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## Cultural Rhetoric : Foundations and perspectives

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Res Rhetorica nr 1, 17-29

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2016

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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## **Cultural Rhetoric. Foundations and perspectives**

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### **Abstract**

Cultural rhetoric is proposed as a methodological system to study the relationship between culture and rhetoric and to analyze rhetorical discourses, literary works and texts of other kinds from the point of view of their rhetorical foundations and their perlocutionary force before receivers. It is connected with the cultural dimension of rhetoric and with the rhetorical dimension of culture. It is within the studies in culture, together with semiotics of culture and cultural studies.

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### **Key words**

Rhetoric, Culture, Cultural rhetoric, Discourse, Literature

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### **DOI**

10.17380/tr2016.1.2

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## Cultural Rhetoric. Foundations and perspectives

### 1. Rhetoric as an art and a discipline. Rhetoric in culture and culture in rhetoric

Although rhetoric was born as an instrument to communicate with persuasive aims before courts and it was initially used in the realm of civil law, it entered easily into the fields of criminal law and political communication. Rhetoric passed from its native land, Sicily, an island that had been colonized by the Greeks, to Athens, and afterwards from Athens to Rome. Rhetoric is the technique of communication and of oral public discourse that each citizen of these cities who wished to play a public role in society should have learned. Consequently, rhetoric became a part of the learning program in Greece and Rome (Cole 1991; Hernández Guerrero and García Tejera 1994; Pernot 2000; López Eire 2002).

There are many definitions of rhetoric, and despite their differences, all of them share the idea of communication influencing receivers. As it is well known, for Aristotle “[r]hetoric then may be defined as the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1355b 25-26). In his turn, Quintilian defines rhetoric as follows: “Rhetorice ars est bene dicendi” (“rhetoric is the art of speaking well”; Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 2. 17. 38, edition 2001). He provides this definition in opposition to that of grammar, which is “recte loquendi scientia” (“the study of correct speech”; Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria*, 1. 4. 2, edition 2001). Of course, there are more definitions of rhetoric, and I would like to emphasize James Murphy’s (1983: 3) definition: “the systematic analysis of human discourse for the purpose of adducing useful precepts for future discourse.” This definition implies the idea that human discourses form a kind of store of cultural heritage that is used as a foundation for the production of subsequent discourses following the system that supports the existing ones. One could give other definitions like the systematization of common sense concerning communication, which I have offered in Albaladejo (2014b: 23). It is important to be aware that all communicative practices, when they are consolidated, are a section of a store which becomes cultural if accepted by the community

of producers and receivers of texts and mainly if texts<sup>1</sup> are communicated in such a way that they achieve an institutional nature and are considered as a part of the activities of society. Let us read George Kennedy's reference to culture and power in his explanation of rhetoric:

*Rhētorikē* in Greek specifically denotes the civic art of public speaking as it is developed in deliberative assemblies, law courts, and other formal occasions under constitutional government in the Greek cities, especially the Athenian democracy. As such, it is a specific cultural subset of a more general concept of the power of words and their potential to affect a situation in which they are used or received. (Kennedy 1994: 3)

Kennedy's expression about rhetoric as "a specific cultural subset" fits for the idea that rhetoric is part of culture. He is aware that rhetoric is found in different cultures, and has proposed a comparative rhetoric with cultural implications: "Comparative Rhetoric is the cross-cultural study of rhetorical traditions as they exist or have existed in different societies around the world" (Kennedy 1998: 1).

Rhetoric became an art as a technique for communicating what had been systematized and hence it could be taught and learned, i.e., it could be transmitted from generations to generations, with the help of classes, handbooks and, of course, training and practice (e.g., the *progymnasmata* or *exercitationes*). The techniques of a society are part of knowledge and they are stored within the cultural heritage that shapes and defines the culture of this society. Rhetoric is configured as a discipline in order to be able to serve in the teaching and learning of communication. The transformation of an art into a discipline is a decisive step for its inclusion into the system of knowledge in a society.

As Jaeger (1978) has illustrated in his book *Paideia*, rhetoric was a constituent of Greek culture and played an important role in education. López Eire (1996, 2006) has dealt with rhetoric as a component of Greek culture. Rhetoric also entered education in Rome – Quintilian includes it in his *Institutio oratoria* – as a learning programme from childhood for those who would deal with public affairs (Murphy 1965; Pujante 1999), mainly in connection with law and politics. Because rhetoric is connected with culture and it is a part of the wider realm of culture (Albaladejo 1998b), it is possible to transmit it in education. In accordance with it, rhetorical discourse (or rhetorical speech) can be considered as a cultural product, as a cultural construction, which is oriented to an interpretation characterized by perlocutionary influences, i.e., influences on receivers (hearers, but also readers). This contributes to an intersubjective consciousness in society about the cultural function of discourses and rhetoric. This consciousness is decisive for rhetoric to become ingrained in the wide cultural realm of society. Lotman (1996: 131) has dealt with the rhetorical organization of culture.

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1. I am using the terms 'discourse' and 'text' as synonyms.

The inclusion of rhetorical speeches that are embedded in literary works is an issue to be taken into account, since the relationship between rhetoric and literature and their discourses as a cultural item is referenced in several works of literature. It is the case, for example, of the speeches delivered by several characters in *Julius Caesar* and other classical tragedies by William Shakespeare (Martín Cerezo 2014) or of the speeches delivered by Emilio Castelar in Benito Pérez Galdós' *España sin rey*, one of his *Episodios Nacionales*.

Supported by its inclusion in culture, rhetoric has extended its domain from the original field of oral discourse towards fields which were new for it, like the written discourse, the discourse of journalism and other media and the newest spaces of communication, like that of the digital discourse. Because of this development, rhetoric has had an evolution that maintains the master lines of its framework as essential items and influences new realities and features of communication. Rhetoric has continuously extended its domain in order to be able to deal with new issues in communication and to contribute to the advance of knowledge in the new ways and trends in communication (Albaladejo 2015b). The cause of this extension of rhetoric, which has demonstrated its suitability for the production of new kinds of discourses as well as for the study of them, is its inclusion in culture. Therefore, rhetoric is conceived as a system that can work in every discourse which aims to persuade and/or convince<sup>2</sup> people (Spang 2005; Cockcroft, Cockcroft, Hamilton and Hidalgo Downing 2014).

However, the preceding view of the cultural dimension of rhetoric is not the only way of looking at the relationship between rhetoric and culture. It is necessary to examine the constitution of rhetoric and its components in order to be aware of the role of culture in rhetoric. Culture is one of the elements which has a very active role in rhetorical discourse and its communication, and in this way culture works as a link between producers and receivers, connecting them in order to achieve the aims of discourse. Rhetoric tries to connect producers and receivers in the realm of society. For Raimondi (2002), dealing with public, with audience, is dealing with rhetoric<sup>3</sup>. The link between the orator and the audience is interpreted by Hernández Guerrero and García Tejera (2004: 15) as follows: “El discurso oratorio es una prueba de reconocimiento y ofrecimiento – de hospitalidad – mutuos entre orador y el público.” [“The oratory discourse is a proof of mutual recognition and of being for each other – actually, of hospitality – between the orator and the audience”].

2. Although persuading and convincing have a very close relationship, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1989: 65-71) have studied the differences of these terms, persuading aims at influencing the receivers' acting but convincing aims at influencing the receivers' thinking.

3. “Ma quando parliamo di pubblico torniamo a parlare di retorica, che è in fondo, da qualunque lato la si guardi, una teoria del destinatario: chi ascolta deve essere conquistato e ciò avviene solo attraverso qualcosa che è già in comune, per esempio una credenza condivisa durante un rito liturgico” (Raimondi 2002: 68).

If we think of the rhetorical operations, the *partes artis*, the five parts that are usually taken into account – *inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *actio* or *pronuntiatio* (Lausberg 1966-1968; Albaladejo 1989: 57-64) – together with *intellectio* (Chico Rico 1989; 1998), it is possible to learn that culture is crossing the whole system of rhetoric. The exercise of *memoria* is a cultural training, as well as that of *actio/pronuntiatio*, which is linked to a semiotic code of gestures. If one looks at the *inventio* together with *argumentatio*, in connection with the parts of discourse, the *partes orationis* – *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *peroratio* (Lausberg 1966-1968; Albaladejo 1988-1989; 1989: 82-108), when dealing with *narratio* (Albaladejo 1989: 85-91) and *argumentatio* (Albaladejo 1989: 91-93; 2015a), one can find a strong presence of culture inside those rhetorical operations. As it is well known, the *narratio* is the account of the events of the cause in order that the receiver can know them in such a way that he or she becomes persuaded or convinced in order to support the orator's position. This *pars orationis* has strong cultural foundations, since narration is a cultural activity and it implies truth and verisimilitude, with the relationship to what receivers expect from discourse looking at it from a cultural and social point of view. The *dispositio* contains possibilities of arranging discourses that are a part of textual culture, like the beginnings *ab ovo* or *in medias res*, among other possibilities of arranging textual macrostructure (García Berrio, Albaladejo 1988).

One must deal with the artistic proofs that are called *exempla*, since they are taken from history, literature or preceding rhetorical discourses (Lausberg 1966-1968: §§ 350 ff.; Albaladejo 1989: 93-100). As artistic proofs, they are created by the orator, and he or she must activate his or her capacity of invention as a process to find examples within the cultural heritage. In this way, examples are taken from a cultural active store and they are communicatively activated by introducing them in the *argumentatio* of the rhetorical discourse. Culture is also active inside the *elocutio*, the operation concerning style, including figures and tropes, because many of their patterns are culturally established as well as many concrete figures and tropes. If we think of metaphor (Ricoeur 1975; Arduini 2000, 2004, ed. 2007; Bobes 2004; Haverkamp, 2007), which is the main trope, we observe that it contributes to strengthen or even to establish the consciousness that producers and receivers belong to a social and cultural group since they find themselves through the production and the interpretation of it. A lot of metaphors have become lexicalized and many times they are not recognized as metaphors, although they are open to a sounder recognition. Metaphor shows human relations with culture and society. Meaning and reference are important in the role of culture in *inventio* and *elocutio*, and metaphor shows itself as a device which has roots in *inventio* albeit it is situated in *elocutio* (Arduini 2000), and its content-oriented dimension is key

for its cultural constitution and function. Cultural elements in *inventio* and *elocutio* constitute a communicative code that connects producers and receivers.

The rhetorical genres have an important rhetorical component connected with their institutional use in communication in society. Deliberative and forensic discourses (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1358a 37 and 1358b 8) play a role in political and social institutions. Their respective roles in political assemblies and in courts are cultural, and they cannot be understood in the absence of the cultural component of these kinds of discourses. If we think of discourses of the epideictic or demonstrative genre, we realize that they have an institutional use, too. All these roles and uses are a consequence of the inclusion of culture in rhetoric, but also a consequence of the cultural function of rhetoric, and therefore of the inclusion of rhetoric in the culture of society.

Both rhetoric and culture are reciprocally involved in such a way that rhetoric is a part of culture and at the same time culture is a component of rhetoric. The presence of culture in rhetorical items impels the rhetorical implication of culture as well as the cultural implication of rhetoric.

## 2. Cultural rhetoric: a proposal

The role of rhetoric in culture and the role of culture in rhetoric are the main foundations of what can be called “cultural rhetoric.” Although rhetoric is cultural since its birth, I emphasize its connection with culture by means of the adjective ‘cultural’, since cultural rhetoric (and, thence, rhetoric) must have its own position in the area of the studies in culture together with other theories or trends in that area. In previous articles (Albaladejo 2009b), I have proposed cultural rhetoric for the study of the cultural function of different kinds of discourses in rhetoric as well as in literature and of the cultural elements included in rhetorical and literary discourses. Cultural rhetoric, which is linked by Chico Rico (2015) to neorhetoric, is built from rhetoric itself. Its system and components are those of rhetoric, but cultural rhetoric emphasizes the role of culture in discourse and communication and the role of rhetoric in culture. It focuses on cultural items in connection with the production of rhetorical discourse.

Based on interdiscursivity – i.e., on the relationships between different discourses, as well as between different kinds of discourses (Albaladejo 2005) – cultural rhetoric deals with the cultural constitution of discourses, their production in connection with the cultural foundations of society and their reception and effects from an interpretation centred on their perlocutionary influence on receivers (Albaladejo 2009b: 16). The role of interdiscursivity and interdiscursive analysis, regarding cultural rhetoric is a major role, are proposed in Albaladejo (2008,

2009a). Cultural rhetoric, although it has its roots in rhetoric, goes beyond rhetorical discourse and communication and is able to deal with literary discourses and other kinds of discourses, since rhetoric and *rhetoricalness* (Martínez-Dueñas Espejo 2003; Ramírez Vidal 2004; López Eire 2006; Albaladejo 2005), i.e., the rhetorical nature, are present in all discourses<sup>4</sup>.

Thence, cultural rhetoric is also based on the comparison of discourses from an interdiscursive perspective, in order to be able to deal with literary discourses, i.e., literary works, taking into account that they have rhetorical foundations and characteristics. The use of cultural issues in literature is active because they are projected on receivers and on their processes of understanding and interpretation. This can provide interesting results concerning the trend in comparative literature dealing with comparison between discourses of different kinds: rhetorical, literary and non-literary. Indeed, one of the most important concerns of rhetoric is its historical engagement with literature, and since the Graeco-Roman Antiquity rhetoric and poetics have constituted the set of the classical disciplines of discourse (Lausberg 1966-1968; Kibédi-Varga 1970; García Berrio 1977, 1980, 1984; García Berrio and Hernández Fernández 2004: 105 ff.; Chico Rico 1988).

In the construction of cultural rhetoric, a *cultural-rhetoric component* has been developed inside rhetoric and especially within a rhetorico-poetic, textual linguistic and semiotic model for the analysis and study of rhetorical and literary texts. This component, which is really a cultural section within the rhetorical system, contains all the cultural items that work in rhetorical discourses and literature. Therefore, it is based on the rhetoricalness of all discourses, comprised the literary works as discourses. The cultural-rhetoric component has a framework which replies the organization of the rhetorical system as constituted by the rhetorical operations or *partes artis*, the parts of discourse or *partes orationis*, the rhetorical genres, and all notions provided or stressed by rhetoric, like the classical rhetorical notions *aptum*, *kairós*, *taedium*, etc. (Lausberg 1966-1968; Albaladejo 1989; Pujante 2003; Hernández Guerrero and García Tejera 2004; Spang 2005) and other new rhetorical notions like *polyacroasis* (Albaladejo 1998a). The aim of this component is to describe, analyze and explain the role of culture in rhetorical and literary discourses as a tool for connecting with the receivers (hearers, readers, spectators) contributing to support the perlocutionary strength of discourses in persuading and/or convincing, in attracting and catching the receivers to the contents, expressions and aims of discourses as *poiémata*. Therefore, one of the main elements of this component is the *communicative cultural-rhetoric code*, which

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4. The research project “Cultural Rhetoric. Proposal of a methodological system of comparative basis for the study of literature, discourse and culture from their persuasive components” was a step in the development of cultural rhetoric. This project was funded by the State Secretariat for Research, Development and Innovation (formerly the State Secretariat for Research, when the project was approved) of Spain. Its reference was FFI2010-15160.

connects the orator or the author with the receivers and allows them to understand and interpret discourse and at the same time can contribute to the receivers' adherence to it. Therefore, cultural rhetoric plays a decisive role in political discourse (Albaladejo 2003, 2014a).

The metaphorical devices have been identified as cultural-rhetoric elements, since they work with rhetorical strength within the realm of culture. These devices include metaphor and other phenomena like allegory or simile, although they are not strictly metaphors. The cultural-rhetoric notion of *metaphorical engine* (Albaladejo 2014c), that is working in all these devices, has been created and provided for cultural rhetoric. Metaphor is an outstanding and unequalled rhetorical and literary device and it is focused on because of the high yield of its function and its study. The study of the metaphorical devices is a part of the study of figural language, which contains and discursively activates the figures and the tropes, and it is also an objective of cultural rhetoric. Both rhetorical language and literary language are cultural constructions made from standard language, and cultural rhetoric is contributing to their explanation (Albaladejo 2013), taking into account that both kinds of language are built as secondary systems of modelization, according to Lotman's ideas about literary language (Lotman 1988: 20-34).

Cultural rhetoric implies taking into account the *transferential critique* as an approach to discourses and to theories that allows the exchange of notions, elements and theoretical perspectives between different theories. In this sense, cultural rhetoric can be considered as a part not only of rhetoric but also of the studies in culture, together with other parts of them, like the following theoretical and critical approaches: the semiotics of culture of the School of Tartu (Lotman y Escuela de Tartu 1979; Torop 1999; Jiménez 2015), the anthropological study of culture (Frazer 2011), the analysis and critique of culture (Godzich 1998; Gullón 2004), the cultural studies (Barker 2000) or the poetics of culture (Engel 2001; Neubauer 2001), among others.

### 3. Perspectives of cultural rhetoric

Cultural rhetoric has demonstrated its suitability for the analysis of rhetorical discourses and literary works from the point of view of their cultural implications and their perlocutionary configuration. It is an ongoing project. The current perspectives of cultural rhetoric are to go ahead in the field of the art of language, which includes rhetorical discourse and literature but also essays, dialogues, and other discourses where style and textual construction are emphasised, e.g., the *Informe sobre la ley agraria* (1794) by Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, a report on politics and economy addressed to the Council of Castile. The interdiscursive

analysis must continue to be associated to cultural rhetoric since the comparison between different kinds of discourses, as well as between different discourses as tokens or concrete discourses, is one of the goals of cultural rhetoric. Indeed, this comparison allows us to become aware of characteristics of different discourses and kinds of discourses relevant to culture and to their perlocutionary dimension (Albaladejo 2012).

Cultural rhetoric must find its own position in the area of studies in culture by supporting studies on discourses, literature and culture connected to the influence on receivers and by comparing its results with those coming from other branches of the studies in culture. Then, cultural rhetoric can provide useful instruments for the analysis and the explanation of *interculturality* as an issue in literature and communication. In this sense, the concept of *ectopic literature* (Albaladejo 2011; Amezcua Gómez 2014; Hellín Nistal 2015) has been provided by cultural rhetoric taking into account the cultural projection onto the literary works that have been written by authors who, because of their displacements from their countries of origin to other countries, use cultural elements from several cultures (at least the source-culture, i.e., their original culture, and the target-culture, i.e., the culture of the country where he or she moves to) in their works with a perlocutionary dimension regarding readers.

Albeit the elaboration of cultural rhetoric has been achieved after a close reading of the main rhetorical treatises and other important contributions to rhetoric, it is necessary to continue to carry out a thorough examination of the treatises and of most texts dealing with rhetoric as well as with poetics and other approaches to discourse and literature. The *rhetorica recepta* (Albaladejo 1989: 29), i.e., the rhetoric received as a rhetorical heritage and hence as a part of the cultural heritage, should be in constant interpretation, since issues and problems of current rhetoric as well as specifically of cultural rhetoric can find answers and solutions through this interpretation. Cultural rhetoric follows and shares the practice of the *recovery of historic thought*, which has been proposed by García Berrio (1984, 1992):

The history of rhetoric, like that of poetics, is so rich, and the documents that constitute it are so numerous and, in spite of appearances, varied, that the current project of scientifically laying the foundations for a re-implantation of rhetoric at the center of the disciplines of discourse presupposes a preceding stage dedicated to the adequate *recovery of historic thought*. (García Berrio 1992: 114)

This recovery allows for the enrichment of cultural rhetoric with concepts and perspectives from the rhetorical heritage that can be interpreted again in such a way where new views on rhetoric and culture can be gained.

Another task of cultural rhetoric within the current perspectives of research is to review the major studies that deal with literary and/or artistic works and to pay

attention to the role that cultural items have in works in order to project them onto receivers for the achievement of perlocutionary aims concerning persuading and/or convincing. I will refer here to two major studies.

The book *Formación de la Teoría Literaria moderna* by García Berrio (1977) deals with the comments and paraphrases to Horace's *Epistola ad Pisones* or *Ars poetica* and their role in the formation of modern literary theory in the Renaissance. The rhetorical configuration of the *Ars poetica*, despite its poetic orientation and goals, is explained by García Berrio as follows:

Además, entendida la Retórica como la ciencia de la actuación de un emisor sobre un receptor, hay pocos documentos más retóricos en la Ciencia Literaria clásica que la *Epistola ad Pisones*, donde la atención se desplaza desde el estudio del objeto literario en sí al de los elementos activos y pasivos que intervienen en el intercambio literario. (García Berrio 1977: 45)

[What's more, taking Rhetoric as a science of influence of a sender over a receiver, in the classical Sciences of Literature there are few documents more rhetorical than the *Epistola ad Pisones*, where the attention is displaced from the study of the literary object in itself towards the study of the active and passive elements involved in the literary exchange].

This book and its second part (García Berrio 1980) offer an interpretation of the presence of Horace in the Renaissance and the Baroque with Horace's three dichotomies as its core, albeit other issues of the *Epistola* (like the appropriateness of meters to genres or the characters' *decorum*) are also studied. These dichotomies are about the sources (*ingenium/ars*), means and constituents (*verba/res*) and goals (*delectare/movere*) of literary creation.

Also the book *A Tale Blazed Through Heaven. Imitation and Invention in the Golden Age of Spain* by Noble Wood (2014) is representative for the cultural rhetoric approach. This book deals with the classical mythological tale about the goddess Venus and the gods Mars and Vulcan and its projection onto literary works and paintings in the Spanish Golden Age through imitation and invention. Particular attention is paid to the cultural role of metaphors: e.g., love as a form of warfare (Noble Wood 2014: 54-55) or love as a form of captivity (Noble Wood 2014: 100-101). After analyzing works of Garcilaso de la Vega, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, Francisco de Aldana and Luis de Góngora, the author emphasizes the reader's responsibility and work in interpreting the cases of allusion:

On each occasion between the precise nature of the relationship between allusion and new context is not made explicit, so the onus is on the reader to work to resolve any potential ambiguity. Though drawn from the same common storehouse, such allusions both refresh and are refreshed by their new contexts. The same elements of the tale are called to mind time and again, but on each occasion they are seen and interpreted in new light. In these examples mythological allusion is no mere ornament, but a highly economical and flexible device that enabled poets to

challenge and inspire admiration in audiences who could be relied upon to have a firm grasp of classical tradition. (Noble Wood 2014: 89)

The mythological tale that is not explicitly referred to constitutes a cultural-rhetorical code that must be found and activated by the readers in their processes of interpretation.

Among the perspectives of cultural rhetoric we must pay attention to the relationship between cultural rhetoric and rhetoric, since they are not two different rhetorics, but both of them work together for discourse and literature and for their study. Of course, cultural rhetoric follows and must continue to follow the master lines of rhetoric, and rhetoric is enriched by the achievements of cultural rhetoric in its own development. Cultural rhetoric must take into account the framework and constituents of general rhetoric as proposed and developed by García Berrio (1984) and keep the connection established by general rhetoric with text theory and poetics (Chico Rico, forthcoming) which must be used to improve the study and knowledge of the relationship between rhetoric and culture.

**Acknowledgements.** This paper is a result of the research carried out by the author during his mobility stay of reference PRX15/00368 at the University of Oxford, funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport of Spain within the “Programa de Estancias de Movilidad de Profesores e Investigadores Seniores en Centros Extranjeros de Enseñanza Superior e Investigación, incluido el Programa Salvador de Madariaga 2015, Modalidad A,” a part of the “Programa Estatal de Promoción del Talento y su Empleabilidad en I+D+i, Subprograma Estatal de Movilidad, del Plan Estatal de Investigación Científica y Técnica y de Innovación 2013-2016.”

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