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Picasso's *Guernica*

The Imaginative
Treatment of History

Riley Buchanan
Master of Philosophy

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



Picasso's Guernica

The imaginative treatment of history

A thesis submitted in the partial fulfilment of a
Master of Philosophy

Riley Buchanan

The University of Notre Dame Australia

June 2018

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I declare that this Research Project is my own and contains work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Riley Buchanan
12 June 2018

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

IMAGINATION, REALITY AND PICASSO'S *GUERNICA*

"In the history of painting one can sometimes find strange prophecies",¹ wrote John Berger. Referring to depictions of human disaster by Pieter Bruegel and Hieronymous Bosch, Berger claimed that such prophecies are strange because they can never have been intended: the artist cannot have known that what they depicted on their canvas and the meanings they produced might, eventually, be perceived in reality. This is not to say that such meanings manifest in any literal, mimetic way. Rather, in a prophetic artwork, there is a traceable familiarity between its imagined, visual representations and the conditions of another reality. Rather than distinction between the imagined and the real, there is connection. Judged retrospectively these artworks and the prophecies they contain are often incontrovertible. Because they depict human disaster, they are always disturbing.

Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* is one such painting. It was produced in May and June of 1937 and exhibited that year by Spain's Republican government-in-exile at the *Exhibition Internationale* in Paris. *Guernica*, too, depicts human disaster. It is prophetic because it addresses the present and the future simultaneously; it witnesses and warns at the same time. Indeed, it has recently been referred to by T.J. Clark as "our culture's Tragic Scene"², which is just one of many indications of its enduring, even vital, resonance. Because of this connection between imagination of reality in the painting, *Guernica* also attests to Seamus Heaney's claim that "the imaginative transformation of human life is the means by which we can most truly grasp and comprehend it".³ With a salute to Heaney, this project seeks to investigate the interplay and consequences of the imaginative treatment of reality.

¹ Berger himself gave the example of Bruegel's *Triumph of Death*, 1562, in which he claimed we can read the future reality of Nazi death camps. He also suggested that the third panel in Hieronymous Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1503, as prophetic of the chaos of late capitalism. John Berger, "Hieronymous Bosch (c. 1450-1516)" in *Portraits: John Berger on Artists*, edited by Tom Overton (London: Verso, 2015), 35.

² T.J. Clark, "Picasso and Tragedy" in *Pity and Terror* ed. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2017), 24.

³ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), 3.



Figure 1. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, oil on canvas. 349 cm x 776 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1937.

*Guernica and the Bombing of Gernika*⁴

Europe was on the threshold of another war when Picasso painted *Guernica*. Spain, where Picasso was born in 1881, and to which he had returned for the last time in 1934, was already embroiled in one. On 17 July 1936, General Sanjurjo and the Nationalist army launched an armed rebellion against the Republican government, which had been elected in 1936. The Nationalist rebellion aimed to institute an authoritarian government that would centralise power and put an end to reforms enacted by the Republicans. However, the uprising faced considerable opposition. Armed workers mobilised in support of the Republican government under a range of broadly left-wing organisations—often whichever happened to be the most dominant locally, and each of which had diverse aims. A prolonged civil war soon seemed inevitable. The Republican cause received aid in the form of weaponry from Russia and Mexico, as well as a variety of International Brigades made up of volunteers from abroad, many of whom joined the Republican cause in contravention of the Anglo-French ‘non-intervention’ policy or were otherwise recruited by the Communist International. Franco, by contrast, received significant support from Germany and Italy. In addition to personnel, weaponry and aid, the fascist allies provided extensive air support. Germany supplied its Condor Legion, which included some 6000 troops and an array of fighter squadrons, bombers,

⁴ ‘Gernika’ is the spelling of the Spanish ‘Guernica’ in Euskara, the Basque language. ‘Guernica’ appears in this text only in quotes, where the quoted used the Spanish spelling of the town.

reconnaissance and other aircrafts, along with previously unmatched deployment techniques. The violence that ensued raged unabated until the surrender of Madrid and the final defeat of the Republic in 1939.

Guernica was born from and addressed these violent and complex political conditions, but Picasso's painting also had more specific connotations. As its title suggests, *Guernica* answers to a more precise reality: a single event that occurred on the afternoon of 26 April 1937, which was the destruction of the Basque town of Gernika in an air raid executed by the Condor Legion at the behest of Franco. Being Monday, it was market day. The town, which contained no legitimate military targets, was full of peasants who had gathered from neighbouring towns to sell and exchange their goods, as well as refugees and wounded soldiers recovering from battle. The population of Gernika on that day was therefore much larger than it would have regularly been. Although the exact figure is not known, Herbert Southworth's research indicated a variety of estimates that ranged from 3000 to 12,000.⁵ "But whether there were 6000 people in Guernica on April 26," Southworth continued, "or a few more or a few less, what is certain is that the town was largely in ruins before nightfall".⁶

Gernika was also a historic symbol of Basque nationalism and independence: the home of the regional parliament assembly house and the ancient oak tree, under which Basque leaders had sworn to observe local customs and traditional freedoms for centuries.⁷ Gernika was not just an ordinary civilian town, far behind the lines of military engagement, it was, and remains, the spiritual capital of Euskadi. The destruction of the "cradle of the Basque race"⁸ had, therefore, a particularly poignant effect on regional morale.

The attack lasted about three hours. Machine-gunning aircraft were used to pursue and shoot civilians who fled to surrounding fields, while high explosive and incendiary bombs set the town alight, reducing it largely to rubble. Remarkably, the only three structures of public significance that were untouched by the bombing were also the only structures that might have been regarded as legitimate military objectives had they been hit: the parliament assembly house, the Rentería bridge, and a small armament factory that lay outside the town. Herbert Southworth, who published a towering and enduringly authoritative history of the event in 1977, wrote that all else in the town was "wiped out".⁹ Being without strategic importance, the attack on Gernika had no obvious military purpose. According to George Steer, one of the first journalists to witness its aftermath and one

⁵ Herbert R. Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica! A Study of Journalism, Propaganda, Diplomacy and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 355-356.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁷ Mark Kurlansky, *The Basque History of the World* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), 160.

⁸ George Steer, "The Tragedy of Guernica: Town Destroyed in Air Attack" *The Times*, 27 April 1937, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Introduction

whose report remains arguably the most definitive account of the attack, the Gernika air raid was intended, principally, to demoralise civilians.¹⁰ As the dispatches of Steer and other journalists were broadcast over the coming days, many came to regard the bombing as technologically precocious (and therefore unparalleled) in design; horrifying and morally indefensible in effect; and for some, a terrifying indication of Europe's imminent future.

Yet the bombing of Gernika was not the first aerial bombing of a civilian population,¹¹ and nor was it the first air raid of the Spanish Civil War itself.¹² However, it was an event that rapidly became an idea, loaded with symbolism and meaning. The event constituted a unique moment of convergence wherein a number of new technologies, and discourses about those technologies, came together to disorient and recast the nature of warfare: of how it could be fought, how it might be suffered, and how that suffering might be expressed and understood. The advent of airpower and its use as a weapon of war was central to this disorientation. Former experiences of battle were defined and often mythologised according to spatial, physical, social and legal distinctions between combatants and civilians, the frontline and the home-front, and war-time and peace-time. But as Gernika had demonstrated, air raids conflated these categories. The advent of airpower and its use in war thus exposed a new and totalising sense of vulnerability.

Air-war

Polemical theories and fantastical speculations about this form of war had occupied public debate in Europe for more than a decade before Gernika was bombed, informed by other experiments in death-delivery from the sky—some within but mostly outside Europe. For example, the use of the airplane-as-weapon had been conducted upon European colonies, beginning with the Italian bombing of Tripoli in 1911,¹³ and perhaps most notoriously by the British Royal Air Force during the 1920s under the practice of 'colonial pacification', particularly in the colonial theatres of the Middle East.¹⁴

Before the bombing of Gernika, air-warfare was generally perceived within Europe as a military strategy that occurred elsewhere: in unfamiliar zones among soldiers and strategists, 'seen'

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Tammy M. Proctor, *Civilians in a World at War, 1914-1918* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 105-110; Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn B. Young, *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

¹² See Michael Alpert's forthcoming book *Franco and the Condor Legion: The Spanish Civil War in the Air* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018); and Rafael A. Permuy Lopez, *Air War Over Spain: Aviators, Aircraft and Air Units of the Nationalist and Republican Air Forces 1936-1939* (Hersham: Ian Allan Publishing, 2009).

¹³ Charles Stephenson, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911-1912* (East Sussex: Tattered Flag Press, 2014), 106-7.

¹⁴ Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control*, 5.

by civilians only through the often heavily regulated lens of news-media. The bombing of Gernika disrupted these perceptions. As Susan Sontag observed, what horrified public opinion within Europe about Gernika “was that the slaughter of civilians from the air was happening in Spain; these sorts of things were not supposed to happen *here*”.¹⁵ Sontag also observed that the Spanish Civil War marked the first conflict to be chronicled in a truly modern way: “by a corps of professional photographers at the lines of military engagement...whose work was immediately seen in newspapers and magazines in Spain and abroad”.¹⁶ Therein lies another convergence: the bombing of Gernika exemplified what Manuel Borja-Villel and Rosario Peiro defined as industrial, mass-scale death that “destroyed not only life but also human identity”;¹⁷ it also provoked critical questions about how it is possible to ‘see’, comprehend and know about such atrocities. What does it mean, then, for a historical event such as the bombing of Gernika—which so violently recast perceptions about the life, death and survival of a citizenry—to be expressed on a motionless, silent, two-dimensional canvas, where the event is compressed as an instantaneous flash that belongs not to the documentary, but to the imagination?

The Imaginative Treatment of Reality in Guernica

In this project, I treat Picasso's *Guernica* as a case study through which I consider and formulate answers to these questions. *Guernica* offers a way of understanding a past reality through abstraction and creative invention: incongruous lines, deformed shapes, ruptured perspective—faculties of the imagination. Picasso's vision of the bombing of Gernika is an invented one, an imperfect one; dislocated from spatial, lived reality because of its fragmented assemblage, yet fundamentally linked to the realities of Gernika, high-technology warfare and the demoralisation of civilians. It is linked not just through referral, however, but through imaginative interpretation. By attending to the interplay of imagination and reality in *Guernica*, it is possible to test and judge the utility of the imagination when it is put in the service of historical interpretation. With specific reference to and analysis of *Guernica* and its corresponding historical reality, I contend that it is through the imaginative treatment of reality that we can more fully understand historical realities. In particular, a reality generated by nascent technologies that would, over the decade following the bombing of Gernika, violently impinge on millions of lives as the world fully encountered the reality of total war.

¹⁵ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003): 2-28. Italics in original.

¹⁶ Susan Sontag, “Looking at War,” *The New Yorker*, December 2002, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/12/09/looking-at-war>

¹⁷ Manuel Borja-Villel and Rosario Pieró, “Introduction” in *Pity and Terror: Picasso's Path to Guernica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2017), 2.

Aims and Argument of this Thesis

It is my intention, therefore, to explore the imaginative treatment of reality through an analysis of Picasso's imaginative portrayal of the bombing of Gernika in *Guernica*, and the degree to which the painting informs understandings of human atrocity. Borrowing from Heaney's claim about the imaginative treatment of reality, I will demonstrate the extent to which we might also consider the imagination of such events as useful in the pursuit of historical knowledge about them.

Accordingly, I intend, first, to assess the extent to which the bombing of Gernika might be thought to have challenged, at the time, the possibilities of expression and knowledge about the event. I will appraise the historical context in which the bombing occurred with close reference to Carolyn Nordstrom's concept of the 'war-scape'.¹⁸ Secondly, I will visually analyse Picasso's *Guernica*, including the political conditions in which it was created and exhibited, to interpret how the imagination of the event works to represent and express knowledge of the event. Finally, I will demonstrate the extent to which the imaginative treatment of a historical reality, such as that provided by Picasso, might therefore hold utility for the interpretation of historical atrocities. The structure of my thesis reflects these three intentions, each of which are discussed in their own chapters.

Method and Literature

The bombing of Gernika may be understood through a framework put forward by Nordstrom, according to her concept of the 'war-scape'.¹⁹ Nordstrom developed this theory in view of her claim that the phenomenon of war cannot be understood "in terms of isolated, self-contained cultural communities".²⁰ Rather, the war-scape allows single events to be interpreted and understood relationally. Interpreting the bombing of Gernika in terms of a war-scape, then, allows the meaning of the event to be considered in terms of its larger context of international influences, stories and meanings. This reveals the event as not in itself paradigmatic, as some scholars have argued, but as contingent on an array of converging influences. I make use of the dispatches written by Steer, Monks, Holme and Corman, which are reprinted in Herbert Southworth's 1977 study of diplomacy, journalism and propaganda in the context of the bombing of Gernika. Southworth's detailed text also closely informs my analysis of the event.

¹⁸ Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, a poem written by Holme, based on his experience in Gernika and published posthumously, is a meaningful point of encounter to demonstrate how the event challenged the possibilities of representation.²¹ Holme questions how it is possible to make sense out of a senseless atrocity—indeed, if it is possible at all. I answer Holme in three ways. First, I appraise the historiography of air-warfare and explain how the shifting conditions of war predicated shifting conditions of inquiry about war, life and death, and how each might be endured. Secondly, I interpret and evaluate the accounts of four foreign correspondents who arrived in Gernika some hours after it was bombed, from which much of today's understandings of the event are gleaned. Thirdly, I assess the ways in which political actors, including Franco and Hitler, lied about the bombing, why this occurred, and how this mendacity hindered public knowledge about the event.

In Chapter Two, I explain the conditions in which Picasso's *Guernica* was commissioned and exhibited. Making use of Juan Mirón and Josefina Alix's model reproduction of the 1937 Spanish Pavilion²² and Miriam M. Basilio's recent study,²³ I demonstrate the purpose of the Pavilion and the ways in which *Guernica* served the Republican government's propaganda project. I attend to scholarly literature, emphasising interpretations of the painting put forward by such authors as Herbert Chipp, Frank Russell, Herbert Read, Roland Penrose, Anthony Blunt, Rudolph Arnheim and, more recently, T.J. Clark and Anne M. Wagner, Gijs van Hensbergen, and James Attlee.²⁴ With this, I examine the contested interpretations of *Guernica* and how those meanings have changed over time. My own visual analysis is strongly informed by the 'ways of seeing' and mode of analysis put forward by John Berger.²⁵ In this chapter, Holme's poetic inquiry about the challenges of representation is also used, in a broad sense, to outline how art facilitates a transcendental quality that may be thought to countervail and overcome the challenges positioned by the conditions of reality, which is then applied to *Guernica* and the bombing of Gernika.

²¹ Christopher Holme, "Gernika, 26 April, 1937" in *Portrait* (Oxford: Text & Graphics, 1992), 12-13.

²² Juan Mirón and Josefina Alix, "Maqueta del Pabellon Espanol. Exposicion Internacional de Paris 1938", model assemblage, 140 x 230.5 x 201 cm, 1987, Museo Centro Nacional de Arte Reina Sofia.

²³ Miriam M. Basilio, *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2016).

²⁴ Herbert Chipp, *Picasso's Guernica: History, transformations, meanings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Frank Russell, *Picasso's Guernica: The Labyrinth of Narrative and Vision* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980); Herbert Read, "Picasso's Guernica", *London Bulletin*, no. 6 (October 6, 1938): 6; Roland Penrose, *Picasso: His Life and Work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Anthony Blunt, "Picasso Unfrosted", *The Spectator*, October 8, 1937, 584; Blunt, *Picasso's Guernica* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Rudolph Arheim, *The Genesis of a Painting: Picasso's Guernica* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); T.J. Clark and Anne M. Wagner, *Pity and Terror: Picasso's Path to Guernica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2017); Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013); Gijs van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth Century Icon* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004); James Attlee, *Guernica: Painting the End of the World* (London: Head of Zeus, 2017).

²⁵ John Berger et al., *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972); John Berger, *The Moment of Cubism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969).

Introduction

In my final chapter, I bring together my analysis of the event, its challenge to representation, and interpretation of *Guernica* to demonstrate how the imaginative treatment of reality poses a form of access through which that reality may be known. In view of the ways in which the event vexed the provision of historical truth, and by considering the potentially transcendental function of art outlined in the previous chapters, I determine the consequences of the imaginative treatment of a historical reality in *Guernica*. Specifically, by examining the interplay of imagination and reality in the painting; its universal faculty; its symbolic, globally-recognised status as a searing accusation against acts of terror; and its contemporary use to denounce civilian atrocities, I demonstrate the utility of the imagination for the interpretation of historical events of atrocity.

The Imaginative Treatment of Reality

“Within our individual selves we can reconcile two orders of knowledge which we might call the practical and the poetic”, wrote Seamus Heaney. He went on to affirm that each form of knowledge can redress the other, and “the frontier between them is there for the crossing”.²⁶ That there is, or could be, a confluence between these forms of knowledge is a helpful opening to a complex, long contemplated process rejected as often as it is embraced: the poetic treatment of the practical, which is taken here to mean the imaginative treatment of past realities.

To reconstruct a past reality through the imagination is to cross Heaney’s frontier, and in doing so to encounter “the worm of epistemological doubt”,²⁷ as Ben Highmore had it, stirred by the project of exploring what is thinkable of the past in the present. To cross is to vex Leopold von Ranke’s prescription to “show how things essentially were”²⁸ in the provision of truth or establishment of fact that largely underwrote nineteenth-century historical discourse. It is to evoke the Aristotelian concept of complementarity between poetry and history²⁹ and join them both, as Hayden White explained, in “the human effort to represent, imagine and think the world in its totality”.³⁰ It is to heed Alex Danchev’s rallying call to refuse to see art, both literary and visual, as “merely illustrative of more fundamental issues in the ‘real’ world”³¹ but as actively and urgently consequential. It is to claim the impetus to interrogate those consequences and put them to use in

²⁶ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995): xviii

²⁷ Ben Highmore, “An Epistemological Awakening: Michel de Certeau and the Writing of History,” *Social Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (2007): 13.

²⁸ Leopold von Ranke. *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. Georg G. Iggers (New York: Routledge, 2011): xix.

²⁹ Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (Iowa: State University of Iowa, 1957): 302-303;

³⁰ Hayden White, “Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality,” *Rethinking History* 9, no. 2-3 (2005): 147.

³¹ Alex Danchev and Debbie Lisle, “Introduction: art, politics, purpose,” *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 776.

the work of questioning, interpreting and understanding the past, and subsequently, if we are to believe John Berger, see the present clearly.³²

The question of the imaginative treatment of reality is, broadly speaking, a question of form and content: the scholarship considered here asks in what form it is reasonable, responsible or useful for the past to take? How might an artistic form carry and answer to its historical content? What might we, in the present, hope to learn of a past that is, as many of these works affirm, estranged from the present? And then there is the moral implication: what kinds of questions does art ask of the past, and what kind of moral judgement does art provoke toward it, which is then by consequence launched into the present? Indirectly, and a little more generally, these works tend not only to interrogate the ways in which the past can be understood through an imaginative form, but why those pasts should be understood through that form at all. White made the distinction thus:

A simply true account of the world based on what the documentary record permits one to talk about what happened in it at particular times, and places can provide knowledge of only a very small portion of what 'reality' consists of. However, the rest of the real, after we have said what we can assert to be true about it, would not be everything we could imagine about it.³³

As such, in what follows there is a concert between the specific question of how the poetic treatment of the practical might be successfully employed, and the more general questions of why this might be considered useful.

The Poetic Treatment of the Practical

There are a number of significant works that consider the efficacy of the poetic treatment of the practical, or the imaginative treatment of reality. The focus is not necessarily on historiography, but the following works can be said to hinge on the same principle: that the imaginative treatment of reality provokes a deeper, clearer or more nuanced understanding of reality. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum, for example, claimed that there are certain truths about the moral situations of human life that can only be adduced through the faculties of imagination. Specifically, this is by attending to representations of reality in fictional, literary texts.³⁴ Iris Murdoch suggested a similar notion in her essay "Against Dryness", where she argued for the ways in which literature may act as a dynamic enabler, allowing its readers to "rediscover a sense of the density of our lives" and provide "a new vocabulary of experience" in the face of the "impenetrable" realities of human life.³⁵ For both

³² John Berger et al., *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972): 16.

³³ White, "Introduction", 147.

³⁴ Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁵ Iris Murdoch, "Against Dryness," *Encounter* no. 21 (1961): 19.

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scholars, imagination as it is employed and generated through fictional literature is a discursive tool through which a certain depth of engagement with and understanding of present reality—the practical—can be made manifest through the poetic.

Within Nussbaum and Murdoch's ideas, there are intimations of certain theorists, many of them French post-structuralists,³⁶ who explored in sharp objection to contextualist and empiricist models of history, the ways in which the past might be considered separate and therefore estranged from the present. Under this lens, any form of historical knowledge is relegated to that separateness because it contains, and Michel Foucault recognised, its own context, its own conditions of coming into being.³⁷ Historiography, for those theorists, is often an experiment in writing the un-writable, since the present is always dealing with a past that is fundamentally distinct from the present.

It is necessary to begin with an explanation of the territory claimed by thinkers concerned with the struggle to represent an estranged past and the scepticism they triggered, and in some cases embraced, for historiography. This scholastic pursuit offered an approach that recast the boundaries between fiction and history to remake them porous and ridden with incitement. As it was put by Fredric Jameson in continuation of post-structuralist thought, "the distinction between something expressed and the...form through which it is expressed is archaic: there is no incorrect formulation of a true idea."³⁸ This might be read as a possible, albeit laconic, abstract of the post-structuralist influence on historiography. Imagination, then, can be put to use with legitimacy and vital consequence in the service of interpreting the past. The imaginative form may carry, and indeed answer to its historical content. For proponents of the value of the historical novel,³⁹ and more recently, historical film,⁴⁰ it matters less, if at all, that the representation of that past is illusory or distorted by its imaginative, inventive treatment; again, the poetic treatment of the practical. This kind of endeavour should be judged, according to Carolyn Forché, "by its consequences, not by our ability to verify its truth".⁴¹ This is quite like Friedrich Nietzsche's claim for the value of illusion

³⁶ Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History," trans. Peter Wexler, ed. Michael Lane, *Structualism: A Reader* (London: Cape, 1970); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia UP, 1988); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002); Niall Lucy, *A Derrida Dictionary* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004).

³⁷ Anne Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (Sydney: UNSW Press Ltd): 197-198; Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1972.

³⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Sartre: The Origins of Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961): 81.

³⁹ Herbert Butterfield, *The Historical Novel: An Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924); Beverly Southgate, *History Meets Fiction* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd., 2009); Paul Wake, "'Except in the case of historical fact': history and the historical novel," *Rethinking History* 20, no. 1 (2016): 81-2.

⁴⁰ Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁴¹ Carolyn Forché, "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art" in Carolyn Forche and Duncan Wu, *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500-2001* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014), 50.

(*Wahn*) for the affirmation of life and his attitude toward the "Use and Abuse of History",⁴² the translated title of his essay that underwrites much of his aesthetic philosophy.⁴³ With a nod to Nietzsche, David Bakan wrote that "a metaphor or fiction might open a door that cannot be opened by approaches that are too weighed down by literal truth",⁴⁴ and according to Danchev, the literal, after all, has its limits.⁴⁵

The Imagination of Violence

"How do we make comprehensible stories out of incomprehensible atrocities?"⁴⁶ So began James Dawes' inquiry into the ways fiction might be thought to represent, bear witness, and answer to atrocity. This is a truly modern question, though its theoretical antecedents are embedded in those works that began to question what was knowable of the past, and how it could come to be known in the present. Jean-Francois Lyotard's metaphor of an earthquake so powerful that it would shatter all instruments of measurement is pertinent here.⁴⁷ The twentieth century experienced many such earthquakes: technologies developed toward the experiment of humanity's inhumanity generated atrocities that breached the accepted frontiers of things. Throughout the twentieth century, war forged its encroachment into daily urban life; the civilian spaces of relative safety. This shifting spatiality of war served to recast the frontiers of not only warfare itself, but of the cultural imagination, knowledge and expression about these events. This predicated shifting condition of inquiry—particularly in the second half of the twentieth century—whereby the value of the literal for understandings of atrocity was often perceived to be usurped by the magnitude of atrocity itself. The protocols of "official and institutionalised sense-making",⁴⁸ as Michael J. Shapiro described it, maintained by the documentary record and ostensibly authenticated by its ability to be verifiable, began to be perceived by a number of scholars across several discourses as ineffective modes of representation, unable to carry or answer to profoundly horrific realities. In the aftermath of atrocity, form and content required a new accord.

⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Use and Abuse of History" in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1975), 57-123.

⁴³ Daniel Came, *Nietzsche on Art and Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁴ Alex Danchev, *On War and Art and Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 3.

⁴⁵ David Bakan, "Narrative Research and Hurt and Harm", in *Ethics and Process in the Narrative Study of Lives* ed. Ruthellen Joesselson (London: Sage, 1996), 29.

⁴⁶ James Dawes, *That the World May Know: Bearing Witness to Atrocity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 2.

⁴⁷ Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 56.

⁴⁸ Michael J. Shapiro, *War Crimes, Atrocity and Justice* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014), 5.

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That “aftermath” was a space defined by Forché as “a region of devastated consciousness”, in which we are able to read the “trace of extremity”.⁴⁹ This trace, she stressed, comes to us not through assertions maintained by documentary evidence, but in the scarred landscape of the battlefield, in oral and written testimony, in unreconstructed ruins — and their extension in art.⁵⁰ Nadine Gordimer discussed this discrepancy in terms of the difference between the forms of “journalistic truth and inward testimony”.⁵¹ While the former might succeed in communicating the “description of the sequence of events, the methodologies of expert analysis”,⁵² it is the inward testimony that generates the “intense awareness, the antennae of receptivity” that transforms the event of depiction into “enduring significance that has meaning”.⁵³ Inward testimony, for both Forché and Gordimer, is an artistic form belonging to the genre of “witness literature”, defined as something of a repository of imaginative redescriptions born in the threshold space between history/fiction, practical/poetic, bearing the trace of extremity in them. Put another way, this form might be defined as a prosthesis for the instruments of measurement shattered by Lyotard’s earthquake.

Holocaust studies are particularly marked by the breach between form and content, and it is the aftermath of this catastrophe in which such new challenges were provoked with particular salience. Indeed, Lyotard’s earthquake metaphor was born from the struggle to represent this catastrophe. Theodor Adorno’s often-quoted dictum, that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,⁵⁴ is routinely held as one insignia of these new challenges. There are many travails in that vexed expanse.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Forché, “Reading the Living Archives”, 50.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵¹ Nadine Gordimer, “Witness: The Inward Testimony” in *Burn this Book*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 99.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Theodor Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,” in *Theodor W. Adorno: Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicolson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982): 32; Klaus Hofman, “Poetry after Auschwitz: Adorno’s dictum,” *German Life and Letters* 58, no. 2 (2005): 182-194

⁵⁵ It would not be possible to list with any adequacy the breadth of writing that has been produced on this topic. The following major works—which are not exhaustible—are listed because they deal with the visibility of trauma in the context of Holocaust studies, and therefore have a specific bearing on the current discussion: Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Beryl Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art Within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Saul Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004); Susan Crane, “Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography,” *History and Theory* 47, no. 3 (2008): 309-330.

There is, perhaps, a more fitting insignia for these challenges, at least for the present discussion, which introduces Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. There, in an appeal to "crash through" the facades put up by the status quo, he wrote that "the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth".⁵⁶ This suggests that truth is discernible based not on objective verifiability but the subjective experience of Gordimer's "inward testimony",⁵⁷ or Forché's "scarred landscape".⁵⁸ By evoking the "facades...into which our consciousness crashes", Adorno also suggests that the prevailing forces of his cultural moment would work to repress if not completely silence these voices. Hence his instruction to "crash through". This countervailing gesture echoes in a principle pronounced by Simone Weil in a posthumous collection, *Gravity and Grace*. There, she wrote that "if we know the way society is unbalanced, we must do what we can to add weight to the lighter scale".⁵⁹ Indeed, much of her work is informed by the idea of counterweighing, of pushing against, of crashing through. "Obedience to the form of gravity. The greatest sin",⁶⁰ she declared. Heaney cited Weil's commandment in his own collection *The Redress of Poetry*, where he demonstrated the capacity for art, specifically poetry, to "place a counter-reality in the scales".⁶¹ For Heaney, it is a reality that is only imagined, but is nevertheless consequential, because "it is imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual and can therefore...balance out against the historical situation".⁶²

That art can offer "a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances",⁶³ as Heaney had it, is a position articulated by Adorno. As noted by Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, in an effort to amend the many misinterpretations of "no poetry after Auschwitz", Adorno revisited "Auschwitz" again and again, attending to though never resolving the contradictory notion that "suffering tolerated not forgetting...that this suffering demands the continued existence of art [even as]...it prohibits it".⁶⁴ Again, this is a form of disobeying, of countervailing, prevailing forces. It is similar to Saul Friedlander's notion that, in the case of the Shoah, the clarity and durability of the historical record can only be maintained through an "uneasy juxtaposition of objective historical narrative with the

⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (Routledge: London, 2004), 17.

⁵⁷ Gordimer, "Witness: Inward Testimony", 99.

⁵⁸ Forché, "Reading the Living Archives", 50.

⁵⁹ Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace* (London: Routledge, 2002), 171.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶¹ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, 5.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "'The Grave in the Air': Unbound Metaphors" in Saul Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 262.

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victim's anguished voices".⁶⁵ In this statement there is an intimation of the tense, epistemologically unstable, conjoining of two reality levels: the conventional historical chronicle and the imaginative interpretation—the practical and the poetic. Heaney emphasised that such a form does not simplify or reduce, but “matches the complex reality which surrounds it and out of which it is generated”.⁶⁶ For Friedlander, this is the only way genuine knowledge about an “earthquake” like the Shoah can be adduced. Even then, an “impenetrable opaqueness”⁶⁷ remains at the core of our understanding of this event. The complexities, ruptures, breaks and discontinuities induced by that catastrophe predicated the need for continuous reflection, rather than the imposition of a definitive judgement.

Such ideas are explored at length in Elizabeth Goldberg and Alexandra Moore's edited work *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*. With a “focus upon form and content in mind”,⁶⁸ the essays contained in their volume, among a variety of interdisciplinary excursions, contemplated how the process of narrativising human rights discourses may work to “illuminate both the limitations of those discourses and the imaginative possibilities of alternative frameworks”⁶⁹ for telling, understanding, and witnessing atrocity. The nexus of literary art and the experience of collective human suffering brought about by atrocity—its limits, its openings, and its ethical freight—has claimed an expansive area of research in the last decade.⁷⁰ To occupy that nexus is to trespass between the practical and the poetic, because that research fundamentally involves the imaginative treatment of past realities. Goldberg and Moore are interested, specifically, in the ways in which literary forms might work to regenerate cultures of rights in lawless places, “in the void of ground zero, in a lethal equation that cannot be resolved; in an aftermath that has no definitive endpoint”.⁷¹ Therefore, their study proposes a form that “asks for interpretation rather than announcing its conclusions, precisely by rendering what happened then/there as a call to both here/now and to elsewhere/the future”.⁷²

⁶⁵ Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History and Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), vii-viii.

⁶⁶ Heaney, *Redress of Poetry*, 10.

⁶⁷ Friedlander, *Memory, History and Extermination*, viii.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth Goldberg and Alexandra Moore, *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁰ Alexandra Schultheis Moore, *Vulnerability and Security in Human Rights Literature and Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2016); Fernando J. Rosenberg, *After Human Rights: Literature, Visual Arts and Film in Latin America, 1990-2010* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

⁷¹ Goldberg and Moore, *Theoretical Perspectives*, 8.

⁷² *Ibid.*

A similar objective underwrites Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg's study of representations of trauma in modernity, but on behalf of the visual arts.⁷³ The book proposed ways in which the visual object might be thought to mediate traumatic histories "to which the object in some sense bears witness but for which it can only account imperfectly."⁷⁴ This is, compared to similar investigations on behalf of the literary arts, a less developed project. For many, it is an imperative one, made all the more urgent when considered in terms of the challenge of making visible what some scholars, including Elaine Scarry,⁷⁵ take to be "essentially unimaginable",⁷⁶ as well as the omnipresence of both images and atrocities (and images of atrocity) in the twenty-first century. The traditional logocentric proclivities of the literary are, for some, too restricting: Shapiro, for example, argued for the importance of challenging "unreflective protocols of official and institutionalised sense making" by emphasising interpretations of "war crimes, atrocities and justice...through artistic texts".⁷⁷ David Levi-Strauss similarly argued that "we cannot bear reality, but we bear images...we believe them because we need what we are in them".⁷⁸ The unique capacities of visual art, especially two-dimensional forms such as painting and drawing, are such that they require an analysis quite divergent from that of literary art in the project of representing past atrocity. Images are, as Peter Burke wrote, "irredeemably mute": they acknowledge something, but explain nothing. Or, as Foucault put it, "what we see never resides in what we say".⁷⁹ Yet some information about the past, as White noted, "can be provided only by visual images".⁸⁰ Such information might constitute what lies in that unstable yet paradoxically fecund space between imagination and the reality of atrocity.

In her book *Seeing Witness: Visuality and the Ethics of Testimony*, Jane Blocker situates herself within, even embraces, that space. Blocker appraises "a new kind of history writing, one based on performance rather than on the preservation-driven logic of the archive" by examining a series of contemporary artworks to understand "the politics of witnessing".⁸¹ It is

⁷³ Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg, eds. *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity* (New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2006).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷⁵ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁷⁶ Elizabeth Dauphinée, "The Politics of the Body in Pain: Reading the Ethics of Imagery", *Security Dialogue* 38, no. 2 (2007): 139-155.

⁷⁷ Michael J. Shapiro, *War Crimes, Atrocity and Justice* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014), 1-2.

⁷⁸ David Levi-Strauss, "The Highest Degree of Illusion," in *Between the Eyes* (New York: Aperture, 2003), 185.

⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2005), 10.

⁸⁰ Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty" *The American Historical Review* 95, no. 5 (1988): 1194.

⁸¹ Jane Blocker, *Seeing Witness: Visuality and the Ethics of Testimony* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 28; see also Blocker, *Becoming Past: History in Contemporary Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

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an exercise in showing, not telling. Blocker responds to the sense of distrust that is sometimes regarded as inherent in the visual arts—their drama, theatrics, and unfaithfulness to fact—by arguing, in the same vein as Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman,⁸² for historical representation that “breaks the frame, that feels more than it knows, that abjures empiricism”. The onlooker (or the ‘witness’, in Blocker’s idiom) in the present might, then, as Levi-Strauss suggested, place their faith in the image, so that “the ‘unimaginable’, and the ‘unbelievable’ may be revealed”.

Roland Bleiker, reflecting on the aesthetic turn in the field of International Relations, noted that a recognition of the value of an aesthetic approach to political contexts has largely already occurred.⁸³ His text *Aesthetics and World Politics* contributed in no small part to shaping this recognition,⁸⁴ and his more recent book *Visual Global Politics*—a compendium of essays from more than 50 contributors—expands it even further.⁸⁵ These essays treat images (photographic and cinematic, as well as two-dimensional artistic mediums such as painting) not as simply representations or illustrations but as political forces in their own right. This principle informs much of Danchev’s more recent work, including his book *On Art and War and Terror*, in which art, war and terror are brought into a fascinating and at times uneasy dialogue, with compelling results.⁸⁶ The contributions of such authors⁸⁷ may have demonstrated the transience of Burke’s speculation that “historians still do not take the evidence of images seriously enough”.⁸⁸ Burke’s text narrates the ways in which images have been used (and misused) as historical evidence, and provides a helpful framework through which greater engagement with a broad range of visual evidence may be used toward developing more nuanced interpretations of the past.

The act of crossing the frontier between the practical and the poetic is, importantly, not neutral: it does not leave things as they were found. The literature assessed here is concerned with what is altered, what is tempered, or what is uncovered under the “imaginative transformation of human life”;⁸⁹ Heaney reasoned that this is the truest way the human experience may be fully comprehended. Another way of putting this, especially amid the problems of representation predicated by conditions of atrocity, might be “consult the artists”.

⁸² Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁸³ Roland Bleiker, “In Search of Thinking Space: Reflections on the Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 45, no. 2 (2017): 260.

⁸⁴ Roland Bleiker, *Aesthetics and World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁸⁵ Roland Bleiker, *Visual Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁸⁶ Alex Danchev, *On Art and War and Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁸⁷ Michael J. Shapiro, *Studies in Trans-Disciplinary Method: After the aesthetic turn* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁸⁸ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion, 2001).

⁸⁹ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, xviii.

The texts considered in this literature review do this in various ways, with contradictory demands, all the while interpreting and reinterpreting what might be understood as knowable of the past.

Significance

This thesis seeks to expand upon the well-established project of reinterpreting what can be understood as knowable of the past. By understanding *Guernica* in terms of its imaginative treatment of historical reality, I contribute to understandings about how art and artists are not only relevant but necessary and consequential to the way historians interpret past atrocities.

Danchev, the late Historian and Professor of International Relations, steadfastly maintained that “some of the most provocative and innovative analysis of difficult political problems comes from interaction among artists, scholars, curators, students and audiences”.⁹⁰ By conjoining the faculties of reality and imagination in my interpretation of *Guernica* and *Gernika*, this thesis seeks to heed Danchev’s proposal, with a shared understanding that art offers intellectual possibilities far beyond its own medium. Indirectly, this project also heeds Picasso’s often-quoted rallying call that “painting is not made to decorate apartments, it is an offensive and defensive weapon against the enemy”.⁹¹ So, as Danchev said, let us mobilise it.

⁹⁰ Danchev and Lisle, “Introduction: art, politics, purpose,” 777.

⁹¹ Simone Téry, “Picasso n’est pas officier dans L’Armée française”, *Les Lettres Françaises* 5, no. 48 (March 1945): 6. Quoted in *Picasso and the War Years, 1937-1945*, eds. Steven A. Nash, Robert Rosenblum and Brigitte Baer (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 77.

CHAPTER ONE

INTERPRETING THE BOMBING OF GERNIKA

Bombs kill and mutilate, but they also destroy the meanings of things.¹ This is both a present-tense assertion and a retrospection, equally applicable to the conditions of the present as to those of the past: a history of killings and mutilations and meanings destroyed by technologies of savagery and death-delivery systems of ever-accelerating sophistication and totality. Bombs also reconstruct meanings. Their force and consequence bind time and place in public memory, then go beyond those contextual origins in forms of story and symbol. This is true of those bombs dropped on 26 April 1937, during the tenth month of the Spanish Civil War, on the Basque town of Gernika. The bombing constituted a unique moment of convergence wherein nascent technologies, and discourses about those technologies, came together to recast the conditions and meanings of war—of how it could be carried out and how it could be suffered. It was this convergence that established the bombing of Gernika as “probably the most passionately discussed single event of the Civil War”.² It was an event that rapidly became an idea, firmly established among the ever-growing list of place-names and dates and corresponding death tolls which, once uttered, though dislocated from contextual detail, beget a collective recognition of meaning that transcends the literal: Gernika is, according to Pierre Vilar, “both Reims and Hiroshima. The symbols complement each other without being confused”.³

What follows is an interpretation of the converging forces that materialised at Gernika to investigate how the event became understood as an idea bearing significant symbolic force, signalling meanings beyond the circumstances that provided its occasion. Carolyn Nordstrom’s concept of war-scapes will inform the method of this investigation.⁴ The war-scape, in view of Nordstrom’s claim that the phenomenon of war cannot be understood “in terms of isolated, self-contained cultural communities”,⁵ allows single events to be interpreted and understood in relationality. An explanation and analysis of the war-scape to which Gernika belongs will reveal the event as not itself paradigmatic, but contingent on a larger context of international influences, stories and meanings. Assessing the bombing of Gernika in these terms will determine how the

¹ This sentence is adapted from John Berger’s contemplation of *Guernica* and the 36 Days War in: John Berger, “How Silent Images Can Break the Silence,” *Aperture* 91, no.191 (2008): 46.

² Peter Monteath, “Guernica reconsidered: Fifty years of evidence,” *War and Society* 5, no. 1 (1983): 79.

³ Pierre Vilar, “Foreword,” in *Guernica! Guernica! A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda and History*, ed. Herbert Southworth (Berkeley: University of California Press), xii.

⁴ Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 37.

⁵ *Ibid.*

event challenged possibilities of representation, where the shifting conditions of war predicated shifting conditions of inquiry about war, life and death, and how each might be endured.

The Spanish Civil War

The bombing of Gernika was a calculated tactic of the Nationalist campaign in the Basque region of northern Spain, executed in an attempt to take control of Bilbao, an industrial port-city and an important strategic centre.⁶ Spain had been embroiled in civil war since 17 July 1936, when General Sanjurjo and the Nationalist army launched a military coup against the Republican government, which had come to power by elections held in 1936. The country was already divided along regional, class, political and religious lines, which both provoked and were exacerbated by the outbreak of the Civil War.⁷ Neither the Nationalist nor Republican sides can be said to be homogenous in their programmes, aims or alliances; each encompassed a number of competing groups who were united only by their pro-Republican or anti-Republican stance. Nationalist ambitions broadly included support for conservative governance, clericalism, and hostility to socialism, communism, anarchism, regional independence and radical social reform.⁸ The Republican side comprised an even less homogenous assembly of liberals, socialists, communists, anarchists, modernisers, trade unionists and left-wing intellectuals,⁹ divided in ambition but united in their shared rejection of conservative Nationalism and fascism. However, it is important to underscore that both sides were politically divided and cannot be said to have had uniform or indeed unchanging agendas.

At the outbreak of the civil war, the Basques were at a junction. The two most historically prominent and stubborn of political ambitions held by the devoutly Catholic Basque people were clericalism, which was under violent attack from the left, and regional autonomy, which was utterly rejected by the right.¹⁰ Despite their traditional Catholicism, which would have aligned the Basque people with Franco's interests, their solidarity from the first moments of the 1936 military revolt lay, reluctantly, with the Republican side. The ambition for regional autonomy contributed significantly to this stance.¹¹ Indeed, the beleaguered Republic rewarded Basque loyalty by grudgingly granting

⁶ Bilbao eventually fell to the Nationalists on 19 June, 1937. See Filipe Riebeiro de Meneses, *Franco and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2001), 49-51.

⁷ Stanley G. Payne gives a laconic explanation of the origins and effects of these tensions in the introduction to his text *The Collapse of the Spanish Republic, 1933-1936* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). See also Paul Preston, "Social War Begins, 1931-1933" in *The Spanish Holocaust: Inquisition and Extermination in Twentieth-Century Spain* (London: Harper Press, 2012).

⁸ Ian Patterson, *Guernica and Total War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 10-11.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Paddy Woodworth, *Basque Country: A Cultural History* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2007), 49-50.

¹¹ Ibid; Fernando Molina, "The reign of Christ over the nation: The Basque question in the Spanish Republic, 1931-1936" *National Identities* 13, 1 (2011): 17-18.

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autonomy to the Basque provinces of Vizcaya, Álava and Guipúzcoa.¹² The alliance was broadcast thus by the Basque Nationalist Party some days after Franco's coup: "faced with the struggle between the citizens and fascism, between the Republic and the Monarchy, its [Basque] principles place it inevitably on the side of the citizens and the Republic".¹³

On 31 March 1937, the Nationalist army—composed of soldiers of the Foreign Legion and of Spanish Morocco, Italian infantrymen, as well as advisors, pilots, armaments and aircraft of the German Condor Legion¹⁴—began their campaign to take control of Republican aligned Bilbao through a series of airstrikes through the Basque country. The Basques were weakly armed in comparison, and their capacity for adequate defence was minimal, otherwise non-existent.¹⁵ Durango, some 17 kilometres from Gernika, was the first town to be bombed. This attack was followed by the bombings of Irún, Eibar, Potes, Elgeta, Otxandio and Ellorio: all undefended civilian targets.¹⁶ The attack on Gernika was therefore not without precedent: it was a calculated part of a strategic offensive. It was, however, of another dimension, both in scale and in public reception.

News of the Bombing

"In the form of its execution and the scale of destruction it wrought, no less than in the selection of its objective, the raid on Guernica is unparalleled in military history".¹⁷ So declared the British journalist George Steer in a dispatch sent from Bilbao for publication in the afternoon bulletin of London's *The Times* on 27 April 1937. The raid to which he referred had occurred the previous afternoon, on 26 April. As Steer described in his memoir, at around 10 pm that evening the journalists drove from Bilbao to Gernika,¹⁸ after learning the news mid-dinner from a weeping Basque official that "Guernica is destroyed. The Germans bombed and bombed and bombed".¹⁹ Accompanying Steer was British journalist Christopher Holme, of Reuters news agency; Noel Monks,

¹² Woodworth, *Basque Country*, 51.

¹³ Quoted in Robert P. Clark, *The Basques: The Franco Years and Beyond* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1979), 58-59; and Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, 5.

In his text, Clark noted the origin of this announcement as first appearing on July 19 in *Euzkadi*, the National Basque newspaper, citing in his footnote: "El Partido Nacionalista Vasco", a mimeographed report issued by the Basque Nationalist Party sometime in the late 1960s, 19-20.

Southworth, however, cites: Andres Irujo Olló, 24. Southworth is most likely referring to Andres Irujo Olló, *Los Vascos Y La Republica Espanola: Contribucion a la Guerra Civil* (Buenos Aires: Ekin S.R.L, 1945).

Irujo Olló appears to have quoted (in Spanish) the same passage that appears in Southworth, but does not provide a citation.

¹⁴ Michael Seidman, *The Victorious Counterrevolution: The Nationalist Effort in the Spanish Civil War* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), 55-66.

¹⁵ Xabier Irujo, *Gernika 1937: The Market Day Massacre* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2015), 161.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48-51.

¹⁷ George Steer, "The Tragedy of Guernica", *The Times*, April 27, 1937, 2.

¹⁸ George Steer, *The Tree of Gernika: A Field Study of Modern War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938): 242.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; Noel Monks, *Eyewitness* (London: Muller Ltd., 1995), 96.

Australian correspondent of the *Daily Express*; and Mathieu Corman, Belgian correspondent of a two-month-old Parisienne daily, *Ce Soir*. Steer was not alone in considering the event unparalleled. Each of the dispatches produced by the four journalists describe the horror they witnessed in the aftermath of the attack. Apart from his article, Holme privately recorded a poetic account of what he saw. "Gernika, April 26, 1937" begins:

The world ended tonight.
There in that unreal desolation
Of molten tunnel, flame-arched passageway,
House-hung setpieces dripping cement and bricks,
A handful of dim creatures
Are scratching for fragments of their slaughtered world.²⁰

The story of the destruction of Gernika necessarily begins with the experiences and reports of these four journalists because, as Southworth claimed, "without the presence of foreign correspondents and Spanish representatives of the foreign press in Bilbao on the night of April 26, there would not have been the event of Guernica as we know it today".²¹ It was the stories produced by these correspondents, read internationally for weeks after the event, that largely determined the bombing of Gernika—not the first air-raid of the Spanish Civil War,²² nor the first in the Basque region, nor the most deadly or internationally significant event of that conflict—as a situation that would garner enduring international consternation and controversy.

In his towering study, Southworth confirmed that the basic facts of the reports filed by Steer, Monks, Holme and Corman are consistent.²³ Hindsight reveals that they also contained many of the same conclusions that were finally reached after 81 years of debate surrounding accountability, intention and the scale of the material destruction.²⁴ They each stated that the town was bombed from the air on the afternoon of Monday, 26 April—a traditional market day. During that afternoon, the town swelled with peasants gathering to sell and exchange their goods and because of this, coupled with the fact that Gernika was already brimming with refugees and injured soldiers, the population of the town had increased significantly that day. They reported that the bombing lasted for more than three hours, that airplanes dropped explosive and incendiary bombs, that many inhabitants who attempted to seek shelter outside the town were relentlessly pursued in the fields and along the roads by machine-gunning aircrafts, and that Gernika had been set alight

²⁰ Christopher Holme, "Gernika, 26 April 1937" in *Portrait* (Oxford: Text & Graphics, 1992): 12-13.

²¹ Southworth, *Guernica!*, 36.

²² Richard P. Hallion and Richard Mason, "The Spanish Civil War" in *Strike from the Sky: The History of Battlefield Air Attack, 1910-1945* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010): 92-97.

²³ Southworth, *Guernica!*, 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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and largely reduced to rubble. Each correspondent cited German culpability, evidenced from alleged sightings of Luftwaffe aircrafts (which they later verified were Junker 52 and Heinkel 51 bombers and Heinkel 111 fighters)²⁵ as well as shells of exploded bombs that were unearthed from the debris.²⁶ Affirming the technological precociousness of the attack, Xabier Irujo recently noted that the attack on Gernika would be called, in contemporary terms, an indiscriminate carpet bombing.²⁷

The Dead

The reports of Steer, Monks, Holme and Corman consistently noted the extensive material damage caused by the bombing. It was due to this level of physical damage to the town that each reporter explained the challenge, if not impossibility, of calculating an exact resultant death toll—though they all estimated a figure of well into the hundreds, if not thousands. Steer wrote that “it is impossible to state yet the number of the victims,”²⁸ and in Holme’s dispatch as it appeared in London’s *Evening News*, he stated that “it is not yet known how many hundred civilians...lost their lives from shells or fire”.²⁹ Monks wrote in his first cable to London that “hundreds of bodies had been found in the debris”,³⁰ a week later asserting that “I saw 600 bodies”³¹ lying dead in the fields outside the town centre. Corman quoted a figure of 800 dead in his first report,³² and in his second report stated that this number was probably larger still.³³ The immediate chaos and consternation in which these journalists first encountered the aftermath also contributed to the difficulty of estimating the number of dead. Steer attested to this in his memoir:

Some of the witnesses were quite dumb. They were digging them out of ruined houses—families at a time, dead and blue-black with bruising. Others were brought in from just outside Gernika with machine-gun bullets in their bodies; one, a lovely girl. The militia cried as they laid her out on the ground...they could give no reason for their tears—they just cried.³⁴

Today, the statistics that are generally quoted and upheld by the Basque government are 1654 dead and 889 injured.³⁵ However, the origins of these figures are ambiguous. Southworth attributes them

²⁵ Southworth, *Guernica!*, 371.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

²⁷ Irujo, *The Market Day Massacre*, 56.

²⁸ Steer, “The Tragedy of Guernica”, *Times*, April 27, 1937, 2.

²⁹ “The Most Appalling Air Raid Ever Known”, *Evening News*, April 29, 1937, 1.

³⁰ Noel Monks, *Daily Express*, April 28, 1937, 1.

³¹ Noel Monks, *Daily Express*, May 11, 1937, 1.

³² Mathieu Corman, *Ce Soir*, April 28, 1937, 1.

³³ Mathieu Corman, *Ce Soir*, April 29, 1937, 1.

³⁴ Steer, *Tree of Gernika*, 244.

³⁵ Gernika Peace Museum Foundation, “The Bombing of Gernika,” last modified 2016, http://www.museodelapaz.org/en/docu_bombing.php; Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1965), 537.

to the Duchess of Atholl, a prominent figure in international support for the Spanish Republic, who in her 1938 book *Searchlight on Spain* credited them to “the latest official statement”,³⁶ but gave no further information. Southworth’s claim in 1977 that “nobody knows how many people were killed in the bombing of Guernica”³⁷ is still true today.

The Gernika event Southworth wrote of in 1977, two years after the death of Francisco Franco that marked the end of 36 years of dictatorship in Spain, is different to the Gernika event as it is understood in the twenty-first century. At that time, some 40 years after its destruction, Gernika still presented an impenetrable “labyrinth”³⁸ to its chroniclers—at least those who did not cling with incessant tunnel-vision to strict partisan interpretations of what had occurred on the afternoon of 26 April.³⁹ Archival inaccessibility due to vigilant censorship;⁴⁰ reconstructions of the story according to ideological, strategic or otherwise vehemently propagandised perspectives;⁴¹ silences from within and outside of Spain; misinformation and perpetual denial or blame: all these competing forces, at once raw material and by-product of a situation that bore heavy human cost and culpability, meant that the possibility of establishing the unequivocal truth of the bombing of Gernika was, and largely continues to be, unattainable. These were the conditions in which Southworth’s scrupulous research was committed, which finally made unambiguous many details of the event that, in general, remain undisputed since. Today, no such labyrinth exists. With the opening of the Peace Museum of Gernika, an institution dedicated to preserving archival material pertaining to the bombing (as well as housing Southworth’s large personal collection of Gernika-related material)⁴² and upholding the “theory and application of peace studies”,⁴³ an official, mainstream narrative has been publicly committed. While there are empirical aspects of the event that remain contested and will likely never be established (the exact death toll, or the population of the town on the day it was bombed,

³⁶ Katharine Marjory Ramsey, Duchess of Atholl, *Searchlight on Spain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938), 189.

³⁷ Southworth, *Guernica!*, 370.

³⁸ Vilar, “Foreword” in *Guernica!*, xii.

³⁹ An explanation of the denial and manipulation of the story of the bombing of Gernika can be found in Southworth, “Riposte from Salamanca” in *Guernica! Guernica!*, 31-43. Also see Luis Bolin’s book, *Spain: The Vital Years* (London: Cassell, 1967). As Southworth explained, Bolin was staunchly pro-Nationalist, and a key director of the manipulation of the Gernika story.

⁴⁰ Paul Preston, “Censorship and commitment: Foreign correspondents in the Spanish Civil War” *International Journal of Iberian Studies* 20, no. 3: 231-241.

⁴¹ Bolin, *Spain: The Vital Years*; Monteath, “Guernica Reconsidered”, 81; see also, for example, Botto’s report on the bombing of Gernika, the headline of which read: “Foreign Journalists’ inquiry in Guernica reveals that town was not bombed. Houses had been doused with gasoline and set on fire by government forces”, *Le Figaro*, May 3, 1937, 5.

⁴² Gernika Peace Museum Foundation, “The Bombing of Gernika”, last modified 2016, http://www.museodelapaz.org/en/docu_bombing.php

⁴³ Joyce Apsel, “Gernika Peace Museum: Creating a Culture of Peace and Reconciliation” in *Introducing Peace Museums* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2015): 108-138.

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for example) there is, unlike Southworth's milieu, a general consensus, and markedly less contention.

Meanings of the Event

The points of difference between past and contemporary understandings of the bombing of Gernika, however, constitute discrepancies of substance, not essence. The perceived nature or quality of the event has endured. Then and since, the bombing of Gernika has been interpreted and imagined as a profoundly horrific, symbolically harrowing event of unparalleled human suffering, which disoriented the meaning of war and how it could be suffered. This was the basic understanding of the event, regardless of one's politics (excluding, of course, those who denied the event had ever occurred).⁴⁴ The consistency of its essential meaning was largely determined by two key aspects of the bombing, coupled with the presence of foreign correspondents to broadcast it: the scale of destruction caused to the town itself, and the resulting fact that all the citizens of Gernika had either been killed, injured, or otherwise displaced by the bombing. This was evident in the initial newspaper articles dispatched by Holme, Monks, Steer and Corman, which all cite the vast human (as well as non-human, given the great loss of livestock) cost of the attack. This is particularly telling when the political alignment of those publications is considered, in view of the conflicts of interest that might be stirred upon the publication of a story about an ethically and politically complex atrocity that suggested heavy human and diplomatic responsibility.

As Southworth explained, none of the newspapers or magazines that published those early dispatches by Steer, Monks or Holme could have been described as left-wing or as garnering Republican sympathies in their political alignment,⁴⁵ and therefore likely to place automatic, uncritical blame on the Nationalists or their international Fascist benefactors. Only *Ce Soir*, the new Parisienne daily represented by Corman, could have been characterised as such.⁴⁶ Yet the story was printed anyway, across a swathe of political positions, despite the diplomatic controversy the event would cause. Further, as Southworth explained, the initial presence of the three British reporters in the Bilbao—whose reaction to the war in Spain he described as “liberal”,⁴⁷ while Monks, a Catholic, was an early supporter of Franco⁴⁸—not by any emotional kinship with the Republican cause, but rather was “determined by the centuries-old economic ties between London and Bilbao”.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Southworth, *Guernica!*, 239-250.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Monks, *Eyewitness*, 96.

⁴⁹ Southworth, *Guernica!*, 13.

Regardless of politics, vested interests, or personal sympathies, the initial accounts of those journalists and their later testimonies resound with a common motif: the bombing of Gernika was an unimaginable tragedy of unparalleled human suffering which, according to Holme's poem, somehow signified the end of the world. The bombs dropped indiscriminately onto an isolated village occupied by civilians whose war-time political sympathies could, on the whole, hardly be described as vehement, exemplified a shocking annulment of innocent lives and the destruction of their homes. Bombs also reconstruct meanings, and the bombing of Gernika, as the story was told in the press, also contained an intimation of what may come: Gernika was interpreted by much of the international community as a confirmation that air bombing was going to be a defining feature of future wars.⁵⁰ This was the essential state as encountered and reported by the journalists, and so was the essence of the story that transpired then, and resounds today.

The Controversy

The story, as it was to unfold to the rest of the world in the pages of newspapers and transmitted across airwaves, began with the dispatches of the four correspondents. The story thus began in the aftermath of atrocity. This was the place of encounter for Holme, Steer, Monks and Corman, and the place of destruction, exodus and grief for the inhabitants of Gernika. Carolyn Forché, in view of the ubiquity of state-choreographed atrocity in the twentieth century, understood 'the aftermath' as a locatable and traceable phenomenon. Forché described it in terms of both a time and a place: "A region of devastated consciousness" and a "temporal debris field, where historical remains are strewn...where that-which-happened remains present, including the consciousness in which such events arose".⁵¹ She also wrote of the aftermath that it is possible to read in its material yield, "in the scarred landscape of battlefields, in bomb craters and unreconstructed ruins, in oral and written testimony", the trace of extremity.⁵²

It was in this zone that the accounts of the four correspondents, which would be transmitted across the world and printed in time for London's evening bulletins on 27 April, were produced. Following Forché's notion of the aftermath, those reports also contained the trace of extremity. This is worth acknowledging because the reconstruction of an event of atrocity from its aftermath, as in Forché's understanding, places the story on precarious ground. The immediate controversy surrounding the Gernika event arguably began thus, with the first lines of a narrative compiled in a

⁵⁰ Overy, *The Bombing War*, 20-22;
Patterson, *Gernika*, 40-45.

⁵¹ Carolyn Forché, "Reading the Living Archives: The Witness of Literary Art" in Carolyn Forché and Duncan Wu, eds., *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500-2001* (London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2014): 50.

⁵² *Ibid.*

site of devastated consciousness,⁵³ where civilians perished in an attack for which they could never have known the reason nor could have fully anticipated—people still arrived for market day, after all. Vilar extrapolated on this point in his foreword to Southworth's text. In considering how an event becomes universally recognised as symbolic, he wrote that "if the event is sufficiently significant, and touches some sensitive points, then, once broadcast by the mass media, it can set in motion psychological responses on an unpredictable level".⁵⁴ That it did, across the myriad realities of war: militaristic, political, ideological, social and cultural.⁵⁵

Gernika, a name that garnered virtually no interest outside of Spain before its destruction, became the nerve centre of a dispute that erupted almost everywhere in the West, where, as Southworth reminded the reader, "such a debate was permitted".⁵⁶ Considered in the context of the Spanish Civil War and its politics during Europe's interwar period, the debate surrounding the bombing of Gernika either bolstered or threatened one's political alignment and ideological sympathies. Both the Republicans and Nationalists had their version of what had happened in Gernika. The Republican position was steadfastly aligned with that of the Basque government, which took its basic facts from the reports of the foreign correspondents in Bilbao, and later eyewitness testimonies from survivors: that Hitler's Condor Legion, abetted by some Italian aircrafts, had destroyed Gernika in an air raid permitted, if not ordered, by Franco.⁵⁷ The Nationalist counter-charges evolved constantly, from the initial categorical denial that any planes flew over Gernika that day due to bad weather,⁵⁸ and that either (or both) the Basques and the so-called "reds"—referring to the Republic, the many factions of which were often conflated to this idiom—had destroyed Gernika themselves to arouse the indignation of their own militia, or to discredit the enemy.⁵⁹ Some days after the attack, in the face of mounting evidence that would undermine these claims, an admission emerged from the Nationalist side that "it is possible that a few bombs fell upon Guernica during days when our airplanes were operating against objectives of military importance",⁶⁰ but,

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Vilar, "Foreword" in *Guernica! Guernica!*, xii.

⁵⁵ Nordstrom, *War Story*, 39.

⁵⁶ Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, 271.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁵⁸ *Heraldo de Aragón*, 28 April, 1937; The author of this communique is unknown. George Steer wrote in *The Tree of Gernika* that it was produced by Vicente Gay. Southworth doubted this, and speculated that it was more likely the Spanish pro-Franco journalist Luis Bolin. See Southworth, *Guernica!*, 33.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Southworth, *Guernica!*, 35. Again, the author of this propaganda line is not definitively known. Southworth traces its origin to a series of radio broadcasts produced on *Radio Sevilla* by General Queipo de Llano, on the night of 27 April 1937. Southworth affirms in his citation these broadcasts were generally not transcribed, and there was "never an official text for the radio talks of General Queipo de Llano". See Southworth, *Guernica!*, 411.

⁶⁰ "Lies, Lies, Lies", *La Nacion*, April 29, 1937, 1. Reproduced in Southworth, *Guernica!*, 33.

according to the authors of this communique, it did “very little” damage to the town.⁶¹ There was no mention of casualties. The bombing created more nuanced and technical problems for diplomacy amid already strained international relations, since German and Italian forces were apparently not even present in Spain: Germany was officially a member of the Non-Intervention Committee.⁶² Irujo explains the impact of the destruction of Gernika in the diplomatic arena in terms of panic: “every European and American statesman was aware that Germany was preparing to bring war to the rest of Europe”, and that if war did in fact break out, “any other European city the Germans chose were likely to be bombed in the same way that Gernika had been”.⁶³ This aspect of the controversy is likely what Vilar referred to when he mentioned the “sensitive points”⁶⁴ disturbed by what had happened at Gernika, once broadcast to the world. Many of the news reports printed in the weeks following 26 April contained this trepidation. For example, an editorial in London’s *News Chronicle* published the day after Gernika was bombed told its readers that:

Guernica is merely a foretaste of what will happen to other cities...Every bomb that falls on an open town, anywhere in the world, threatens our lives, and exposes the bankruptcy of statesmanship that can allow such actions to go unpunished.⁶⁵

The War-scape

The bombing of Gernika cannot be understood as a singular phenomenon in military history, its meaning only discernible in terms of its own time and place. The consequences of the event certainly occurred within the Basque country, within Spain and its Civil War, and it belongs intrinsically to these origins. It is not, however, contained to them. Given the range of implications generated internally and internationally by the bombing of Gernika, it is impossible to consider the event only in terms of the circumstances that provided its occasion. The knowledge and interpretation of the bombing of Gernika, its advent as a “symbolic event”⁶⁶ came into being through its surrounding contextual environment; through the connective reach of modern journalism and the pre-existing tensions and character of both the diplomatic and cultural arenas. The meaning of the bombing cannot be understood as inherent in the moment of explosion but was constructed according to external forces. To understand its meaning as coming into being in this way is to situate the event in terms of a war-scape.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Norman J. Padelford “The International Non-Intervention Agreement and the Spanish Civil War”, *American Journal of International Law* 31, no. 4 (1937): 578-603.

⁶³ Irujo, *The Market Day Massacre*, 192.

⁶⁴ Vilar, “Foreword” in *Guernica! Guernica!*, xii.

⁶⁵ “Flyers were Germans, Basques Charge”, *News Chronicle*, April 27, 1937, 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

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This term was developed by Carolyn Nordstrom in an anthropological context, with a nod to Arjun Appadurai's "ethno-scape",⁶⁷ in recognition of the fact that those who chronicle war can no longer do so in terms of self-contained times and places. Nordstrom holds that even the most circumscribed locale, and the actions that occur within it, is indelibly set within broader contexts of influences, meanings and discourses, which continually transform the character of both the locale and its wider context. As such, the war-scape denotes reciprocity between micro and macro, between the localised event and its broader contingencies. There are no clear beginnings or endings: the war-scape is fluid, a "theme and a process, not a place".⁶⁸

Borrowing from Nordstrom's description, which she applies to the context of the 1977-1992 Civil War in Mozambique, the defining characteristics of the war-scape to which Gernika both informs and is formed by might be explained thus: a variety of groups act and interact with vested interests constructed by the histories, politics and ideologies underpinning the given conflict. Arms, soldiers, strategists, mercenaries and interest groups move into a country, physically or metaphysically. Refugees and displaced people move across borders, carrying with them the violence of their experience and the weight of their stories. A corps of foreign and local correspondents and photojournalists, and their editors, make choices about which events will be broadcast to the world. Those events are interpreted across a variety of socio-political environments, acquiring different meanings according to the states and ideas at play in those environments. Censorship complicates stories. Lies manipulate public opinion. The truth is distorted, or indelibly concealed. The world watches, takes sides, debates, ignores. Interest flares up and dissipates. Daily life is temporarily or permanently interrupted, often violently. The familiar is irrevocably altered or disappears completely. Bombs kill and mutilate. Meanings are destroyed and reconstructed. All these fragments, components, actors and actions are dynamically enmeshed in the cultural construction of the conflict, and that construction, for Nordstrom, is never fixed but "continually reconfigured across time and space".⁶⁹

The use of Nordstrom's concept particularly warrants use in the case of the bombing of Gernika, given that the event has, at times, been treated by its more recent chroniclers as paradigmatic: the conclusion of an argument that claims the meaning of the event is naturally derivative of the event in itself, displacing the bombing from its broader milieu which, in fact, was pivotal in the construction of its meaning. This idea finds expression in the often-quoted theatrical

⁶⁷ Nordstrom, *War Story*, 37; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 33.

⁶⁸ Nordstrom, *War Story*, 38.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

cliché that likens the bombing of Gernika to a “dress rehearsal” for the coming war.⁷⁰ This thinking is problematic because it judges the event only in terms of anticipation of the next conflict, and risks overlooking the nuances of the antecedent forces that brought the meaning of the bombing of Gernika into being. The event, treated as contingent on this kind of retrospective analysis, is reduced to a chronological marker on the trajectory towards a more violent, more horrific conflict. A degree of Eurocentrism informs this argument, since it frames the bombing of Gernika in terms of other attacks that occurred only in European theatres. However, attacks of comparable technology and devastation had been directed toward European colonies, for example, for years before the attack on Gernika, beginning with the Italian bombing of Tripoli in November 1911⁷¹ and, most recently preceding Gernika, during the “war of aggression” conducted by Benito Mussolini in Ethiopia in 1935-36.⁷²

A similarly teleological narrative persists in more localised Basque historiography, where, according to Fernando Molina, a prevailing interpretation reduces the bombing of Gernika to an episode in a “canonical narrative that reflects (and mostly praises) the struggle of an ethnic group [the Basques] to defend its political sovereignty and cultural heritage against State-imposed uniformity”.⁷³ The attack on Gernika, under this interpretation, became limitedly symbolic of “‘fascist’ repression of the ‘Basque people’ and the last phase in a secular history of ‘political conflict’”,⁷⁴ which culminated in a more violent, more bloody sectarian conflict beginning in the 1960s.⁷⁵

The concept of the war-scape, on the other hand, recognises (and uses as tools of interpretation) the intervening forces which determine what may or may not be said of, representative of, and therefore known about, a given event. The war-scape hinges on the understanding that the world—its complexities, contingencies, accidents and multiplicity of interpretations—was responsible for determining and directing its meanings. Far from the bombing of Gernika being an unprecedented event generating meaning in and of itself, or garnering meaning only perceptible if rendered retrospectively along a linear trajectory, it is a part of a much longer and

⁷⁰ Apsel, *Introducing Peace Museums*, 110; Irujo, *The Market Day Massacre*, 192; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, *The Thirties: Theater of Cruelty, Place of Encounter* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2013), 4-5; Patterson, *Guernica and Total War*, 5.

⁷¹ David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force, 1919-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 5; Charles Stephenson, *A Box of Sand: The Italo-Ottoman War 1911-1912* (East Sussex: Tattered Flag Press, 2014), 106-7; Yuki Tanaka and Marilyn Young, *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth Century History* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 29-30.

⁷² Tanaka and Young, *Bombing Civilians*, 29.

⁷³ Fernando Molina, “Lies of Our Fathers: Memory and Politics in the Basque Country Under the Franco Dictatorship, 1936-68”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 2 (2014): 298.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ The beginning of the ETA separatist conflict, see Rafael Leonisio, Fernando Molina and Diego Muro, *ETA’s Terrorist Campaign: From Violence to Politics, 1968-2015* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

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more complex story about air power, warfare, and what is at stake in the lives and deaths of citizens living within a society.

Air-Warfare

Integral to the making of the war-scape to which the bombing of Gernika belongs was the technology that enabled it, and that which it exposed: aeronautics, and an intensified perception of humanity's vulnerability. Air warfare, as a theoretical project and a realised weapon, breached and confounded previously accepted frontiers of warfare. Specifically, where and how it could be fought, and how it might be suffered. Those shifting frontiers were temporal, spatial and physical: with the advent of the airplane as weapon, no longer could the previous distinctions be drawn between wartime and peacetime; the battleground and the home-front; and soldiers and civilians.⁷⁶ The conflation of these elements that once characterised (indeed, mythologised) warfare can be said to be the defining feature of this war-scape.

Susan Grayzel recognised the beginnings of this shift (as it occurred within a European context) during the First World War, when air warfare began its encroachment into civilian spaces with a new intensity, as "genuine experiences of war akin to what soldiers faced on the front line".⁷⁷ War, which had once been perceived from a European perspective as an event that occurred elsewhere—in unfamiliar zones of barbarity away from home, among soldiers and military strategists, seen by civilians only through the stories correspondents and their publishers decided to tell, according to the stipulations of censorship—was brought within the realm of the familiar with the new possibility of an air raid. It is worth recalling Sontag's observation here, that what horrified public opinion within Europe about an attack from the air as it was deployed on Gernika "was that the slaughter of civilians from the air was happening in Spain; these sorts of things were not supposed to happen *here*".⁷⁸ In his detailed study *A History of Bombing*, Sven Lindqvist also argued, with similar dispassion, "Of all these bombed cities and villages, only Guernica went down in history, because Guernica lies in Europe. In Guernica, we were the ones who died".⁷⁹

Following Sontag and Lindqvist, the bombing of Gernika might also be understood to have recast the meaning of 'here': no longer was this the place from which violence is only perpetrated elsewhere but suffered within. 'Here', because of the new possibilities of destruction and suffering,

⁷⁶ Mary Dudziak, *War Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

⁷⁷ Susan Grayzel, "'A Promise of Terror to Come'" in Stefan Goebel and Derek Keenes, eds. *Cities into Battlefields: Metropolitan Scenarios, Experiences and Commemorations of Total War* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), 47-63.

⁷⁸ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 27-28.

⁷⁹ Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (London: Granta Books, 2002), 123.

is now akin to that unfamiliar barbarity that once occurred elsewhere. Perceptions of home and urban life, whether in a metropolis or an isolated village, were also marked by this realisation.⁸⁰ Physical structures (and sounds, as in warning sirens) of precaution were the most palpable manifestation of the changing nature of warfare in urban life, recasting the meaning of 'home' to that of a refuge, a site of anticipatory danger, and in certain cases (or during certain times), subject to omnipresent threat.

The Emerging Totality

The shifting conditions of war begat by the advent of airpower were often understood in theory as the defining characteristics of 'total war'. As such, the discourse surrounding each followed a parallel lineage, with notable points of confluence. The idea of total war had gained significant currency in military literature, especially in Italy and Germany, by the time Erich Ludendorff published his canonical (and polemical) treatise, *The Nation at War*, in 1935.⁸¹ The intellectual concept of total war, as Roger Chickering and Stig Forster wrote, was "born of one twentieth-century European war in anticipation of another",⁸² and thereby projected both an analysis of one war and a vision of the next. In whichever form such debate took, including in connection to theories of a totalised state,⁸³ its locus was World War I and the place of civilian mobilisation in that conflict. Ludendorff held that the two basic principles that would define all future wars was that they would be short, and that all available resources of a nation would be mobilised and exploited toward the singular goal of victory.⁸⁴ It became especially clear among military theorists and leaders⁸⁵ during the second half of World War I that non-combatant men, women and children were the most critical of these resources. A widely perceived aspect of that conflict was that war now required the commitment of all civilians in belligerent states: civilians were as important as soldiers to the outcome of the war. This perception, reinforced by the sheer scale of fighting during World War I, suggested that combatant states had little choice other than to mobilise their civilians to meet war's new demands for material and human resources.

⁸⁰ Grayzel, "A Promise of Terror to Come", 50.

⁸¹ Erich Ludendorff, *The Nation at War*, trans. A. S Rappoport (London: Hutchinson, 1938).

⁸² Roger Chickering and Stig Forster, "Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War" in *A World At Total War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁴ Erich Ludendorff, *The Nation at War*, 18.

⁸⁵ Gerald D. Feldman, "Hugo Stinnes and the Prospect of War before 1914," in Boemeke, Chickering and Forster, *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 77-96.

The all-encompassing involvement of civilians was, in Chickering's words, "profoundly disorienting".⁸⁶ This was because the war-scape that the theory of total war informed (partly based on the experience of the previous war, partly an intimation of what was to come) denoted a kind of limitlessness that, considering the change in popular expectations of World War I at its inception and its conclusion,⁸⁷ was largely unanticipated. It is this aspect of total war, arguably its most critical, which finds convergence with the advent of airpower technology. Each is fundamental to the war-scape to which the bombing of Gernika belongs. Both the concept of total war and the possibility of air bombing as a legitimate tactic during war erased distinctions between soldiers and civilians, thus exposing new possibilities for the ways in which war might be suffered by the ordinary individual. The consequence was a kind of macabre equaliser: no human being is immune from military violence through bombardment from the air. Every life and every home became apparently vulnerable in the same way.

Italian general and air-power theorist Giulio Douhet contemplated these technics with acute foresight some sixteen years before they were deployed on Gernika. While his account is rhetorically extravagant and at times fanciful (likely owing to his personal enthusiasm for Italian Futurism, which regarded with passion, even optimism, the aesthetic possibilities of violence perpetrated from the air and suffered on the ground),⁸⁸ he was aware of not only the scale to which such weapons would produce unprecedented physical destruction, but their capacity for mental consternation. He noted that because "nothing man can do on the surface of the earth can interfere with a plane in flight moving freely in the third dimension" no longer could areas exist in which life could be lived in "safety and tranquillity".⁸⁹ Thus the airplane deployed as a weapon would recast the meaning of home and shatter the expectation of a life lived free from terror. At their inception, Douhet's ideas became quickly established as "standard air power doctrine",⁹⁰ establishing him as a "prophet"⁹¹ of classical air power. It is clear, then, that such ideas gained currency precisely because they were relevant and spoke to genuine (if not yet fully realised or even articulated) theories and fears held by academic, military and citizen communities alike.

⁸⁶ Roger Chickering, "Introduction to Part II" in Chickering, Dennis Showalter and Hans van de Ven, *War and the Modern World* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012), 183.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁸ For example, see F. T. Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism, 1909" in *100 Artist's Manifestos*, ed. Alex Danchev (London: Penguin, 2011), 12-15.

⁸⁹ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari, eds. Joseph Patrick Harahan and Richard Kohn (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama: 1942), 9.

⁹⁰ Paul K. Saint-Armour "Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism", *Comparative Literature Studies* 42, no. 2 (2005): 63.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

For Douhet, whose ideas continue to be considered canonical in the discourse of air-war in the interwar period, the central consequence of the future of war was the precariousness of human life it would expose. Douhet argued that civilians were utterly defenceless against such an attack and so the destructive potential of an air bombing on a civilian target would generate a total breakdown of the previously understood social order. Human agency would be usurped by that of a machine moving “freely in the third dimension”⁹²—or, rather, by the humans responsible for directing that machinery. The meaning of the metropolis (or, in more personal terms, of home) would be recast akin to battlefield or “trauma ward”,⁹³ with even the anticipatory threat of an air bombing producing a psychological effect of comparable to the actual experience of such an attack. For example, when Douhet forecasts how the possibility of air-bombing necessitates the erasure of spaces of “safety and tranquillity”, he predicts that whether a town actually experiences bombardment from the air or not, the sustained threat of one will nonetheless interrupt normative perceptions of a life lived free from the threat of terror, or from terror itself. One year after the bombing of Gernika, Lewis Mumford described a similar scenario, albeit in a less impassioned tone. Describing the effects of aerial bombardment, he claimed that “whether the attack is arranged or real, it produces similar effects”.⁹⁴ Mumford regarded both the anticipated attack and the actual attack as psychologically indistinct: “the constant anxiety over war produces by itself a collective psychosis comparable to that which active warfare might develop”.⁹⁵ Material vestiges of such anxiety that changed the urban landscape itself, such as the provision of bomb shelters or other cautionary measures, undoubtedly served to promote this sense of “collective psychosis”.

The war-scape in which the bombing of Gernika occurred was brought into being by all these realities: by the actual experience of aerial bombardment, the discourse that surrounded it, its material corollary in urban life, and the condition of dread it engendered. Each of these realities generated lived experiences of their own, each an interconnected part of the whole. This war-scape presented a departure from normalcy: a breach of the accepted frontiers of structures, both physical and metaphysical, that once gave coherence to outside events. Worlds were destroyed by the realities encompassed in the war-scape. Not only the worlds of home, safety, security, family and community, but also, as Nordstrom emphasised, the worlds of personal and cultural definitions, perceptions, and understandings.⁹⁶ That which was humanly imaginable, knowable, definable or

⁹² Ibid., 9.

⁹³ Paul K. Saint-Armour “Air War Prophecy and Interwar Modernism”, 131.

⁹⁴ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1938), 275.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Nordstrom, *War Story*, 37.

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articulable about war no longer corresponded to what had become existentially possible (in threat or actuality) during war. Nordstrom put it thus:

The dilemma is clear: between the world as it was, the world as it should be, and the now of a world destroyed lies an abyss, a discontinuity, a need to define the one by the other, and the impossibility of doing so.⁹⁷

This dilemma probes critical questions about the limits of representation exposed by the shifting conditions of war: did those shifting conditions of how war might be experienced predicate shifting conditions of enquiry about that experience? Given the profoundly disorienting and multiple realities of the war-scape to which Gernika belongs, and the bombing of Gernika itself, it is reasonable to question whether it was any longer possible to adduce a single, integrated discourse about the atrocities that now constituted modern warfare.

The Question of Representation

In his poem 'Gernika, April 26, 1937', Holme posed this question in another form:

Aeroplanes, bombs, German invaders,
Are easy embodiments of hatred
For daily sufferers, easy too the description
'Death rained', 'wings darkened the sky'.
But what later uprush of indignation can out-burn
The shining grape-clusters of aluminium
Which unthinking as the boyish hands that hurled
Have caused this dumb life after death
This timorous, unbelieving survival
Of a few not now nor again ever fittest?

Holme offers no conclusions, but his incitement is rich and provocative enough to stand on its own. He asks the reader how it might be possible to go beyond dominant forms of representation, the so-called easy descriptions or "embodiments of hatred", to unearth a form that might carry and answer to its seemingly ineffable content: "this dumb life after death/this timorous, unbelieving survival". He asks if the material vestiges of the attack, the "shining grape-clusters of aluminium" that reduced a town to rubble, might be transcended, "out-burned", and thereby apprehended beyond the literal origins or consequences of such an event. If this kind of transcendental action is possible, how is it to be achieved? Holme does not leave his reader cynical about such a task, but rather his poetic enquiry works to jolt the reader out of any conventional or comfortable categorisations that he implies can no longer meet the challenge presented. That challenge, fundamentally, is to re-accord form with content. It is to make sense of that which does not make sense, that which has upended

⁹⁷ Carolyn Nordstrom, *Fieldwork Under Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 147.

the familiar, to “find the proper terms with which to endow them with historical significance”,⁹⁸ to push back against conditions that would impose limits on the representation of atrocity. Judith Butler provided an applicable subtext to Holme’s provocation when she wrote that “dominant forms of representation can and must be disrupted for something about the precariousness of life to be apprehended”.⁹⁹

In citing the dominant forms of representation, or ‘embodiments’, in Holme’s idiom (aeroplanes, bombs, German invaders) he suggests their limitations. The insinuation is, therefore, that the value of such descriptions in the service of representing, apprehending, and perhaps transcending the atrocity are usurped by the magnitude of the atrocity itself, the incomparability of its meanings. To extend this judgement in the context of the present discussion, the implication is that the recasting of the frontiers of war also recast the frontiers of expression about war. With its changing form, the project of enquiry also must change. Easy embodiments of hatred will no longer do: they cannot transcend, cannot out-burn. Holme continues:

But what will tell the visitor from another life,
Stepping delicately among fallen tramwires,
Counting seconds till the next crash of fire-soaked masonry,
How time itself was shattered by those frequencies,
Intolerable air displacements beyond sound,
Quarrying the public square at random?

Under Holme’s poetic treatment, the bombing of Gernika was an event that vexed the possibilities of ‘telling’, of expressing the fundamentally inexpressible: after all, how does one represent the shattering of time, the displacement of air, that which is beyond sound? These are impressions of a world that, Holme also maintained, had ended. They are nonsensical, impossible images; imperceptible to the human imagination.

If representation is understood as it was by Arthur Danto, as substitutional: “something that stands in the place of something else”,¹⁰⁰ then ‘Gernika, April 26, 1937’ asks what will stand in for the destruction of Gernika, once the conventional fell impotent to its scale. The event left in its wake no tools for this undertaking, only, according to Holme, a series of impossible images occurring in the same dreadful moment, rendering the world unmade. Goldberg and Moore, in assessing the process of meaning-making in the aftermath of violence, refer to a similar moment—where one’s world is unmade by the experience of violence—as one where meaning is rendered unavailable: it is

⁹⁸ Chickering, *War and the Modern World*, 183.

⁹⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2009), 4.

¹⁰⁰ Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 1.

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a space “inhabited by loss, characterised by aporia and wordlessness”.¹⁰¹ Much of the dominant historiography of the Twentieth Century tells that this context was ridden with such moments: of realities derailed, spaces of anticipatory horror, “wordlessness”,¹⁰² worlds destroyed, imaginations defied. These are the moments of the traumatic event, of “the space and time in and of the explosion, of silence before cacophony...between life and death”.¹⁰³ Such moments bear the uneasy paradox of occurring within reality and yet effecting a disaccord with that reality, bringing the possibility of their representation in historical or literary form into question. As I have mentioned, this notion is perhaps best, or at least most famously, encapsulated in Adorno’s declaration of the “final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism”, that there can be no poetry after Auschwitz.¹⁰⁴ For Adorno, the frontiers of expression (particularly aesthetic expression) had been uncomfortably probed by that catastrophe, if not definitively reached.

Yet, to repeat DeKoven Ezrahi’s point, Adorno insisted that “this suffering demands the continued existence in art even as...it prohibits it”.¹⁰⁵ Bombs destroy the meanings of things, but the possibility of what might happen beyond the given impoverishments, that which might be made from them, begins there: in the space where the world ends, where convention is rendered useless. There, the destroyed meanings might be reconstructed, re-collected, “like dark matter atoms gathering energy as they climb out of the gravitational well”,¹⁰⁶ as Goldberg and Moore put it. The following chapter attempts to locate that space exposed by the Gernika atrocity, to understand the place of imagination within it, and in doing so, offer a means to answer Holme’s anguished question. To do this, I look to Pablo Picasso’s *Guernica*: arguably the definitive reconstruction of the meaning of the bombing of Gernika.

¹⁰¹ Goldberg and Moore, “Meditations on A Fractured Terrain: Human Rights and Literature” *College Literature* 40, no. 3 (2013): 26.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Theodor Adorno, “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,” in *Theodor W. Adorno: Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicolson (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1977), 394.

¹⁰⁵ Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, “‘The Grave in the Air’: Unbound Metaphors,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 262.

¹⁰⁶ Goldberg and Moore, “Meditations on A Fractured Terrain,” 26.

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THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION

But what later uprush of indignation can out-burn
The shining grape-clusters of aluminium
Which unthinking as the boyish hands that hurled
Have caused this dumb life after death
This timorous, unbelieving survival
Of a few not now nor again ever fittest?¹

Holme did not achieve the “uprush of indignation” capable of “out-burning” his historical situation, nor did he seek to. Rather, by asking the question as he did, by opening up the possibility of an ‘uprush’ to ‘out-burn’ as a form of inquiry, Holme brought into question how a countervailing action might transcend the reality from which he wrote, the bombing of Gernika. The poem also suggests that the conditions of that reality are such that this kind of transcendental action is not only possible but necessary: that the “unreal desolation” generated by the bombing and revealed through Nordstrom’s concept of the war-scape, necessitated a countervailing action. Holme does not reveal what the outcome of such an action would be, the precise nature of the conditions that provoked it, nor does he define the action itself. The task for the remaining discussion, then, is clear. In this chapter, I aim first to show how the bombing of Gernika, in terms of the war-scape discussed in Chapter One, necessitates a countervailing action. Second, to explain Holme’s notion of an ‘uprush to out-burn’ in terms of the imagination, and how this might be exercised by artistic interpretations of historical reality. Third, by considering Pablo Picasso’s masterwork *Guernica* as an imaginative interpretation of the bombing of Gernika, I propose that the artwork constitutes a response to Holme’s question.

Completed on commission from the Spanish Republican government in exile in June 1937, *Guernica* is an imagination of a historical reality that transcends its contextual origins. The bombing of Gernika is said to “live” through its imaginative interpretation in *Guernica*, while the painting is said to “live on the streets, as a global symbol of man’s inhumanity to man”.² Historical specificity and universalised, unbound meaning coexist in Picasso’s canvas—though not necessarily harmoniously. I will interpret the ways in which the war-scape generated shifting conditions of imagination, where the correspondence between imagination and reality was vexed by new

¹ Holme, “Gernika, April 26, 1937”, 12-13.

² Alex Danchev and Debbie Lisle, “Introduction: Art, Politics, Purpose,” *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 777.

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possibilities of violence brought about by advanced war technologies. I will offer a visual and contextual analysis of *Guernica* and, in so doing, lay the necessary groundwork for the final chapter, which will show how the artist's imaginative treatment of a violent historical event (which, as I have discussed, generated a symbolic freight of its own), worked to 'out-burn', in Holme's idiom, the atrocity—an event that would otherwise resist any such 'uprush'.

Revisiting the War-scape

Paul K. Saint-Armour has argued that under the threat of an air raid, the experience of civic society is remade in its image; in the bomb's promise of chaos and destruction. Under the threat of air-warfare, civilisation was recast akin to a "trauma ward": a place of anticipatory dread and pressure where every day is reduced to a rehearsal for the next.³ This state of collective anxiety was generated by the disruptive notion that an aeronautic form of war was not regulated by space but terrifyingly autonomous and indiscriminate in its actualisation. In many ways, Saint-Armour's argument was a salute to the work of Lewis Mumford, who claimed that because the permanent settlement of a citizen in a community (whether circumscribed locale or burgeoning metropolis) meant not only the establishment of continuity but also security, then the deployment of an air raid onto that residence interrupted the fundamental meaning of settlement—of home.⁴ The actualisation of an air raid necessitated discontinuity and insecurity in the most extreme sense, and so constituted, for Mumford, "the maximum possible assault upon the processes of civilisation".⁵ This manifested in the episodic, anxiety-ridden preparation for defence against an attack from the air—one which may or may not come. Recalling Douhet, the realisation of war from the air, in theory or actuality, necessitated the eradication of liveable spaces: a life lived in "safety and tranquillity"⁶ was no longer a reasonable expectation for the citizen living under the threat of air-war.

This was the essential character of the war-scape in question. The bombing of Gernika, as discussed in the previous chapter, gained notoriety for a variety of reasons, but it was in large part its prophetic freight that marked it as a "symbolic event"⁷ of universal, because borderless, significance. It was the intensity and force of the destruction of Gernika—and, importantly, the murder and displacement of non-combatant men, women and children—that established the event as one that did not just occur in the Basque country of Spain but across Europe: the event attained a

³ Paul K. Saint-Armour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 6.

⁴ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Open Road Media, 2016), 189.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari, eds. Joseph Patrick Harahan and Richard Kohn (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama: 1942), 3-22.

⁷ Pierre Vilar, "Foreword" in *Guernica! Guernica! A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda and History*, ed. Herbert Southworth (Berkeley: University of California Press), xii.

kind of social, political and human currency that extended across borders because it signalled the changing nature of warfare, and the emergence of its totality.

Total war, in theory and in actual experience, breached previous understandings about how war could be fought and suffered, and air-bombing was central to enabling this breach. What was imaginable about war no longer corresponded to what the threat of air-bombing (deployed within Europe) had made existentially possible during war: life had become precarious (because so easily, indiscriminately annulled) in previously unfathomable ways. The most significant aspect of the war-scape to the present discussion is the displacement and reorientation of these meanings. Holme described this in his Gernika poem, evoking impossible images conjured by the experience of an air-raid: the shattering of time, the “intolerable air displacements beyond sound”.⁸ T.J. Clark’s remark that the flash of a bomb-blast is the “hardest, most finite thing imaginable”⁹ supplements Holme’s evocations. In this sense, an air-raid, whether in anticipation or actualisation, defied the very logic of empirical reality, of one’s relationship to space and time.

Elaine Scarry indicated something similar when she wrote, in deliberately self-evidentiary terms,¹⁰ that “the purpose [of war] is to alter (to burn, to blast, to shell, to cut) human tissue, as well as to alter the surface, shape, and deep entirety of the objects that human beings recognise as extensions of themselves”.¹¹ To expand on Scarry’s point, it is worth recalling Nordstrom’s emphasis on the elements of one’s ‘world’, which not only comprises of material exteriorities—physical bodies, structures, locations—but also mental interiorities: personal and cultural perceptions. Following Scarry, then, an air raid may literally destroy one’s home, but the perceptions about one’s home—its meanings, security, and emotional registers—are equally vulnerable to destruction. The conditions of the war-scape therefore involved not only a rupture in a literal sense: of physical homes, of bodies and of one’s sense of spatial and temporal fixity, but also of the imagined understandings that are formed from one’s place within those literal entities. The worlds of imagination were as much the casualties of the wreckage as the destroyed bodies and buildings of Gernika.

The bombing, then, offered no durable coherence to the victims within the immediate maelstrom, nor to the onlookers without. The sense of consternation became especially evident as

⁸ Holme, “Gernika, April 26, 1937”, 12-13.

⁹ T.J. Clark, *Picasso and Truth: From Cubism to Guernica* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013), 250.

¹⁰ Scarry argued that the primary purpose of war, “to alter...human tissue”, routinely goes “unacknowledged” in the “newscast narrative of events” of modern warfare, largely because it is too self-evident to qualify public discussion. She contended that this was caused by “an active desire to misrepresent the central content of war’s activity...and this conscious attempt...can in its turn be broken down into an array of motives, some malevolent, some relatively benign”. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

the vitriolic Gernika debate unfolded: the “impenetrable labyrinth”¹² that continued erratically into the 1970s, with no enduring consensus as to what occurred in the small Basque town, by whom it was directed and why. Further, while the bombing of Gernika confirmed various prophecies about the probable deployment of air bombing in future wars, it also recast previously accepted meanings concerning how these new forms of war would be suffered. The conditions of society, and of human life within society, were affected by this new reality, such that all life had become equally and irrevocably vulnerable under the threat of an air-raid.

It is possible to interpret in the thought of Simone Weil a description—or, rather, an evocation—of these conditions. In referring to the ‘force’ that can be employed upon life which reduces—or, more accurately, has the potential to reduce—humanity to “a thing” (that is to say, having the effect of dehumanisation) Weil wrote: “it will surely kill, it will possibly kill, or perhaps it merely hangs, poised and ready, over the head of the creature it can kill, at any moment, which is to say at every moment”.¹³ This uncertain and indefinable ‘force’ fulfils its task even without actually, actively, or visibly fulfilling it. Just as the panopticonic prison determines the behaviour of its prisoners by way of design rather than actual, physical enforcement,¹⁴ Weil’s ‘force’ achieves its purpose by intent alone. Such was the force, too, of an air raid: war, fought from the air and thereby no longer segregated or bound by space, became asymmetrical: no longer a matter of ‘legitimate’, concentrated armed forces in an ‘elsewhere’ foreign to one’s home, the promised violence of air-war might be understood, as Clark did, as “escaping, diffusing, metastizing”.¹⁵ No longer invisibly elsewhere but ubiquitously everywhere, though never ‘showing’ itself.

Holme’s Question

It is toward these changing conditions of war (and of life) that Holme directs his question, which begins “but what later uprush of indignation can out-burn”. Before responding, it is first necessary to offer a more precise understanding of Holme’s inquiry. We might interpret the reference to an ‘uprush’ that can ‘out-burn’ as the ability to transcend: to perform an action that matches the complexities of the given circumstances (of the war-scape, in this instance) but is able to go beyond the ostensible limits of those circumstances in the extent or power of the meaning that action generates. Jacques Derrida described something similar when he wrote of poetry (referring to poet

¹² Vilar, “Foreword” in *Guernica! Guernica!*, xii.

¹³ Simone Weil, “The Illiad: Or, Poem of Force” *Chicago Review* 18, no. 2 (1965): 7.

¹⁴ As Michel Foucault analysed in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 195-228.

¹⁵ T.J. Clark in “Picasso and Tragedy” in *Pity and Terror: Picasso’s Path to Guernica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Art Reina Sofia, 2017), 55.

Paul Celan, whose work is marked by the experience of another kind of horror)¹⁶ that “in the reference that carries it beyond itself toward the other or toward the world, opens the verbal body to things other than itself”.¹⁷ Following Derrida, then: an action that ‘out-burns’ is one that begets more than is given by the circumstances of reality, more than ‘itself’. Its meanings are not contingent on or bound to the conditions of its own medium, but generates meanings that expand beyond those conditions.

Based on this interpretation of Holme’s question, I propose that the ‘uprush’ that might fulfil the task of ‘out-burning’, of going beyond, is to be found in the work of the imagination as it is manifested in art: the utmost (because publicly committed rather than privately contained) imaginative exercise. By understanding Holme’s inquiry in this way, as transcendence, it seems that he is concerned with the activity of making the world rather than simply inhabiting, or being bound by, its circumstances. Indeed, as discussed in chapter one, Holme indicates in his poem that those circumstances (the so-called “easy descriptions” or “embodiments of hatred”) cannot meet the task of transcendence, are not themselves enough to subvert the given experience to attain or glimpse at something beyond it. The ability to transcend cannot be achieved by transcriptions of reality, but rather necessitates an act of transformation. Emmanuel Levinas’ position regarding the ethical function of art may substantiate the claim that Holme’s inquiry calls for an imaginative exercise. Levinas understood that art

Deals with objects that are also spoken of in the newspapers, posters, memoirs and letters of every passing age...these objects merely furnish...and serve as pretexts. It is of the essence of art to signify only between the lines—in the intervals of time, between times—like a footprint that would precede a step, or an echo preceding the sound of a voice.¹⁸

In this sense, the work of the imagination (manifest as art) cannot be considered coterminous with external events in actual, sensed reality as embodied by dominant couriers of information and forms of expression—“newspapers, posters, or memoirs”,¹⁹ as Levinas had it. Art may refer to or be provoked by these, but art does not operate in the same terms as news-media, for example, because it is not bound by the same operative conditions. As Levinas stated, art exists “between” these objects which only “furnish” and “serve as pretexts”.²⁰ Art may not, then, represent the world

¹⁶ Paul Celan, a Romanian Jew born in 1920, was interned in Nazi labour-camps during World War II. His poetry, particularly his well-known poem “Deathfugue” (“Todesfuge” in German), is marked by his experience of the Shoah. See John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, trans. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (Fordham University Press, New York, 2005), 66.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Proper Names* trans. Michael B. Smith (California, Stanford University Press, 1996), 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

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directly but may become, as Heaney claimed, “another truth to which we can have recourse”²¹ by its capacity to express something else about the world, beyond the given. Art, in other words, cannot possess reality, but by functioning beyond its normative conditions, can become a repository through which reality may be expressed, and thereby known. It should be noted, however, that this position regarding the operative conditions and potential function of art should be seen as just that: a potential, rather than a condition or indeed a doctrine. After all, there are a number of examples of early-Cubist collages by Picasso and Braque which incorporated large sections of newspaper that demanded to be interpreted exclusively as newspaper, as well as in relation to the other objects pinned around them, such as Picasso’s *Still Life with Bottle of Suze*, 1912 and Braque’s *Violin and Pipe, ‘Le Quotidien’*, 1913.²² Such works may prompt us to question whether art, in some circumstances, can be placed on the same operative conditions as news-media and thereby read in similar terms.



Figure 2. Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Bottle of Suze*, Pasted papers, gouache and charcoal, 65.4 x 50cm, 1912.

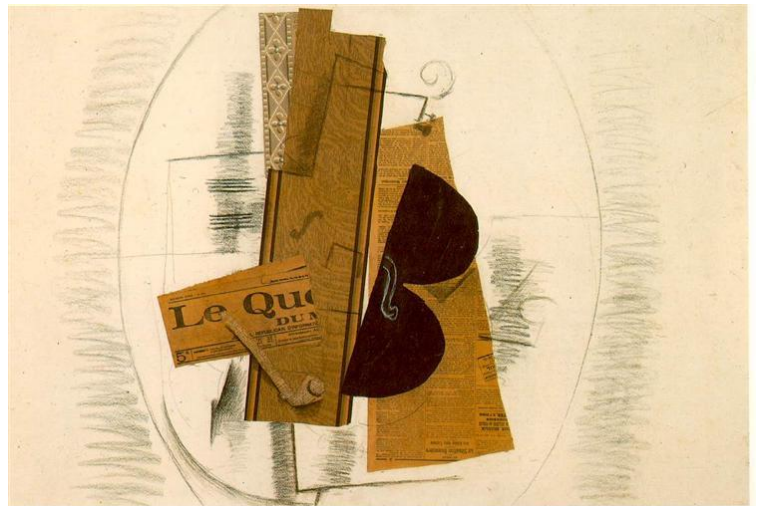


Figure 3. Georges Braque, *Violin and Pipe, ‘Le Quotidien’*, chalk, charcoal and pasted papers, 74 x 106 cm, 1913.

Yet it remains that in bringing the possibility of ‘an uprush to out-burn’ into question, Holme calls for a project that would match, even go beyond the conditions of the event and the complex reality that surrounds it, and out of which it is generated. Given in its own language rather than the language of the world that provoked it, the work of the imagination as it is manifested in art might

²¹ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, 10.

²² See figures 2 and 3.

prove capable of the transcending action that Holme incites. This is not to suggest, however, that this imaginative act would be salvific, remedial or corrective to the conditions of the world. It would, however, offer a response to them by intervening in perceptions of those conditions; by confronting and answering to them. This project would therefore be capable of, to repeat Wallace Stevens' expression, pressing back against the pressures of reality;²³ of offering a countervailing action against that which Holme suggests necessitates transcendence: "the shining grape-clusters of aluminium" that caused "this dumb life after death / this timorous, unbelieving survival".²⁴ What follows seeks to show that such a project, an intervention, a 'pushing back against', emerged from a studio in Paris, some days after Gernika was bombed. On 1 May, Pablo Picasso began his first sketch for what is today widely considered his greatest painting, *Guernica*.

The Conception of Guernica

The story of *Guernica* begins three months before Gernika was bombed, in January 1937. Picasso, who was at that time the world's most famous living artist,²⁵ received a commission from the Spanish Republican government-in-exile to produce a painting for the *Exposition Internationale* to be held that year in Paris. Picasso accepted with some hesitancy, allegedly stating that he was not sure he could fulfil his commissioners' expectations.²⁶ At that time, stark political statements were, after all, virtually non-existent in his prolific body of work, and so too were murals—the allotted space in the Spanish pavilion was to be filled by a canvas measuring 349 x 777 cm. It would have been very difficult, however, for Picasso to decline the commission. In 1936, Picasso's political and artistic support for the exiled government was sealed when he was appointed as Director of the Prado museum at the behest of the Director of Fine Arts, José Renau.²⁷ Further, as Richardson has written, Picasso was ultimately politicised by the Spanish Civil War and became a passionate supporter of the Republican cause and, thanks to the blandishments of his friend the poet Paul Eluard, a vocal supporter of the left in France.²⁸ It was expected, therefore, that whatever Picasso created would reflect this support: the Republican government anticipated a visual testimony to the horrors that

²³ Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in *The Necessary Angel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 36.

²⁴ Holme, "Gernika, April 26, 1937", 12-13.

²⁵ John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (New York: Vintage International, 1965), 2; Gijs van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth Century Icon* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 26.

²⁶ Robin Adele Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 152; van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth Century Icon*, 26.

²⁷ An honorary position in essence, since Picasso was never to return to Spain in his life, and had (practically) nothing to do with the removal of artwork from the museum after it was bombed by the Nationalists. See van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth Century Icon*, 23.

²⁸ John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: The Triumphant Years, 1917-1932* (London: Johnathan Cape, 2007), 497-499.

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his motherland was enduring under Franco's repressive, violent and internationally aided rebellion. Further, it was expected that these elements would be comprehensible to a popular audience.²⁹ The Republicans had commissioned, essentially, a piece of propaganda.

This was the rationale behind the Spanish pavilion itself, which, side-stepping the



Figure 4. Pablo Picasso, 'The Dream and Lie of Franco', etching and aquatint, 31.5 x 42.2 cm (platemark), 1937.

Exposition's brief, would work to legitimise the Republic and condemn Franco's Nationalists through art and propaganda. Picasso's contribution, vital to the Republic's exhibition given his international fame, was therefore expected to produce a powerful appeal to the Republic's frustrated attempts at international political and economic solidarity. Other than a biting satirical group of etchings entitled *The Dream and Lie of Franco*, 1937³⁰ (prompted upon receiving the commission in

January) reprinted as postcards and sold for the benefit of the Republic in early 1937, the scale and circumstance of the Exposition commission was a first for Picasso. Disconcerting to the Republic's expectations, the canvas remained blank for more than three months, while Picasso produced several compositional sketches entitled *Artist in his Studio*, which reflected not the tumult of public life in Spain but that of his personal life in Paris,³¹ the substance of which is documented in Richardson's text.³² It was not until Picasso learned the news that Gernika had been bombed that he began sketching³³ and then rapidly painting what would become his masterwork, which began its expansive public life only six weeks later.

²⁹ Greeley, *Surrealism and the Spanish Civil War*, 40;

Miriam M. Basilio, *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 2016), 94.

³⁰ See figure 4.

³¹ Although, it has been suggested by Herbert Chipp that there were significant compositional parallels between *Artist in his Studio* and *Guernica*; Herbert Chipp, *Picasso's Guernica: History, transformations, meanings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 66.

³² Richardson, *A Life of Picasso: the Triumphant Years*.

³³ See figure 5.



Figure 5. Pablo Picasso, 'Composition study', pencil on blue paper, 26.9 x 20.9 cm, 1937.

The Exposition

The first encounter between *Guernica* and the public occurred in a rather paradoxical setting: the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* in Paris. Indeed, Picasso's mural contributed in no small part to the contradictory character of the event. This paradox arose from the tension between the Exposition's professed rationale and the social and political climate in which it was actualised. The Exposition, which drew at least 30 million visitors throughout its duration from May to November,³⁴ offered both retrospection and revelation of the moment of modernity that Europe (and its colonies, which were represented with the eurocentrism typical of the time) had arrived at in 1937. This moment, filtered through an interpretation that privileged dreams of peace and freedom, materialised beneath the Eiffel Tower as a paean to the utopic triumphs and possibilities of the Twentieth Century. As Jay Winter put it, "here was the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century visualised, materialised, festively celebrated through the central dynamic elements of the twentieth century".³⁵

That central dynamism, of course, did not wholly correspond to the optimism of the Exposition's intentions. Admittedly, this argument can only be taken so far, since the imminence of

³⁴ James D. Herbert claimed 34 million in his text, *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8. Jay Winter claimed 32 million in *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 77.

³⁵ Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, 78.

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another world war is only fully appreciable in hindsight. Nevertheless, the Exposition seemed to express with equal certainty that war was both unthinkable and imminent. A visitor could marvel at the literal and figurative illumination brought about by new technologies at the *Palais de l'Électricité*, and, at the *Pavilion de la Defense Passive*, view exhibits of ammunitions, gas masks and air raid sirens.³⁶ The most visually blatant and much discussed relic of the deep antagonisms of the 1930s was the spatial confrontation between the German and Soviet Union pavilions. Architectural accolades to their respective claims to power, they stood directly opposite each other in an arrogant display of symbolic defiance. Outside of the political realm (though, in the years of rearmament, not entirely separate from it) the *Palais de la Découverte* celebrated “fundamental discoveries which have widened the field of our intelligence, ensured our mastery over matter or increased our physiological security”.³⁷ Conversely, it was this same “mastery over matter” that generated civilisation’s insecurities, with the experimentation of weaponry and the ongoing course of rearmament in the 1930s.

The Spanish Pavilion

The debut of Picasso’s *Guernica* at a world exhibition that was designed to give form to the aspirations of “peace, freedom and international solidarity”³⁸ revealed the frailty of these visionary impulses. The painting’s commissioned residence was the ground floor of the Spanish pavilion, designed by Josep Luís Sert and Luis Lacasa. In deliberate (and, due to a lack of financial provision, pragmatic) contrast to the monumentality of the Nazi and Soviet pavilions, Sert and Lacasa’s design was anti-monumental, rationalist and functional.³⁹ The Republican government’s intention for the pavilion was that it would communicate to a popular and international audience the suffering inflicted upon Spain by the rebels; the resilience of the Spanish people; and the political, economic and moral legitimacy of the Republic.⁴⁰ According to Jordana Mendelson, the pavilion also sought to express its religious tolerance and its independence from the Soviet Union, its principle ally during the Spanish Civil War.⁴¹ In other words, the pavilion was an instrument of propaganda that concealed as much as it revealed about the situation in Spain in an appeal to vital international support.

³⁶ Van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth Century Icon*, 63.

³⁷ Quoted in Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, 76; *Exposition internationale: Arts and crafts in modern life* (English edition) Paris, Editions de la société pour le développement du tourisme, 75-79.

³⁸ Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom*, 87.

³⁹ See figure 6.

⁴⁰ “Pavilion of the Spanish Republic, 1937”, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, accessed 11 January 2018, http://www.museoreinasofia.es/sites/default/files/salas/informacion/206.07_eng_web.pdf

⁴¹ Jordana Mendelson, *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation, 1929-1939* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 129.

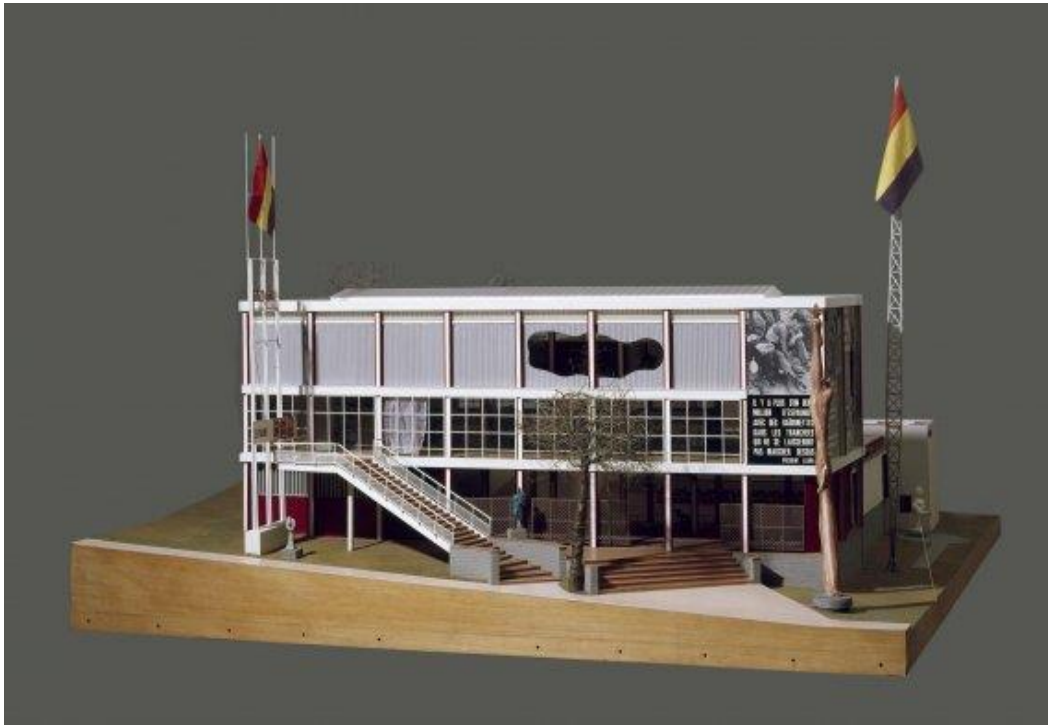


Figure 6. Juan Mirón and Josefina Alix, *Maqueta del Pabellon Espanol. Exposicion Internacional de Paris 1938*, model assemblage, 140 x 230.5 x 201 cm, 1987, Museo Centro Nacional de Arte Reina Sofia.

Architecturally, Sert and Lacasa's pavilion was highly innovative. The exterior of the building was flanked by Republican flags and a 12.5-metre-high sculpture by Alberto Sanchez.⁴² The walls of the pavilion were generously fenestrated, promoting natural light and openness, which according to van Hensbergen, made the pavilion appear to “float” in dramatic contrast to the “anchored colossus” of the German and Soviet pavilions.⁴³ Much of the exterior wall space was covered with huge photomontages expressing the plight of the Spanish people. One such photomontage contained an image of lorries transporting El Greco's *Trinity* from the Prado to the safety of Valencia—a measured piece of propaganda suggesting that the so-called “reds” were the saviours of culture and not, as Nationalist propaganda continually claimed, its destroyers. An exterior staircase delivered visitors to the entrance on the second floor, where the public were introduced through a selection of paintings, drawings and photographs, to the theme of the civil war. An interior staircase provided the entrance to the ground floor, where the visitor was delivered before *Guernica*.

Picasso's Guernica

Guernica denotes place yet is simultaneously placeless. While the title of the artwork immediately refers the viewer to both a town in the Basque country of Spain and the widely publicised event that

⁴² Other artworks were contributed by Joan Miró, René Magritte, Julio Gonzáles, Alexander Calder, Josep Renau, and Luis Buñuel.

⁴³ Van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 66.

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occurred there, the picture itself lacks any contextual referent: Picasso's characters are nowhere, at least nowhere recognisable, languishing in various stages of injury and death; consequences of an assault that comes from elsewhere. The cause of the attack is invisible to the viewer, who only witnesses the experience of the attacked. The unfolding action thereby diminishes, even entirely ruptures, the viewer's sense of contextual fixity. Picasso, in painting *Guernica*, abstracted a locatable moment from history, and through a cacophony of shapes and figures of black, white and grey, reimagined it and in so doing, out-burned it.

Despite its huge proportions, *Guernica* is laconic. The execution of the painting was itself an act of compression: it is not a transcription or even a reflection of the reality to which it refers, but rather a condensation of what the artist took to be its meaningful elements, treated imaginatively. Nine figures populate the canvas. Similarly sized, they are posed closely together as actors in a tableau, frozen in the instant of explosion. From left to right, the viewer is introduced to: the bull, with its deadpan gaze; the distraught mother with her dead child, a modern pietà; the dying soldier, mouth gaped and arm severed but still grasping a sword, which touches a flower; the barely visible bird, gawking upward; and the wounded horse, with its dagger-like tongue. Then, in the right of the picture, there are three women: one clutching her breast and gazing on from a window in horror, bearing a light; another, arms stretched open as if to question the unfolding tragedy, dragging behind her a disfigured limb; and another, hands and fingers splayed upward, toes jutting out from the flames, burning.

Hanging over the humans and animals is an electric bulb, which together with the oil lamp carried by the woman reaching through the window, form a duplication of light. The bulb, however, is propelled by nobody: it hangs unsupported over the action, a result of its advanced technology. Its effect as a 'giver of light' is not apparent compared with the softer glow of the oil lamp beside it, held up by the woman toward the centre of the scene, in a deliberate effort to illuminate the horror below.

The Light Source

Several critics have interpreted the duplication of light in terms of a good/evil binary, and therefore attribute varying degrees of malevolence to the electric lightbulb. William Proweller, for example, straining to establish connections between *Guernica* and "primeval ancestral sacrifice",⁴⁴ regarded the lightbulb as demonic, and remarked among his limited evidence that it is "also a replica of the arcanic shape of the female vulva".⁴⁵ Rudolf Arnheim was less concerned with any such binary and

⁴⁴ William Proweller, "Picasso's 'Guernica': A Study in Visual Metaphor" *Art Journal* 30, no. 2 (1971): 243.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 248.

instead interpreted the bulb as a “symbol of detached ‘awareness’, of a world informed but not engaged”.⁴⁶ Given the far-reaching distribution of the Gernika news story, the continuing (and for the Republic, catastrophic) policy of non-intervention, and the dissemination of misinformation about what had really occurred (by whom and why) in Gernika, Arnheim’s interpretation appears to offer a quite accurate perception of the state of the world in 1937—at least in the context of the international reception and relations during the Spanish civil war.

While there are limits to how far this binary can be argued, lest the argument become reductionist, the placement of these two objects of common purpose certainly generates a significant contrast between them. The bulb is large, powerful, and produces as many shadows (and by extension, obscurities) over the scene as beams of electricity (illumination): jagged like paper cut-outs, making the bulb appear, as Eugene Cantelupe recognised, more like an iris in the middle of an imposing eyeball,⁴⁷ even the flash of a camera. “Consciousness without conscience”, in Arnheim’s words.⁴⁸

The small lamp, by contrast, seems the more trustworthy light source: the extent of its illumination is made palpable by the steadily demarcated white, triangular beam that meets the gaze of the bending woman below. The light-bearer’s tight grip—supported by a thick, strong arm—around the lamp attributes a humanity and steadfastness to the object. The light of the lamp is smaller and likely vulnerable to the brutality below, yet presented as it is in *Guernica*, it appears unwavering and persistent. Richard Rhodes has noted that Juan Larrea was the first major critic to connect the image of the light-bearer to the Statue of Liberty, which was constructed in France and donated to the United States in 1886.⁴⁹ Three smaller models still existed in Paris in 1937, though Larrea believed that Picasso was unconscious of the allusion.⁵⁰ Others have drawn similar connections, attributing the virtues of Truth, Justice or Salvation to the reaching woman.⁵¹ The lamp she carries may, indeed, be the only visual embodiment of hope in the picture, where all else indicates indiscriminate destruction.

⁴⁶ Arnheim, *The Genesis of a Painting*, 20.

⁴⁷ Eugene Cantelupe, “Picasso’s *Guernica*” *Art Journal* 31, no. 1 (1971): 19.

⁴⁸ Arnheim, *The Genesis of a Painting*, 20.

⁴⁹ Richard Rhodes, “*Guernica*: Horror and inspiration” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 69, no. 6 (2013): 23.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ William Proweller, “Picasso’s ‘Guernica’: A Study in Visual Metaphor”, 248.

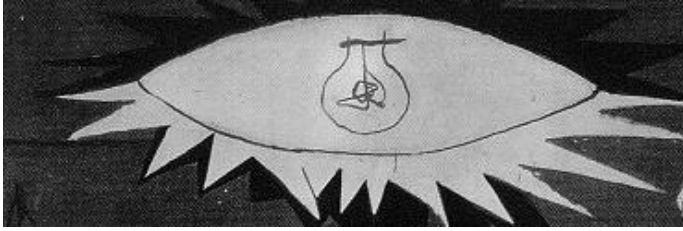


Figure 7. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* detail of globe, oil on canvas. 349 cm x 776 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1937.

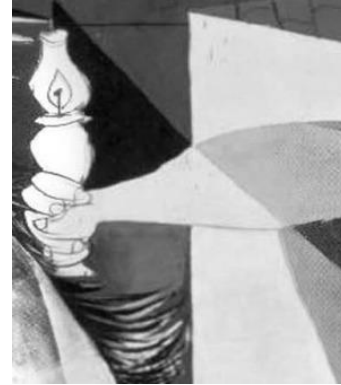


Figure 8. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* detail of oil lamp, oil on canvas. 349 cm x 776 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1937.

The Question of Origin

A significant point of debate in many attempts to decode the figures in *Guernica* is the question of their origin: do the animals and humans appear as they do in *Guernica* because they derive directly from Picasso's artistic vocabulary, or were they derived external to the artist's creative practice, that is, from reality? For the photographer Dora Marr—who collaborated with Picasso on several projects in 1936 and 1937, became his lover, and photographed the development of *Guernica*—it was the latter. When asked in an interview about whether her photography had influenced *Guernica*, she replied in the affirmative, stating that "*Guernica* is like a photograph because it's absolutely modern".⁵² Citing the grey-scale palette and the instantaneity of the picture, she added that in creating *Guernica*, Picasso was "thinking of a moment you find in photographs".⁵³

Others go further, suggesting that *Guernica* does not only refer to the style and mechanics of photography, but also the content of certain photographs that appeared in newspaper reports on the bombing of the Gernika. It is very likely that Picasso would have seen these photographs, featuring ruined homes and distraught refugees or victims with limbs blown off, in left-wing Parisienne journals such as *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*, where such images were often reproduced.⁵⁴ Paul Eluard—a poet, communist, and close friend of Picasso—was a frequent contributor to *L'Humanité*, and it is probable (particularly considering Eluard's own artistic preoccupation with the bombing of Gernika)⁵⁵ that Picasso was kept up to date with such media through this friendship.

⁵² James Attlee, *Guernica: Painting the End of the World* (London: Head of Zeus, 2017), 73-74.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 66.

⁵⁵ Paul Eluard, "The Victory of Guernica", trans. Roland Penrose in *Picasso, his life and work* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 315.

However, this would assume that Picasso did not himself seek out news about the tumult of his war-torn homeland, which van Hensbergen's account suggests that he did.⁵⁶ Further, although his art was never previously overtly political,⁵⁷ his *Dream and Lie of Franco*⁵⁸ says plenty about his political understanding of the conflict—he clearly had opinions about the Spanish situation. James Atlee has recently argued that the monochromatic palette and even the 'flash' of the light bulb in the picture imitate or at least suggest a connection to such photographs.⁵⁹ Furthermore, as Edward Kern and others have suggested, the repetition of line on the horse's hide resembles newsprint.⁶⁰ It is tenable, then, that the photography that emerged from the Spanish Civil War (which, to repeat Susan Sontag's observation, epitomised modern photojournalism)⁶¹ influenced the production of *Guernica*.

Despite the number of connections that have been made to these photographs, many deny that there is any direct link to be found in the painting. Often, this denial is supported by the recognition that figures that populate the mural have recurred elsewhere, and often, in Picasso's work. There was no need, as Arnheim argued, to borrow from elsewhere: the embodiments already existed, it was only the ideas they embodied (and the meanings they communicated) that were provided by reality.⁶² Indeed, save the title, there is nothing documentary about *Guernica*. The historical event is thematically implicit rather than explicit, and so the painting alludes to reality without specifically confirming it, and in this way, as Eugene Cantelupe wrote, *Guernica* renders a "universal, even cosmic dimension".⁶³ This is the painting's power. The following discussion will show that it was only possible to achieve such an effect by mingling imagination with reality: importing the embodiments from a pre-existing creative vocabulary and not directly, or definitively, from a specific reality.

Visual Vocabularies, Contested Meanings

The often-cited case in point is Picasso's 1935 etching *Minotauromachy*.⁶⁴ Indeed, comparisons between the two works have claimed an expansive literature, which was intensified by Dean

⁵⁶ According to van Hensbergen, "on the afternoon of 27 April 1937, Picasso struggled, as did everyone, to come to terms with the gravity of what he had just heard, and with its implications particularly for his family in Barcelona who, it was reasonable to assume, might well suffer the same fate". See van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 44-45.

⁵⁷ Although others, like Patricia Leighton, have argued that Picasso can be considered a political artist before 1937. See Patricia Leighton, "Response: Artists in Times of War", *The Art Bulletin* 91, no. 1 (2014): 35-44.

⁵⁸ See figure 4.

⁵⁹ James Atlee, *Guernica: Painting the End of the World*, 73.

⁶⁰ Edward Kern, "Cry of anger: Guernica", *LIFE* 65, no. 26 (1968): 93.

⁶¹ Susan Sontag, "Looking at War," *The New Yorker*, December 2002, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/12/09/looking-at-war>

⁶² Arnheim, *The Genesis of a Painting*, 20.

⁶³ Eugene Cantelupe, "Picasso's Guernica" *Art Journal* 31, no 1 (1971): 18-21.

⁶⁴ See figure 9.



Figure 9. Pablo Picasso, *Minotaure*, etching and engraving, 49.6 x 69.6 cm, 1935, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Simonton's detailed quantitative analysis of how the 1935 etching influenced the creative process of the 1937 mural.⁶⁵ The reason, in part, that this piece so often referred to is because of the compositional parallels: if *Minotaure* is inverted (as is vital when considering an etching, since the process always involves inversion), the arrangement of figures is nearly identical to that of *Guernica*: first the bull, followed by a wounded horse, a dead warrior wielding a sword, a female figure bearing a light, and by two women regarding the scene from a window. Then, there is the repetition of characters. Bulls (and bull-men) specifically were persistent themes for Picasso, especially in the 1930s.⁶⁶

Given the mythical resonances of the bull or Minotaur, and Picasso's apparent preoccupation, the bull in *Guernica* has been widely discussed. The ongoing conversation was

⁶⁵ Dean Simonton, "The creative process in Picasso's *Guernica* sketches: Monotonic improvements versus nonmonotonic variants" *Creativity Research Journal* 19, no. 4 (2007): 329-344.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Picasso's *Vollard Suite*, named so after Ambroise Vollard, one of Picasso's art dealers. It is a series of 100 etchings, engravings and aquatints produced between 1933 and 1939, many of which depict bulls or minotaurs. It is notable that even in the same series, the creature seems to embody a variety of different attitudes. For example, in "Four children watching a winged bull" (no. 13), four children stare enthralingly at a stoic, peaceful winged beast. In "Death in the sun" (no. 16), we see the violent bull of the *Corrida*, charging toward a terrified horse after killing the bullfighter.

initially spurred by two towering (and polarised) accounts by two Spaniards: Juan Larrea and Vicente Marrero. Larrea's text, published in English in 1947, argued that the bull is the "totemic" animal of Spain and, in *Guernica*, the bull stands for the Spanish people.⁶⁷ Marrero's account appeared in English in 1956, and contrarily claimed that the meaning of both the bull and the horse is consistent throughout Picasso's works. For Marrero, the two animals are always adversaries, and so in *Guernica*, the bull symbolises cruelty and brutality, the horse the defeated victim.⁶⁸

Picasso's work is brimming not just with bulls and horses, but with depictions of warriors, mothers and children, and (in particular) bare-breasted women. Contrary to Marrero, the re-emergence of these characters cannot be associated with a consistent import of meaning. Each of Picasso's bulls or bull-men serves its own purpose and contains its own symbolic force. For example, Charlotte Doyle identified several incarnations of the bull in Picasso's work: lusty animal; erotic and destructive beast; noble and powerful protector; the bull of the *corrida*; at times a symbol for Spain, at others a personal symbol for the artist himself.⁶⁹ Doyle goes on to speculate that the bull in *Guernica* may in fact allude to Picasso, and in painting an incarnation of himself into the scene comments on the "changing understanding of the role of the artist in the face of human catastrophe"⁷⁰—and no doubt a nod to this technique of Spanish artists before him, Velazquez and Goya.⁷¹

To return to the *Minotauromachy* comparison: the bull in *Guernica*—still, deadpan, a touch pathetic—does not embody the same attitude to the bull of the etching—active, contorted, monstrous. Nor the bull in *Dream and Lie of Franco*—murderous and yet, in the end, the saviour—completed only a few months before he began *Guernica*. This comparison demonstrates that the meaning of the bull, as with the other characters in *Guernica*, is not contingent on their appearance elsewhere in Picasso's work. Arnheim regarded this distinction as crucial because it highlights "the astonishing extent [to which] an artist's images are independent of the meaning he makes them carry in any particular instance".⁷² Thus, while it is true that Picasso did not need to imagine the bombing of Gernika through the reality (as in the photographs) of the event, instead drawing from his own creative archive, it does not mean that the interpretation of them need also be imported from his creative archive.

⁶⁷ Juan Larrea, *Guernica, Pablo Picasso*, trans. Alexander H. Krappe (New York: Arno Press, 1947).

⁶⁸ Vicente Marrero, *Picasso and the Bull*, trans. Anthony Kerrigan (Chicago: H. Regnery Co., 1956).

⁶⁹ Charlotte Doyle, "Exploring the Creation of Picasso's *Guernica*: Composition Studies, Chance, Metaphors, and Expertise" *Creativity Research Journal* 20, no. 4 (2008): 446-447.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁷¹ See for example Velazquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) and Goya's *La Familia de Carlos IV* (1800-1). In both cases the artist painted himself into the scene.

⁷² Arnheim, *Genesis of a Painting*, 22.

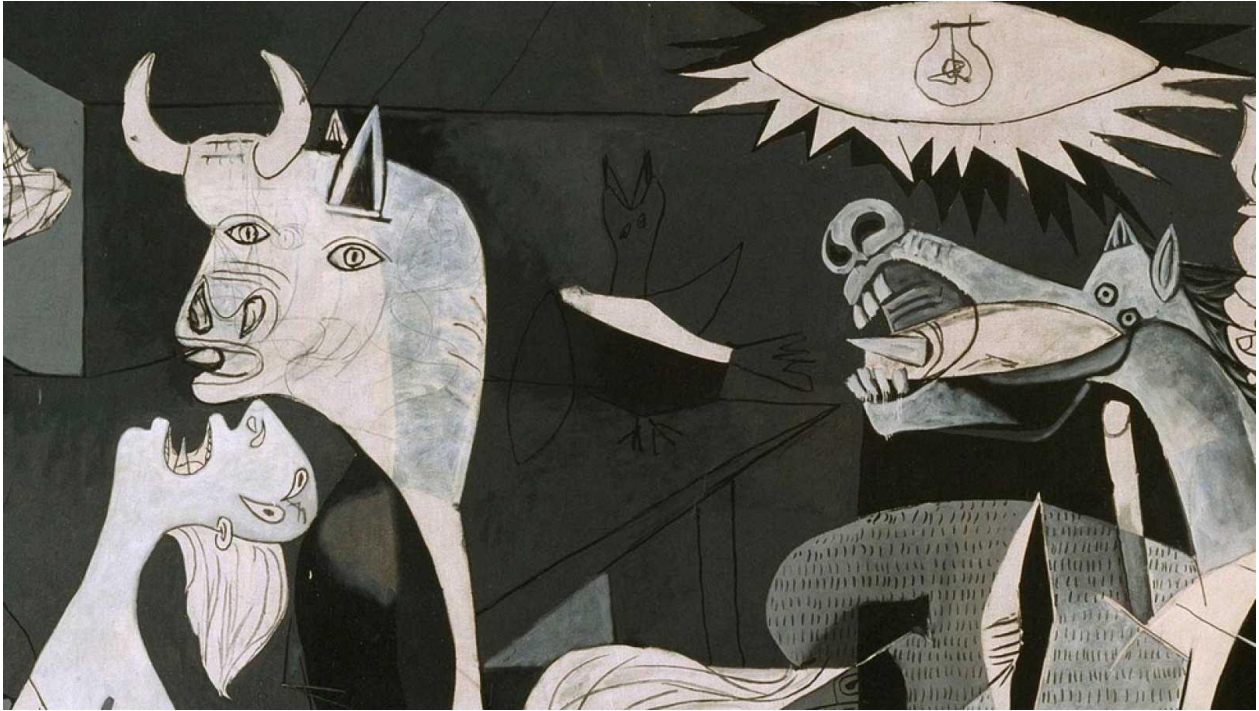


Figure 10. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* detail of bull and horse, oil on canvas. 349 cm x 776 cm. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 1937.

In an effort to unearth a malign force which, legitimised by its precedence in past depictions, would better justify *Guernica* amongst the Republic's display of propaganda in the Spanish Pavilion, several critics have reasoned that the bull must indicate a monstrous force—that is, Fascism; specifically, Franco's Nationalists—while the wounded horse stood for the wounded people of Spain. In response to one similarly determined interviewer, Picasso offered, as he rarely ever did, his own account: "the bull is a bull, the horse is a horse...these are massacred animals. That is all, for me".⁷³ If we are to trust Picasso's statement, then the animals and humans in *Guernica* are not couriers of contextual specificity or predestined meaning but of universal, and therefore more subtle and complex, conditions: the suffering of life, of all life, generated by human barbarity.

The function of the characters in *Guernica* is to portray both a historic episode and to express certain ideas. Those ideas, however, are not mimetically related to the specific, the locatable or the definitive. Nor can their meanings be discerned by precedence. Arnheim cautioned against "assuming automatically that the same pictorial motif represents the same meaning in different contexts".⁷⁴ He cautioned because to do this would be to reduce the meaning of *Guernica* to a specific time and place; to deny the unboundedness of its meaning over more than 80 years; to limit the possibilities of interpretation; to reject the original condition of its existence as public art; and to

⁷³ Quoted in van Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 66.

⁷⁴ Arnheim, *Genesis of Painting*, 32.

contradict its deliberate and many uses, across times and borders, as a denunciation of a multitude of crimes against humanity that continue to burden the world.

Formal Features

The composition of the painting, together with the style in which it was executed, works to articulate the totality of the destruction brought upon Gernika, and the meaning of it. There is no negative space in *Guernica*, therefore neither the viewer nor the figures embroiled in the brutality are granted any respite from the claustrophobic scene—the destruction is total. At each top corner of the painting, there are demarcated lines angling toward the centre of the image, forming a cubed background which partially suggests perspective: a point of depth in which the lines might converge, giving the viewer's eye some sense of spatial reality; a horizon. However, the notion of perspective is immediately overridden by the interception of Picasso's cast of characters which, all proportionally similar, dominate the space. The lines that form the background cannot converge, such as the human eye finds natural, amid the chaos of shapes. As such, the unfolding action is severely compressed. The lack of spatial perspective catapults each of the figures in *Guernica* into a single dimension. The entirety of the scene is thus presented in the forefront of the painting, balanced only by the symmetrical correspondence between the bull and the burning woman, each figure "planted", according to Frank Russell, "like fortified gates".⁷⁵

Exacerbating the painting's spatial uncertainty is the conflation of inside and outside. *Guernica* contains elements that suggest both, or perhaps neither. The cubed structure of the background indicates containment and therefore interiority. There is the suggestion of a table beside the bull, and what might be understood as tiles lining a floor, while the glow of the electric bulb logically necessitates an interior space. Conversely, the presence of the three animals—bull, bird and horse—indicates exteriority. The burning building to the right, with which the burning woman's ailments are surely associated, also suggests an outside space. The woman with the lamp, then: is she reaching through a window from within or without? Another tiled pattern appears above the light-bearing woman: a roof? And the slightly ajar door to the right of the picture, fully articulated as if to emphasise its presence with clarity among many uncertainties, does it propose an entry into or an exit out of? All these elements foster a sense of spatial uncertainty that upsets dominant processes of comprehension, because conventional perspective has been disrupted.

The brutality depicted in the canvas can therefore be said to be occurring in all possible dimensions or whereabouts of space. This also suggests collapse—both of logical coherence that

⁷⁵ Frank Russell, *Picasso's Guernica: The Labyrinth of Narrative and Vision* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 60.

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relies on spatial differentiation, and of the physical world as it is literally brought about by air bombing. If this is true, then the spatial disorganisation of *Guernica* has a literal resonance; a reciprocity of meaning between historical referent and artistic style. Clark's use of the word "metastizing"⁷⁶ to describe the advancement of violence as it was signified by the bombing of Gernika, then, proves particularly poignant considering the disorientation presented in *Guernica*. Violence, we are told by its effect in the painting, is ubiquitous and interlocking, yet anonymous. It terrorises from elsewhere, and so is protected in identity: it cannot be named, so cannot be accused. Invisibly it hangs, as Weil said, over the creature it can kill, at any moment, which is to say at every moment:⁷⁷ in any place, which is to say at every place: in *Guernica*, as in reality.

Meanings of Cubism and Surrealism

Guernica was completed more than two decades after the conclusion of what John Berger called (in reference to what he understood as the suspended, 'not yet' sensibility of the concept) the "moment of Cubism".⁷⁸ This was the period between 1907 and 1914 through which George Braque and Picasso conceived a philosophy of painting⁷⁹ which, as Berger claimed, constituted a break in the history of European art comparable to that of the Renaissance with medieval art.⁸⁰ This philosophy transformed the expression of space and relation between forms in art. Painting, executed according to Braque and Picasso's Cubism, became schematic: it disrupted the creation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional canvas. Cubism flattened form, and so broke the continuity of space as it is normatively visualised and comprehended. There are no horizons in Cubist paintings, and no individually, clearly demarcated distinctions between forms. Yet, the portrayal of objects in this way does not render them entirely nonsensical: it remained possible to discern one form from another, to infer meaning from the fragmentations. The point is, rather, that the relation between any two objects in a Cubist painting no longer established the rule for all spatial relationships between all forms portrayed in that picture. In Braque's cubistic *La guitare*, for example, the form of the guitar is not singly, spatially defined: the whole form can only be found (and understood) by perceiving the whole surface of the picture.⁸¹ Another example of this spatial principle can be found in Picasso's *Bowl of Fruit, Violin and Bottle*.⁸²

⁷⁶ Clark, "Picasso and Tragedy", 55.

⁷⁷ Weil, "Poem of Force", 7.

⁷⁸ John Berger, *The Moment of Cubism* (London: Pantheon Books, 1969), 1.

⁷⁹ Which, Berger affirms in his essay, affected all genres of art, including poetry, music and architecture.

⁸⁰ Berger, *Moment of Cubism*, 8.

⁸¹ See figure 11.

⁸² See figure 12.

Nothing in the Cubist image makes sense in isolation but must be comprehended relationally. Berger explained it thus: “the viewing-point of Renaissance perspective, fixed and outside the picture, but to which everything within the picture was drawn, has become [in Cubism] a field of vision which is the picture itself.”⁸³



Figure 11. Georges Braque, *La guitare*, oil on canvas, 71.1 x 59.9 cm, 1909-10.



Figure 12. Pablo Picasso, *Bowl of Fruit, Violin and Bottle*, oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm, 1914.

It is also clear that Surrealism is at work in *Guernica*. Indebted to the irrationality of Dada, Surrealism sought to make visible the imagery of the unconscious, understood to be a deeper (because ambiguous and largely unexplored) reality than that of the conscious mind. Spurred by the work of Sigmund Freud (particularly *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1899) the movement hinged on the emerging conviction in the 1920s that “the imagination is perhaps on the point of reasserting itself, of reclaiming its rights”⁸⁴ in the realm of conscious, empirical reality.⁸⁵ This was the belief of André Breton, chief amongst the movement’s proponents, who championed Picasso as one of its foremost benefactors. Breton’s *Manifesto of Surrealism* made clear why the subjectivity of Picasso’s art, especially at the height of his Cubism, would be considered so relevant to the goals of Surrealism. In

⁸³ Berger, *Moment of Cubism*, 8.

⁸⁴ André Breton, “Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)” in Alex Danchev, *100 Artists’ Manifestos: from the Futurists to the Stuckists* (London: Penguin, 2011), 241-250.

⁸⁵ Aaron H. Esman, “Psychoanalysis and Surrealism: Andre Breton and Sigmund Freud” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 59, no. 1 (2011): 173-181.

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the *Manifesto*, Breton argued for “the future resolution of...dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a surreality, if one may so speak”.⁸⁶

Guernica achieved this to the degree that the painting was an unreal, de-contextualised representation of the real: an imaginative abstraction of reality on the surface of a canvas. Indeed, it is possible to see Max Ernst’s definition of Surrealism at work in *Guernica* specifically, considering the illogicality and equivocality at work in the mural. Ernst understood Surrealism, as it is expressed in collage techniques, “the systematic exploitation of the fortuitous or engineered encounter of...intrinsically incompatible realities on a surface which is manifestly inappropriate for the purpose.”⁸⁷ A surface which is, as Cubism argues, the sum and origin of all we see.

Cubism claims that the artist’s task is not to imitate nature nor to contain or transcribe reality mimetically but to “summarise experience”.⁸⁸ *Guernica*, painted according to this concept, therefore expresses forms which meaningfully refer to, but do not imitate or transcribe, their appearance according to the actual conditions of the world. Conceptually, Cubism achieves this because of the rupture it enables: between the actual conditions of perception (reality) and that which appears in the painted image (imagination). The goals of Surrealism, it is clear, were significantly (though not totally) similar. Both concepts, by breaching the frontiers between known and unknown, reality and imagination, expressible and inexpressible, propose “a new relationship between man and reality”,⁸⁹ between human life and the perceived world. *Guernica* holds the same suggestion. The result is a confrontational encounter between the viewer and picture. “The forms in Cubist paintings”, because of their reconfiguration of space, “advance towards the spectator”,⁹⁰ in Danchev’s words. *Guernica* therefore demands that the viewer do more than look at the painting; the viewer must enter the painting, must confront it as it confronts them.

The Reception of Guernica in 1937

According to art critic Clement Greenberg, by the time Picasso came to paint *Guernica*, Cubism could no longer achieve the level of confidence and profundity that it did in its ‘moment’ of conception. For Greenberg, *Guernica* constitutes a caricature of Cubism, and proof that Picasso “could not make a success of a large canvas with cubistically flattened forms”.⁹¹ Michael Fried, a student of

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Max Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté, A Surrealistic Novel in Collage* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), quoted in Uwe Schneede, *The Essential Max Ernst*, trans R. W. Last (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 64.

⁸⁸ Berger, *Moment of Cubism*, 4.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Alex Danchev, “Provenance, or, Authenticity: *The Guitar Player* and the Arc of a Life” in *On Art and War and Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 58.

⁹¹ Clement Greenberg, “Picasso at Seventy-Five” in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 63.

Greenberg's, similarly argued that while *Guernica* succeeded in its expressive vigour, it failed in its formal approach.⁹² When *Guernica* was first presented to the public in June 1937, its reception garnered a significant amount of criticism of a similar thrust. Those who were specifically concerned with the propaganda efforts of the Republican government's desperate struggle against (what was often internationally understood as) a fascist power, lamented the painting's abstractedness. Not only did the undecipherable Cubist forms fail to depict and therefore denounce the enemy, but the mural was ostensibly incomprehensible to a popular audience. *Guernica* did not appear, therefore, to belong in a pavilion that was, first and foremost, an instrument of propaganda directed toward a popular audience. Anthony Blunt,⁹³ particularly hostile to Picasso's contribution to the Spanish pavilion, qualified this criticism thus: "Picasso has spent the whole of his life in the Holy of Holies of Art...refining more and more his mystical rites, so that for the initiate they grew in significance, but for the world they become ever more remote and unreal."⁹⁴ Undoubtedly, the depiction of form in *Guernica* according to Picasso's earlier Cubism, as well as its association with Surrealism, contributed to the 'unreality' that Blunt perceived.

In a speech delivered to the pavilion's organisers just before it opened, Max Aub identified with great perception how *Guernica* risked being received by the Exposition's audience: "It is possible that [*Guernica*] be accused of being too abstract or difficult for a pavilion like ours which seeks to be above all...a popular manifestation".⁹⁵ Aub was proven correct, and it was not just left-leaning art critics who were repelled by the "intrinsically incompatible realities"⁹⁶ in *Guernica*. Representatives of the Basque government who visited the Spanish pavilion regarded it without enthusiasm, and when Picasso offered them the painting, refused. The Basque painter José Maria Ucelay, who assisted in curating the Basque contribution to the pavilion, and understandably felt that the task of publicly memorialising the bombing of Gernika should go to a Basque,⁹⁷ scathingly remarked that *Guernica* was "just 7 x 2 metres of pornography, shitting on Gernika, on Euskadi, on everything".⁹⁸ For Ucelay and presumably other Basque representatives, *Guernica* was not only a formal failure, but offensive to the memory of those who were killed in the Gernika atrocity.

Time, circumstance, and the myriad of impassioned interpretations contra-Blunt that emerged in the years following 1937 have revealed the transience of Aub's prediction. Especially

⁹² Quoted in Borja-Villel and Pieró, "Introduction", *Picasso's Path to Guernica*, 1.

⁹³ Blunt was a leading British art historian who, from the 1930s until at least the early 1950s, had been a member of the Cambridge Five, a group of spies working for the Soviet Union. Blunt's confession, a well-kept secret for most of his life, was revealed publicly by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

⁹⁴ Anthony Blunt, "Picasso Unfrosted", *The Spectator*, October 8, 1937, 584.

⁹⁵ Max Aub, *Hablo como Hombre* (Mexico: Joaquín Mautiz, 1967), 204.

⁹⁶ Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté*, quoted in Schneede, *The Essential Max Ernst*, 64.

⁹⁷ This situation is described in detail by van Hensbergen in *Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 33.

⁹⁸ Quoted in van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 72.

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notable, because it continues to be discussed,⁹⁹ was that of Herbert Read, who debated Blunt in the “Letters to the Editor” of *The Spectator* in 1938, after *Guernica* was exhibited in the Whitechapel gallery of London. Read concluded that the age in which he lived could no longer offer the artist any sense of glory, heroism or even confidence, therefore, “the only logical monument would be some sort of negative monument...to disillusionment, to despair, to destruction”.¹⁰⁰ For Read, this was Picasso’s offering: the anti-monumentality of *Guernica* was such that it could successfully answer to the horrors of his time. Carl Einstein similarly suggested that the creatures in *Guernica* were undistinguishable from the subject yet necessarily outside it, essentially unknowable and thereby indicative of the loss of self in a profoundly hostile reality.¹⁰¹ In his response to the painting and to Blunt’s argument, Read also incited the idea that *Guernica* answers beyond its circumstances: “not only Guernica, but Spain; not only Spain, but Europe, is symbolised in this allegory”.¹⁰² Again, this response affirms the necessity of Picasso’s choice to avoid historical specificity to ensure the maximum expansiveness of the painting’s meaning. According to Read, he succeeded.

Roland Penrose also contributed to Read and Blunt’s correspondence in *The Spectator*, responding to Blunt’s denunciation of *Guernica* as “private art” by insisting that the mural possesses a universal quality that marks it as an undeniably public piece. Exhibited as it was “amidst the gaiety of the Paris exhibition”, he added, *Guernica* “makes an overwhelming contrast to its surroundings”,¹⁰³ and ultimately succeeds as both a piece of propaganda and a testimony to both a local and global atrocity. Myfanwy Evans, another British art critic who viewed *Guernica* at the Spanish pavilion, similarly acknowledged the painting’s success as propaganda, but also noted that *Guernica* is “least of all...a ‘Red Government’ poster screaming horrors to a panic-stricken intelligentsia”,¹⁰⁴ but rather contains a recognition that resonated beyond its ostensible reference points. She continued:

whether in war or out of war, implicated or not implicated, whether apparently abstract or apparently realistic, the detachment is in the painting and not in the feeling; that is what gives [Picasso’s] abstract picture life and makes *Guernica* a great painting, and not just a piece of sentimental political propaganda.¹⁰⁵

Contrary to many early criticisms of the painting, which held that the manner of its execution ultimately limited the possibility of meaningful engagement between the artwork and the viewer,

⁹⁹ Most recently in the special edition book released by Reina Sofia Museum for the 80th anniversary of the exhibition of *Guernica*, *Pity and Terror: Picasso’s Path to Guernica*, 145-153.

¹⁰⁰ Herbert Read, “Picasso’s Guernica”, *London Bulletin*, no. 6 (October 6, 1938): 6.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Borja-Villel and Pieró “Introduction”, *Picasso’s Path to Guernica*, 12-13.

¹⁰² Read, “Picasso’s Guernica”, 6.

¹⁰³ Roland Penrose, “To the Editor of *The Spectator*”, *The Spectator*, October 29, 1937, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Myfanwy Evans, *The Painter’s Object* (London: Curwen Press, 1937), 6.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Guernica has maintained its status as a popular manifestation. Further, for some 80 years, *Guernica* has remained a universal accusation against high technology warfare; the demoralisation of innocent civilians in an act of terror; the delusions of war criminals; complicity toward the avoidable infliction of pain upon others; and the brutalisation of 'here' from 'elsewhere'. This point will be expanded on later. For now, it is important to note that the degree to which *Guernica* was executed successfully in relation to Picasso's preceding accomplishments in Cubism and their place in Surrealism, as Greenberg and others asserted, proved not altogether relevant to its realised meanings. What is relevant is that these aesthetic and philosophical concepts are at work in *Guernica* and are crucial to the communication of the painting's meaning. The mural could not have been completed as it was without Picasso's previous achievements and development of them, and, as will be expanded upon in the following chapter, it is vital that *Guernica* was painted as such.

From Local to Global, and Beyond

Guernica is not a transcription of the bombing of Gernika, but an expression (or "summarisation", according to Berger) of the experience it generated. There are no aircrafts, no Nazis, and no visual information to place the viewer, imaginatively, in the context of Gernika, the Spanish Civil War, or Europe in 1937. The seven photographs of the development of *Guernica* taken by Dora Maar indicate that this was a deliberate decision. Two photographs dated from 11 May show that Picasso had chosen to include the Republican salute, a raised fist, which emerged from the body of the dying soldier.¹⁰⁶ Had this symbol remained, *Guernica* would permanently include a specific political resonance, establishing the painting exclusively with the Communist Party, and more broadly with the international struggle against fascism. It was not to be, and the salute eventually vanished from Maar's series, and the completed *Guernica* contained no contextual coordinates.

¹⁰⁶ See figures 13 and 16.



Figure 13. Dora Maar, *Reportage sur l'évolution de Guernica* (Photo Report of the Evolution of *Guernica*), photograph, 18 x 28 cm, 1937.

With no visible enemy or cause of destruction, *Guernica* confronts the viewer not with the form of war, but with the expression of suffering.¹⁰⁷ The form of war that generated this suffering is there, too—but it is delocalised, unspecified and implicit in the visual language of the painting. The air-raid is implied in the compression of the scene; the jagged flame-like shapes; the conflation between inside and outside; the mangled bodies in various stages of dying; and, most obviously, in the painting's title. By making visible the experience of suffering, *Guernica* makes visible and summarises both the essence and the consequence of this new form of war. Arnheim argued that by the time *Guernica* was conceived, "the art of painting had made possible a reality level at which deformities of shape and space and incongruities of subject matter actually succeeded in portraying the world as it is".¹⁰⁸ So too, after the bombing of Gernika, had the character of the world. For Lydia

¹⁰⁷ Manuel Borja-Villel and Resario Peiró have noted that the depiction of civilian victims in *Guernica* as protagonists "points us directly at Goya". Though they do not mention a specific piece, *The Third of May 1808* would demonstrate their point well. There, the executioners remain anonymous, while the victims are granted centre-stage. Borja-Villel and Peiró, "Introduction" in *Pity and Terror*, v.

¹⁰⁸ Arnheim, *Genesis of a Painting*, 17.

Gasman, the Cubism of *Guernica* is central to enabling an accurate representation of Picasso's historical moment:

Picasso after cubism...created in the 1920s and 1930s the art he believed this century best deserved. His art became caricatural *crimen laesae majestatis humanae* [a crime against the majesty of the human race], because humanity provoked him with a chain of crimes.¹⁰⁹

There is, then, a synchronicity of meaning between the formal, conceptual and thematic elements of *Guernica*, and the reality in which it was conceived. The force and manifestation of each work in reciprocity to create and enlarge the painting's meaning. The deformities of shape; spatial uncertainty; claustrophobic composition; cast of characters; monochromatic palette; massive scale; context of creation and public dissemination; and historical reality that provided its conception: all these components of visual and symbolic makeup represent what, once impossible in logic, had become true in life: the indiscriminate destruction of life by air bombing. To achieve this confluence, Picasso created an image that corresponded to the both the portrayal of a historical event and the expression of certain ideas about that event. As such, the spatial uncertainty of the painting is the imaginative reality of the spatial uncertainty generated by air bombing, just as the painting's contorted bodies are, in Berger's words, "the imaginative equivalent of what happened to them in sensation of the flesh".¹¹⁰

Conclusions

Everything in *Guernica* comes into being through relation. The entirety contained and expressed in Picasso's mural—the totality of destruction, the mutations of the bodies, the obliteration of the 'worlds' of the actual and perceptual—work to make visible the new shape of suffering as confirmed by the bombing of Gernika. *Guernica* imagines the impossible image of bombs dropped inexplicably from an unknown vantage point: the collapse of space and annulment of life by weaponry that operated according to a previously unfathomable logic. This chapter approached an analysis of *Guernica* using Holme's poetic problematic as a point of encounter. In his own idiom, the war-scape in which the bombing of Gernika occurred opened the possibility for an "uprush" to "out-burn". I have explained the conditions that would generate this possibility and offered a contextual and visual analysis of Picasso's *Guernica* in view of my proposal that the imagination, as manifested in art, offers the transcendental action incited by Holme. The question as to whether *Guernica* might indeed fulfil this task is yet to be fully answered. Equipped with an analysis of the painting, and an

¹⁰⁹ Lydia Gasman, "Mystery, Magic and Love: Picasso and the Surrealist Poets, 1925-1938" (PhD diss., Columbia University, New York, 1981), 527, quoted in Clark, *Pity and Terror*, 39.

¹¹⁰ John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (New York: Vintage International, 1965), 49-50.

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explanation of its contextual history, the following chapter will respond directly to Holme's incitement, in view of Heaney's claim, and this work's guiding principle, that "the imaginative transformation of human life is the means by which we can most truly grasp and comprehend it".¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1995), 3.

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IMAGINING GERNIKA IN *GUERNICA*

We have been a little insane about the truth. We have had an obsession. In its ultimate extension, the truth about which we have been insane will lead us to look beyond the truth to something in which the imagination will be the dominant complement.¹

This partly flippant, partly percipient passage comes from Wallace Stevens' contemplations on what he understood as the interdependence of imagination and reality. In essence, it is a prediction. Stevens' conviction was that an obsessed-over, sanity-weakening search for an elusive truth compels a need to look beyond it, toward an imagined account of reality. There is something of Holme's incitement in Stevens' prediction: that reality may be of such a nature—that its conditions might breach and confound the accepted frontiers of what is comprehensible and what is expressible—that it necessitates the countervailing force of imagination in order for it to be knowable. This action is achieved by Picasso's imagination of the bombing of Gernika in *Guernica*.

The historical event to which *Guernica* refers, its meanings constructed through a war-scape of a profoundly disorienting character, was one that Holme maintained cannot be fully expressed by dominant forms of representation or "easy embodiments of hatred" that might satisfy common expectations of solidarity but are effectively reductive. As I argued in Chapter One, the bombing of Gernika evaded a single, integrated and uncontested truth—at least until the publication of Herbert Southworth's research in 1977. In view of the ways in which the event vexed the provision of historical truth, and by considering the potentially transcendental function of art outlined in the previous chapters, I will interrogate the consequences of the imaginative treatment of a historical reality in *Guernica*. Specifically, I will examine the interplay of imagination and reality in the painting; its universal faculty; its symbolic, globally-recognised status as a searing accusation against acts of terror; and its contemporary use to denounce civilian atrocities, I will demonstrate the utility of the imagination in the interpretation of the bombing of Gernika.

An Uneasy Coexistence of Imagination and Reality

Guernica represents reality yet presents an unreal scene. Both imagination and reality, abstract invention and historical authenticity were integral to the painting's conception and its meanings. While the context of its creation associates the artwork explicitly with the historical moment to

¹ Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" in *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 33.

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which its title refers, *Guernica* offers generality over specificity; the universal over the singular. There is nothing documentary about the scene presented: the atrocity is only implied by the painting's obscure, nightmarish visual language. Indeed, this uneasy coexistence of imagination and reality was the source of much of the early criticism of the painting. The lack of visual prompts to specifically link *Guernica* to the bombing of Gernika, and particularly the lack of an explicit partisan agenda, frustrated the Republican propaganda effort, and therefore the very conditions of the mural's commission. This led some viewers to condemn *Guernica* as disillusioning—an “expression of a private brain storm”,² in Blunt's words. Further, the painting's abstract style was accused of being unnecessarily remote, potentially offensive to the memory of the bombing's victims³ and ostensibly subversive of the conditions associated with its commissioned place in the Spanish Pavilion, a project that continually insisted on its function as a “popular manifestation”.⁴

However, it is precisely because *Guernica* was perceived to exist outside the definitive categories of pure invention and historical specificity that the mural was, and is, often hailed as a transcendental force: its meaning neither contingent nor fixed, yet eternally relevant, even vital to realities of both the past and the present.

In January 2003, *Guernica* staked claim to a future reality. From the sanctum of the United Nations in the wake of the attack on New York's Twin Towers, Secretary of State Colin Powell briefed the world's press about the imminent war in Iraq, which was to begin with the aerial bombardment of Baghdad, standing beneath a tapestry replica of Picasso's disturbing—and in this instance chillingly prophetic—accusation.⁵ The symbolism was almost absurd in its synchronicity, even more so when the tapestry was shrouded in a blue curtain to hide it from view. UN Press Secretary Fred Eckhard, tasked with downplaying the significance of the action, stated that the curtain was used because it was a less confusing visual backdrop for television cameras.⁶ This justification did little to downplay the power of the symbol, however. In a speech delivered to Australian federal parliament in response to the covering-up of *Guernica*, politician Laurie Brereton pointed out that:

We may well live in the age of the so-called “smart bomb”, but the horror on the ground will be just the same as that visited upon the villagers of Guernica sixty-five years ago. Innocent Iraqis ... will pay a terrible price. And it won't be possible to pull a curtain over that.⁷

² Anthony Blunt, “Picasso Unfrosted”, *The Spectator*, October 8, 1937, 584.

³ As Basque painter Jose Ucelay articulated in his comment that *Guernica* was merely “pornography...shitting on Euskadi”. Quoted in van Hensbergen, *Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon*, 72.

⁴ Aub, *Hablo como Hombre*, 204.

⁵ The tapestry was commissioned with Picasso's permission by Nelson Rockefeller after having been denied the possibility of ever owning the painting. After Rockefeller's death in 1979, it was donated to the United Nations Security Council.

⁶ Van Hensbergen, *Guernica*, 2.

⁷ Laurie Brereton, “Shroud over Guernica”, speech delivered to Australian Parliament, February 5, 2003, <https://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/02/05/1044318661158.html>

In view of this widely-discussed case, T.J. Clark's recent statement that "*Guernica* is our culture's Tragic Scene"⁸ seems acutely relevant. Clark's claim also resonates in the question posed in 2006 by the Israeli filmmaker Juliano Mer Khamis in the wake of the 34 days war, in which it is estimated that some 15 000 Lebanese homes were destroyed by Israeli defence forces: "Who will paint the *Guernica* of Lebanon?"⁹ But while Clark's claim and Mer Khamis' question have clear contemporary resonances, they are not new. In riposte to Blunt's criticism and with a similar thrust to Clark's claim, Herbert Read predicted the expansive and continually relevant public life *Guernica* would assume: "it is only when the commonplace is inspired with the intensest passion that a great work of art, transcending all schools and categories, is born; and being born lives immortally".¹⁰

According to Read, *Guernica* contains an "undeniable universal quality"¹¹ that not only addressed Spain and its reality but also resonated across borders and, evidently, across time. That *Guernica* could not be bound to a singular time and place was apparent to many in 1937, and this quality was continually confirmed throughout the Twentieth Century, perhaps the most recent and widely discussed expression being in 2003, outside the Security Council Chambers of the UN. However, Read demonstrated his own ideas about the universalism in *Guernica* by associating the painting not with the future, but with the past: to the work of Francisco de Goya.¹² When the mural was first exhibited, comparisons between Goya and Picasso were frequently employed. As will be shown, there was a propagandistic agenda to such comparisons, but they were also often made to undercut arguments that derided *Guernica* for its excessively imagined qualities and lack of realism. To examine these comparisons, then, is one way to demonstrate and assess the interdependence of imagination and reality in *Guernica*, and how this affected perceptions about the bombing of Gernika.

Imagination and Reality in the Work of Goya

Given the canonical status of Goya's subject matter—especially his *Disasters of War* and the venerated *Third of May, 1808*, which served as ideal material for propaganda campaigns during the

⁸ T.J. Clark, "Picasso and Tragedy" in *Pity and Terror* ed. Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid: Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2017), 24.

⁹ "Who will paint the Guernica of Lebanon?" *The News*, July 20, 2006, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/16290>; John Berger, "How Silent Images Can Break the Silence" *Aperture* 91, no. 191 (2008): 44-49.

¹⁰ Herbert Read, "Picasso's Guernica", *London Bulletin*, no. 6, October 1938, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² However, Read also argued that any comparison made in terms of equivalence was insufficient, and held that while both were great artists, Goya's reactions to war were individualistic, while Picasso's were more universal.

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Napoleonic invasion of Spain in 1808 and the ensuing Peninsular Wars—Goya was a key referent for the Republican government in the 1930s.¹³ It should be pointed out that the Nationalists also used Goya's work for their own propaganda campaigns, with the general purpose of bolstering their claims of loyalty to Spanish tradition and culture.¹⁴ For the Republican cause, however, not only was it possible to establish historical parallels between Goya's nineteenth-century denunciations of war and Franco's coup in 1936 (particularly through the notion of a 'foreign invasion', since Franco launched his coup from Spanish-occupied Morocco and was abetted by foreign powers throughout the conflict) but the interplay of imagination and reality in Goya's work proved exemplary for how acts of war might be artistically imagined and responded to. Many of Goya's artworks exemplified how flights from realism may, counterintuitively, express the truth about reality. In particular, Goya's *Disasters of War* suggested how creative invention could powerfully, publicly condemn both past and—as the Republic's use of his art confirmed—present realities. Many pieces of Republican propaganda contained clear references to Goya.¹⁵ Moreover, such references served the Republican government's claim to a progressive understanding and reverence for Spanish cultural traditions, in counter-argument to the Francoist claim that Republicans were the destroyers of Spanish culture.

As Miriam Basilio demonstrated in her essay, Goya's use of "caricature, allegory, grotesquerie, or fantasy"¹⁶ to depict the reality of war provided many Spanish artists—Ramon Puyol and Juan Antonio Morales in particular, given their significant contributions to the Republican propaganda effort—with something of a precedential repertoire from which to draw in order to represent the violence of their own historical moment: realities characterised by increasingly disorientating forms of violence, upending expectations and assumptions about how war could be fought and suffered. For instance, Picasso's own cartoonish satire *Dream and Lie of Franco*, in which Franco is depicted as a bumbling, ridiculous phallus, suggests a connection to the ways in which Goya mocked the clergy or certain statesmen in his cartoon-strip-like series *Los Caprichos*, which also involved caricature and surrealistic techniques.

¹³ Miriam Basilio, "This is What Picasso Saw: Goya, Satirical Engravings, Realism, and Republican Wartime Propaganda" in *The Thirties: Theater of Cruelty, Place of Encounter* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2013), 145.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In particular, the contributions of Josep Renau, Ramon Gaya and Feliu Elias to the Republican propaganda campaign.

¹⁶ Basilio, "This is What Picasso Saw", 148.



Figure 14. Francisco de Goya, "The Consequences", plate 72, *The Disasters of War*, 175 x 215 mm, c. 1815/20, published 1863.



Figure 15. Francisco de Goya, "Charlatan's Show", plate 75, *The Disasters of War*, 148 x 196 mm, c. 1815/20, published 1863.

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Despite Goya's fantastic imagery and surrealistic excursions, his work was often referred to, particularly during the Spanish Civil War, as a "primary document",¹⁷ and Goya himself as an "eyewitness"¹⁸—even, as Danchev more recently described, a "moral witness"¹⁹—to the atrocities of his time. The interplay of imagination and reality is especially evident in the *Disasters of War*, where Goya condemned the violence and barbarity of Spain's reality (the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the terrible famine that ensued) by showing fragmentary scenes of real and imagined wartime calamities.²⁰ Although Goya's subject matter undoubtedly derived (at least in part) from his own experiences, these etchings do not present real scenes but nightmarish imaginations of savagery and suffering, and their consequences on the intellectual, cultural or spiritual life of a people. The monsters and caricatures that Goya depicted—fantastical, frightening and often sardonic—belong not to the documentary, but to the imagination. Yet, their messages bore acute relevance to both Goya's present reality and to the future reality of the Spanish Civil War. This claim resounds in Danchev's proposal that "Goya's testimony is to all intents and purposes irrefutable; it is etched in the cultural memory of an entire continent".²¹ This "testimony" is imagined, unreal and yet succeed in bearing messages that answer to reality.

A number of Goya's etchings and drawings from his *Disasters of War* series were reprinted and sold as postcards in the Spanish Pavilion.²² This helped to establish Goya as a vital and strategic referent to the Republic's political ends, and served to consolidate the association between him and Picasso.²³ Not only did this association place both artists within debates surrounding the appropriate style for art during war, or what Basilio referred to as "the definition of artistic freedom during wartime",²⁴ but it also worked to legitimise the abstract visual language of *Guernica*: despite its lack of realism, *Guernica* could, just as Goya's *Disasters* did, successfully communicate reality to the masses. This message was suggested by Jose Bergamin, who assisted in curating the Spanish Pavilion, when he wrote that "our Spanish war of independence will give Picasso, as the other gave

¹⁷ Feliu Elias, "Goya: Un geni de l'art, un character exemplar", *Meridia*, 25 March 1938, quoted in Basilio, "This is What Picasso Saw", 155.

¹⁸ Miriam Basilio, *Visual Propaganda, Exhibitions, and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 41.

¹⁹ Alex Danchev, "Our Brothers' Keeper: Moral Witness", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 40, no. 3-4 (2015): 192.

²⁰ See figures 14 and 15.

²¹ Alex Danchev, "Our Brothers' Keeper: Moral Witness", *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 40, no. 3-4 (2015): 192.

²² Basilio, "This is What Picasso Saw", 154;

Museo Reina Sofia, "The Pavilion of the Spanish Republic, 1937", accessed 13th April 2018, http://www.museoreinasofia.es/sites/default/files/salas/informacion/206_06_eng_pabellon_esp-goya-guernica.pdf

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Basilio, "This is What Picasso Saw", 155.

Goya, the conscious plenitude of his poetic, pictorial, creative genius".²⁵ The comparison between the two Spanish artist-witnesses sought to confirm the mural's rightful place in the centre of the Spanish Pavilion, and on the world's stage. Simultaneously, it affirmed the place of the imagination in communicating the reality of war, as well as Spain's present reality and, according to some interpretations (particularly that posed by *Exposition* itself) Europe's imminent future.

Establishing Knowledge about the Bombing of Gernika

The provision of public knowledge about that reality was, as chapter one demonstrated, fitful. For this reason, it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to speak of the possibility of truth, in an absolute sense, in relation to the bombing of Gernika. From its inception as a news story, information about the event was manipulated in attempts to absolve certain political actors of accountability. Consequently, there will probably never be a single, definitive historical truth about the bombing of Gernika; this aspect of the historical record will never be incontestable. Holme captured this in the last stanza of his Gernika poem, where he wrote of the mendacious Nationalist claim that the Basques had lit fires and destroyed Gernika themselves:

Spokesmen will get up among the well-fed and comfortable
And tell those dead and the unliving survivors:
What fires they lit to consume their own homes.
What mines they laid to blow themselves up.
What lies they told of an air-fleet which destroyed their world.²⁶

Truth—the absolutist kind that documentary, verifiable evidence often promises to deliver, and which both the Nationalists and the Republicans, in vastly different and polarised ways, held claim to—about the bombing of Gernika may not be attainable. Knowledge, however, is. In what follows I trace the ways in which the imaginative treatment of the bombing of Gernika in *Guernica* works to make that reality knowable.

In his foreword to Southworth's text, Vilar invoked historian Pierre Nora's account of the 1894 Dreyfus case²⁷ to describe how information about the bombing of Gernika was distributed, and the significance of Southworth's ability to dismantle the inconsistencies through his scrupulous research. Nora's enumeration begins:

²⁵ Quoted in Basilio, "What Picasso Saw", 154.

²⁶ Holme, "Gernika, 26 April, 1937", 12-13.

²⁷ The Dreyfus case was a political crisis that began in 1894 and continued until 1906 in France during the Third Republic. The controversy centred on the question of the guilt or innocence of Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus, who had been convicted of treason for allegedly selling military secrets to the Germans in December 1894.

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Initial rumours; the exploitation of silence; the persistent paralysis of official information; hints of compromise within spheres of power; the affront to great principles; dichotomy of the world into good and evil people; augmented suspense through false documents and a series of leaks; appeal to public opinion through open letters and manifestoes; the mediating function of ‘intellectuals’ between the public and the event ...²⁸

“It is striking”, Vilar continued, “to be able to use almost word for word [Nora’s description] in order to describe the themes of Southworth’s *Guernica! Guernica!*”.²⁹ Indeed, it was largely because of those ‘phases’ described by Nora and quoted by Vilar that Southworth—whose research took at least 35 years to complete³⁰—could not hope to establish a consensus on the event’s history. Vilar rightly predicted that the book “will anger some people”,³¹ and Southworth was judged by some as an “anti-Spanish propagandist”³² because of what he had written. Indeed, the establishment of any single, unequivocal historical truth and therefore a united public consensus did not seem to be his ultimate purpose. While Southworth succeeded in his intention to provide answers, or at least reasoned speculations, to the questions of how and by whom Gernika was destroyed, his question of why the town was destroyed remained (and, to some extent, remains) unclear. Reasoned and today, generally accepted conjecture, and his remark that “there are ... people still living in Spain and in Germany who know the precise motive for the terror bombing. Perhaps one of them will speak up”,³³ was all he could plausibly offer.

There are, as I have mentioned, several empirical facts about the event that will likely never be definitively established. It is reasonable to speculate that those initial lies that were told in contradiction of the original reports by the four journalists, which previously kept the history of the event from being fully expressed and which Southworth debunked, nonetheless altered possibilities for future public knowledge about the event. “Every act of recognition alters what survives”,³⁴ wrote David Lowenthal. Likewise, every act of denial or distortion of an event must have consequences for its future possibilities of interpretation, of knowledge, and of expression about that knowledge. This is implied in Southworth’s offhanded suggestion that “under other political circumstances”, the bombing of Gernika might become a “symbol for reconciliation, on the condition that all the truth be

²⁸ Pierre Nora, *Faire de l’Histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974): 210-217, quoted in Vilar, “Foreword” in *Guernica! Guernica!*, x.

²⁹ Vilar, “Foreword” in *Guernica! Guernica!*, x.

³⁰ Susan F. Rhee, “Cataloging of Spanish Civil War Materials: The Herbert R. Southworth Collection” *The State of Western European Studies* 6, no. 1-2 (1984): 193-204.

³¹ Vilar, “Foreword” in *Guernica! Guernica!*, xvi.

³² Rhee, “Southworth Collection”, 55.

³³ Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, 386.

³⁴ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country: Revisited*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 411.

proclaimed concerning the attack and the lies afterward told about it”.³⁵ In other words, the question of what the event might come to mean, of its place in both the historical record and in popular perceptions, is largely contingent on the extent to which information about the event is accessible and recognised publicly. By examining these challenges, I will show how the bombing of Gernika, to return to Stevens’ proposition, was a historical reality that continues to prompt its interpreters to “look beyond the truth to something in which the imagination will be the dominant complement”,³⁶ thus affirming the utility of imagination for the interpretation of historical reality, as Picasso achieved in his imagination of the event in *Guernica*.

Information in the Public Sphere and the ‘Precariousness of Life’

In her collection of essays on “the powers of mourning and violence”, Judith Butler claimed that the public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said or shown about a given reality. The regulation of this space—where ideas are circulated and, ideally, discussed freely—is one way, according to Butler, “to establish what will count as reality, and what will not”.³⁷ To construct what will constitute public knowledge about an event therefore requires the control of what people see, read and hear about that event.

In this way, that which could and could not be said or shown about the bombing of Gernika had consequences for the ways in which that event, and the lives and deaths of individuals who suffered that event, could be known about in the public sphere. Butler’s ideas can be applied to the context of the bombing of Gernika to apprehend the moral consequences of the ways in which information about the event was manipulated. This will demonstrate the extent to which the external, political conditions of the atrocity intervened in common perceptions about it and disrupted the ability to recognise the lives and deaths of the bombing’s victims.

Butler developed her ideas about the “limits of the sayable”,³⁸ and how these limits determine the character of the public sphere, according to her notion of the “precarious life”.³⁹ This is a model that approaches an ethics of non-violence by apprehending the extreme insecurity of human life; how easily it may be annulled; the deep connection of all humanity to the shared fate of death; and the recognition that one’s life is always, in some sense, in the hands of the other. Butler explained it thus:

³⁵ Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, 397.

³⁶ Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words”, 33.

³⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*; Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016).

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To say that life is injurable, for instance, or that it can be lost, destroyed, or systematically neglected to the point of death, is to underscore not only the finitude of a life (that death is certain) but also its precariousness (that life requires various social and economic conditions to be met in order to be a sustained life).⁴⁰

Butler is principally concerned with the extent to which the precariousness of life is affirmed, recognised or repressed in the public sphere, especially by the information exchanged through news media. She argued that the realities constructed by what can or cannot be shown about violent events effects “whose lives can be marked as lives, and whose deaths will count as deaths”.⁴¹ The question of marking—of recognising, of becoming conscious of another’s suffering and death, and of attributing meaning to it—is necessary, she argued, for a sufficient understanding of the precariousness of life. Butler emphasised that “precariousness implies living socially”⁴² and therefore this recognition of another’s suffering should be a task mutually and continually attended to in the public sphere. Without this capacity to recognise the individual lives destroyed in acts of violence, Butler claimed that “we lose that keener sense of life we need in order to oppose violence”.⁴³ In other words, to heed the precariousness of life is to enable the creation of certain moral demands that seek to overcome future conditions of violence.

The implication of Butler’s argument in relation to the bombing of Gernika is that if lives are deprived of their capacity to be recognised (of their “grievability”, as Butler had it) due to their invisibility, perpetual anonymity or otherwise threatened presence in the public sphere, then an understanding of life’s precariousness is lost. This failed recognition renders the future social and political possibilities of human communities vulnerable, because necessary moral demands that might overcome violence cannot be made. This is, possibly, another way of expressing Lowenthal’s claim that “every act of recognition alters what survives”:⁴⁴ future circumstances are, according to Butler’s argument, contingent on which aspects of a violent past event are known about in a meaningful way—and the ways in which this takes place—in the ceaselessly alterable public knowledge of a historical event.

Life and Death in Gernika

The lives destroyed in the bombing of Gernika, vehemently confirmed by Steer, Monks, Holme and Corman, were continually denied by certain actors, compelled by various political agendas. Those

⁴⁰ Butler, *Frames of War*, 13.

⁴¹ Butler, *Precarious Life*, 49-50.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 411.

killed in Gernika were never counted, identified, or compiled in a register, as was the case for other bombed towns in the Basque country.⁴⁵ Durango, for example, was bombed on 31 March, some three weeks before Gernika—the opening shot in the Nationalist’s northern campaign. Southworth claimed that at that time, “the Basques still had the morale to take the time and care to document the casualties”.⁴⁶ However, the destruction caused to Gernika was total, and the number of casualties far surpassed that of Durango.⁴⁷ Given the scale of destruction to Gernika, Southworth reasoned, there was simply “not enough time to search the ruins for bodies”.⁴⁸ When the town fell to the Nationalists less than seventy-two hours later, the Basque government irrevocably lost all control over the counting and identification of the dead.

When the news about the bombing of Gernika was first disseminated by the four journalists, the victims could only be referred to, for the most part, in the form of estimated numbers of generally arbitrary, because unverifiable and continually disputed, value: both the scale of destruction and the inflated, unknown population size made it impossible to estimate an accurate figure.⁴⁹ Southworth demonstrated the array of different statistics that were circulated across news media, and how widely they varied: for example, he cited an interview recorded by pro-Franco historian Ricardo de la Cierva in 1969. Referring to “the myth of Guernica”, la Cierva claimed that “not even a dozen perished”.⁵⁰ In statements from the political left, the death toll was claimed to be well into the thousands. La Cierva’s statement, however, is almost an anomaly among pro-Franco disquisitions on Gernika, since he did concede, although with obvious contempt, that there were victims. Until the 1960s, the lives of those killed at Gernika were effectively erased from the record. Southworth demonstrated this:

A Spaniard in the Rebel zone, whose only source of information was the press of that area; a French conservative, whose view of the war was limited to that given by a newspaper such as *Le Figaro*; an Englishman, whose knowledge of the Guernica incident was obtained from the writings of Jerrold, Lunn and the like—all these people might well have demanded the reason for the uproar about Guernica.⁵¹

Yet the fact that there were victims constitutes the very essence of the event’s meaning: this was the reason that the bombing of Gernika generated enduring international attention and was regarded as so catastrophic, even prophetic of Europe’s future. Again, Southworth described this:

⁴⁵ Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!* 353.

⁴⁶ Patterson, *Guernica and Total War*, 20.

⁴⁷ Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, 348.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁴⁹ See pages 28-30 of this thesis for a discussion on the figures estimated by the four journalists, and how these differed.

⁵⁰ *Arriba*, 30 January 1937, quoted in Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, 349.

⁵¹ Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!*, 354.

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Had the...bombs touched only the wood and stone construction of the Basque town...it would have been a pardonable aggression. Guernica held a sentimental place in Basque hearts, but such an aggression would, after all, have been of minor international consequence if people had not died in the raid...doubtless what touched the imagination of so many people in the world, not yet wearied of Coventry, Dresden, Hiroshima and Hanoi, was the fact that people were killed.⁵²

That civilians were killed, wounded or otherwise permanently displaced in Gernika was known from the time those first reports by Steer, Holme, Monks and Corman were dispatched. Yet this fact was, from the first moments of dissemination, on precarious ground. While it is widely recognised today at both popular and official levels,⁵³ the destruction of human and non-human life in Gernika was lied about for some 40 years after the attack. At the time of the attack, depicted by most news sources (generally regardless of their political affiliation) as profoundly catastrophic, there was no way for the victim's lives to be marked other than by referral: either through haphazard (and easily disputable) statistics or ideological mendacity, with the purpose of denial and the repression of dissent and debate. Effectively, the deliberate annulment of life by air-bombing was disaffirmed and subjugated, again and again, to the clamour of political propaganda. Following Butler, the moral outcry and action that might transpire in response to the atrocity also remained threatened.

Against the "pressures of reality"

Adorno's claim that "the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth"⁵⁴ is applicable to the historicisation of the atrocity committed at Gernika—replacing, of course, the notion of truth with that of knowledge. It is likely that Southworth would share a similar conviction, given his own efforts to make incontestable the claim that the bombs dropped on Gernika killed, wounded and permanently displaced so many, and to debunk the lies that kept this truth from public knowledge. Adorno's assertion also supplements Butler's argument. Like Butler's notion of the precarious life, Adorno insisted on the visibility and recognition of the life that suffers—of the "victim's anguished voice",⁵⁵ as Saul Friedlander had it—for the provision of knowledge about a profoundly violent past.

⁵² Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!* 353.

⁵³ In 1997, after a decade of campaigning by Greens politicians Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian, Germany formally acknowledged accountability for the bombing and agreed to pay compensation to Gernika for the damage caused by the Condor Legion. See "Germany Admits Guilt Over Guernica, *The New York Times*, April 28, 1997, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/28/world/germany-admits-guilt-over-guernica.html>. The history of reconciliation between Germany and Gernika is set out in Michael Kasper, *Gernika y Alemania: Historia de uni reconciliación* (Gernika, 1998) and in Gert Bastian and Petra Kelly, *Guernica und die Deutschen* (Hamburg: Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 1992).

⁵⁴ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 17.

⁵⁵ Saul Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, vii-viii.

In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno preceded his claim with the following: “the power of the status quo puts up the facades into which our consciousness crashes. It must seek to crash through them”.⁵⁶ It bears repeating this quote because Adorno’s meaning echoes in Butler’s assertion that the “failure to heed the claim of precarious life only leads, again and again, to the dry grief of an endless political rage”.⁵⁷ In a certain sense, Butler promotes a crashing through, a countervailing action, by affirming the necessity of reaching beyond the alienating forces of political circumstance that are, as Butler seems to suggest, fundamentally dehumanising. Adorno, too, proposed that the confirmation of that which is denied is to countervail the prevailing conditions that threaten acts of recognition. Hence his instruction to “crash through”. The recognition and affirmation of that which is made deniable and threatened by circumstance is one way to reach beyond those forces: it is to reconfigure what is knowable, and thereby reconfigure reality.

This idea has significant contemporary manifestations. The guiding manifesto of many post-conflict truth-telling tribunals or commissions of the late Twentieth Century is similar to the ideas that Adorno and Butler proposed. As Julie Stone Peters wrote in her discussion on narratives of atrocity and cultures of testimony, these tribunals seek to “transcend the chaos and violence of the rabble”⁵⁸—a notion that is similar to Butler’s description of the “dry grief of an endless political rage”—by heeding the individual narratives of atrocity victims, with the purpose of generating “responsive action and social union”,⁵⁹ in other words, a moral imperative. Their philosophy is anti-utilitarian and redemptive. In general, these tribunals are unconcerned with what the telling of that experience might achieve or even the accuracy of the victim’s statements. Rather, the concern is with the human dignity for which they stand, and the opportunities for redress and reconciliation that they offer. Further, such acts of truth-telling, though they may not re-establish a definitive truth about the history with which they deal, reconstitute the kinds of knowledge about atrocity that are available. Rather than relying on the factual, verifiable or quantifiable forms of knowledge, such commissions pose a form of access to a lived experience. Whether these events are indeed curative or even productive of social cohesion remains an open question. However, their underlying principle demonstrates how Adorno’s proposal to “lend a voice to suffering”, and Butler’s argument for the recognition of the precariousness of life, remains a relevant and desirable outcome for contemporary post-atrocity contexts.

⁵⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (Routledge: London, 2004): 17.

⁵⁷ Butler, *Precarious Life*, xix.

⁵⁸ Julie Stone Peters, “‘Literature,’ the ‘Rights of Man,’ and Narratives of Atrocity” in *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, eds. Goldberg and Moore (New York: Routledge, 2012), 22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

The ideas put forth by Adorno and Butler suggest knowledge-producing, countervailing acts, because they each insist on disobeying the circumstances that work to deny and therefore distort knowledge. They affirm that the obtainment of any fixed truth is not the goal: for “lending a voice to suffering” claims that the interpretation of a violent past is based not on the objectively verifiable (since the objectively verifiable is often, and particularly in the case of Gernika, made inaccessible by circumstance) but on what Nadine Gordimer called “the inward testimony”: that which foregoes the “methodologies of expert analysis” for an imagined account of reality.⁶⁰ Gordimer called this the “intense awareness, the antennae of receptivity” that may allow a reality to be more receptively, wholly, and contemplatively known about, in a way that the circumstances of external realities refuse to deliver.⁶¹ In the context of the bombing of Gernika, it was the conditions that engendered the series of distortive actions as enumerated by Nora— “initial rumours; the exploitation of silence; the persistent paralysis of official information ...” —that this ‘awareness’ seeks to disobey, counter, and thereby transfigure. And it is these conditions that Stevens referred to when he proposed a way of telling in which the provision of knowledge begins with the imagination.

Imagination as the “dominant compliment”

For Stevens, this countervailing action should be directed against what he called the “pressures of reality”, defined as “the pressure of an external event...on the consciousness to the exclusion of any power of contemplation.”⁶² Holme’s poetic incitement of an “uprush to out-burn” expresses a parallel desire: to confront the conditions that deny that which, for Stevens and Holme, must be affirmed for anything to be meaningfully known about a given reality. Stevens defined this notion of “pressure” as “life in a state of violence”—a description in which he included states of physical as well as spiritual violence: a violence that is not felt directly, but nonetheless sensed and felt affectively.⁶³ Indeed, this indirect ‘spiritual violence’ might be applied to the broader international sphere when Gernika was bombed, given the significant and enduring reception to the event. Following Stevens, imagined interpretations of violent realities make it possible to generate meaning that endures amid (and beyond) the cacophony of political and ideological claims to some superior—and therefore necessarily regulated and distorted—truth.

Heaney’s argument for ‘poetry as redress’ contained several direct and indirect nods to Stevens’ propositions, and arguably went further in claiming the necessity of imagined

⁶⁰ Nadine Gordimer, “Witness: The Inward Testimony” in *Burn this Book*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009): 99.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Stevens, “The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words”, 36.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

interpretations of reality. Heaney was convinced of poetry's ability to "place a counter-reality in the scales",⁶⁴ to affect the circumstances of a given event and to transcend and thereby redress those circumstances. Heaney accepted that this imagined reality is just that—imagined. Thus, it cannot promise to be in itself productive of new events in reality. Nevertheless, he argued that an imagined reality remains necessary to access knowledge about the past, and be consequential to it, because "it is imagined within the gravitational pull of the actual and can therefore...balance out against the historical situation."⁶⁵ Heaney is vague on how this 'balancing out' manifests in lived reality. However, the principle is clear. It is best articulated in his claim that "the imaginative interpretation of human life is the means by which we can most truly grasp and comprehend it." Picasso's *Guernica* exemplifies this principle.

Imagination and Reality in Picasso's Guernica

Guernica imagines, and therefore makes visible what the circumstances surrounding the bombing of Gernika failed to make clear and accessible: that life was destroyed in an atrocity, largely for the purpose of the demoralisation of civilians. This was the very essence of the event, its most conspicuous attribute, yet this information was constantly made vulnerable and often usurped by the complex political conditions that surrounded it. Following Butler's argument, this amounted to the failure to heed the precariousness of life, therefore hindering the creation of moral action that aims to denounce and counter such events. *Guernica* countervails these conditions through its imaginative treatment of reality: the interdependence between imagination and reality in the artwork enables the bombing of Gernika to be more fully and meaningfully known about.

The historical realities that brought *Guernica* into being enabled the painting's close and uneasy interplay of reality and imagination. Arnheim seemed to suggest this with his claim that by the time Picasso came to create *Guernica*, "the art of painting had made possible a reality level at which deformities of shape and space and incongruities of subject matter actually succeeded in portraying the world as it is".⁶⁶ However, it was not only changes in the possibilities of artistic expression that enabled *Guernica*, but the changing aspects of reality itself—as they were experienced from a twentieth-century European perspective. Specifically, the emergence of aeronautic technology and its deployment as a weapon of war, understood in terms of the war-scape I have analysed. Both as an actual experience and as a concept apprehended indirectly, the physical and psychological effects of air-warfare were profoundly disorienting. This new form of war,

⁶⁴ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, 4.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Arnheim, *Genesis of a Painting*, 13.

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as it was deployed within Europe, effected a disaccord between the reality of what had become possible, and how that new possibility might be imagined, expressed and known about.

As the analysis of the war-scape demonstrated, the bombing of Gernika recast the previously accepted frontiers of warfare: by the suffering it delivered and by the bomb's conceptual promise of terror, which, recalling Douhet, manifested as the impossibility of a life lived "in safety and tranquillity".⁶⁷ In *Guernica* we find an imaginative equivalent of this breach. The "deformities of shape and space and incongruities of subject matter"⁶⁸ in *Guernica* presented a flight from reality, yet counterintuitively revealed life as transformed by the reality of air-warfare. Clark suggested this in his rhetorical question: "in *Guernica* didn't [Picasso] find a way to make appearance truly terrible...a permanent denunciation of any set of human reasons, which aims or claims to make what actually happens (in war from the air) make sense?"⁶⁹ How Picasso managed to produce this is demonstrated by the ways *Guernica* appeared to deviate from the event it claimed to interpret: the spatial uncertainty, lack of explicit partisanship, abstract symbols and its dislocation from any specific time or place. Picasso's comment in 1923 that "whenever I had something to say, I have said it in the manner in which I felt it ought to be said. Different motives inevitably require different modes of expression"⁷⁰ resonates strongly with his treatment of reality in *Guernica*: the changing circumstances of reality—which, as Mumford and Saint Armour argued, damaged not only human life but human identity by permanently and violently interrupting the familiar—necessitated a response that refused to reconcile in imagination that which was so alienating in reality. This finds connection in Herbert Read's comment that the only logical monument Picasso could have offered was a negative monument: "a monument to disillusion, to despair, to destruction".⁷¹ Read also claimed that art ceased to be monumental when the age it sought to represent ceased to offer any glory. The bombing of Gernika, then, could be expressed in no other way: the expression of the event in *Guernica* was necessitated by the nature of the event itself.

This is further demonstrated by the counterintuitive way in which the imagined qualities in *Guernica* do not correspond mimetically to reality yet succeed at showing what the bombing of Gernika had proven to be real. With its deformities, incongruities and unspecified subject matter, *Guernica* encompasses existence transfigured by vulnerability: the reality made terrifyingly and irrationally absolute by the possibility of destruction that did not adhere to time or space but was

⁶⁷ Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari, eds. Joseph Patrick Harahan and Richard Kohn (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama: 1942): 9.

⁶⁸ Arnheim, *Genesis of a Painting*, 14.

⁶⁹ T.J. Clark in "Picasso and Tragedy" in *Pity and Terror: Picasso's Path to Guernica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Art Reina Sofia, 2017), 55.

⁷⁰ Pablo Picasso, "Statement, 1923", in Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 265.

⁷¹ Herbert Read, "Picasso's Guernica", *London Bulletin*, no. 6 (October 6, 1938): 6.



Figure 16. Dora Maar, “Reportage sur l’évolution de *Guernica* (Photo Report of the Evolution of *Guernica*”, photograph, 17.5 x 24 cm, 1937.

autonomous in a way no other weapon of war, in 1937, could be. By imagining reality, *Guernica* confronts the viewer with the essential quality of this new form of war: its consequences.

The artwork could not have achieved this had Picasso adhered to a realistic, mimetic representation, fixing his portrayal exclusively to the expression of the historical chronicle as it was interpreted and judged by political actors. A crucial outcome of the interplay of imagination and reality in the painting is that it offers its message not on behalf of any political agenda, but on behalf of humanity. For example, Dora Maar’s photographic record shows that during the creation of the mural, Picasso chose to include the Republican salute—a closed fist rising straight and defiant from the body of the dying soldier. The inclusion of this symbol of internationally recognised solidarity would have aligned *Guernica* more specifically with Spain’s beleaguered Republic in the context of the Spanish Civil War and, more broadly, the international struggle against fascism. As I have mentioned above, this also would have placated the concerns of some critics that *Guernica* could only be understood as private art.

However, in the last week of May, Picasso abandoned the idea. And by not identifying a protagonist, it is difficult if not impossible to discern the antagonist. *Guernica* was thereby abstracted from the reality of bitter and bloody partisan conflict, and so exasperated common expectations of solidarity, adding a complication when the general desire (at least for those

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concerned with the Republican propaganda effort) was for simplification: a good/evil binary that favoured one's own side. Avoiding political dichotomies, *Guernica* might be said to have failed as Republican propaganda. Rather than a propagandised and necessarily reductive expression, the imagination of a historical reality in *Guernica* illuminates something altogether larger, more complex and harder to neatly define: the meaning of atrocity in human life and, to borrow Nadine Gordimer's line, "the shattered certainties which are as much a casualty as the bodies under the rubble".⁷² In other words, Picasso reached beyond any objective literal truth of reality—that Gernika was bombed by German and Italian planes at the behest of Franco—to show the consequences of this form of violence on human and non-human life.

Implicit in Picasso's choice not to include these contextual coordinates is the recognition that the bombing of Gernika could not be contained to mimetic and necessarily regulated symbols. The story of the event was larger than its immediate embodiments, the "airplanes, bombs, German invaders", for example, which Holme enumerated in his poem and dismissed as unsatisfactory modes of representation. In *Guernica*, we are confronted with the yet unanswered question of how we are to live with one another in the world Picasso reveals, which for many had become—and would become for many more—a lived reality.

The imagination of the bombing of Gernika in *Guernica* constitutes the countervailing act established by Stevens and others. Picasso not only made visible the destruction of life by an act of terror but he also succeeded in preserving and perpetuating the essence of the event. We are accustomed to news and explanations of events reaching us every day, in continuous and fragmented dispatch. Generally, attentiveness to these explanations flares up and then dissipates. Much is vulnerable to oblivion: to forgetfulness, indifference or duplicity. The bombing of Gernika will always live through the memory and story of those immediately affected by the event, but in *Guernica* it is made public, salvaged from oblivion, in a way that the event could never have otherwise been. *Guernica* perpetually attends to the pain and resistance of the bombing's victims; to the precariousness of life which is never independent but always contingent. It has, at the same time, transcended these origins and stands, steadfast and massive, as a permanent recognition of and accusation against all such murders, across borders and through time.

As with any piece of art, *Guernica* proposes reciprocity. It wants to be seen. Not least because of its visual power but because of the urgency of its message, which fundamentally is about the question of survival in human communities that persevere under the ongoing threat of state or non-state sanctioned violence and the demoralisation of civilians. When *Guernica* is seen, the

⁷² Nadine Gordimer, "Literary Witness in a World of Terror: The Inward Testimony" *New Perspectives Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2009): 66.

interaction between the artwork and the viewer might be thought to resemble a plot, devised by two (the art and the viewer), in defiance of all the other plots which determine what can and cannot be shown about the event, and what can and cannot be known about the event. This interaction is brief in the instantaneity of the moment it renders—the moment of explosion in which everything familiar is about to be lost—yet eternal because made public, continually reproduced and held up to answer and disobey all the other plots which determine acts of barbarity, or work to conceal them from view. *Guernica* presents an incessant counter-reality amid the burdens of all other realities, affirming that which was denied voice. It seeks, as Borja-Villel and Pieró wrote, “to represent the world and to change it at the same time”.⁷³ We might, therefore, understand *Guernica* as John Berger wrote of desire: “a short parenthesis”: it persistently, silently screams its message as day-to-day life continues around, before and after it, so that we are always prompted to ask, as Mer Khanis did, “who will paint the Guernica of ...”⁷⁴

⁷³ Borja-Villel and Pieró, “Introduction”, i.

⁷⁴ “Who will paint the Guernica of Lebanon?” *The News*, July 20, 2006, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/16290>

CONCLUSION

HISTORY AND THE UTILITY OF IMAGINATION

In 2017, to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the creation of *Guernica* and the 25th anniversary of its arrival at the Museo Reina Sofia in Madrid, the gallery held an exhibition of over 170 pieces by Picasso, alongside an exhibit of the Republican government's 1937 Spanish Pavilion. These accompanied the masterwork itself and proposed "a poetic genealogy"¹ of *Guernica*. Curated by Anna M. Wagner and T.J. Clark, *Pity and Terror: Picasso's path to Guernica* affirmed the ever-renewing relevance of the painting to the world today. Central to this exhibition was the following question? "Why *Guernica*? How does the picture answer to our culture's need for a new epitome of death—and life in the face of it?"² To help answer it, a number of other artists were drawn upon. On the wall adjacent to *Guernica*, an excerpt from W.B. Yeats' poem "The Second Coming" was printed in fine black text. It was almost inconspicuous, being positioned so close to the massive work, though it bore an immediate significance to the painting once noticed. The excerpt read:

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.³

Certain pieces of art, positioned together in a particular way, can be made to speak to one another. Yet the conversation inherent between these pieces by Yeats and Picasso seemed contradictory; there was disagreement. The first line, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold", appeared to deny what *Guernica* presented, for in the mural the centre is held, gripped, by the woman leaning out the window, bearing the light. Her grip around the lamp is so pronounced—you can see all five fingers—that it is maybe the only unambiguously steadfast action in the painting. Where everything that surrounds the reaching woman denotes destruction and ambivalence, her grip, by contrast, is unwavering.

¹ Manuel Borja-Villel and Rosario Pieró, "Introduction" in *Pity and Terror: Picasso's Path to Guernica* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2017), 2.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

³³ W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming" in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 328.



Picasso's answer to Yeats might have been, then, "Things fall apart; the centre can be held". Or perhaps this was my answer, gazing back and forth between words and shapes, wondering about their connection. As the "blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/the ceremony of innocence is drowned", something steadfast remains. Or, it can remain: it is not a guaranteed fact but an assured potential, an invitation, even—one that can be accepted or not. This potential is no stronger than a dimly lit lamp gripped by a single hand, but it is enough to hold the world together. At the very least, it is enough to illuminate the destruction, to keep its story from oblivion. *Guernica* has succeeded at this. It has not only held and preserved the story of Gernika but has mutated, as all great artwork does, to remain, as directors of the Museo Reina Sofia, Manuel Borja-Villel and Rosario Peiro, wrote: "a vast mirror in which modern history discovers itself".⁴

Objectives of this Thesis

This project intended to address three key objectives, the first of which was to assess the extent to which the bombing of Gernika might be thought to challenge the possibilities of representation. By appraising the historical context in which it occurred according to Nordstrom's concept of the 'war-scape', and by analysing Holme's poetic problematic, it has been shown that the bombing of Gernika posed a significant challenge to these possibilities. As my analysis showed, this was in part because the bombing of Gernika was a technologically advanced and calculated form of terror bombing that murdered a significant number of civilians. It was also because the event was at first categorically denied and then, for 40 years, lied about by the Nationalists and their allies. I presented an interpretation of the event through primary source material with an emphasis on the initial reports written by Steer, Monks, Holme and Corman. Their accounts of the events at Gernika can be situated in Nordstrom's theory of the war-scape and through my analysis of air warfare in the early Twentieth Century as it has been historically understood. My first chapter, therefore, demonstrated that human identities, as well as material realities, were destroyed by this new form of weaponry. The outcome of this process can be understood as a breach between what was then thought possible in the experience of war, particularly for civilians, and the ways in which these new realities might be represented and known about. Holme's poem provided a point of encounter to the idea

⁴ Ibid.

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that the imagination of reality, as in *Guernica*, might be thought to countervail, or in Wallace Stevens' idiom, push back against, the circumstances that surround the event.

Secondly, another objective in this thesis was to visually analyse Picasso's *Guernica* and the conditions in which it was created and exhibited, just as it was to interpret how the imagination of the event worked to represent and express knowledge about the event. This was achieved in chapter two, where I began by consolidating my analysis of the war-scape and the ways in which airborne warfare recast the possibilities for knowledge and expression about the reality it delivered. Or, promised to deliver: for the effect of the actual reality and the anticipated reality may be understood as one and the same. Through a visual and contextual analysis of Picasso's *Guernica* and the conditions in which it came to be, I determined how imagination and reality interplayed in the painting, and can be understood as interdependent in any interpretation of the painting. Picasso's imaginative treatment of the bombing of Gernika worked to represent and express knowledge about the event, and for this reason the painting constitutes an "uprush to out-burn"—the countervailing action poetically incited by Holme.

To support this argument, I proposed a way of understanding the painting that drew significantly on interpretations by Rudolph Arnheim, T.J. Clark and John Berger. I also looked to interpretations and criticism provided by those who first received *Guernica* in 1937 and 1938, which clarified that the uneasy coexistence of imagination and reality in the painting was apparent to many. An analysis of the painting's formal features proved as important as its symbolic meanings to my argument that, following Heaney, the imaginative treatment of reality is the means through which we more fully grasp and comprehend it. Cubism and Surrealism, understood not just as styles but as philosophies, enabled Picasso in *Guernica* to both portray a historical reality and to express ideas that generate meaning through the interplay of imagination and reality.

Finally, I aimed in my last chapter to demonstrate the extent to which the imaginative treatment of human atrocity holds utility for the interpretation of the past. With reference to the many connections drawn between *Guernica* and the work of Goya, I demonstrated the ways in which we can understand the interplay of imagination and reality in art. I attended to the ways in which the comparison between the two Spanish masters was used to explain how divergences from reality, in *Guernica* as in Goya's *Disasters of War*, actually succeeded in portraying reality with greater clarity than the reality itself offered. In the same chapter, I revisited the mendacious denials that followed the bombing of Gernika, which hindered knowledge of it. Using Butler's concept of the "precariousness of life", and Adorno's notion that truth demands the affirmation of the sufferer's voice, I have shown that *Guernica* makes visible what those who denied the bombing of Gernika refused to make accessible: the consequences of an act of atrocity upon humanity. By imagining

reality as Picasso did, the mural affirms that which was denied voice and, following Stevens' notion of the "pressures of reality", reconfigures reality. *Guernica* performs the countervailing action incited by Holme: an "uprush to out-burn" the circumstances that provided its occasion.

Significance and Further Research

My argument for the imaginative treatment of historical realities deepens accepted means of historical interpretation. To view the past, particularly past experiences of violence, by assessing how it is approached and treated imaginatively—in poetry, film, photography or painting, to name only a few modes of artistic creation—is to reorient one's vantage point and recover meanings that may otherwise not be encountered; perhaps because they have been lost to the "dry grief of an endless political rage"⁵ which, as I explained in the chapter three, often circumscribes the ways in which the past is understood. Within the context of the Spanish Civil War, this circumscription results in narrow and limiting dichotomies: between good and evil, the political right and the political left, the moral and immoral, truth and lies. Such circumscription is misguided because it entails a reduction: the imaginative treatment of reality asks what lays beyond those limits, and what they might offer to interpretations of both the past and the present. Art offers, as Heaney wrote, "a glimpsed alternative, a revelation of potential that is denied or constantly threatened by circumstances".⁶ The framework that I applied to *Guernica* and the bombing of Gernika, then, might be applied to a diversity of other contexts, with productive results. Such application may also succeed in challenging what Shapiro called "the unreflective protocols of official and institutionalised sense-making"⁷ and offer another way of interpreting contexts of violence which, to a large degree, we remain unable to make sense of.

The revelations art may offer to an understanding of history are not necessarily radical: they do not promise to upend previous understandings to revolutionise the way we perceive the past, nor do they promise to be curative or salvific—though these possibilities should not be ruled out. The consequences of the imaginative treatment of reality may be no more ostentatious than a shift in perspective, a reorientation of thought, a new or renewed vantage point. Yet the utility of such shifts is undeniable: they can break and remake worlds of assumptions. Above all, though, this project has affirmed, as Alex Danchev did, that art is not merely illustrative "of more fundamental events in the 'real' world",⁸ but is necessary, urgent, and consequential to those very events.

⁵ Butler, *Prekarious Life*, xix.

⁶ Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry*, 4.

⁷ Michael J. Shapiro, *War Crimes, Atrocity and Justice* (Oxford: Wiley, 2014): 5.

⁸ Alex Danchev and Debbie Lisle, "Introduction: art, politics, purpose," *Review of International Studies* 35, no. 4 (2009): 776.

Conclusion

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