The ‘Perfect’ Body:

A Study of The Body in Today’s Consumer Society

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Abstract (Key words: ‘perfect’ body, commodity, consumption, fitness culture, slimness, postmodernism)

This thesis explores the ways in which the body is positioned within consumer society. The development of body ideals in Western societies is examined in order to point out consumers’ occupation with appearances and their bodies as signifiers of success. The three case studies (A&F, Calvin Klein Underwear and fitness magazines) will enable a close analysis of contemporary society and its engagement with the body. I argue that today the body acts as a signifier for people’s narcissistic obsession with the surface, and that the body itself has come to exhibit characteristics of a commodity in consumer society.
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1. Introduction

The suggestion that one should revert back into one’s own body and invest it narcissistically ‘from the inside’ […] to form it into a smoother, more perfect, more functional object for the outside world (Baudrillard 1970, 131)

If we regard the advertising that is constantly displayed around us we notice that there is one aspect immanent to nearly all of it. It is the usage of the body. The employment of the body and especially the sexualised body in the media is not new but has been part of the industry since its beginning. What differentiates advertising in the 21st century from before is not so much the use of images of the always perfectly shaped body but the presentation of this body as something that inevitably must be obtained through consumption. Thus the media fabricates the notion that our body needs constant improvement.

Something that is very present in today’s society is the shift that has taken place from advertising that concentrated on the product and its functions towards advertising that often seems to neglect the product and instead promotes ideas and fantasies. In respect to this capitalist society seems to ignore individual behavioural and biological ways of working regarding our bodies. Thus the body is “skinned from its biological imperatives” (Ewen 1984, 183). The treatment of the body in today’s consumer society thus erases difference through presenting everyone with the same image of the ‘perfect’ body.

Since the 1940s society has experienced changes in the media that had a lasting effect on the pace of transformations taking place around us. The fact that the body is something that is constantly visible in advertising illustrates that it “has literally taken over that moral and ideological function from the soul” (Baudrillard 1970, 129). Whereas in the past the body “was regarded as a transitory vehicle, a means to higher spiritual ends” (Featherstone 1982, 26), it is now a vehicle for the display of success represented through its very surface. The connection between the body and the soul seems to have been disrupted, thus proposing that there is no more possibility of salvation through the soul - as in previous times - but only salvation through the body.
(Baudrillard 1970, 129). Many of us are increasingly interested in our appearances as opposed to the content of things: “The Christian tradition glorified an aesthetics of the soul not the body” (Featherstone 1982, 24). The body has become a sign in our society, standing for a society in which the wish to be seen as spectacular and beautiful has become paramount. The body in the media has been turned into something upon which the desires and hopes of many consumers are reflected. Alongside an uncountable amount of products the body often seems to assume a position alongside other commodities. With maintenance of beauty and vigour seemingly being the main tasks in life, the body often implies its evolvement into a “narcissistic cult object” (Baudrillard 1970, 132).

**1.1. Aims and Research Questions**

The obsession with physical beauty and the fight against decay have become highly visible issues in today’s consumer society. The focus has shifted towards the body as one of the chief objects that allows happiness and success, achieved through the constant act of optimisation. The incessant wish for this optimisation of the body seems to concern the majority of people in the capitalist society. They are made to believe that their bodies are easily changeable and to be rid of problems such as so-called ‘problem zones’. We are told that changing our body is as easy as the consumption of any other commodity available to us in the capitalist society. As easy as the replacement of ordinary commodities, the body is presented to the consumer as another object that can be consumed.

What changes have taken place regarding the body ideal in capitalist society and in what ways could the body in today’s consumer society be regarded as the most valuable commodity? These are the questions that this paper seeks to answer basing the analysis on Baudrillard’s postmodern theory of the sign-value. Three case studies were selected through which the usage of the ‘perfect’ and the ‘disciplined’ body shall be presented and through which the body as a highly dominant agent within capitalist society is analysed.
The aim of this thesis is to discern in what ways the body in contemporary capitalist society serves as another source for consumption. The three case studies are serving as the basis for this analysis and shall point out how similarly the body in various areas of consumption is presented and used as a means to stimulate the purchasing of commodities.

1.2. Method and Material

In order to analyse the way in which the body functions within the contemporary consumer society this paper is going to investigate three case studies. In order to do so it will commence by giving an outline of what postmodernism is. After that the notion of the shift from use-value, linking to Karl Marx, to the sign-value, connected to Baudrillard’s postmodern train of thought shall be explained. To be able to point out the particularities of contemporary society and its notion of the ‘perfect’ body the body ideal in today’s Western society will be looked at.

The first case study will look at Abercrombie & Fitch and its particular marketing strategy that uses nakedness and sexuality as a way to sell their clothes. What will be analysed here is the A&F Quarterly, a combination of catalogue and magazine often referred to as ‘magalogue’, published by A&F itself, in which scantily dressed female and male models are on display. The analysis of this magazine and the notions it conveys serve as a way to understand the consumers’ motivations to purchase apparel by A&F. The analysis is carried out by drawing on Consumer Culture Theory, looking into the ways through which consumers are attracted by the brand. Another aspect in respect to A&F that will be analysed in this paper is the manner in which they employ the body in their stores. The images of A&F subliminally conjure up notions of perfection encompassing the body, through the production and circulation of highly idealised bodies within the brand’s imagery.

The second case study is going to examine two campaigns of Calvin Klein Underwear by employing close semiotic analysis. What will be looked at in respect to this case study is two underwear advertising campaigns. The first one will be the campaign with Natalia Vodjanova and Fredrik Ljungberg from 2008 and the second
one will be the campaign from 2009 with Eva Mendes and Jamie Dornan. The analysis is carried out as a means to uncover the signs the human body carries in contemporary society. In what ways is the body presented to the consumer and which notions about the body are these campaigns supposed to invoke in the consumer?

The third case study is going to be a study of the fitness magazines *Men’s Health* UK and *Women’s Health* UK with particular attention to its covers and the most prominent aspects that centre on idealised notions of the body. Here the focus will be on the contemporary fitness and gym culture and its obsession with the ‘immaculate’ and disciplined body. An overview will be given here of the way the fitness culture works in contemporary society. Besides these aspects this case study will analyse the ways in which the production of the image of the immaculate body takes place, not only analysing the images employed but also at the language.

When analysing these different case studies I find it necessary to expose the ways in which the body is employed. Is it employed as a way to attract attention, to add more erotic content to the imagery or marketing, is it employed as a result of today’s inevitable sexualisation of aspects within our lives or as something entirely different? This will be done through taking a close look at the imagery and the marketing strategies of the body within the different spheres of consumer culture. All these three case studies will be analysed in order to find this out and analyse whether the body could even be seen as one of the most valuable commodities in capitalist society, pointing out the modes through which the body in contemporary society has turned into a product that reflects society’s desire to constantly consume.

### 1.3. Previous Research

Scholars have examined the body from various different angles and within a broad range of disciplines. Since clothing is always created in order to clothe the body, scholars within fashion studies have continuously analysed the body and its materiality due to the centrality it takes up in the world of fashion. The fact that in the past fashion has mainly been ascribed to women and denoted as futile by male scholars in the world
of science has led to a large amount of literature written by women focusing on the female body. An important aspect here is the often discussed ‘exploitation’ or objectification of the female body in the media. Recently this discussion has experienced some changes with a wider angle, including the treatment of the male body in the media. Many studies are concerned with the effect the presentation of the sexualised and specifically the ‘perfect’ body has on young girls and boys as well as on adults of both sexes. An example for one of those studies is Harper’s and Tiggemann’s study “The Effect of Thin Ideal Media Images on Women’s Self-Objectification, Mood, and Body Image” from 2008 in which they analyse the ways in which young women are affected by idealised images of women in the media, showing that their anxiety was higher than that of those who were shown control images. The study “The Media’s Representation of the Ideal Male Body: A Cause for Muscle Dysmorphia?” by Leit, Gray and Pope from 2002 examined the effect idealised images of male models have on men and found out that those shown images of muscular men experienced greater discrepancy between their own muscularity and the muscularity they aspired than those shown neutral images.

The treatment of the body has mainly, as said above, focused on the exploitation and the objectification of the sexualised (fe)male body through the media. Regarding the three case studies within this thesis there has been some specific analysis by scholars of the body in respect to Calvin Klein Underwear, Abercrombie & Fitch and the gym or fitness culture. When it comes to A&F McBride’s book Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on race and Sexuality from 2005 analyses the ways in which A&F discriminates against people of non-white skin colour and generally against those who do not fit into a stereotyped and idealised image of a man or woman. Though the attitude of McBride is partly very negative towards A&F - obvious in the title of the book - she manages to give a critical and highly fruitful analysis of the company’s and its marketing strategies. Literature regarding CK is very often concerned with the objectification of the female body, since the company’s advertising campaigns often show models scantily clad in positions that most often point straight at sexual acts. Hirshman’s article “Was There Sex Before Calvin Klein?” from 1995 discusses this with a focus on Foucault and the presentation of sexuality which is often regarded as being depicted in a pornographic and controversial way in the campaigns of CK. In general CK is criticised for the pornographic manner in which men and
especially women are presented in the brand's advertising. When it comes to previous research regarding fitness culture or the gym culture several books have been published. Sassatelli’s book *Fitness Culture - Gyms and the Commercialisation of Discipline and Fun* from 2010 is one of those and it outlines how the body has become one of the most important icons in contemporary society. She conducts an ethnographic study in order to find out how gym members experience the gym in their lives while she also - but rather in order to underline the before mentioned aspect - analyses the fitness discourse within contemporary society.

2. Postmodernism and Its Difficulties

The late twentieth and especially the twenty-first century have been marked by a significant rise in literature on fashion and its industry. A subject which until recently was not considered worth studying and researching has turned into a vast scientific field of study. Its connection to various scientific disciplines points out its relevance in a society in which to incessantly consume has become the norm. This “major reevaluation of fashion, both in terms of its legitimacy as an area of serious academic investigation and its significance in contemporary Western culture” (Negryn, 2008, 1) has produced a vast body of literature giving fashion the academic attention and credit it is already experiencing in the worlds of those who consume it.

It is because of fashion’s increasing popularity in today’s society that this chapter commences with an outline of the topic of fashion in the academic world instead of a description of postmodernism. De Kelver points out this significance of fashion by saying:“It [shopping] is the most important pastime of this century” (De Kelver 2008, 22). The quote exemplifies the increasing presence and importance of shopping and consumption in general by highlighting that shopping as an activity we pursue in our free times has come to be vastly important.

This development highlights the drastic change from a society in which the written word was paramount to a world in which the image has seemingly become the chief source from which to derive meaning. This change was aided by the advent of the television and was further influenced by billboard advertising and technological
changes which made the constant circulation of images possible. Today moving images relentlessly surround us and penetrate our eyes and our minds leaving little space for us to experience the world irrespective of images. The novelty and the expectations that surrounded the television in its beginning have diminished in favour of a sense of pointlessness pointed out by some academics: “There is no hope for meaning” (Baudrillard 1981, 164). With the television entering society in the 1940s people were presented with a new version of the world, a world composed of images performing on screens. This eclectic array of images which began to appear some decades ago and is even more apparent today cannot be separated from the fashion industry since this industry has largely become dependent on images and the circulation of those.

Unlike modernism which mainly affected art, literature and architecture, and was given a rather concise explanation in its various fields, postmodernism cannot be as clearly assigned to specific disciplines. It is scattered amongst multiple fields and has in all these areas experienced eclectic and differing developments. What seems to be intrinsic to the concept of postmodernism in general though is this intangibility: “The concept of postmodernism is not widely [...] understood today” (Jameson 1982, 1). The difficulty that arises out of the concept of postmodernism is also very much due to the recent dissolution of the gap between the so called high culture and pop art (Jameson 1991, 14). The increasing presence and importance of mass culture or pop culture in the recent past - i.e. the circulation and easy employment of images by everybody - became inevitable because of the above mentioned rise of digital image. Whereas modernism speaks of “violent jolts and dislocations” (Evans 2003, 8) postmodernism is often describing the fragmentation of the subject as inherent to its movement (Jameson 1991, 14).

This increasing distribution of easily available images started to dissolve some of the restrictive boudaries that previously had excluded 'the Other', e.g. the black man or woman, the gay, the female. Archaic notions about what high culture started to be altered through new ideas, thus blending popular imagery with those notion that had been there before. In a society in which every human subject is decentered (Firat, 241), everybody gets the chance of constructing something new. The intangibility characterising postmodernist theory creates space for those who had been neglected and negated before allowing them to position themselves as agents within society.
In this respect shopping serves everybody as a possibility to create meaning. It is an act of the assemblage of various objects to be put together in order to produce a coherent image. Thus fashion and the clothing of the body today often seem to act as an attempt to mend this fragmented, intangible self via its surface. The stress consumers put on fashion nowadays can be exemplified by a quote of Andy Warhol, who probably was and still is the most important pop artist of our times: “When you think about it, department stores are kind of like museums” (Warhol in De Kelver, 54). This points out today’s cumulative importance of the act of shopping. Shopping seems to have taken the place of the most favourite pastime of many people. The fact that the Mall of America has 40 Million visitors annually, more than all national monuments and parks in the USA combined, (De Kelver 2008, 66) is another indicator for the increasing importance given to consumption in our times.

The before mentioned dissolution of the gap between high and pop culture was influenced by the circulation of media images. The constant flow of images led to a change in the minds of people making them perceive the world differently. This points out the important topic of the act of identity building people in postmodern times are facing. More than in modernity, postmodern times are marked by people who seek to construct their identities in a world in which uncertainty seems to be the only constant. Concluding, what denotes postmodernism is the vastness of the topics it affects, the dissolution of the difference between high culture and pop culture, and its uncertainty, i.e. its fragmentation. The above mentioned aspect of fragmentation seems to be at the very centre of postmodernism:

Postmodernity is said to be a culture of fragmentary sensations, eclectic nostalgia, disposable simulacra, and promiscuous superficiality, in which the traditionally valued qualities of depth, coherence, meaning, originality, and authenticity are evacuated or dissolved amid the random swirl of empty signals (Baldick 2001, 201).

What is suggested here is the disappearance of meaning, depth and coherence in favour of superficiality and empty signs. This superficiality, i.e. the deduction of meaning from the surface of things will be the topic of the next chapter, explaining the sign-value of objects according to Baudrillard.
2.1. From Use-Value to Sign-Value and the Role of Advertising

This chapter seeks to explain the terms use-value - initially employed by Marx - and the term sign-value which is significantly present in Baudrillard’s work *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981). The best way to highlight these terms is to refer back to the previous chapter. The most prominent aspect in that chapter was the fact that in postmodern contemporary society people are constantly surrounded by images. We spoke of the existence of more information and less meaning and could say that this also accounts for commodities. Commodities are no longer so much bought for their original functions but as markers for success, for the status they take in society. Purchasing an object nowadays means to purchase its surface, the lifestyle that encompasses the product. Advertising has had an immense effect on consumerism in the sense that it has produced values attached to commodities which are not inherently linked to those products and their functions. These values and characteristics became stronger over time as soon as companies realised that this allowed them to make higher profits. This accretion of values and meaning with the decrease of consumers’ interest in the actual function of the product signifies what Baudrillard means by sign-value: “[...] the whole of advertising and modern erotics are made up of signs, not meaning” (Baudrillard 1970, 148). Sign-value thus means the loss of any direct function of an object:

In the logic of signs, as in that of symbols, objects are no longer linked in any sense to a definite function or need. Precisely because they are responding here to something quite different, which is either the social logic or the logic of desire, for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of investigation (Baudrillard 1970, 77).

Departing from the present and the sign-value of products it is now easier to understand the term use-value that Marx uses in *Das Kapital* in which he begins by describing the use-value of a product as follows: “The usefulness of a thing makes it a use value” (1982, 126). It is thus a product’s usefulness in serving humanity that distinguishes its value. Therefore “use-values are only realized [verwirklicht] in use or
in consumption”. The fact that people use an object and exhaust an object’s function makes it valuable.

Whereas in the past an object in society was primarily determined by its function and usefulness, something that was particularly important with the emergence of first household auxiliary equipment for example, the industrialisation brought about a change after which people in society increasingly bought commodities only because of their appeal and their desirability. One aspect that influenced this change was the separation of private and public domains such as the work from the free, i.e. Leisure time which was aided by the separation of women from the site of production (Firat 1995, 245). This separation was aided by the separation of women from the site of production:

The actual history of this transfer has been much more complex, of course, with women and children initially being pulled into the factories as cheap labor during the industrial revolution and then being returned to the home as ‘pure’ consumers, their labor in the workforce being replaced by machines and male workers (Firat, 246).

Industrialisation allowed the increasing production of new goods which prior to that had not been there. The production process of goods became faster leading to a vast amount of goods on the market. These newly available and quickly produced goods were a result of changes in technology. What society was facing was an overflow of commodities that had to be consumed in order to create space for new goods.

At this point advertising came to the fore. As something that until 1851 scarcely existed (McClintock in Stratton 1996, 271) advertising soon grew and became more visible in various forms of media thus reaching more people in society. Advertising created a world of new ideas and lifestyles from which people were told to choose: “Business literature indicates that many business leaders believed it was necessary to increase people’s desire to buy and ability to purchase, both of which they saw as a prerequisite for a consumption-oriented society” (Hartmann in Firat, 247). What advertising has always tried to achieve is to convince consumers that there was room for improvement in their lives (Featherstone 1982, 19). This aspect is at the bottom of all advertisements and keeps capitalist society alive, for without the notion of the
possibility of improvement the consumption of commodities would be rendered redundant. This ever-present notion of enhancement within advertising connects to the sign-value of a commodity. The promise of a better life through a certain product can only be acted out through the accretion of value to products. This accretion of value is the symbol, i.e. the sign Baudrillard speaks of in his work. Instead of highlighting the function of a commodity companies rely on the power of signs: “Thus, the whole of advertising and modern erotics are made up of signs, not of meaning” (Baudrillard 1970, 148). It is also in this light that Jhally speaks of a total absence of meaning in respect to commodities:

Only once the real meaning has been systematically emptied out of commodities does advertising refill this void with its own symbols. Thus when products appear in the marketplace, although we may well be aware of them as products of human labour, because there is no specific social meaning accompanying this awareness, this symbolisation of advertising appears as more real and concrete” (Jhally in Stratton, 35).

It is due to this accretion of symbols, of signs that brands have become paramount in capitalist society. What does a brand stand for (Holt 2003, 43) and what can it promise to its consumers? Companies who most outstandingly establish that kind of brand identity are most successful in attracting the attention of and convincing consumers to buy what they have on offer.

3. The Image of the Body in Contemporary Society

Attaining the ‘perfect’ body that was presented in the media started to become something that was more aggressively demanded from consumers throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It was a time in which new ways of modifying the body emerged and quickly became more prominent: “[...] the main ways of modifying the body involved the application of makeup and the wearing of certain types of clothes, the
new techniques for molding the body such as diet, exercise, and plastic surgery, are more intrusive [...]” (Negrin 2008, 13).

The immense focus on the body and its position in society in which it could provide people with a new source for consumption took its beginning with the before mentioned emergence of the mass media and its employment with the surface, with the image of things. The constant talk of consumers’ bodies in advertising reminds them of the option and obligation they have of optimising their bodies: “Television and motion pictures, the dominant visual media, churn out persistent reminders that the lithe and graceful body, the dimpled smile set in an attractive face, are the keys to happiness, perhaps even its essence” (Kern in Featherstone 1975, ix). The goal for both men and women in contemporary society is therefore to work on their bodies in order to get that ‘beautiful’ shell that is seemingly the ultimate sign of achievement (Ewen, 189).

What differentiates previous decades from the 1970s and onwards is therefore not a change in body shape but the firm establishment in consumers’ minds of the belief that their bodies are imperfect and can be moulded into the idealised picture sent out by the media. It is the arranging of the body as something that can be improved through consumption. The mass production and the rise of the mass media with a particular importance and presence of advertising has created manic consumers and made desire indistinguishable from need (De Kelver, 128). People are increasingly made to believe that to mould the body into the idealised figure that is presented to them through the media apparently will lead to a successful and happy life. Both the male and female body are presented as imperfect as a means to stimulate insecurity and thus increase the consumption of commodities. Unthinkable is the detachment from consumption, since it ensures one’s belonging to capitalist society.

The employment with the surface of things has led to the body becoming the epicentre of attention within capitalist society, calling on consumers to take care of their bodies and not to harm it, i.e. abusing by body through smoking or drinking for example (Featherstone, 25). The instrumental strategies consumers employ are eclectic nowadays, reaching from make-up and clothing over physical exercise to plastic surgery. Some consumers exhaust all of these options hoping that what they will arrive at is happiness, not realising that the current confinement of the body to the world of
relentless consumption has made satisfaction through the constant superficial employment with it impossible.

One of the before mentioned option’s for moulding the body is physical exercise. This occupation with physical appearance and exercise started to become more important and apparent in the 1920s when women increasingly stepped outside of the realm of home and began to take up employment (Ewen, 178). Television workout sessions as well as fitness magazines with a vast amount of advice appeared, furthering consumers’ insecurity regarding their bodies. The eclectic advice and ‘rules’ present in the media turns people into credulous consumers, hoping that their belief and adherence to those rules will eventually grant them the ‘perfect’ body that is seen everywhere. The body is depicted as something that can be changed by the hand of man: “In fitness culture the body is characterised as plastic” (Sassatelli 2010, 177). The increasing presence of exercise machines which allow consumers to ‘transform’ and ‘mould’ their bodies into the desired shape has begun to manifest itself as an important part of people’s lives.

Various aspects have led to the manifestation in people’s minds that the shaping of the body and the competition regarding it in contemporary culture is mandatory. First of all, the constant presence of media images penetrating our eyes has led to changes of our perception and a shift of values and importance regarding what matters in this world reflected in the success of apps like Instagram and Pinterest. Secondly, technological advances have made it possible for consumers to attempt to achieve this body ideal because improvement is what distinguishes humans. And thirdly, the increasing presence and importance of consumption in this world has turned shopping and the possession of material goods into a paramount task for all. The shopping mall is today’s venue for the salvation of the consumers: “The department store of the 19th century caused a real ‘retail revolution’. This style of shop, described by Zola as ‘the cathedral of modern commerce’, would awaken our desire - even craving - for consumerism” (De Kelver,44).

What has come to the fore during the last twenty or thirty years and has become even more important today is the obligation to work out in order to have that ‘disciplined’, well-toned and muscular body. Showing off well-formed muscles is now also something which women are told to pursue turning the gym into a battleground where everyone is competing for the price of the most ‘perfect’ body. This desire for
a ‘beautiful’ body becomes even more apparent when one looks at the vast range of sports apparel circulating in the fashion industry. While gaining endurance is still an important aspect of the workout, many gym participants put their focus on how to gain the muscles that are presented to them in the media. What gym participants often seem to forget is that this scrupulous and hard workout for a thin body “offers them little in the way of either health or emancipation” (Ewen, 180). So not only the shift from what is inside the body to the outside has taken place in the outside world - from soul to body surface - this shift has also and especially changed the way we take care of our bodies, making many of us pursue that idealized image that emanates from the media.

4. The ‘Perfect’ Body in Advertising

Rare are those of us who are completely sexually - or materially - satisfied (Reichert 2003: 22).

The importance and presence of images in contemporary society as well as the immense part shopping and the consumption of clothes play in many of our lives is undeniable. The eclectic choice we have when it comes to consumer goods exceeds our possibility to purchase all these goods. This is something that can make consumers feel anxious about decision-making, since a final decision means the dismissal of other commodities. Actually, this never-ending array of goods is by some regarded as the source for dissatisfaction (Schwartz in De Kelver, 201). This dissatisfaction which seems to never come to a halt, is conditioned first of all by advertising and its continuous presentation of ‘new’ goods that promise to cure this dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the renewing presentation of images in our society could also come from the need or wish for new commodities we seem to possess. Independently of these two aspects it can be said that the ongoing search for satisfaction furthers society’s consumption of goods.

When one looks at the advertising of the past and the present one notices one element that has always been present in one way or another. That element is the body as an object which is often employed by the industry as a means to increase profit.
Important here is that the body is presented in a sexualised way: “[...] sex has generated sales and saved companies from the brink of bankruptcy” (Reichert 2003, 9). How come that images in advertising which employ the (sexualised) body are so present? Baudrillard argues that this is because the body differs drastically from any other commodity in contemporary society: “In the consumer package, there is one object finer, more precious and more dazzling than any other - and even more laden with connotations than the automobile [...]” (Baudrillard 1970, 129).

No other object seems to convey as many feelings, hopes and as much desire as the body. When we speak of the employment of the body in advertising - regardless of whether we mean in the past or present - the aspect of sexuality is very often present in it. Tom Reichert analyses the use of sexuality in advertising in his book The Erotic History of Advertising in which he says that since the emergence of advertising “marketers and advertisers have used sex to sell their brands” (Reichert, 13). Even though nowadays men are equally often presented in advertising images and often just as much sexualised as women, women’s sexualised bodies have always been at the centre of advertising: “it is woman who orchestrates or around whom is orchestrated this great Aesthetic/Erotic Myth” (Baudrillard 1970, 137). Human beings are driven by their sexual instinct: “[...] sex, a potent instinctual drive. A drive that ranks high among essential survivalist drives and motivations such as the need for safety, shelter, appetite, thirst, and companionship” (Reichert, 20) and thus are naturally affected by images that display and play with this need which is intrinsic to humanity.

Since in contemporary society the ideal body has come to be the slim and ‘disciplined’ body promoted by the media and various institutions such as gyms, fitness magazines, etc., the combination of a ‘perfect’ body and the nakedness of this body in advertising have proven to be for many companies and the marketing of their products to be the most lucrative imagery. The advertising industry began to change quickly at the turn of the twentieth century. The proverb “a picture is worth a thousand words” could not be truer for advertising than in the twenty-first century. The shift from advertising around 1900 in which the large part of the ad was taken up by words towards ads of today in which sometimes there are no words at all exemplifies this state of society. An example for this are these two advertisements, one from 1919 (Ill. 1) and the other one from 1994 (Ill. 2), contrasting each other starkly. The ad from the 1919 is from Debevoise and shows a colourless drawing of several woman amidst a
text of about a vast amount of words, while the other one is from a 2009 GUESS campaign and only shows the brand name on top of the picture of the woman. What one notices is that both ads show women - both clad quite scantily in respect to the centuries - in a sexualised way. Their bodies stand for the body ideal that was and is promoted in society, exuding images of ‘perfection’ to the world that watches them.

The previous chapter examined the body ideal in contemporary society which is the slim and muscular body - both for men and women. This notion is almost aggressively directed at consumers’ eyes in order to make them, first of all, think that there is something wrong with their bodies, and, second of all, to make them want and desire these bodies. Today’s advertising is no longer presenting products but dreams and hopes to which consumers can and must aspire. This is why in today’s society a company in order to be successful must have a meaningful and eye-catching brand logo and an convincing concept that lure consumers into buying the products of this particular company. Baudrillard speaks of this and explains the consumer society and its relation to brand names as follows: “[...] recognizing the obvious truth of the consumer society which is that the truth of objects and products is their brand name” (stress in original 1970, 116). What advertising today is composed of is not a certain message behind the picture or slogan the brand seeks to convey. It is quite the opposite, namely the absence of any kind of message: “Thus, the whole of advertising and modern erotics are made up of signs, not of meaning” (Baudrillard 1970, 148). In this light it is the body which has proven to be the most successful conveyor of desires and hopes which is why it is present to such an extent in advertising.

4.1. Analysis of Abercrombie & Fitch

The formation of A&F and its change over time can only be described as conspicuous. Established in Manhattan in 1892 by David T. Abercrombie as David T. Abercrombie & Co., the little shop was intended as a place to purchase gear for all those who loved the outdoors (McBride 2005, 62). One of his loyal customers - customers who were mostly male - was Ezra Fitch, a man with whom Abercrombie entered into a business
partnership in 1904 and thereafter called the company Abercrombie & Fitch (McBride, 63). After several disputes over where the company should be headed, Abercrombie resigned in 1907, leaving it to Fitch who established it as the biggest sportswear seller in the world (McBride, 63).

This might sound very surprising for those who only know A&F as this young, sexy and scantily-clad provider of youth apparel. Nowadays A&F does not sell proper outdoor gear anymore and therefore has altered its image quite drastically. The most noticeable aspect of today’s image of the company is the change regarding the age group it is targeting: “According to Jeffries, the target market has radically switched from “70s to death” to the other end of the age spectrum, teens and young adults ages eighteen to twenty-two” (Reichert, 234). It was most of all Mike Jeffries, the CEO of A&F since 1992 (McBride, 65), who very much changed the company’s marketing strategy and the overall concept. Targeting the young proved to be the road to success which is why the purpose of the A&F Quarterly which was launched in 1997 was described by one commentator as follows: “glamorize the hedonistic collegiate lifestyle on which the company built its irreverent brand image” (McBride, 65). The notion that has been built around this collegiate lifestyle is that of sexual promiscuity mainly. The A&F Quarterly highlights this through its employment of a high amount of images showing mostly naked girls and boys (aged between 18 and 25). One edition of the A&F Quarterly is going to be analysed here as a means to find out in what ways A&F is using naked bodies and how this employment of bodies relates to the idea of the body as something that is added to the world of commodities.

The edition I will be analysing here is the A&F Quarterly from 2003 named Back to School. A&F consulted the philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek. The catalogue introduces him as follows:

[...] he’ll expound on Lacanian-Marxist theory or get caught up with why he thinks Linda Fiorentino is so sexy. [...] His essays cover everything from Alfred Hitchcock to war and terrorism in a series of paradoxical (sometimes contradictory) arguments that border on comedic genius (A&F Quarterly, 4).

The overall first impression of this ‘magalogue’ is that of a cluttered assemblage of pictures of mostly naked adolescents. The cover image (Ill. 3) shows three
approximately 19-year-old teens - two male and one female - inside an open Volkswagen Beetle that is painted with flowers. All of them are white and have blond hair. They are completely naked (except for the girl who is wearing tiny pink briefs) and display their bodies in an open manner. What the reader ‘learns’ or is supposed to learn from the very first pages is sex: “Back to school thus means: forget the stupid spontaneous pleasures of summer sports, of reading books, watching movies and listening to music. Pull yourself together and learn sex” (stress in original). The 116 pages that follow this statement are all an illustration of how this life where everyone engages in ‘good’ and ‘sexy’ sex should be orchestrated. The three bodies of the ‘main’ models are seen on almost every page - a small part of pages shows other models clothed in apparel by A&F.

The A&F Quarterly is a catalogue which differs from catalogues of other clothing companies in so far as its content is not a page-wise depiction of clothes and their prices and measurements but an illustration of what life will be like after the purchase of A&F apparel. The life they present to the young clientele is most of all sexually exciting. It is not simply nudity that takes centre stage in the A&F Quarterly, what is most prominent on every page on which the three models are displayed is the notion that through sexual promiscuity your life will be a happier life. Let us look at some page pages in particular in order to analyse this.

Open page 44-45. On this double page (Ill. 4) you see a picture of the three main models in this Quarterly. This is the first time they are all completely dressed seemingly running. If we turn to the next double page (Ill. 5) we see on the left one of the young men topless and taking off his cargo pants while the girl is topless too and with closed eyes is looking into the sun. The other young man is concerned with his guitar and also topless but still wearing his cargo pants. On the next page (Ill. 6) the reader sees three pictures which are arranged vertically. The picture at the top shows all three youths on the same spot of grass now all naked. In the middle of the picture we see the girl whose briefs are taken off by the young man on the left. The other man sits on the left side of the girl and watches them while playing the guitar. The second picture shows the same scene but with the girl now undressed of her briefs which the young man is taking in his hands and conspicuously looking at. The way he holds the briefs is with an air of bemusement or embarrassment almost. The last picture then shows how that man is holding the briefs in one hand while biting on them. All of them
are clearly laughing at this point. What is depicted here is not simply three naked youths in the sun but the prelude to a threesome which can be seen on the picture following on the next page. Performed is here the act of promiscuous sex, the main thing that readers of this catalogue are supposed to ‘learn’. This disrobement forms the centre of attention in all of the three pictures. The aspect of promiscuity worries quite a few parents as for example Corinne Wood who wrote a letter to Jeffries criticising the A&F Quarterly: “irresponsible promotion of gratuitous sexual behavior and promiscuity through the use of pictures of young models in compromising and sexually suggestive positions” (Reichert, 236).

Not only is the young reader of this catalogue assigned to have sex; no, the reader can learn from what he or she sees in the catalogue that having sex and enjoying life only becomes possible with an ‘immaculate’ body. The absence of models of a non-white skin colour, a different ethnicity or of a more voluptuous figure demonstrates to everyone that to achieve this lifestyle you either already are white and slim or are forever trying to achieve it:

the consumer must necessarily bring to his or her understanding of A&F, a fundamentally racist belief, that this lifestyle - this young, white, natural, all-American, upper-class lifestyle - being offered by the label is what we all either are, aspire to be, or are hopelessly alienated from ever being (McBride, 85).

The air of the scene of these three teens bears some aspects of pornography which is to be felt almost throughout the whole catalogue. Even though pornographic material is very often staged artificially, it retains its mythical and exciting appeal, and therefore often exceeds the excitement and appeal of real sexuality. Just as with the media and the increase of images that lead to a loss of meaning, the constant presence of artificial sex leads to something similar: “In matters of sex, the proliferation is approaching total loss” (Baudrillard 1979, 5). Or how Roland Barthes describes it: “Sex is everywhere, except in sexuality” (in Baudrillard 1979, 5).

Let us again regard the bodies of the models in the catalogue who are all slim and white. Nobody in the catalogue has what the media calls ‘problem zones’. The men are all of an adonis-like figure with broad shoulders and trimmed abdominals, whereas the women show themselves slim with firm butts and firm breasts. All of these
bodies clearly fit into the image of the ‘perfect’ body churned out by the media. Page 8 (Ill. 7) for example shows the young woman standing slightly turned towards us smiling and with her eyes on us too. She is wearing very revealing light pink briefs that can be tied on the sides. Her heels are raised from the floor and her hands are holding onto the wooden door frame in order to keep balance. What this girl seems to say to the readership is: Don’t you desire me? Don’t you want a body like this?

And, of course, many people in contemporary society want a body like this, an effect from the decade-long mantra dictated to us that our bodies are not good enough. The look, the observance of others that are seemingly better at shaping this ‘perfect’ body has become intrinsic to today’s society: “As the cultivation of one’s looks assumes ever greater importance, aesthetic criteria come to substitute for ethical ones in the conduct of one’s life so that the basis of decision making is no longer ‘Is this a good thing to do?’ but ‘Does it look good?’” (Negrin, 2).

All these slim and trained bodies in the catalogue are presented to teens who often are more willing to absorb and accept specific behavioural patterns. What A&F pursues is simply to increase sales through sex by aiming it at youths. This is only working though because society in general has come to put a conspicuous amount of attention on the ‘beautiful’ and sexualised body:

Ours is an age obsessed with youth, health and physical beauty. Television and motion pictures, the dominant visual media, churn out persistent reminders that the lithe and graceful body, the dimpled smile set in an attractive face, are the keys to happiness, perhaps even its essence (Kern 1975 in Featherstone, 21).

What Mike Jeffries has established for A&F is a contact point for youths who are looking for confirmation and a sense of belonging: “The company depends on the teenager’s basic psychological yearning to belong” (Goldstein in McBride, 59). Not buying this or that brand item means excluding oneself from the circle of teens that are ‘cool’ and who are acting out the mediated lifestyle: “Surely we know that people are not buying “Abercrombie” for the clothes. The catalog itself isn’t even about featuring those, after all. People buy “Abercrombie” to purchase membership into a lifestyle” (McBride, 86). Possessing a clothing item of A&F - at least in the US and from own experience also in Germany until a few years ago - has been and still is largely essential
for college youths (Hancock 2009, 71). Purchasing A&F thus means purchasing a lifestyle that brings with it the treatment of one’s own body as a tool, as an object that, if handled with care and attention, can give us that exciting lifestyle we see in images.

Baudrillard’s concept of the sign-value becomes more apparent here. Clothing by A&F is not bought because of its design but because of the signs that surround the apparel. These signs speak of a happy life through the disrobingment of exactly the clothes which the company sells. Thus the clothes the adolescents wear are not simply clothes but a promise to a life that is just as exciting as the one the models in the catalogue seem to lead. Interestingly the writer of the comments in the 2003 A&F Quarterly highlights exactly this taking over of signs in contemporary society: “Is it not clear that we really make love with signs, not with bodies?” (stress in original, 61).

Many consumers are no longer primarily paying attention to the use-value of products, i.e. how warm a jacket will keep them but instead hope to buy a jacket that is in line with the called-for attractiveness that pervades today’s media. What counts is the body beneath these clothes, a body that is treated with so much care that it hopefully becomes the ‘perfect’ shell that determines a society of appearances: “[...] late capitalism, which actively promotes the idea of a constantly transmuting self where the cult of appearance is privileged over all other modes of self-definition” (Negrin 2008: 2). When everybody is concerned with appearances and the surface of things, is there still a sense for depth or is any kind of depth and meaning erased? In the case of A&F this depthlessness is represented through the ‘philosophical’ content in the A&F Quarterly, superficially acting as an authority to the adolescent readers who absorb the words as seemingly meaningful guidelines to their lives.

In respect to the presented bodies within the catalogue one notices that the young men are slightly prioritized and presented in a very muscular manner. The presentation of this masculine body is maintained throughout the catalogue and reflects the underlying group towards which the images of A&F are directed: “A&F has manipulated the average American man’s worst fear by objectifying the male body and weaving homoeroticism throughout its most important retail space” (Hancock, 72). Even though some argue this homoeroticism is obvious in the imagery of A&F

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1 Interestingly A&F’s profits have dropped an astonishing 58% over the last months (Hiscott 2014).
(Hancock), others say that this interpretation lies solely in the mind of the viewer (Shahid in Reichert, 236).

The bodies in the imagery of A&F - as well as in the stores - are nothing else than signs churning out dreams of happiness and success. What the imagery of A&F tells its viewers is to become part of this world of images in which one’s body, the outer shell of themselves is the new agent. To purchase apparel by A&F is to approximate one’s body to the body that the brand presents us with. The act of purchasing these clothes is already a step towards this new body because what a store visit of A&F presents us with is an area in which the sales staff, the moving bodies, are treated as objects rather than subjects.

The previously mentioned aspect of homoeroticism is, if one wants to see it, most apparent in the A&F stores. The focus on men and a stark masculinity is very apparent in the various forms of marketing at A&F for which the store visit is an example. During this visit the customer is able to have a picture taken with one or two male models who are always posing shirtless at the entrance. In contrast to the usual critique of the exploitation of the female body, A&F is doing almost the opposite and is using the male masculine body as the focus point. The presentation of the homo-erotic male body is not easily recognisable because a young woman is most often accompanying the men in order to break up some of the homosexual tension. Indeed, the female at A&F is often desexualised and seen as an outsider to the sexual encounter: “Like straight women at gay nightclubs, she becomes insignificant and desexualized” (Hancock, 81).

Besides this air of homoeroticism that surrounds the imagery and the stores of A&F the aspect of sameness becomes apparent. When it comes to the bodies of the models at the stores the men all display highly masculine features such as trained abdominals, legs and a broad trimmed chest (Ill. 8 and 9). More masculine and toned than many men will ever be the images exhibit the ‘perfect’ body which to possess becomes obligatory in order to wear A&F apparel.2 The muscles that are shown in these pictures translate as signs into something like this: “The blatant use of the word muscle is a direct signifier to masculine identity and performativity. The word muscle

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2 Mike Jeffries even declared that ‘fat’ kids were not supposed to wear the brand’s clothes: “He doesn’t want larger people shopping in his store, he wants thin and beautiful people” (Robin Lewis about Jeffries, http://elitedaily.com/news/world/abercrombie-fitch-ceo-explains-why-he-hates-fat-chicks/).
directs the wearer of what his body should look like in order to wear this shirt” (Hancock, 79).

These underlying instructions are exactly what is true for the advertising of A&F, but also advertising in contemporary society in general. The aspect that what one can purchase at A&F is clothing has been eclipsed by the spectacularity that surrounds the marketing of the company. In connection to the before analysed A&F Quarterly one can say that for a clothing company there has never been less stress on clothing: “Speaking of nakedness, there was never a pitch more naked than Abercrombie’s: the non-display of its products, in deference to sheer biological determinism” (Reichert, 231). What adolescents are buying at A&F is therefore not the apparel but the desire for a body as presented to them through the brand’s images. Just as present as in other advertising campaigns A&F have carried it to extremes by employing the naked and overtly sexualised body in most of their imagery. The policies the company follows even involve the rating of the attractiveness of the store staff - they call them models - highlighting the undeniable importance of the body and one’s overall look for A&F.

Any sense of diversity in relation to the shape of the body has been erased through A&F’s employment of mostly identical bodies both in their imagery and their stores. At A&F stores the gaze is constantly directed away from the face and towards the body. This does not only apply so much to the imagery of A&F but very much also to other advertisements. One example for this is the paper bag the sales staff put the purchased clothes into. This particular bag shows a black and white picture of a masculine male torso just cut off at the neck so that the head is not shown (Ill. 10). What we have here is a product of the company that on a basic level demonstrates to the outside world where one shopped: “The shopping bag is a postcard that says where you’ve been and what you did there” (De Kelver, 18). For teenagers for whom a sense of belonging is often highly important this bag serves as a proof for the called-for coolness. Spending money on an item of clothing and then presenting oneself to others with the bag in which these clothes are found is the first step in acquiring the desired body. Thus, what the customers of A&F do is buying into this dream of the ‘perfect’ body.

A second example for this acting out of sameness and the erasing of diversity are the events which the retailer organizes for the opening of new stores. At such an
event dozens of mostly scantily clad models are hired lining up in front of the shop in order to attract attention. One such event took place in Munich in 2012 at which all male models were wearing the same red jacket, jeans and brown flip flops (Ill. 11). One cannot escape the underlying message these events as well as the overall marketing strategies of A&F convey to its customers. Just as the shopping bag with its display of a ‘perfect’ but anonymous body, which in itself is becoming a commodity by being carried around, the arrangement of similarly looking models who act the same and are dressed the same perform as commodities used by the company to further demonstrate that lifestyle. After a so-called ‘blitz’ – a visit of the upper management at the store - a model could be asked to leave the store if she or he was not regarded beautiful enough (McBride, 83).

The imagery of A&F and also the way their stores operate highlight the way in which the company uses the body, i.e. the ‘beautiful and ‘perfect’ body as a means to increase sales. What lies behind this is the increasing attention today’s society pays to appearances. We are constantly buying because we are possessed by this desire to purchase more objects. This desire to buy has recently - as said before - become one with need because of the promises the media churn at us: more commodities mean more happiness. Due to the constant presence of images and products - now more present than ever thanks to smartphones - many speak of a decrease when it comes to the social abilities of people and say that we are no longer surrounded by people but by objects (Baudrillard 1970, 25). This objectification of the body is apparent in the various marketing strategies of A&F through which they deny the beauty of every single body and instead construct this notion of the naturally ‘perfect’ body. The imagery of the retailer permanently dictates its viewers to consume as a means to possess this body of ‘perfection’. Consuming is what will make them satisfied and happy with their bodies: “The theoretical equivalence between bodies and objects as signs is what in fact makes possible the magical equation: ‘Buy - and you will be at ease in your body’” (Baudrillard 1970, 134).
4.2. Analysis of *Calvin Klein Underwear*

(...) I put this on, I’m getting laid (Simmons in Agina 1999, 111).

In regard to the fact that underwear is intended as something we wear *under* our clothes and therefore mostly remains unseen to the outside world, Calvin Klein has been and still is incredibly successful in the world of fashion in which everything that seems to count is the image: “In a sense, fashion has returned to its roots: selling image. Image is the form and marketing is the function” (Agina, 14).

Before Calvin Klein established his brand in 1967 (Voguepedia, vogue.com) and became the most successful retailer of underwear in the world people were looking for features such as fit, comfort and durability in underwear (Reichert, 172). As said in the previous chapter advertising is about the idea of improvement and the establishing of an effective way of convincing consumers to buy. In this respect Calvin Klein, just as some other designers, had an objective that differed from previous modes of designing: “In the late twentieth century, mass-market fashion brands were no longer differentiated via materials, forms, production values or even style, but via their constructed identities: their ‘total design’” (Huppatz in Riello, 555). Klein’s ability to create convincing narratives around his advertisement has continuously spurred the consumption of his products (Hancock 2009, 195).

The year 1982 marked a significant change in the brand’s history when Calvin Klein decided to launch his first underwear line for men, the first line of underwear that was designer-branded before he launched a women’s underwear line a year after that (Voguepedia, vogue.com). The briefs which, both for men and for women, have an elastic waistband with the brand’s name on it interestingly resemble very much the briefs by Jockey, another manufacturer of underwear (Reichert 2003, 175). And indeed the similarity goes further if one examines the production process: “Klein’s Y-front briefs were similar to those produced by Jocker; in fact, they were made by the same manufacturer” (Gains in Reichert 2003, 175). But albeit this similarity Jockey and CK could have not been further apart when it came to profit and popularity. CK’s approach

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3 The brand Calvin Klein is hereafter referred to as CK.
to advertising was a completely different one than Jockey’s: “The advertising justified the price and made the distinction between the two brands” (Reichert 203, 175). A successful move was therefore when teenagers in 1985 could see the main character of ‘Back to the Future’ in CK briefs, thus ensuring the company the desired success: “the stylish briefs secured their place in the pop-culture pantheon” (Voguepedia, vogue.com).

The success of underwear by CK has two main reasons. Firstly, it is the just mentioned recognition value the briefs have with their imprinted logo, something that is “the easiest way for each designer to impart a distinguishing characteristic on what amounts to some pretty ordinary apparel” (Agina, 15). And secondly, it was CK’s advertising that revolutionised the fashion world since it is not only sexy and appealing but often regarded as highly artistic: “the bold graphic design and the look of the photography elevated sex in advertising to a new art form” (Lippert in Reichert 2003, 176). CK’s advertising is special and also makes its viewers feel special about themselves when buying the brand’s products. In order to understand the way the body performs in advertising of CK Underwear a semiotic analysis of one campaign from 2006 and one from 2009 will be carried out.

Let us begin with the campaign from 2006. The campaign is comprised of several photos of which the majority shows both Vodianova and Ljungberg and of which some only show Vodianova. The following black and white picture (Ill. 12) shows both models in CK underwear lying on a bed. While the man is lying on his back, she is sitting on top of him. He is wearing a white pair of the typical CK briefs – even though almost invisible - while she is wearing the same white briefs for women and a white indistinguishable tank top that has slightly ridden up. Her blond hair is worn open and, while she has her head bowed and turned slightly towards the camera, it is covering her face partially. The expression both models in the photograph have is one of fatigue. This fatigue can be read from the way the female model bows her head and the way in which she is holding both her hands onto the chest of the man. It is not fatigue due to a lack of sleep but fatigue due to sexual intercourse that is suggested here. The bed in which the scene takes place underlines this. It is almost as if the suggestive gazes from the two speak out an invitation to the viewer.

Something as ordinary as underwear is elevated to a different level in this picture. The use of words has become unnecessary for CK since what does the talking
is the signs located in the picture. Clothing the body, the flesh in underwear and presenting it in a highly eroticised way to consumers became successful for CK only because he was able to create an erotic narrative that the viewer wanted to take part in. The naked body is invisible here in its directness but it becomes visible through the viewer’s imagination. This image of nakedness is conjured up through the presentation of the ‘perfect’ body clothed by underwear which is actually very plain. Unlike in the shoots for A&F, CK cleverly evokes the notion that through his underwear one’s body will be as sexy as the bodies of the models on display. To buy CK products can therefore become obligatory for those who are convinced that what they see might become real.

The analysed picture and many other campaign shots by CK are usually displayed on large billboards and thus are seen by a vast amount of people. The question is whether people really see the underwear products or something else that is disconnected from the fabric itself. The scenes in which the models engage are sexually loaded and display their bodies in their totality so that viewers have no chance of escaping the suggested narrative around the sexualised bodies. What probably strikes the viewer in the before mentioned picture is the way in which the bodies are sexualised, which even through the wearing of underwear cannot be concealed. Both bodies not only display the slimness and ‘beauty’ the media calls for but also act as part of the vast amount of sexually provoking images which perpetually circulate the media. What CK evokes through his advertising is the construction of “images of femininity [and masculinity] and ideal female [and male] beauty” (Reichert 2006, 204).

This construction of a certain kind of femininity and masculinity is an important topic in respect to CK. The brand’s creation of androgynous-looking underwear reduces the borders between what is regarded as masculine and feminine. Thus men and women are offered the chance to perform their desires and ideas of life more openly and less restrictively. The body turns into a site of experimentation for the consumer but also into a site for exploitation through the consumer industry.

In a world where the body has come to be the most significant sign of success, in which “it is a sign [...] that one is a member of the elect” (Baudrillard 1970, 132), people strive for the easiest way to come close to that image. CK plays an important role in this aspect since the brand offers exactly the ‘cure’ for many people who think
that their bodies are imperfect. This insecurity people possess drives them into consuming images and ultimately products that promise a remedy for their ‘imperfect’ life and bodies: “The woman buying 7.50 Dollar panties doesn’t get much than she can’t find at 3 Dollar. The difference is that insecure people feel better wearing designer labels - and there are plenty of insecure people out there” (Trachtenberg in Reichert 2003, 183). Buying a piece of CK underwear thus means buying something that brings you closer to that ‘perfect’ body that is presented in the media. In that way purchasing CK underwear is almost a form of buying a ‘new’ body, a better version of your self.

This crave for a more ‘perfect’ body has become stronger over the years, reflected in the large amounts of money companies invest in sexual advertising, knowing that people are captives of consumerism due to their insecurity and their wish to gain happiness. No longer are we what we possess inside ourselves but we are what we possess outside ourselves: “Our fragile sense of self needs support, and this we get by having and possessing things because, to a large degree, we are what we have and possess” (Belk 1988, 139). That what counts are the commodities which we can show to others since these let us progress further in this societal competition.

In this respect the body serves as the site at which the consumer can display apparel that in itself already signifies success. This success is monetary - in CK’s profit - as well as sexual - in the suggested acts demonstrated by the models. CK continuously employs the body in his underwear campaigns in a sexualised manner. Having realised that very often sexualised advertising can be a factor that makes people purchase specific goods (Ill. 13), CK employs the half-naked body as a means to reach consumers. These consumers are thinking of their bodies as ‘imperfect’ or not ‘perfect’ enough - a thought that has manifested itself in many consumers’ minds - and/ or desire the lifestyle that is presented to them. The presented bodies in the photos of this CK campaign blend perfectly into the array of idealised pictures of bodies other advertising presents us with. In order to get a more nuanced view on the advertising of CK underwear let us now look at the campaign from 2009.

The campaign is from 2009 and consists of several shoots of which six show both Eva Mendes and Jamie Dornan and of which some only Eva Mendes and some only show Jamie Dornan. The picture that shall be analysed here is this (Ill. 14). It
shows both Mendes and Jamie Dornan lying on a ground which is indistinguishable. The floor as well as the wall are white and thus form a contrast to the body of Mendes which is suntanned and which seems rather sweaty and even dirty. She is lying next to the man and has one arm spread across his chest. While he is wearing white briefs Mendes is wearing black briefs and a black bra with lace details. Her hair is wet and spreads across her face. The scene - just as the photo of the other campaign - is either a prelude to a sexual act or the sequel to it. Both figures are plagued by fatigue and present themselves to the viewer as sexually aroused and simultaneously sexually arousing.

When it comes to the bodies of the models within this shoot one has to note that both have the ‘perfect’ bodies that other media images provide. The way they act out their sexuality also ties into the way in which sexuality is displayed in the media. Not only do both figures provide the viewer with what seemingly is an indirect satisfaction of his or her sex drive through indirectly acting out the sexual act but they also provide him or her with an artistic version of the already existing images of played-out sexuality in fashion advertising.

Whether the sexualisation of their bodies is oppressive or not, something that other academics have analysed in detail, is not of interest here. What stands out in this shoot is the body's display as desirable; combined with very convincing artistic advertising the consumer gets what he or she has been craving for all along: a product that brings him or her closer to the repeatedly displayed image of the 'perfect' body. This alternative advertising by CK shows itself especially in the way in which the female is the agent that acts out dominance. This reversal of traditional presentations of men and women could even be seen as a stimulation and even liberation for women.

The models’ bodies are watched by those consumers who have been convinced by advertising that their bodies need new commodities, in this case underwear by CK. The purchase of CK briefs or a bra thus means not only the consumption of underwear as apparel that conceals the genital areas - if that were so consumers would resort to cheaper underwear - but it means the consumption of a dream of beauty and sexual fulfilment. Relying on CK as a provider of underwear thus means that the consumers give in to this advertised sexualised body of 'perfection' that surrounds them perpetually.
4.3. Analysis of fitness magazines Men’s Health UK and Women’s Health UK

Where else in the world of the media is the body more present, more palpable than in fitness magazines? Whereas advertising for apparel often directs the attention towards the body resulting from the unsurmountable connection between sexuality and the body, fitness magazines are even more direct in their approach to this matter. More than one-hundred English-language muscle and fitness magazines have emerged since the turn of the twentieth century (Kosar, Todd 1998, 8) representing the rising interest people have taken since then in maintaining their health and appearance.

Before this change came about most centuries in the history of Western society had a very different notion of the ‘perfect’ body which could best be described as voluptuous. This voluptuous figure resembles the figure one often finds in Peter Paul Rubens’ paintings. Two examples for this shape of the body are the paintings The Pelt (Ill. 15) and Hermit and Sleeping Angelica (Ill. 16). Both figures exhibit features that stand in stark contrast to today’s slim and almost boyish-looking figure of the woman. Today these depictions of women would probably regarded as unaesthetic by many due to the changes which have taken place in regard to notions of the ‘perfect’ body.

This development towards the refusal of fat, of surplus flesh might stem from the fact that we live in a society in which food has become easily accessible: “Might it be that in a society of overconsumption (of food), slenderness becomes a distinctive sign in itself?” (Baudrillard 1970, 141). This occupation with beauty and health in contemporary society is not anymore really a way of ensuring survival but more increasingly an imperative linked to status (Baudrillard 1970, 139). Or it could be that the increasing exposure of the flesh allowed by ever-more revealing clothes makes people invest more in the figures of their bodies (Sassatelli, 1).

It was at the turn of the twentieth century that physical exercise fully came to the fore, making people believe that disciplined exercise was the route to ultimate satisfaction. The late 1960s marked a change in this respect when Arthur Jones presented equipment for physical exercise, thus revolutionizing the way people exercised (Martin 2007). From that point in time physical exercise was becoming more
prominent and the wish for a slim body and weight loss “has reached its zenith in the current craze over ‘fitness’” (Ewen, 180).

One can say that the maintenance and the defence of the decay of the body started to become central to society and even more apparent around the 1980s. From the emergence of fitness videos, the increase of fitness magazines and machines there has been a constant attempt to reshape these aspects in order to keep alive their appeal to consumers. With the beginning of the fitness culture or the gym culture which was both directed at men as well as women, aerobics was particularly directed at women as a feminine way of shaping the body and body-building as its masculine counterpart. There was no clear boundary though so that body-building was also illustrated in articles within fitness magazines aimed at women. The well-shaped body which in today’s light is the trimmed and slim body with well-defined muscles often seems to have become the centrepiece in today’s capitalist society: “The lithe and energetic body, tight and slim, with its firm and toned-up contours is a powerful icon of contemporary Western culture” (Sassatelli 2010, 1). Contemporary society seems to be solely concerned with the spectacle, with how spectacular an event is presented: “The age of postmodernism may truly be called the age of the symbol and spectacle” (Arnould, Thompson 2005, 250).

An app like Pinterest exemplifies this state of society. Pinterest allows users to create “pin boards” on which they can “pin” images of an eclectic array of topics, ranging from beauty, fashion, architecture, over food to celebrities, health and fitness. With over 70 million users in October 2013 (http://expandedramblings.com/index.php/pinterest-stats/#.U2jyLBB9LfU), Pinterest shows how much people nowadays favour images and how much they pay attention to the surface and the appearance of things. One exemplary pin on Pinterest describes the reason for Pinterest’s success: “Pinterest’s collection and boards satisfy the Internet’s addiction to hoarding images and content” (http://www.pinterest.com/pin/283797213988589038/).

In regard to the idealised and disciplined body Pinterest has a section called ‘Health and Fitness’ in which the majority of pins show women and an idealised version of the female body. Interestingly few pins in this section are on how men can achieve a muscular body. Very often these images tell the viewer about how another
woman has changed her body from a voluptuous figure to a slim and toned figure, thus exhibiting the ‘disciplined’ body to the outside world as a sign for success.

It is obvious that today’s society exhibits a particular interest in the investment in the body. One part in this plays the previously analysed role of the advertising industry which continuously employs the body as a means to attract attention and ultimately increase profit. Another undeniably important and apparent role plays the culture of fitness in today’s society. This occupation with the fit and sculpted body might derive, as previously mentioned, from the abundance of food and the subsequent strength and success the renouncement from food signifies to the outside world. In this case a sculpted body means success over your own desire and the need to eat, a need that even has been presented as unnatural to women as a result of the advertising in which models are primarily slim, very often bordering on the brink to anorexia. In contrast to men women have always been in a conflict with food, constantly forced to execute a strong control over their hunger: “[...] Patients who don’t eat because they don’t experience hunger as an appropriate desire have to be taught not only to let themselves eat but also to allow themselves to hunger” (Gilbert in Chernin 1981, 45). This repressive notion that eating is wrong and should be avoided has manifested itself in the brains of many women and young girls but increasingly also in the minds of young men. That this notion is primarily affecting women though derives from the fact that the ultimate sign of success for men is signified through the display of muscles: “muscul arity is the sign of power - natural, achieved, phallic” (stress in original, Dyer in Stratton 1996, 194).

A third aspect in this strong employment with the ‘beautiful’ body plays the capitalist society which can only be sustained through people’s consumption of goods: “Body maintenance, too, provides an expanding market for the sale of commodities” (Featherstone 1982, 19). The previously mentioned presentation of the body as imperfect results from exactly this expansion of the consumer market: “The [...] body [...] is now being overtly constructed as a site of lack. It is being described in advertising as an incomplete or inadequate body which can be improved by buying these new [...] consumer goods” (Stratton, 185).

The differentiation between men and women is very apparent in the fitness culture of today. Even though both women’s and men’s fitness magazines advise their readers to build up muscles for a toned and ‘beautiful’ body, there is a stark difference in the
way this demand is communicated. Reasons for this are the differing notions we still seem to have when it comes to the ‘perfect’ male and feminine body, deriving from the above mentioned aspects such as the relationship to food and the age-old notions of masculinity and femininity. Even though some periods have produced alternative versions of femininity - as the flapper girl for example - these have never prevailed long. Instead images were reformulated which brought back archaic representations of thinking in a society in which flesh is negated (Baudrillard 1970, 141).

As a prerequisite for the fitness culture to function the notion of ‘plasticity’ has been created as a means to provide consumers with the necessary motivation to continue their body maintenance: “Plasticity in turn is not conceived of as absolute, but it is tied to the ability to work and limited to what may be achieved with workout” (Sassatelli, 177). Depicting the body as something that can be transformed into a better, a more beautiful version is the key to consumers’ minds and their desire to possess the ‘perfect’ figure that emanates from all the advertising around them. In respect to the fitness gym this chance of changing the body is a key factor for its success in contemporary society: “For some, buying a fitness pass is like buying a dream of perfection and plasticity” (Sassatelli, 152). This highlights the hope and the high aspirations some people have when it comes to the gym. In order to better understand the fitness culture and the way in which the body is a marker for success in today’s society one edition of *Men’s Health* UK and one edition of *Women’s Health* UK will be analysed.

The *Men’s Health* UK edition is from May 2014. Its cover (Ill. 17) shows a man whose torso is very muscular and partially covered with tattoos. He is wearing a pair of shorts that reach down to his knees. His face is slightly contorted as a means to express strength underlined by the way he has his arms lifted up with clenched fists. As blatant as possible the main headline of the cover says: ‘Want a body like this?’ with an arrow pointing at the abdominals of the man. Through an exclamation like this the magazine speaks out the wish of every reader of this magazine, i.e. to possess a muscular body. The readers of this magazine therefore cannot avoid the fact that what is demanded from them is discipline and a power of will, “to joyfully take responsibility for their bodies and to invest in body maintenance” (Sassatelli, 2). What becomes apparent here is the previously mentioned notion of the body as changeable, as something we can easily alter in order to fit that idealised image:
While the body incorporates fixed capacities such as height and bone structure, the tendency within consumer culture is for ascribed bodily qualities to become regarded as plastic - with effort and ‘body work’ individuals are persuaded that they can achieve a certain desired appearance (Featherstone 1982, 22).

The readers of this magazine are seemingly not completely satisfied and happy with their bodies which is why they turn to it as a provider of advice, as a route out of their dissatisfaction. No longer is the natural unaltered figure of the body desired, instead the body needs to be disciplined and improved so as to keep up with everyone’s rivalling effort for that ‘perfect’ body. This discipline as a requirement for an ‘ideal’ body is spoken of within the magazine on page 44 (Ill. 18) on which the article about the cover man begins: “WWE strength, agility and stamina will turn you into a beast during Sunday-league games or at the gym”. The agenda of Men’s Health is not moderateness or mediocrity but ‘perfection’ and ultimate strength which allows the reader to present himself to others as the ‘beast’ he wants to be perceived as.

The disconnection between the inner and the outer self I have spoken of before becomes apparent on all pages of the magazine. An example for this is not only the dominant presence of advertising which centres around expensive cars, watches and glasses - the possession of these ‘male’ commodities itself a marker for success - but also the occupation with the appearance of the outer self. The neglect of your bodily appearance means to withdraw yourself from what could bring happiness. And indeed, neglecting your body and accumulating excess flesh is, according to Men’s Health tantamount to being a loser as can be interpreted in an article about men (Ill. 19) who have lost a significant amount of weight: ‘These losers are #winning. Five Men’s Health readers have swapped 27 stone of the wobbly stuff for a new lease of life. And their secrets? Nothing you can’t do...’. The words which are used here to connote a life without success are ‘losers’ and ‘wobbly stuff’ in comparison to ‘winning’, ‘new lease of life’ and ‘secrets’. The way in which today’s society stresses the ‘perfect’ body becomes most apparent if one looks at the subheading of the section on ‘Personal Trainer’ on page 117 where it says: “Because fit is the new rich”. The reader is told that his body is his new tool to success, if he uses it right he will experience the promised happiness and satisfaction.
The constant presentation of seemingly new techniques and modes of shaping a better body distinguishes fitness magazines. The fact that every month another magazine is published with even more and even ‘better’ tips, albeit the statement that the previous tips were everything the reader needed, does not serve as a wake-up call to him that what he is presented with is simply a repetition of former articles. On the contrary, the reader believes in what he reads as an improvement of techniques and a possible improvement of his self. The repeated buying of this magazine thus means the purchase of the hope to eventually possess this body. Buying the magazine is therefore tantamount to buying a certain degree of satisfaction, the first approximation to what they wish for because “the rediscovery of the body takes place initially through objects” (Baudrillard 1970, 134). Exemplary for this is one tip within the magazine by which the readers are presented with what is apparently the only exercise one needs for abs made out of steel. Nevertheless, the following pages still present the reader with more options thus confusing the reader in what he needs to do.

The readers of Men’s Health are consumers who have been convinced that what they need in order to be satisfied and happy is a masculine and toned body. They have accepted the notion that there is no space for excess flesh when it comes to living in a world of appearances. ‘Fit is the new rich’ which is why maintaining one’s body is paramount in order to be successful, an aspect that is especially present in the case of Men’s Health in which the male readers are confronted with a sustainment of archaic notions of a man, this man being monstrously strong and invincible. The idea that in order to ‘keep’ a woman the man has to be successful - rich in the past and fit in the present - runs through the whole magazine. Fighting one’s body in order to possess a better body is what it is all about in the magazine, something that is highlighted by a sentence on one of the pages within the magazine: ‘Your belly fat is a pest, so let this bug bite’.

As a means to further the understanding of the body within the fitness culture the June 2014 edition of Women’s Health will be analysed now. In alignment with the fact that for women and men different rules in regard to the treatment of the body have been established the edition of Women’s Health serves as a confirmation of these differences. The cover of the magazine (Ill. 20) employs all those colours that are traditionally thought of as ‘feminine’, i.e. pastel colours and pink, whereas the edition of Men’s Health used colours more of a ‘masculine’ sort, i.e. dark blue, black and red.
as a marker for aggressiveness. The women’s edition uses a playful and soft font while the men’s edition shows a harsh and bold font with sharp edges further highlighting the contrast between what represents women and men.

The body on the cover of the magazine shows a white, young and very slim smiling woman. Her T-Shirt is white and tied above the navel in order to show off her flat belly. The briefs she is wearing are small and accentuate the outlines of her genital area. This presentation of the female body stands in stark contrast to the presentation of the man’s body since it focuses on the woman’s sexuality through the accentuation of her most private parts. The often-criticized objection of the female body to men is here sustained through the verbalization of her task to perform as a sexually attractive female being: ‘Seduce any man any time’. The division between men and women as actors in the fitness culture is therefore still prevalent: “The mixing of techniques is becoming more common among both male and female gym-goers, even though on average a gender division of keep-fit activities still holds in fitness gyms” (Sassatelli, 23).

This contrast between what is seen as appropriate for women in the fitness culture is highlighted by a reader letter in which he woman asks the magazine for advice: ‘I really sweat when I work out. Is that weird?’ Sweat, the unavoidable side-effect when doing sports, is regarded as disturbing and unattractive by this woman. This shows that many women hold the view that, even though sports shall serve as a means to achieve a slim body, sweat shall be avoided in order to align to standardised beauty ideals. Even though the magazine tries to convince the reader that her concern is harmless, the various articles within the magazine sustain the notion of the woman as a graceful and attractive gym-goer. An example for this is the article that begins on age 33 (III. 21) and is entitled ‘Made in the 80s’, on its first page showing a young very slim woman in a shiny black body. She has her hands on her hips and her head turned to the left. Her hair is carefully braided and draped across her neck onto her chest. What the reader is presented with is not a sweaty, trained and muscular body but a very skinny body that almost opposes the muscular bodies the men’s magazine shows and instead stands in line with the bodies of fashion models that often starve themselves in order to have more chances in this ruthless business.

The connection the magazine draws between a ‘successful’ sex-life and a slim body communicates a notion to the readers that demands discipline in respect to eating
habits and exercise behaviour. In the case of Women’s Health food is subconsciously presented as an enemy. In all the magazine’s advertising that tries to sell food readers come across words such as ‘light’ or ‘low in calories’ usually employing colours that are equally light. This underlines the still prevailing eating behaviours women are supposed to follow. An American author once remarked about the figures of girls in novels:

The familiar heroines of our books, particularly if described by masculine pens, are petite and fragile, with lily fingers and taper waists; and they are supposed to subsist on air and moonlight, and never to commit the unpardonable sin of eating in the presence of man (Goold Woolson in Stratton 1996, 146).

This notion that the female body has to be slim and slender is something that becomes even more apparent when one compares Women’s Health to the articles on food in the men’s edition in which words such as ‘fat’ or ‘grease’ appear quite often. According to the women’s magazine women’s eating behaviour must not be greedy and excessive but moderate and concentrated on ‘light’ products in order to fit into the prevalent and oppressive notion we have of the woman of the modern age.

What accounts for both men and women and the presentations of them in the respective magazines is the dominant idea that one will reach ultimate satisfaction when leading a life that approximates the presented life within the magazine. This notion is created through the display of imagery which centres on the idea that life is a constant spectacle, a constant exhibition of images to be imitated: “Modern life is so thoroughly mediated by electronic images that we cannot help responding to others as if their actions - and our own - were being recorded and simultaneously transmitted to an unseen audience or stored up for close scrutiny at some later time” Lasch in Featherstone, 22). Society has become primarily concerned with appearances and in this society people strive for the fifteen minutes of fame Warhol has spoken of.

The editions of Women’s as well as Men’s Health both demonstrate and articulate the body’s significance within a culture of commodities through their presentation of it as the key to success. Focusing on one’s body and trying to acquire a ‘beautiful’ body thus means the approval and acceptance of standardised notions by consumers. The inclusion of the body within consumer culture must not be understood
as the possibility of being able to simply purchase a new body. Instead it means the inclusion of an even bigger array of products centring on the body from which the consumer can choose in order to reach the promised satisfaction and success: “Working out and caring for your body means to “produce a yield” (Baudrillard 1970, 131). In this respect fitness magazines provide exactly the ideas and advice the consumer needs in order to perform this called-for discipline as an inherent aspect of consumer society. And buying a fitness magazine thus constitutes the first step towards this slim body.

5. Conclusions

It is the only object on which everybody is made to concentrate, not as a source of pleasure, but as an object of frantic concern, in the obsessive fear of failure or substandard performance, a sign and an anticipation of death (…) (Baudrillard 1986, 33).

For some philosophers the body has been regarded as oppressive, as limiting: ”The body is a betrayal of and a prison for the soul, reason, or mind” (Grosz in Fraser 2005, 47). This view does clearly not conform to the way in which the body in contemporary society is treated. No longer is it a 'prison' but the site of liberation and satisfaction, now concentrating on how it appears to be.

The stress we put on commodities surrounding us has also and especially been transferred to the body, thus shaping it into something that serves as another source for more consumption. The body's importance as a highly visible agent within this world is undeniable and has become apparent through the analysis of the body as an agent within the companies A&F and CK. A&F relies on the naked body as a stimulant and attention getter thus conforming to the predominant establishment of the body as a site of desire and source of satisfaction. Purchasing a piece of A&F apparel thus means to buy this idealised image of the body by which consumers are relentlessly attacked.

Even though the campaign shoots of A&F and CK exhibit similarities CK features its products in a more nuanced and direct way to the eye of the consumer. Both brands employ the body as the sexualised shell upon which the company's products are
presented. CK though does so in a more artistic manner that suggests the body as something elevated and even divine from which we can derive salvation and ultimate satisfaction.

There is no denial of the fact that not only the advertising industry but also we as consumers are perpetuating the elevation of the body as the chief site for consumption. The fitness culture, as the most important of locations at which the slim disciplined body is sought to be acquired, acts as the main propagator of the image of the 'perfect' body. In this regard the fitness magazine provides consumers with repetitive advice that continually locates the idea of the slim body in consumers' minds. Thus readers are captives of this demand for a continuous improvement of the body itself being a form of consumption, often not realising that what they are presented with is an inevitable characteristic of consumer society.

As we have seen society has taken on traits and behavioural patterns that not so much centre on the profound shades of people's personalities but on their appearances. Showing off and getting that glimpse of ultimate attention is of concern to many of us consumers today. In this sense the body serves as the eminent object through which everybody can participate in the call for relentless consumption. Estranged from each other consumers are focusing on the body and the surfaces of things, thinking that their bodies, the commodities that surround them, will give them the desired and promised meaning. What we are trying without avail is to reach this idealised image of the body attempting to sell our selves as if it was a commodity (Featherstone, 27).
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7. Illustrations

Illustration 1


Illustration 2

Illustration 3


Illustration 4

Page 44-45 of A&F Quarterly
Illustration 5


Illustration 6

Page 49 of A&F Quarterly.
Illustration 7

Page 8 in A&F Quarterly.

Illustration 8

Illustration 9

Picture of male models in an A&F store. [http://parisiangentleman.co.uk/class/news/page/3/](http://parisiangentleman.co.uk/class/news/page/3/)

Illustration 10

Illustration 11


Illustration 12

Illustration 13

Illustration 14
Illustration 15

Rubens, Peter Paul. 1638. *The Pelt*. Oil on wood. 176 x 83cm.
Illustration 16

Rubens, Peter Paul. 1626-28. *Hermit and Sleeping Angelica*. Oil on oak-panel. 66 x 43cm.

Illustration 17

Cover of *Men’s Health* UK May 2014.
Illustration 18

Page 44-45 in *Men's Health*. (the text became invisible through the conversion from pdf to jpeg).

Illustration 19

Page 96 in *Men’s Health*. (the text became invisible through the conversion from pdf to jpeg).
Illustration 20
Cover of Women’s Health UK June 2014. (the text became invisible through the conversion from pdf to jpeg).

Illustration 21
Pages 34-36. (the text became invisible through the conversion from pdf to jpeg).