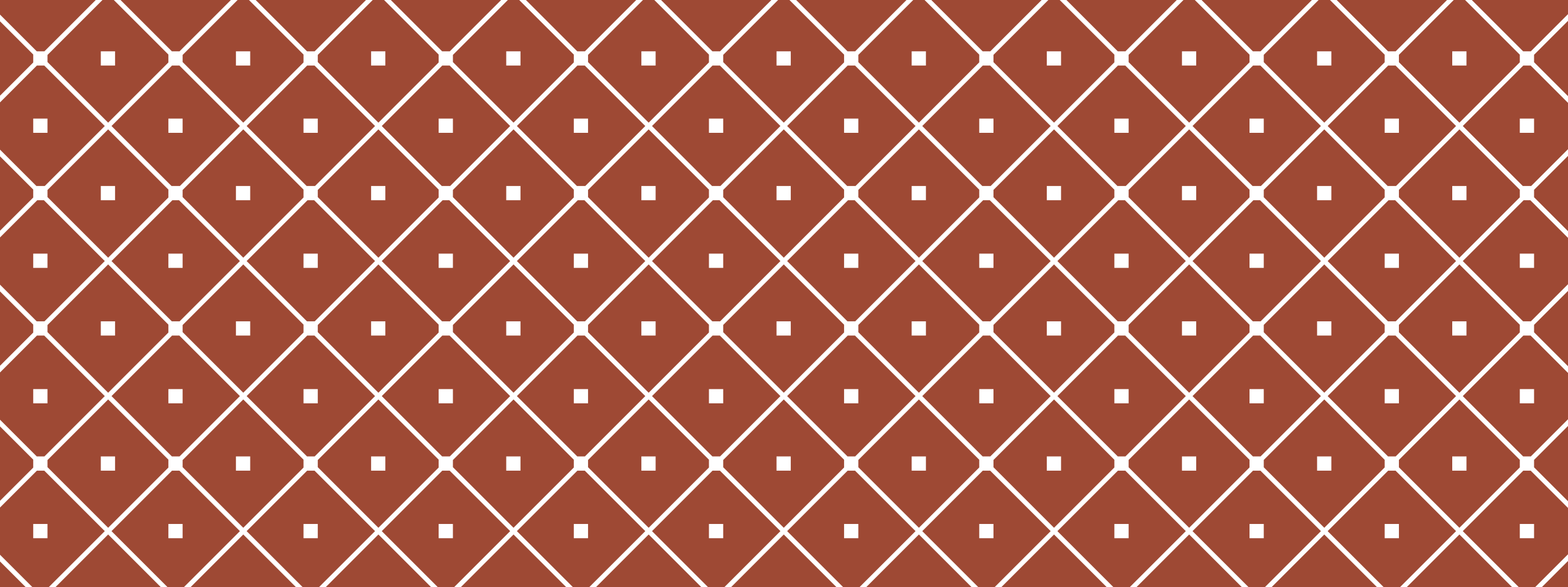




# REPRESENTATION OF DESIRE IN ADVERTISING: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL CRITIQUE OF COCA-COLA

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# PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CONSUMER CULTURE

Freudian psychoanalysis has been used in marketing and advertising research since the 1930s (Bennett, 2005, p. 5).

In his theory, Freud defined the “psyche” as an “economic model” of the mind, by explaining that there is a libidinal energy “that could be pleurably “spent” or discharged in sexual activity, productively invested in work, or unproductively dammed up in the unconscious by neurosis” (Bennett, 2005, p. 6).

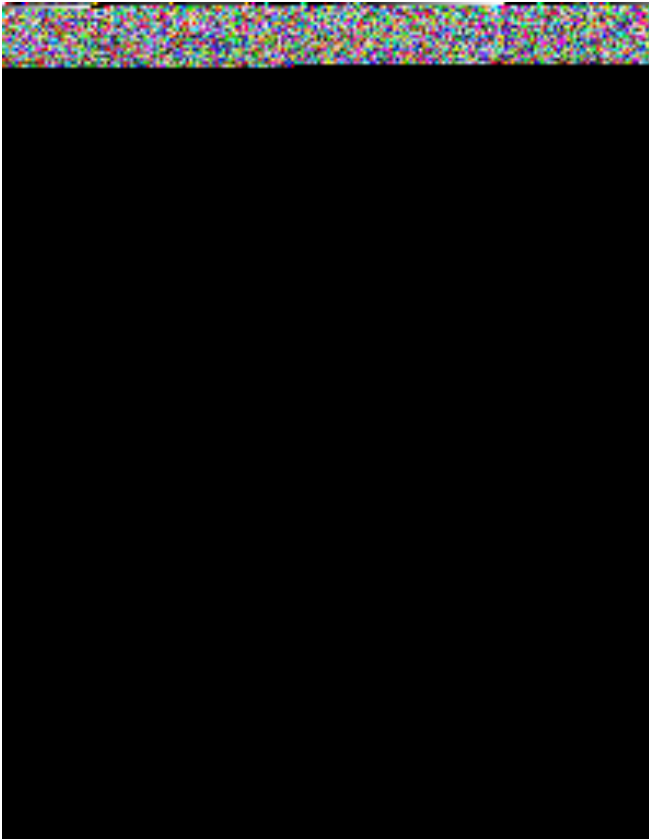
Since the 1940s, images of sexuality has been employed by advertisers to create attractiveness in products through provoking consumer desire.

Following Freud’s main concepts, advertisements aimed to expose “repressed desires” of the individuals, by setting up “fantasies” through advertising image (Johanssen, 2019, p. 6).

The use of desire in advertising has been frequently referred to and studied by scholars in the field of marketing and communication by the term “Hedonic Consumption” (Oswald, 2010)



# LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS



Jacques Lacan

After the 1970s, there has been a rediscovery of psychoanalysis in critical social theory especially inspired by the writings of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Johanssen, 2019, p. 5).

Lacan contributed to Freudian psychoanalysis by conceptualizing new terms including; “the imaginary”, “mirror stage”, “the symbolic” and “the Real” (Oswald, 2010, p. 114).

➤ **the Real** refers to the first 6 months of the infant’s life, which is experienced as a full union with the mother as an object of pleasure. The desires of the infant is uninterrupted and fulfilled. The Real is beyond “beautiful, meaningful, good, satisfactory and even comprehensible” (Loose, 2015, p. 32)

# LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Lacan's second stage in the infant's psychosexual development is "**the imaginary**" (6-18 months), where the infant feels that he/she does not possess the mother, begins to detect the father's existence (the phallus).

The child looks at himself/herself in the **mirror** (literally or metaphorically), and sees his/her image in the eyes of "others" (**mirror stage**) (Homer, 2005, p. 25).

During the mirror stage, the child confronts his "**lack**".

"**Lack**" constitutes "**desire**", as the child attempts to fulfill his/her lacks by desiring to be the phallus for the mother (Homer, 2005, p. 26).

The imaginary stage signifies the child's early awakening of his/her self, encountering the "other" and ends by the Oedipus Complex.

After the Oedipus Complex, the child enters "the **Symbolic**" stage, which introduces social norms, father's authority and ideology (Hitchcock, 2008, p. 159).

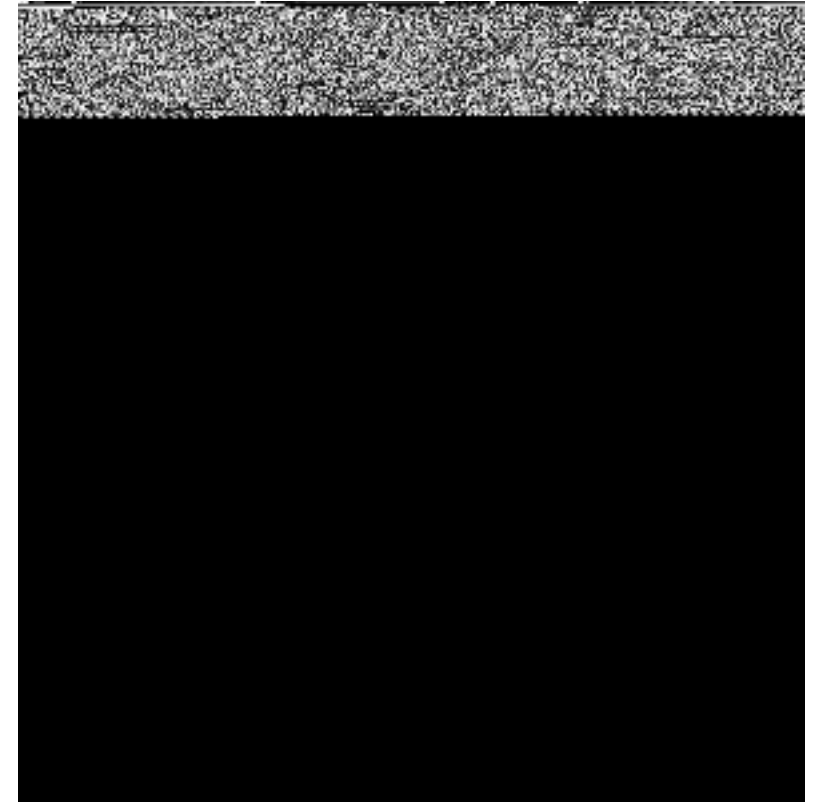


Image retrieved from  
<https://psychoanalyzadnes.cz/2016/12/12/introduction-to-lacanian-psychoanalysis/>

# PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MEDIA

Lacan's concepts have been applied to the analysis of media to analyze the relationship between media narratives and the audiences.

Psychoanalysis has been conceptualized as a visual and textual methodology to analyze how media narratives appeal to the unconscious and provoke desire in different ways (Rose, 2002, p. 102).

In this regard, advertisements have been discussed and criticized for;

- Producing the feeling of “**lack**” in audiences.
- Enhancing identification with the “camera” and the characters (Metz, 1982).
- Setting up dreams and fantasies to satisfy unfulfilled desires (Forest, 2015, p. 2).
- Facilitating the “**male gaze**” (sexualization of female body) (Mulvey, 1975), and “**scopophilia**” (desiring through looking) (Sasatelli, 2011, p. 127).
- Conveying ideology and sustaining social control by restructuring the audience's sense of the Symbolic (Williamson, 1978).

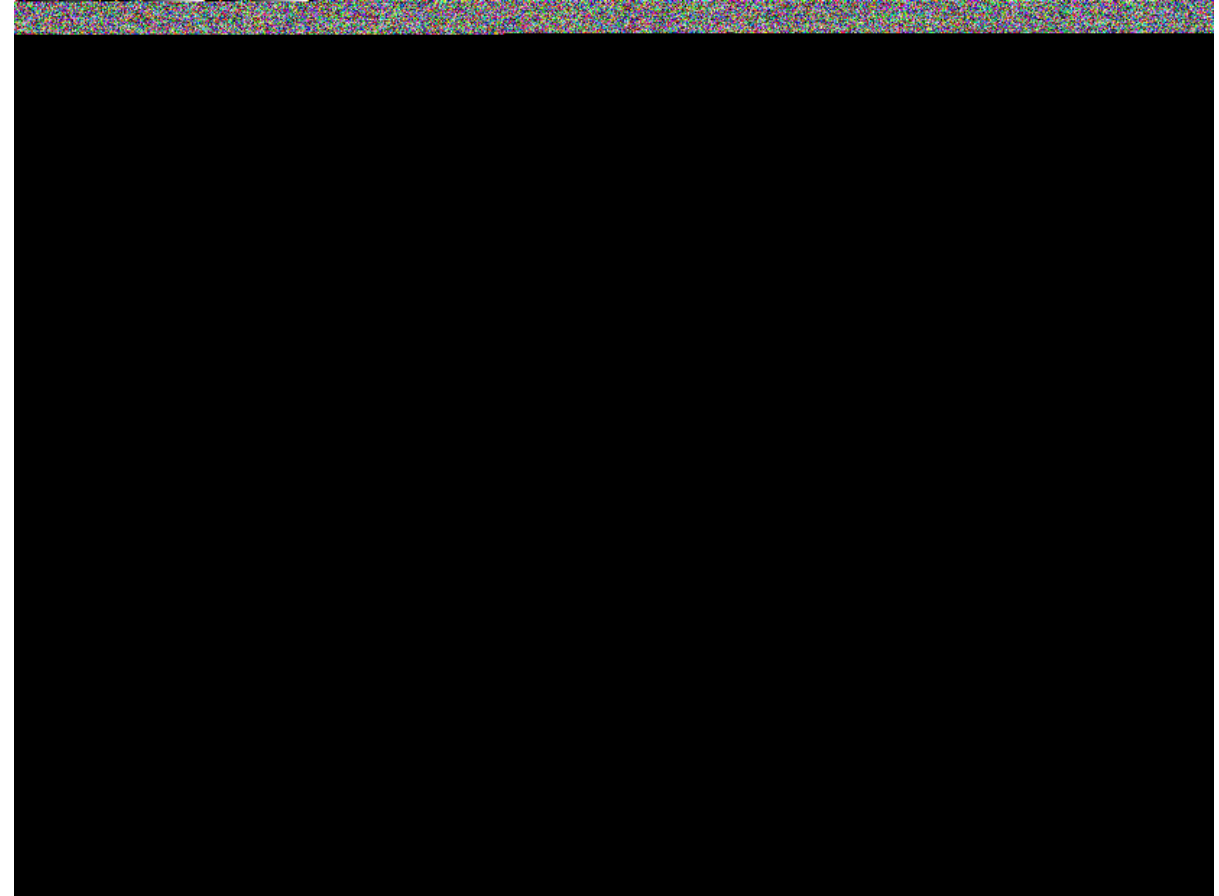
# ANALYSIS

This paper conducts a psychoanalytical analysis of Coca-Cola's "Asansör" (The Elevator) advertisement, which was published online in December 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CG480NxO0NA>

The advertisement was launched as part of a global campaign by the brand, with the same advertisement narrative adapted to different national contexts, such as Turkey, Spain, India and the US.

The narrative depicts the encounter of a male celebrity with a female hotel worker, who get trapped in an elevator and eventually enjoy bottles of Coca-Cola.

In this regard, the scenes were analyzed with reference to Lacan's psychoanalytical stages to discuss how the advert uses desire as a crucial element of its narrative.

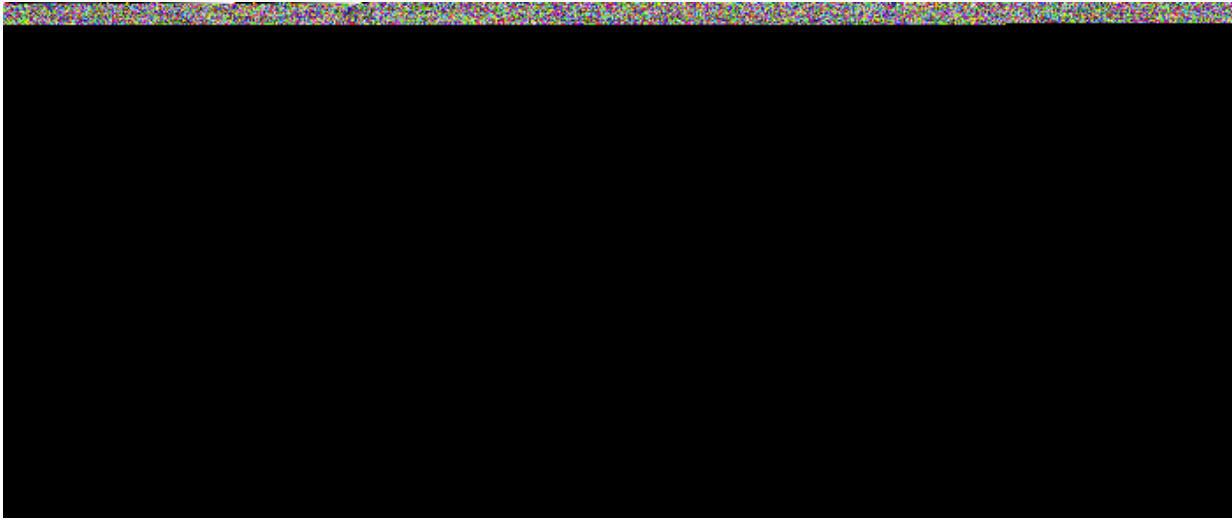


The advert begins as Kivanç Tatlıtuğ, a famous Turkish actor, enters a hotel surrounded with media attention. The narrative depicts an expected event from ordinary life, which signifies the Symbolic stage.

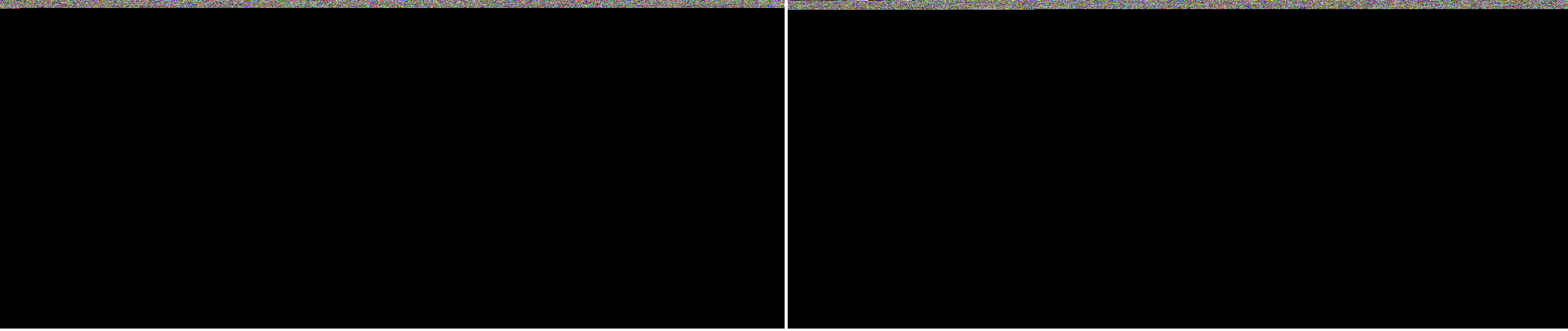
As the man enters the hotel, the camera shows a young woman working in the hotel in a tired manner. The narrative depicts two different lives, an upper-class and a lower- class experience at the beginning of the advert in a realistic way, structuring the Symbolic stage.

As the young lady enters the elevator, she meets K. Tatlituğ entering right after her. She looks surprised and amazed. At this point of the narrative, the Symbolic stage begins to erode since an unusual encounter occurs which is outside the routines of everyday life of two individuals belonging to different social status.

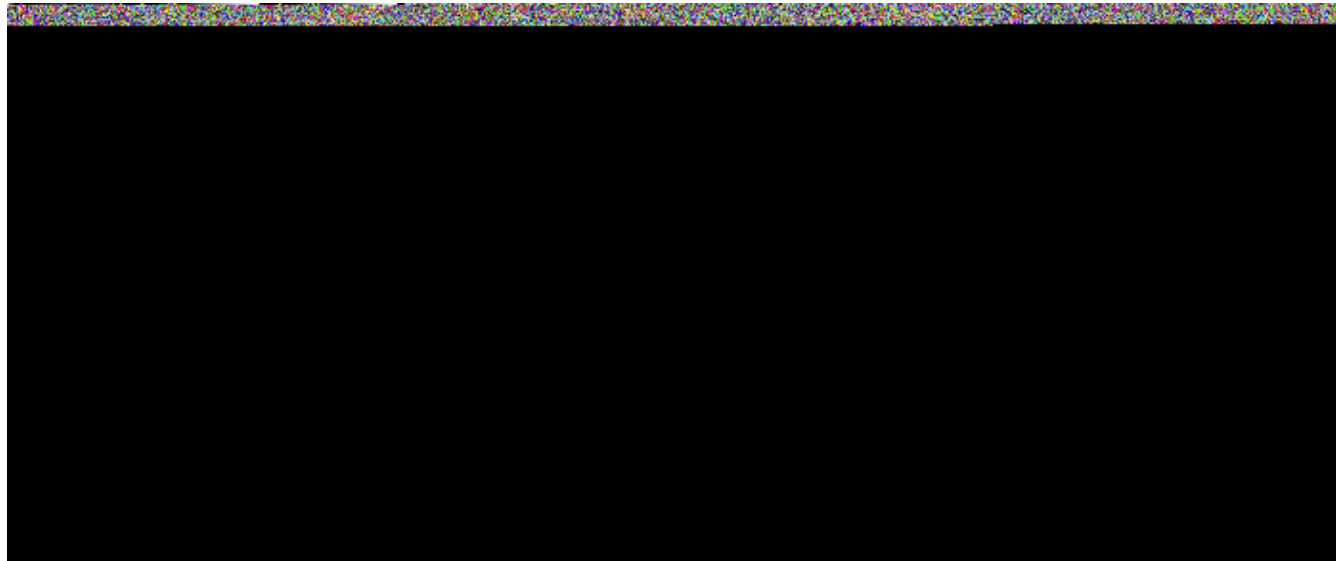
The Symbolic stage is finally suspended when the elevator breaks down and they stuck in it. After a brief moment of anxiety, the two begin to enjoy their time at the elevator by drinking Coke.



The following scene implies that the elevator is getting hot as the young lady offers the man a Coke. Once Coca-Cola enters the scene, the transition from Symbolic stage to the Real stage is finalized. The Coke symbolizes the lost phallus – an object of pleasure – in young lady's life. She manages to fulfill her desires by seeking pleasure in the Cole, which is accompanied by an authority figure, Kivanç Tatlıtuğ. The elevator sets up a psychic space to move beyond the ideology of everyday life, and makes it possible for a working-class woman to realize her fantasy with an higher-class celebrity.



The intense feeling of dancing in the elevator signifies excessive pleasure, as the characters complete detach themselves from everyday life and experience a “dream”. The dream is structured on the basis of ”lack” that the young lady maintains in her daily life. Due to her social-class, she cannot engage in a relationship with a celebrity in her ordinary life. The brand provides her with the chance to fulfill her lack and seek pleasure. The background music cites Coca-Cola’s famous slogan “Enjoy” (Tadını Çıkar).



Through the end of the advert, a crucial scene appears (upper left) when the characters are seen from the security camera. The camera signals the presence of the Symbolic stage, as they are being observed by the authorities. In the following seconds, the rescue team opens the elevator's door and "save" the characters. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the Real cannot last forever, but only its presence can be temporarily felt within the Symbolic stage. The Real resists symbolization by morality, authority and ideology; yet it will eventually fail as the things get back to normal.

In the final scene, the everyday life is restored, the Symbolic stage is reset after the rescue effort. The young lady enjoys the selfie that she has taken with K. Tatlituğ in the elevator as Coca-Cola's slogan appears on the screen: "Enjoy". The selfie signifies a "fetishistic" object, which is put as a exchange for the original object of pleasure. In Lacan's terms, it signifies the "objet petit a", a fantasy object which is not realizable.

# CONCLUSION

The psychoanalytical reading of Coca-Cola advertisement can be summarized as follows:

- The advert initiates the Real stage and represents a fantasy that is being lacked by the woman.
- The advert associates the product with desire by likening it to the phallus that manages to actualize pleasure within the fantasy.
- Yet the desire will not be fully met, as the young lady will need to satisfy her desire by constantly dreaming, fantasizing and therefore, purchasing the brand.
- Considering its other advertising campaigns, Coca-Cola can be considered as a brand, which positions itself psychoanalytically in the psychic perception of the consumers, by emphasizing desire and enjoyment as its main brand identity.

