

# Negotiating roles and identities in corporate advertising: a multimodal analysis of the *Total Energy Doubled 2005 TV* commercial

NICOLETTA VASTA  
University of Udine

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the multimodal representation and negotiation of (asymmetrical) roles and (genderised) identities in a TV commercial launched by the multinational oil company Total in 2005. The corporate advertising campaign<sup>1</sup>, called 'Energy Doubled', to which the commercial at issue belongs was designed to raise brand awareness by promoting the company's mission – or, in the advertisers' own words, '[by] demonstrat[ing] in concrete terms Total's industrial vitality and vision of the future of energy sources, [while highlighting] the group's dual commitment regarding the intensification and advancement of the traditional oil and gas discipline', on the one hand, and 'renewable energy and consideration of the environment'<sup>2</sup>, on the other.

The analysis will be conducted from within the framework of Kress and van Leeuwen's seminal work on multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; van Leeuwen, 1996, 1999, 2005), complemented by insights from geosemiotics<sup>3</sup> – i.e. the study of signs in the material world in which they are placed (Scollon & Scollon, 2003) –, as well as from mediated discourse analysis<sup>4</sup> – i.e. the study of the actions people take with texts and other cultural tools and the social consequences these actions have (Norris & Jones eds., 2005; Lemke, 1999, 2003, 2005). The goal is to explore the narrative project and visual thematics of the TV commercial at issue and then focus on visual composition and visual dynamics as resources for ideational, interpersonal and textual meaning-making in the con-

struction of participant roles and identities, which will be shown to be contextually and relationally derived, rather than objectively posited. Additionally, some phase-and-transition patterns (Gregory, 1995, 2002; Thibault, 2000; Baldry, 2004; Baldry & Thibault, 2006) will be investigated with a view to corroborating some of the observations made at the macro-textual level. Finally, the text-image-sound interface will be explored with reference to the only verbal texts in the commercial, those respectively contained in the baseline ('Our energy is your energy', 'signifying responsibility, attentiveness and proximity'<sup>5</sup>) and in the single clause sung on the soundtrack ('[I could do] anything for you', signalling potentiality, ability and willingness).

The main purpose will be to highlight the co-patterning and synergic interplay of different semiotic resources in the construction/construal of the overall message in ways which resemiotize (in Iedema's sense<sup>6</sup>) Total's own and other actors' identities: by reframing its Research & Development, as well as productive activities as a 'story' functioning as an offer of goods and services aimed at making its customers' lives easier, Total presents itself as a responsible corporate actor who enacts the hierarchically (and ideologically) superior role of Benefactor. At the same time, by suggesting that the corporation's concerns are the customers' concerns, Total ultimately promotes the viewer's identification with the company and projects a desirable situation from which all dialogic tensions and heteroglossic voices – e.g. those challenging the view that the oil companies' activities are costless in terms of their impact on the environment or local populations – appear to have been removed.

The analysis offered here develops from the author's previous research (Vasta 2005) into the multimodal construction of corporate social responsibility in print advertisements for Shell. The main purpose of that research was, on the one hand, to explore the 'role of corporate public discourse in maintaining organizational legitimacy and influencing social and institutional stability and change' (Livesey, 2002: 117) and, on the other, to identify the verbal and non-verbal construction of agency and 'lamination of participant role structures' (Hill & Irvine, 1993: 12) aimed at distributing responsibility, marginalizing cultural specificity and 'narcotizing' (Eco, 1979: 92) the local communities' conflicting positions in favour of ideological common sense. The Shell 1999 corporate advertising campaign then under investigation, called *Profits and Principles: Is There a Choice?*, is based on a Problem-Solution pattern intermeshed with a Goal-Achievement pattern (Hoey, 2001), as illustrated in Fig.1:

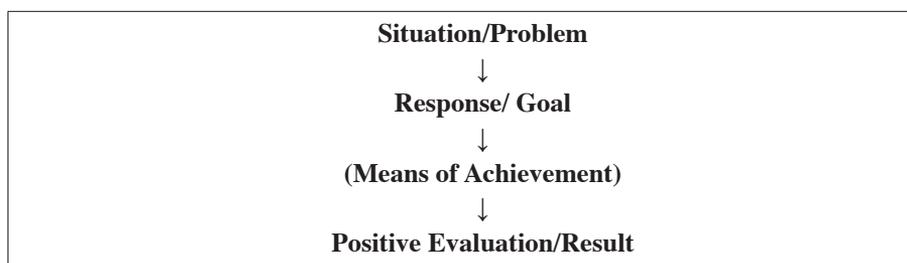


Fig. 1: Text organisation pattern in Shell's *Profits & Principles* corporate advertising campaign 1999

Throughout the Shell campaign, the Problem (or, more accurately, ‘an Aspect of the Situation requiring a Response’, Hoey, 2001: 126) resides in the paucity of natural resources, in the exploitation of local communities or in pollution, as the case may be, and it calls for an action (Response<sup>7</sup>) based on a shared Goal (i.e. an intended change in the Situation). The Goal is to be equated with a better (i.e. more socially and environmentally responsible) world: this is constructed, on the verbal level, as desirable/desired by socially responsible oil companies and their stakeholders (but also by all ‘rational’/‘reasonable’ people, for that matter), and predicated as achievable, on the visual level, in the right-hand section of each visual. The Means of Achievement of such a Goal is evoked, rather than explicitly inscribed in the text, through an implicit request to endorse the company’s ‘identity claim’<sup>8</sup> (verbalized in its mission statement<sup>9</sup> and visualized in the right-hand section of the visual), so as to arrive at a positive Evaluation of its corporate image<sup>10</sup> (here, a positive assessment of new Shell’s responsible behaviour) and, ultimately, at a positive Result (a better world with new Shell).

In other words, each ad in the campaign (see, for instance, Fig. 2 below) could be interpreted semantically as a *proposal*<sup>11</sup> or, in speech functional terms, as a *demand* for goods and services, viz. a request for the reader to take a stand between profits and principles and choose new Shell.



Fig. 2: ‘Cover up or Clean up?’ (from Shell’s *Profits & Principles* corporate advertising campaign 1999)

In the case of the Total 2005 TV commercial under investigation here, conversely, the Problem is only evoked *in absentia*, or better it is framed as part of shared world knowledge about the shortage of traditional energy sources and the need to explore for renewable ones. Total’s ‘dual commitment’ to reconciling its traditional commercial activities, based on oil and gas exploitation, with research into renewable energy sources – which ultimately consists in striking a balance between business interests and environmental concerns through ‘sustainable development’<sup>12</sup> – is rendered by translating the creative concept (i.e. ‘establishing relationships’) into a film which, by exploiting the ‘split screen’ technique, relates the company’s efforts to ‘walk the talk’ in its daily activities. The film tells

two juxtaposed stories: in the top half, the story of a day in the life of its employees (four men, respectively working in Iceland, on a North Sea oil platform, on a wind farm and at a solar energy plant, and a woman carrying out an experiment in a science lab) and, in the bottom half, a day in the life of a young woman who uses a certain number of services provided by Total to its customers<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. THE NARRATIVE PROJECT AND VISUAL THEMATICS OF THE TOTAL COMMERCIAL

Those two juxtaposed stories, simultaneously unfolding on the split screen, feature two sets of 'parallel' Incidents (i.e. events and/or activities), which can be schematized as follows:

	UPPER SECTION OF THE SCREEN	LOWER SECTION OF THE SCREEN
TIMING OF EVENT	INCIDENT & SPATIAL LOCATION [in the Total employees' world(s)]	INCIDENT & SPATIAL LOCATION [in the woman's world]
	ORIENTATION	
Dawn	Going to work [Iceland scene]	Waking up [bedroom scene]
	VISUAL RECORD OF EVENTS	
(early) Morning	Providing tap water [Iceland scene: <i>water valve</i> ]	Taking a shower [bathroom scene: <i>shower nozzle</i> ]
	Providing electricity and gas [Iceland scene: <i>main distribution frame</i> + North Sea scene: <i>oil rig chimney</i> ]	Having breakfast [kitchen scene: <i>fridge door</i> + <i>boiling kettle</i> ]
↓	Providing petrol [helicopter & oil field scene: <i>oil duct</i> ]	Going to work [scooter scene: <i>road and tunnel</i> ]
	Providing wind energy [wind farm scene: <i>wind turbine</i> ]	At work [office scene: <i>laptop screen</i> ]
(late) Afternoon	Doing research [laboratory scene: <i>reagent drop</i> ]	Enjoying leisure time [swimming pool scene: <i>top board dive</i> ]
	Providing solar energy [solar energy plant scene: <i>solar-cell panel</i> ]	Relaxing at home [living room scene: <i>TV set</i> ]
	TRANSITION	
Dusk	Stop working [Iceland scene]	Going to bed [corridor scene]
	CODA	
Night	Going home [Iceland scene: <i>torch</i> ]	Going to sleep [bedroom scene: <i>bedside lamp</i> ]

Table 1: Parallel narratives and a typical chronotope in the Total commercial

Apart from the opening and closing activities in each narrative ('going to work'/'waking up' and 'going home'/'going to sleep', respectively functioning as Orientation and Coda), Total's staged activities are constructed as being conceptually instrumental to the achievement of a real, or more practically-oriented result, translating visually into the smooth carrying out of the woman's daily life. In itself, the latter identifies 'a typical chronotope, with each element [i.e. incident] happening in its own typical time and setting and with its own typical pace of events' (Lemke, 2005: 118). The visual thematics of the commercial is thus interpretable – in speech functional terms – as an *offer* of goods and services, which correlates with an Opportunity-Taking pattern (as the 'sum total' of the narratives in the upper and lower sections of the screen, respectively) intermeshed with a Goal-Achievement pattern (Hoey, 2001).

The underlying Pattern complex is as follows:

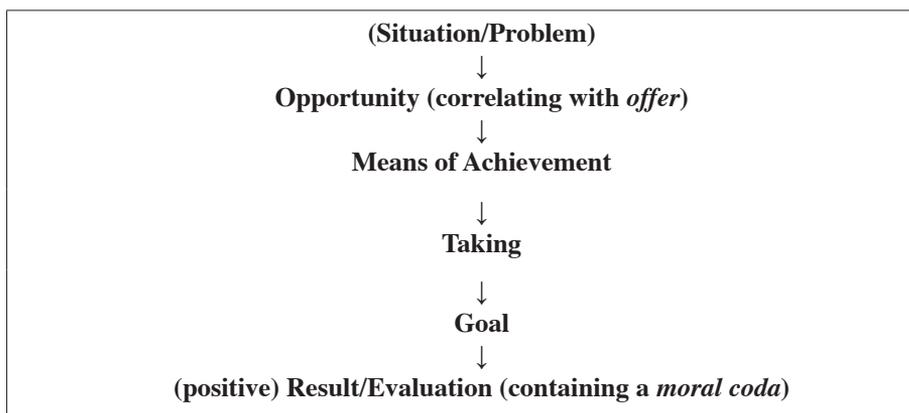


Fig. 3: Text organisation pattern in Total's *Energy Doubled* TV commercial

Here, the Problem, i.e. the objective need for energy, both traditional and renewable ('doubled', as the campaign title has it), is evoked *in absentia*, or rather taken for granted<sup>14</sup>. The Opportunity-Taking pattern is triggered by the spatial contiguity, temporal sequentiality and conceptual (viz. cause-effect) relatedness of the two juxtaposed narratives, which thus appear to be complementary. Indeed, from the viewer's perspective, the film in the top half is to be construed as an implicit offer (i.e. an Opportunity 'signalled', in visual narrative, 'by an encounter with an object of unambiguous function', Hoey, 2001: 153), which the represented participant<sup>15</sup> in the second narrative appears to take, however unconsciously<sup>16</sup>, by performing a consequent, logically related activity. The Opportunity-Taking pattern can be said to combine with the Goal-Achievement pattern in that the Total employee's action, conceived of as a Means of Achievement, enables the woman to take the Opportunity offered by Total and to perform a consequent action in order to achieve a practical Goal<sup>17</sup>. To give just one example, the Total technician's opening a valve in the midst of Iceland at the break of dawn in Fig. 4 'causes' water to flow into the waterpipe and 'enables' the woman to take her morning shower.



Fig. 4: *Iceland and Bathroom scene*

Such logical relatedness is construed by the viewer despite the fact that, on the one hand, the represented participants are portrayed as ‘singles’ (in Goffman’s dramaturgical view of social interaction, 1981) and ‘disconnected’ by being ‘shown in separate shots’ (van Leeuwen, 1996: 84), and that, on the other, they appear to pay ‘civil inattention’<sup>18</sup> (Goffman, 1963: 84): they never establish eye contact, not only with each other, but also with the viewer – which drives the interpretation of the entire commercial as a macro-offer<sup>19</sup> (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 126-127 & 154).

What enables the viewer to understand the logical (cause-effect) relatedness of the two narratives is, first and foremost, the layout and the use of connecting vectors<sup>20</sup>. More specifically, the represented participants’ individual actions and positions are carefully designed, on the split screen as the sum total of the two narratives, so as to identify a vertical vector linking the participants’ respective tools (indicated in italics in Table 1 above), which thus become not only ‘visual collocates’<sup>21</sup>, but one and the same ‘hybrid’ tool indexing<sup>22</sup> one cause-effect logical relationship and thus one self-contained activity. Figs. 5 through 7 are further examples of the general tendency, in the editing process, to correlate top with cause (viz. source of energy being provided) and bottom with effect (viz. household appliance working properly) through the use of vectors – e.g. those connecting the oil platform and [the steam coming out of] the kettle, the wind turbine and the laptop screen (side view), or the solar panel and the TV set –, so as to lead the eye towards their interpretation as spatially contiguous and conceptually related entities. In the *Oil platform and Kitchen* scene, incidentally, conceptual relatedness is further stressed by the vector formed by the sunbeam reflected first on the sea water and then on the glossy surface of the kitchen counter.



Fig. 5: Oil platform and Kitchen scene



Fig. 6: Wind farm and Office scene



Fig. 7: Solar energy plant and Sitting room scene

On these grounds, the analysis will now turn to an investigation into how the crucial relationship between the represented participants – one which perpetuates and reinforces highly stereotyped gender roles and identities – is constructed through visual composition and visual dynamics.

### 3.1 VISUAL COMPOSITION: INFORMATION VALUE, FRAMING AND SALIENCE

As is evident from Figs. 4 through 7, the 'split screen' technique sharply divides the semiotic space where the two parallel narratives unfold into top *versus* bottom. In Western cultures, the upper half of a text's visual space is conventionally devoted to, and interpreted as the ontological space of the Ideal, whereas the lower half tends to be associated with the Real: in Kress & van Leeuwen's application of this framework to print ads, the Ideal often encodes the promise of the product/company (as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'<sup>23</sup>) based on 'the consumer's supposed aspirations and desires' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 193)<sup>24</sup>, whereas the Real is 'the solid foundation of the edifice of the promise' (*ibid*: 193)<sup>25</sup>. Indeed, in

highly standardized print advertisements, the Ideal is typically realized by the visual, which is usually most prominent and highly symbolic, while the body copy, packshot and logo are typically in the semiotic space devoted to the Real/concrete information. What is more, to quote again from Kress & van Leeuwen (1998: 190, emphasis original):

Such structures are ideological in the sense that [...] the information is presented as *though* it had that value or status, and that readers have to read it within that structure initially, even if they then produce a reading which rejects it. These structures are ideological in another sense: particular states of affairs are at least implicitly suggested as established common sense.

In perfect harmony with this conventionalized, ideology-driven mode of constructing and construing information, the Total employee's narrative occupies the domain of the Ideal – which is 'the ideologically foregrounded', and thus hierarchically dominant, 'part of the message' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 194) –, whereas the woman's narrative is in the domain of the Real – intended as the ontological space where the promise of the company appears to be fulfilled through the 'actual' experience of a customer using a product or service: Total's staged activities are therefore presented as unfolding immediately prior to, and 'symbolically' determining, the woman's complementary activities, which are congruently placed in the lower half of the screen as the semiotic space wherein a real, or more practically-oriented, result is achieved.

Such 'ideological foregrounding' of Total's activities is reinforced by more 'delicate' choices in the editing technique: when the two main participants in each narrative are brought together within the same semiotic space (that of the screen) and a visual connection between the respective 'tools' of their activities is created through vectors (see again, e.g., Fig. 4 above), two main effects are produced:

- the vertical elongation produced by those vectors 'creates a more pronounced distinction between top and bottom and hence a bias towards hierarchy' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 55); and
- the represented participants are made to interact in a material process of transaction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 61-64; van Leeuwen, 1996: 82-85), wherein the Agent is 'the participant which instigates the movement' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 63), i.e., here, the Total employee.

Thus, the cause-effect relationship between the participants' respective actions is signalled iconically, while the source of the process/external agency is made to coincide with the action of each Total technician as causer/Initiator of the woman's related action. This is even more evident if the visual transaction is verbally transcoded as a causative (with 'enable') of the reussive 'manage' (Halliday, 1994: 287): with reference to Fig. 4 above, for instance, 'The woman *manages* to take a shower' can be transcoded as 'The employee *enables* the woman to take a shower...', which can be analyzed as follows:

<b>The employee</b>	<b>enables</b>	<b>the woman</b>	<b>to do X</b> (e.g. take a shower)	<b>by doing Y</b> (e.g. by opening a valve)
Initiator/Agent		Actor/Medium		
	Pro $\alpha$	$\rightarrow$	-cess x $\beta$	
				Hypotactic enhancing clause of Manner (Means)

In other words, the actions of the employee-as-Agent (or Initiator, i.e. source of the process) bring about a certain effect. More precisely, they enable the woman-as-Medium to perform some other related action: quoting from Thibault (2000: 342), ‘in this ergative perspective, the focus is on causality rather than on intentionality: [...] the Agent performs a primary movement which, from the viewer’s perspective<sup>26</sup>, causes or instigates a secondary movement in the Reactor’. Thus, the intentionality of the woman’s actions (i.e. her agency) appears to be superseded by the conceptual primacy ascribed to the employee’s related actions as a necessary precondition for those [re]actions to be successfully performed. In more general terms, this (and any other similar sequence in the commercial) is clear evidence that, to borrow Suzie Scollon’s words (2005: 173-4), agency is to be understood not as ‘involving a single actor, an autonomous individual with a simple intention [...but as being] distributed socially, culturally and historically’ among the various (represented and interactive) participants – including, in this case, the viewer.

The cause-effect schema activated in the viewer through the text encoder’s careful editing choices, complemented and supported by the [Western] culture-driven interpretation of how meanings are made in visual space, is therefore likely to produce the following alternative paraphrase of what is happening on the screen:

<b>The employee</b>	<b>provides</b>	<b><i>a</i></b> (e.g. tap water)	<b>for the woman</b>	<b>by doing Y</b> (e.g. by opening a valve)
[Benef]Actor	Process: material	Goal (Goods)	Beneficiary (for the use of)	Hypotactic enhancing clause of Manner (Means)

– wherein

- the Total employee’s action of ‘providing’ – a material process which, in Halliday’s words (1994: 155), ‘is inherently a service with a benefactive implication, in this case because it creates a usable product’ – is enhanced hypotactically through a clause expressing the Manner (or means) which enables the woman to take the offer;

- the Total employee, metonymically representing the company, is thus in the role of [Benef]Actor, i.e. Provider of certain goods and services in the form of such usable products as tap water, gas, light, petrol etc.; and, finally,
- the woman is in the role of Beneficiary (of the type 'Client') of those goods and services (and she is in fact to be construed as the 'prototypical', or ideal, customer).

The first two keys to the interpretation of this text, i.e. the bias towards hierarchy produced by vertical elongation and the benefactive implication inherent in the process of 'providing' goods and services, are found in the executive role of the man as opposed to the woman's dependency on the man to receive those goods and services; and the fact that she seems to be unaware of the 'gift' makes her subordinate status even more evident since, as 'passive' Beneficiary, she is unable to make a critical, competent choice among different providers of the same goods. These layers of interpretation reiterate and reinforce highly stereotyped gender roles (based on subordination and, as we shall see, on complementarity) which create an Intertextual Thematic Formation<sup>27</sup> variously resurfacing at different stages in the dynamic unfolding of the commercial.

The second type of polarization of the visual space in Western cultures is left *versus* right, so that the information placed on the left is ideologically constructed as being in the domain of the Given while those on the right tend to be framed and interpreted as the New.

This is particularly evident in the opening sequence of the film (see Figs. 8 and 9 below), which introduces the two main participants by constructing the Total employee as Given (and congruently portrayed *in medias res* and in the left-hand section of the screen) and the young female customer as New (in the right-hand section), perhaps anticipating the viewer's expectation for relevant information about how Total's activities can affect her life. It has to be pointed out, in passing, that what is Given and what is New may also depend on what is, or is progressively made, salient<sup>28</sup> in visual composition or visual dynamics (Thibault, 2000: 330). Here, however, the fact that the Total employee is seen to 'perturb the invariant background' (Thibault, 2000: 343) by moving rightwards towards the centre of the screen and thus becoming increasingly salient, does not affect his status as Given: he remains within the left-hand section even when the camera cuts to a close shot of the two participants, congruently construed as equally salient and logically complementary (Fig. 10).



Fig. 8: *Iceland and Bedroom* scene (at dawn) [1] Fig. 9: *Iceland and Bedroom* scene (at dawn) [2]



Fig. 10: *Iceland and Bedroom* scene (at dawn) [3]

The left-right structuring is sometimes ‘blown up’, in Eco’s terms (1979: 92), through the use of disconnecting devices (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996: 182 *et passim*), such as the vertical frame lines identified, for instance, by

- the wall corner, in the *Iceland and Bathroom* scene (see again Fig. 4 above), which leads the eye vertically so as to isolate each physical setting from the action carried out in that setting by each participant,
- or, vice versa, in the *Oil platform and Kitchen* scene (see again Fig. 5 above), by the doorpost which isolates the action, on the left, from the surrounding physical setting, on the right.

When Given and New combine with Centre and Margin, the result is what is known as a triptych (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 207):



Fig. 11: *Iceland and Kitchen* scene

In Fig. 11 above, for instance, the main distribution frame and the fridge door are placed centrally one above the other and form two vertical frame lines which divide the centre from the left and right sections, which respectively contain the employee (as Given) and the woman (as New). The new 'hybrid' object formed by the distribution frame and the fridge door in central position acts as Mediator between the two human participants, who, by slightly overlapping the Mediator, are made even more salient than the Mediator itself, and thus dominate the triptych. The transition from Given to New is further underscored, in visual dynamics, by the left-to-right, almost simultaneous opening of the two doors, while the disconnection between the two separate realities, which is produced by the use of frame lines, is somehow counterbalanced by the similarity of the actions performed by the participants, as well as by their individual movements which converge towards the centre when they reach out their hands in order to, respectively, switch on the distribution frame and take food out of the fridge. The ideological work done by the multiplying effect of these and other devices would seem to consist in the projection of complementary, though hierarchically distinct, gender roles and identities – which is best illustrated through the analysis of representation and interaction, as constructed by camera position, angle, gaze, and distance.

### 3.2 REPRESENTATION AND INTERACTION: ANGLE, GAZE AND DISTANCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF POWER AND INVOLVEMENT RELATIONSHIPS



Fig. 12: *Wind farm and Classroom scene*



Fig. 13: *Science lab and Swimming pool scene*

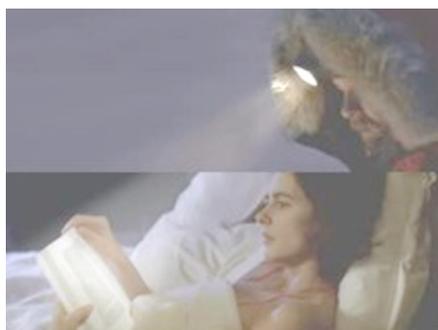


Fig. 14: *Iceland and Bedroom scene (at night) [1]*

In Fig. 12, the viewer is positioned frontally, which means that he/she is somehow involved in what is going on. Yet, there is no eye contact between him/herself and the represented participants, which favours the interpretation of the image as an *offer* (see again notes 18 & 19, as well as Fig. 3 above). Besides, the viewer is observing the scene from two different angles, looking up to the employee and down at the woman, and is therefore respectively dominated by him and dominating her: a possible interpretation is that the film director has tried to project the Intertextual Thematic Formation of the VIEWER-AS-A-COMPETENT-CHOOSER, who is invited to look somehow deferentially at the company, but who has the power to decide whether to identify with, and become one of its customers.

As for the relationship between the two represented participants, the absence of direct eye contact in the first example (illustrated in Fig. 12) testifies to the lack of a dialogic relationship, let alone one of solidarity: their diverging gaze vectors point to somewhere outside the picture frame, which might suggest 'a monitoring function, a sense of readiness, or expectation' (Thibault, 2000: 340), as seems to be confirmed by the fact that, at this point in the visual dynamics of the sequence, they have already stopped moving.

In the second example (see Fig. 13), taken from the only scene where the Total employee is a woman, the power relationship between the company and the customer as, respectively, Provider and Beneficiary of goods and services, would seem to be self-evident: not only is the lab technician, who is shot from a very close (i.e. intimate) distance, infinitely more salient than the diver, who is portrayed impersonally (see the long shot indicating detachment, or an objective representation of the event); what is more, as a result of a careful editing process, the original Phenomenon (i.e. the microscope slide) of the reaction process of which the woman technician is the Reactor in the lab scene is substituted for, in the commercial as the 'sum total' of the two separate narrations, by the diver. In other words, the technician seems to be looking down at the diver while the latter is about to jump from the top board, a crucial scene to which I shall go back shortly in order to show that the power relationship will be partially reversed in the follow-up of the commercial.

The third example (see Fig. 14) complements the other two, in the sense that, being a medium-close, oblique shot of the two unfolding actions, it constructs the viewer as an external, objective observer. At the same time, the employee's gaze vector, which is indexed by the beam projected by the helmet light, is directed down at the woman, who seems to be using that light to read her book. The apparent distribution of roles is, once again, an effect of the editing – though one which does not alter the power asymmetry dominating the commercial: as Goffman has shown to be common in advertisements (but not only), 'when a man and a woman collaborate in an undertaking, the man is likely to perform the executive role' (Goffman, 1976: 32), as is indeed the case here. This particular shot and the sequence of the dive from the top board are certainly the clearest examples in the text of something which is valid for any dynamic multimodal text, and that is, as Kress and van Leeuwen have convincingly argued (1996: 223), that 'the meaning of the individual shots is largely determined by the editing, rather

than by the intrinsic meanings of the shots'. And the implication of this for the present study of ideology is, obviously, that 'truth' is in the eyes of the beholder and in the hands of the text-maker, and that only by 'reading' a(ny) text critically can the beholder resist manipulation, if any.

### 3.3 VISUAL DYNAMICS: SIMILARITY AND CONTRAST AS PROJECTED BY PARTICIPANT-INITIATED AND/OR CAMERA-INITIATED MOVEMENTS

Since the present analysis focuses on the negotiation of roles and identities, it will leave aside aspects of composition in time relating to temporal conjunction (i.e. sequentiality/simultaneity/flashback) and spatial conjunction (i.e. contiguity/overview/detail), and concentrate, instead, on comparative conjunction (i.e. similarity/contrast). This is realized by participant-initiated and/or camera-initiated movements and will be investigated here with particular reference to the construction of relationships of similarity or contrast between gender roles and identities.



Fig. 15: *Going to work*



Fig. 16: *At work*

The stereotypical representation of the complementarity of gender identities, already discussed above with reference to Figs. 10 and 11, is made particularly evident in the two sets of co-thematic phases<sup>29</sup> which we might dub, respectively, GOING TO WORK (Fig. 15) and AT WORK (Fig. 16): in the upper section of the first shot taken as an example here, we can see the man moving from right to left towards the helicopter, positioned in the left-hand section of the screen. Simultaneously, in the bottom half of the picture frame, the woman is shown to move in the opposite direction, towards the scooter parked in the right-hand section of the screen. When the two participants simultaneously cross the centre of the scene, a vertical vector is identified which connects and foregrounds the opposite and complementary nature of their respective actions.

Similarly, in the phase in which the two participants are at work, their complementary relationship is suggested by the film director's choice of taking a back view of the man walking away from the viewer and towards the wind turbine in the background, whereas the woman is depicted frontally and approaching the viewer as she walks down the classroom aisle. The immediately following cut to

the close shot of the participants projecting diverging gaze vectors (see again Fig. 12 above) initiates a phase of progressive involvement with the viewer, which will become particularly evident in the final sequence.

In turn, the similarity of female roles and identities is best epitomized in the sequence of the dive from the top board (Fig. 17 below). As anticipated above, the initial shot (reproduced in Fig. 13) would seem to construct the Total woman employee as having power over the customer. In fact, looking at the immediately following sequence, one can notice that the camera-initiated movements (namely the cut to a very close shot of the reagent drop falling on the microscope slide, juxtaposed with a long shot of the diver jumping into the water) create a visual rhyme (i.e. a repetition of the same movement, shape, etc.) which foregrounds similarity. That sequence might therefore be taken as a visual metaphor for two parallel creative efforts<sup>30</sup>: the researcher's striving towards discovery and the diver's striving towards perfection. Such a striving is made salient, in this particular sequence, by the co-deployment of different semiotic resources, as instantiated by the image-text-sound interface, to which the analysis will now turn.

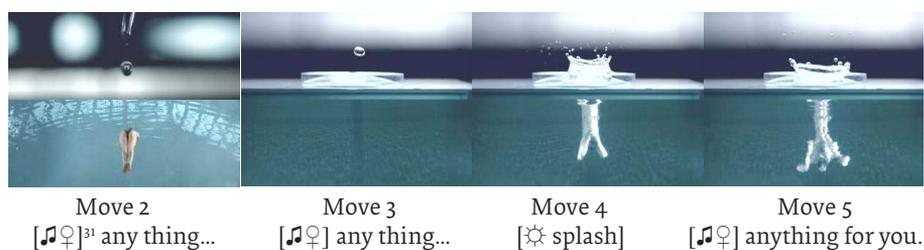


Fig. 17: The *Experiment and Dive* sequence

#### 4. THE IMAGE-TEXT-SOUND INTERFACE

Music plays an important interpersonalizing role (van Leeuwen, 1999: 133) and it has a material and rematerializing history (Iedema, 2003: 49). The pop song chosen as a soundtrack – sung by a female soloist in a soft, cuddling voice which connotes intimacy and fulfils a reassuring function – is characterized by a simple, regular rhythm, major scale tonality and ascending melody. Taken out of context, the lyrics ‘I could do anything for you’ count as a vow of one lover (‘I’) to another (‘you’); however, when the song is made to co-pattern with the visual dynamics of the commercial, agency – as verbally constructed in the material process of ‘doing [anything for you]’ – is ‘rematerialized’, ‘resemiotized’ (see again note 6) and distributed between the ‘disembodied narrative voice’ (Cook, 1992: 178) of the female soloist and the Total employees, metonymically representing the company. The pulsed syllables (‘I could do anything for you’) are ‘made more prominent, more ‘attention-catching’ by means of increased loudness, pitch [and] duration [...]. If [one] heard only these syllables [one] might still get the meaning’ (van Leeuwen, 2005: 182-183).

The effect, in communicative terms, is that the viewer is invited to construe ‘I’ as being co-referential with ‘we, the company’ and the two together as addressing

a 'you' which, as is the norm in advertising discourse, 'has a double exophora involving reference to someone in the picture [here, the ideal customer in the lower section of the screen] and to the [viewer]'s [here, the prospective customer's] own self' (Cook, 1992: 156). This high-involvement strategy, which is powerfully sustained by major tonality – typically associated with positive emotional states, namely 'a belief in progress through human achievement, science, industry etc.' (van Leeuwen, 1989: 261) – and ascending melody 'motivating the listener to join an activity or cause' (*loc.cit.*), is mediated by 'interdiscursive dialogicality', i.e. 'the mutual influence of discourses within a semiotic aggregate'<sup>32</sup> (Scollon & Scollon, 2003: 167). The result is an illusion that the dialogue (which, in the song, is between two lovers) is in fact between the represented participants in the upper and lower sections of the screen and ultimately – through the mediated actions of the ideal customer with whom the viewer is to identify – between the company and the viewer him/herself.

Identification between the company, its employee and the 'I' of the song, on the one hand, and the female ideal customer and the 'you' of the song, on the other, is maximum in the *Experiment and Dive* sequence, which marks the climactic (as well as hyperthematic<sup>33</sup>) phase in the film and unfolds in five main moves<sup>34</sup>: the first is epitomized by Fig. 13, seen earlier, and the last four are reproduced in Fig. 17 above.

After the female soloist has repeated 'anything' twice in moves 2 and 3, 'which signpost what is about to happen' (van Leeuwen, 2005: 186, emphasis original), there is a dramatic rest in the musical score realized through the rhythmic formula known as *contratempo*, serving to shift the listener's attention to the upcoming transition in the thematics of the sequence, one which anticipates an epiphany (i.e. revelation). More specifically, in moves 2 and 3, the drums accompaniment, which had been introduced in the fridge scene (see Fig. 11 above), is replaced by a series of vibrato guitar notes which index an escalation in the narrative tension and which co-pattern with the parallel, slow motion sequences of the reagent drop falling and of the diver springing from the top board. The tension is then amplified by a silent pulse, which 'delays the inevitable climax of the scene and in that way creates further suspense' (van Leeuwen, 2005: 186, emphasis original). The visual climax is reached when the drop touches the microscope slide and the diver touches the water surface: such a climax co-patterns, at the auditory level, with the splashing sound of the perfect dive, which represents a perceptually salient transition point (Baldry & Thibault, 2006: 47-50 *et passim*) in the shift to the fifth and final move, 'provid[ing] the resolution, but again hold[ing] back the moment of revelation as long as possible' (van Leeuwen, 2005: 186). The revelation occurs when the tension is finally released by the return of the music with the repetition of 'anything for you', sung with markedly prolonged vowel sounds and in a slightly lower volume, in order to anticipate the completion point in the lyrics as well as in the narrative.

In the concluding sequence (see Figs. 18 to 20 below), the two participants are shown, at the end of their working day, simultaneously turning off, respectively, the helmet light and the bedside lamp (Fig. 18). The spatial settings and the represented participants are the same as in the initial sequence (see again Figs. 8 &

9 above), but the temporal settings and the actions have changed in such a way as to create choreographic circularity and to round off the argument ‘visually’: after turning off the bedside lamp the woman goes to sleep, while the man goes up the slope and is seen from behind and not frontally, as was the case in the opening sequence, and thus ultimately disconnected from the viewer (see Fig. 19). Then, as the music fades out, the logo and brand name are superimposed on the upper half of the screen (Fig. 20), while the baseline, fading in at the bottom of the screen (Real), brings the identification process to an end, as I shall clarify through a detailed analysis of the functions of logo and baseline, respectively.

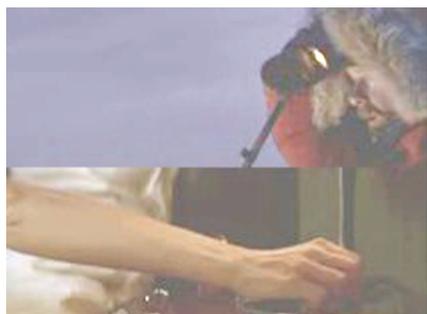


Fig. 18: *Iceland & Bedroom* scene (at night) [2] Fig. 19: *Iceland & Bedroom* scene (at night) [3]



Fig. 20: *Closing shot*

Firstly, the usual placement of the logo in print ads is in the bottom right-hand quadrant, i.e. the semiotic space which tends to construe the company’s identity as real and new in order to appeal to as many prospective customers as possible. In these respects, the logo functions as an ‘empty signifier’, or as an instance of ‘corporate chameleonism, which enables the company to affiliate with diverse communities’ (Lemke, 2003: 134). Here, conversely, the ‘emplacement’ of the logo in central upper position is an instance of ‘transgressive semiotics’ (Scollon & Scollon, 2003: 147ff.)<sup>35</sup>. In other words, the unusually great salience here assigned to the logo ‘deviates’ from standard expectations, in that the logo loses its ‘congruent’ informative/referential ‘weight’ (specifying the institutional source of the

message) and gets ‘resemiotized’ (Iedema, 2003), or de- and re-contextualized (Fairclough, 2006: 26)<sup>36</sup>: it acquires a symbolic ‘weight’, which is a function of the emplacement of the sign in the material world (Scollon & Scollon, 2003: 110), as well as of the generic discursive process at issue (in this case the requirement that corporate advertising should discursively construct the company’s identity). As a result, the company is able to affiliate with the individual (actual or prospective) customer, accordingly addressed here as ‘you’.

As Iedema (2003: 41) rightly points out, ‘meaning-making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice [here, from commercial advertising to corporate advertising], or from one stage of a practice to the next’. Of course, a systematic analysis of a larger corpus would be needed in order to corroborate what, at this stage, is just a working hypothesis, i.e. that seemingly ‘deviant’ uses of the logo as a ‘symbolic’, rather than congruently ‘referential’, meaning-making device would tend to correlate with ‘non-standard’ communicative practices in the commercial domain, such as addressing repeat customers or re-branding the corporate image, as opposed to the more traditional practice of selling a specific product to generalized (however carefully singled-out) prospective customers, who ‘make use’ of the logo to identify/recognize the (‘real’ and ‘new’) brand. Be that as it may, it is certainly significant that, in this case, the logo is located in the semiotic space in which the Total employees’ narrative unfolds, i.e. the ‘symbolic’/Ideal space.

Secondly, the baseline (‘Our energy is your energy’), which is meant to be a pragmatic equivalent of the original French baseline (‘Pour vous, notre énergie est inépuisable<sup>37</sup>), powerfully reiterates the identification process between the represented female participant and the viewer initiated in the *Experiment and Dive* sequence and leads it up to the final identification between the company and the viewer as prospective customer, congruently realized as a relational (identifying) process of ‘being’, metonymically (viz. ‘possessions’ for ‘people’) equating the company’s and the customer’s identities:

OUR ENERGY	IS	YOUR ENERGY
participant role: Identified	process: relational	participant role: Identifier

Although the baseline is a written slogan with no voiceover disambiguating its possible readings, one can imagine that it is meant to be uttered in a proclaiming tone, with ‘YOUR’ being made pitch-prominent as a marker of informativity and the second occurrence of ‘energy’ being pronounced on a low key to stress the equative meaning. This ultimately translates into an identification between the company and the customer and, from here, between the customer and the viewer, conceived of, in SFL terms, as the Client for whom services are done, as

has been obsessively repeated so far by the song on the soundtrack<sup>38</sup>. After stressing the power of science and technology as exercised by a responsible actor and projecting 'social well-being as a matter of consumption, instead of a complex mixture of changing, sometimes contradictory needs and desires that have to be negotiated within a political process and public space' (Livesey, 2002: 133), the ad eventually brings 'the consumer and consumption [...] to the fore as the central moral agent and act' (*ibid*: 131) to legitimate its own actions<sup>39</sup>. What is implicitly posited, in the slogan, as shared ideology – in line with the advertisers' declared intention of 'establishing relationships' (Total, 2005) – is the fact that the company's and its publics' respective interests should converge upon a common Goal (visualized but not explicitly stated). Yet, under the surface of discourse, one can hear the echoes of 'interdiscursivity' (Fairclough, 2003) in the form of the mingling (and ultimate silencing) of those potentially heteroglossic (i.e. dialogic, conflicting) voices which challenge the view that economic development and protection of natural resources/local populations can easily be reconciled by responsible companies.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

If the above analysis has reached its intended objective, it will have shown that, at a global level of analysis, the mediated actions taking place in the two separate worlds depicted on the screen must be decoded as belonging to the same 'site of engagement'<sup>40</sup>, one which comes into existence as a function of the multimodal project underlying text composition and interpretation/processing and as a 'reality [which] is neither given nor an effect of the meanings that humans entertain, but comes about at the interstice where subject and object 'intra-act'' (Iedema, 2007: 939). Besides, the analysis conducted here provides further support for Anthony Baldry's contention that, on the one hand, the meaning of a multimodal text is 'the composite product/process of the ways in which different resources are co-deployed' (Baldry, 2004: 87), and, on the other, that the meaning of a single shot has to be construed in relation to the phase from which it is taken as 'an enactment of locally foregrounded selections of options' (*loc. cit.*).

In other words, 'the reality or the 'weight' of things is a construction that comes about as part of the relation that we have with them (Sloterdijk, quoted in Iedema, 2007: 939), and is therefore 'modifiable'<sup>41</sup>. By the same token, identities are not fixed, but contextually and relationally derived, i.e. 'materially negotiated and (re)confirmed' (Chia, 2003: 106), or conversely challenged, according to whose interests they serve, when, where and how.

1 As Total's Director of communication Yves-Marie Dalibert observes, 'the point of a corporate campaign is for a company to show, to explain to people the work that it does. [...] In Europe [...] it's a question of awareness [...]. In Great Britain, for instance, we only have 10% brand awareness against 65% for Shell or BP. [...] The energy challenge is central today and it's at the heart of this campaign. Its message is showing tomorrow's energy needs means developing new techniques, going further and deeper in search of oil and gas. [...] We're developing new solutions, solutions in the field of sustainable development, solutions in the field of energy saving, solutions in the field of treating greenhouse gases [...]' (from 'The interview' at [www.total.com](http://www.total.com), last accessed 5 April 2008). For a multimodal analysis of the print ads in this campaign, see Bortoluzzi (this volume).

2 From 'Why this campaign?' at [www.total.com](http://www.total.com) (last accessed 5 April 2008).

3 Geosemiotics, i.e. situated semiotics, challenges the somehow decontextualized semiotics proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen (cf. Scollon & Scollon 2003: 145-147) and seems particularly illuminating here as a framework for the analysis of signs in (the) context (of a social action).

4 Mediated Discourse Analysis is relevant for our present purposes in that it places a strong emphasis on the fact that agency, while of course intimately connected to issues of power and domination, is always 'distributed among human actors, mediational means and the various discourses that circulate through them. [...] From this perspective, the study of agency is seen not so much in terms of objectively attributing responsibility for social actions, but rather in terms of understanding how those we study position themselves in various relationships to their actions, and understanding

how we as observers position ourselves when we formulate interpretations of those actions' (Jones & Norris 2005: 170).

5 From 'The creative concept' at [www.total.com](http://www.total.com) (last accessed 5 April 2008).

6 'Resemiotization is about how meaning making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next' (Iedema 2003: 41).

7 Though categorizing the general pattern as 'Problem-Solution', Hoey (2001: 124) argues that Response is a more adequate label than Solution, since 'what is expected is the description of something done to deal with the Problem, not necessarily something that was *successful* in dealing with the Problem' (emphasis original).

8 In Riley's definition (2002: 57), 'identity claims are utterances in which individuals affirm their membership of specific social figurations or sub-groups [here, the sub-group of socially and environmentally responsible companies] in order to foreground them with reference to the matter in hand and thereby orient their audience's behaviour and expectations.'

9 I.e. 'a formal declaration of the reasons why an organization exists [i.e. its *mission*], the goals it intends to pursue [i.e. its *vision*] and the ideals to which it subscribes' (Lahey 2003: 100). In the Shell campaign, such a mission statement – which is reiterated in the right-hand section of each ad's body copy, that is, as we shall see, in the semiotic space generally encoding the real and the new information – reads as follows: '[It's part of] our commitment to sustainable development, balancing economic progress with environmental care and social responsibility'.

10 I.e. 'the composite, overall perception that the general public has of an organization' (Lahey 2003: 38)

as a function of its *corporate identity*, *corporate reputation*, *corporate personality* and *corporate values*.

11 At a more local level of semiosis, to borrow Lemke's words (1999: 41), each headline in the campaign, formulated as a disjunctive question (e.g., in Fig. 2, '[Should we] cover up or [should we] clean up?'), is 'not just a question to which the text below provides an answer; it is a call to arms, and [...] semantically a proposal, with the infinitive realizing the obligatory unreal feature.'

12 A similar mission statement, however more explicitly verbalized, was found in the Shell campaign mentioned above (see *supra*, note 9).

13 In the print ads created for the same campaign (see Bortoluzzi's analysis, this volume), conversely, the visual space is divided vertically and a 'visual rhyme scheme' is used: 'on the left hand side is Total's work today as an oil and gas company and, on the right-hand side, Total in the future, with its work and research in new forms of energy and new ways of using energy' (from the interview to Yves-Marie Dalibert, Total's Director of communication, published in the 2005 'Energy doubled' campaign website, (at [www.total.com](http://www.total.com), last accessed 5 April 2008).

14 In the Shell 1999 corporate advertising campaign, conversely, the world's objective need for energy was explicitly brought up, however couched in nominalized processes from which all explicit markers of agency and responsibility had carefully been deleted, to distribute responsibility for, and involve 'the whole world' in the 'other', 'socially irresponsible' oil companies' deeds and policies (see Vasta 2005: 439-444).

15 'There are two kinds of participant involved in every semiotic act, the *interactive participants* and the *represented participants*. The former are the participants in the act of communication – who speak and listen or write and read, make im-

ages or view them; the latter are the participants who are the subject of the communication, that is, the people, places and things (including abstract 'things') represented in and by the speech or writing or image, the participants *about* whom or which we are speaking or writing or producing images' (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 46).

16 Ideologically, this is of course a metaphor for the identity posited by the text maker between 'everyday life' and 'life-style', or 'what is accepted in the industrialized parts of the world as a taken-for-granted standard of living, [...or...] truth, from [Total's] commercial perspective, about what constitutes basic social necessity' (Livesey 2002: 130).

17 In the text-maker's supposed intentions, that Goal should of course lead to a positive Result entailing a favourable Evaluation (of Total's perceived identity), which is verbally condensed in the baseline ('Our energy is your energy') functioning as a moral coda (the *payoff*, or *reason why* one should choose Total).

18 In the sense that, despite being in the 'same' semiotic space, the represented participants ignore, and are seen to ignore, the visible and audible behaviour of others.

19 Rather than as a macro-demand, as was the case in the Shell campaign. Cf. the rhetorical question in the Shell campaign slogan ('Profits or principles. Is there a choice?'), implicitly *demanding* that the reader take a stand when it comes to choosing among different oil companies, and choose new Shell.

20 Vectors are 'lines which lead the eye in an image' (Goodman 1996: 56).

21 Thibault (2000: 336) uses 'visual collocation' to indicate 'secondary objects, etc. which do not have participant status, but which function to specify either the role of the participant or the activity which he or she is performing'.

22 Indexicality is the property of the context-dependency of signs: 'when a sign makes its meaning by its geographical placement, its physical characteristics, or its *placement together with another sign or object*, we call that phenomenon indexicality' (Scollon & Scollon 2003: 133, my emphasis; also see *ibid.*: 197-207 *et passim*).

23 This is Boorstin's (1961) terminology. Also see Giaccardi (1996: 251-252 *et passim*).

24 Also see Cheong 2004.

25 Also see *Ibid.*, p. 184.

26 As cursorily anticipated above, I subscribe to Burke's (1962) view, widely exploited in geosemiotics and mediated discourse analysis, that agency is chiefly a matter of perspective and that 'any analysis of agency must focus on the tension between the way agency is constructed by individuals in their discourse, and the way it is interpreted by others as actions unfold' (Jones & Norris 2005: 170).

27 In Lemke's definition (1995: 91), a 'thematic formation [is] a recurrent pattern of semantic relations used in talking about a specific topic from text to text': it is, in other words, a discourse pattern which is repeated in the same text or across different texts produced in, for and by a given sociocultural and discursive community. Besides dealing with the same theme ('co-thematic' texts), these interrelated texts can sometimes share similar participant structures and participant roles ('co-actional' texts) and/or similar interpersonal orientations/points of view ('co-axiological' texts).

28 Salience creates a hierarchy of importance among the elements, regardless of their placement. Indeed, salience 'results from [...] a complex trading-off relationship between a number of factors: size, sharpness of focus, tonal contrast ([...] for instance borders between black and

white [...]), colour contrasts (for instance the contrast between strongly saturated and 'soft' colours, or the contrast between red and blue), placement in the visual field [...], perspective (foreground objects are more salient than background objects, and elements that overlap other elements are more salient than the elements they overlap [...]), and also quite specific cultural factors, such as the appearance of a human figure or a potent cultural symbol' (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996: 212).

29 In Gregory's terms (1995: 71), 'phasal description distinguishes, at varying degrees of delicacy, stretches of discourse (continuously or discontinuously manifested) that share ideational, interpersonal, and textual consistency and congruity. Transitions out and/or into phases are signalled by changes in selections in one or more of the functions.' Also see Gregory (2002: 321-324), Thibault (2000: viz. pp. 325-6), Baldry (2004: viz. 92-95) and Baldry & Thibault (2006: 184-186 *et passim*).

30 The choice of a lab technician as the only woman employee in the Total's narrative was probably mandatory, since all the other activities in which the Total employees are engaged are 'typically' masculine. However, it is not unreasonable to presume that the creative effort involved in research and the emotional attitude displayed by the researcher – who, immediately after the shot reproduced in Fig. 13, smiles at the diver, or so it seems – are meant to correlate with an idealized view of the woman as creative, empathic and emotional, as opposed to an equally stereotyped, complementary view of the man as a rational being. Also see Vasta (2001: viz. 308-311).

31 Key to annotation symbols: [♫♀]= female soloist; [♫ splash]= other non-speech or non-musical sounds, including silence, followed by verbal specification of the specific sound. For a complete list of

notational conventions used in the transcription of soundtracks, see Baldry & Thibault 2006: 215.

32 Semiotic aggregates are formed by 'the intersections of multiple discourses and the interaction order in particular places [...and they are] a result of centripetal forces of aggregation including discourse aggregation' (Scollon & Scollon, 2003: 167-8). Here, we may consider the Total commercial as a semiotic aggregate of commercial, utilitarian, environmental, intimate/affective discourses, which are recontextualized in such a way as to 'transform the original social practices in accordance with the goals and values of the recontextualizing practices of advertising agents and their clients' (Baldry & Thibault 2006: 213).

33 A hyperthematic phase carries and/or foregrounds the main argument and thus fulfils an anchoring function, in that it establishes a global interpretive (viz. semantic and pragmatic) framework for all the other related phases and enhances the overall coherence of the text.

34 The terminology and parameters used in the following analysis are based on similar analyses conducted by van Leeuwen (1999; 2005: 181-197).

35 However, it must be pointed out that 'what is 'transgressive' at one time can become itself a semiotic system that can be used symbolically at another time or in another place' (Scollon & Scollon 2003: 151). For instance, evidence gathered so far from my corpus of print advertisements would seem to suggest a significant, symbolic correlation between the placement of the logo in the left-hand bottom corner and the company's addressing repeat ('real' and 'given') customers.

36 Indeed, the same 'deviation' from 'standard' expectations was noted in Shell's 1999 corporate advertising campaign (see again Fig. 1 above and Vasta 2005: 437-8).

37 Since this was an international campaign, the baseline had to be adapted in the different languages in such a way as to express a commitment that is perceived to 'be credible and to create a connection with the target audience' (from the interview to Yves-Marie Dalibart published in the 2005 'Energy doubled' campaign website (at [www.total.com](http://www.total.com), last accessed June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2006). In the original French baseline, 'Pour vous' creates a connection with the public (congruently foregrounded as marked Theme) and 'notre énergie est inépuisable' is the commitment.

38 'I could do anything for you': in the context of the song, 'for you' is probably a circumstantial element of Cause (Behalf) meaning 'for the sake of', but in the process of resemiotization of the song in the larger (and dominant) context of the commercial as a semiotic aggregate (see *supra*, note 32), it is interpretable, in my view, more as a Beneficiary (of the type Client, for whom services are done) than as a simple Recipient (to whom goods are given, e.g. tap water).

39 In the Shell campaign, a similar strategy was aimed at distributing responsibility while stressing the 'objectivity of the world's ever-increasing demand for energy...' (see again note 14 above).

40 '[Sites of engagement] are convergences not just of social practices, but of individuals and their histories, of schemes, scripts and plans, of social identities, of architectural or software designs, and of the various discourses we participate in with their patterns of fixing social relationships of power and of marginalizing certain kinds of social identities and practices' (Jones 2005: 153).

41 See, in particular, the 'transgressive' discursive function of the logo as discussed above.

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