

# THE SCENT OF SUCCESS

## Image-Sound Relations and Audio-logo-visuality in Baz Luhrmann's two promotional films for Chanel No.5 perfume

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### Abstract

This article analyses Baz Luhrmann's two short promotional films for Chanel No 5 perfume (2004 and 2014) in terms of the aesthetic styles deployed for their promotional functions. The article begins by providing a contextual introduction to Luhrmann's oeuvre and to aspects of Michel Chion's notion of 'audio-logo-visuality' (2009) relevant to the director's oeuvre. Section I discusses Luhrmann's first Chanel No 5 commercial, made in 2004, the nature of its music track and the role of narration in the production. Section II considers Luhrmann's reworking of the song 'You're the one that I want' (from the 1978 film *Grease*) for his 2014 promotional film. Our discussion of the latter details the manner in which the audio-lyrical text is complemented and extended in the visual text to promote its product through a complex cluster of associations. The analyses identify two contrasting approaches to the use of music in the films' promotion of the perfume product and two distinct patterns of audio-logo-visuality.

### Keywords

Baz Luhrmann, audio-logo-visuality, advertisement, Chanel No.5

### Introduction

Luhrmann is renowned for his direction of intricate, glamorous audio-visual texts in which music plays a prominent role. The five feature films, *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Romeo + Juliet* (1996), *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *Australia* (2008) and *The Great Gatsby* (2013) constitute his best known outputs (along with his work in opera<sup>14</sup>) but he has also made a number of other short audio-visual pieces that merit attention. Two significant examples of the latter have been promotional films for Chanel No 5 perfume. The first was made in 2004, starring Nicole Kidman (lead actress in *Moulin Rouge!*) and the second in 2014, starring Brazilian 'supermodel' (and occasional actress<sup>15</sup>) Giselle Bündchen.

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<sup>14</sup> Luhrmann's idiosyncratic interpretation of Benjamin Britten's operatic rendition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed in Sydney, Melbourne and Edinburgh to favorable reviews in 1993 and his production of Puccini's *La Bohème* was a box-office and critical hit in New York in 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Bündchen starred in Tim Story's 2004 film *Taxi* and had a supporting role in David Frankel's *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006).

Cook has described the approach pursued by Luhrmann and his creative team in the period 1992-2008 as marked by “clashing genre conventions”, a “histrionic acting style that do[es] not chime with cinematic realism” and an “overheated” visual style “with a dramatic use of colour design that complements the fast editing pace and overtly mobile camera” (2010: 3). Complementing these aspects, the musical scores for his films are also highly idiosyncratic, eclectic and stylistically florid. As Coyle (2012) discusses, with specific regard to Luhrmann’s initial features (often referred to as the ‘Red Curtain Trilogy’), music is often featured in “sequences centred on spectacles, thereby challenging designations of diegetic and non-diegetic film music functions” (2012: 10-11). As she also emphasised, his distinct approach to music is manifest in his production team’s “choices of music”, “the relationships of this music to his narratives” and in “his manner of ‘versioning’ music” (ibid: 11). As Coyle’s characterisations suggest, music is not just an addendum to the audio-visuality of Luhrmann’s films but rather a complex element that informs and interacts with dialogue, plot and spectacle. The nature of his ‘versioning’ of music is a particular focus of this article, addressed here as an aspect of his strategies for marketing a designated product (in addition to the music itself). Coyle also identifies that as a result of his willingness to embrace clashing genres and new interpretations in dynamic sonic collages:

*Luhrmann’s aural approach to audio-vision bridges, at its best, syncretism in which seemingly inharmonious elements are blended and, at its worst, literalism that strives to address the broadest of audiences. (ibid: 29)*

One aspect of the “literalism” that Coyle identifies above concerns what Chion has referred to as the ‘audio-logo-visual’ aspect/tendency of cinema (2009: 468), i.e. the role of (spoken) words in relation to the audio and visual elements on screen. Chion regards the former as having a powerful determining influence on the overall audio-visuality of cinema. He contends that while image-movement may give us fleeting impressions, “one element” - i.e. dialogue - “remains constrained to perpetual clarity and stability” (ibid: 170). Referring to dialogue between characters as “theatrical speech”, Chion characterises that this has “a dramatic psychological, informative, and affective function”; and goes on to assert that this “conditions not just the soundtrack but the film’s mise-en-scene in the broadest sense” (ibid: 171). In addition to this standard aspect of cinema he also characterises the function of what he terms “textual speech”, such as the off-screen voice-over, as having “the power to make visible the images that it evokes through sound—that is, to change the setting, to call up a thing, moment, place, or characters at will” (ibid: 172). These characterisations of the role of these two types of speech in cinema (which is implicitly realist, feature-length film in his analyses) are however markedly less dominant in short audiovisual media formats and genres less concerned to produce extended narrative-thematic arcs. In order to understand the role and nature of audio-logo-visuality in other types of media texts it is necessary to address the form and generic function of the productions concerned and the creative space this provides directors working with them. Subsequent sections attempt to do this with regard to Luhrmann’s two promotional films for Chanel.

### Luhrmann’s 1<sup>st</sup> Chanel No 5 Film (2004)

Luhrmann’s first Chanel 5 commission came at a convenient time in that his long-planned film about the life of classical Greek hero Alexander the Great had stalled (and was subsequently shelved). The Chanel project came to Luhrmann following

*Moulin Rouge!* star Nicole Kidman's employment as the promotional face of the perfume. Selected and developed by French couturier Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel (1883-1971) shortly after the end of the First World War, the perfume was launched in 1924. After achieving success in the French market, the product broke through internationally in the mid-1950s following the endorsement of Hollywood actress Marilyn Monroe<sup>16</sup> and subsequently by high-profile fashion magazines such as *Vogue*. Following a dip in its market prominence in the 1970s, Chanel embarked on a high-profile advertising strategy including television commercials shot by rising directors such as Ridley Scott. As might be expected from a company marketing a relatively expensive perfume product, these commercials prioritised visual style and elegance and the representation of glamorous women. Like the company's other promotional material, its television commercials strove to maintain a consistent brand image of timeless quality, despite changing fashions and socio-economic circumstances. As a result of such enterprises Chanel No 5 remains the world's most iconic perfume and its marketing and mystique have been subject to a number of book-length studies (see, for instance, Mazzeo, 2010 and Froment, 2013). While disaggregated figures for the company's advertising recent spend on various products are not available, its advertising budget in the United States alone in 2013 has been calculated at US \$386.4 million, rising from \$362 million in the previous year (Statista, 2013: online).

Following their commission to showcase Kidman's arrival as the brand's new face, the director and his collaborators embarked on sustained research and development of the project, in a similar manner to their research of Paris's famous cabaret venue in their production of *Moulin Rouge!*<sup>17</sup> This lengthy pre-production, and the creative team's desire to emulate the glossy extravagance of their preceding feature film collaboration with Kidman, resulted in the commercial being shot on a budget of c\$42 million (Edwardes, 2004: online), an aspect that also featured heavily in publicity for the commercial. The production was set to an arrangement of 'Clair de lune', a solo piano tone poem by Claude Debussy written in 1890.<sup>18</sup> Tone poems (also referred to, with regard to compositions for orchestra, as symphonic poems) were a style of instrumental composition that commenced in the mid 1800s, reached a creative apogee in the late 1800s and declined in popularity after the end of World War One. Tone poetry was a product of the Romantic sensibility, which encouraged composers to produce work that was associative rather than abstract (i.e. extra-referential rather than infra-referential). While tone poems were not necessarily based on, or necessarily illustrative of, specific literary, dramatic or visual texts; many took specific works as their inspiration. Debussy produced a number of notable works in this genre, including 'Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune', a ten minute long orchestral composition based on a poem by Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>19</sup> Debussy's 'Clair de lune', a delicate, sonorous, piano piece, with periodic ascending arpeggios and quieter, reflective passages, was an interpretation of Paul Verlaine's eponymous poem (1869).<sup>20</sup> Verlaine's twelve-line poem is a subtle and poignant work that combines representations of beauty with senses of ineffable sadness and loneliness, as clearly indicated in its opening verse:

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<sup>16</sup> An audio recording of Monroe's (apparently spontaneous) endorsement of the product was combined with archival images for a 2013 Chanel ad.

<sup>17</sup> It is also pertinent to note that the 50 second long 'Green Fairy' sequence in *Moulin Rouge!* (featuring Kylie Minogue as the - singing and dancing - fairy in question), can effectively be considered as an (un-commissioned) advertisement for Absinthe. (See Hayward, 2012 for an extended discussion of the sequence).

<sup>18</sup> While written in 1890 the piece was not published until 1905 when it appeared as part of 'Suite bergamasque'.

<sup>19</sup> See Code (2003) for a detailed discussion of Debussy's interpretation of the poem.

<sup>20</sup> See Gertrude Hall's translation online at: [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8426/8426-h/8426-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0001](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8426/8426-h/8426-h.htm#link2H_4_0001) - accessed May 26th 2015.

*Your soul is as a moonlit landscape fair,  
Peopled with maskers delicate and dim  
That play on lutes and dance and have an air  
Of being sad in their fantastic trim.*

While there is nothing to suggest any interpretative or referential relationship between Verlaine's poem and the narrative, scenario and/or visual design of Luhrmann's first Chanel film, there is a significant relationship in terms of the musical score being an interpretation of the poem. This relationship is based on the complementarity of the mood/atmosphere of the poem and of the film resultant from their connection via a shared musical text.

The version of 'Clair de lune' recorded for the film was arranged and played by Craig Armstrong, accompanied by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Armstrong is a Scottish composer who has been a key collaborator of Luhrmann's, working on *Romeo and Juliet*, *Moulin Rouge!* and *The Great Gatsby*. His arrangement of Debussy's piece represents a substantial reworking of both the original piano piece and subsequent orchestral arrangements and only used fractions of the original, highlighting some of its most prominent melodic themes and harmonic progressions to fashion the short film's score.

The film was released in several versions. The core visual narrative, which comprises the principal and shortest version (just over two minutes in length),<sup>21</sup> is introduced by a male character's narration that establishes Kidman as a famous beauty who temporarily runs away from her pressured professional life for a brief romantic dalliance with a male whose identity/occupation remains mysterious. The film also features dialogue and interaction between Kidman and the male. In many ways, the narrative essentially reprises aspects of Kidman's role as Satine from *Moulin Rouge!* and her dalliance with the penniless poet, Christian (Ewan McGregor). Like *Moulin Rouge!*, the film features glittery cityscapes and a world of rooftop signs, against which the characters pose. These sequences, introduced by and later reflected upon by the male character's voiceover, epitomise the tendency identified by Chion "in so many occurrences of textual speech in films" whereby "the mise-en-scene takes care to give the image a stylised, artificial, and general turn (by controlling light, setting, and costumes), as if to bring the image more closely in line with the text." (2009: 174)

The music provides a constant underscore that shares the filmic audio-space with both voiceover sequences and brief snippets of dialogue. In the opening 25 seconds, sustained high-pitched strings accompany the piano, which plays a variation of the opening four bars of Debussy's original piece. However here the piano part is transposed from a major to minor key (Db) providing a solemn and stately mood that gives dignity and gravitas to the narrator's question "When did I wake into this

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<sup>21</sup> An extended 5.35 long-form version complicates elements of the core narrative and intersperses this with production sequences that combine to emphasise the design concerns and major production 'back-story' to the ad's production. The film opens with a black and white sequence evocative of the 1950s (which the orchestration colours with a rumbling, slightly ominous passage not present in the short version), the imagery then transitions to colour (foregrounding its artifice through images of video screens and clapperboards). After showing Kidman in Times Square in her elaborate white dress, its designer (recognisable to fashion cognoscenti as Karl Lagerfeld) is then shown sketching and developing the design before the film shows us the featured jewellery. It then switches back to quasi-documentary production sequences from the shoot that lead to the film's concluding red carpet and logo sequence. The extended version (somewhat heavy-handedly) serves to emphasise the (highly expensive) processes and personnel involved in the production, effectively showing the film's budgetary 'expense trails' and emphasising the scale of Chanel's spend as a factor in public estimation of the product (at the same time as further glamourising it by association with Lagerfeld and high-end jewellers).

dream?” This mood continues during one of the film’s most visually arresting sequences, which sees Kidman trapped in the middle of the street near Times Square after running from a cab wearing an impracticably long and feathery white dress. As she gets caught by paparazzi, looking like a deer caught in headlights, a low sustained Eb synth/string note fades in, synchronised with a camera flash, shifting the tonal centre. The piano part then returns to the original Db major tonality and plays the next 4 bars (5-8) of the original almost as written, with a sustained string accompaniment. Having escaped the throng, and now seated in the rear of a cab next to her male confidant, the music shifts as Kidman directs the taxi driver to “drive”. The opening melodic theme is then stated by a full string orchestra, as the image shows Kidman and her lover safely above the throng on a building’s roof. Illustrating Armstrong’s virtual collaging of elements of Debussy’s original, the theme here is condensed from the original six bar length to four, and fragments from four of the original (bars 15, 24-26) are used leading back to a restatement of the previous melodic theme with harp and woodwinds added to the lush strings sound. A swell on the cymbals and a ‘woosh’ sound effect accompanying the image of spotlights crossing in the sky (evoking the spotlights that summon Batman to help the inhabitants of Gotham city) heralds the appearance of the arpeggiated I – iii – I – iii chord movement from the original (bars 66 – 69). This chord movement is first stated by the strings and then, with harp added, as the sequence cuts back to Kidman back on the ground and back in her usual life, climbing red-carpeted stairs.

Direct product representation is discrete (with the iconic perfume bottle entirely absent) and with the product only referenced through its icon, initially glimpsed unobtrusively as rooftop signage, until the final sequence shows a (now far more composed) Kidman wearing a diamond ‘No 5’ pendant over an expanse of her back, revealed by the plunging cut of her black dress. The film’s final voice-over has the male asking, “Has she forgotten?” As if in answer, Kidman turns her head and the music returns to the beginning of Debussy’s original composition, with the piano playing the opening two bars before moving to a tranquil, piano-led coda accompanying the phrase “I know I will not - her kiss, her smile...” that swells to a full orchestra, tonic chord resolution to accompany the final spoken words “her perfume”. The combination of the glittering pendant logo with the word “perfume” leaves no ambiguity about the focal emphasis of the film, providing a final audio-visual reminder of the product that provides the text’s *raison d’être*.

For listeners familiar with the original ‘Clare de lune’ (who might be surmised to be in the minority, given the film’s wide exposure) the film’s underscore provides fleeting associations that are recognisable and evocative, referencing a longer and more substantial musical work. For others it provides a less specific connotation of sensitivity, sophistication and/or Frenchness/Europeanness appropriate to its product image and associations. The composite associations of the music and of the glamorous visual representation of Manhattan provide the film’s promoted product – i.e. its perfume – with a very specific inflection. One of the more notable aspects of Luhrmann’s second Chanel film, produced a decade later, is the manner in which he deviated from this approach and sought to rework elements of a seminal kitsch/retro representation of American popular culture, mobilising a significantly different set of associations and different audiovisual and audio-logo-centric strategies.

## 'You're the one that I want' and *Grease* (1978)

Unlike his first Chanel film, set to an orchestral arrangement of a celebrated art music piece; Luhrmann's second No 5 film featured an extended re-arrangement of an iconic popular song, 'You're the one that I want', from the 1978 musical-comedy film *Grease*. Directed by Randal Kleiser and set in California in the summer of 1959, *Grease's* narrative concerned the antics of a diverse bunch of final year high school students. The film was a major international hit upon release in 1978. Made on a budget of \$6 million, the film went on to gross \$393,955,690 (Box Office Mojo, 2014: online). The project had an extended gestation,<sup>22</sup> before being mounted as a successful Broadway musical in 1972 (and was also produced internationally, including in Australia in 1973).<sup>23</sup> A film adaptation by Allen Carr and Bronte Woodard followed in 1978 that introduced a number of new songs, including two of the most subsequently popular, Sandy's tender ballad, 'Hopelessly devoted to you' (addressed to her love interest, Danny) and the couple's highlight, love-affirming duet, on 'You're the one that I want'. Like the film, the film's soundtrack was a major success. The album topped the US, UK and Australian charts and sold eight million copies in the five years following its release, spawning three number 1 US singles, including 'You're the one that I want' (which also topped the Australian charts).

A significant element in the film's and soundtrack's appeal in Australia was the presence of Australian singer Olivia Newton-John as Sandy and the (inter-cultural) chemistry of her relationship with actor John Travolta (as Danny). The couple's showpiece song features in the narrative at a point when Danny has shed his greaser image in order to appeal to Sandy, who had been wary of his subcultural style and its connotations. Visiting a fairground, he encounters a group of his old friends who tease him about his new, 'respectable' appearance. This interaction is broken by the arrival of Sandy, who has transitioned the other way and is now dressed in leather trousers and jacket, with fluffed up hair and high-heels and smoking a cigarette. Her arrival on-screen is synchronised with the start of a blues piano riff. The song's introduction kicks in as a rockabilly style rhythm bed laid down by drums, bass, guitar and piano. Danny then expresses his admiration for the new, highly-sexualised Sandy by singing, in an exaggerated, theatrical manner:

*I got chills, they're multiplying  
And I'm losing control  
'Cause the power, you're supplying  
It's electrifying!*<sup>24</sup>

Shedding his jacket and starting to dance during the verse, Danny drops to his knees to further express the erotic shock of Sandy's 'makeover'. Urged on by her friends, she drops and crushes her cigarette, then casually pushes the rising Danny over with her foot before strutting around singing, in a clear, controlled voice:

*You better shape up, 'cause I need a man  
And my heart is set on you  
You better shape up, you better understand  
To my heart I must be true*

<sup>22</sup> It was initially conceived by Jim Jacobs in 1970, with the idea for a stage musical featuring 1950s pop and R n' B hits (Neutze, 2013: online). Developed into a musical drama about final year High School students, the play was first staged at Chicago's Kingston Miles Theatre in 1972.

<sup>23</sup> In a version directed by Ross Coleman and starring Australian performers David Atkins, Tina Bursill and Denise Drysdale.

<sup>24</sup> With the final word treated with audio delay, as if to give an 'electrified' quality to the sound.

Chorus vocals, visually represented as performed by Sandy together with Danny and Sandy's female friends, alternate variants on "You're the one that I want" and "Oo, Oo, Oo honey" before resolving with "You're the one that I need/ Yes indeed". Totally smitten, Danny follows Sandy as she dances around. After emerging from a fairground attraction on which the words 'Danger Ahead' are painted, she entices Danny towards her singing:

*If you're filled with affection  
You're too shy to convey  
Meditate my in direction  
Feel your way*

Following her up a gangway, the duo alternate lines:

*Danny: I better shape up, 'cause you need a man  
Sandy: I need a man who can keep me satisfied  
Danny: I better shape up, if I'm gonna prove  
Sandy: You better prove that my faith is justified  
Danny: Are you sure?  
Sandy: Yes I'm sure down deep inside*

Multiple renditions of the chorus see the couple dancing amorously together on a 'Shake Shack' stage and then a whole fairground of teenagers join in dancing and clowning until Danny finishes the number off by hitting a high striker with a hammer, ringing its bell and landing a prize (implicitly Sandy and/or his anticipated sexual congress with her).

The film sequence described above marks the start of an intimate relationship between the couple and can be interpreted as a passage in which the clear differences between the cultural, class and/or subcultural contexts of the protagonists are dissolved in the energetic context of the song and dance number. In terms of Chion's earlier characterisations of the audio-logo-visual nature of film texts, the duet and its ensemble choruses can be considered as a form of musicalised "theatrical speech" (2009: 170) but, at the same time, the whole song and dance number (and its screen visualisation) exist to deliver the dialogical interaction between the characters in a captivating manner. The sequence matches the mood of the film's nostalgic re-imagining of the late 1950s as a time of relative innocence and simplicity, at least (as depicted) for those approaching adulthood. By contrast, the milieu and characters of Luhrmann's 2014 film are more specifically representative of an older (implicitly 30-40 year old) moneyed class in a glamorous/glamourised present.

#### Luhrmann's 2nd No. 5 film (2014)

In an interview in *Vanity Fair* magazine in 2014, Luhrmann stated his intention to pursue a contemporary realism in his second Chanel production that was in marked contrast to his first No. 5 film:

*The Chanel No. 5 woman in the time of Nicole was the world at that time. The world was so enamored with pure romanticism, and I think Gisele represents the Chanel No. 5 woman now. Meaning, she can be doing sports on the beach, have a moment to herself and own it. She can have a child.*

*She can have a real job. Her job, where she creates inspirational images for women, doesn't mean she can't have stress or have a complicated relationship. All those things that we actually know—to go with all of that isn't fantasy, it is reality. But it doesn't mean she needs to forego romance, and escape, and put on a beautiful dress, and have a moment and sensuality. So, having it all does not come easily. That's the film—it isn't all just pretty smiles and flowers. (Grinnell, 2014: online)*

Luhrmann's characterisation of Chanel's current paradigm of a professional (super-) woman as an aspirational role model is obviously complex and contentious. But for the purposes of this essay it is most striking that Luhrmann chose a track to accompany such a representation that was so steeped in a previous cultural moment and its associations that it might almost seem 'over-burdened' with its prior connotations. In *No 5: The Song*, one of the short 'making of' films released to complement the premiere of the main film, Luhrmann made reference to the work of celebrated haute couture designer Karl Lagerfeld (who also designed Kidman's dresses in the 2004 film) to explain the process by which the original *Grease* duet track was reinterpreted in a manner that he deemed appropriate as the (sole) soundtrack element of his second No 5 film:

*Like Karl does so brilliantly in his work – he's always able to take something very classical, something you think that you know, and he's able to turn it over and find a new experience there. So I wanted to find that in a musical idea...*

This comparison of fashion design and music creation is somewhat cryptic. In one sense – the sense that Luhrmann appears to offer – it might be taken to refer to the modification of design elements in order to refresh established styles and to make them somehow more relevant to a contemporary sensibility. In another, and by no means uncomplementary sense, it might be perceived that the "new experience" apparently offered is as much about the packaging and promotion of stylistic modifications as it is about the actual textual modifications themselves.

The idea for a cover of 'You're the one that I want' was suggested by Luhrmann's musical supervisor, Anton Monsted, who was aware that American singer/violinist/arranger Matthew Hemerlein, who currently works under the name Lo-Fang,<sup>25</sup> was interested to record a radically different interpretation of the song.<sup>26</sup> In a carefully staged piece of what might be termed 'documentary theatre', the 'making of' film shows Luhrmann in a film studio with Lo-Fang as the director explain his thought processes: "I was thinking, 'how could that possibly be right?' you know because we know it as [sings indistinctly] 'I've got hands ah yah yah...'"<sup>27</sup> [snaps fingers]. The scene then cuts to Lo-Fang singing "and my heart is set on you" accompanied only by his pizzicato violin as the director touches his arm and nods in encouragement. Luhrmann resumes his address to camera with the following characterisation:

<sup>25</sup> The artist released his debut album *Hot Nickels* under his original name in 2011 before adopting his current professional moniker for his 2014 album *Blue Film*.

<sup>26</sup> Lo-Fang has stated that he started working on his version of the song in 2010 when he was "just sketching songs" that he liked and that he "liked those reverse guitar sounds plus the bassline in the chorus is very compelling... Somehow the melody and the lyrics spoke to me" (in Darwin, 2014: online).

<sup>27</sup> This is a mis-remembered line, "thrills" being the correct lyric rather than "hands".



*You immediately feel ‘Errr... Do I know that song? I think I know that song’. So it feels familiar and then when you do realize you know it - at that moment I think you enjoy more that there’s more to it.<sup>28</sup>*

After a brief interlude showing Lo-Fang singing the line “I’ve got chills, they’re multiplying and I’m losing control” while Luhrmann shoots his performance on a digital camera, the director resumes:

*When I heard the interpretation I went ‘He’s done exactly with that classic song what Karl does with fashion. He’s taken something you think you know and he’s shown you a different emotional take, a different way in.*

Luhrmann also goes on to characterise that:

*I think that’s the mark of a classic. A classic anything be it a play or a piece of music, a film - the thing about a classic is that it can move through time and it can be reinterpreted many ways at many different times but it still is able to possess its fundamental meaning.*

These statements raise more questions than they answer. What is the nature of the ‘classic’ status identified here (with some unspecified “fundamental meaning”) and how is it open to reinterpretation? In Luhrmann’s work there appears to be a perception of ‘the classic’ persisting in a socio-cultural space that is somehow generalistic rather than specific.<sup>29</sup> Given Luhrmann’s propensity to rework well-established cultural texts (such as Shakespeare’s ‘Romeo and Juliet’) such a perception may be close to his creative heart. But, again, this statement is somewhat problematic in that the test of whether a work is ‘a classic’ (or not) is premised on its retaining its “fundamental meaning”. But what is that, and who assesses what it means and whether it persists in subsequent versions?

Lo Fang’s 2014 remake of the original (recorded) version of the song maintains the same basic formal structure with only slightly modified lyrics and melody, but differs substantially in terms of textural and rhythmic elements. The tempo of the remake is significantly slower (60bpm as opposed to 107 bpm for the original) and the key is raised a tone from the original (B minor and relative D major) and the track features sound sources that reference both classical music and electronic dance music styles. The song opens with short excerpts of reverse piano and bowed strings and two-note piano ostinato that presage the pizzicato violin ostinato that continues throughout the verse and pre chorus sections. Guitar (or possibly keys/synth sound) chords accent beat one of the verses with a reverse delay of this sound panned across the stereo spectrum to fill out the texture in each bar. An irregular kick drum pattern, low in the mix, punctuates the close mic-ed and breathy vocal delivery in the first verse.

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<sup>28</sup> Luhrmann also states, somewhat cryptically, that what appealed to him about Lo-Fang’s version was that, “he played the sub-text, not the idea on top”. No further discussion of what Luhrmann regarded as the either the “sub-text” or “idea on top” is provided and the analyses presented in this article fail to illuminate the remark further.

<sup>29</sup> This latter point reflects something of a contradiction in that, at various times, Luhrmann appears to represent himself as part of a transnational cultural space and, at others, to be specifically implicated in Australian cultural traditions. With regard to his second Chanel No 5 film, for instance, it is significant that while he did not refer to the matter in any of his discussions of his song choice for the film, he had previously sought to include a radical revision of another Olivia Newton-John song in a previous production; initially intending to feature a slow, sultry cover of Newton-John’s 1981 hit single ‘Physical’ by fellow Australian singer Kylie Minogue in *Moulin Rouge!* (see Hayward, 2013: 32-33). The aspects of the song referred to by Luhrmann might therefore be seen as both classic in an international arena and also classic within a distinctly Australian sphere of cultural experience.

The pre-chorus section is the peak dynamic section of the track. In its first instance, its texture includes a glitch style beat comprised of modified sampled sounds (hi hat, rim shot, kick drum and other slow attack mid-range frequency noise sounds), a descending arpeggiated bass synth part, reverse low range piano notes and vocal harmonies a third above the main melody. Unlike the original, the climax of the pre-chorus has the hook line delivered over minimal instrumentation (slow swelling keys sound and pizzicato double bass) and without the follow up lyrics (i.e., “you are the one I want, ooh, ooh, ooh, honey”). New sounds are introduced in the second verse (high pitch reverse bell-like sounds, slow attack distorted guitar notes) and the pre chorus (an elaborate bowed string arrangement. The final chorus is delivered over minimal instrumental backing, this time with a gentle backing vocal section (in a slow and barely recognizable reference to the original – ‘ooh, ooh, ooh’), descending bass synth arpeggio and a tranquil bowed string arrangement. Harmonically the track retains the basic elements of the original although a IV chord is swapped for the vi chord in the pre-chorus (i.e., I, III7, IV, vi instead of I, III7, vi, IV) and the chorus is much simplified to a basic I – V movement.

In addition to the cutting of lyrics from the chorus, Lo Fang’s version has some subtle lyrical changes in the pre chorus to reflect the shift from the original duet version to a solo one. These involve the lines “You better shape up, cause you need a man” (our emphases). The second pre chorus section is also altered as follows:

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*If I’m gonna prove – replaced with - You better prove*  
*That my faith is justified – replaced with - Are you sure?*  
*Yes I’m sure down deep inside*

The song forms a pre-constituted soundtrack that the film’s imagery and narrative fragments can be set to without the additionally complicated effects of (synchronised) dialogue or narration. Explaining the role of music in the film, Luhrmann has stated that, “there’s no dialogue in this little film, the song itself is the narration” (*No 5: The Song*). While Luhrmann doesn’t make the association explicit, the form he refers to, where the lyrics generate the narrative scenarios, is a standard music video one. Lo-Fang’s various appearances lip-synching are also classic music video devices. Similarly, while the presence of an identifiable (non-musical) star in the narrative is far from common across the entire spectrum of music video productions, high profile personalities have frequently featured in high-budget productions, including a variety of recognisable super-models deployed to glamourise music videos’ visual tracks.<sup>30</sup>

Chion has referred to music video’s “joyous rhetoric of images”, which he notes is unlike cinema “since it does not involve dramatic time”, creating “a sense of visual polyphony” (2009: 166). He also asserts that:

*music video leads us back to the silent cinema—seemingly a paradox, since we’re talking about a form constructed on music. But it is precisely insofar as music does form its basis, and none of the narration is propelled by dialogue, that the music video’s image is fully liberated from the linearity normally imposed by sound... the two are not wholly independent from each other. But this relation is often limited to points of synchronization,*

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<sup>30</sup> Such as Christie Brinkley in the video for Billy Joel’s *Uptown Girl* video (1983), Kate Moss in the White Stripes *I just don’t know what to do with myself* (2003) or Kate Upton in Lady Antebellum’s *Bartender* (2014).

*where the image matches the production of sound in some way. The rest of the time each goes its separate way.* (ibid: 167)

Chion's initial comparative point is salient, and might also be extended via a consideration of the similarity of the acting mode and styles of those performing in narrative elements of music videos to those of 'silent' cinema. Yet there is a degree of misinterpretation of the degree of liberation from linearity identified as "imposed by sound". This involves the extent to which the song words featured in music videos in many cases determine aspects of the visual track of the music video and, often, of action and/or character interaction sequences in these. In this manner the "points of synchronization" are not just with the "sound" but often with connotative or denotative aspects of words, phrases or longer arcs of sung text. In some instances, music videos blend lip-synching with visual sequences that enact the lyrical scenarios via narratives (such as The Dixie Chicks' video 'Goodbye Earl' [2000]), build entire scenarios around fragments of lyrics (such as The Aphex Twin's 'Come to Daddy' [1997]) or else represent aspects of the lyrics in visual tandem with their vocalisation (as in ALL CAPS' 'Delete You' [2011]). Indeed, rather than the "liberation" of image from sung text, one common aspect of music videos concerns the manner in which the inter-relation between the two can be enacted.

One of the few deviations from standard music video form in Luhrmann's 2014 Chanel film results from its *raison d'être* as a promotional device for a commodity other than the track and its performer (which it also provides a music video for in the classic manner). Along with the singer and glamorous lead actors, Chanel No 5 perfume has a central, iconic presence in the film (despite its fleeting representation on-screen) and the other performers, despite their greater prominence, are effectively the product's supporting cast. The film features three main characters: Bündchen, effectively playing herself,<sup>31</sup> actor Michiel Huisman as her love interest and Lo-Fang, playing himself, singing in a nightclub. (NB due to the absence of any fictional character names in the film, the film's characters are referred to below by their performer surnames.) The film's footage combines material from 3 main locations<sup>32</sup>:

1. The ocean and the adjacent house. (The location for the first two minutes of the film)
2. The night club where Lo-Fang sings and which Huisman enters in advance of Bündchen, who arrives at the end to re-unite with him
3. The photographic studio, where Bündchen is briefly shown working

Lo-Fang's version of the *Grease* song dispenses with the male/female duet and ensemble chorus structure and delivers the lyric entirely from a male viewpoint. In a similar manner to that of Luhrmann's first Chanel film, which was organised around the male character's memories and reflections, he has stated that Lo-Fang's performance voices "the thoughts in the man's head" (*No 5: The Song*) and the implication is that the representation of Bündchen is effectively through Huisman's eyes, in a similar manner to Kidman's visualisation through the eyes of the 2004 Chanel film's male character.

The following paragraphs give some sense of the complex manner in which the film creates drama through intercut narrative/thematic sequences that are (particularly in the first minute, during which the elements of drama are established) closely tied

<sup>31</sup> In that she plays a model who also surfs.

<sup>32</sup> Additional sequences include Bündchen walking down a city alley and driving into the city over bridges.

to, if somewhat ambiguously illustrative of, the song's lyrics. The discussion also details how the film operates as what might be regarded a *visual-narrative* tone poem (inverting the relationship of previously discussed musical tone poems to extra-musical referents) premised on both the lyrical and musical content of the music track it is set to.

The film opens by rapidly establishing a sense of drama. The first three seconds show images of waves breaking on the surface of the sea, shot from under the surface, accompanied by a bowed string and reverse piano part. The music develops in a manner reminiscent of John Williams' famous theme to Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), albeit with a more consonant ascending major 2<sup>nd</sup> (B – C#) as opposed to a minor 2<sup>nd</sup> interval. This builds tension that is complicated, rather than offset, by a floating higher register piano ostinato (F# - B) that accompanies a wide panning shot of a city at night. This is followed by a two second sequence of a female figure, seen in long shot from behind, running with a skipping motion through a neon illuminated alley lit by two Chanel No 5 logos. These two musical cues set a somewhat ominous feel (through the low register, reverse sounds) and ambiguous tone (harmonically the pitch content suggests a Bsus2 chord - neither major or minor). At 0.07 the sea image returns, this time showing the silhouette of a woman on a surfboard, shot from underneath, rising up to crest a wave as the image cross-fades to a medium close-up of Lo-Fang singing the opening line of lyrics, "I've got chills, they're multiplying". Prior to the vocal entry, the musical score functions to create atmosphere (and a degree of tension/enigma) in a standard (if well-crafted) cinematic manner. Given that there is nothing in the initial (pre-vocal) musical sequence to suggest the instrumental score as related to the *Grease* song, the first (and subsequent) lines of lyrics constitute just the element of surprise that Luhrmann refers to above (at least for those audience members familiar with the song and/or the film in which it was originally featured).

As Lo-Fang gets to the word "chills", the image cross-fades to a shot of a body-suited female plunging feet-first downwards into the water. Given the wetsuit, the image suggests "chills" as related to the cold of the water. The air bubbles surrounding the submerged figure then appear to be superimposed over a brief image of Lo-Fang singing "multiplying" before the singer's image is replaced by a Chanel No.5 logo surrounded by similar bubbles. As the lyrics state "And I'm losing" a complex cross-fade includes Lo-Fang, to left of image, the bubbles and a closer shot of the female that shows her buttocks exposed to the water by her upper-body suit. As the lyrics transition from "losing" to "control" the image shows the swimmer gracefully rising to the surface, again from behind. Then, on the final syllable of "control" the image shows the male protagonist walking along a balcony in the theatre that Lo-Fang is performing in. As the singer intones "because the power", the swimmer is shown, swimming back up to her surfboard on the surface. With the words "you're supplying", the swimmer's face is glimpsed as she rises towards and breaks the surface, climbing on to a board marked with two prominent Chanel logos (and with a large house on the shore in the background). On the word "supplying", and in a sequence that is only one second long, the male protagonist is shown clearly, face to camera in a room whose square windows are similar to those of the house glimpsed from the water. His expression is ambiguous but he is clearly unsettled, presumably related to a letter he holds in his hands, low in the screen image, as he looks passed the camera. On the word "electrifying" the image shows Bündchen in medium shot, face to camera, clearly recognisable for the first time, and with her expression – together with her looking passed the camera - suggesting a 'look back' to the house and the male. The shot returns to the male, again looking out, unnerved, before the image transitions to an overhead shot of Bündchen

paddling her board forward urgently before transitioning to a more lingering shot of her raising her torso on her board to reveal the board's Chanel logo before rising and surfing a breaking wave.

The surfing section is cleverly ambiguous and highly accomplished in terms of its suturing of primal oceanic and domestic interior spatialities. The tension and cutting between character looks off-screen, followed by Bündchen's urgent forward paddling, initially seem to indicate some drama in-progress between the characters but this is undercut (or, at least, complicated) when she reaches the wave, which is thereby suggested as what she is most strongly pursuing. Further irony and ambiguity is given by the sequence unfolding to the lyrics "you'd better shape up". Given that her bodily shape appears to be more than satisfactory, the "shape up" lyric seems to refer to more emotional matters. The image of her on the wave returns the sense of emotional drama, as it reveals her looking off-screen – clearly not 'in the moment' of her wave-ride – implicitly staring towards the house and the male with a troubled expression as the lyrics intone "because you" before the image returns to Huisman (on the balcony of the venue again) as they state "need", only to return to a dramatic overhead surfing sequence as they state "a man". The juxtaposition of image and lyric is complex here. Instead of images of vulnerability, which might seem appropriate to such a lyrical emphasis, the visual sequence shows Bündchen as supremely at home in her environment and showing pleasure in her ability to ride some not inconsiderable waves (the sequence around 0.55 shows her surfing the face of a wave around 3-4 metres in height).<sup>33</sup> The "need a man" aspect of the lyrics is thereby suggested as less a protective need and more of an emotional one. At 0.52 Lo-Fang sings "and my heart" as the image cuts to Huisman's face in the house room (again looking troubled) as the lyric continues, "is set on you". The image then returns to Bündchen surfing down the face of a large wave, before cutting to a close-up juxtaposing her emotionally tense face with a wall of water behind her. At 0.58, complementing the lyric "you better shape up" the image shows Huisman placing an envelope down. Although difficult to glimpse on first viewing, the inscription written on the envelope's front continues the lyrics with its inscription, "To my heart I must be true". As he places the envelope, the image cuts to another overhead of Bündchen surfing. The phrase "You better" starts during the overhead image, with the phrase continuing "understand" as Bündchen emerges from the water, carrying her board just as the image shows Huisman leaving the note (with its inscription now clearly visible) on a glass coffee table. As the lyrics repeat the inscription on the letter, Bündchen is shown in medium long shot, witnessing Huisman's exit from the house with some concern.

The 1.11 long sequence described in detail above illustrates the manner in which the short film creates narrative tension and ambiguity through frequent and highly effective cross-cutting that is given significant thematic colouration and complexity through close editing to lyrical passages and to the song's slow, almost stately rhythms. Having created a sense of the protagonists' relationship as in a moment of crisis, the film continues to sketch the female's complex life through introducing her children into the narrative before she finds the note. The potential disruption of the note is foreshadowed when piercing high pitched reverse bell-like sounds and a relatively harsh, distorted guitar line enter, adding an extra level of tension to the music that links with the narrative development unfolding on screen. At this moment the child enters the frame and then, whilst hugging her, Bündchen spots the envelope left by Huisman, thus setting up a duty/romance conflict. Unlike

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<sup>33</sup> We are aware that this may be a stunt double rather than Bündchen herself but the visual sequence clearly attempts to represent it as her.

Luhrmann's earlier No. 5 film, in which the iconic No.5 bottle does not appear, the tone of the narrative shifts around 2.04 as Bündchen sprays No.5 in the air in front of her daughter, to break the mood and to cheer her daughter before she departs for school. But this is undercut musically, as the close-up shot of mother and child is synchronised with the movement to the III7 chord in the pre chorus, harmonically the most dissonant part of the chord progression.

At this point, the film shifts to represent the Bündchen character's professional life as a model, showing her posing and twirling for the camera in a studio, with Luhrmann directing the shoot, together with prominent No.5 logos. Re-integrating the two threads, she is shown reading the letter in the studio, before being called back to the shoot by Luhrmann. She responds by running out of the studios and is shown driving over Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan in a open-topped car,<sup>34</sup> finally arriving at the venue where Lo-Fang is playing the song live (as in the previous intercut sections of the performer). She then approaches Huisman with a Chanel No.5 pendant swinging around her back (in a similar image to that of Kidman's back in Luhrmann's preceding Chanel film) and embraces him as the lyrics state "And my heart is set on you). The two then kiss passionately as Lo-Fang sings ("one that I need") turning away from the lovers, as if recognising their need for privacy. The film ends with Bündchen's warm smile and a final caption image that states - with suitable audio-*logo*-visual finality - '5 #ONETHATIWANT'.

## Conclusion

The sonic (re-)interpretation of 'You're the one that I want' by Lo-Fang for Luhrmann's film has a number of significant stylistic differences from the 1978 original. Along with matters of pace, texture and vocal style, the most significantly different aspect concerns purpose – the former being a lively, up-tempo number that brings lovers together in the feature film narrative (for the first time); whereas the latter is a slower, sultry and reflective track that delineates the tensions and delicate dynamics of two established lovers. While Lo-Fang's version clearly draws on and reinterprets the original cast music recording, Luhrmann's 2014 film shows no sign of addressing any aspect of *Grease's* narrative, visual design or editing style. Instead, Luhrmann's film is a densely constructed and finely wrought representation of the particular tension and ambiguity between two adult lovers. Whereas Danny and Sandy duet in *Grease* dressed in costumes that they have donned ('out of character') to pursue each other; Bündchen and Huisman (like Kidman and her confidant in the 2004 film) are very much 'themselves', inasmuch as they wear elegant clothes that seem appropriate to their age, wealth and class positions (and the product's ostensible demographic).<sup>35</sup>

The orchestration of imagery to the soundtracks of both No. 5 films involves what Coyle (2012: 29) describes as the director's tendency to combine both literalism (in audio-*logo*-visual aspects) and syncretism, in blending seemingly inharmonious elements (such as intercutting between the surf and the interior of a home through implied exchanges of glance off-camera in the 2014 film). Rather than elements of Debussy's original composition or *Grease's* audio-visual presentation of 'You're the one that I want' providing identifiable subtexts for the director to re-work; they might be better thought of as *pre-texts* (in both senses of the term) - with the

<sup>34</sup> An image that recalls similar scenes from *The Great Gatsby*.

<sup>35</sup> We state "ostensible" as products are often marketed to audiences as emblematic of a particular life style above their target purchaser's actual socio-economic level.

exercise of re-envisioning the originals serving to facilitate a particularly 'free' approach to narrative. In this manner, the notional functionality of taking a commercial commission shot to a single music piece can be seen to have allowed the director to have subtly rendered two distinct visual-narrative tone works that merit consideration within the main body of his work rather being regarded as trivial commercial addenda. Specific product association is rendered within a complementary audiovisual embodiment of glamour and romantic ambiguity and tension. The films generate creative spaces that are far more than frameworks for product placement and are, thereby, all the more effective promotional devices for the product concerned.

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