Luxury Commercials under the Influence of the Cinema

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The luxury commercial has evolved. Advertising has been approaching the cinema, either by increasingly taking on the form of a film with a more complex narrative structure and less direct camera techniques and effects, or in some cases, through references to prominent figures and works in the field. This article explores the rising phenomenon of luxury-cinema, with a focus on the following three aspects. Firstly, the nature of luxury as well as factors in the present day climate pushing the luxury commercial to evolve in this direction is evaluated. Next, the concept of the cinema is scrutinized, exploring its compatibility with commercials from the perspective of cinema lovers. Finally, four commercials influenced by the cinema in various forms are analyzed in terms of the strength of their storytelling, and the effects of their rapprochement to the cinema, culminating in an evaluation of the success factors for luxury commercials' move towards this modern art form.

The rising phenomenon of cinema-advertising

Cinema and advertising have never been fully separate entities. Film star brand ambassadors, product placement, film directors doubling up as directors of commercials… these all have been frequent, historical interactions between the two worlds. However, 2001 can be considered as the start of an advertising revolution[1] marking the sharp augmentation of brands' collaborations with film directors and the evolution of the commercial. That year, the high-end car company BMW brought the term "branded content" (or "advertainment") into the spotlight with the release of a series of eight short films on the Internet over two years, each produced by a different world famous director (Ang Lee, Tony Scott, Wong Kar-wai, Guy Ritchie, etc.), and all of them integrating the luxury German car into the narration as an indispensable element, without specifically calling attention to it. "Branded content" can be defined as "a relatively new form of advertising medium that blurs conventional distinctions between what constitutes advertising and what constitutes entertainment"[2]. While this concept has been applied to a wide variety of evolved, interactive mediums, its influence on the commercial specifically has intensified and metamorphosed the collaboration between film directors and brands, and more generally, the presence of the cinema in advertising. The cinema's influence in advertising can manifest itself in various forms. There is the commercial that re-creates or imitates a scene in a movie (such as Chanel's *Le Rouge* directed by Bettina Rheims), the commercial that makes references to one or various films (Chanel's *Bleu de Chanel* directed by Martin Scorsese), the commercial inspired by and trying to reproduce the style of a famous director (Dior's *The Lady Noire Affair* by Olivier Dahan), and the commercial directed by a famous cineaste who reproduces his own style (BMW's *The Follow* by Wong Kar-wai), to name some commonly observed trends.

The extent to which lines have been blurred between cinema and the commercial is strongly illustrated by the début of Wong Kar-wai's episode for BMW "The Follow" at the Cannes Festival in 2001. The multiplication of such "film-commercials" has

taken on such a momentum that the category "Branded Content and Entertainment" was actually added to the same renown film festival in 2012, and one notices a multiplication of journalistic inquiries into the rising phenomenon of cinema-advertising mélange. It is important to note that the cinematic commercials mostly have artistic aspirations: the directors chosen are often highly acclaimed and/or award-winning, imitations or references are usually made to "classic", respected or cult films or film-makers.

The "why" in luxury film-commercials

These film-commercials are particularly prominent in the advertising of luxury brands, due to the intrinsic and evolving nature of luxury, interacting with several overlapping worldwide developments that have acted as catalysts in this advertising revolution.
The definition of luxury, which according to Michel Chevalier and Gérald Mazzalovo in their book *Luxury Brand Management,* used to be "selective and exclusive… almost the only brand in its category, giving it the desirable attributes of being scarce, sophisticated and in good taste". However, as Mark Tungate explains in *Luxury World: the past, present and future of luxury brands*, "when established luxury brands fell into the hands of giant corporations with profit-hungry shareholders, this courtship of the mass market accelerated and intensified" with the use of entry-price products, the democratization of luxury let "commoners" enjoy the treatment and status of the "aristocracy". The journalist Dana Thomas in her book *Deluxe: how luxury lost its luster* criticizes this evolution of luxury, stating that "in order to make luxury 'accessible', tycoons have stripped away all that has made it special". Finally, again in the book *Luxury Brand Management*, we find an updated definition of luxury, which can serve as a general, moderated consensus – while the aspect of scarcity and rarity in luxury has diminished considerably, luxury still provides an essential "additional creative and emotional value for the consumer".
This explains the intrinsic need for storytelling on the part of a luxury brand, which uses images and narrations, as well as public buzz and opinions strategically as the building blocks of its "brand capital" and justifies the exorbitant efforts towards conventional and evolved advertising. As summed up in a journalistic exploration of this rising phenomenon, "*en faisant appel à des réalisateurs stars, les marques de luxe cherchent à s'approprier un territoire chargé d'imaginaire", "sans parler du 'buzz' et du 'rédactionnel' qui va s'ensuivre*"[3]. Furthermore, and very importantly, the desired artistry present in these film-commercials (also seen in advertising posters inspired by classic paintings) elevates the luxury brand culturally, portraying it as surpassing the purely commercial/capitalistic domain. The material desire for a product is often a manifestation of the consumer's desire to buy a membership into the realm of the brand, hence it is necessary that the consumer enjoys an emotional connection with what the brand symbolizes; what is cinema, if not the art of storytelling and of forming emotional connections through images?
Aside from the luxury brand's inherent need for storytelling and hence natural inclination towards modified forms of advertising, there are also cultural/social and economic developments that have amplified this need. The democratization of the Internet with its multiple and diverse sources of free information and entertainment on-demand has emancipated the consumer, gifting her with an ever-stronger autonomy, rendering her "more active, selective and critical"[4]. She is hence more immune towards, and even bored of, "classic" commercials, pushing advertising agencies and brands to invent new forms of communication, namely "the most effective

advertising" which "tends not to look like adverts"[5], among which lies that which is art-inspired. The on-going financial crisis has exacerbated this "cynicism": consumers turned away from flashiness and the hit of the moment, demanding greater value, elegance, quality, and emotion, as reported in the *Journal de Textile* in 2011. According to Natacha Dzikowski, director and founder of Luxury Arts, TBWA Paris interviewed in 2010, in explaining how the crisis has affected luxury consumer –"*Plus que jamais, nous avons faim d'histoires*". The transformation of the commercial in branded content (what the luxury brands would like to call cinema) provides a purer form of this storytelling, and corresponds with the desire for elegance and emotion. The crisis has also further amplified the importance of the emerging countries as markets for the luxury industry. China, the second largest luxury market is predicted by Bain & Co. to be number one in two years. The cinematic commercial provides a means of making strong connections with certain countries: it is not by chance that Dior commissioned *Lady Blue Shanghai* from David Lynch, or that Cartier's *L'Odyssée* traverses the BRIC minus Brazil. Finally, in a present day market where "luxury brand codes are increasingly copied and duplicated by low-mid range chain stores (with Zara next to Van Cleef & Arpels on Fifth Avenue in New York)", luxury brands can combat this by offering something "different, more virtual and mythical than what is done by the Spanish store, whose boutique aesthetic which is carefully constructed and impeccable confuses the codes that separate luxury from mass products"[6].

Finally, the Internet, besides being an impetus for this advertising (r)evolution as mentioned earlier, also permits luxury brands to fulfill this increasingly important need for storytelling by providing a means for them to showcase the film-commercials, removing the time guillotine that cuts the lengths of classic TV commercials. Film-commercials running six minutes have the time to develop a story in a language far more profound and paced than the impatient advertising visual lingo. Furthermore, the credibility and effects of a commercial are heavily augmented when it is the internet user who chooses to be a viewer, and shares it with the people he knows, as opposed to being forced to endure it on the television. This changes the relationship of the brand with the viewer. With 1.7 billion people with computers in 2010 (and continuing to rise sharply) according to the Blackstone Group, the effects are far-reaching and the costs divided manifold. However, it is important to note that not all the advertisements jumping on the cinema bandwagon are limited to the medium of the Internet; the TV commercials have also been influenced, and will similarly be examined in this article later.

Is advertising compatible with cinema as an art form?

Looking at this contemporary alliance from the perspective of great cineastes and critics, the inevitable conclusion drawn is that the two realms, despite their technical and visual similarities, can never truly intersect, due to fundamental ideological differences.

For André Bazin, renowned film critic, this modern art was "part of his passion for culture, for the truth"[7]. This quest for "the truth" manifests itself in varied nuances among those who have committed their lives to seeking it out, inevitably converging in the endless journey towards knowledge and understanding of humanity. It is perhaps Wim Wenders' response to the question "why do you make films?" in his book *The Logic of Images* that best explains this notion of truth; the German cineaste quotes Béla Balázs, film critic and writer: "He talks about the ability (and the responsibility) of cinema 'to show things as they are'"[8].

Cinema as "*an art of showing*"[9] encapsulates the myriad complexities associated with this art form – a composition of visuals that have to be "read" and messages waiting to be "decoded"[10]. The spectator is required to play an active, effort-filled part in this: "showing" is "a gesture that demands looking and watching"[11]. On the part of the cineaste, "showing" implies a direct connection with the truth: it is neither invention nor glorification, it is taking the eye of the spectator and pointing it in a certain direction, towards real, immutable, emotions, lives, thoughts. Showing, permits the cinema to form what Daney describes beautifully as "the promise of a counter society, a counter society within society, which believes itself to be superior, which holds society in contempt, which denies society and thinks of itself as the carrier of what society doesn't recognize or fights against, with this idea that one day, later on, always later, we will see what we will see"[12]. Showing, is also the act of overturning finely-woven silk carpets to uncover, reveal, expose, all that is miserable and ugly that the society – the unthinking majority or those in power – have tried to dissimulate.

It is resoundingly clear that this vision of the cinema by men who have all played a part in shaping its history, and some who continue to mold its present, cannot be reconciled with advertising commercials. The idea that commercials under the influence of cinema become more than commercials, transforming beyond even branded content into films, seems absurd given the unyielding, diametrically opposed worlds occupied by these two medias representative of two ideologies as viewed by Daney and Wenders. For Daney, images which are on "the side of promotion and advertising, which is to say the side of power… are no longer on the side of the dialectical truth of 'seeing' and 'showing'"[13]. The world with "images among others on the market of brand images… is precisely the world 'without cinema'"[14]. Wenders distinguishes cinema as "art" that "tells stories to the public", whereas the "industry wants to make its profits from the storytelling"[15]. In his dichotomy, advertising comes under the umbrella group of "industry" which also targets big budget Hollywood movies for compromising what is real, "only telling the affirmative type of story"[16].

Analyzing the art of storytelling and cinematic inspirations through four examples

While the juxtaposition of the respective ideologies belonging to advertising and cinema may be clear and their disparities unbridgeable, a more concrete, constructive and optimistic perspective of this "marriage" can be obtained through the analysis of varied luxury commercials influenced by the cinema. Although the press and luxury brands often indiscriminately proclaim all these commercials as artistic works that pay homage to certain directors or films, there are, in my opinion, story-telling, cinematographic successes like *Bleu de Chanel* and *The Follow,* that sharply contrast incoherent attempts at easy "cultural capital boosts" such as *Le Rouge* or *The Lady Noire Affair.* Comparing the commercials in the two camps permits the derivation of certain conditions judged essential to the successful cinematic evolution of advertising.

The TV commercial *Bleu de Chanel* tells the story of Hector, a young recently successful actor who rejects the expectations and lifestyle that come with this celebrity. While at a press conference, Hector's mind wanders back to the past towards his old loves, Sophie and Theodora, in flashbacks. He is brought back to the present by a question asked by someone in the audience – it turns out to be his first love Sophie asking the question, and this acts as a catalyst that helps him decide to walk away from everything in his life, in a quest for freedom. *Bleu de Chanel* makes references to the films *Nottinghill*, directed by Roger

Michell, and the cult classic *Blow Up*, directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. In *Nottinghill*, famous actress Anna Scott meets and falls in love with everyman William Thacker, ultimately deciding to spend the rest of her life with him despite the disparity of their worlds. *Bleu de Chane*l refers to the scene of the press conference in *Nottinghill* where William, after having refused to be in a relationship with Anna, regrets his decision and makes a public apology in an effort to win her back. In *Blow Up*, Thomas is a famous fashion photographer who is disillusioned with the superficial and decadent life that he leads, and harbors the dream of becoming a "serious" journalistic photographer. *Bleu de Chanel* makes a reference to the well-known scene at the beginning of *Blow Up* where Thomas takes photos of Verushka, a famous model, putting Hector in the place of Thomas, and Sophie in the place of Verushka.

The reference to *Nottinghill*, while evident, does not appear particularly meaningful. Although Anna Scott and Hector are in largely parallel positions, they end up making gender-stereotypically diverging choices – the woman prioritizing love and a family, and the man putting his liberty above all else. The rapprochement between Thomas and Hector is more interesting and coherent, both being young, conventionally successful male protagonists who are fundamentally dissatisfied with their lives and on a quest to find greater meaning. Ultimately, however, while there is no dissonance between the commercial and its references, the commercial's strengths lie in Scorsese's personal talent, and are not parasites of what has been borrowed from other films, despite the cultural capital intrinsic to *Blow Up*.

Watching *Bleu de Chanel* for the first time is a very confusing experience due to its narrative density – a large number of scenes are compressed in a minute, sometimes changing by the millisecond, and there are abrupt chronological jumps in the story as a result of the flashbacks, in particular the system of the flashback within the flashback. Scorsese does not aim for easy comprehension. Instead, he creates a false impression of time, especially with regards to Sophie's and Hector's relationship – the viewer feels privy to years in the couple's lives, in just a few seconds. There is also a praise-worthy visual richness in the variation of colors, textures, rhythm and the utilization of pictorial metaphors. The atmosphere, packed with suspense and excitement, is amplified by the blue toned ambient lighting. The unnaturalness of the blue-toned lighting takes the commercial out of the drudgery of realism, instantly establishing exoticness in the physical set-up of the commercial to accompany the idealized, romantic vision of the protagonist, while constantly reminding the viewer of the name of the perfume, *Bleu de Chanel*. The different women Hector loved, brunette Theodora and blonde Sophie, are juxtaposed by distinctive mini-universes: the first cold, elegant and unwelcoming with static, formally composed shots, the latter blurred, varied, colorful, warm, with hand-held camera shots. This vibrant ambiance culminates in the exhibition of Hector's strength as a man, literally represented by the collapsing of the press conference's walls, and his choice to walk into the darkness – he chooses the realm of limitless possibilities above the multitude of material and sexual pleasures we have witnessed earlier.

Le Rouge, in blatant opposition, is a commercial that relies entirely on a superficial, physical imitation of a modern cultural classic *Le Mépris*, directed by Jean-Luc Godard, to mask its lack of inspiration. This 30 second TV spot advertising a Chanel Allure lipstick features model Julie Ordon naked, teasingly posed on a white bed, with a voice-off (presumably Ordon's) asking an anonymous male figure who holds and manipulates a lipstick in his hand, extending and retracting it, if he

loves her lips. The man does not reply and the commercial ends with her taking the lipstick from him and applying it on her lips. This is a recreation of a famous early scene in *Le Mépris* where Camille, played by Brigitte Bardot, asks her husband Paul a series of repetitive questions – if he loves each part of her body (feet, thighs, breasts, etc.) one by one, to which he responds yes each time, leading her to conclude that he loves her "completely".

That Chanel would use this masterpiece by a director whose name is monumental in French (and International) artistic cinema is understandable, in terms of the artistic and cultural capital gained. Furthermore, Julie Ordon gains an instant association with beauty and sex symbol Brigitte Bardot, which is bestowed onto the product. However, although the commercial has been referred to by both the press and the director as a tribute to Godard, the dissonance between it and the film can only be described as tragic.

The choice of the commercial to reproduce this scene is questionable: the scene is separate from the rest of the film, created to satisfy the American producer's insistence on the exhibition of Brigitte Bardot's body. The isolation of the scene is conveyed through the disconcerting, unnatural switches in ambient lighting inconsistent to the narrative. Bardot's series of questions reduce the individual to a series of body parts, objectifying the body in the style of pornography that often isolates images of sexual body parts. However, during the scene and the series of questions, the camera rests primarily on Bardot as a whole. This, together with her conclusion at the end ("so you love me completely"), can be seen as a rejection or a mockery on the part of Godard to this objectification of the body. In the commercial, the ambient lighting is constructed to give the impression of natural daylight, effacing Godard's intentions to establish an isolation of this particular scene. Ordon asks only one question in the style of Bardot, whether the man loves her lips, establishing the isolation of a body part, and an objectification of the body, without any counter-attacks. The commercial's incomplete extractions of elements from the film results in a very literal, vulgar reprisal of the scene Godard meant to be an ironic critique of his American producers and the general public's demands.

If we disregard the commercial's botched appropriation of the film, all that is "original' to the commercial is an overt sexuality that verges on, and crosses over into crudeness: the phallic shape of the lipstick, and the manner that it is called to attention as the man holds it in his hand, clicking and un-clicking; Ordon's silent pin-up girl posing in bed. There is neither narrative nor visual inventiveness – without the forced association with Godard, the commercial is simply uninteresting.

Despite their cinematic influences, *Bleu de Chanel* and especially *Le Rouge*, are still anchored to traditional advertising with classic time limits and product presentations at the end of the commercials. *The Follow* and *The Lady Noire Affair* are both internet "film-commercials" around six minutes long, each an "episode" in the non-linear collection created by different famous directors. The analysis and comparison of these two structurally similar, yet fundamentally diverging works, give us a more insightful understanding of how luxury commercials can both move more faithfully towards the cinema in the case of the former, and conversely, in the case of the latter, make a sham of this contemporary art form.

In *The Follow*, as in all the short films of this series, Clive Owen plays The Driver, someone who is hired to accomplish a mission in his BMW. In this particular story, The Driver is hired by the nervous manager of a film star, The Husband, who suspects that his wife is cheating on him. The Driver's task is to trail The Wife and report back on her activities. The Driver accepts the job reluctantly, and follows her in her daily life all the way to the

airport where she has bought a ticket to return to Brazil to see her mother. He discovers that she is bruised, and makes the conclusion that it is The Husband who has physically abused her. He leaves and later returns his payment to the manager, claiming to have lost track of The Wife.

Notwithstanding the commissioned nature of *The Follow*, this short film is still identifiable and true to the world-famous Hong Kong director in terms of its themes and style, to the extent that it has been recognized as "a miniature Wong Kar-wai film in all aspects"[17] by film historian Stephen Teo.

Isolation and loneliness, one of Wong's principal recurrent themes, structures *The Follow* like a skeleton, constructed by the film's estranged characters and motifs, both cinematic and visual, of solitude. The Driver is a solitary, mysterious figure who works alone. The only romantic relationship directly portrayed in the short film is one that is overtly dysfunctional, between an abusive, jealous husband and his suffering, victim of a wife. Aside from these plot elements, one of Wong's classic stylistic devices which signal characters' alienations from one another, the voiceover monologue, is used frequently by The Driver. These monologues have been used to great effect in many of Wong's other films, such as in *Fallen Angels* where one of the protagonists Ho is mute and his voice is only heard in these voiceovers where he communicates his motivations and sentiments. Wong also enriches this theme of solitude through the use of two motifs. The first is completely visual, that of a solitary moon suspended in a black sky, repeated in long fixed shots, reminding us of the "one" in alone – the driver's way of being kind to The Wife is giving her her liberty, by taking his leave, so that her husband will no longer be able to find her. This image of the solitary moon is visually recalled at the end when The Driver has refused to continue the mission and drives off alone, through the reflection of tunnel lights on the windshield of his car, forming a single white round spot that moves out of view and is soon replaced by another identical reflection.

The second motif, this time cinematic literary-style, is that of the road. Wong uses the basic, enforced plot to enhance the theme of isolation and loneliness: the film begins and ends when The Driver is in a car, portraying him as a roaming spirit with no attachments or anchors. Much of the film also takes place on different sorts of roads: the highway, streets in the city, winding roads by the sea. When the scene does not take place on the road, it takes place at temporary locations, either physically or metaphorically speaking, such as the airport.

Two other favorite themes of Wong's – the eternal impossibility of love, and time – are echoed in *The Follow*, and finally tie back to the theme of loneliness. There are strong romantic overtones between The Driver and The Wife, despite the fact that she never ends up knowing him. The Wife is portrayed very picturesquely by the camera – the opening shots takes her out of focus from the back in a flowing white dress in front of an open sky. The theme song "*Unicornio Azul*" (Blue Unicorn), a sentimental, wistful Spanish song is played loudly during the scenes where The Driver is following The Wife, and the ambient sound is either muted or dimmed, creating a dreamlike atmosphere that one identifies instinctively with romance. The impossibility of a relationship or a rapprochement of the two is consistently visually manifested. Awkward camera angles are chosen to obscure the view of The Wife when The Driver is following her – symbolic of the inherent barrier (The Husband) between them. It is also important to note the natural, organic, beautifying, alchemizing effect that The Wife has on The Driver's otherwise sterile, cold life, manifested visually through the warm lighting and sepia or natural coloring of the scenes when he is

following her, that contrasts the faded, green, artificial lighting the film ends with when he drives off alone.

Aside from these distinctive, principal themes and the stylistic devices employed to illustrate them, Wong's films are also fundamentally anti-Hollywoodian in the subtlety of their narrative development, belonging to the realm of art films. Great importance is given to looks and gestures as opposed to direct disclosure, and events are often accompanied by no additional verbal explanations. Wong remains faithful to his style of discretion even in this commissioned "film" – no direct reference is ever made to the turning point of the narration, where The Driver discovers The Wife's bruised eye, which takes place without any dialogue and uses revelatory shots that invite the viewer to piece the story together, and infer the Driver's conclusion that The Husband is abusive.

The Lady Noire Affair tries to emulate the success of *The Follow* with a similar structure, and an equally stellar director and cast, but falls far behind. Marion Cotillard plays Lady Noire, a mysterious, elegant, brunette woman on a mission to save "James", who is held captive alone in a room in the Eiffel tower. "James" is connected to a "big boss" figure in a luxurious apartment running some operation that apparently does not go as planned. The air is thick with a conspiracy theory: Lady Noire is detained by the police with a bag check in some sort of hotel, when she is impatiently in search for "James"; someone whose identity is unknown is dismantling the lock of the door to where James is held captive. Her Lady Dior bag is removed. Lady Noire retrieves her (or another similar) bag at the concierge with a number conveying some message/information from or about "James". She runs to the Eiffel tower and takes the lift up. Dangerous men in black coats with guns arrive and start running up the stairs of the Eiffel tower. Gunshots are heard. When the lift stops, Lady Noire climbs onto a beam of the tower to avoid being detected. A helicopter arrives to her aid. She opens the locked door to the room where James is held, transformed by a change of hairstyle, make up and dress.

This extremely confusing story scripted by fashion bloggers is officially communicated by Dior as a film noir tribute to Alfred Hitchcock, renowned for the direction of mystery/crime/horror thrillers, certain of which have become cult classics, such as *Psycho* and *The Birds*. There are also several references to Hitchcock's well-known mystery thriller *Vertigo*, in which a retired policeman Scottie unknowingly abets an old schoolmate's murder of his wife Madeleine. The music in the film-commercial primarily made up of strings instruments and composed by Guillaume Roussel, recalls the opening and recurring strings music in Vertigo by Bernard Hermann as it is repetitive, haunting, very suspenseful and fatalistic. The recurring zoomed image of an eye or eyes, during the credits and at a moment in the film-commercial, is a close replica to certain shots in the movie. Finally, the transformation of Lady Noire from brunette and elegant to blond and showy at the end, recalls a key element in *Vertigo*'s plot, the dual identity of "Madeleine", who is actually played by an actress called Judy.

Aside from the references to *Vertigo*, Lady Noire touches on a few of some of Hitchcock's pet themes, namely that of moral ambiguity, fear/paranoia, and role-playing. In *Lady Noire*, all the characters appear suspicious, even the policemen, due to their overtly mysterious, inexplicable actions. The confusion in the moral alignments of the characters creates the heavy paranoid atmosphere of a conspiracy theory, sustained by Lady Noire's fear. These themes are also reinforced by some of Hitchcock's stylistic devices. For example, the slight disparity between the visual and the audio, manifested in the oppressively loud, foreboding, and very dramatic music from

the opening song even during scenes where nothing technically exciting/dangerous was occurring. The troubled atmosphere is also created through the alignment of the weather – the stormy grey threatening skies as Lady Noir runs towards the Eiffel tower – with Lady Noire's anxiety and fear. The chiaroscuro lighting, and the repeated superposition of the Eiffel tower's menacing lattice of iron on Lady Noire's face as she gets closer communicate her single-minded distress. Utilizing the weather, the lighting and "special" montage effects are all techniques of German expressionist cinema, which influenced Hitchcock's work such as in *Rebecca* or *The Wrong Man*.

Yet despite these similarities, comparing the advertisement to Hitchcock's works is like comparing an accomplished parrot's speech to a human's – the parrot might use some of the same words but its words ring empty. For a luxury brand like Dior, the advertisement has strict objectives and limitations; certain themes are taboo, such as violence and death. The viewer has the impression that there are no real consequences to its plot. Lady Noire is never in any danger – be it of failing her "mission" or of suffering personal injuries. For example, when Lady Noire is at the Eiffel Tower, supposedly the scene of great "suspense", there are gunshots, but Lady Noire is safely in the elevator away from the gunmen on the stairs and no one else is hit. In Hitchcock films, people often die in dangerous moments, sometimes very brutally or unexpectedly, or even if they finally end up surviving the spectator is kept on the edge of his seat until the outcome is clear. This is what charges the atmosphere in his films, what has established him as the "Master of Suspense". In contrast, if there are no consequences, there is no real engagement with the spectator's emotions, and the commercial is just a paper caricature of a film noir more suited to children.

Another disparity between the commercial and Hitchcock films is *Lady Noire*'s lack of a convincing, illuminating ending that acts as the backbone for the entire plot. One of the great strengths of Hitchcock's works is the twist ending that elucidates the mystery. For example, in *Vertigo*, the actress Judy shares an uncanny, surreal resemblance to "Madeleine" because she *was* this character for most of the film, hired by Madeleine's husband to play the role of Madeleine, pretending she was crazy so that the murder of the real Madeleine could be accepted as suicide. Scottie eventually discovers the truth because he chances upon Judy in the streets after Madeleine has "committed suicide", and is obsessed with her due to her resemblance to the dead woman. In sharp contrast, the commercial begins with many deliberately mysterious elements that do not become important plot elements in the course of the film, and concludes with the viewer having gained absolutely no additional knowledge on the situation. The contrived storyline is linked to both the desire to refer to Hitchcock, as well as a result of the intrinsic advertising nature of the "film" already mentioned above, which creates and propels events by the desire to showcase the handbag and other products, as opposed to what is crucial for a good story. The zooms on the eye(s) of Lady Noire, and the bizarre transformation of brunette Lady Noire to blonde Lady Noire, are both direct references to *Vertigo* that never attain their own significance within the commercial. Unanswerable loose plot ends cripple the story, while this same ambiguity and obscurity attack the characters. At the beginning, as at the end, we have no idea who the characters Lady Noire, the man being held captive (except a name "James") or the "big boss" are, nor gained any insight on their motivations. All the lack of information greatly weakens the story-telling capacity of the commercial, because there finally isn't really a story. This lack of conviction further condemns the "film" as a complete caricature, as it has no substance to justify the very dramatized atmosphere.

Looking at the four luxury productions influenced by the cinema, the two most cinematographically successful share two essential similarities. Firstly, all the directors had a liberty in their construction. Chanel has said that they left Scorsese with a "carte blanche" and Wong has testified to the freedom that he was given as director. This is compared to *The Lady Noire Affair* where Olivier Dahan worked around a script by fashion bloggers. Secondly, and most importantly, both commercials are largely and richly original, despite the references to or inspiration by films. Logically, this seems intrinsically linked to the idea of directorial liberty. While *Bleu de Chanel* uses references to two films, these were woven into a third story that could have forgone the visual *clin d'œils* without losing its narrative complexity or the richness of its imagery. *The Follow* was faithful to Wong's trademark themes and style, but without direct recycling of plot or visual elements. It is important for any aspiring commercial "film" to be able to stand alone based on the eloquent fertility of its own content. The examples of *Le Rouge* and *Lady Noire* provide proof in negative forms of this assertion by displaying the danger of clutching parasitically to cinematic successes, hoping to ride on other films' or directors' celebrity. The inspiration by the cinema should rest an influence, not consume the production; imitation does not suffice, and cannot replace the brilliance of creation. Thirdly, both *Bleu de Chanel* and *The Follow* are respectful of their viewers, giving their intelligence enough credit to believe that the story does not have to be handfed to them. *Bleu de Chanel* for example, in Jean-Michel Bertrand's words, uses "the narrative and above all temporal complexity that obliges the spectator to work a little to (re)edit the scenes into a chronological order. Forcing the spectator to make an effort is no longer that common in the cinema, but it is often the condition for giving a film an edge that is more than strictly consumerist"[18]. *The Follow*'s anti-Hollywoodian narrative style mentioned earlier also demands this degree of effort from the spectator.

There is significant merit in an imaginative, original and cinematographically rich commercial. Personally, I feel that this evolution of the luxury commercial is culturally favorable in terms of increasingly creativity and intelligence, since luxury brands have the resources to engage experienced, competent film directors and to fund their demands.

While the ideological and artistic chasm between cinema and advertising can never be crossed due to the divergent intentions of luxury brands and cineastes, this does not mean that advertising cannot arrive at a middle ground between the two worlds. André Bazin has said that "the cinema more than any other art is bound up with love"[19]; engaging those that love this art and giving them the liberty, respect and resources to create, even with vested interests, could be the closest that advertising can get to the "supplementary country called cinema"[20].

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1. Fabrice Bousteau, "Pourquoi les marques singent de plus en plus l'art", *Beaux Arts magazine*, nº 315, septembre 2010, p. 80.
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Branded_content
3. Véronique Richebois, "Quand les grandes marques font leur cinéma", *Les Echos*, 4/06/2010.
4. Fabrice Bousteau, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
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