

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Public Relations Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/pubrev

Full Length Article

Publicizing atrocity and legitimizing outrage: Picasso's *Guernica*Jordi Xifra^{a,*}, Robert L. Heath^{b,*}^a Department of Communication, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain^b University of Houston, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Pablo Picasso
Guernica
Public relations
Art
Propaganda
Spanish Civil War

ABSTRACT

Picasso created his most famous painting, *Guernica*, in just over three weeks in 1937 after the bombing of the little town of Guernica, located in the Basque region, during the Spanish Civil War. Thousands of innocent people were injured or killed. In its sharp lines, its confusion and its distorted shapes, *Guernica* shows the suffering and pain of war. Rather than using color, especially vivid reds, Picasso used only black and white paint as symbols of death, mourning and tragedy. He believed that brighter colors might distract the viewer from the agony of the scene. In *Guernica*, most of the figures have open mouths; hear them shouting, groaning or screaming. The aim of this paper and its relevance to public relations is to examine whether and how visual communication can publicize and frame a military event, the character of military leaders, and warfare as a generic aspect of democratic self-governance. This paper proposes that rhetorical, discursive art can contribute impact to public relations efforts, by focusing attention, making issues public, and making informative, framing, and democratizing statements. Even more important is the ability of art to express moral outrage, especially when giving voice to muted interests.

“Picasso knew well, I shall argue, that for a work of art to retain a political impact beyond the flash of mere propaganda, any notion of politics had to be located as much if not more in the act of representation itself in a specific context” (Greeley, 2006, p. 156).

“Guernica blinds us, it stuns us (...). We do not know where to look, where to direct our attention (...) Picasso breaks here with the traditional idea of contemplation of the work of art (...) Guernica deafens us. The visual impression, followed by an aural impression of collapse (...) Picasso does not want us to contemplate. He wants us to understand what is happening (Palau i Fabre, 1979, pp. 40–41).

1. Introduction

Public relations and politics, long intertwined, have become a sub-discipline (Stromback & Kioussis, 2011). Typically, research topics address the problematic of self-governance and interrelatedness; these need further development. To that end, this paper uses the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), especially the atrocity of the bombing of Guernica, and Picasso's iconic painting to address how an established government employs public relations to support its defense against a coup/revolution and seek the quality of relatedness that aligns interests to support its defense. The mural-sized painting, *Guernica*, helped publicize the civil war by featuring an atrocity and employing the rhetoric of identification. In that regard, however much the painting helped assign blame for the atrocity

* Corresponding authors.

E-mail addresses: jordi.xifra@upf.edu (J. Xifra), rheath1941@me.com (R.L. Heath).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.10.006>

Received 15 September 2017; Accepted 31 October 2017

0363-8111/ © 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

on the Francoists, it certainly expressed moral outrage that resounded around the world.

'Publicity involves the use of communication to make an entity publicly known,' wrote Hallahan (2010). Hallahan's insightful discussion emphasized the universal importance of calling attention to some matter, and in doing so, helping to frame that matter as a call to action. In the case of *Guernica*, it called attention, made public, for an atrocity and expressed moral condemnation so as to legitimize the Republican cause.

That discussion parallels Hiebert's (1991) conclusion: "Public relations today is an essential part of modern warfare" (p. 107). During times of military conflict, public relations supports democratic processes by getting valued information to citizens so they can make enlightened choices whether to support or oppose causes and actions. To shoulder its institutional responsibility, Hiebert reasoned, a government needs "to inform, influence, change, or at least neutralize public opinion" (p. 108). Government should explain how military action serves the public interest.

Emphasizing how polyvocal warfare discussions are, Hiebert (2003) compared public relations and propaganda, as companions and competitors in public discourse. His critical analysis judged how well communicative practice, based on rubrics of effectiveness, form, and means, can accomplish dialogue, symmetry, and transparency. Framing is needed to interpret events and facts (and values, policies, and identifications) about events. Frames use metaphor. Relevant to the case in point, *Guernica* became a visual metaphor that framed and condemned Francoism.

Communicator (roles), purpose, meaning, and responsive discourse is challenged to address rhetorical problems. Ihlen's (2010) exploration of the interdependence of rhetorical theory and public relations theory emphasizes the need to understand citizens' (and governments') ability to strategically interpret, confront and respond to rhetorical problems in ways that strengthen societies as collective endeavors. A rhetorical problem arises from natural events (a hurricane), human events (atrocities) or statements (for instance media reports) to demand enlightened decision making.

In 1937, the Republican government of Spain was resisting a coup/revolution. It used classic strategies and tactics of public relations, such as publicity, media relations, events, and moral outrage to seek supporters for its cause, to raise funds, to align interests against the coup, and to legitimize resistance. In this cause, Picasso's mural-sized oil painting, *Guernica*, played a strategically metaphorical and tactically visual role by condemning the atrocity of aerial bombing the village of Guernica by German warplanes on April 26, 1937.

2. Context and rhetorical problem

Spanish Civil War began after the insurrection of the army against the Government of the Second Republic. In its defense, the Republican government in Spain used strategies and tactics to make supporters (and potential supporters) aware of their cause, able to morally judge the war, and willing to support the Republic. In this cause, artists and writers, both near and far, employed new artistic methods to document and inform others about the war, and to express moral outrage (Martin, 2014; Greeley, 2006). Their work coincided with the 1937 Paris International Exposition. The Spanish government wanted to promote the cause of the Republic abroad; it approached specific Spanish artists to create works of art to be displayed at the Spanish Pavilion at the Exposition. The purpose of the art on display at the Spanish Pavilion was to condemn the war and call to people from other countries to support the Republican cause.

During the Spanish Civil War, journalists employed new techniques of communication, such as photography and film. Although few journalists went to Spain (Preston, 2016), those who did made a big impact. Journalists were critical to the Republican cause when they denounced Francisco Franco and the fascists who denied responsibility for the destruction, devastation and censorship of cultural activities such as art.

In the analysis of such dramatic occasions, critics of public relations become less bound to functional concepts such as directionality, symmetry, and mutuality. Instead judgment focuses on the ability of voices to inform, frame, redefine, and refocus thoughts, values, facts, policies, and identifications on the side of humanity. Among the many means available, art and artists are traditionally keenly engaged in politics, as they were in the design of WWI propaganda posters and posters used during the Russian Revolution.

Analysis can be directed to the artist as participant, as engaged to address rhetorical problems regarding the justness of war, the strategies and tactics used to wage war, and the character of those engaged in warfare. Thus, the classic *Guernica*, whether viewed as one-way or two-way, was polyvocal, not only part of a dialogue, but it expressed aesthetically the voices of universal anguish. Viewed in this way, artistic expression examines organizational legitimacy, legitimacy writ large, as means and rationale for self-governance, for aligning interests that make society more fully functioning.

Warfare creates events, and events define warfare. Guernica, a town in the Basque region of Spain, came to symbolize the atrocity of war in general and in specific the cynical slaughter of humans and animals in the name of "seeking peace." The symbolic importance of Guernica, thus the reason for targeting it for bombing, was its status as the meeting place of the Biscayne assembly and a symbol of traditional freedom of Basque people. The Germans attacked to support the efforts of the Spanish General Francisco Franco who was waging civil war to overturn the democratically-elected Spanish Republican government. Franco, in his efforts to achieve a coup, conspired with Hitler to use the town to test aerial warfare tactics to intimidate the Republicans.

Guernica, the name of a famous painting by the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso, depicted the bombing of Guernica. Picasso was asked by the Spanish Republican government to create a painting to decorate the Spanish Pavilion during the 1937 Paris International Exposition. In response, he created a painting that condemned the tragic destruction of Guernica. Picasso's *Guernica* depicts people, animals, and buildings exposed to the violence and chaos of the unexpected attack. This large canvas, expressed in shades of black, white and grey, embodies the inhumanity, atrocity and hopelessness of war and the cruelty of bombing civilians.

After the Fair, when the Spanish Republican government had been defeated by Franco's forces, Picasso refused to allow this

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6575861>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6575861>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)