

Untangling the myth of 'culture as renewable oil': a Barthesian exploration of PDVSA La Estancia's visual campaign Transformamos el petróleo en un recurso renovable para ti

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Plaza, P. (2019) Untangling the myth of 'culture as renewable oil': a Barthesian exploration of PDVSA La Estancia's visual campaign Transformamos el petróleo en un recurso renovable para ti. In: Graves, H. and Beard, D. E. (eds.) *The Rhetoric of Oil in the Twenty-First Century: Government, Corporate and Activist Discourses*. Routledge. Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/72735/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Published version at: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Rhetoric-of-Oil-in-the-Twenty-First-Century-Government-Corporate/Graves-Beard/p/book/9781138484375>

Publisher: Routledge

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Untangling the myth of culture as ‘renewable oil’: a Barthesian exploration of PDVSA La Estancia’s visual campaign *Transformamos el petróleo en un recurso renovable para ti*

There is a historical narrative in Venezuela that has regarded the arts, and by extension culture, as a resource analogous to oil. The most eloquent is a statement made by Venezuelan visual artist and playwright César Rengifo in an interview to daily newspaper *El Nacional* whilst working on a mural for the military in 1973:

‘We are like oil: a reserve; but in Venezuela we have yet to be put in motion’ (1973, p.12)

By saying that artists are like oil, Rengifo asserts his value and repositions himself as a natural resource suggesting that the Petrostate would invest in artists like him, and culture in general, only if they are viewed like a reserve of crude oil. His statement reveals the clout oil carries in shaping the relationship between the Petrostate and culture in Venezuela. The discussion developed in this chapter reveals how a particular understanding of culture is privileged by the national oil industry.

The chapter is divided in four parts. The first part provides a review of George Yúdice’s proposition of the expediency of culture as a resource which enables its use for economic, social and political purposes. The second part describes the profile and context of PDVSA La Estancia’s advertising campaign, in particular the visual and textual elements that compose the adverts. The third part develops a semiotic analysis of the visual and verbal element of the adverts using Barthes’ theory of Mythical speech to elucidate the intended meanings behind the slogan ‘We Transform oil into a renewable resource for you’ and thus what notion of culture is mobilised by PDVSA La Estancia through the city re-presented as an oil field. Finally, the analysis of the visual and verbal elements draws on George Yúdice to look into the discursive construction of oil as a ‘renewable resource’ to examine how the adverts construe the notion of culture-as-mineral-deposit.

Culture then becomes inextricable from land, akin to a mineral deposit, and tightly controlled by the Petrostate. The inclusion of giant oil workers in the adverts and their interactions with the urban spaces depicted point to a re-signification of the city as an oil field, in an explicit attempt at naturalising a direct and somewhat mechanistic relationship between oil, culture and the city.

The Expediency of Culture as a Mineral Resource

The analysis of the visual and verbal elements of the adverts draws on George Yúdice’s expediency of culture as a resource to argue that PDVSA La Estancia discursively renders oil and

culture equivalent by construing what this chapter defines as the notion of culture-as-mineral-deposit, as if culture could be extracted and processed like crude oil. George Yúdice's *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (2003) explains the utilisation of culture as a resource as an instrument to aid social and economic development. Yúdice argues that culture has acquired to an extent the same status as natural resource as a consequence of the process of globalisation, which has accelerated the transformation of all realms of modern life into a resource. Nonetheless, he argues that the use of culture as a resource is not a perversion or a reduction of its symbolic dimension. On the contrary, the expediency of culture as a resource is a feature of contemporary life, its transformation traced to a performative force, a style of social relations, generated by diverse organised relations between state institutions and society such as schools, universities, mass media, markets, and so on (Yúdice 2003, pp.47, 60–61). Yúdice characterises performativity 'as an act that "produces which it names"' revealing the power of discourse to produce realities through repetition (Yúdice 2003, pp.47, 58) and the particular institutional preconditions and processes by which culture and its effects are produced.

Whilst the term expediency refers to the merely political in regards to self-interest, Yúdice's performative understanding of the expediency of culture 'focuses on the strategies implied in any invocation of culture, any invention of tradition, in relation to some purpose or goal' which is what makes possible to invoke culture as a resource 'for determining the value of an action' (Yúdice 2003, p.38). The expedience, or convenience, of culture as a resource is what allows its use for economic, social and political purposes. For Yúdice, the expediency of culture as a resource has become, in practice, the only surviving definition (Yúdice 2003, p.279) becoming impossible not to turn to culture as a resource as it is congruent to the way we now understand nature, affecting the way culture is viewed and produced. Similarly, this chapter argues that for the national oil company it would be close to impossible not to turn to culture as a mineral resource.

Yúdice's discussion frames this chapter's approach towards the work of PDVSA La Estancia. PDVSA La Estancia has the privilege of direct access to the oil rent to be a founder of culture. It has an organizational and legal autonomy that means that PDVSA La Estancia need not negotiate with the government or follow any other agenda than its own. Finally, PDVSA La Estancia can even surpass in financial and political power the jurisdictions of the state and other public institutions whose functions overlap with their work over the city. For PDVSA La Estancia, culture has acquired the same status as natural resources.

Profile of the Campaign 'We transform oil into a renewable resource for you'

PDVSA La Estancia launched the campaign '*Transformamos el petróleo en un recurso renovable para ti*' in early 2013, the year of Hugo Chávez' unexpected death, right at the start of what would have been his fourth term in office. Chávez had outlined an ambitious presidential programme for the elections of 2012 with the objective of transforming Venezuela into a world power of oil energy by expanding the extraction of Venezuela's vast reserves of crude oil (Terán Mantovani

2014, p.161; Chávez 2012, pp.7, 27). Nonetheless, the majority of the public art and public spaces restored by PDVSA La Estancia and depicted in the adverts predate the arrival of Hugo Chávez to the presidency; they are symbols of the modern oil nation, built and erected during the era of what Chávez renamed as the Fourth Republic¹ (1959-1999), vilified by his Bolivarian Revolution.

In July 2014 I interviewed the General Manager of PDVSA La Estancia at their main building in Caracas. At the end of the interview, the Department of Public Relations handed me a CD with a set of photographs of every public art and public space that had been restored by the institution up to that moment, such as Alejandro Otero's Abra Solar (Image 1), Jesus Soto's Esfera Caracas (Image 2), and Sabana Grande Boulevard (Image 3).



Image 1: Abra Solar. Photo courtesy of PDVSA La Estancia

¹ The majority of the public art was erected between the 1950s and 1980s. They belong to the historical period that defines the 40 years of representative democracy and oil-driven prosperity in Venezuela, from the end of Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship in 1958 tending with the Constituent Assembly set up in 1999 by Hugo Chávez on his first presidential period to draft a new constitution. This inaugurated what Chávez defined as the Fifth Republic, renaming the country the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Formerly Republic of Venezuela) to differentiate it from the Fourth Republic which saw the decline of the traditional political parties Democratic Action (AD) and the Social Christian Party (COPEI) that had dominated Venezuelan politics, considered corrupt and blamed for submerging Venezuela in a deep social and economic crisis in the 1980s and 1990s.



Image 2: Esfera Caracas. Photo courtesy of PDVSA La Estancia



Image 3: Sowing Oil Square, Sabana Grande Boulevard. Photo courtesy of PDVSA La Estancia

The photographs in the CD form the basis of the campaign. Adding PDVSA La Estancia's logo

to the photograph would not have sufficed to evidence the institution's direct involvement in restoring these locations to their original state. To evidence its authorship, visual and linguistic strategies were devised, such as the inclusion of a giant oil worker and the verbal text to differentiate it from the institutions that had traditionally received funds from the oil rent to carry out such works, such as municipalities or the National Heritage Institute.

The campaign consists of 23 posters of the city spaces and public art that had been restored by PDVSA La Estancia between 2005 and 2012. The adverts can be seen on most PDV petrol stations, on PDVSA La Estancia's main headquarters in Caracas (Image 6), as well as on an album in their Facebook page (PDVSA La Estancia 2013). Each poster features a giant oil worker clad in red gear, portrayed as if caught in the middle of a working day (Images 7, 8 and 9).



Image 6: Adverts at PDVSA La Estancia offices in Caracas. Photo by Penelope Plaza, 2014

The visual element of the 23 adverts is a photographic image, composed by public art or architectural structure and a giant oil worker; it is complemented by the verbal text 'we transform oil into a renewable resource for you'. The photographs were digitally altered to include a giant oil worker, as can be seen in the following sample of three of the adverts showing the Esfera Caracas, the Abra Solar and Sabana Grande Boulevard respectively:



Image 6: Esfera Caracas Advert

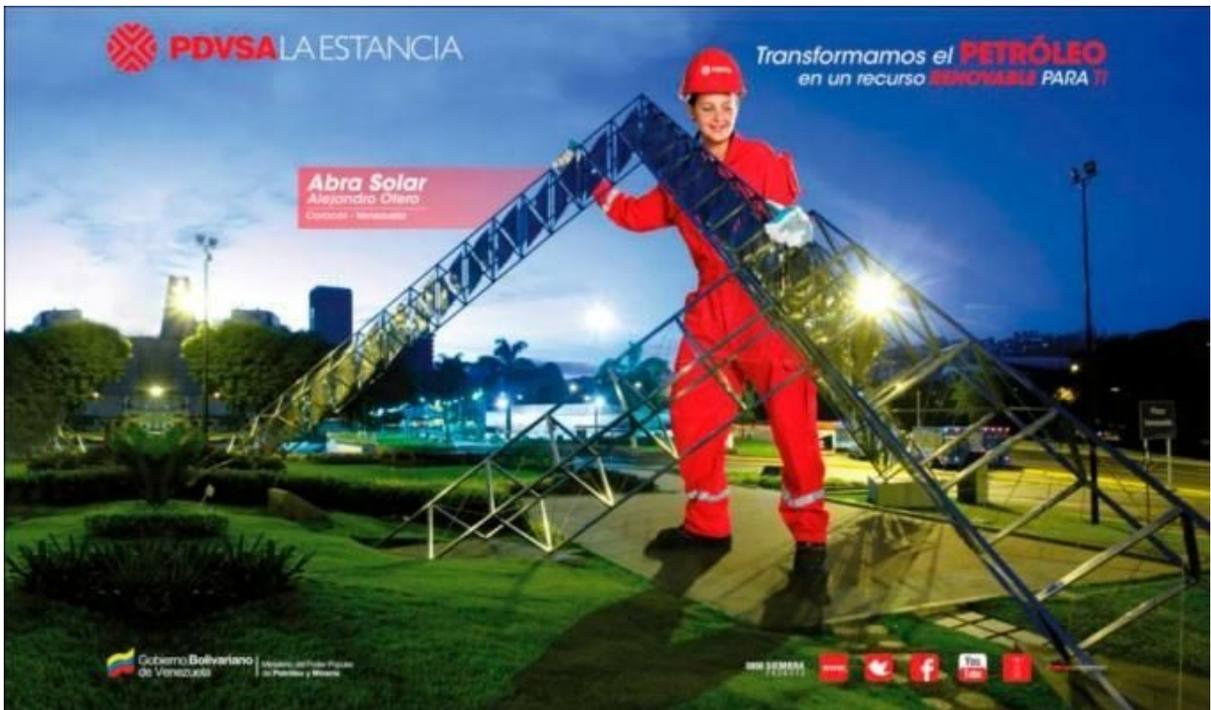


Image 7: Abra Solar Advert



Image 8: Fisicromía Advert

The majority of the adverts feature public art; this is a key point showing not just the regeneration aspect but also the intention to create aesthetic and artistic associations with the oil company. Nineteen out of the 23 spaces depicted are located in Caracas, which highlights that PDVSA La Estancia's investment in urban regeneration has taken place predominantly in the capital city. The public art works are identified by a label that contains the name of the artwork, the name of the artist, and its location:

- Plaza Venezuela, Santos Michelena, Caracas-Venezuela
- Abra Solar, Alejandro Otero, Caracas-Venezuela
- Esfera Caracas, Jesus Soto, Caracas-Venezuela
- Fisicromía, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Caracas-Venezuela
- Los Cerritos, Alejandro Otero, Mercedes Pardo, Caracas-Venezuela
- Pariata 1957, Omar Carreño, Caracas-Venezuela
- Uracoa, Mateo Manaure, Caracas-Venezuela
- Venezuela Ocho Estrellas, Ender Cepeda, Edo. Zulia, Venezuela

The labels do not indicate the date they were built, the adverts don't differentiate between the

Bulevar de Sabana Grande built in the 1970s from the restored structure of the Gazebo of El Calvario which dates back to late nineteenth century. Playgrounds and sports grounds are not provided with any specific location, they are simply labeled *canchas* (courts). Playgrounds are labeled as Parques La Alquitrana (Tar Parks), suggesting that such parks have been built by PDVSA La Estancia all over the country. La Alquitrana is a feminised Spanish term for tar; PDVSA La Estancia's website explains that the circuit of La Alquitrana parks is named after Venezuela's first oil well that spurt crude oil in 1878, located in the Andean region of Táchira (PDVSA La Estancia n.d.). Overall, the adverts depict material spaces of leisure and cultural recreation: playgrounds (childhood), sports grounds (youth), public art and parks (families); all made possible by PDVSA La Estancia (oil). But these material spaces appear miniaturised by the presence of what is in effect the focal point of the campaign: the giant oil worker. The next section opens the visual semiotic analysis of the adverts, using Roland Barthes visual-rhetorical analysis of Myth.

Giant Oil Workers and the Myth of 'Renewable Oil'

PDVSA La Estancia's adverts will be dissected to its smallest units of meaning, considering the two main features of the composition: the photographic image and the verbal text. The photographic image depicts the interaction of a giant oil worker and the material space of the city. The verbal text solidifies the message conveyed by this visual interaction. The advert, then, is a composite of urban space, giant oil worker, and verbal text. To further explore the signification of the PDVSA La Estancia adverts, the visual semiotic analysis of the adverts will draw on Roland Barthes' theory of Myths. Barthes was a pioneer in the semiotic study of images, with works focused on photography such as 'The photographic Message' (1961) and 'The Rhetoric of the Image' (1964). The analysis in this section will be based on 'Mythologies' (1957), an earlier and still influential work that developed his theory of the myth through the analysis of French adverts.

For Barthes, Myth is a type of speech, 'a system of communication, that it is a message', it is not a concept or an idea, it is a concrete entity, a form, a 'mode of signification' defined not by its literal sense but by its intention (Barthes 1993, p.109,124). In his sense, myth is a type of speech 'chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things' (Barthes 1993, p.110). For Barthes, everything can be a myth as long as 'it is conveyed by a discourse', it is not confined to the written word or oral, all visual representation mediums such as cinema, photography, reporting, advertising, can serve as a vehicle for mythical speech:

'we are no longer dealing here with a theoretical mode of representation: we are dealing with *this* particular image, which is given for *this* particular signification. Mythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them whilst discounting their substance' (Barthes 1993, p.110)

Myth does not hide, lie, confess or flaunt, ‘its function is to distort, not to make disappear’ (Barthes 1993, p.121). Myth is an inflexion of the concept, and through this inflexion rather than revealing or dissolving it, naturalises it: ‘we reach the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature’ (Barthes 1993, p.129), therefore myth is read as a reason, never as a motive, it aims to cause an immediate impression ‘experienced as innocent speech not because its intentions are hidden –if they were hidden they would not be efficacious- but because they are naturalized’ as factual (Barthes 1993, pp.130–131). This factualness characterises myth as ‘depoliticized speech’ (political understood in its deeper meaning as the power humans have in making their own world); by transforming history into nature contingency appears eternal as things lose their historical quality and memory: ‘things lose the memory that they once were made’ (Barthes 1993, p.142). This chapter posits that PDVSA La Estancia propagates the myth of ‘renewable oil’ within the advertising campaign, which informs the notion of culture-as-mineral-deposit. The propagation of this myth is communicated through two modes of discourse: the visual component and the verbal text. Each one of PDVSA La Estancia’s adverts is a fully formed composition, fusing image and text. The photographic image depicts the interaction of two fundamental elements: a giant oil worker and the material space of the city. The verbal text fuses the visual interaction between giant oil worker and the city and enriches the meaning.

In the set of professional photographs provided by the Department of Public Relations of PDVSA La Estancia, most of the spaces are predominantly were photographed at dusk, under dark blue skies, the night lights blurring the hustle and bustle of motorised traffic and people at rush hour. As these are all pre-existing structures, the photographs by themselves would not evidence PDVSA La Estancia’s direct involvement in restoring the depicted public spaces and public art back to their original state, after many years of disrepair and vandalism. With a few exceptions, the public art and public spaces restored by PDVSA La Estancia predate Hugo Chávez’s presidency. The photographs of actual, identifiable material spaces of the city intervened by PDVSA La Estancia are enhanced by the inclusion of the giant oil worker through digital manipulation. This visual fusion engages in a direct interaction with the public space/public art depicted. However, the main focal point of the adverts is not the restored structures but the giant oil worker, who signals the viewer to look at what she/he is working over: public art and public space restored by PDVSA La Estancia.

The giant oil worker connects to both the human-scale worker (as actual giant oil workers do not exist) and the existential relationship with the oil industry, including the extraction of crude oil. The oil workers appear in full working gear, clad in red –the colour that identifies the Bolivarian revolution and the new revolutionary PDVSA² - hard hats, protective overalls, boots, and gloves,

² On May 1st 2007, Hugo Chávez announced during a national television broadcast that his Bolivarian Revolution was seizing control of the Orinoco Oil Belt from multinationals, as dictated by the new Law of Hydrocarbons. The Minister of Energy and President of PDVSA greeted the four thousand oil workers who would be transferred from the multinationals to PDVSA by saying “Welcome to the new PDVSA!” as the workers, in a symbolic act, traded their traditional blue hard hats for red ones. The broadcast ended with Chavez celebrating the “new, red, red PDVSA”. Sources: <http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/4490/cascos-de-color-rojo-como-simbolo-de-la-toma/> http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readmenu.tpl.html&newsid_obj_id=3910&newsid_tem

wielding tools such as pipe wrenches suggesting heavy duty work. The giant oil workers interact with the public art or architectural structures as if they were heavy machinery in a refinery -the natural environment of an oil worker- and not in the midst of the city. Of an unnatural monumental size, collectively the oil workers are portrayed as benevolent giants occupied with beautifying the city, presented as a naturalised and ubiquitous presence in a city visually miniaturised by their monumental scale. In the pair of posters of Sabana Grande Boulevard (Images 10 and 11), the giant oil workers are seen installing a canopy. They are presented as if they were screwing in a giant piece of an oil drill into the ground. In the case of the adverts that depict public art, these lose their monumental scale through the interaction with the giant oil worker. Like the canopies, they are handled like heavy machinery in a refinery.



Image 10: Sowing Oil Square, Sabana Grande Boulevard Advert



Image 11: Sowing Oil Square, Sabana Grande Boulevard Advert

These spaces, although already completed, are shown unfinished in the adverts, in the midst of the active process of being either manipulated or recently repaired. The giant oil workers also function as visual-cultural ambassadors of PDVSA La Estancia, the *obrero petrolero* (oil worker), that gets down and dirty to perform the extraction of crude oil from the subsoil.

If the giant oil worker is a visual-cultural ambassador of the oil industry, then their inclusion and interaction with the spaces depicted point to a re-possession of the city visually reconstructed as an oil field in a clear attempt at naturalising a direct and mechanistic relationship between oil and urban space. The giant oil worker functions as a visual metaphor that transfers the extractive activity of the oil field to the city, mediated by public space and public art. As an artificially constructed image, the giant oil worker offers a direct connection between the oil company and the viewer (and within the advert between the oil worker and city dwellers), suggesting a break with the historical social division between oil workers and rest of the population, as argued by Tinker Salas:

‘Many directly employed or indirectly benefiting from the oil industry subsequently assumed key positions in Venezuelan society, government, commerce and industry. Their views reflected a series of self-sustaining myths about the oil industry and its importance to the nation and society. Paramount among these was the notion that for Venezuela the oil industry was the means to achieve modernity in all its forms. For those employed by the industry, these new modern traditions accentuated certain traits and behavior patterns –discipline, efficiency, work ethic, meritocracy, and in some cases even

bilingualism- that helped define the “collective consciousness” of the oil industry and distinguished those working in it from the rest of society.’ (2009, p.5)

But this symbolic break with the social hierarchy that used to distinguish those working for the oil industry from the rest of society is contradicted by the colossal scale of the giant oil workers and their paternalistic demeanour towards the viewer. All the adverts vividly capture the face of each giant oil worker, they are all easily identifiable. Their superiority and monumental scale is emphasised by the low-angle shot, they do not gaze directly at the viewer; they are either focused on their duty or engaging with the miniaturised city inhabitants below them in a cordial manner. The represented giant oil workers do not address or acknowledge the viewer with a ‘visual you’, the giant oil worker’s gaze does not demand anything from the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, pp.121–122); rather, their scale incites deference.

To achieve this, the campaign romanticises the harsh reality and ‘dirtiness’ of the work in the oil fields by offering a sanitised version of the oil worker as they are relocated in the midst of the city. Oil is once again presented as the source of prosperity and the producer of culture through the labour of a ‘workers elite’. PDVSA is presented as a provider of beauty and prosperity through the actions of PDVSA La Estancia, materialised in beautifully restored urban spaces and public art. The giant oil worker appears as a symbol of PDVSA’s benevolence and power.

The adverts are a sign of the city colonised by oil and appropriated by the state-owned oil company. Before progressing further with the analysis it is necessary to state the obvious: Caracas is not, and has never been, a site of oil extraction and refining; there are no crude oil deposits in its subsoil. Seen together, the actions of the giant oil workers as a collective of images (Image 12) represent a cause-effect relation of the impact of the work of PDVSA La Estancia on the city, which could not be entirely conveyed by just pairing the photograph of the restored space and the logo, it needs to tell the story, to make evident to the viewer the institution is behind it: PDVSA.



Image 12: the 23 adverts of the campaign "We transform oil into a renewable resource for you"

Two types of cause-effect relations can be identified in the adverts: one natural and one artificial. The natural is that those spaces were in fact restored by PDVSA La Estancia. However, the giant oil worker obscures the bureaucratic mechanisms and institutional structures needed for restorations of this scale to come to fruition, but only the authorship of the oil company is acknowledged. Visually, it is not as simple as having a giant oil worker do the repairs, public works need sophisticated and complex set of decisions and institutional arrangements to make them possible. The visual emphasis on giant oil workers depoliticises the campaign. *'Petroteros'* (oil workers) as an identity is not controversial and divisive in a nation unified by oil (Coronil 1997) but currently submerged in deep political polarisation. This confirms the campaign as mythical depoliticised speech in Barthes' terms. The adverts of the campaign locate all public art, sports grounds and public spaces, in the same present temporality, the same quality of newness, placing them in a history-less present. They propose an abolition of history, appropriating public art, public spaces and heritage for the Bolivarian revolution. This is emphasised by the absence

of the date the art works and spaces were built in the label that identifies them. The Abra Solar, the Esfera Caracas, The Fisicromia, Pariata 1957, Los Cerritos, Gazebo del Calvario, Sabana Grande Boulevard, and Plaza Venezuela are all stripped in the adverts of their political and cultural history.

The artificial cause-effect relation is found in claiming that through the actions depicted in the adverts they are transforming oil into a 'renewable resource'. It also provides the images with volition; it expresses the idea of possibility latent in the advert, condensed by the verbal text. This chapter now turns to the verbal text to identify 'mythical speech'. Barthes provides the analytical framework to decipher the type of reality that the language of the adverts aims to create, and hence what notion of culture is construed by PDVSA La Estancia.

The verbal text of the advert, *Transformamos el petróleo en un recurso renovable para ti* (We transform oil into a renewable source for you), expresses eloquently the purpose of the campaign. This expressed purpose, or intention, reveals the verbal text as the construction of myth in Barthes' terms, completed by the interaction between the verbal text and the visuals of the campaign. The intention of the campaign is suggested by PDVSA La Estancia's discursive construction of the role of oil (and the oil industry at large) in the city and the relationship it should to establish between oil and culture.

The campaign presents as a fact that PDVSA La Estancia is transforming oil into a 'renewable resource' but it does not make explicit what this renewable resource is, it is suggested by the images of the oil workers manipulating public art and architectural structures in the city. The myth is emphasised in the colouring and layout of the typography, the words of the verbal text are given two different combinations of colour, white and red, or black and red. The same three words are highlighted red and bold in every poster:

Transformamos el **PETRÓLEO**
en un recurso **RENOVABLE PARA TI**

We transform **OIL**

into a resource **RENEWABLE FOR YOU**

The implied 'nosotros' (we) in the plural of *Transformamos* (we transform) in the verbal text is the voice of the institution represented by the collective voice of the giant oil workers depicted in the adverts, who function as the 'cultural ambassadors' of PDVSA La Estancia. The 'We' also excludes viewers. Compounded by the monumental scale of the giant oil workers, the use of the 'we' hales viewers as the beneficiaries of PDVSA's philanthropy setting them as one-down to the company. Then, *Petróleo* is not only highlighted, but appears in a larger size, singled out visually. In the typographic layout, the left half of the text is written in lowercase letters whilst the right half dominates the composition with words in capital letters and highlighted in bold red: **OIL RENEWABLE FOR YOU**. The key message of the campaign is contained in the right half. The composition of the verbal text produces a focus of information; Kress and van Leeuwen

propose that as a general rule in a visual composition, the elements placed on the left are presented as Given, and the elements placed on the right are presented as New:

For something to be Given means that it is presented as something the viewer already knows, as a familiar and agreed-upon point of departure for the message. For something to be New means that it is presented as something which is not yet known, or perhaps not yet agreed upon by the viewer, hence as something to which the viewer must pay special attention (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996, p.187).

The position of *Petroleo* (oil) and *renovable* (renewable) in the layout of the text puts *Petroleo* right on top of *renovable*, visually suggests them to be read together as *petroleo renovable* (renewable oil)



The two meanings of the two words together is incongruent, pairing oil and renewable is paradoxical because oil is a non-renewable natural resource, it is finite. But the paradox implied here is not literal. Whilst the paired words suggest that PDVSA La Estancia is claiming that a never ending supply of oil is possible as PDVSA succeeds in ‘magically’ transforming oil into a renewable resource, oil is made renewable metaphorically by investing the oil rent³. Hence, if oil is made renewable by investing in culture then culture is like renewable oil: oil, culture and the city are conflated into one entity.

The next words in the text highlighted in bold red leads to the intended audience of the campaign, the PARA TI (*for you*):



The other word highlighted in red bold typeface is *ti* (you). It's made renewable *for you*. The ‘for you’ aims to create a sense of closeness between the institution and the viewer by addressing the viewer directly. The audience to which the *you* is addressed to, is the potential users of the spaces, the dwellers of the cities these structures are located in, but given the national scope of the campaign, it implies the population of Venezuela at large, in other words all citizens of the Petrostate who share the national identity of oil.

The adverts as a group are the material form of the sign. Barthes’ concept, unlike

³ Nineteenth century economist David Ricardo is credited with introducing the term Rent and developing the first comprehensive analysis of resource rent. Resource rent should not be confused with contract rent. The term resource rent was originally related to the use of land and agricultural production, a renewable but scarce resource. The variations of yield of different lands would determine the potential of resource rent for each. Rent, as defined by Ricardo, is the compensation paid by the farmer to the owner of the land for the use of the original and indestructible properties of the soil (Ricardo n.d., para.2.2). The payment of rent is also determined by, and varied according to, the investments made in infrastructure by the landlord.

Saussure's signifier, can take a variety of forms because it only re-presents itself and it is this multiplication what allows to decipher the myth through the repetition, in this case, the idea of transforming oil into a 'renewable resource'. The concept relies on understanding culture as crude oil, as an expedient natural resource, a mineral deposit that accumulates in the subsoil that upon extraction yields political and social benefits but that unlike oil can be transformed and renewed. Oil then becomes a double-sided cultural entity, it is invoked as a singular force capable of producing palpable cultural effects, it is a producer of culture but also a cultural product in itself. If culture is like a mineral deposit extracted from the subsoil of the nation then culture and the discursive and political wealth produced by, what I define as culture-as-renewable-oil is, like the subsoil, the exclusive property of the Petrostate.

Culture-as-renewable-oil: Culture and Oil as analogous renewable resources

The myth presented by the adverts is oil made renewable by investing in culture, therefore culture becomes analogous to renewable oil. Culture, oil, and the city are coalesced into one entity through the myth of renewable oil and the notion of culture-as-renewable-oil. The myth comes into fruition through the performative force of PDVSA's giant oil workers. The myth of 'renewable oil' also serves to calm anxieties about the end of oil resources and high oil prices. In the manner of the demiurgic exercise of power of the Magical State defined by Coronil (1997), PDVSA La Estancia becomes the sorcerer that makes possible the impossible by transforming oil into a renewable resource. Oil and culture are rendered as equivalent when culture is turned into crude oil, as if culture was a physical material that could be industrially extracted, measured, exploited, processed and commercialised. Moreover, 'renewable oil' attaches to culture conflicting notions of resource: resource as nature and resource as deposits extracted from the subsoil that yield wealth.

In this context, the notion of culture-as-renewable-oil can be regarded as more than a mere discursive construction. The implications is that by tying culture to the land, it constructs culture as a material entity that accumulates in the subsoil, ready to be extracted, processed, weighed and measured under tight control by the Petrostate. Therefore, modern and abstract manifestations of culture such as the ones depicted in the adverts can only be quantified as valuable if they are transformed into oil machinery, rather than as symbols of the abstract notions of civilisation and progress. Then, for culture to fit this rhetoric, it has to be defined in narrower terms and become the exclusive property of the Petrostate. To paraphrase Yúdice, it is impossible for the state-owned oil company not to view culture as reserve of crude oil. Therefore, PDVSA La Estancia's discursive construction of culture can be defined as 'culture-as-renewable-oil'.

The instrumentalisation of culture-as-renewable-oil is not oriented towards the conventional model of development discussed by Yúdice, rather it is instrumentalised for political aims. Culture is not required to provide financial returns, as the Petrostate's distributive expenditure policies do not require financial accountability or representative bargains.

Culture-as-renewable-oil condenses the materiality lost by oil when it was reduced to the fetish of rent money (Pérez Schael 1993, p.94), becoming inextricable from land.

The advertising campaign renders oil and culture as equivalent by construing culture-as-renewable-oil, as if culture could be extracted, exploited and processed like crude oil. In the notion of culture as culture-as-renewable-oil, culture is discursively bound to the subsoil, so that it is the exclusive property of the state and belongs to the realm of PDVSA. But unlike oil, culture can be renewed, reconverted, and transformed.

Conclusion

The whole campaign can be interpreted as a symbol of PDVSA's discursive power. The space of the city is envisioned as an oil field, where giant oil workers are seen repairing or installing architectural or sculptural structures. They give a face –or rather a collective face- to oil in the campaign as their colossal figures subliminally communicate that the urban spaces, and the city at large, are contained within the realm of the oil industry.

PDVSA La Estancia devised the visual strategy of the giant oil worker to establish their ownership over the city. The giant oil worker functions as a sign of the oil industry, their inclusion and interaction with the spaces depicted in the adverts visually reframes them as oil fields in a clear attempt at naturalising a direct and mechanistic relationship between oil and culture. The labour of the giant oil workers transforms oil into a 'renewable resource' as an illusion congruent with how PDVSA La Estancia conceptualises culture-as-renewable-oil; it discursively renders oil and culture equivalent as if culture could be extracted, exploited and processed like crude oil. This provides a new illusion, a novel dramaturgical act: culture as renewable oil is tied back to the land. Hence, culture-as-renewable-oil is inextricable from the land, from territory; if culture is 'extracted' from the soil, then the Venezuelan Petrostate can claim complete ownership and tight control over culture as a 'renewable resource' as established by the Law of Hydrocarbons.

This is the context of the naturalisation of the giant oil worker metaphorically transforming oil into culture, acting outside of its natural environment -the refinery and oil fields- stripped of the dirtiness of directly handling oil. Their colossal scale is intended to provide them with a mythical aura, whilst at the same time performing the material quality oil lost by being reduced to rent money (Pérez Schael 1993, p.94). The myth of 'renewable oil' may serve the purpose of calming anxieties about the end of oil, which endangers the survival of the Bolivarian. In the specific context of this campaign, the verbal text suggests that oil is being transformed into culture, inferring that culture is *the* quintessential 'renewable resource', naturalising as truth that PDVSA La Estancia is making possible the utopia of inexhaustible oil.

References

- Barthes, R., 1993. *Mythologies*, London: Vintage.
- Chávez, H., 2012. Propuesta del Candidato de la Patria Comandante Hugo Chávez para la gestión Bolivariana socialista 2013-2019. *www.mppeuct.gob.ve*. Available at: <http://www.mppeuct.gob.ve/el-ministerio/politicas/leyes-y-planes/propuesta-del-candidato-de-la-patria-comandante-hugo-chavez> [Accessed March 24, 2015].
- Coronil, F., 1997. *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T., 2006. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* First., New York: Routledge.
- Kress, G. & van Leeuwen, T., 1996. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, New York: Routledge.
- PDVSA La Estancia, 2013. Facebook. *TRANSFORMAMOS EL PETRÓLEO EN UN RECURSO RENOVABLE PARA TI*. Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.296539377135848.64316.130175993772188&type=3> [Accessed September 5, 2014].
- PDVSA La Estancia, Historia. Available at: http://www.pdvsalaestancia.com/?page_id=131 [Accessed April 14, 2016].
- Pérez Schael, M.S., 1993. *Petróleo, cultura y poder en Venezuela*, Caracas: El Nacional.
- Rengifo, C., 1973. Los artistas en Venezuela somos como el petróleo: una reserva. *El Nacional*, p.sección C, página 12.
- Ricardo, D., Chapter 2 On Rent. In *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. London: Empiricus Books, p. 2.2.
- Terán Mantovani, E., 2014. El fantasma de la Gran Venezuela: un estudio del mito del desarrollo y los dilemas del petro-Estado en la Revolución Bolivariana. *CLACSO*. Available at: http://www.clacso.org.ar/libreria-latinoamericana/libro_detalle.php?id_libro=1092&pageNum_rs_libros=0&totalRows_rs_libros=1057 [Accessed March 22, 2016].
- Tinker Salas, M., 2009. *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela*, Duke University Press.
- Yúdice, G., 2003. *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era*, London: Duke University Press.