1. Introduction: hyper-Discourse and the spiders of the Web

If we were to choose a group of terms which, in themselves, could summarize the passage from the second to the third millennium, one of the first choices would almost certainly be ‘internet’. This word, formed by a Latin prefix and a noun which evokes one of the most primitive tools used by man to ‘capture’ food, prey or whatever, represents a crucial divide in the history of Western and Western-oriented culture and society.

The Internet also represents a new, extremely complicated and multi-faceted semiotic space because it reproduces and re-elaborates the semiotic systems of the real world. In this virtual, parallel world, where space and time are variables through which the virtual is linked to the real, semiotic systems may have a virtually unlimited semiotic potential. In websites, the ‘countries’ and ‘planets’ of this digital universe, this potential is however limited through trajectories, or paths developing through different levels of a website (co-present hyper-pages) pre-designed by the website producers, which web users will follow by selecting among different sets of choices. This is the paradox of hyper-contexts: the web-user, who is virtually free to explore the whole internet without the physical limitations which characterise the human condition, is actually ‘directed’ through paths pre-organised by web designers for website owners. This is even more true in massively-multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG), a phenomenon

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which already involves millions of people all over the world. In these games, the
web-user is represented by a virtual identity which can have any aspect (even a
different sex or the aspect of a non-human being), an avatar through which he/
she moves, acts, in a word lives a virtual life. Some of these games, however, also
produce economic effects in the real world: apart from the obvious income of the
games producers, these virtual worlds have become the source of considerable
income for some players who do business with virtual items.

To analyse Internet environments I have adopted the functional framework
proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen in their study of visual design (2006). Their
model of analysis is based on Halliday’s model of Functional Grammar, which
they applied and developed as a framework to study in a systemic functional per-
spective the communicative strategies and functional structures of other semi-
otic systems, or modalities. In this perspective, semiotic realisations of different
nature like sounds, images, a verbal text presented in written form or ‘spoken’
by characters or recorded voices on a website, which are always co-present in
Internet communication, can be all studied on the basis of the communicative
functions they serve. Websites, webpages, MMORPG environments, blogs, chat
rooms, personal online pages, are all examples of texts realised through the inte-
gration of some or all of the semiotic systems listed above. The functional frame-
work based on Halliday’s systemic functional linguistic theory (Halliday, 2004)
studies texts as semiotic realisations in context: their primary function is con-
textual communication, thus they construe in their structures the context which
created them and which, at the same time, they contributed to create. Analysis
performed on texts that make use of more than one semiotic system has proved
that each of these systems – verbal, audio, visual, tactile, olfactory - in order to
enact communication, has to fulfil simultaneously three basic requirements:
representing human experience, establishing social relationships and doing this
in a coherent form which is termed the ‘message’. In other words, every mes-
sage has to communicate an event as well as conveying the kind of relationship
existing between those who take part in the communication, and it has to do so
in a coherent, understandable manner. Functional theory has been successfully
applied to analysis of multimodal texts, following the example of Kress & van
Leeuwen’s model (Kress & van Leeuwen, [1996] 2006; Ventola, 2004; O’Halloran,
2004; Jones & Ventola, 2008; Maiorani, 2009). Multimodality studies the ways
and the results of the production of multimodal meaning.

Internet communication is multimodal because it makes use of different
semiotic systems to realise messages: visual, verbal, sound. Although the de-
velopment of a systemic functional multimodal theory is still at an early stage,
groundbreaking studies (O’Halloran, 2004, Ventola et al., 2004) have already
proved not only its effectiveness in the study of various forms of multimodal
communication but also its importance as a scientific perspective that favours
interdisciplinary research.

In this research I have also adjusted the terminology used in Functional
Grammar to analyse verbal texts and describe the multimodal Internet environ-
ment. Thus, I can say that in websites and games the web-user features as Par-
ticipant (the one responsible for enacting Processes) while the website or game

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designer (and/or creator) creates the environment or (hyper)Context. The choices made by the web-user, i.e. the trajectory he/she follows or makes his/her avatar follow, is comparable to a discourse structure: it is multimodal hyper-discourse (a discourse realised through several semiotic systems and through different, co-present levels of text), a semiotic process which takes place in the Internet Context of Culture and is used as a powerful tool for advertising/commercial strategies. In multimodal hyper-discourse, it is the website or game designer who creates the multimodal semiotic system in which the web-user will make his/her choices, thus limiting his/her virtually unlimited possibilities of expression. This power is exerted through the hyper-Context of Situation, in which the multimodal discourse of the web-user is realised: the choices available for the web-user are part of a programmed path which permits and constrains alternatives.

Thus, the multi-semantic value of the term ‘Internet’ is clear: through the net, the web-user is connected to a virtually unlimited space which, at the same time, is a net that ‘entraps’ him/her in the threads woven by the ‘spiders of the Web’, i.e., the website designers.

2. The Matrix website: a case study of a multimodal commercial strategy

The notion of the Internet as a virtually unlimited but confined space where the border between real and unreal is very fuzzy, lies at the core of one of the most culturally impacting and commercially successful multimodal entertainment phenomena of the end of the millennium: The Matrix movie market. The Matrix (1999) was the first movie whose plot was primarily based on the existence of the Internet: the whole Matrix trilogy (including The Matrix Reloaded, 2003, and The Matrix Revolutions, 2003) brings the Internet world on to the big screen in a reversed perspective: what is represented at the beginning as the contemporary real world and life is revealed as a computer program created and controlled by machines, which govern the real world and use human bodies as ‘batteries’. To provide energy for the machines, human beings must have a cerebral life. Thus, while kept sleeping in plugged-in cocoons, their minds are connected to the Matrix, the virtual world where they believe they live a real life. Only a group of rebels, who are un-plugged and hide in the underground city of Zion, are fighting against the machines: their leader is Neo, a former hacker with unusual powers. When the rebels consciously connect to the Matrix and enter its virtual world, their knowledge gives them special powers.

The big success of the movies was inevitably followed by the expansion of the market of franchised products sold through the movie website and its ‘branches’ in the real world, i.e. shops. These products include many kinds of everyday gadgets, clothing, and games, and influenced fashion worldwide for a long period.

The example of the Matrix website and the websites associated with it, can be taken as a starting point of a broader study which uses the systemic functional approach to semiotics as a tool to investigate how communication, especially advertising/commercial communication, takes place on the Internet, and how it evolves strategies to elicit interaction from the web user⁴. The aim of this paper
is to trace and highlight how the Matrix phenomenon has been created through a particular and continuative strategy developed through various media and the exploitation of the Internet as an involving social medium that offers great possibilities to multimodal advertising campaigns. More specifically, it investigates the following aspects of the hyper-discourse constructed in the Matrix website:

- communicative strategies in the poster advertising campaign as a first approach to an Internet community (a summary of previous research);
- the user’s presence in the Matrix website as the interactively represented Participant;
- The Matrix on line game as a potential sequel of the movies.

The Matrix world is a multimedia, multimodal, cultural and social event which developed a huge market exploiting both the very notion and existence of the Internet and the possibilities offered by its virtual lack of boundaries. This allowed the Matrix world and market to keep on living and thriving well after the release of the whole movie trilogy. Multimodality, investigating the new meanings resulting from the combination of different semiotic modes, can be considered the ‘key perspective’ from which to study the multimodal language of the Internet.

The starting point of this paper, as will be further explained in the following section, is previous research based on the multimodal analysis of the advertising posters for the movie trilogy (Maiorani, 2007).

3. The interactive development of an advertising campaign

The study of the multimodal communicative and commercial strategy created for the Matrix market started with research which focused on the movie advertising posters (Maiorani, 2007; 2008). The research, conducted in a multimodal, functional perspective, focused on a corpus of English language posters released worldwide (though mainly in the U.K and the U.S.A.) to advertise the three movies of the trilogy. The results showed the creation of a commercial strategy based on the notion of interactivity, related to the use of the Internet. They can be summarised as follows:

- each movie poster campaign developed according to the birth and growth of a ‘Matrix community’ which produced its ‘Matrix culture’: its members not only bought and wore the Matrix gadgets but also communicated through websites and chat rooms, which consolidated their status as a worldwide Internet community;
- the movies poster campaign also developed along with the creation and progressive expansion of a ‘Matrix market’ whose products were conceived not only for the movies’ fans but for all potential buyers who were attracted by the ‘Matrix look’ and Matrix world.

The Matrix posters developed from an early campaign based on ‘classic’ action movie posters, featuring the main characters with their typical look and gadgets set in an evocative background, and a slogan.
For the second movie, however, many more posters were produced, and in various series: rather than focussing on the movie itself, the interest shifted to the characters' appearance/image and to fashionable gadgets, so much so that Reloaded could have been taken as the name of a new fashion line. The Matrix community was growing, the Matrix market had expanded, items inspired by the Matrix look were sold all over the world and the advertising campaign exploited precisely these factors. Posters featuring only the movie title and date of release on an exciting background were also produced, for the sole purpose of advertising the movie.

For the third movie campaign things changed once more: posters still focused on the Matrix look but retrieved an ‘interest’ in the movie itself and its setting, resulting in a kind of synthesis of the two previous campaigns.

All three campaigns relied on an essential factor: interaction with the viewer, which was elicited as an interpretative response through the realisation of multimodal meanings. In the case of the posters, the integrated use of the visual and the verbal resource systems was the basis for communicative and commercial strategies: the interplay between visual and verbal semiotics created messages that continuously advertised the Matrix market of franchised products while advertising the movies themselves. The following paragraphs will show how, also in the Matrix website, integration of different semiotic systems and interaction with the web-user are distinctively exploited as part of the communicative and commercial strategies.

4.1 The Matrix website: the function of the Elicitors

The Matrix website was fully operative on the web until Summer 2008. Major changes have occurred since then, and the website has become a simple online advertising space for new DVD releases (but no new movie) and other material related to the trilogy.

The Matrix website on which this study is based was specially but not exclusively made for the Matrix community: it was there that items and gadgets were sold and the Matrix philosophy was also explained and discussed. Its environment had evidently been created on the basis of a notion which is also at the centre of all three movie plots: the fuzzy border between the real and virtual world. The whole website was designed and functioned as a threshold: like the characters in the movies, the visitor entered the website and got out of it by passing from reality to ‘virtuality’ and back, though following a reversed path with respect to the movie characters, who, by exiting from what is believed to be our ‘reality’, enter the real world of Zion. The visitors, joining the Matrix world from the real world, performed the same action as the characters who in the movie exited from it, knowing very well that it was virtual. Thus, a first level of interaction was already ‘triggered’: the mimetic action visitors performed by entering the Matrix environment made them identify with the movie characters without even using a visual avatar who appeared and acted on the computer screen (as happens with MMORPG).

The trajectory designed for the visitor, a pre-determined multimodal discourse structure which develops in time and hyper-space and is realised through
his/her interactive choices, started with a page (www.whatisthematrix.warner-bros.com) where the newest market releases were advertised and connection choices were offered as well as demanded (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 The Matrix website welcome page, retrieved in April 2006.

In this page (on line in April-June 2006), the movies’ main character, Neo, was positioned on the right side of the screen, where new information is typically positioned in visual messages (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 179 ff.). No matter what the image represented, however, the background always visually evoked a ‘passage’ between the virtual and the real dimensions: in fact, behind all items or characters displayed, a sort of corridor formed by dropping figures on a fuzzy greenish background was represented, which evoked how the border between the Matrix and the real world is visualised in the movies. In this case, Neo performed a visual action vectorially directed towards the ‘outside’, against a background which showed light rays flashing in the same direction: he seemed to be coming out of the screen, breaking that boundary between real and virtual, whose fuzziness formed the basis for the whole Matrix market strategy.

Various banners and buttons offered a choice of language: on the left side, the choice of connection was offered, and there was also access to a free trial of videogames. Clicking on the connection choice, the web-user entered the www.thematrix.com home page (Fig. 2; also on line in April-June 2006). Below the welcoming sentence there was a triptych of little windows: the left side one displayed a series of icons and stills taken from the movies and it linked to a section where the visitor, ‘manoeuvring’ from the virtual cockpit of a Zion battleship, could download desktops with movie shots and access other material (all these items were from the movies, which were supposedly already known information and thus located on the left side of the triptych; see Kress & van Leeuwen on information value, 2006: 179 ff.). The central window linked to videogames and other associated websites (where blogs, forums and on line discussions on the Matrix world took place). On the right side, where new information is usually
From this page one could enter both the sections related to the three movies and the mainframe, and even access the latest news about this particular world (or vision) of the Internet. The sections were divided according to the frame in Figure 3:

![Fig. 2 The Matrix website home page, retrieved in April 2006.](image)

![Fig. 3 The Matrix website: structure of the operational frame, retrieved in April 2006.](image)
This frame designed the limits of the hyper-discourse choices available on this website. It displayed all the hyper-space sections the website designers/producers offered to the web-user to realise his/her hyper-discourse in pre-determined hyper-contexts. The sections devoted to advertising materials from the three movies (gadgets, photos, videos, supplementary information, insights, etc.) were positioned on the left side, where ‘taken for granted’ or already known information is typically displayed. The ‘mainframe’ area, where all the Matrix market products were displayed and advertised for sale, occupied the right side of the page, the new information area. Accordingly, the ‘latest news’ button was also located in this area.

The mainframe was also the area where the Zion Archives were located. This was the section that best showed the website’s promotional strategy, based on a new kind of representation of the website visitor and potential buyer, who I have defined as the interactively represented participant. This is a multimodal representation of the presence of the visitor achieved through the movement and reaction (beeps, lights, scrolling texts) of the website hyper-environments that are construed, organised and displayed as if rotating around the visitor him/herself, according to his/her movements and actions. Thus, the visitor was represented as if inside the website, and not by a multimodal avatar or character through his/her physical presence as in MMORPG, but only when he/she interacted with the hyper-environment (hence his/her definition as interactively represented).

The Zion archives were a series of this kind of environments reproducing the movie locations. The website visitor realised his/her own hyper-discourse in these environments by clicking on access spots which, when touched by the cursor, flashed a green light and gave out a beeping sound. He/she was offered links to a series of hyper-Locative Circumstances (the website environments rotating around the visitor’s presence), embedding sometimes Circumstances of Means, which functioned as tools for interacting with particular spots. Some of these environments or hyper-locative Circumstances, for example, displayed ranges of tools and machinery (means) that could be clicked on to scroll down an information text page or to activate a link to other sections or related webpages.

The trajectory was visualised as if the webpage were a ‘threshold’ to access the Matrix world in the first person. In this way, a parallel was construed between the characters who in the movies consciously enter the Matrix, and the web-user who consciously entered the website to re-enact/re-create the movies’ experiences.

I have defined these hyper-locative Circumstances or environments as Elicitors because their primary function was not that of providing a ‘set’ for the action of online characters representing the website visitors (as happens in MMORPG); rather, they provided the visitor with an ‘inscape’ into the Matrix world, representing him/her as if inside the website and changing, moving and reacting according to the visitor’s own movements and actions in the website environment. Elicitors elicit interaction from the visitor in terms of creation of a trajectory within the environments: they change the world around the visitor according to his/her choices: without interaction, Elicitors would be inert settings, mere backgrounds on a screen. Elicitors in the Matrix website also elicited interaction in terms of recollection: while creating his/her own trajectory through the vari-
ous links, the visitor would remember locations as they were and functioned in the movies. On the other hand, the visitor who had not, or not yet, watched the movies, would be motivated to watch them. So, in this specific case, Elicitors were also another powerful multimodal means to advertise the Matrix world and products.

The spots of the Elicitors that flashed green lights and beeped when being ‘touched’ by the cursor were signals which pointed to hyper thresholds or hyper discourse sections: by clicking on these spots, the visitor could either link to another environment or scroll a hyper text down in order to be instructed on the technical characteristics of different items, as happens in the movies when characters are virtually instructed as they connect to the Matrix.

Elicitors in the Matrix website were therefore designed to be visited and explored: rather than being hyper-locations where the visitor reproduced the movie scenes or characters’ actions through a visible avatar, they were an interactive map of the movie locations. However, the hyper-space and elicited Processes (or possible actions) that were available to the visitor while inside them would not allow him/her to change the pre-determined structure of the website. The freedom the visitor experienced inside Elicitors had limits and borders pre-determined by the website designers, whose main scope was that of keeping the Matrix market alive.

The Processes that the visitor enacted while inside Elicitors were the more virtual aspect of the website, and reflected the idea on which the movies’ plot was based, namely, that the visitor did not really walk, nor was represented as walking into the hyper-locations: it was the locations which actually rotated around him/her, as if he/she were ‘inside’ the screen. Elicitors functioned as the Matrix does in the movies, where people who believe they are living a ‘real’ life are actually lying asleep in artificial cocoons where they provide energy to machines. Though represented as being ‘inside’ the website, the visitor was no more physically present in it than those asleep in the cocoons in the movies were physically present in what they believed to be the ‘real’ world. Figure 4 shows an example of one of the Zion Archives’ Elicitors:

![Fig. 4 The Zion Archives: a hyper-locative Circumstance (Elicitor), retrieved in April 2006.](image-url)
Thus, the Zion Archives served the purpose of reproducing the Matrix environment for visitors and offering them the opportunity of experiencing the movies’ locations first hand. In this way, the process followed by the movie characters when connecting to the Matrix was also reproduced. Elicitors functioned as ‘advertisements in progress’: they kept on offering the Matrix experience first hand, and worked through the interaction which they demanded from the website visitors.

4.2 The cockpit and the interactively represented Participant.

Offering the Matrix as a world where the visitor can move ‘in the first person’ and not through an avatar, was the starting point of the website’s successful commercial strategy. The site has no sections which are openly for sales activity: visitors are not directly offered advertised items on sale but they are induced to buy them as a consequence of the Matrix experience they undergo while following their trajectory through the Matrix website semiotic space. Figure 5 shows a typical ‘non-explicit sales environment’, where photos are displayed on the screens of a Matrix movie location, and these photos could be bought:

Fig. 5 The website Matrix location where (on sale) photos are displayed, retrieved in April 2006.

Elicitors were the main devices used to make this commercial strategy work. In order to construe the website visitor as someone who crossed the border between the ‘outside world’ and the Matrix dimension, thus reproducing the condition of characters in the movies, the website designers did not offer visitors the possibility of seeing themselves reflected on the screen through a visible avatar; rather, they offered them Elicitors from which they could directly enter the Matrix world and construe their hyper-discourse. The cockpit in figure 6 shows one of the main Elicitors, from which the whole of the Matrix items on sale could be ‘experienced’:
This cockpit was modelled on a movie battleship environment. By clicking on the various screens, levers and buttons, one entered the different sections of the website and had the impression of ‘piloting’ one’s way through hyper-space. Acoustic beeps underlined every action performed in the environment. All the website sections and the items on sale they contained were thus revealed during a ‘hyper-space journey’ determined by the multimodal hyper-discourse realised by the visitor. Thus Elicitors, as already observed, demanded interaction from the visitor in terms of creation of a trajectory and, therefore, of a hyper-discourse which was multimodally construed through the visitor’s moves/choices in the hyper-environment.

By directly interacting with the Matrix website hyper-context through the virtual cockpit and the other hyper-Locative Circumstances, the visitor had the impression of continuing, being part of and developing the plot of the Matrix movies. This development, however, could only be in terms of ‘discovery’ within the pre-structured environments offered by the website: the visitor could only really interact as visitor, finding out more specific features and facts about the Matrix movies and their world, and as buyer of the products sold on line (which would be used in the ‘outside world’). Thus, the Matrix website offered an experience which reproduced the one represented in the movies: the Matrix is in fact a pre-ordained program that surrounds those who enter it like a ‘real world’, limiting and guiding their actions through its own structure. Similarly, visitors of the website could only enact a multimodal hyper-discourse whose structure had already been developed by the website designers, and whose aim was basically to sell the Matrix products.

In conclusion to this section, the Matrix website’s advertising strategy accomplished three aims:

1. through the Elicitors, they realised a hyper-discourse through interaction with the hyper-locations. All possible trajectories would lead to the discovery of items on sale.
2. to attract web-users to the Matrix world, which was still ‘alive’ and continually updated on line, so as to persuade them to buy new by-products and keep the Matrix market thriving (since advertising new movies was no longer required).

3. for the second and third movie posters, the advertising plan of the website relied on the movies’ social impact. Years after the release of the trilogy, advertising had to concentrate on the by-products market and to rely on factors that could make them appealing and keep the Matrix world ‘fresh’ and fully operating. Through a strategy based on Elicitors and the interactively represented Participant, the website visitors’ personal capacity for recollecting and making connections with the movies was exploited once again to advertise not only the trilogy but the whole Matrix world on sale.

After the release of the movie trilogy, the Matrix world expanded and was enriched by new stories and characters featuring in videogames, comics, cartoons, and especially in its on line videogame, ‘The Matrix on line’: the next section will focus on the homepage that introduces the Matrix website visitors to the game.

5. The Matrix on line: marketing a ‘self-made sequel’

The screen shot in Figure 7 below, with the (incomplete) verbal text ‘The Matrix on line is the future of the matrix picking up right where the trilogy left off’ shows how the web-user is introduced to this very well known on line role-playing game on its home page. This page has to work as a ‘threshold’ to a section of the Matrix world where the visitor seems to be really able to develop the movie plot by playing.

Fig. 7 The Matrix on line home page – detail of the welcoming verbal text, retrieved in June 2006.
The title of the game is both on the right and the left side of the web page, in the upper part, which is the first to appear before one scrolls it down; on the right side, however, the sentence ‘What is the Matrix on line’ announces an explanation of the game, once more where new information is usually placed. The title on the right side retrieves a type of font which was used on the movies’ advertising posters; the one on the left displays fonts that are smaller and of a different colour than those used for the question ‘What is …’: thus the visual focus shifts to the question at issue, which is not much concerned with technical information but focuses rather on the role of this game within the Matrix world on line. The hyper-Theme (or topic clause) of the explanatory paragraph is analysed for transitivity, mood and thematic structure in Table 1 to show how language works on all three semantic levels to be effective in advertising this product and its specific properties:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Matrix on line</th>
<th>is</th>
<th>The future of the Matrix [picking up right where the trilogy left off]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identified</td>
<td>Pr: relational/identifying</td>
<td>Identifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Finite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOOD BLOCK</td>
<td>RESIDUE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

The name of the game functions as co-extensive subject of a clause which, as a bald assertion, implies a high degree of certainty. It is also multimodally highlighted by the use of letters in italics and bold. The embedded non-finite clause (picking up ...) in the nominal group functioning as the Identifier also positions the game as a consequence and a sequel of what is taken to be an already known product, the Matrix movie trilogy. This is therefore mainly a game for those who have seen the movie and/or are already clients of the Matrix market.

This piece of information - the first written text offered to the visitor in this section - is particularly important in orienting his/her choice to play the game, because it advertises once more the principal experience the Matrix market offers and sells through the website: entering the Matrix world and ‘acting’ in it as characters do in the movies. Except that, by playing the game visitors will be able to ‘add’ something of their own to the Matrix world and storyline (by creating characters, acting in the hyper-environments) though always within the game structure pre-designed by its producers.

The players in The Matrix on line are a specific community within the Matrix community of fans and product-consumers: they can join the game for free, but additional material such as game facilities or updating can be bought later from Station.com (the address appears on the upper right side of the web page), a firm
which sells on-line games and is a branch of Sony. Unlike what happens in the Zion Archives, which are a section of the Matrix website, ‘The Matrix on line’ - an ‘affiliated website’ linked to www.whatisthematrix.com and managed by Station.com - offers avatars which visualise the player’s actions within the hyper-environments of the game. These avatars are a visual projection of the player’s identity into the Matrix world. Figure 8 shows a shot from ‘The Matrix on line’ home page as it appears when scrolling down:

![The Matrix on line home page – detail of the bottom part, retrieved in May 2006.](image)

All paragraphs below the figures in the triptych start with the clause ‘You can’: the potential player then, is construed as someone who has the ability to change and/or create something in the Matrix world through his/her interaction with the game. The game is therefore the counterpart of the Zion Archives in particular and of the Matrix website in general: while the movies website has to focus on the movies and their related market, relying on the response of the visitor as interactively represented Participant who can re-visit the Matrix world without changing it, The Matrix on line website represents the ‘future’ of the Matrix, a development of the Matrix market which is focused on ‘the new’, and relies on the identity market of the game avatars to attract the potential player to the Sony/Matrix net. The avatar which will represent the web user’s virtual identity is in itself a product. In order to provide his/her avatar with more tools and updating, the player will have to buy them from, or support Station.com, and thus enter the net of the Sony market.

The central part of the page displays a scene (here, of combat) which recalls a scene of the movie but is clearly a shot from the game. Experientially speaking, the image features Processes of transactional action and reaction, because the represented Participants are fighting while looking at each other. The two Participants also realise an analytical Process: they are both Carriers of attributes - a woman from the Zion community and an ‘agent’ of the Matrix – which players who have watched the movies will easily identify. The choice of a community to
which the avatar belongs will also determine the online community the player will be attached to and which choices he/she will be able to make in terms of multimodal hyper-discourse while playing (each type of character is allowed specific actions, powers and relationships): in this way, the player will also enter an online social context which replicates that of the movies. Interpersonally speaking, the kind of Contact realised by the gaze of the characters appearing in the scene is an ‘offer’: the represented Participants do not look at the interactive Participants, they therefore do not demand any immediate attention from them and are simply offered as object of the viewers’ gaze (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 116 ff.). This matches the choice made in terms of horizontal angle, which is frontal and therefore aimed at involving the viewers as if they were ‘there’ as spectators of the combat. The vertical angle at eye-level also selects a point of view of equal power between represented and interactive Participants.

Textually, the whole central section is itself organised as a vertical triptych, whose centre is the game shot and whose margins are the title of the game on top (where the word ‘combat’ is highlighted through the use of bigger fonts, which draws even more the attention on the central combat scene), and an explanatory short text at the bottom. This is the very core of the page and it is focused on what will probably be the main aim of the game: winning combats. Thus, the pre-determined game structure is also made explicit by the multimodal semiotics of the page.

Both the right side and the left side sections, by contrast, are not so ‘dynamic’ and experientially only realise non-transactional reaction and analytical Processes. Interpersonally, on the left section a character from the movies, the Oracle, appears in the game format while looking at the viewer from a locative Circumstance which also recalls one of the movie locations. The kind of Contact is here a demand, which matches the imperative Mood of the sentence written in big fonts at the top: “Continue the Story…”, once more an invitation to realise the ‘future’ of the Matrix. Textually, in the left section of a triptych - where already known information is usually visually offered (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006: 179 ff.) - the invitation to play and continue the Matrix story with a ‘self-made sequel’ is associated with a character of the movie with whom the trilogy fans are likely to be very familiar.

The Participants represented in the section on the right side (the triptych ‘new information’ side) are presumably some of the visual avatars amongst which the player can choose in order to visualise his/her actions on the screen. These are new characters, characters of the ‘future’ of the Matrix, characters of what will be a ‘self-made sequel’ to be realised by the game players as a multimodal hyper-discourse. Also in this case, only non-transactional reaction and analytical Processes are realised, but here there is no locative Circumstance, only a dark colour background: what will happen and where is still to be decided and realised by the player’s multimodal hyper-discourse. The kind of Contact is once more a demand, which matches another imperative Mood clause, also appearing on top: ‘Be anyone you want to be’. Tables 2 and 3 offer an analysis of these two sections’ top clauses, which seem to work to expand and reinforce what the hyper-theme of the webpage states:
As the tables show, the first verbal message of the triptych is a strong invitation to perform an action on a subject the player should already know: the deictic ‘the’ implies that this is a story whose plot the web user should remember. The ‘you’ representing the player appears in the embedded clause in the nominal group *anyone [you want to be]* functioning as Identifier, to underline the player’s position as a new character in the ‘future’ developments of the Matrix story. Notice also that, in the image, the Oracle has her mouth open, which leads the viewer to infer that the invitation is pronounced directly by her. Moreover, those who know and remember the movies, will infer a further message: the Oracle, in fact, is the movie character who knows every mystery of the Matrix and helps the main character, Neo. Thus, the web user and potential player/client is construed as being addressed by her, as Neo and his companions are in the movies. The dots at the end of the sentence suggest the idea of a sequel, ‘to be continued’. Visually, they point towards the following sections on the right side. The characters in the central sections are somewhat blurred, not exactly identifiable, but their actions suggest that combat is what is mainly offered in the game, they serve as an example of what it will provide. The characters displayed in the third section are much more visually detailed and can be chosen as virtual identities if the player decides to start this virtual combat game as suggested by the Oracle. Furthermore, each one of the sections of this triptych, when clicked on, activates an explanatory
text. The one activated by the Oracle's section is especially interesting, and the opening clause complex:

‘Participate in the continuing story of The Matrix and become a part of Matrix history’

deserves particular attention. Table 4 shows an analysis for transitivity, mood and thematic structure of the two component clauses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participate</th>
<th>In the continuing story of the Matrix</th>
<th>And become</th>
<th>A part of Matrix History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pr: Material</td>
<td>Circ.: location/Space</td>
<td>Pr: relational/attributive</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Predicator</td>
<td>RESIDUE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESIDUE</td>
<td></td>
<td>RESIDUE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Rheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

Both clauses realise a strong invitation to the potential player/client: one elicits an action to be carried out in the hyper-location of the Matrix, not as a video game but almost as an alternative dimension to the outside world; the other elicits a relation with the game world in attributive terms, and invites the viewer to almost physically become part of the Matrix world and net. This text, therefore, invites the potential player/client to enter the Matrix world as creator and protagonist of a ‘self-made’ sequel. Once more, what this page offers is the Matrix experience first hand through an online game. In this case, however, advertising strategies focus on the product’s promises of new developments and the opportunity for the player, to be really able to expand the Matrix world.

6. Conclusion

This overview of the different forms of advertising that have supported the Matrix phenomenon and the analysis of the strategies enacted in the Matrix website have highlighted the continuity and transmedial nature of a strategy based on the integration of different semiotic systems and interaction with the potential Matrix market customer.

The description of how this strategy develops within the Internet environment has also highlighted the fundamental paradox of online hyper-contexts, those online environments structured on different co-present levels (or hyper-pages) which Internet users enter when visiting market-oriented websites: though being set in the ideal, boundless dimension of the Internet, these con-
texts are pre-structured portions of hyper-space modelled by website producers according to a specific marketing target. The 'freedom' visitors seem to be allowed inside them is actually limited and directed towards what is generally a commercial aim.

The Internet is obviously an incredibly effective means for advertising campaigns: its multimodal nature allows the creation of messages which make use of different semiotic systems and realise integrated, more complex meanings in more complex semiotic domains (Gee, 2003: 18). It also allows advertising campaigns to reach a vast public with unparalleled immediacy. The Matrix market advertising strategy is a perfect example of how the movie advertising campaign developed to advertise the whole Matrix market, and through the use of different modalities.

The posters campaign, as shown through the results of previous research (Maiorani, 2007, 2008) exploited the Internet not as a medium but as a notion linked to the movies' plot and to the ways and means of the fan community that was gathering around the trilogy when it was being released. Its strategy, based on interactive interpretation demanded from the viewer, relied on the growth and consolidation of a Matrix fan community whose worldwide expansion was obviously mainly due to the use of Internet communication. This campaign already made use of multimodal messages (visual and verbal modality) which, due to the movies plot, made constant reference to the Internet dimension.

The Matrix website strategy demanded interaction from visitors through the use of some very particular hyper-contexts which I have named Elicitors. These are hyper-environments that construe the visitor as being ‘inside’ the website by rotating and changing around him/her according to his/her moves and choices. They demand interaction in terms of creation of a path or trajectory, a multimodal hyper-discourse the visitor will realise through the website visit. In this specific case, they also demanded interaction in terms of recollection of the movies' plot, characters and locations, thus implicitly advertising once more the movie trilogy and its world. Elicitors offered a ‘first hand’ experience of the Matrix dimension: visitors’ eventual online purchases would be a consequence of their journey through the Matrix world. Elicitors are pre-determined and pre-structured by the website designers and producers and implicitly limit the visitors' hyper-discourse choices though apparently offering them great freedom, leading their trajectory towards purchase. In doing so, however, the Matrix website Elicitors revived and kept ‘alive’ the hyper-environments in the Zion Archives which, otherwise, would have been just an inert collection of stills portraying movie sets of a trilogy that was already a product of the past. Elicitors kept the Matrix world alive in the present.

The online Matrix marketing strategy, however, does not stop here: it also projects the Matrix world in the future, and it does so through the homepage of its online role-playing game, The Matrix on line. The multimodal discourse of the game homepage construes the potential buyer and player as someone who could really add something of their own to the Matrix world and story: visitors are offered the opportunity to create new characters who will function as their avatars in the game, as well as to create new storylines. The chance to continue the sto-
ryline of the movies is the game-specific quality on which the advertising strategy relies, and it is the game’s main appeal. However, though the Matrix future seems to be in the hands of the potential player, here too, the game structure will determine their choices and introduce them to an online social context which is the replica of that presented in the movies.

The Matrix market strategy kept the Matrix phenomenon alive in order to continue selling its products. To do so, it had to endow the Matrix world with duration, with a temporal dimension which went beyond the movie trilogy, an event in the past. This goal was mainly achieved through the website strategy analysed here, and its demand for interaction of / with the website visitor in the form of hyper-discourse. It seems likely that the Matrix phenomenon will continue to live and attract potential new customers to the Matrix market, as long as web users and potential buyers continue playing the Matrix on line, realising multimodal hyper-discourses by continuing the Matrix adventure in the game.
NOTES

1 For a discussion on the way the Internet was changing communication and the very notion of semiotics in the years when *The Matrix* (1999) was being produced, see Bignell 1997:203 ff.

2 Other methodologies can be used in the study of visual messages (see Rose, 2007) but the functional approach seems to be the most effective perspective from which to approach texts where the visual semiotic integrates with other semiotic systems and where both producer and receiver of the communication are taken into account at the same time and on equal terms.

3 For a discussion of how public involvement and identity on the Internet is linked to levels of interaction see Cameron (2007).

4 Contact is a category that Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) list among the resources that construe and maintain visual relationships between both the represented participants, ‘the people, the places and things depicted in images’ (2006:114), and the interactive participants, ‘the people who communicate with each other through images, the producers and viewers of images’ (2006: 114). The role gaze plays in visual communication is described by them in terms of presence or absence of direct demand of attention from the represented participants: ‘There is, then, a fundamental difference between pictures from which represented participants look directly at the viewer’s eyes, and pictures in which this is not the case. When represented participants look at the viewer, vectors, formed by participants’ eyelines, connect the participants with the viewer. Contact is established, even if it is only on an imaginary level.’ (2006: 117).

REFERENCES


