

### CHAPTER 3

## CELEBRITY NAMES/BRAND NAMES: NICOLE KIDMAN, CHANEL NO. 5 AND COMMODIFICATION

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### **Abstract**

Many cultures believe that personal names are imbued with strong magic (Dossey, 1999, p. 12). Furthermore, according to anthropologists Mary Douglas and Caron Isherwood, “the structure of culture” itself is based on the shared knowledge of the names of goods. These names, they say, underlie “a means of thinking” – that is, a culture’s understanding and hierarchising of the world. Sharing this knowledge is a social pleasure that further strengthens cultural ties (1979, p.75). This cultural studies chapter will explore the functions, within consumer culture, of the names of performers – particularly film stars – and the names of branded products. The literature review covers names and naming; star theory; and commercial discourse on brand creation. It is followed by textual analyses that demonstrate the parallels between stars’ names and brand names.

To illustrate the importance of names as fundamental organising principles both of stardom and brands, this chapter uses the example of Nicole Kidman’s appearance in a \$60 million, two-minute commercial for Chanel No. 5, made in 2004, and its various associations with famous, glamorous “names” (Coco Chanel, Marilyn Monroe and Catherine Deneuve, for example). Directed by Baz Luhrmann – himself a “famous name” – the commercial was supported by a number of promotional campaigns, including its own “making of” documentary.

While this chapter analyses a series of name-texts in order to show how they contribute meanings to the commercial, it also considers the ways in which these promotional intertexts work to ensure that target audiences have a strong awareness of these “names” and their associations – associations that guide audience interpretation of the commercial, position the engaged audience as “knowing”, and provide pleasure in the process. This chapter therefore links together three typically

unconnected fields of research – academic star theory, scholarly and popular writing about names, and commercial writing about branding – in order to highlight the important, complex, but virtually unrecognised functions played by names as they shuttle cultural meanings among celebrities, commodities and consumers.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2004, filmmaker Baz Luhrmann directed “the world’s most expensive advertisement” (Edwardes, 2004): a \$60 million, three-minute commercial for iconic perfume Chanel No. 5. Visually stunning in Luhrmann’s trademark lush “red curtain” style, the commercial featured glamorous costumes by Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld, worn by Hollywood A-list actress Nicole Kidman. The commercial was released amidst a massive global publicity campaign that focused on the three-minute “film” as if it were a major motion picture. In Australia alone, this campaign included magazine articles, interviews, and a half-hour television documentary, *Le Film du Film: Chanel No. 5*, about its production.

The commercial can be seen as a series of expensive and carefully crafted images and sounds. This chapter will argue, however, that it can equally be understood as a series of expensive and carefully chosen “names”: Luhrmann, Chanel, Lagerfeld, Kidman and Chanel No. 5. Acting alongside the formal “language” of the film, each name is an intertext that makes a crucial contribution to the meanings of the commercial. Audience engagement, it will be argued, arises not just in response to the visual and aural experiences, but also from recognition of the names, and from “reading” the interactions and combinations of the names’ connotations.

This chapter, then, will analyse the commercial through a sequence of the featured names, showing how each one is a rich text in itself. This study necessitates the linking together of three typically unconnected fields of research: academic star theory, scholarly and popular writing about names, and commercial writing about branding. It will also explore popular-culture texts about the commercial, such as a magazine article on Coco Chanel, and the previously mentioned documentary on the making of the commercial. This analysis will demonstrate the complex functions of star names, and provide a basis for comparing the discourses of celebrity and commodity, revealing strong parallels between the cultural meanings and functions of global celebrities and commodities. The chapter thus uses the Chanel No. 5 commercial as a particularly clear, persuasive example

of the important, complex, but unrecognised functions played by names as they shuttle cultural meanings among celebrities, commodities and consumers.

## STARS AND COMMODITIES

This chapter will focus on one type of celebrity: film stars. Celebrities are, of course, also found outside entertainment, in sport, politics, even religion. For the purposes of this chapter, however, the film star provides a model of celebrity applicable to other fields. Joshua Gamson explains:

Entertainment is clearly the dominant celebrity realm in this century; it is also the most fully rationalised and industrialised. It is therefore typically used as a model for the development of celebrity in other realms (politics, for example) ... Understanding entertainment celebrity promises to help us comprehend celebrity as a general cultural phenomenon: Its peculiar dynamics, its place in everyday lives, its broader implications. (1994, p.5)

Since the ground-breaking work of Richard Dyer (among other works, 1979, 1986) and Richard deCordova (1990), stars have been recognised as an area of serious academic study, from both cultural and economic perspectives. That is, they are seen as communicating cultural meanings (Dyer 1979, 1986; Gledhill [ed.], 1991; Gamson, 1994; Studlar, 1996; Marshall, 1997), in addition to forming the foundation for economic strategies within the film industry (May, 1980; King, 1987, 1991; deCordova, 1990; Ravid, 1999).

Richard Dyer stresses that while “[a] film star’s films are likely to have a privileged place in his or her image”, stardom is a cumulative effect of the promotional texts surrounding a star:

The star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars. A star’s image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio handouts, and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star’s doings and ‘private’ life. (1986, pp.2-3)

It is no surprise that celebrities are often considered (and consider themselves to be) commodities, with their name functioning as their “brand”. The “unofficial and unauthorised biography” of Jennifer Lopez, for example, claims that her “brand recognition” resembles that of Coca-Cola or McDonald’s (Charles, 2000, p.157). Along with the media

technologies of stardom, control over the celebrity's "brand name" has changed since early Hollywood, when "film performers were essentially studio-owned-and-operated commodities" (Gamson, 1994, p.25). Now, however, in "New" Hollywood, it is the film performers and their agents that position themselves as "brands".

With branding now considered to be "the single most important business tool available today" (Hasking, 2000), it is pertinent to consider exactly what a brand is. One book aimed at advertisers bluntly states that a brand is "a product that provides functional benefits plus added values that some customers value enough to buy" (Jones, 1986, p.29). The intangibility of a brand is emphasised by another writer: "the only place where the brand truly exists is in our heads" (Bremser, 2001). But is it really appropriate to speak of a human as a brand? Certainly star promotional activities can be understood to resemble the ways that brands differentiate products; stimulate awareness; generate "positive perceptions"; and add value (Hague & Jackson, 1994, p.101). The parallels are heightened by marketing discourse that speaks of brands as having a "personality", even a soul, comparable to that of a human. As advertising executive Jeff Bremser asserts:

A brand isn't a package. It isn't a logo. It's a living, breathing personality. A remembered symbol connects to miscellaneous thoughts, emotions and information stored in the human brain ... You can't stop the 15,000 messages we all get daily but you can make sure the messages you control stand out from the clutter. You can make them...more entertaining, more understandable, more likeable, more emotionally involving. (2001, p.20)

Just as intense emotional connections can occur between stars and fans, the same connections can develop between consumers and brands. In fact, according to research carried out by advertising agency Young and Rubicam, brand distinctiveness based on emotional attributes will generate more customer loyalty than those with more rational attributes (Brands Must Create Emotional Pull, 2003).

It is no accident that celebrities and brands are closely linked. Indeed, many promotional strategies of the early star system were developed by moguls like Goldwyn, Laemmle and Fox, all of whom applied techniques learned while working in the clothing industries. Furthermore, from the 1920s, publicity discourses on stars for example, emphasised their role as consumers, showing their fashionable clothes, luxurious homes, and expensive cars (May, 1980). Within this glamorous consumer world, the

star was used in a back-and-forward promotion of other commodities. For example, Charles Eckert's widely referenced article, *The Carol Lombard in Macy's Window* (1978), is a history of product tie-ins from the early thirties. He exposes interconnections among entertainment companies, other national companies (like General Motors), cosmetics companies, department stores, and even politics.

Film stars and commodities, then, co-exist in a matrix of entertainment, in which stars and commodities are both positioned as objects of desire, and the presence of each suggests the desirability of the other. Furthermore, both are implicated in a process by which they "contribute" aspects of identity to audience members. Jackie Stacey's survey (1994) of female audiences for Hollywood films in Britain during the 1940s and 1950s suggests a model of audience identification – one that probably can be applied to men as well as women. Stacey documents women's identification occurring through active, pleasurable responses rather than passive "brainwashing". She describes her subjects as assembling a new, hybrid identity from fragments of many star images, "*imitating* behaviour and activities, and *copying* appearances", often using commodities purchased for that purpose (p.195; her emphasis). Audiences are thus invited to buy commodities and assemble new, more desirable identities in a pleasurable "game" that engages both the emotions and the wallet.

## NAMES, CELEBRITIES AND BRANDS

Analysing names – personal, star, and brand names – helps to shed light on the nexus of personal identity, celebrity and consumer products. Any name is linguistically complex. In fact, according to anthropologists Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, "the structure of culture" itself is the shared knowledge of the names of goods. Names, they postulate, underlie "a means of thinking" – that is, a culture's understanding and hierarchising of the world. Sharing this knowledge is a social pleasure that further strengthens cultural ties (1979, p.75). Daniel Boorstin points out that it is a culture's sharing of a name that "makes" a celebrity: "The hero was a big man; the celebrity is a big name" (1962, p.61). And although a brand is an imaginary construct, the value of the brand name can be far greater than tangible assets. In 1998, the Coca-Cola brand name was worth \$39 billion (Correy 1998).

In language, personal names differentiate us from each other, signalling dimensions of identity such as gender (Lieberson, Dumais & Baumann, 2000); class; ethnicity; rank; and even age (Williams, 1990; Hoffman, 2005). Like clothing and adornment, names sit on

the public/private boundary, reflecting both inner and outer “selves”. Within the multifaceted star image, the name performs an even more extensive cohesive function. Along with the glamorous visual image, the name connects the fragmentary star persona across diverse intertexts; it “supports the actor’s identity in language” (deCordova, 1990, p.20).

Like a star’s name, a brand name coheres the multiple intertexts that construct a brand image, and in addition, acts as a symbolic condensation of the qualities or characteristics – the “personality” – associated with that brand. And just as a star’s name acts along with visual images, the brand name joins with the “logo, corporate ID, packaging design and copy, Web design and copy” to communicate the brand’s “essence”, say Julie Cucchi and Nin Glaister, co-founders of a “brand expression agency” (2002).

Performers’ strategies for commercial viability are reflected in the practice of name changes. Interestingly, it does not appear that film stars’ names have been investigated from an academic perspective, even though serious attention has been paid to the assumed names of male stars of gay porn, cross dressers (Hoffman, 2005), and Australian circus performers (St Leon, 1999). Mark St Leon’s study of circus performers, one of the few explorations of the reasons *why* performers change their names, emphasises commercial motivations: “The use of *noms d’arena* in Australian circus was fundamentally dictated by the need to fashion what today we would call a corporate identity or image” (1999, p. 169). This “brand name” is a foundation of the star’s “persona” or “image”, with the name becoming synonymous with a specific set of characteristics and personality traits, even personal background considered important in that particular field. Circus performers and opera singers change their names to seem more exotically “European”. Circus showman Con Sullivan, with Irish heritage, “romanticised” his family into the Colleanos, for instance (St Leon, 1999, pp.166-7). By contrast, many film stars have changed their names to disguise ethnic backgrounds. Thus Joyce Frankenberg became the undeniable “English” Jane Seymour, adding high-culture connotations of history, and queenly sexual desirability. Issur Danielovitch became Kirk Douglas. Winona Horowitz became Winona Ryder (*Celebrity Name Dropping*, 2001, p.21).

The silent era offers many embarrassingly obvious examples of the ways in which names reflected domain-appropriate qualities: Arline Pretty, Blanche Sweet, Bessie Love. Less obviously, in the sound era, Norma Jean Baker (named by her screen-struck mother after screen stars Norma Talmadge and Jean Harlow [Lexton, 1994, p.52]) was renamed Marilyn

Monroe, “a shorter name with more flair”. According to one source, her new name has “female, ‘mammary’ overtones”:

Psycholinguists point out that virtually all cultures use a word like *mama* or *mummy* to represent mother and this derives from the closed-lip infant sucking motion. “M” is a very comforting, feminine consonant...It is, therefore, obvious why John Wayne could hardly have made it as a hard-hitting cowboy star under his original name of Marion Morrison. (Evans & Wilson, 1999, p.51)

Just as a star’s name provides a focus for a fan’s attention, so too is the name of a brand an important component in establishing this emotional connection between consumer and product. As brands and their advertising campaigns are frequently global, specialist companies such as Name Lab (Freivalds, 1996) do nothing but provide advice on names. Brand names should be “easy to say, spell and remember” (Laura Ries, quoted in Frankel, 2004). Laundry powder Omo for instance, has what has been called “the world’s most perfect product name”: “it sounds like ‘mother’ in many languages and designates a household product” (Freivalds, 1996) – an appeal that perhaps echoes that of “Marilyn Monroe”.

There is an almost mystical understanding that names reveal the essence of their owners. An increasing trend for parents to name their children after particular brands, including A’lexus or Lexus, Corvette, Camry, Disney, Ikea and ESPN (Kloer, 2003), indicates the parents’ hopes that they can infuse their child with qualities they believe are communicated by the brand name they have chosen.

But the process also happens in reverse. A star’s name absorbs values or characteristics by condensing surrounding intertexts. “Nicole Kidman”, for instance, stands for a very different set of qualities than does “Marilyn Monroe” or “Meg Ryan”. The most famous celebrities are referred to by one name (“Marilyn”), and magazine readers decipher conjunctions of couples’ names like “Brangelina” (Brad Pitt/Angelina Jolie) and “Bennifer” (Ben Affleck/Jennifer Lopez). That is, one shorthand name can absorb and represent at least two complete star personae, as well as their relationship. In some cases, a name can become so powerful that it eclipses the individual, leaving nothing but the image. According to Diane Negra:

‘Marilyn’ was a persona so artificial, so manufactured and packaged that it eradicated the person. In becoming ‘Marilyn’,

the image, [the name,] this woman produced an ideal of female glamour that has endured for half a century. (2004, p.14)

There is also the legal aspect of a celebrity's name. Its centrality was recognised in early Hollywood, when adopting a new name was often a condition of a studio contract. As one author stated:

Hollywood studios consolidated their power over their labour force by 'erasing' an actor's real name and personal history in order to create a 'coherent, saleable persona' whose public circulation the studio controlled. (Clark quoted in McLean, 2004, p.32)

The studio maintained ownership of the name, and would then threaten legal action to prevent the star from contracting with a new studio, under the name that had been contractually bestowed and by which the public now knew them. This practice – redolent of a patriarchal control that accompanies naming rights (Dossey, 1999, p.14) – was an effective industrial control of star power.

## ANALYSIS

Luhrmann wrote about the commercial: "I'm envisioning the ad as a mini-movie of an epic that has never been made" (2004, p.238). The storyline of this "mini-movie" features Nicole Kidman as a star overwhelmed by her life who, when fleeing paparazzi, meets a dark, handsome stranger, played by Brazilian actor Rodrigo Santoro. The famous celebrity and handsome but poor Bohemian writer go to his rooftop garret where they have a brief but intense love affair. She departs, strengthened by their love and ready to face her world again, leaving him with the memory of her "smile, her kiss, her perfume" – Chanel No. 5. This is an example of a relatively new form of advertising known as "advertainment" – commercials "that mimic traditional media forms but [are] created solely as a vehicle to promote specific advertisers" (Kretchmer, 2004, p.39). Advertainments generally contain a strong emphasis on narrative structure, gradually unfurling a story around a product so as to captivate and intrigue consumers.

At 180 seconds, the commercial is considered quite long; however there are so many references and inferences contained within its structure that much additional material, supplied via the publicity campaign, was required to ensure the public was able to draw the necessary correlations between the commercial's storyline and the suite of famous names associated with it.



The overall aim of the commercial was to update the image of the perfume so as to attract younger consumers. To this end, the promotional pieces were carefully placed where they were likely to be noticed by the perfume's target demographic. For example, the documentary *Le Film du Film: Chanel No. 5* was broadcast on Australian television directly after the concluding episode of the popular series *Sex and the City*, to capture the series' large audience of young, fashion-conscious, luxury-brand-loving women. The fashion magazine *Vogue* (2004, November) published excerpts from Luhrmann's private diary, in which he explained his strategies and identified the key players and their interrelationships. Aiming at a slightly older, less affluent audience, the *Australian Women's Weekly* published an article on Coco Chanel (Langley, 2004), again emphasising the same qualities reflected by Luhrmann. *New Weekly* instructed readers how to achieve Kidman's smooth hairstyle, as featured in the commercial's climactic scene (2005, January).

## BAZ LUHRMANN

The first of the "names" associated with the project, Baz Luhrmann, was already famous for his distinctive "Red Curtain" trilogy of *Strictly Ballroom* (made in Australia in 1992), followed by the Hollywood productions *Romeo + Juliette* (1996), and *Moulin Rouge!* (2001). The mainstream success of these films elevates his status to the extent that his making of this commercial becomes an event, generating media coverage. Luhrmann also has high-culture credentials because of his stage production of *La Boheme* (televised 1993), emphasised in the documentary by footage showing him conducting the orchestra and talking about his classical music choice. His productions tend to feature the theme of love – frequently doomed – told in an extravagant, romantic, visually spectacular and highly stylised manner, all of which he brought to the Chanel commercial. As he wrote in his diary:

For the past 10 years, touring to promote my movies, I've sometimes remarked 'how potent the love story can be'...What seems incredible to me now is that here I am considering using a love story to sell perfume – why not? (2004, p.236)

In the documentary, Luhrmann says his goal is "to tell a simple story in which people's emotional relationship with Chanel No. 5 is reignited". His approach reflects a definite shift in advertising "to create more emotional stories around a product" (Friedman, 2004, p.1), a strategy supported by research that has found that "narratives" are an

essential component in everyday life as “people make sense of their lives by envisaging themselves as characters in a story” (Proctor et al. 2002, p.246). In advertising, consumers’ involvement in a narrative about a brand can “produce meaning for the brand and associate together the brand and people’s self concept”, thus generating the desired strong emotional attachment (Proctor, Papasolomou-Doukakis & Proctor, 2002, p.246). Luhrmann intended to develop this same connection by creating an intensely romantic love story that would allude not so much to the actual scent of Chanel No. 5 but to the emotional “essence” of the perfume.

## COCO CHANEL

Chanel is the next of the “names” associated with the project. Coco (real name Gabrielle; 1883-1971), is considered “one of the most revered designers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”, and was honoured in 2005 by a major exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The exhibition notes point to her “authority and mastery of her work, the resonance of her image of the modern woman” (“Chanel”, 2005). Her trademark style can be seen in the iconic little black dress; her use of black with cuffs and collar in white; the two-piece suit, often in tweed; and her jersey sportswear (“Chanel, 2005). She also popularised menswear styles for women, and was “savvy” about using logos (Sischy, 1998).

The connotations of modernity connected with Chanel are underlined in Luhrmann’s diary, the *Woman’s Weekly* article on Chanel, and in the documentary. As Langley (2004, p.109) states: “Coco’s gift for fashion was intuitive...she could tell in one glance what would improve a woman’s look, and in a second where fashion was heading”. After gaining success in the world of fashion, Chanel turned her attention to perfume. She is quoted as saying that perfume “is the unseen, unforgettable, ultimate fashion accessory. It heralds your arrival and prolongs your departure” (quoted in Holmes, 2004, p.164). In 1921, she and perfumer Ernest Beaux created “the scent of love” (quoted in Langley, 2004, p.107). The perfume, a complex mixture of over 80 ingredients including roses, Madagascan ylang-ylang and jasmine, was a complete break from the more “heavy, mono-floral” perfumes of the past (Pumphrey, 2005, p.55). It was the first time a perfume had been named after a designer (Sischy, 1998) – her name combined with her lucky number five (Langley, 2004).

The perfume was an instant success, its expensive price tag ensuring an exclusive clientele, a fact the fashion house later drew upon in their

marketing strategy by “making its brand synonymous with Hollywood glamour” (Edwardes, 2004). Marilyn Monroe for example, generated a wave of publicity when she famously claimed that the only thing she wore to bed was Chanel No. 5.

## **KARL LAGERFIELD**

Lagerfield – the next “name” associated with the commercial – is far from being an anonymous designer hidden behind the Chanel name. He is famous in his own right for bringing the house of Chanel back from its lacklustre fortunes following the death of Chanel herself. His designs and business acumen “in 1983 revitalised the spirit and identity of the house”, and his “masterful and often irreverent citations of Chanel’s work, as well as his combination of influences from high and low culture...re-articulate Chanel’s innovations” (“Chanel”, 2005).

*Le Film du Film* emphasises Lagerfield’s central creative role within Chanel by showing him sketching Kidman’s costumes, and fitting them on her. The costumes support the story of the character’s adventure, and draw upon some of Chanel’s trademark fashions, strengthening the brand associations with Chanel. When “the most famous woman in the world” makes a desperate escape from a paparazzi frenzy, she is dressed in a luxurious pink feathered dress that swirls dramatically around her as she dashes across the rain-soaked streets of a nameless metropolis before almost being hit by a taxi. The couture creation is intended to reflect “someone beautiful but encaged” (Luhmann, 2004, p.238).

Once the commercial’s star character is hidden away in the bohemian writer’s roof-top loft, she reappears in a casual play on the Chanel black and white “garconne” look, made up of the writer’s waiter jacket, shirt and a pair of shorts, expressing the sense of “anonymity and freedom she’s found by escaping” (Luhmann, 2004, p.240). When her lover asks who she is, she avoids replying with her name, rejecting its star associations by saying “I’m a dancer”. When she returns to her world, “the regal backless black dress [she wears] at the end touches on the idea that she’s returned changed – able to have power over her life instead of being overpowered by it” (Luhmann, 2004, p.240).

## **NICOLE KIDMAN**

In 2003, Karl Lagerfield chose Kidman to be the “face” of Chanel No. 5, supplying her with gowns for her red-carpet duties. The connection between Kidman and Chanel was enhanced when Kidman and Lagerfield, along with Anna Wintour, influential editor of *US Vogue*, were co-chairs for

The Costume Institute Benefit Gala, Metropolitan Museum in May 2005 (“Chanel”, 2005). The name “Nicole Kidman” is considered by many to be synonymous with elegance and stylishness. In fact, the actress “was officially recognised as a style icon by the Council of Fashion Designer’s America” and is thought to have “polish and an innate sense of chic that has helped fashion-makers ‘reach a truer understanding of glamour and refinement’” (quoted in McCann, 2003, p.5).

According to Baz Luhrmann (2004, p.238), the character Kidman plays in the commercial – the most famous woman in the world – is:

...a composite of all the iconic women who had or who very well could have had some relationship with Chanel, from Marilyn Monroe to Jacqueline Kennedy, Maria Callas, Catherine Deneuve, Princess Diana and now, Nicole.

As with these other famous names, Luhrmann asserts that Nicole Kidman’s name conveyed a certain sense of “sophistication” combined with a “freedom of spirit”. The underlying message that Luhrmann repeatedly emphasises in the supporting promotional material is that, as a result of these qualities, Nicole Kidman represents the “ultimate modern woman” (Luhrmann in *Le Film du Film*, 2004).

In the commercial, the star’s “freedom” comes in the form of the handsome bohemian writer who admits: “I must have been the only person in the world who didn’t know who she was”. (Funnily enough, Rodrigo Santoro is a big star in Brazil, but his name is not widely recognised outside his home country [Luhrmann in *Le Film du Film*, 2004]). By being unaware of her name and hence her “star” identity, he enables Kidman’s character to escape from all expectations, allowing her to choose her identity for herself. As Luhrmann explains in the documentary:

For the first time in her life she’s able to discover who she really is, and the more time she spends with him, the more she becomes the person she really is rather than the image of the person everyone needs her to be.

This concept of defining one’s identity lies at the heart of the Chanel commercial. Kidman’s character is struggling under the pressure of being the most famous star in the world. As Luhrmann (2004, p.238) states, in the process of becoming icons, stars:

...become mythologised images of themselves, and maintaining that mythology becomes a job. There’s a certain degree of tragedy but a beauty in that tragedy. It is the yearning to escape

this responsibility by way of an innocent romance that can perhaps be understood by all women.

The commercial cleverly blurs reality and fantasy with its references to lost love and personal growth, which can be applied not just to the character Kidman plays, but also to Kidman herself. After all, the character has been purposely left nameless, thus allowing the audience/consumer to project Kidman's personal history of lost love—her very public divorce from Tom Cruise—onto the character in the commercial. Luhrmann refers to this connection in his diary when writing about Kidman's divorce:

It was a moment when she [Nicole] had to decide either to run from public scrutiny or to confront it—and take control of her life. The idea that seems right for the Chanel spot follows a similar storyline. (2004, p. 238)

Even though Kidman's separation occurred during the post-production of *Moulin Rouge*, Luhrmann writes that Kidman's own feelings and experiences of doomed romance played a crucial part in the formation of her character, Satine. This notion of lost love and enduring romance seems to have become a reoccurring theme in a number of Kidman's latest movies, including *Dogville* (2003), *The Human Stain* (2003) and *Cold Mountain* (2003). As Germain asks: "Everyone assumes such somber drama is the result of Kidman's blue period—dark times following a miscarriage and the end of her marriage to Tom Cruise" (2003, p.9).

However despite—or perhaps because of—Kidman's sorrows and emotional hardships, what could have been seen as a humiliating rejection has been turned to her advantage. Before her divorce, she was often perceived by the public as cold, reserved and aloof, epitomized in the press by the constant use of her full name "Nicole Kidman", with its clipped sounds and formal tones. However, her response has been a public relations triumph, not only strengthening her image but humanising her in the public's eye. This could be seen by the sudden use in many women's magazines of the much softer and more personal "Nic", and even "Our Nic". Furthermore, as Germain (2003, p. 9) states: "After a decade in Cruise's superstar shadow Kidman [has] emerged as a critical and commercial sensation". That is, like the star in the commercial, Kidman is seen as a stronger person after her romantic crisis.

A modern day fairy tale with feminist undertones—romantic at heart but still extolling independence—the Chanel mini-movie/commercial is "about a female character who represents the very essence of the woman

who wears Chanel No. 5" (Luhrmann 2004, p. 238). Its placement on Australian television allowed it to reflect the atmosphere of feminist romance in *Sex and the City*'s final episode, in which New York writer Carrie Bradshaw, in Paris with her Russian lover Aleksandr Petrovsky, decides that she is unwilling to compromise her notion of love. She declares: "Well, maybe it's time to be clear about who I am. I am someone who is looking for love, real love, ridiculous, inconvenient, consuming, can't-live-without-each-other love."

## CHANEL NO. 5

Thus, ironically, the perfume that Chanel proudly called "artificial" (see Cervellino 2006) has the effect of helping women find their most "authentic" identity. This demonstrates "a cultural pattern", noted by Huisman (2005, p. 286) who states, "the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings". In fact, very often advertinements contain little or no product information at all. In the Chanel commercial, the perfume is only an undercurrent in the story's progression, and the commercial's success depends on audience knowledge of what "Chanel No. 5" denotes as well as connotes. The only references to the brand are the company's insignia on top of a building and the close-up shot of a diamond-encrusted "Chanel No. 5" necklace pendant. Luhrmann acknowledged this gamble when he wrote in his diary:

One of the biggest risks in the commercial is that the product—a bottle of fragrance— won't appear, but only this specifically designed insignia, the closing shot, and it has to be perfect. (Luhrmann 2004, p. 240)

It is this pendant that provides the last link between the famous star and her lover. Hanging down her back as she confronts the awaiting paparazzi frenzy, the glittering pendant instead faces towards her lover who sits on the Chanel sign on his bohemian rooftop. Although she has turned her back on their love, they remain connected via this symbol, this name—a connection as intangible and romantic as his memories of "her kiss, her smile, her perfume".

Typically, a commercial can be located along the "information to magic" spectrum (Huisman, 2005, pp. 287-288). At the information end of the spectrum are the object-orientated advertisements, that is, advertisements with a primary focus on factual details— what the product is, how much it costs and where it is available. At the other end of the

spectrum are the “magic”-based advertisements where the entire focus is centered around the subject—that is, the audience/consumer. The greater the emphasis on “magic”, the less factual information will be presented. Instead the attention will reside on the concept of attributes—what status the product will give the consumer, how much romance and glamour they may experience, and so on. The Chanel No. 5 commercial, then, with its complete absence of product details, is situated entirely at the “magic” end of the spectrum in which “(t)hey are not selling products, they are selling an image and an attitude attached to that image” (in Friedman 2004, p. 1).

In order for this sequence of names to make their impact as conveyors of meaning, the audience must be aware of their significance. The promotional materials emphasise this significance, repeating the same messages in different ways. The payoff for the audience is that their recognition—of names, logos, references—is that they are engaged in an active process of making meaning, and at the same time are being positioned as informed and knowledgeable about the world of glamour and luxury goods.

## CONCLUSION

In the process of making the Chanel No. 5 “mini-movie”, the names Baz Luhrmann, Nicole Kidman, Coco Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld, and Chanel No. 5 all refer to specific characteristics, which then circulate among all the “names”, becoming part of a new, more extensive set of associations. For example, Luhrmann contributes his acclaimed style, but also the prestige of his name as a successful Hollywood feature director. And, just as the connections of Kidman’s name, face and fashionable style with Chanel fashions and perfume have been of benefit to the fashion house, so too has the name “Chanel” helped extend and solidify the public’s perception of Kidman as the beautiful symbol of glamour, sophistication, “freedom”, lost love and romance. The very name “Chanel” “lends her lustre by association” (McCartney quoted in Edwardes, 2004), and furthermore “being linked to the most expensive, elite perfume will [help to] reinforce her position as the most elite and desirable of actresses; a peer of the product as opposed to a mere famous face-for-hire” (Friedman, 2004, p.1). She is now affiliated with the perfume’s long history of endorsement by some of the most famous and desirable women of all time, including Marilyn Monroe—another symbol of lost love and tragedy. Just as the commercial depends on audience knowledge of just what Chanel No. 5 actually is, the elevation of “our Nic” to icon, “the most famous woman

in the world”, depends on audience recognition not just of the image but also of her personal history.

But beyond this, Chanel benefits from its association with Kidman because the company is revitalised and updated via the currency of the references to celebrity culture—not just that surrounding Kidman herself, but also her pre-existing association with Luhrmann, with the role of Satine, and with the red-carpet exposure of fashion. The commercial and surrounding publicity achieved its goal: the Luhrmann-Kidman-Lagerfeld commercial has managed to “make grandma’s favourite fragrance more contemporary” (Thompson, 2004, p.4).

Thus these celebrity/commodity exchanges take place in an entertainment matrix that merges print, film and television; it blurs the boundaries between advertisement, documentary and feature film; and it blends together the “real”, private person, mediated public celebrity, and acted role. The names make all these border crossings, bringing their connotations with them; audiences—interested in assembling new identities through identification with stars as well as through purchased commodities—engage in an interpretive process that is nudged into shape by associations trailing in the wake of the names.

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