SUMMARY. The aim of this article is to show how rhetoric and critical thinking are intrinsi-
cally interrelated. I will explain why, in keeping with the history of the discipline itself, rhet-
oric can be a powerful tool for critical literacy. It can help raise our awareness of how social,
political, ethical issues are always rhetorically constructed and why they are always the outcome
of arbitration about the right linguistic and rhetorical choices to make in particular rhetorical
situations. One of the basic epistemological tenets of this article is that, instead of confining
ourselves to a single rhetorical theory, we can choose among the huge rhetorical heritage at
our disposal to elaborate a coherent analytical framework to investigate the message conveyed
by a text, be it oral, written, visual, or one that combines these three modes. In this article,
I have drawn from Chaïm Perelman’s *New Rhetoric* and Kenneth Burke’s *Dramatism* to analyze
a multi-semiotic document.

KEYWORDS: rhetoric, critical thinking, audience, presence, identification, naming,
multi-semiotic.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to show the importance of rhetoric in laying bare how social
and ideological representations and meanings are constructed. It is my assumption
that rhetoric is of uttermost importance in an ever-changing world that raises new
democratic and philosophical challenges; a world that is saturated with a massive
flow of information, ever-growing agonistic discourses, and numerous attempts of
manipulation. More specifically, I will show that, once dissociated from a dismis-
sive and reductionist belletristic vision, rhetoric enables us to highlight how stances
are taken in heated debates and how particular angles are rhetorically disseminated.
In other words, rhetoric is considered, in this paper, as a crucial and powerful tool
that develops critical literacy and enables us to resist manipulations, delusions, and
deceptions. Besides, this very critical literacy that rhetoric fosters and gives access to
can help us be discerning, self-reflexive, independent subjects, ethically responsible
for what we do with words. In sum, in this paper, I take it for granted that in rhetoric, the critical dimension goes hand in hand with the ethical one. The long history of rhetoric puts at our disposal a huge number of concepts and notions, elaborated within various rhetorical frameworks and traditions; these concepts and notions may contribute to bringing to the fore how different, and sometimes, competing claims about reality are promoted and how audiences are enticed to embrace and believe them. To show the importance of rhetoric and its empowering role, I will, first, start by giving a brief overview of rhetoric and critical thinking; second, I will introduce a set of notions with the help of which I will carry out a sample analysis; third, I will apply the analytical framework introduced to analyze a visual document published by the British tabloid newspaper, The Sun, during the 2011 riots in Great Britain.

OF RHETORIC AND CRITICAL THINKING

If, for example, we run a somewhat crude search on any English-language online library catalogue, using the keyword rhetoric, we may come across a huge number of definitions. This is not surprising for a discipline that spans over more than two millennia and whose roots are anchored in an age-old philosophical tradition. Besides, in order to account for this profusion of definitions, one has to bear in mind that the history of rhetoric is a history of constant reframing, redefining, and updating.

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines rhetoric, in its eleventh edition, as: “the art of using language in such a way as to produce a desired impression upon the hearer or reader. The object is strictly persuasion rather than intellectual approval or conviction.” In the Oxford English Dictionary, rhetoric is defined as “… speech or writing expressed in terms calculated to persuade; hence (often in a depreciatory sense), language characterized by artificial or ostentatious expression. c. pl. elegant expressions; rhetorical flourishes.”

These two definitions stress two of the main ideas associated with rhetoric and explain, to some extent, its bad reputation; first, the persuasion sought by rhetoric is not achieved through rational choice and thinking, but obtained thanks to manipulation and deceit. Second, rhetoric means verbosity, linguistic posturing, ornamental but empty speech. Therefore, one may be tempted to deduce that rhetoric should not command much respect because it achieves persuasion either at the expense of rationality or through empty eloquence.

It is an undeniable fact that, throughout its history, rhetoric has often oscillated between two endpoints; it has been either praised for enabling the orator to achieve
a persuasive end or suspected of being mere linguistic ornamentation whose goal is to deceive and manipulate. These two endpoints date back to the origins of the discipline itself and to the debate between Plato and the sophists. (Debordes, 1996, 11).

The sophists’ conception of rhetoric had been mistaken, for a long time, for the promotion of a canny and almost sly use of language. But, the sophists:

conceived of rhetoric primarily as a *techné* (art) whose medium is logos and whose double aim is *terpesis* (aesthetic pleasure) and *pistis* (belief).” It is the art “to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible. (…) [It] is an artistic undertaking which concerns itself with the how, the when, and the what of expression and understands the why of the purpose. (Poulakos, 1983, 36)

Plato may have been one of the first harsh critics of rhetoric, yet he was well aware enough of its importance as he himself makes a masterly use of it in his *Gorgias* (Kennedy, 1999, 53; McAdon, 23). Plato defines rhetoric as the “art of enchanting the soul,” “the counterpart in the soul of what cookery is to body.” Rhetoric seeks, according to him, to exert an influence on “the mind by means of words, not only in courts of law and other public gatherings, but in private places also” (Bloom, 1968). In Plato’s definition, the aim of rhetoric is to convince by winning the soul and the mind of the audience by discourse. He does not confine it to a particular institutional setting since it was resorted to in highly institutionalized and ritualized contexts as well as in everyday, mundane situations (Corbet, 1990, Herrick, 1990, Reboul, 1991).

Aristotle defines rhetoric as a “practical discipline that aims, not at producing a work of art, but at exerting through speech a persuasive action on an audience.” Unlike other “arts” [*technai*] such medicine, geometry, etc., which “instruct” and “persuade” only about their subject matters, rhetoric “is not concerned with any special or definite class of subjects”; thanks to its “technical character”, it has the power of unveiling “in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion.” (Aristotle, 1356)

Cicero (Bizzell and Herzberg 289–338) and Quantilian (Bizzell and Herzberg, 400) see in rhetoric, respectively, a “speech designed to persuade” and “the art of speaking well.” But St. Augustine, for instance, sees in rhetoric “the art of persuading people to accept something, whether it is true or false,” (Bizzell and Herzberg, 465); John Locke considers rhetoric disparagingly as a “powerful instrument of error and deceit” because it “has its established professors, is publicly taught, and had always been had in great reputation” (Bizzell and Herzberg, 422); and Montaigne sceptically defines it as “an instrument invented to manipulate and agitate a crowd and a disorderly populace, (…) an instrument that is employed only in sick
states, like medicine” (Brake, 2009, 30). In sum, rhetoric is merely “a means for verbally manipulating people through fallacious arguments and appeals to irrational impulses” (Arnhart, 1981, 3).

This highly arbitrary selection of definitions shows how difficult it is to come out with a single definition of rhetoric as the term itself is polysemic and the tradition it refers to is far from monolithic. As we can see, the term rhetoric conveys different meanings and it is associated with divergent connotations, which can, very schematically, be divided into two categories.

On the one hand, rhetoric is commonly viewed as the skilful use of language that aims to win over the addressee’s mind. This general definition is neither positive nor negative of course; it basically implies that rhetoric has to do with a human’s use of language to achieve a communicative goal. On the other hand, it is negatively perceived for at least two separate but complementary reasons. First, defining rhetoric as the skilful use of language to win over the addressee’s mind may cast doubt on the sincerity and real intentions of the speaker since the latter may be suspected of using words falsely and deceptively. From this standpoint, rhetoric can be considered as a cover word for manipulation. Second, rhetoric is sometimes used as a synonym of verbose, showy and overblown speech; therefore, it does not refer to dangerous and deceptive use of language, but rather to exaggerated or inflated talk, ornamental style, flowery figures of speech, big words that in the end just try to hide the emptiness of the message. In both cases, anyway, rhetoric is considered as a fraudulent use of language either to give advantage and manipulate or to show a certain mastery of language without communicating any substantial ideas.

I am not concerned, in this paper, with the dismissive and disparaging vision of rhetoric that deems it as irrelevant, manipulative or as verbose, empty posturing. I am concerned with its potential ethical and critical dimensions; with the positive roles it does play in shaping our awareness of how human communication functions. These aspects of rhetoric and its role have been of paramount in importance since the beginning of the discipline. The Ancient Greeks were so aware of the centrality of rhetoric to a democratic society and of the decisive part it played in the everyday management of their city-states that they integrated in the education of the free citizens (Herrick, 1990, 34, Robrieux, 2015, 17). Besides, rhetoric had a highly practical character to it because it prepared the citizens of the city-states to develop and acquire critical skills so as to participate actively in deliberation and decision-making relative to public affairs. From the outset, therefore, rhetoric had as practical character and a critical one as well.

The teaching of rhetoric and the art of speaking persuasively was important at this early stage because the constitutional power was in the hands of all the citizens; the latter were aware then that their destiny relied largely on their ability to
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speak persuasively (Porter, 1997, Debordes, 1996). Rhetoric was of such primordial importance that boys as young as fourteen were to attend schools and classes for theoretical instruction in rhetoric and public speaking (Kennedy, 1963). The Sophists insisted on the usefulness of the teaching of persuasive techniques so as to help citizens procure the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with practical and immediate issues they were confronted with (Reboul, 1995, Pernot, 2015, Ober and Strolls, 1990).

From the outset, then, rhetoric was conceived of as a powerful means attending to acquiring autonomy and responsibility; for this very reason, it is eligible to be at the heart of critical thinking. By critical thinking, I mean the capacity to distinguish arguments from non-arguments and to evaluate their truth values; the capacity to scrutinize the conclusions drawn from the premises upon which arguments are founded. Critical thinking has also to do with the capacity to work out the assertions made about reality and the rationale as well as the ideological assumptions that sustain them. In sum, critical thinking means the examination and the testing of propositions of any kind which are offered for acceptance, in order to find out what values, representations, and claims they make about reality and about the topic being discussed.

It goes without saying that critical thinking is not innate, but is rather the fruit of teaching and training; it requires a discipline that provides us with analytical tools that give us insight in how communication functions, how people interact to persuade, influence, or manipulate. Rhetoric is such a discipline thanks to its capacity to develops attitudes to critical thinking that protects us from (self-)delusion, manipulative brain-washing, and deception. Rhetoric is also crucial to critical thinking because it helps to expose the processes whereby the locutor seeks to reason their way from one stance to another.

In several respects, rhetorical analysis is one of the modes of critical thinking since many of the public arguments and discourses – whether in our post-modern societies or in ancient Greece – are about reason-giving. Much of rhetoric is about investigating how people agree or disagree about an issue and make claims about reality, no matter how certain or uncertain, absolute or shaky these claims may be. Rhetorical analysis shows that people are always engaged in rhetorical interactions of one sort or another; they always draw on different rhetorical devices and strategies, either consciously or unwittingly, to make their points and to have the audience(s) share their views and beliefs.

Indeed, rhetoric is intrinsically linked to critical thinking because it clears up the lines of arguments each locutor develops and encourages a healthy scepticism towards public arguments of all sorts by testing their reasoning patterns, the substance of their arguments, and the credibility of their claims. Furthermore, rhetoric
provides us with conceptual and analytical tools for the deconstruction of all forms of public discourse, not only in order to unveil and counter manipulative strategies, but also to elaborate convincing and compelling arguments of practical reason in all circumstances. Rhetoric is from this perspective a practical art whose aim is to enhance and link practical reason to moral action; we can say, therefore, that rhetoric enhances our capacities to take informed and rational stances towards social, political, ethical debates.

Finally, the critical thinking and the critical literacy that rhetoric helps to acquire are crucial to access personal autonomy and to protect one’s dignity. Mastering and commanding rhetorical skills is indicative of a person’s self-reflexivity and capacity to think by herself, of her status as self-responsible, rational, and competent.

For these reasons, critical thinking and rhetoric can be considered as two intertwined sine qua non conditions of the fostering of autonomy and self-responsibility. They cultivate and reinforce our capacities to think for ourselves instead of being directed or having our ideas and representations of the world imposed on us. Therefore, we should not adopt a dismissive view of rhetoric that reduces it to the study of stylistic devices, tropes, and figures or that sees in it a weapon of manipulation. We have to insist on its critical dimension and the pivotal role it may play in everyday actions that engage the political and the personal dimensions of the self. It should be conceived, therefore, as a means that entices and nurtures our disposition as independent and sensible social and ethical beings who make choices freely and rationally and who reason well regarding the texts and the images we continually receive and produce.

As we can see, even if rhetoric has deeply evolved since ancient Greece, it is still relevant and crucial in our post-modern, post-truth societies. It is not only relevant and crucial to conducting debates in the public domain and achieving persuasiveness; it is also relevant and crucial to the analysis and to the evaluation of these same debates. This explains, to a great extent, why research on rhetoric as a powerful tool in the analysis of public debates, has developed into an important area of interdisciplinary scholarship where argumentation theory, philosophy, linguistics, history, law, media studies, etc., are cross-fertilized and combined with each other so as to gain deeper insights into how reality and social relations are rhetorically constructed and enacted.

CHAÎM PERELMAN’S AND KENNETH BURKE’S THEORIES

As we have seen rhetoric can enhance our critical faculties and make us aware of the fact that we communicate and transact in rhetorical situations; that we deal not
only with self-evident, objective facts existing out there, but with rhetorically con-
structed representations, facts, etc. Indeed, more often than not, the choice of what
facts and events are relevant is to a large extent arbitrary; they are named, imbued
with “salience”, and infused with a more or less strong affect. That’s why rhetoric
and rhetorical analysis, as critical and self-reflexive practices, are concerned with
what is said, how it is said, who says it, and to whom it is said.

To explore these aspects and to show how rhetoric can be a powerful means for
enhancing and sustaining critical thinking, I will draw from two rhetorical theories
that reshaped and renewed rhetorical studies and contributed to the emergence of
a rhetorical turn: Perelman’s *New Rhetoric* and Burke’s *Dramatism*.

**CHAÏM PERELMAN’S NEW RHETORIC**

Perelman’s *New Rhetoric* is undeniably one the major successful intellectual and
epistemological enterprises in the humanities in the twentieth century. In his the-
ory, Perelman combines the tenets of both rhetoric and dialectic in order to inves-
tigate ‘nonanalytic’ thought; i.e., discourses that formal logic had set aside. The
domain of exploration of the *New Rhetoric* is not those forms of deliberation and
interaction in which necessity and self-evidence prevail; it focuses, rather, on argu-
mentation as the domain of the credible, the plausible, the probable, the preferable
(1). Argumentation, Perelman insists, is about values and value judgments, most of
all; and rhetorical analysis should seek to explain how certain claims are rhetorically
constructed and why certain linguistic or stylistic choices are made. Among the
considerable number of concepts and notions that Perelman elaborated or revita-
lized, two are of particular importance to my analysis in this paper: audience and
presence.

**AUDIENCE**

One of the main aims of rhetorical analysis, according to Perelman, is to bring to
view how an arguer endeavours to win over a target audience by having them share
a set of beliefs and values. Perelman defines audience as “the ensemble of those
whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation” (Perelman, 1969,
26). Attention to audience in argumentation is not mere “window dressing,” for
the arguer needs to take into account their audience when developing an argument
so to create or increase adherence to what is presented for their assent (1969, 45).
As a matter of fact, the core of Perelman’s theory is concerned with how dialectical
argumentation techniques are effectively used to persuade by increasing the “intensity of adherence among those who hear it in such a way as to set in motion the intended action” (45). In keeping with Perelman’s theoretical assumption, Tindale maintains that all argumentative standards, even logical standards, are audience-dependent; “the rhetorical is the vehicle for the development of the logical, for the logical is a product of audience and can be nothing more, nor less” (2004, 143). He expands on this premise by maintaining that:

Arguments are judged successful and evaluated not directly in terms of their internal logical support, but in terms of their impact on the audience. The aim of argumentation is the adherence to its theses. It will be judged strong or weak according to the degrees to which this is accomplished. (Tindale, 1999, 85–6)

In his New Rhetoric, Perelman elevated the notion of audience to a new and almost unprecedented height; for him, the weight and the credibility of an argument depend to a large extent on whether it appeals to the intended audience or not. For Perelman, “[i]t is indeed the audience which has the major role in determining the quality of argument and the behaviour of orators” (24). Consequently, the soundness and the credibility of an argument are not given by reference to independent rules but fully rely on the reaction of the audience to it, and its correspondence to the audience’s “frame of reference or not.”

Perelman refines the notion of audience and makes a distinction between a “universal audience” and a “particular audience.” The “universal audience” refers to all those the arguer considers as reasonable, competent, and rational people; in addressing the universal audience, the arguer appeals to values and principles that supposedly enjoy unanimous approval (2008, 40–44). The universal audience helps the arguer choose those arguments and appeals that will define, in his argumentation, the norms and standards for separating sound and good arguments from the bad and unacceptable ones. The “particular audience” is also a group of people the arguer seeks to influence; it may be composed of a more or less clearly sub-grouped of addressees who share a set of features (age, social class, cultural belonging, etc.). Obviously enough, both the universal and the particular audiences are rhetorical constructions and mental representations the arguer projects onto her/his actual audiences. On the one hand, the criteria that define what is reasonable always differ from one speaker to another, from one ideology to another, from one culture to another, etc. On the other hand, the particular group of people the arguer addresses is far from homogeneous, and what the arguer thinks they have in common may not exist. In fact, Perelman reminds us that audiences are often composite and the arguer may move from addressing a universal audience to addressing a more or less clearly delineated group of people in this same text.
PRESENCE

Perelman maintains that “in the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied. Such a choice endows these elements with a presence” (1969, 116–7). Presence, which is almost a sensory experience, “is an essential factor in argumentation and one that is far too much neglected in rationalistic conceptions of reasoning… it acts directly on our sensibility.’ (Ibid.). It is all the more important that each arguer endeavours “to bring his or her audience to the point of seeing the relevant facts, or experiencing the truthfulness of an idea and to direct thought.” (Ibid.)

Presence, which is obtained through acting on the senses of the audience, is the outcome of a process of selection; the arguer chooses words, phrases, figurative images, or any rhetorical or discursive strategy either to (a) make something absent ‘present’ to the audience’s mind or (b) increase the presence of something that has already been brought to the audience’s attention. In Perelman’s theory, the idea of presence is, as we can see, a conceptual metaphor, for when it is achieved, what initially was “absent almost seems to be ‘in the room’ with the audience.”

According to Perelman, presence seeks to bring about communion between the locutor and their targeted audience. By achieving presence, the locutor aims at establishing commonalities and identification with the audience by foregrounding certain elements that are assumed to attract minds permanently.

Therefore, a rhetorical analysis should explore those elements and aspects that are made present and salient and consider their pertinence to the overall message. This implies that we should scrutinize the values they are associated with and how they contrive directly or indirectly to act on the audience’s mind and feelings. The rhetorical analysis should, in other words, show how arguments seek to gain strength by achieving “presence” in the minds of the audience and by creating associations between ideas and representations that correspond to the audience’s frame of reference or that stands in sharp contrast with it.

KENNETH BURKE’S DRAMATISM

Burke conceives of rhetoric as a drama and a type of representation since all language uses perform symbolic actions that have a staged aspect to them (1969a). He sought to account for this dimension of language with the help of the pentad, which consists of five key terms: scene, agent, act, agency, and purpose. Consequently, when engaged in communication, people dramatize and stage their
acts, interactions, and presentations of the extralinguistic events. One of the main interests of Burke’s *Dramatism* lies in the possibility it gives us to show how language functions to create and maintain communities of individuals. Burke states that:

[R]hetoric is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols. Burke’s rhetorical theory is premised on the anthropological assumption that humans are symbol-using animals, even if they keep ignoring it and cling to “a kind of naïve verbal realism that refuses to realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in (our) notions of reality.”

Burke defines rhetoric as: “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or induce actions in other humans” (Burke, 1969, 14); in his theory, language is a powerful symbolic medium humans use to act and to convey attitudes. But, in Burke’s rhetorical theory, the influence of language goes far beyond mere persuasiveness; it creates realities within which humans operate:

And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced firsthand, the whole overall “picture” is but a construct of our symbol systems. To meditate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss.

I am not going to deal with all the notions elaborated within the framework of Burke’s theory; I will borrow just a single concept, *identification*, which is of great importance to the sample analysis I will carry out below.

According to Burke’s theory, language may create inclinations towards cooperation, mutual agreement, and peace; and, conversely, it may haze and distort the perceptions we have of ourselves and of others, provoke confusion, and bring about conflict. These potentially antagonistic alternatives depend on the process of *identification*; which Burke defines as follows:

“A is not identical with his colleague B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so.” But, Burke reminds us that identification “is not an either-or occurrence but a matter of degree… Identification can be great or small, and it can be increased or decreased by the actions of the communicators. (142)

From the perspective of Burke’s *Dramatism*, persuasion is achieved once the arguer manages to identify with the addressee; that is, once common grounds are directly established between them. As a rhetorical strategy, identification involves three processes: naming, identification by an “assumed we,” and identification by “antithesis.”
Naming is an important process in the rhetorical construction of reality, for whenever we use language, we identify a person, place, object, or event; we single them out and differentiate them from other people, places, objects, or events. Naming is a “magical act” because there is almost never a one-to-one relationship between the named and what it is supposed to represent, and language is almost never objective and neutral. Naming almost always conveys attitudes and suggests positions towards what is being named; for instance, words such as “a fanatic” or “a moderate” are labels that suggest a way of looking at a person and a host of representations that we associate with her. This is all the more true in that naming always implies defining a person as an object in terms of what they are and what they are not. Consequently, words used to depict someone or something are to be considered as choices made by the arguer among a number of others, and this choice has to be questioned and analyzed.

Identification by “an assumed we” has the advantage of implicitly suggesting unity and a common purpose; it is premised on the fact that what unites the two parties is far more important than what separates them. Identification through an “assumed we” stresses “consubstantiality”; it promotes commonality of goals and values; and fosters a strong intersubjective bond between the arguer and their audience. Identification by “anti-thesis” is promoted by virtue of an enemy the arguer and the targeted audience allegedly have in common. It presupposes the existence of an excluded third who enables them to come out with an us-versus-them polarization and gives credit and strength to the probity of their values, stances, and representations of the world.

As we can see, identification is intrinsically associated with the use of language as an act of naming on which it heavily depends in the course of rhetorically constructing interdependent identities and shaping perceptions of, and attitudes to, social realities. As a strategy, it includes “the whole area of language usage for the purpose of inducement to action or attitude” (Day, 1960, 271); it goes beyond mere persuasion and “encompasses all means resorted to to include cooperation and build communities” (Day, 1960, 279).

Finally, we can also say that identification is a rhetorical manoeuvre whereby audience members are invited to participate in the drama by identifying with what the locutor says and how they portray events, people, etc. It seeks to have the audience align with what the text conveys and the way it frames a certain perception of reality.
From what has been introduced before, we can maintain that communicating almost always means transacting in rhetorical situations and that every communicative act involves rhetoric (Kennedy, 1999, 1). To Perelman, whenever communication aims to influence an addressee, to influence their thinking, to trigger their emotions, it necessarily belongs to what he labels “the realm of rhetoric” (2012). This is premised, as we have seen also, on the fact that, generally, people do not deal exclusively and systematically with objective facts lying, self-evidently, out there in an empirical and palpable reality. On the contrary, what they deal with does not exist independently of how it is mediated through a filter of some sort.

Rhetoric teaches us that language users always make choices in enacting social relations and in re-presenting reality; the latter is, to a large extent, also, a rhetorical construction and duplication, in the symbolic field, of what takes place in the extra-linguistic realm. It is a rhetorical construction that consists of naming things and people, of imbuing them with “salience,” of infusing them with more or less affect, objectivity, etc. Therefore, the choice of what facts are relevant to the interpretation of a particular event, to the explanation of a situation or to the behavior of people is underlined by a process of selection and it is, therefore, a matter of arbitration.

In order to lay bare the explicit and implicit communicative goals this text seeks to achieve, I will address a number of interconnected issues:

1. Naming choices and presencing
2. Facts and values
3. the type of identification the document enacts
4. the audience(s) addressed

To do so, I will draw on the notions borrowed from Perelman and Burke introduced above to shed light on how a particular social and political event is framed, what aspects are foregrounded and made salient, how the problem is defined, and what causal interpretations and moral and ideological assumptions are promoted. In other words, I will investigate, with the help of the notions of presence, audience, identification, and naming how the flagship tabloid constructs rhetorically its claims about reality and to scrutinize what is made present and given salience, and how a particular audience is targeted.

More particularly, I will analyze one of the most widely spread and commented upon pictures published by the popular British tabloid, The Sun, during the 2011 urban riots in Great Britain. The picture illustrated a leader by the deputy political editor, Graeme Wilson on October, 24, 2011; the headline of the editorial is “I Predict a Rioter” and the lead runs as “Hundreds on benefits or dole Fear at black youth numbers”: 
The document under scrutiny uses a multi-semiotic mode of discourse construction: language, image, layout, colors, and typography. These modes are integrated in the meaning making of the overall message and actively manoeuvre to trigger a particular reaction in the target audience(s).

This text is historically and ideologically embedded. It is historically embedded because it refers to a historical events that took place in many UK cities in the summer of 2011. It is ideologically embedded because it was published in a right-wing popular newspaper.

The title of the leader and of the visual document, *I predict a Riotor*, is a pun and appropriation of the title *I Predict a Riot* of a famous song by Kaiser Chiefs, a music band from Leeds. Both the headline and the lead summarize and foreshadow what the editorial will be about, of course, and they also set its tone. As a leader, the text gave the opinion and the stance of the tabloid on the riots and specified the angle from which the issue was seen and the chosen emphasis.

The headline and the lead are not nuanced or convoluted statements; they are monologic ones that claim harshly and bluntly to tell unvarnished truths. This, of course, is hardly surprising, since it is in keeping with the newspaper’s political and ideological stands in the British newspaper landscapes and politics. The claims are reinforced by the intersemiotic complementarity between the headline, which is also the caption of the picture, the lead, and the picture itself; the latter is supposed to substantiate and exemplify visually what the headline and the lead state.

In the picture, we can see hooded male figures, one of whom is holding a sword, in a looting scene; their faces are partly or totally hidden, but we can guess that they are young; they are looking sideways, as if searching for victims or police and ready to attack them. The behaviors and appearances of the characters are meant to communicate their negative social identity. How they are dressed and the positioning of their bodies are symbolic codes indicative of their social identities. On the left hand side, a fire is ablaze in the background and the whole picture is saturated with flame-like colors: red, orange, and yellow, reinforcing, the impression of total chaos, uncontrolled violence, and havoc.
The picture is supposed to reproduce a naturalistic scene and to offer readers factual information. Like many newspaper pictures, it makes a truth claim: it is merely referential and it simply captures and mirrors what exists in the empirical world. The layout of the picture is crucial to the construction of this truth claim; its various compositional features are not placed on the page randomly, but are placed there for various purposes, the most important of which is to convey to readers a sense of unity, of cooperation, and of consistency in terms of the total message. As an intersemiotic document, the visual representation provided by the picture is further elicited and substantiated by percentages and figures. The latter are, in fact, one of the main naming choices made by the *Sun*.

As seen above, naming is not a neutral or natural act; it is a framing device that identifies and portrays people and events from a specific standpoint each time. By using figures and percentages and apparently unbiased words and labels, the *Sun* shows that it avoids an emotionally evocative or a derogatory language. Its lexical choices are, apparently, neither eulogistic nor dysphoric, they are factual and almost technocratic. Even “rioters” is supposed to be merely descriptive and not associated with any value judgment. The figures frame the characters we see on the image and invite the audience to establish a direct link between what the figures and the statistics and the three male figures mean and to see in the latter the illustrations or personifications of these very figures and statistics.

The combination of the visual and the written codes give salience and weight to what the *Sun* claims to be pure facts and endow them with presence. Both the truth claims of the image as well as the figures and statistics constitute a trope of *self-evidence*. The factuality of the figures and the factuality of the image are associated with each other in a recognized liaison and thus become an argument from authority. They are a means of conveying to the targeted audience of the newspaper the truthfulness and factuality of what did happen and of giving it a high degree of credibility. Indeed, the image appeals to rationality and is founded on logical reasoning which no reasonable person could contest or reject; figures, statistics, and the factuality of the image have a compelling aspect since they are supposed to trigger consensus and general agreement. They are meant to endow the message with a commanding and authoritative tone, purportedly stripping it of any outspoken subjectivity or explicit value judgments.

The use of factual terms and figures reinforces the idealistic and neutral ethos of the picture as a source of undisputed and widely agreed upon truths which cannot be distorted by subjectivity or bias. However, this conception of figures and images is underlined by a naïve premise according to which they are promises of objectivity. It goes without saying that the intersemiotic code under scrutiny is far from neutral; it actively participates in the naming and presencing
processes that construct rhetorically an ideologically marked representation of the 2011 riots.

The naming process resorted to in this document is a complex one; underneath its factuality and neutrality claims, its figures, statistics, and supposedly descriptive labels, it activates stereotypic representations of the youths involved in the events of the 2011 summer.

A noun such as “rioters” is, in the *Sun*, not purely descriptive but is a label and a social stigma, for it associates the group thus referred to with a number of negative associations (violence, aggression, etc.), which the picture corroborates. The negative associations are further warranted by the socio-economic portrayal of those involved: all of them live on disability allowance, most of them are males, have criminal records, and more than a quarter of them are school dropouts, etc. Indeed, the naming choices in this document foreground indicators of “deviance,” and the “rioters” are linked to a whole range of social problems such as unemployment, welfare dependency, and crime. These naming choices converge to convey a particularly dangerous and threatening representation of those “rioters” and set them apart from what the *Sun* considers the “mainstream society.”

Obviously enough, the identification and naming choices as well as the selection of “facts” and their presencing serve an ideological and a moral function: they define the “rioters” and the “riots” in negative terms and describe what isn’t morally acceptable. They give away the stance adopted by the newspaper and trigger the old image of the dangerous classes and hordes of violent young outcasts who put society in danger. These rhetorical choices are part and parcel of a persuasive strategy that imbues what is apparently descriptive and neutral with pathos so as to bring forth an emotional response from a target audience. They aim not only to establish standards for interpreting what’s at issue, namely, the events that took place in the summer of 2011, but also to prompt in the targeted audience a sense of moral indignation.

Not only are naming and presencing intrinsically associated, but they are audience-specific and they seek, even if not exclusively, to bring about a process of identification between the newspaper and the targeted audience. In point of fact, the naming process, with its labels and their connotative meanings, attend to how the target audience of the *Sun*, namely its readership, is maneuvered into parsing the message conveyed by the picture. Indeed, naming serves as an information-processing lens for interpreting and integrating what the picture stages and represents as an unbiased snapshot of reality. Actually, the image carves out a subject position from which the target audience of the *Sun* is enticed to interpret the “facts” provided by the image, endowing with presence a stereotypical representation of the dangerous classes that the readers of the *Sun* can easily recognize.
The figures and the iconographic representation of the “rioters” mutually reinforce each other and contribute to orient the targeted audience’s interpretations and perception of the extralinguistic reality. The construction of this particular audience is crucial to the persuasion strategy of this picture, since it aims to create a common ground, i.e., identification between the newspaper and its targeted audience.

The naming strategies and the presencing process that underlies it create a particular “gaze” and a spatial identification by dissociation and anti-thesis. The target audience is solicited to be outraged and shocked, since the characters of the picture and what they stand for metonymically are depicted so negatively that the readers of the Sun can’t but reject and condemn them. What stands out is dis-identification and incommensurability between the latter and what the tabloid newspaper labels “rioters.” Therefore, the picture constructs its own audience and establishes con-substantiality between the newspaper and its readers, by opposition to the “rioters.”

In sum, the naming choices and what is made present are implicitly exclusive because they delineate a dividing line between “us,” the Sun and its target audience, and “them.” This binary anti-thesis identification process is, naturally, a persuasive strategy that undertakes to generate a feeling of solidarity and proximity with the “us” group so that the target audience comes to endorse the newspaper’s stance.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to show how rhetoric, and its long and fertile history, are of paramount importance when it comes to critically exploring and appraising a text just because one of its aims is to enable us to sail our way through those rhetorically created social representations within which we live and which govern our being in the world. Indeed, rhetoric teaches us that the situations we live in as well as our everyday transactions are fundamentally symbolic and rhetorical. Rhetoric insists that the language and symbols we use are likely to be misused to deceive, to reject, to stigmatise, and to rhetorically create particular representations and versions of reality. As a matter of fact, in its early stages in ancient Greece, one of the aims of rhetoric and its teaching was to have a keen insight into how argumentation is carried out and persuasion is achieved; hence the necessity to delve deeply into their meanings and not to take them at face value.

One of the assumptions of my analysis is that the object of study of rhetoric may be extended to all forms of human acts and artefacts. I have chosen to analyze an intersemiotic document, with the help of a set of notions – audience, presence, identification, naming – to explore how persuasion is aimed at. I have shown that
the naming choices, combined with the iconographic representation, set the scene, frame the rhetorical situation, define the problem, diagnose the issue, and make moral and ideological judgments. All these elements mutually reinforce each other and elevate a particular ideological stance to salience and give it maximum prominence while, at the same time, claim its neutrality and factuality.

I have also shown that the combination of these various elements targets a particular audience which is rhetorically constructed through identification by dissociation and antithesis. An audience is invited to take what is depicted as faithful, true, undisputable, and consisting of straightforward facts located in a real world which the audience members can easily recognize. Finally, my analysis has brought to the fore the rhetorical choices and strategies the picture resorts to in order to make a claim about a social problem, how it frames it, and how it imbues with salience particular aspects of the situation at the expense of others.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


RAKTAŽODŽIAI: retorika, kritinis mąstymas, auditorija, buvimas, identifikacija, įvardijimas, daugiasemiotika.