fragrance to be perceived. To convey the brand visually, Jean Paul Gaultier decided on a particular representation of maleness by invoking the

image of the sailor, a trope for brazen masculinity and sexuality. As previously discussed in my literature review, the image of the sailor is a fixture in gay visual culture. All three examined artefacts use tight-fitting, midriff-exposing, striped sailor shirts. The sexuality of the sailor, particularly in connection with the homosocial world in which he inhabits, is given increased salience because of the highly sexualized representation. The depictions of these sailors in the “Le Male” brand work together with representations of sexually attractive young men to evoke idolized body ideals of gay men (Duncan, 2010).

3. GAY-CODED POLYSEMY. None of the artefacts explicitly depict homosexuality. We do not observe two men kissing or engaging in any overt sexual acts. However, by objectifying and idolizing the male form along with consistently employing gay visual iconography, and excluding the depiction of women, the brand is an example of “gay window advertising” or “dual marketing,” which describes a promotional strategy designed to appeal to both homosexual and heterosexual audiences. This is achieved through constructing visual codes that could be perceived as homoerotic or reflecting homosexual subjects or culture through subtext and therefore intentionally offers multiple different possible readings. The presence of implicit readings, requiring effort on the part of the subculture to derive alternative meanings distinct from the mainstream, is itself a desirable quality of visual signs: “gay codings are appealing only insofar as they are veiled” (Sender, 1999, p. 186). The heterosexual audience, disengaged from gay culture, would not detect this subtext and, therefore, would not be aware that the advertisement is being targeted to gay as well as straight men. Conversely, gay men would detect the subtext and draw meaning from the brand as making an attempt to appeal to them.

The three artefacts are coded with signs that resonate with gay men in ways that would not resonate with straight men. First, while sailor connotations are sexualized and overtly masculine, the sailor is a potent sign within gay iconography, similar to the drag queen or the male flight attendant. Gay men know that not all sailors are gay and not all gay men are sailors. However, their sexually freewheeling connotation combined with the homosocial environment of the navy lends the image of the sailor to subversive innuendo, particularly in visual media. In the flacon, we have a bottle that celebrates the potent male body. A straight man might interpret it as an object of admiration and respect for masculinity, whereas a gay man might also see a campy, exaggerated male fetish object resembling phallic symbolism.

In addition to this visual reference, the body language of the two subjects in the print advertisement is also ambiguous and open to interpretation. On the one hand, the men appear to be arm wrestling and staring intensely at one another as a confrontational display of machismo. Through a gay lens they also appear to be holding hands in a strong yet sensual embrace. Their locked eyes indicate a sign of affection, rather than aggression. Stylistically, gay men might also recall Tom of Finland illustrated erotica based on the butch appearance of these men and their tilted sailor caps and midriff-exposing shirts.

In the video advertisement, the men exchange furtive glances, a gesture loaded with significance in the gay community for identifying and soliciting other men (Nicholas, 2004). They exchange affectionate touches that, on the one hand, appear friendly and innocent, but through a gay lens, might be seen as flirtatious. The locker room setting, as noted earlier, is probably unremarkable to straight male audiences, but a gay male viewer may see references to the backdrops of numerous erotic imagery made for gay men who find such a homosocial and athletic

environment tantalizing. The conviviality enjoyed in the company of other men further recalls Tom of Finland's compositions. In Appendix A, we see instances of off-duty sailors engaged in homoerotic play, presented with the same "to-be-looked-at" quality—that is, inviting the sexual gaze and enjoyment of the audience, which is evident in the video advertisement. Furthermore, the absence of women in both the video and print advertisements further opens gay-coded reading strategies. Sender (1999) writes "in many advertising texts, the heterosexuality of the scenario is suggested by representing physical intimacy between male and female models" (p. 182). The absence of women in the "Le Male" artefacts serves to heighten the possibility of a gay-coded reading of the marketing material.

Research Question 2: What image of masculinity is being communicated?

"Le Male" presents men as objects of worship with ambiguous sexual orientation. While a heterosexual male audience may view the depictions of men within this brand to represent idealized images of masculinity and objects of admiration, homosexual male audiences would additionally see these depictions as objects of sexual desire. The images of masculinity presented by the flacon, print advertisement, and video advertisement reflect stereotypical ideals of what a man should be: physically strong, imposing, and sexually potent (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). The images are polysemous in that the subjects' sexual orientations are not explicit, and the audience is able to project preferred sexualities on to the male subjects. The fluidity of male sexuality is notable. Bordo (1999) notes that the strategy of depicting "a culture of exclusively male bodies, young, gorgeous, and well-hung" (p. 183) can be construed as purely heterosexual, yet through that very depiction also creates highly "gay" image by way of camp irony. She cites Calvin Klein and Abercrombie & Fitch as examples of companies who have pursued a dual

marketing approach through this strategy. Rohlinger (2002) describes the increasingly prevalent sexual objectification of men in mainstream media and writes that the male body is becoming “a blank canvas on which the viewer can project meaning” (p. 71). Jean Paul Gaultier’s branding of “Le Male” as the sexually ambiguous sailor is a clear manifestation of this trend.

The use of sailor imagery is rich with semiotic meaning for what “Le Male” intends to communicate about masculinity. Across all three artefacts, the sailor uniform is a powerfully ambiguous sign. Danesi (2008) writes that military dress “connotes patriotism and communal values; but outside the military it can convey a countercultural statement, a parody of nationalistic tendencies” (p. 168). As a sign, the sailor uniform has strong heterosexual, conservative undertones. Danesi’s latter point is expanded upon by Steele (1996) who discusses the meaning behind clothing fetishes. She argues that military uniforms also symbolize male potency and evoke specific sexual fantasies:

The erotic connotations of the military uniforms derive, in part, from the sexual excitement that many people associate with violence and with the relationship between dominance and submission. Military uniforms also enhance the perceived sexual attractiveness of the wearer through the use of phallic signifiers, such as boots and weapons, and through the design of the clothing, which frequently emphasizes the physical body to a degree uncommon in ordinary menswear (p. 180).

The sailor’s uniform is used to encode the brand with male potency. This potency is neither heterosexual nor homosexuality. Lee (2009) notes that sailors, in the popular imagination, cross sexual boundaries yet remain decidedly masculine. The sailor is “a brawny working-class hero” who appeals to the straight male in a socially acceptable form of male-on-male attention; however, “the sailor is also a homoerotic figure, sexualized by tight-fitting trousers, which emphasize his buttocks and groin” and whose life of freedom at sea invites a metaphor for the freedom from conservative social mores on sexuality that gay men wish they could enjoy on land

(p. 322). This supports the case that “Le Male” presents men as objects of worship and masculinity with ambiguous sexual orientation.

Research Question 3: How is gay male desire being commoditized?

The branding of the “Le Male” focuses on heightening the desirability of men as sexual objects. This commoditized desire is generated through the depiction of sexually attractive bodies that are also sexually available. The sexual ambiguity and youthful athletic physique of the models reinforce standards of beauty that are highly coveted, especially within a gay male culture (Duncan, 2010). This objectification also has unique significance to gay men. “Le Male” taps into the sexual desires and aesthetic sensibilities of gay male audiences to make a multidimensional appeal. While sex is the most obvious persuasive appeal, the use of camp and artistic styles that pay homage to vintage gay artwork add complexity to the fragrance’s branding strategy. This cooptation of gay iconography by Jean Paul Gaultier reflects how “Le Male” makes gay male desire a strategic target for the promotional communication of the brand. The strategy, as we now see more clearly, focuses on the physicality of masculinity rather than emotional or intellectual dimensions. Physical appearance is more important to gay men than to straight men. Reilly and colleagues (2008) argue that this is because of

...a cultural emphasis on physical beauty and attraction because gay men themselves may assume that to attract a partner, they must be attractive, and attractiveness is related to the ideal body. The ideal body for many gay men is lean and muscular (p. 315).

When presented with images of ideal male bodies, such as those depicted in the “Le Male” artefacts, gay men aspire to look like these models possessing desirable physical traits and also desire the models sexually. This duality is significant. Bloch (1995) finds that “When given the choice between two products, equal in price and function, target consumers buy the one they

consider to be more attractive...The perception and usage of beautifully designed products may provide sensory pleasure and stimulation” (p. 16).

“Le Male” integrates the physical male ideal into its product package, print advertisement, and video advertisement. The print and video advertisements present sexually attractive men with ambiguous sexual orientations and pair this imagery with visual representations of the “Le Male” flacon. This visual pairing is semiotically significant. The viewer is meant to view the print and video advertisements, see the carefully constructed signs of men that reflect the company’s brand positioning, and then mentally connect the signs with the connotations behind the design of the flacon, a product that the consumer interacts with both visually and through haptic response. When consumers purchase the fragrance, they not only buy into the imagery, but also acquire a physical, three-dimensional manifestation of male sexuality, which is the cologne bottle shaped like a male torso and dressed as a sailor.

Furthermore, Jean Paul Gaultier employs visual gay iconography, discussed in both the literature review and in this semiotic interpretation, to appeal to gay male audiences (McDowell, 2000). The art direction of “Le Male” bears some aesthetic references to Tom of Finland’s illustrated erotica. Because the artist’s influence has largely been restricted to the aesthetic sensibilities of gay men, the campy eroticism would not be lost on this audience, heightening the importance of this brand’s visual polysemy to its overall effects. Homage to Tom of Finland’s distinctive visual style can be observed in the following ways: (1) the flacon’s exaggeratedly muscular shape and form-fitting, undersized sailor jersey; (2) the print advertisement’s emphasis on grainy lighting and shadows that depict men engaging in boisterous play; (3) the video advertisement’s depiction of a group of young men in sexually-charged situations in a change room. Jean Paul Gaultier’s

strategy for tapping into gay male desire is to draw allusions to established works of artwork with cultural significance to this specific target audience.

DISCUSSION

The Use of Visual Semiotics

The findings show a consistent use of visual semiotics identified in the LGBT literature to appeal to gay male audiences. The three themes discussed throughout this study—sexual objectification, iconography, and gay-coded polysemy—are core strategies that Jean Paul Gaultier uses to visually brand the “Le Male” fragrance. The brand is strengthened by its cohesive visual themes across the print and video advertisements. “Le Male” notably extends the visual connotations into the physical product and places that product within the still and moving images. The brand remains one of the world’s best selling fragrances almost twenty years after its release in 1995. This is an impressive feat in a saturated market where hundreds of fragrances compete for consumer attention.

Jean Paul Gaultier’s “Le Male” is not the first product to target gay male audiences. The brand takes its place in a long history of gay-targeted promotions (Branchik, 2007). Calvin Klein, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Diesel are all fashion houses with fragrances that have reached out to gay male audiences (Arning, 2009; Branchik, 2007). Indeed, the fashion industry leads in the depiction of gay male images and images with a potential gay reading (Branchik, 2007). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to compare “Le Male” to other instances of gay-coded branding, it is worth noting that this fragrance’s enduring popularity reflects an effective branding strategy that delivers images possessing high semiotic significance to gay men while

remaining a mainstream fragrance. This is noteworthy especially when we consider research that demonstrates that straight audiences have a more negative attitude to images where they are able to detect homosexual content (Bhat, Lee, & Wardlow, 1998; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Puntoni, Vanhamme, & Visscher, 2011).

Given the visual analysis, I suggest that Jean Paul Gaultier retain the marketing formula that made “Le Male” successful—selling a fantasy that balances admiration and lust for masculinity—to move forward with their brand. If future marketing material for “Le Male” loses its sexually charged content and homosexual undertones, it risks losing its appeal to gay male audiences who derive meaning from such depictions. However, if it ventures into more explicit depictions of homosexual imagery, the brand may lose its mainstream appeal to straight men, who may perceive “Le Male” to be a “gay” fragrance and therefore shy away from purchase. The fine line between explicit and implicit gay semiotics is a balancing act, but the stakes are high for this commercially successful fragrance.

The Communication of Masculinity through Visuals

For the gay male audience, the brand narrative of “Le Male” is a charged sexual fantasy. A number of fetishes are depicted through a strategy that Lee (2009) identifies as a play between subtle references to queer culture and exaggerated detail that invokes camp. The emphasis on muscularity in the three artefacts reflects an obsession with the idealized male body. While many advertisements depict attractive men alongside women to confirm the heterosexuality of a scenario (Sender, 1999; Reichert, 2003), there is a distinct lack of women’s presence in the “Le Male” artefacts. The absence of women and the display of male physicality recalls beefcake magazines from the 1950s and 1960s that served as proto-pornography for gay men before

obscenity laws were relaxed in many Western countries (Waugh, 1996). The literature confirms that a fetish for athleticism is prominent in gay culture (Drummond, 2005; Duncan, 2010).

A fetish for sailors and their environs is evident in all three artefacts. In the print advertisement, two subjects appear to be out at sea in the lower cabins of their ship. In the video advertisement, a group of sailors are interacting in a change room. The sailor, as discussed earlier in this paper, represents sexual freedom, virility, strength, and machismo. Their ambiguous physical contact heightens the fantasy, providing more visual content to decode and derive subtext. Moreover, their lifestyle reflects all-male social groups and fraternity bonding, a delicate line that straight men maintain as “buddy culture,” but this line is blurred for gay men (Sender, 1999). The absence of women in these artefacts encourages gay male audiences to indulge in this sexual fantasy. The fetish is conveyed through clothing, which Steele (1996) has argued can have powerful erotic connotations in the context of hidden sexual tastes. The subtle details of ambiguous physical intimacy and the exaggerated details of sailor stereotypes reflect Lee’s (2009) work on the significance of sailor iconography to gay men. “Le Male” taps into this fetish for sailors and constructs homoerotic visual material to heighten its salience to gay male audiences.

Rather than representing typical depictions of beautiful men, “Le Male” demonstrates cleverness in its delivery of gay sexual fantasies that assume a life of campy expressions of gay culture.

Drawing on Arning’s work (2009) I contend that the polysemous depictions of gay male fantasies seen in “Le Male” reflect subtle expressions of deviance that mocks societal norms of masculinity and sexuality. The brand is, therefore, subversive; but it functions within a commercial context of selling cologne to the masses. Moving forward, Jean Paul Gaultier should retain its evocative iconography, not only for visual continuity of its brand, but also for the layers

of semiotic meaning this iconography evokes. This serves to differentiate the “Le Male” from other fragrances in a competitive market.

The Commodification of Gay Male Desire

“Le Male” draws its semiotic significance for gay male audiences by tapping into a rich visual subculture and crafting erotic fantasies. In so doing, the brand co-opts that visual culture and reinforces stereotypes. One can argue that Jean Paul Gaultier, being a gay male (McDowell, 2000), cannot assimilate a culture in which he belongs. However, I contend that “Le Male” does exploit gay male desire in order to sell a fantasy, as fragrance producers do when they sell scent in a bottle wrapped in sign symbols (Reichert, 2003). The brand would not be the first to do so.

The relationship between business and aesthetics are inseparable in contemporary society (Danesi, 2008). Bronski (1984) argues that “gay identity” developed in the 20th century as a product of the relationship between erotic desire and capitalism. Schroeder and Zwick (2004) note “Most ad campaigns invoke gender identity, drawing their imagery primarily from the stereotyped iconography of masculinity and femininity” (p. 22). This cultural co-optation is not unique to gay male audiences, nor is it unique in the larger context of marketing semiotics.

The issue is that “Le Male” is engaging in a larger discourse that may have negative consequences for consumers: “Representations do not merely ‘express’ masculinity, rather, they play a central role in forming conceptions of masculinity and help construct market segments” (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004, p. 22). This brand presents a very specific representation of men: young, beautiful, muscular, and eroticized. This narrow and often unrealistic archetype for the ideal (gay) man is reinforced in this subculture that already highly values these qualities.

Drummond (2005) writes that gay men are constantly subject to the gaze of others, living up the

standards of beauty, manner, and action that allow them to blend into heterosexual culture, as well as fit cultural conventions of gay culture. He goes on to argue:

Several studies have shown gay men reporting more body dissatisfaction than heterosexual men... Gay male subculture imposes strong pressures on gay men to be physically attractive and that gay men, like women, experience extreme pressure to be eternally slim and youthful looking and therefore are also likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies (p. 271).

This brand, therefore, commoditizes gay male desire by reinforcing body image ideals within carefully crafted homoerotic fantasies. “Le Male” presents gay male audiences with visual material that resonates with their queer aesthetics. It does so within a minimal set of superficial values reflected in the fleetingly beautiful body. In line with Drummond’s research on gay men’s body image dissatisfaction, the “Le Male” advertisements have the consequence of contributing to this problem through its depictions of sexual fantasies and idealized representations of men to sell a product that can promise nothing more than make its wearer smell pleasant for a short period. While this strategy might be profitable, it might also be exploitative. One ethical implication of this strategy is that it promotes a misguided obsession with the “ideal” body image that most individuals do not attain, and nurtures a culture of judgment or prejudice derived from these ideals. Due to the limited scope of this paper, ethical issues in promotional communication to gay male audiences remains unresolved.

Limitations and Future Study

This research project, as with most semiotic exercises, is not concerned with deriving statistically significant findings that can be generalized into a theory or model. As such, the findings are not representative of all brands that are targeted to gay men or can be applied to all brands that wish to target gay men. Rather, through the semiotic approach, I designed a rich case study that

examines a selection of cultural significant artefacts, the merit of which “...stands or falls on its analytical integrity and interest rather than on its applicability to a wide range of material” (Rose, 2012, p. 110). Furthermore, this study aims to stimulate broader discussion about the applicability of semiotic inquiry in advertising and professional communication to reach niche market segments. There is an opportunity to expand on this work within the following areas:

- (1) EMPIRICAL CONFIRMATION: Quantitative research can be undertaken to determine whether the semiotic interpretations articulated in this study represent normative interpretations. While the most appropriate sample population to observe would be gay men, in order to confirm or disconfirm the reading strategies presented, it would also be valuable to determine the reading strategies adopted by straight men. By expanding the scope of observation, scholars can determine the prevalence of straight readings in straight audiences as well as gay readings in straight audiences. This would allow professional communicators, especially marketers and advertisers, to understand and predict the “success” rate of their branding material based on the likelihood that a particular audience would interpret visual images as intended.
- (2) GAZE THEORY: Future qualitative work could expand on feminist theories that help describe the process of visual interpretation and perspective. Particularly, Mulvey’s gaze theory (1975) can be a useful analytical tool to better understand the power of visual material to create distinct viewing positions for audiences. Drukman (1995) and Wood (2004) have written on the “gay male gaze” to describe a visual or cinematic experience created for the viewing pleasure of gay men. This scholarship could add theoretical richness for further work on “Le Male.” It might explore the ways in which the flacon, print and video advertisements position gay men as spectators differently (or similarly) to straight men

and the extent to which the brand uses voyeurism and scopophilia, deriving pleasure from intimate behaviour and through gazing, to drive gay male appeal as promotional communication strategies.

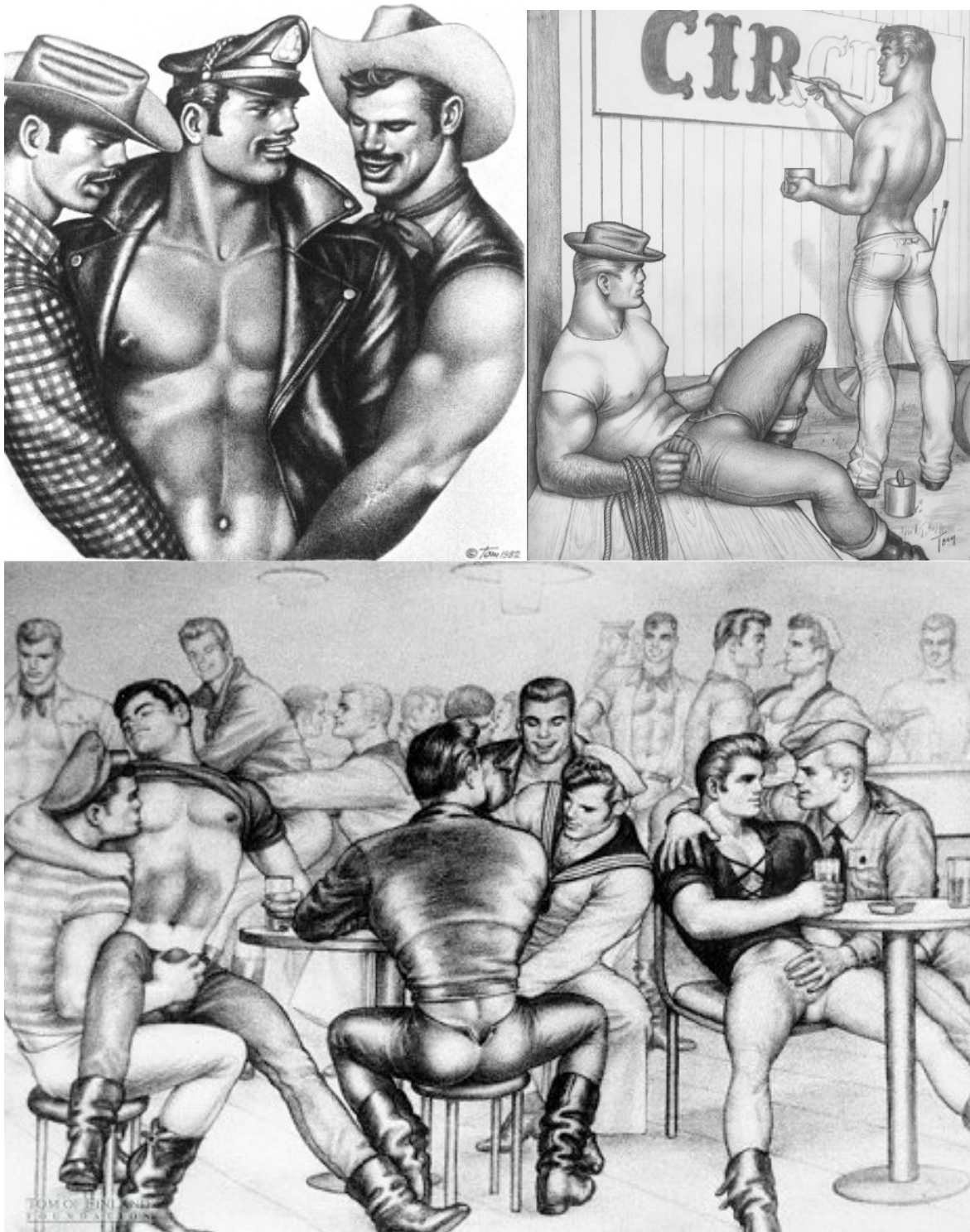
- (3) **INTERCULTURAL THEORY:** The LGBT literature that provides theoretical grounding to this paper is positioned primarily within the Western context. The queer visual culture that underpins much of the iconography and symbolism that makes “Le Male” a gay-coded brand may not have the same resonance with non-Western gay audiences because of their distance from this cultural inheritance. As Jean Paul Gaultier’s “Le Male” brand is sold worldwide, it would be valuable to know whether gay male audiences from non-Western markets would exhibit the same reading strategies. The result of such a study would help researchers determine whether there are globally recognized symbols that resonate with gay male audiences and whether this points to the existence of a universal queer semiotics.
- (4) **MULTI-SENSORY BRANDING:** This study focuses exclusively on the visual semiotics of branding strategies. Fragrances, themselves, would potentially be a rich site for research into multi-sensory branding. Further work could examine how “Le Male” engages consumers through other senses: smell, touch, and sound. Some questions that arise in this direction would be: (1) How does the specific scent resonate with gay men vs. straight men and does attitude toward this fragrance change depending on exposure to the marketing material? (2) How do the haptic qualities of the fragrance bottle effect consumer attitude of the product? (3) How does sound in video advertisements affect consumer’s attitude toward the “Le Male” brand? (4) What semiotic significance can be conveyed through smell, touch, and sound that would have resonance for gay male consumers?

CONCLUSION

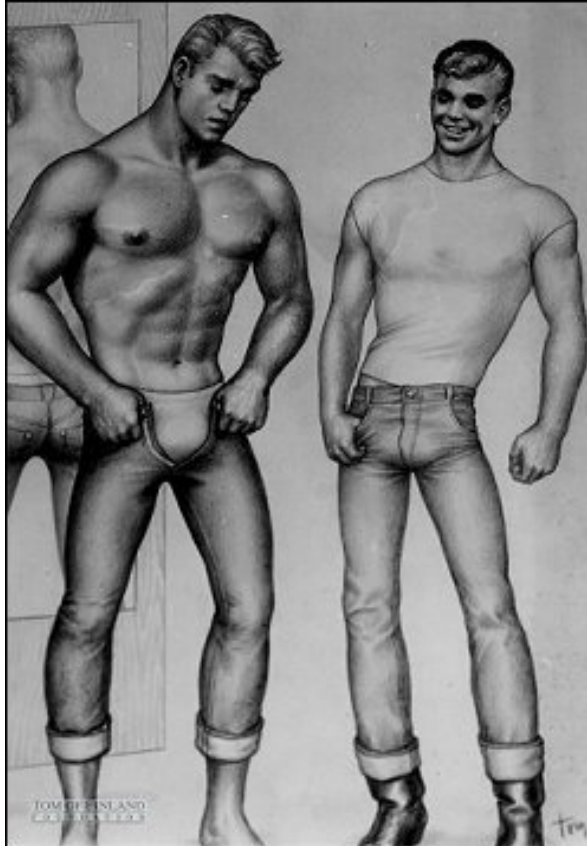
This MRP explores the visual semiotic codes of three branding artefacts from Jean Paul Gaultier's men's fragrance, "Le Male." The aim of this project was to meet at the crossroads of three scholarly disciplines: visual semiotics, LGBT studies, and promotional communication by adopting an interpretative, critical perspective grounded in visual semiotic theories. The study addresses the gap in the literature about how visual semiotic principles can be applied to branding strategies for gay male audiences and sought answers to the following questions: How do product packaging, print advertising, and video advertising use visual semiotics to appeal to gay male audiences? What image of masculinity is being communicated? And how is gay male desire being commoditized?

Research findings demonstrated that "Le Male" uses three strategies to craft semiotically rich marketing material targeting gay male audiences: sexual objectification of the idealized male body; gay visual iconography that developed in 20th century Western art; and gay-coded polysemous images. The communicated image of masculinity reflects idealized and fetishized physical ideals, represented by the young, muscular, attractive sailor interacting with his fellow seamen in sexually ambiguous situations. By presenting homoerotic fantasies and reinforcing body image ideals that might have adverse consequences for this target audience, Jean Paul Gaultier commoditizes gay male desire through the "Le Male" brand. In a broader scope, this study is relevant to how professional communicators can weave a coherent, visual story through a deeper understanding of rhetorical signs and symbols that resonate with specific subcultures.

APPENDIX A: TOM OF FINLAND IMAGERY



Source: <http://tomoffinlandfoundation.org>



APPENDIX B: COMPOSITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF FIGURE 1

Component	Observation
Content / Narrative structure	The bottle resembles a male torso wearing a sailor jersey, a tight-fitting shirt with horizontal stripes. The stainless steel spray top or atomizer is positioned where the head would appear anatomically. The anthropomorphized bottle that contains the liquid extends from the base of the neck to top of the legs. On the back plane, the word “GAULTIER” is embossed on the top.
Colour	<p>Hue. The bottle is primarily blue, more specifically colour resembling teal, aqua or turquoise. The horizontal stripe embellishment is off-white, appearing as a tint of the underlying colour.</p> <p>Saturation. There is low saturation in both the stripes and the base.</p> <p>Value. There is low value in both the base and the stripe embellishments.</p>
Spatial Organization	<p>The flacon is symmetrical from the front and back planes, the line of symmetry being vertical. The flacon is visually top-heavy. The upper torso is the largest section and is emphasized by sculpted pectoral and abdominal muscles, as well as prominent horizontal stripes. This top-heavy dominance, however, is anchored visually by two protrusions: in the front plane, this is the large presentation of the genital bulge, suggesting a generous endowment; in the back plane, this is the buttocks, also large in its shape; on the side plane, both buttocks and genital area are visible.</p> <p>From the side plane, we also see more emphasis on musculature, as pectoral and abdominal muscles are still visible and defined. The back muscles are also defined, and with the large buttocks, result in an S-shaped posterior.</p>
Light	Appearance of light depends on the lighting conditions of the space in which it is observed. However, due to the flacon’s shape, shadows are typically cast that accentuate the muscles, buttocks, and genital areas.
Expressive content (i.e. mood, atmosphere)	The flacon is evocative, sensual, and vaguely sexual. The idealized masculine form is presented: muscular, lean, with developed gluteus and very well endowed genitals. While exaggerated, the male form is still naturally proportioned, rather than cartoonish.

APPENDIX C: MODES OF REPRESENTATION IN FIGURE 1

Representation of bodies	
Age	Undeterminable – however, the slim, muscular physique can be attributable to someone between the age of 18 to 35 years of age.
Gender	Male
Race	Undeterminable
Hair	Smooth, no hair
Body	Muscular and lean
Size	The male body takes the entire form, the entire flaçon
Appearance	The flaçon is anthropomorphized to an ideal male form: virile, strong, and muscular, with exaggerated genital silhouettes and buttocks. The flaçon is the physical embodiment of the phallus; it is a fetish item; a totem
Representation of manner	
Expression	n/a
Eye contact	n/a
Pose	Upright posture
Representation of activity	
Touch	n/a
Body movement	n/a
Positional communication	n/a
Props and settings	
	n/a

APPENDIX D: COMPOSITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF FIGURE 2

Component	Observation
Content / Narrative structure	<p>The foreground appears to be the exterior of a naval vessel, centering on a porthole. The surface of the vessel has a sandy or bumpy texture. Underneath the porthole are words raised in relief: “LE MALE” in a sans serif font; beneath are the words “Jean Paul GAULTIER” reflecting the brand’s logo. Through the porthole, two sailors are arm wrestling in the middle ground. Their eyes are fixed on one another. Their muscles are flexed. We see their upper bodies; their lower bodies are hidden behind the porthole. The sailor on the left is holding a polished tin can that has imprinted on it “Jean Paul Gaultier” with his free left arm. The other sailor has a bottle of “Le Male” beside him, placed at an angle from the viewer’s perspective, highly its shape. The table upon which they are arm wrestling, and presumably sitting, has a reflective surface but has no other embellishments. In the background is a solid colour block with no other embellishments.</p>
Colour	<p>Hue. The dominant colour scheme is blue, present in the foreground, middle ground, and background. The naval vessel is a light blue; the table is a light green; the left sailor’s t-shirt stripes are cobalt; the fragrance flacon is teal, the background is teal or turquoise.</p> <p>Saturation. Colours are highly saturated. This is apparent especially in the sailors, whose skin tones appear very rich and tanned, and the background which is vivid and intense.</p> <p>Value. Neither high or low value colours dominate.</p>
Spatial Organization	<p>The composition is flat, as little depth is suggested between foreground, middle ground, and background. The two main volumes, the male subjects (which are in fact the same model but pieced together in production) are presented as near symmetrical reflections. The angle of the image places the height of the audience level with the models. The image is neither static nor dynamic. The composition does not indicate directed motion (vector), but the subjects are arm wrestling and therefore imply movement.</p>
Light	<p>The light source appears to be above the two subjects. The lighting is uneven, as shadows are cast brightly on parts of their bodies, with shadows casting on other parts. The light source is unknown.</p>

Expressive content (i.e. mood, atmosphere)	<p>The mood or atmosphere of the image is ambiguous. It can be interpreted as an aggressively masculine image because of the strong, virile models arm wrestling, an archetypal contest of strength. Their eyes staring at each other fiercely. Their muscles are flexed. It can also be seen as an incredibly camp image; masculinity is so exaggerated, the model(s) so beautiful and muscular and virile-looking yet adorned with tattoos, tilted sailor hats, ear piercings, and tight-fitting matelot shirts that expose the stomach and shoulders of the left model. It is a masculinity that is so exaggerated that it becomes a spectacular that pokes fun at itself.</p>
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APPENDIX E: MODES OF REPRESENTATION IN FIGURE 2

Representations of bodies	Observation
Age	Early to mid 20s
Gender	Male
Race	White/Caucasian/European
Hair	Dark brown, average length, casually untidy; smooth skin, no body or facial hair.
Body	Muscular, tanned/bronzed, tattooed (left: tiger, right: “love” and heart), ears pierced on both subjects, left subject is wearing a form-fitting blue stripe t-shirt and a sailor cap, right subject is shirtless and wears a white sailor cap; we see their bodies from the torso up in side profile.
Size	Large and prominent placement in centre of the ad in nearly symmetrical presentation between the two subjects.
Appearance	Both subjects, who are in fact the same model, exhibit conventional Western male beauty. They possess blemish-free skin, healthy-looking, muscular bodies, masculine faces with defined bone structure, and otherwise attractive and “model-worthy” appearance. They could be presented as twins.
Representations of manner	Observation
Expression	Both subjects have ambiguous facial expressions. They appear neither happy nor sad. They are not smiling, but they are also not frowning. Their facial expression, if anything, conveys intensity of focus.
Eye contact	Each subject stares intensely at the other, eyes locked; the eye contact is presented ambiguously and can be perceived to be aggressive, coy, or romantically suggestive.
Pose	Both subjects appear to be seated. However, their lower bodies are not visible; the subjects could be standing but this is not discernable.
Representations of activity	Observation
Touch	Both subjects share a very similar pose, leaning forward, their right arms are locked and flexed in what appears to be an arm wrestling match. Their hands and wrists make skin-to-skin contact. The left subject’s left arm is holding a tin can (container for the “Le Male” fragrance), the right subject’s hand is clenched and pressed firmly on the flat surface (presumably a table).
Body movement	Both subjects appear to be “active” subjects engaged in physical activity, as opposed to “passive” subjects who receive the effects of that activity.
Positional communication	Neither subject appears socially or physically inferior or

	superior to the other (they are the same model depicted in a mirror-like way). However, their arm wrestling match (if that is the intended reading of their contact) can be understood as a contest to determine superiority.
Props and settings	Observation
Props	They are both wearing stereotypical sailor apparel. The left subject wears a striped t-shirt and a sailor cap and earrings. The right subject wears a sailor cap with earrings. The left subject holds the tin can that contains the perfume bottle. The perfume bottle is positioned near the right subject on the edge of the table.
Setting	The foreground indicates that we are looking into a porthole, meaning we are, as the audience, peering in from the outside of a naval vessel. The subjects are, presumably, crewmembers of the vessel. We do not see more detail of their surroundings, other than they are by a table.

APPENDIX F: COMPOSITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF FIGURE 3

Component	Observation
Frame	30-seconds in length; 4:3 screen ratio – focusing on people rather than landscape; open screen frame – suggestion of things happening beyond the sight of the audience – the closed, private space of men’s change rooms, locker room behavior – more than meets the eye; single image shown throughout (as opposed to multiple images or split screens).
Shots	<p>Distance. The camera shoots tightly close to the models, remaining between one to three metres away for the duration of the advertisement, resulting in medium to head and shoulders shots. The advertisement begins with the camera shooting furthest away and quickly zooms closer and closer as the video progresses.</p> <p>Focus. The shot contains a deep focus as images in foreground, middle ground, and background are in focus at all times. The focus is also soft.</p> <p>Angle. Low angle throughout, camera looks up at the models, as opposed to eye-level or above.</p> <p>Points of view. Third person shot throughout.</p> <p>Camera movement. Begins as a tracking shot, moving rightward. Movement then moves to a series of quick pans and tilts. Concludes as a tracking shot, moving rightward.</p>
Light	Lighting is soft and emanates from multiple directions, including behind the models towards the camera, and from the side (left). The video is cast a blue-teal tint that is likely the result of post-production editing. While the models are lit, the frame contains numerous shadows that accentuate the models’ bodies.
Narrative structure	Five young men, who appear to be sailors, are in a change room, changing from nautical uniforms and into suits. They exchange glances, touch, and laughter while spraying themselves with “Le Male” from a single bottle, which they pass around to one another and share. In the final seconds of the advertisement, they are dressed, lean against a row of sinks, posing for the audience in casual, relaxed, often leaning positions. What they are dressing for—the event—remains unknown.

Expressive content	<p>The atmosphere is sensual or sexual. The shots of muscular, lean torsos emphasize this. The soft lighting, the shadows, quick camera movements, and close-up shots suggest a voyeuristic gaze. The video can be interpreted as either very homosocial or very homoerotic. This is due to the all-male group, male-exclusive environment, and fraternity-like social bonding that presents an ambiguous narrative.</p>
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APPENDIX G: MODES OF REPRESENTATION IN FIGURE 3

Representations of bodies		Observation
Age		Early to mid 20s
Gender		Male
Race		White/Caucasian/European
Hair		Varying lengths and styles. Buzz cut to medium length. Mostly brunette, one blond.
Body		Five models. All lean, muscular, slim builds with defined abdominal muscles. They move from various states of undress. They wear sailor uniforms, consisting of striped nautical shirts, trousers, and one wears a sailor cap, in the beginning of the video and then change into business suits.
Size		Images of bodies dominate the frame.
Appearance		The models are all exhibit conventional Western male beauty. They possess blemish-free skin, healthy-looking, muscular bodies, faces with defined bone structure, and otherwise attractive and “model-worthy” appearance.
Representations of manner		
Expression		For the first half of the video, the five models do not exhibit much facial expression. Beginning in the second half, once they change into their suits and apply the “Le Male” fragrance, the models show smiles and laughter.
Eye contact		The blond model engaged in furtive, perhaps flirtatious glances to other models. The long-haired brunettes and the model with the olive skin share friendly eye contact.
Pose		In the final seconds of the advertisement, the models lean against a row of sinks, posing for the audience in casual, relaxed, leaning positions.
Representations of activity		
Touch		The models begin the video by touching mainly their clothes to remove them. They then take turns touching and applying the cologne and handing it off to other models. When the mood becomes more gregarious, they share quick pats on the neck and lower back. They continue to touch their clothes and adjust their outfits.
Body movement		Body movements are very sensual. Within the first second of the video, we see a model remove his trousers in profile, revealing his tight white briefs behind a pane of frosted glass in one smooth motion. The second model in sequence removes his sailor cap in one hand, and lifts his striped shirt facing the viewer. The third model lifts his shirt with both hands facing the viewer, revealing his muscular torso. Another model, who is shirtless, approaches a hand dryer

	and turns the machine on and enjoys the wind blow across his face (he seemed to be dry prior to this performance). We now see a hand pick up the fragrance bottle for “Le Male” and pass it around, with shirtless abdominals clearly in view. The blond model walks over to a locker to grab his suit and looks back, perhaps stealing a glance of something (or someone). The long-haired brunette looks at himself in the mirror and applies “Le Male” before patting his hand behind the neck of a model beside him, handing off the cologne bottle if the other hand. The model with short hair and Mediterranean features receives the bottle smiling. The bottle continues to be exchanged and applied. The camera focuses on the exchange of the bottles.
Positional communication	The models are all in very close physical proximity. They are presented as equals, like a fraternity. This equality is reinforced by their shared uniforms, similar age, and rank. They share the fragrance, suggesting that the men are on close terms to share such an intimate personal product.
Props and settings	
Props	The dominant prop is the cologne bottle. It is shown and manipulated for most of the video. Another prominent prop is the sailor uniform and the business suit. A less prominent prop is the drying machine.
Setting	The entire video is set in a small locker room or change room. Polysemy works here again: the locker room can be seen as a very mundane setting for heterosexual men, or it can be a highly eroticized and fantasized location for gay men because of its homosocial, hypermasculine connotation.

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