

The Red Rebel Brigade and the Blood Bath: Environmental activism and the visual impacts of metaphors

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Abstract

This paper investigates the visual metaphors identified during two performances produced by the environmental movement Extinction Rebellion: the Red Rebel Brigade and the Blood Bath. These performances use BLOOD as a visual source concept at play during environmental protests. The different conceptualisations of BLOOD and the arguments promoted during each performance shed light on the visual metaphor scenario SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES AS COMMON BLOOD. I thus ask how the different uses of the scenario may affect the public while raising awareness about the climate crisis. On the one hand, I demonstrate that the Red Rebel Brigade relies on artistic features to depict Extinction Rebellion's vision of an ideal world. On the other hand, I establish that the Blood Bath relies on more explicit conceptualisations to make environmental damages visible to the public.

Der Beitrag untersucht visuelle Metaphern, die während zweier Aufführungen der Umweltbewegung Extinction Rebellion, Red Rebel Brigade und Blood Bath, identifiziert werden konnten. Diese Performances nutzen BLOOD als visuelles Quellkonzept bei Umweltprotesten. Die unterschiedlichen Konzeptualisierungen von BLOOD und die während jeder Aufführung vorgebrachten Argumente werfen Licht auf das visuelle Metaphernszenario SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES AS COMMON BLOOD. Es wird gefragt, wie sich die unterschiedlichen Nutzungen des Szenarios auf die Öffentlichkeit auswirken und gleichzeitig das Bewusstsein für die Klimakrise schärfen können. Einerseits wird gezeigt, dass die Red Rebel Brigade auf künstlerische Elemente setzt, um Extinction Rebellions Vision einer idealen Welt darzustellen. Andererseits ist festzustellen, dass Blood Bath auf expliziteren Konzeptualisierungen beruht, um Umweltschäden für die Öffentlichkeit sichtbar zu machen.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, environmental scientists have evidenced the human responsibility for climate change in the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, First Assessment Report, 1990). However, global emissions are still rising, and the climate crisis has transformed into an increasingly dangerous phenomenon.

Because of this increasing danger, environmental Non-Governmental Organisations have alerted the public to the effects of the climate crisis (Augé 2021, 2022a, 2023; Bosworth 2021; Doyle 2007). This paper focuses on the communicative strategies used by a particular NGO, Extinction Rebellion (XR). The organisation is known for its international influence and its spectacular protests facilitating wider communication about the climate crisis. These

protests distinguish XR from other environmental organisations: activists attract media attention through peaceful disturbances (blocking streets and businesses), and eye-catching performances (see below). While XR remains a relatively new organisation – officially established in the United Kingdom in 2018 – its influence spread globally: in 2020, 1,136 affiliated groups and 250,000 ‘rebels’ were established in 72 countries (according to XR’s official website). Following an investigation reported in the British newspaper *The Independent*, XR represents “by far” the least popular NGO in the UK, but it is also established as the most well-known (Tryl 2021).

In April 2019, XR was joined by a circus troupe, the Red Rebel Brigade. The Red Rebel Brigade was originally part of a slow-motion mime show called *Blanco*, displayed as part of the “Invisible Circus” during the 1990s (Invisible Circus’ official website).¹ The “Invisible Circus” gathers street performers who travel across Europe to “encourage people to be a part of the change and challenge the status quo” (quoted after the Circus’ website).² According to the creative directors, Doug Francisco and Justine Squire, the emphasis on the colour red “was part aesthetic and part symbolic, creating a very strong contrasting visual and resonating with emotive responses to the colour, red symbolising blood, danger, passion, stop signs etc.” (quoted from the Red Rebel Brigade’s official website).

Despite the artistic origins of the Brigade, the emphasis on red also comes with strong political connotations: while the troupe is originally based in England, their name may also refer to leftist terrorist organisations such as Germany’s Red Army Faction (Pluchinsky 2008) or Italy’s Red Brigades (Jamieson 2007), alongside the long-established association between red and communism (Priestland 2009). Although the troupe never explicitly acknowledged such political references, one can infer that their involvement in (environmental) protests may be politically connoted in the eyes of the public.

Along this line, XR’s protests have also been impacted by controversies. Notably, in 2020, the UK police listed XR as a “terrorist organisation spreading extremist ideology” (Dodd/Grierson 2020). This eventually resulted in a change in the protest laws in the UK (Murphy 2022). This controversy may be linked

¹ The Red Rebel Brigade’s official website: <https://redrebelbrigade.com/> (26.08.2022).

² The Invisible Circus’ official website: <https://invisiblecircus.co.uk/> (14.08.2023).

with the regular arrests of protesters following the blockades (see XR's official statement on "Arrestees' welfare")³ and with the disturbances caused by activists.

The present research draws on these existing controversies by focusing on two particular performances conducted as part of XR's protests: the Red Rebel Brigade and the Blood Bath. The performance of the Red Rebel Brigade involves a group of 'rebels' dressed in red robes, with red flowers, red veils and crowns, and faces painted in white.⁴ The Blood Bath is a more heterogeneous performance that systematically involves 'rebels' spraying fake blood in the streets, on individuals, or on buildings.⁵

These two performances are of particular interest because they are regularly observed during XR's protests and can characterise the particularities of such protests. These rely on the source concept BLOOD to convey environmental arguments. This results in a "cognitively biased" (Kövecses 2010: 176; Lakoff 1987) depiction of the climate crisis that comprises emotional implications (e.g., EFFECTS OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS AS A BLOODSHED).

In this paper, I analyse the different conceptualisations attached to the source domain BLOOD in the context of environmental activists' performances observed in England. On the one hand, I demonstrate that the Red Rebel Brigade relies on artistic features to share a BLOOD-related conceptualisation of the climate crisis. On the other hand, I establish that the Blood Bath performance relies on a more explicit conceptualisation of the environmental threat. This analysis aims at answering the following question: how do environmental activists' different uses of the BLOOD-related metaphor 'affect' the public to generate environmental awareness (or environmental 'effect')?

To this end, I analyse the metaphorical meaning of the two performances. Throughout this analysis, I aim at uncovering how each use of the visual

³ XR's Arrestees' welfare: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/act-now/resources/arrestee-welfare/> (06.08.2022).

⁴ Pictures of the Red Rebel Brigade available at: <http://redrebelbrigade.com/visions/> (26.08.2022).

⁵ Pictures of the Blood Bath available at: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/11/09/bloodbath-extinction-rebellion-stands-with-apib-against-the-destruction-of-the-amazon/> (26.08.2022).

metaphor can possibly impact the public, in view of the situational context (environmental protests in England).

In the following section, I discuss the theoretical approaches at play to analyse these visual occurrences.

2. Metaphors and climate crisis argumentation

2.1 Environmental activism

In order to understand how XR's BLOOD-related performances may 'affect' the public, I first need to discuss the notion of *artivism*. Lemoine and Ouardi (2010) provide a thorough analysis of different 'artist' performances, and convincingly demonstrate that the notion is ultimately attached to various possible definitions, depending on the causes that are being defended and the artistic techniques that are used to defend such causes. Overall, they propose a purposefully general definition: a work of art that is a reflection of activism (Lemoine/Ouardi 2010).

Existing literature suggests that artivism appeared in the late 1990s, in California, and primarily focused on racialisation and social marginalisation (Diverlus 2016). Artivism evolved globally to address a wider range of issues, among which are environmental issues. For instance, Susan Schuppli's *Nature Represents Itself* (2018), focused on the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and Judy Chicago's *Stranded* (2016), which shows a polar bear on top of a shrinking iceberg, have been cited as examples of environmental artivism (Greenberger 2020; O'Neill 2022).

Artivism has been shown to have a "transformative potential" (Aladro-Vico et al. 2018: 10-11). It generates reflections on socio-political issues as it invites the public to learn about such issues and perceive these through the lens of art (Rhoades 2012; Roig-Palmer/Pedneault 2019). Consequently, artivism can allow for a "transformative experience" that can yield "creative solutions", and it aims at promoting compassion for socially-excluded groups (Schubert/Gray 2015: 1353).

In this research, I do not only aim at analysing the 'effects' of artist performances (i.e., the 'transformation' these may allow for), but also the ways these artist performances can 'affect' the public. This focus draws on Duncombe's (2016) and Duncombe and Lambert's (2018) definition of *artivism*.

Accordingly, activism refers to activities that challenge power relations: activism is oriented towards an outcome and can generate an 'effect' (Duncombe/Lambert 2018). In contrast, the 'effect' of art cannot be precisely assessed. Art is oriented towards people's feelings, perceptions, and emotions; it generates 'affect' (Duncombe/Lambert 2018: 63-64). Following this insight, activism is a combination of effect and affect. Duncombe (2016) argues that affect can lead to effect while effects have an affective impact.

For instance, Medrado and Rega (2023) analyse activism in the context of ethnic violence erupting across Kenya. They thoroughly explore how artists responded by using a creative combination of technologies and aesthetic tactics. Their analysis shows that activism was used to resist narratives about Africa that revolve around fatalism, failure, and poverty by giving a voice to individuals, raising critical consciousness, and fostering empowering exchanges (Medrado/Rega 2023: 72-97). This leads the scholars to conclude that activism may ultimately generate "counter subversive feelings of connection" (2023: 143).

Hence, in the analysis that follows, I aim at drawing attention to the ways these particular performances can 'affect' the public so as to generate 'effect'. This analysis will be conducted by focusing on the 'conceptual keys' (Charteris-Black 2001) and cultural connotations associated with BLOOD in the context of XR's environmental protests in England.

2.2 Multimodal metaphors in climate crisis discourse

Metaphors prevail in climate crisis discourse. These can make the topic less complex (e.g., quantifying one's 'carbon footprint', Augé 2022b; Nerlich/Hellsten 2014), they can promote arguments regarding climate change mitigation and policies (e.g., the 'war' against climate change, Atanasova/Koteyko 2017), they can persuade recipients of the urgency to tackle the problem (Flusberg/Matlock/Thibodeau 2017), and they can attract public attention to the issue (Augé 2021). Notably, in his critics of the metaphor COVID-19 AS A WAR in political discourse, Hanne (2022) concludes that:

To treat not only the actual pandemic and this metaphorical pandemic, but also the other major challenges, we require a vision that incorporates many elements. That vision will be both international and local. *It will view human beings as integral to the*

natural world, rather than distinct from it. [...] It is the discipline of ecology which encourages us to think of the world in such a holistic way. Ecology is concerned with interconnection and interdependence, with communities of living creatures (Hanne 2022: 97; my emphasis).

Indeed, this idea of “interconnection and interdependence” seems to be a major characteristic of XR’s visual metaphors related to the source concept BLOOD (see below). Visual metaphors have been documented in environmental discourse (Hidalgo-Downing/O’Dowd 2023). Existing literature has demonstrated that visual metaphors increase people’s concerns and make the environmental problem more tangible (Meijers et al. 2019: 999). Notably, Doyle (2007) identifies a wide range of alarming metaphors observed in the posters produced by the environmental NGO Greenpeace (e.g., CLIMATE CHANGE AS A TIME BOMB). Pérez-Sobrino (2013) investigates the advertisement of environmentally friendly marketed products and notices the prevalence of the colour green to represent the products as desirable items (i.e., GREEN AS DESIRABLE). However, to my knowledge, no study has yet focused on the metaphorical meaning of environmental activists’ performances.

Forceville (1994, 1996) defines visual metaphor as a replacement of an expected visual element by an unexpected one. He notes that there must be no pre-existent or conventional connection between these two elements (Forceville 1994). In the context of environmental activism, the BLOOD is understood as the source domain of the metaphor since the association between BLOOD and the climate crisis is, following Forceville’s phrasing, “unexpected” and without “conventional connection” (Forceville 1994: 24-26, 1996: 200).

2.3 The source concept BLOOD

The BLOOD represents a concrete concept that allows the BODIES to live (Charteris-Black 2004: 262). This association between BLOOD and LIVING BODIES can be reflected through prevalent socio-cultural views on the source concept.

Metaphor scholars have acknowledged the relation between bodily experience and expressions that refer to human emotions (e.g., fullness to describe the presence of an intense emotion, as in “to be filled with emotion”, Charteris-Black 2001: 273, 2004: 262). Thus, if the body is conceptualised as a CONTAINER that can be ‘filled’ or ‘emptied’, this indicates that it is one that is filled with

blood (2001: 273). Following this observation, Charteris-Black (2001) analyses the different 'conceptual keys' associated with the concept BLOOD in different languages. He defines 'conceptual keys' as follows:

this is a formal statement of an underlying idea that accounts for the related figures of speech that occur in different languages. A conceptual key explains figurative rather than literal senses in a language; it does not distinguish between metaphor and metonymy or other figures because different languages may vary in the way that these figures are employed in their phraseology. [...] If bodily experience were universal, then we would expect to find evidence in figurative phraseology for cross-lingual or universal conceptualisations (Charteris-Black 2001: 274-275).

This consideration leads him to identify three main conceptual keys associated with BLOOD: BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY, BLOOD FOR LIFE, and BLOOD AS TEMPERAMENT. He notes that, despite the "universal motivation" of such conceptual keys, their meanings and resonance considerably vary within and between languages (Charteris-Black 2001). For instance, the conceptual key BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY can serve as a metonym for cultural or racial inheritance, dependency, or aristocracy. BLOOD FOR LIFE may refer to vitality, creativity, enthusiasm, but also violence, exploitation, and murder. BLOOD AS TEMPERAMENT can refer to indignation, suffering, or determination (Charteris-Black 2001).

These findings highlight how the concept BLOOD can be used and understood differently depending on the context in which it appears, and the cultural connotations it is associated with. The present research, however, does not aim at establishing such a comparative analysis across languages. I complement Charteris-Black's account on the BLOOD conceptual keys by investigating how these conceptual keys can be reflected, visually, in the performances staged in the context of environmental activism. Notably, the performances analysed below take place specifically in England. It is thus necessary to consider the cultural connotations associated with the concept of BLOOD in this context.

For instance, the source concept may be associated with Christian religious beliefs: it can be related to the phenomenon of 'transubstantiation' whereby, according to the Bible, disciples are to drink "the true and eternal life-giving blood of Jesus" (Wilson 2022: 5). Gonzalez (2005) notes that this conversion reflects a spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ's body and all species

(2005: 208). Accordingly, the concept BLOOD can be interpreted as a means to create connections.

From a different stance, the source concept BLOOD can be related to the conceptual domains of CONFLICT and VIOLENCE. Charteris-Black (2004: 25-27, 41-42) documents the conceptual associations made in political discourses between BLOOD and conflicts (e.g., political conflict as BLOODSHED). Notably, the source concept BLOOD has been widely discussed in the existing literature that investigates anti-immigration discourse. The BLOOD conceptualisation can be traced back to the British Conservative Politician Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech (1968). According to this politician, "inflows" and "outflows" of immigrants (Charteris-Black 2006: 566; Chilton 2004: 117; Musolff 2015: 46) have been implicitly assimilated to Virgil's depiction of the rivers filled with the enemies' blood in the *Aeneid* (Goguey/Dubouchet 2014: 47). This conceptualisation also prevails in more recent immigration debates. For instance, Musolff (2015) identifies "dehumanising metaphors" in contemporary British press, blogs, and readers' comments which present depictions of immigrants as "blood suckers", "sucking blood out of [the host society]" (2015: 47-48). This "dehumanisation" also appears in discourses about gender and race. Existing research has demonstrated that BLOOD metaphors have been used to promote racist ideologies ("black blood"; "tainted blood", Russell 2010) which advertise white supremacy and draw a distinction between different 'races'.

Following these findings, it is possible to identify different connotations associated with the source concept BLOOD. In the following analysis (sections 4 and 5), I demonstrate how these connotations are at play in environmental activists' performances.

2.4 Metaphor scenario

The source domain BLOOD can promote different arguments in environmental discourse. These BLOOD-related arguments lead to the identification of a BLOOD-related scenario. Scenarios involve assumptions about the source concept: this source concept becomes part of a metaphorical script to promote a certain evaluation of the topic (Musolff 2016: 30-31). In the performances of the Red Rebel Brigade and the Blood Bath, the BLOOD is a visual representation of a characteristic shared by living beings (see sections 4 and 5). Therefore, the visual

conceptualisations observed during these performances can be associated with the scenario SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES AS COMMON BLOOD.

Environmental activists' exploitation of the scenario demonstrates the different ways in which such BLOOD-related metaphorical performances can impact the public, in the context of environmental protests in England.

The different uses of the metaphor scenario are discussed at length in the following sections. These are preceded by methodological information, which I now explain in more details.

3. Methodology

The research started by watching different occurrences of the two performances, i.e. the Red Rebel Brigade and the Blood Bath, during XR's protests taking place in England. I consulted the official British website of the organisation⁶ along with the official website of the Red Rebel Brigade⁷. All the communications published on the website of the Red Rebel Brigade have been reviewed (i.e., introductory statement, visions, exposure) to retrieve contextual information about the performances (places, dates, and tools used during performances). On XR's website, I used the search option to select publications associated with the search terms *red rebel brigade* (38 publications) and *blood* (92 publications). The publications which were selected for this research include videos or photos of the performances and textual information about the context of the performances.

The metaphorical conceptualisations associated with the two performances were analysed following the two established procedures: MIPVU (Steen et al. 2010) and VISMIP (Šorm/Steen 2018; see also FILMIP, Bort-Mir 2021). VISMIP is a procedure to identify visual metaphors, its steps can be summarised as follows:

1. look at the entire image, including visual and verbal elements, to establish a general understanding of the meaning;
2. structure descriptive phrase(s);
3. find incongruous visual units;

⁶ XR's official website: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/> (26.08.2022).

⁷ The Red Rebel Brigade's official website: <https://redrebelbrigade.com/> (26.08.2022).

4. test whether the incongruous units are to be integrated within the overall topical framework by means of some form of comparison;
5. test whether the comparison(s) is-are cross-domain;
6. test whether the comparison(s) can be seen as some form of indirect discourse about the topic (Šorm/Steen 2018).

The procedure established in MIPVU is also relevant as the performances can involve verbal communication produced by activists: for instance, the performances involve activists talking to the public and giving away leaflets. Therefore, this verbal communication is also part of the essentially visual performances. MIPVU focuses on verbal metaphors, its steps are as follows:

1. find local referent and topic shifts;
2. test whether the incongruous lexical units are to be integrated within the overall referential and-or topical framework by means of some form of comparison;
3. test whether the comparison is nonliteral or cross-domain;
4. test whether the comparison can be seen as some form of indirect discourse about the local or main referent or topic of the text" (Šorm/Steen 2018: 53; Steen et al. 2010).

The metaphorical meaning of the two performances is thoroughly discussed in the following sections. Yet, neither MIPVU nor VISMIP-FILMIP can fully grasp the metaphorical meaning of performances: these have been designed for the analysis of verbal metaphors, images (like cartoons), and films. These procedures can still help to identify the metaphorical conceptualisations at play during the performances. Such conceptualisations have then been qualitatively analysed following the methodology established in Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black 2004): 1. Identification, 2. Interpretation, 3. Explanation. In the identification phase, I conducted the MIPVU and VISMIP-FILMIP procedures. In the interpretation phase, I considered how the BLOOD was used in each performance (e.g., the red robes of the Red Rebel Brigade and the fake bloodshed resulting from the Blood Bath). In the explanation phase, I focused on the situational context, i.e. environmental protests in England, to figure out how these particular occurrences of BLOOD were related to the cause defended by environmental activists.

The scope of this research is qualitative. Videos and images of the performances have been analysed according to the procedures defined above, along with

Forceville's definition of visual metaphor, in terms of "unconventional connections" (Forceville 1994: 24-26, 1996: 200). This qualitative analysis aims at observing how the performances of the Red Rebel Brigade and the Blood Bath may affect the public and generate environmental awareness, with particular attention paid to the 'conceptual keys' and cultural connotations associated with BLOOD (Charteris-Black 2001).

In the following section, I discuss the metaphorical use of BLOOD during the performance of the Red Rebel Brigade. I then focus on the Blood Bath performance to eventually compare the different connotations at play in the use of the visual metaphor scenario, observed in the context of environmental activism.

4. The Red Rebel Brigade

4.1 The colour red

The Red Rebel Brigade was originally a circus troupe with limited political involvement (the involvement is not explicitly recognised by performers). In April 2019, it became affiliated with the environmental movement XR. This affiliation means that the situational context in which the performance takes place has – to some extent – altered the meaning of the performance: it moved from an exclusively artistic setting (i.e., the circus) to a socio-political setting (i.e., environmental protests). This consideration is significant in the analysis of the performance: the originally artistic performance is, in this research, viewed as an instance of environmental activism because the artistic performance is displayed as part of environmental protests. In this section, I aim at showing how the artistic features of the performance have been preserved while the performance has taken on an additional – environmental – meaning.

The source concept BLOOD remains implicit throughout the Brigade's performance: the references to BLOOD can be perceived through the visual metonymy RED FOR BLOOD while, in such a socio-political context, the colour may easily recall political movements such as communist movements (Priestland 2009). Yet, the information retrieved from XR's website, regarding the origins of the environmental movement, insists on the fact that the movement is not

associated with any political party ('about us' section of the website).⁸ Thus, the red robes, veils, crowns and flowers used by the Brigade may not refer to such political groups. The leaflets (accessed via the Red Rebel Brigade's website)⁹ distributed by activists during the performance aim at orienting the public's interpretation: the short text appearing on the leaflets explains that the colour red is a way to "symbolise *the common blood* we share with all species" (my emphasis).

4.2 COMMON BLOOD

The red colour displayed during the performance is thus to be interpreted following the metonymy RED FOR BLOOD. The emphasis, in the leaflets, on "common blood" is also reflected visually during the performance: activists hide most of their individual features by painting their faces in white (preventing the public from identifying particular individuals) and wearing the same clothes. Additionally, the performance requires activists to either hold each other's hands or, alternatively, to collectively hold a long red thread as they progress in the streets.¹⁰ This visual detail of the performance indicates a focus on collectivism contrasting with individualism: the performance downplays activists' individual features while collective features are represented through the omnipresence of the colour red.

This emphasis on collectivism can be analysed in terms of the conceptual key BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY, and in particular "dependency" (Charteris-Black 2001). Accordingly, the Brigade relies on the metonym so that the common bodily features we share with all species are more visible to the public. In the context of environmental activism, the insistence on similarities implies that we have similar bodily features (i.e., blood), therefore what may affect one species can affect us, and vice versa: interconnectedness has a role to play in the way we experience the climate crisis.

⁸ XR's official website, 'about us' section: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/about-us/> (06.10.2023).

⁹ The full text of the leaflets is presented in the annexes.

¹⁰ Picture of the performance: <https://redrebelbrigade.com/wp-content/uploads/steph-stillwell-uptake-studios-min-scaled.jpg> (06.08.2023).

If one considers the situational context (environmental protests in England), the colour red displayed by the Brigade is also related to the conceptual key BLOOD FOR LIFE (Charteris-Black 2001). The visual metonymy RED FOR BLOOD insists on what makes us all alive (i.e., the blood that runs in our bodies), which contrasts with the context in which activists warn about a danger to our lives: the climate crisis. The BLOOD is a key aspect of the performance: the Red Rebel Brigade draws attention to a part of the BODY that is, to some extent, invisible when the BODY IS HEALTHY. However, the BLOOD is a physiological component that becomes visible when the BODY HAS BEEN INJURED. The Brigade's performers do not visually express any signs of INJURIES and PAIN: activists' faces are painted, which deprives them – to some extent – of facial expressions.¹¹ Their focus on the BLOOD relies on the public's embodied experiences (El Refaie 2019; Gibbs 2005; Gibbs et al. 2004). Accordingly, the Brigade resorts to the public's cognitive bias (Kövecses 2010: 176; Lakoff 1987) and 'moral foundations' (Charteris-Black 2021) induced by the conceptual key BLOOD FOR LIFE (Charteris-Black 2001), which are to possibly generate reflexions regarding a possible CURE-INTERVENTION. This interpretation is also coherent with the situational context (i.e., environmental protests) which relates to the extinction of species caused by the human-made climate crisis.

As the Brigade progresses in the streets, they show to the public a sense of cohesion: activists follow the same rhythm, they work together to create a 'march' or theatrical mimes. This cohesion displayed by the Brigade can, on the one hand, highlight that individuals can work together to create a collective piece while, on the other hand, this cohesion also involves a threatening aspect. Their cohesion ultimately appears as a ceremonious procession which the general public may not be initially informed about, and is not invited to join.

This consideration uncovers a significant issue regarding activism: this cohesion among activists might eventually exclude the general public. Members of the public are only conceived as viewers but not as actors involved in the performance-protest. For instance, the sophisticated appearance of red 'rebels' (robes, make-up, mimetic gestures) creates a frontier between the activists and the public. The same kind of frontier is notably observed during artistic performances (e.g., the 'fourth wall'), which means that the Brigade's role during

¹¹ Picture of activists' painted faces:

<https://redrebelbrigade.com/wp-content/uploads/james-pearce-min.jpg> (06.08.2023).

environmental protests remains an essentially artistic role: their performance is to 'affect' the public, but the performance is not aimed at producing immediate 'effects' (e.g., public's impulsive participation). Artivists use this frontier separating them from the public to attract attention, raise questions about such a procession, and affect the public so that the public can start a transformative reflexion on environmental issues.

4.3 The artistic fantasy

From a more critical point of view, this conceptualisation of BLOOD (related to LIFE and DEPENDENCY and CONNECTIONS) may appear as a fantasy disconnected with our social reality. Indeed, the artivists' insistence on collectivism – perceived through artivists' cohesion and collective appearance during performances – discards relevant characteristics of modern society (e.g., the socio-cultural prevalence of the 'Great Chain of Beings', according to Lakoff/ Turner 1989). This consideration can weaken the artivists' arguments. Yet, the artivists acknowledge this fantastic aspect of their performance. Notably, they justify this fantastic aspect in their leaflets (distributed during protests), which ask the public to "enter into the magic realm" (see Annexes). The self-identification of the Brigade as a group of MAGICAL CREATURES is reflected visually, as the performance deprives artivists of most of their human-like features: their faces are painted, their bodies are completely covered in large red robes, and their heads are covered by red veils. These fading human traits are also associated with non-human gestures (i.e., a slow-motion mime show). This disguise does not only aim at attracting attention, but it also invites the public to reflect on the fantasy. Artivists self-identify as 'magical' creatures while they are involved in environmental protests. This contrast between fantasy and protests suggests that the public is not only invited to perceive the environment as an issue (that requires protests), but they are also invited to fantasise a world deprived of such environmental issues (the protests transform into artistic performances).

Additionally, the reference to "magic" in the artivists' leaflets can be associated with childhood fantasies: while art may depict a fantasised world, the "magic" refers more explicitly to stories addressed to children. For instance, the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) defines *magic* along this line: "the use of special powers to make things happen that would usually be impossible, such as in

stories for children” (definition A2). The Brigade aims at inviting the public to recall the vision of the world they had when they were young children (in the leaflets, activists state: “we are who the people have forgotten to be”, see Annexes). The performance invites the public to reflect on this fantasised world defined by the lack of environmental issues, as these phenomena were (partly) ignored during childhood.

However, this ‘fantastic’ aspect of the performance may not generate transformative reflexion about the climate crisis, if one considers the current socio-political context. Indeed, the climate crisis remains a highly complex phenomenon which is misunderstood by a significant part of the population: for instance, the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication (ongoing) recently identified a new wave of climate scepticism which started in 2020 and is increasing since then. Similarly, artistic performances can be perceived as complex, since art works rarely convey explicit messages (Duncombe 2016; Duncombe/Lambert 2018). Hence, even if activism may succeed in attracting public attention, this lack of explicit messages about a complex issue, such as the climate crisis, may in fact increase public misunderstanding. The Brigade’s performance may still ‘affect’ the public, but its ‘effects’ can be questioned.

In the next section, I turn my attention to a more explicit use of the BLOOD source concept, which can be observed during XR’s Blood Bath performance.

5. The Blood Bath

5.1 The situational context

XR’s Blood Bath performance is mainly characterised by the spraying of fake blood over strategic places (e.g., banks, fossil fuel lobbies, polluting companies, politicians’ offices) during environmental protests. Unlike the Red Rebel Brigade, this performance is produced by ‘regular’ protesters who may be disguised as politicians¹², widows or injured bodies¹³.

¹² Images of the protest available at: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/11/09/bloodbath-extinction-rebellion-stands-with-apib-against-the-destruction-of-the-amazon/> (21.08.2022).

¹³ Image of the protest available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/extinction-rebellion-protesters-cover-themselves-in-fake-blood-and-stage-die-in-at-london-fashion-week-a4235691.html> (21.08.2022).

It is to be noted that the climate crisis may result in actual bloodsheds in specific contexts, such as land exploitations in the Amazon which resulted in a “dirty war” and genocide of Indigenous tribes (Toomey 2009). Accordingly, the BLOOD used by environmental activists can be understood as a metonymical reference to the (literal) deaths caused by such environmental issues. The BLOOD still takes on a metaphorical meaning while considering the situational context in which the performance takes place: the BLOODSHED is observed in England and, in particular, in the wealthy neighbourhoods of London, such as Downing Street¹⁴ (where the UK Prime Minister’s office is located). Therefore, the situational context of the performance produces “unconventional connections” (Forceville 1994: 24-26, 1996: 200) existing between the BLOOD observed in England and environmental issues (i.e., the cause defended by activists).

The BLOOD sprayed in the streets or over buildings results in chaotic images suggesting BARBARIC MASSACRES. In particular, the performance focuses on politicians’ and polluters’ guilt since the strategic location of the Blood Bath also adds to the meaning of the performance. Images of the streets covered in BLOOD can be conceptualised as CRIME SCENES, identifying the targeted polluters and politicians as BARBARIC CRIMINALS in the eyes of the public. The visual metaphor is thus a way for XR to draw a direct link between politics, finance, and deaths related to pollution.

5.2 The fake blood

The environmental activists’ reliance on ‘fake blood’ as part of their performance results in a very explicit use of the concept BLOOD, compared with the Red Rebel Brigade’s implicit references to BLOOD, represented through red clothes. Such an explicit representation of BLOOD during the Blood Bath can have a direct ‘effect’ on the public. As the public is to observe the unexpected presence of BLOOD, this unexpectedness can trigger immediate reflexions (Schubert/Gray 2015) regarding this visual element. Subsequently, the public may reflect on the origins of this BLOODSHED which is to prospectively lead them to learn about the environmental activists’ message.

¹⁴ Images of the Blood Bath in Downing Street available at: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2019/03/09/breaking-extinction-rebellion-activists-create-sea-of-blood-at-downing-st-to-call-alarm-on-climate-and-ecological-emergency/> (17.08.2023).

Alternatively, this “unconventional connection” (Forceville 1994: 24-26, 1996: 200) may weaken the environmental activists’ message: the resulting BLOODSHED may seem like an exaggerated representation of the effects of the climate crisis. The performance can still ‘affect’ the public and generate reflexions regarding the ground of such conceptual associations, but the shock produced by the performance may also lead some members of the public to contest the message of environmental activists. Indeed, the performance represents a BLOOD-related conceptualisation of environmental issues that does not correspond to the public’s experiential knowledge (i.e., the “connection” may be too “unconventional”, Forceville 1994: 24-26, 1996: 200). Consequently, the artistic aspect of the performance – which is to generate long-term effects (Duncombe 2016) – may not be grasped by the English public. However, the affective impact of the performance (Duncombe 2016) can, in such circumstances, be directed towards the performers themselves, who can be blamed for the shock experienced by the public. In other words, the ‘artistic’ aspect can also have an impact on the ‘activist’ aspect of the performance.

The visual shock generated by the performance is also permitted by cultural connotations associated with the concept BLOOD. Indeed, environmental activists rely on the conceptual key BLOOD FOR LIFE (Charteris-Black 2001). The BLOODSHED resulting from the performance can ‘affect’ the public following conceptual associations between BLOOD and INJURIES and DEATHS: as mentioned in section 2, this physiological component is – to some extent – invisible in healthy circumstances but becomes visible in case of injuries. Here, the environmental activists do not only make the BLOOD visible, but their performance also makes it eye-catching.

The amount of fake blood required for the Blood Bath (existing reports claim that no less than 1,800 litres of fake blood have been used for a single performance)¹⁵ has been calculated so that the performance can easily catch the attention of the general public. This amount of fake blood, suggesting a BLOODSHED, does not leave much room for conceptual questioning: the BLOOD is used to conceptually represent DEATHS, in accordance with the conceptual key BLOOD FOR LIFE (Charteris-Black 2001).

¹⁵ Report available at: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2019/10/03/extinction-rebellion-spray-fake-blood-on-treasury-using-fire-engine/> (17.08.2023).

This huge amount of fake blood can also be interpreted following the conceptual key BLOOD AS TEMPERAMENT (Charteris-Black 2001). Accordingly, the quantity of fake blood conceptually reflects the high degree of suffering experienced by the victims of environmental issues. Interestingly, while the strategic location of the performance helps the public to identify the CULPRIT, the identities of the VICTIMS are not disclosed. The BLOOD is used as a bodily component that shows that the CULPRIT is being targeted for MURDEROUS actions. Such actions are represented as BODILY HARM to insist on a bodily feature (i.e., blood) which the public can relate to. The performance relies on the public's conceptual knowledge to persuade them to CARE for the victims (implicitly represented through the BLOODSHED), while observing the HARM that has been done.

Along this line, the performance also refers to the interconnectedness between humans, with regards to the BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY conceptual key (Charteris-Black 2001). The performance may particularly affect the public because the BLOOD is similar to the blood contained within the bodies of the members of the public. The images of the BLOOD sprayed in England warn about the risks that concern every human being, as this BLOOD could belong to any living being.

5.3 The artefacts

Environmental activists also use different artefacts to carry the litres of fake blood during the performance. These artefacts are not only used for practical reasons, but they also convey additional messages to the public during the performance.

For instance, a noticeable occurrence of XR's Blood Bath performance took place in front of the Treasury, in London, in October 2019. As part of this protest, environmental activists used a fire engine to spray fake blood over the building.¹⁶ The use of the fire engine identifies ENVIRONMENTAL ARTIVISTS AS FIRE FIGHTERS. Accordingly, this performance places activists in the role of HEROES while the Treasury is represented as the FIRE RAISER, and the BLOOD may refer to the victims of the FIRE (implicitly represented through the fake blood, see above). The representation of the danger as a FIRE may be an implicit

¹⁶ Images of the "fire engine" available at: https://extinctionrebellion.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/72175248_10162360758870710_6250363646992449536_o.jpg (17.08.2023).

reference to the climate crisis, also referred to as *global warming*. The FIRE is a typical example of extreme, dangerous warmth which suggests a topic-triggered use of the visual metaphor (Semino 2008). The environmental activists rely on this conceptual association to draw a visual link between finance and climate-related deaths.

A different instance of the Blood Bath was performed during an environmental protest in London in March 2019.¹⁷ The ‘rebels’ were holding buckets of fake blood to be sprayed over Downing Street. This reliance on buckets may be decoded according to the conceptual key BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY (Charteris-Black 2001). Indeed, the performance involves activists carrying their own buckets of blood, which may highlight a link of possession existing between the blood contained in each bucket and the activist who holds this bucket. Therefore, we can speculate that this sense of belonging might visually signify that the bucket contains the activist’s *own* blood.

This use of buckets was also explained by an environmental activist, speaking during the performance:

- (1) We are in a surreal situation now where we have got devastating changes, it is very close on the horizon and *most of us are asleep*, and part of what we are doing here is to *shock a little bit*, because *this is the blood of our children, it is our blood*, and things have got to change (Extinction Rebellion 09/03/2019, my emphasis).¹⁸

Following the environmental activist’s claims, the source concept BLOOD is exploited to highlight the main unmatching features of the metaphorical conceptualisation: the protesters (“our blood”) and their children (“the blood of our children”) are obviously not injured nor dead. These unmatching features can yet particularly affect the public since these buckets of blood are represented, verbally, through the conceptual key BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY. This conceptualisation implies that CARING is conceived as a personal duty: the BLOOD used during the Blood Bath is similar to human blood, and therefore the public’s and their children’s blood. The performance thus turns environmental

¹⁷ Images of the “buckets of blood” available at: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2019/03/09/breaking-extinction-rebellion-activists-create-sea-of-blood-at-downing-st-to-call-alarm-on-climate-and-ecological-emergency/> (17.08.2023).

¹⁸ Video available at: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2019/09/14/our-childrens-blood-xr-hamburg-14-september-2019/> (06.08.2022).

issues (i.e., the cause defended by activists) into personal duties, identified through cultural connotations associated with the concept BLOOD.

The explicit representation of the BLOOD concept as part of the Blood Bath may lead us to consider the artistic aspects of this activist performance. Indeed, the Blood Bath generates immediate ‘effects’ as the public is to learn about the origins of the unexpected BLOODSHED. It can also generate more long-term reflexions related to the conceptual associations between environmental issues and (bodily) danger.

In the following section, I provide answers to my main research question: how do environmental activists’ different uses of the BLOOD-related metaphor ‘affect’ the public to generate environmental awareness (or environmental ‘effect’)? I also discuss the endorsed and contested aspects of these performances in the British media. This leads me to consider the various functions of visual metaphors observed as part of environmental activism.

6. Discussion

This paper has presented the varying uses of the visual metaphor scenario SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES AS COMMON BLOOD during the performances staged by Extinction Rebellion and the Red Rebel Brigade in England.

The analysis of visual metaphors has demonstrated that the activists conceptualise the BLOOD as a CONNECTION between all individuals. This emphasis on interconnectedness is coherent with the defining features of activism, which is to promote “counter subversive feelings of connection” (Medrado/Rega 2023: 143). In this research, I demonstrated how environmental activists rely on the conceptual keys BLOOD FOR LIFE, BLOOD FOR ANCESTRY and BLOOD AS TEMPERAMENT (Charteris-Black 2001) to draw a conceptual link between the public (and the blood contained in their bodies), and the BLOOD used during these performances. The BLOOD is a concept that can produce strong emotions, which are associated with the situational context: environmental activists’ performances in England.

This emphasis on interconnectedness in the use of BLOOD by Extinction Rebellion and the Red Rebel Brigade relies on the public’s moral foundations (Charteris-Black 2021). Notably, in my analysis of the Blood Bath, I established

how the fake blood sprayed over strategic places in England (such as banks, politicians' headquarters, fossil fuel lobbies) can attract public attention to the HARM caused by these companies, while inciting the public to CARE for victims and, more generally, for the prosperity of all living species. In my analysis of the Red Rebel Brigade's performance, I suggested that the visual metonymy RED FOR BLOOD also reflected this idea of interconnectedness and collectivism while also insisting on BODILY HARM (i.e., visibility of the BLOOD) and thus, environmental danger (i.e., situational context). Accordingly, the environmental activists resort to the public's cognitive bias (Kövecses 2010: 176; Lakoff 1987) and moral foundations (Charteris-Black 2021) induced by the conceptual keys associated with BLOOD (Charteris-Black 2001), which are to generate reflexions regarding a possible CURE-INTERVENTION.

This focus on interconnectedness represented through the concept of BLOOD draws on spiritual conceptualisations documented in religious discourse (Charteris-Black 2004; Gonzalez 2005; Wilson 2022). For instance, this idea of interconnectedness recalls existing scientific views on the ecosystem defined in James Lovelock's "Gaia Theory" (2007). According to this theory, elaborated since the early 1970s (Donahue 2010: 55-6), nature is represented as a system of interactions between species, organisms, and the environment. These interactions create a single living entity characterised by its indivisibility: Gaia (Donahue 2010: 52; Ogle 2010: 275-7). This theory provides a particular view on human life on earth: human control of nature is opposed to Gaia's self-regulation which leads Lovelock to call for the preservation of "emotional bonds to Gaia" (Ogle 2010: 280). His work has had a significant impact on science because it raised new questions and hypotheses about the influence of humans on the climate (Donahue 2010: 53-4; Ogle 2010: 276-8). In the context of the environmental activists' performances, this conceptualisation is aimed at promoting compassion through references to moral foundations related to CARE-HARM (Charteris-Black 2021).

Throughout the analysis, questions have been raised as to how these environmental activists' performances may 'affect' the public so as to lead to 'effect' (Duncombe 2016; Duncombe/Lambert 2018). During the performances, the public is essentially perceived as viewers but not as actors. This is particularly noticeable during the performance of the Red Rebel Brigade: the activists self-identify as 'magic creatures' conducting a ceremonious procession

which the public may not be informed about and is not invited to join. While the 'magical' aspect of the performance is aimed at envisioning a fantasised world deprived of environmental issues, the activists' cohesion, theatrical mimes, and collective appearance as a circus troupe might feel like a threat to the public. These references to 'magic' have been criticised by climate change deniers who perceive climate activists as "medieval preachers" (Atanasova/Koteyko 2017: 460) who believe in a "false religion" (Nerlich 2010: 434).

The activists' role during environmental protests remains an essentially artistic role: their performance is to 'affect' the public (Duncombe 2016) but the performance is not aimed at producing immediate 'effects'. Activists use this 'fourth wall' separating them from the public to attract attention, raise questions about the performances, and affect the public so that the public can start a transformative reflexion (Schubert/Gray 2015) on environmental issues. Alternatively, the artistic aspect of the performances may not be grasped by the public. This has notably been considered in my analysis of the Blood Bath. In this case, the affective impact of the performance (Duncombe 2016) can generate critical views on the performers, and thus the environmental movement, who can be blamed for the shock experienced by the public during the performance: the 'artistic' aspect can also have an impact on the 'activist' aspect of the performance.

Another question appeared with regards to the lack of measurable 'effects' of art (Duncombe/Lambert 2018: 63-64). Indeed, art rarely conveys explicit messages. Yet, such explicit messages may be required in the context of environmental activism because the climate crisis remains a misunderstood issue as evidenced by the increasing wave of scepticism (Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, ongoing). The artistic aspect of environmental activism may not ultimately generate transformative reflexion (Schubert/Gray 2015) about the climate crisis.

The question (regarding how these BLOOD-related performances can 'affect' the public and generate 'effects') can be further discussed through a study of British media descriptions of each performance. A brief research on the Nexis database, which provides access to newspaper articles and online news, has demonstrated that the two performances have been endorsed by British newspapers (e.g., "keep the strange wonder alive!", report on XR's protest by Charlotte Becquart, *Cornwall Live*, 17/02/2020), with some verbal exploitations of the source domain

to insist on the activists' arguments (e.g., "Red Rebels have travelled, silently and with purpose, along the veins of the country to the beating heart of COP26 in Glasgow", Miranda Norris, *Oxford Mail*, 01/11/2021; "How Extinction Rebellion put the world on red alert", Nosheen Iqbal, *The Guardian*, 06/10/2019). A major contrast between the two performances can yet be perceived in more critical media, such as the British newspaper *Telegraph*. Indeed, both performances have been criticised, but the criticism seems to be much more scathing in descriptions of the Blood Bath than in descriptions of the Red Rebel Brigade. For instance, the description of the Red Rebel Brigade in *Telegraph* claims that the aim of the "scaremongering" and "disruptive" protest is to "take us back to pre-industrial Dark Ages" (*Telegraph* 07/10/2019). *Daily Mail* described activists as "clowns" (*Daily Mail* 09/10/2019) while *The Cambridge Independent* denied that the performance is an instance of "witchcraft", as claimed by a discontented citizen (*The Cambridge Independent* 12/12/2020). In contrast, criticism regarding the Blood Bath suggests that the performance could have been "claimed by Al Qaeda" and was an instance of "ecofascism" (Richard Littlejohn, *Daily Mail* 03/10/2019). The journalists also criticised the "bloody mess" left by the fake blood sprayed in the streets and complained about the cost of the cleaning and the possible toxicity of the material used to produce the fake blood (*Telegraph* 03/10/2010). The emphasis on the colour red during the two performances has also been misleadingly associated with political ideologies (i.e., communism; *Telegraph* 07/10/2019). This brief discussion of the media descriptions of the performances suggests that on the one hand, the Red Rebel Brigade does not produce very strong criticism, but the main argument is downplayed in descriptions of the 'wonder' of the protests. On the other hand, the Blood Bath has been heavily criticised in the media. Notably, some claims are particularly concerning since these relate to existing controversies presenting Extinction Rebellion as a terrorist group (see report by Dodd/ Grierson 2020).

Therefore, the varying visual occurrences of the scenario SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES AS COMMON BLOOD during Extinction Rebellion's and the Red Rebel Brigade's performances serve different functions: first, these undeniably produce 'peaceful disturbance' which attracts public attention. Second, these represent a new form of protests that distinguish the newly founded NGO from other organisations. This can eventually attract more activists who may want to join the 'events', while avoiding participations to

‘protests’. Third, the singularity of the performances effectively attracts media attention, which helps activists to convey their messages to the general public.

7. Concluding Remarks

It is now possible to establish the complementarity of the performances: the Blood Bath favours an explicit version of the visual metaphor scenario SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES AS COMMON BLOOD while the Red Rebel Brigade presents an essentially artistic visual version of the scenario. Accordingly, the source concept BLOOD is exploited by environmental activists so as to encourage the spread of their main message: the climate crisis needs to be averted to prevent the extinction of all species. Therefore, even if the two performances seem to differ at first sight, these promote similar environmental arguments, related to the need for connections. The source concept BLOOD can provoke a wide range of reactions among the public, which can ultimately generate transformative reflexion (Schubert/Gray 2015) and foster “empowering exchanges” (Medrado/Rega 2023: 143).

It is possible to infer that environmental activists’ significant reliance on BLOOD during protests is caused by the cultural connotations and the (universal) conceptual keys associated with the concept (Charteris-Black 2001). Interestingly, performances related to women’s rights present highly similar visual characteristics: the visual features of the Red Rebel Brigade recall the work of the French artist Valérie Belin who depicted female submission through images of women wearing magnificent, embellished dresses (“The Brides”). In contrast, the explicit representation of BLOOD as part of Extinction Rebellion’s Blood Bath recalls the works of female body-artists whose artworks and performances rely on blood to denounce the violence against women (see the works of the French artist Gina Pane and the Israeli artist Sigalit Landau). This demonstrates the relevance of the visual exploitation of a (source) concept, which can be viewed through different lenses (artistic lens or activist lens) to reach a large variety of individuals with different visual sensibilities.

From a linguistic viewpoint, this research has proposed a different approach to the analysis of visual metaphors: it considered the possible impact of a visual metaphor scenario in the context of environmental activists’ protests, and it adapted existing methodologies to investigate the metaphorical conceptualisations promoted during performances. I conclude that performances taking

place in a socio-political context, such as environmental activism, are relevant objects of investigation to understand the role played by visual metaphor scenarios in argumentation.

Data available at:

Extinction Rebellion's official British website: <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/> (26.08.2022).

Red Rebel Brigade's official website: <http://redrebelbrigade.com/> (26.08.2022).

Nexis: <http://lexisnexis.com> (06.08.2022).

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Annexes

Text of the leaflets distributed by the Red Rebel Brigade during their performances (from the Brigade's official website):

Red Rebel Brigade symbolises the common blood we share with all species,

That unifies us and makes us one.

As such we move as one, act as one and more importantly feel as one.

We are unity and we empathise with our surroundings, we are forgiving

We are sympathetic and humble, compassionate and understanding,

We divert, distract, delight and inspire the people who watch us,

We illuminate the magic realm beneath the surface of all things, and we invite people to enter in, we make a bubble and calm the storm, we are peace in the midst of war.

We are who the people have forgotten to be!