



And



Paul White

Using explorative strategies to help understand the 'Coca-Cola Advert' lyrics and Picasso's Guernica.

To me, the texts from the coke advert and from Guernica mean a great deal. As we read into them and, through drama, begin to find ways to understand them, we can discover many serious morals and lessons to be learnt. These cover powerful and highly important issues such as the future of humanity, the essence of hope and optimism inbred into each of us, and the manifestation of evil in the world.

In Guernica, Picasso embraces *universal* truths. It confronts us with the bitter facts of what has been happening in Iraq while at the same time documents what happened at Guernica. Picasso had told the truth about Guernica but with a slant. Because he hadn't totally immersed himself in *Historical* time, he had spoken across the boundaries of all time with a message that rings true now, then, and sadly, in the future.

For me, Guernica is a vivid reflection of the violence imposed on the town. But beyond that, I believe it represents a loud warning against the disasters caused by war and man's destruction. So much of the artist's feelings and emotions are evident in the painting: the way it is presented, segments seemingly 'flung' together in an incoherent confused horror and panic. This demonstrates the distortion of Picasso's outlook on the scene.

Hitler's assault on Guernica stole the lives and the testimonies of many people of the town. By transforming a real life event into a form that can never die, he consequently immortalises the people from the town that he depicts. These people are given a second chance; their feelings can be heard by anyone who will look at the painting.

There is a plethora of symbols and clues hidden in Guernica that are directly linked to the themes of war, death and destruction.

Two of the symbols that caught my attention were the images of the bull and the horse. They are in sense emblematic and are tortured images of Spain itself, refracted through an angle drawn from bull fighting. Also, by the way the picture of the bull is not complete. It is almost as if the event has ripped the heart out of Spain. What is more, on further observation, I began to see the bull as a mythical god-like creature, a symbol of good energy, standing slightly aloof – grieved and maimed by what is going on. There are so many conclusions and parallels we could draw from these two symbols alone, however, I believe that too much analysis could lead to confusion and detract from the main themes of the painting. Picasso himself said:

"The public ... must see in the horse or in the bull symbols which they should interpret as they wish. . . ."

In the foreground, there is a fragmented figure of a beheaded warrior. To me, the head looks like the head of a statue or a bust and may represent the falling apart of the *ideal of humanity*.

There is another powerful symbol I would like to discuss. At the top of the picture is a light bulb. This I think represents the influence of technological innovation. This is another example of how this picture could be timeless – there are many current new technologies that have potentially harmful consequences like cloning, GM Foods, nuclear power, etc. Another symbolisation may be that the light bulb shining over the whole scene is actually meant to represent the explosion of the bomb, (we can see how sharply it shines) and to

represent the violence that affects many innocent people whenever human malevolence, aided by technology is unleashed.

Aside from all the destruction, there is an underlying theme of hope. Out of the clenched fist of the warrior, there grows a single white flower. I believe that this symbolises hope that new life will continue to grow despite man's attempts to destroy it. The delicacy of the flower also adds to the general horror of the scene through *contrast*.

Guernica is the heart-rending interpretation of one terrible day in the history of mankind. But more than that, it is a demonstration of all war and bloody conflict between humans. All of the images, symbols, themes, lessons, morals and emotions engrained in the painting can be applied to almost every war that resides in our history. The war in Iraq is at the forefront of our minds at this time as the most recent example of such conflict. The conflict itself is symptomatic of the very evil in human nature that we are striving to transcend.

The lyrics from the coke advert are part of an advertising campaign for a world-leading product, the desired result being that more *Coca-Cola* is sold. Therefore, we can infer that the lyrics are designed in a way that will make people want to buy coke. This may be in the feeling of attraction to the product, the pressured feeling of wanting the product to avoid being bullied for not having it, the subconscious attraction caused by the brain's association with the themes of the advert and the product, or the convicting feeling that one is incomplete without the product – that it is a vital necessity.

The way in which these feelings are induced by watching the advert is very clever. The setting includes hundreds of young people in a group on a hilltop. This immediately creates a sense of family and togetherness. On its own, this is an extremely attractive concept; many young people today live lives affected by broken families and no sense of belonging. Thus, displaying a throng of young, happy people, joining together as a team, regardless of race, background and situation, is a brilliant and effective way of captivating and reaching out to the target audience.

The reason why the coke advert lyrics are so successful is because it directly identifies with the needs we both as individual and humans and as a race have. The world is starving, homeless, at war, seething with inner hate and painfully divided.

So...

"I'd like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love." This is perhaps a link to the end of *homelessness* – everybody in the world to live in a lovely home, "furnished" with a "loving" *family*, as it were.

"Apple trees and honey bees", along with a reference to nature, these symbolise *food* – sources of food for the whole world and an end to *starvation*.

"Snow white turtle doves": this is an undeniable, direct symbol of peace – the end of all *war*.

"I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony". A world without racism – nationalism and prejudices are smashed in the name of 'the world as a team'. Interestingly,

“sing” is the result and a product of work. Could then this lyric develop into the idea of the world working together only to produce more money, and not for *humanity’s* sake?

In the coke advert lyrics, the predominant message is *hope*. The underlying theme is the current state of destruction in the world. Interestingly, in the painting of Guernica, this is exactly the same, but the other way around. The immediate ‘picture’ is of evil and doom, with the second, more intricate, message of hope intertwined.

In this way, the two are inextricably linked. Guernica is screaming in protest at man’s evil, just as the coke ad is spelling out clearly what the world needs to stop this evil.

It is evident in the coke ad that there is a lack of the things it is symbolising by the emptiness and imploring optimism in the style.

In almost exactly the same way, Guernica is crying out for the things identified in the coke advert lyrics. The exact absence of these is blatantly obvious.

The coke advert and Guernica *balance* each other out. Each provides the cause for the actions in the other. We need to begin to see the two items not as separate and individual forms but as two counter-dependent pieces of the complete message.

Another link between the two sources is that they both serve as a connection between people. When writing the lyrics for the advert, the coca cola people saw another way in which Coke could function. They decided to view Coke not as it was originally designed to be – a liquid refresher – but as a tiny bit of commonality between all peoples, a universally liked formula that would help to keep people company.

In a similar way to how Coke is connecting one person with another using a product, through the painting, Picasso is connecting the people from Guernica to the people of today. The artist himself once said: ***“Whatever the source of emotion that drives me to create, I want to give it a form that has some connection with the visible world.”***

Picasso used the painting to link the *feelings* he had to people in the *material* world. He was able to consolidate emotions into ‘shapes on a wall’. These ‘shapes on a wall’ took the form of expressionism.

By ‘expressionism/expressionistic’ I mean not how the world looks, but how Picasso *feels* the world looks.

Guernica expresses the fundamental nature of the event. It symbolises the manifestation of its existence.

Picasso didn’t take a photograph. Instead he built on the techniques of realistic painting, took that reality and pushed it with heartfelt emotion and grotesqueness - past naturalism and into an expressionistic style. This enabled the painting to reveal the true character of the situation.

Very similar to expressionism, our group used Physical Theatre to break through what we thought to be irrelevant patterns of realistic performance and typical routines of response. We aspired to cut right to the heart of the raw emotions on display.

In our piece, the Coca Cola People (Sophie and I) were manifesting emotions of optimism and hope contentiously intertwined with sinister depravity and malevolence. To convey this effectively was indeed ambitious. However, *the physicality of our performance style forced*

us to express an exposed image. We broke the natural boundaries of realism and climbed right into the soul of the role.

We worked intensively on our facial expressions, for instance showing optimism and joy using our eyes, eyebrows and smiling mouths. Furthermore, the delivery of the lines “Snow white turtle doves” and “Perfect harmony” carried feelings that contrasted with those of the facial expressions. We spoke the lines slowly, accentuating the consonants and hissing in a way that resembled a snake. This applied a savage slant to the seemingly innocent lyrics. By twisting our trunks and arms and linking certain points of contact, we created interesting physical shapes, and extended the reference to a reptilian, demonic side to the coca cola company.

In addition, we used boldly stylised movement, repetitive and violent, to show a rotten core beneath the veneer of the conventional lyrics. Our concern in the role of the ‘Coke People’ was to unlock the debate of coca cola’s illicit intentions.

The other party consisted of Chelsie and Nicole and represented Picasso. Just like coca cola had created song that conveyed a message, Picasso had created Guernica. Through this he was proclaiming a message of destruction interwoven with a theme of hope. Coke’s advert professed the ideals of humanity but in doing so highlighted the *impeding factors* that induce the status quo. In this way, both parties are artists trying to convey a message that discounts the other. However, the goal of both sides is ultimately the same, both the Guernica painting and the coca cola advert are striving for peace and happiness in the world. One reveals how stricken the world is with evil at the moment with references of how to abolish this. The other source looks to a future utopia and uses *subtext* to highlight the resistant factors of this concept. The message is the same yet ironically self-conflicting. We attempted to convey this statement of ‘**conflict in spite of eternal agreement**’ as one of the main ideas behind our work.

During the exploration of the two texts, it became clear that we would need other factors to aid our learning; such was the nature of the topic. We were introduced to ‘explorative strategies’. These are a variety of methods useful when embarking on a subject surrounded by certain themes and issues. By approaching Drama from a different angle we can begin an effective familiarisation process with some of the more difficult concepts. Some of the strategies include ‘sound collage’, ‘machine’, and ‘hot seating’. Each explorative strategy is Highly flexible – can be used simply in an investigative manner, or developed further into a polished performance; however, it requires careful selection for some strategies may be irrelevant. I think ‘explorative strategies’ are brilliant and inspiring ways of developing your personal understanding and confidence in areas otherwise aloof.

Initially, our group found difficulty in identifying the similarities and connections between the texts. Using strategies like ‘**Machine**’ helped us gain valuable insight into the explicative composition of the source. It was seeing the two sources in this exposed manner that helped us get past obvious differences in content and style and extract similarities of the text’s intentions.

In our production we utilised previously effective explorative strategies and adapted the performances to infuse with our production. Aside from everything else, these added a dash

of spice and diversity to the overall effect. These two strategies were **sound collage** and **montage**.

Montage.

Our performance included the strategy of montage. We contrasted the form of physical theatre and expressionism with the content of the advert lyrics. This distorted and challenged the conventional view of Coca Cola as an innocent, benevolent company. Further contrast was also made through the use of sound to conflict the intentions of the lyrics.

Not only were we taking part in an exam, through our production we were expressing personal emotion that had come to the surface through exploring this topic. This provided the piece with a real depth of sincerity to the protesting message. Drama is a beautiful and stimulating form of art. The high emotional input that is required is repaid tenfold by the extreme liberation of cathartic expression experienced during performance.

We tried to use the provided space as ambitiously as possible. The action occupied almost all of the floor space and the final tableau was formed intentionally in an area of the audience. By doing this, our group established a sense of professionalism and command over the room.

In the centre of the space we had constructed a 3D image using chairs. The result was an abstract version of the Guernica picture. This parallel was further established by the positioning of the 'stone of hope' at the top – similar to the candle in the painting. The way in which the chairs connected with each other was in an attempt to convey some of the twisted and angry emotions from the painting.

The effect on the overall production was that it opened the eyes of the audience and made them more receptive to the *physical* attributes and themes of our piece. Another result of the presented image was that a theme of *confusion* was introduced. The intense confusion of morals held by the Coca Cola People together with the style of the painting was consolidated in the construction of the chairs.

The two parties were separated by the central structure. This immediately created the effect of two opposing sides.

Using a **sound collage**, we established the differences between the two sides by contrast in tone and pitch, tone and dynamics. For instance, the low menacing tone of the Coke People clashed in juxtaposition to the high-pitched screeching wails of Picasso. We also used the sound collage to create an atmosphere of tension - both sides competing for sound supremacy.

At this point, the obvious visible differences between the two sides were clear and the atmosphere of unease and discomfort had been created. These things established, the next stage in our production was the conflict. The two sides began to menacingly eye the other side up. This feeling of unrest and tension reflects the veil of uneasiness that surrounds matters that concern the issue of evil. The attitude of the 'stiff upper lip' and feelings of distaste are common when one is faced with an art form as brutal and explicit as is Guernica.

Coca Cola and Picasso glared intensively into each other's eyes. Both sides could see the bowl that held the 'stone of hope'. Yet they realised that a fight for its capture was inevitable due to the contrast in style between the two texts. As the converging parties grew ever closer to the central structure, the sound collage

increased in tempo, volume and emphasis. This crescendo increased the possibility of something significant happening.

Sure enough, they rushed at each other in an aggressive, snarling attack. Upon clashing, they reached over the central structure and tried to force each other back using hands against foreheads. We held our bodies rigid, muscles tense and straining. The baring of our teeth also added to the savagery of the battle. Then suddenly, the attack ended with the internal hate exploding, forcing each team back.

The following assault appeared to be angrier, bitterer, and yet not as violent. The parties were so close to each other that they were almost on top of the central structure. So close in fact that they were all in an ideal position to see the 'stone of hope'.

Stone of Hope

In the painting of Guernica, one of the symbols of hope is the flower. Though incredibly small in relation to the rest of the painting, on observation, this symbol is extremely powerful and compresses a multitude of meanings into one simple representation. The quintessences of hope. Likewise, in the coke advert, "coke" is professed to be the secret of hope in the world. Now, in isolation, this word is small, short and abbreviated. Yet, according to the poem, the ultimate meaning is far from empty. "Coke" is linked to all the remedies longed for by the world and holds the key to happiness and love.

Therefore, the small stone in our production symbolised coke/symbolised flower/symbolised Hope. Furthermore, we tried to retain the significance of hope being 'compressed' or 'potentially explosive' and link that into the piece.

So the moment when both Picasso and the Coke People actually saw the stone, the mood completely transformed. We as actors reacted to the stone as if it were a dazzling blaze of light. We flung our bodies away from the structure, emitting a loud, high-pitched screech as if we had been blinded and pushed away.

This section was a symbolisation of the two sources fighting over hope. This is what we believe the two texts to be doing.

From residing in crumpled heaps on the floor, both parties collected themselves and began to reform. The atmosphere supported by the sound collage had changed again, a decisive state of shock hovered over the scene.

Picasso was beginning to be affected by the emotions that he had expressed in the painting. Beginning to feel disturbed by the hypocritical irony of man's tendency to ruin all chances of capturing hope. "The whole idea of Hope is that it is a way forward/a way out of the despair caused by conflict. No wonder there is no hope in Guernica, NO WONDER THERE IS NO HOPE IN THE COKE ADVERT!" Picasso despaired.

How does the human race move forward if we tackle the very thing we are trying to abolish with the same disastrous thing? Picasso knows that he didn't directly answer this question. Instead he spelled out the situation as clearly as is possible, and presented it to the world in a hope that a lesson would be learnt.

Meanwhile, the Coke People began to stir. Moving with extreme control and precision, we slowly rose to face each other. Using the full length of our arms and hands, we made repetitive gestures fuelled with contrasting emotions of shock, hate, and love. Our body language became lyrical, approaching the feeling of a ritual dance. This was reflecting the massive impact that the theme of 'hope' had on the lyrics of the coke advert. The blast of light from the 'stone of hope' had completely repented the actions of the Coke People.

It was when both parties had come to the edge of the central structure that the realisation hit them. During the fighting, amid the hate and anger, the 'stone of hope' had been knocked off and now lay hidden somewhere at the bottom of the chaotic central structure. There would be no *hope* of ever finding it again. We believe this was also what Picasso was saying through the painting. Mankind can never redeem itself – looking for hope yet in the process making hope harder and harder to find. There follows a moment of tableau and silence. This suddenly drops a cape of tension over the whole room as the action is paused, for a few moments the audience are left with only their racing imaginations. When the action resumes, it catches up with both parties searching for hope. During the ensuing search, the two parties are drawn to a spot where they believe the 'stone of hope' to be. It is not unlike a primitive ritual. Coca Cola and Picasso moving as if in a trance. Our movements were trance-like, dreamy yet meaningfully focused. Hanging our heads as if hypnotised, we advanced towards the invisible stone using our eyes as the centre of our emotional display.

Gathering around the stone, the two groups had somehow, lost the huge differences that had previously separated them. In fact, the only way to differentiate between the two was to identify the source of each sound in the sound collage, which had gone back to how it was at the beginning. This 'coming together' of the two sources symbolises the similarities of each sources message. It also suggests that even if all 'hope' is lost, there remains an everlasting factor of hope inbred into each one of us - hence the invisibility of the stone.

The piece concludes with a tableau. An image is created where all four actors are in a circle, linked in some way, but not necessarily upright. The impression is of one object comprised of two factors. Our bodies occupied unnatural positions e.g. arched backs to indicate a morphing process. **Through the quest for hope in ourselves as opposed to hope in general, both parties were united in eternity.** Picasso's 'Guernica' and Coke's advert lyrics both aim for an end to suffering. We as individuals need to nurture and connect with the element of hope that resides in each and every one of us.

Appendix

The poem can be seen as a literate version of the painting, describing the events in the painting, converting the painting's emotions into 'cries'. The poem is extremely powerful and disturbingly effective, captivating the reader's attention, as though screaming the content into one's face. The repetition of the word "cries" is a very important contributor to the success of the poem; it painfully makes explicit the emotion of pain by conveying the message of the picture in the result of that pain, (a cry).

The poem also uses dramatic imagery to develop an image of great clarity in the reader's mind. Also successful is the way in which Picasso personifies the objects described in the poem. It is almost as if the objects have been so affected by the tragedy, that they have been possessed by the evil and are thus manifesting that evil through cries.

As an accompaniment to the painting to provide additional content, I believe this poem is extremely useful and valuable. However, I don't believe that it should be regarded as an alternative to the painting as it would not do it justice. For instance, the way in which Picasso uses image in a phenomenally successful way to demonstrate the destruction of war cannot even be allowed to juxtapose the poem.

References

Coca-Cola Commercial lyrics

I'd like to buy the world a home and furnish it
with love,

Grow apple trees and honey bees, and snow
white turtle doves.

I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect
harmony,

I'd like to buy the world a Coke and keep it
company.

[Repeat the last two lines, and in the
background:]

It's the real thing, Coke is what the world wants
today.

Excerpt from a poem by Picasso

“...cries of women cries of birds cries of flowers cries of timbers and of stones cries of bricks
cries of furniture of beds of chairs of curtains of pots of cats and of papers cries of odours
which claw at one another cries of smoke pricking the shoulder of the cries which stew in the
cauldron and of the rain of birds which inundates the sea...”