

Representation and Interaction of Images - An Iconography Analysis of Peace Posters

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Abstract

Peace posters serve as a vital conduit for disseminating the tenets of peace and advocating against armed conflict. They facilitate a public discourse on the concept of peace, prompting reflection and fostering a deeper understanding of its nuances. Peace posters are not merely a collection of graphics and text; rather, they are a complex and nuanced form of communication. The image within the poster carries a profound connotation, reflecting the intricate relationship between the various elements. These living images are not isolated or static; they are continuously produced, disseminated, and accepted within a cyclical process. This dynamic interplay shapes the evolution of society, enabling the development of deeper meanings. These vivid images are not isolated static objects; rather, they are situated within a dynamic cycle of production, dissemination, and reception. As such, they derive additional meanings over time as society evolves. This paper employs image research methods to examine the connotations of images in peace posters from the vantage point of image reproduction and interaction. It elucidates how these images can effectively resonate with viewers' psychology, expeditiously convey the message of peace, and fulfill the function of calling for peace, thereby constructing a distinctive attitude toward peace and its value.

Keywords: peace poster, images, representation, interaction

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1. Introduction

The concept of peace has consistently emerged as a pervasive theme in the history of human representation. From the dove and olive branch in the biblical narrative of Noah's Ark to the graphic metaphor of the "Goddess of Peace" in classical paintings, the image of the dove of peace and anti-war symbols during the Second World War, and the anti-war posters that proliferated on the streets, the visual representation of peace has undergone a discernible evolution. In the contemporary era, the theme of peace continues to be evoked through a range of graphic metaphors, as evidenced by the images that have emerged in the digital age. The images on the theme of peace demonstrate a clear line of creation. Concurrently, peace-themed poster creations and exhibitions continue to emerge, including the Auschwitz Political Poster Biennale and the Nanjing Peace Poster Biennale, among others. Peace posters have become a pervasive theme in exhibitions. They not only exemplify the fundamental aspiration for peace among people, but also serve as an efficacious instrument for advancing political agendas.

The poster is an important communication tool to achieve the purpose of communication to the public through visual design and information conveyance. Restricted by the medium, the poster must condense the content expressed into a static image, which is a typical narrative image that visualises and illustrates abstract concepts. As an abstract concept, "peace" must be fully expressed in this two-dimensional space in the creation of posters, and presents a more diversified visual style and narrative form than earlier creations, in which the many images appearing are also more diversified, and more images are produced as society develops, differentiated according to different cultural perspectives. The reproduction of images in peace posters and the reproduction and interaction of images in peace posters are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Image representation provides the basic elements for interaction, while interaction gives new vigour and deeper meaning to the reproduced image. Both lead the viewer to interpret the human thoughts and emotions behind the images in peace posters. At the same time, the diverse and innovative design and artistic impact of the peace posters strengthen the combination of the images in their narrative context, thus enabling the viewer to communicate and interact in the context of the peace theme, and ultimately achieving the effective communication of the concept

of “peace”.

2. Research Methodology

The data for this study comes from the official websites of the Stop the War Poster Exhibition and the Nanjing Peace Poster Biennale, two peace-themed poster exhibitions. Through the method of image research, the images in these peace posters were collected, focusing on the representation and interaction of the images, analysing the specific ways in which these images were created, their logic of operation and how they were communicated to viewers.

3. Discussion

3.1 Representation of images in peace posters

Like many artistic creations, the creation of peace posters relies on a large number of images. An image can be either a material object or a mental abstraction, a mental image. It is both the entity and the illusion that people see visually, and it is also the thing that people's senses perceive, and it can even transcend the visual, and language and sound can also produce an image. The image is the universal idea that gives rise to particular analogues (harmonies, imitations, analogues, resonances) that bring the world together through 'intellectual forms' (Foucault, 1970). The image appears as a series of impressionistic sketches, sometimes very clear, sometimes ambiguous. The appearance of the image does not mean that one does not have a full grasp of the thing, but that this state of affairs represents a certainty in itself. It is on this basis that one can distinguish the image of an object from its material object. For example, one does not see the image of a tree in an oil painting as a pile of coloured blocks, but as the image of a tree. It is because of the existence of such properties that a concrete concept is simplified and abstracted into a structure with basic characteristics, and although it is completely far away from the real image, the characteristics of abstract generalisation rather make these concepts clearer.

Since its birth in the myth of Noah's Ark, the image of the Dove of Peace has appeared countless times in artistic creations on the theme of "peace", from one medium to another. It has appeared as a meta-image in paintings, photographs and novels, and thus the dove of peace has become the meta-image that underlies the whole discourse of "peace". This image is clearly visible in the peace posters. Figure 1 shows a huge dove flying in the centre of the picture, taking up most of the image, and the photographic technique brings the viewer into this beautiful moment. But there is nothing else in the picture, the dove is alone in the picture. A solitary thing, especially when it exists as a witness or with a quick meaning, can change the whole meaning of a place (Mitchell, 2018). The body of the dove in the vast blue sky in this poster seems at first glance to declare its insignificance, but the "WAR NO MORE" text behind it declares that the space is occupied by the concept of anti-war. But the "WAR NO MORE" text behind it declares that the space has been occupied by the concept of anti-war. Figure 2 shows the broken wall forming the outline of the peace dove, this outline not only distinguishes the hole from the wall, but also implies the breaking of the space of the wall, there is a better space (peace) outside the wall to facilitate the formation of the action of "breaking". The wall and the silhouette of the dove form a close and contrasting relationship, and both are no longer complete images of the wall and the dove. The wall no longer represents the meaning of the wall itself, but the meaning of war. The silhouette of the dove is not just a simple broken silhouette, but the meaning of peace and active resistance.



Figure 1. Peace poster artwork. Keith Kitz. Source: https://stopwarposters.org/?page_id=2



Figure 2. Peace poster artwork. Mica Miloradovic. Source: https://stopwarposters.org/?page_id=2

The Dove of Peace, as a symbolic image of peace, is an icon in the eyes of pacifists, who subconsciously perceive it as sacred and holy, and as having the same omnipotent and powerful power as all icons. This image has been represented in various sets since ancient times and is still reflected in peace posters. Figure 3 shows the Dove of Peace in an extremely grandiose, muscular and powerful manner. The guns under the claws are as small as ants and are easily destroyed by the powerful claws, and there are also destroyed gun parts on the feathers of the wings, all proclaiming the victory of the dove and its untouchability, and showing the determination of peace to win. At other times, this image is depicted as a sacred elephant (Fig. 4), which resides in the centre of the picture, showing a benevolent, sacred and majestic style, representing a highly idealised state.



Figure 3. Peace poster artwork. Brenda Guerrero Zeron. Source: https://stopwarposters.org/?page_id=2



Figure 4. Peace poster artwork. Source: <https://www.ipbp.org/cn/>

When an image is deified, it is inevitably destroyed. Figure 5 completely destroys the image of the dove, which, because of its symbolic nature, is not special as a visual image, but reflects a rather frightening idea. The dove of peace is an "offensive image" for war, and its destruction is not only the destruction of its image, but also a kind of "creative destruction". While the dove of peace is being destroyed, the terrible image of war is being created, and an image of war is being created which is the opposite of peace, i.e. war. The image of war is the opposite of peace. At the same time, the text at the top of the poster provokes people to think about how to deal with such a powerful force when the cruelty and bloodshed of war cannot be avoided even by the image of peace. The image of the peace dove is secularised, stripped of its sacred colours and presented as a non-divine, ordinary animal that can be hurt.

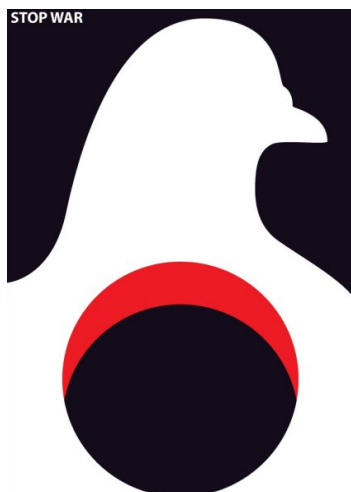


Figure 5. Peace poster artwork. Source: https://stopwarposters.org/?page_id=2

In contrast, the image of war as horror can be "creatively destroyed" in this way, destroying the image of horror and creating a subversive effect. Figure 6 transforms the image of the missile into paper and tears it up, completely destroying its image in terms of medium and form, not only playfully dismantling the concept of war, but also creating a counter-image of good peace. When two images of the same type are superimposed, either a more powerful image of the same type is born, or an image that is diametrically opposed to the same type is born. For example, in Figure 7, the combination of two horrific images, the coffin and the rocket, creates the idea that the rocket (war) is dead. The destruction of the image of the missile is a way of tearing away the sanctity of 'peace' and rationalising the relationship between war and peace in a secular way. The destruction of the image of terror is a way to tear away the horror of "war" and the exaggerated imagination of its power caused by terror, and to look at war optimistically and playfully. The power of war is weakened and the power of peace is strengthened, reflecting the idea that peace will prevail.

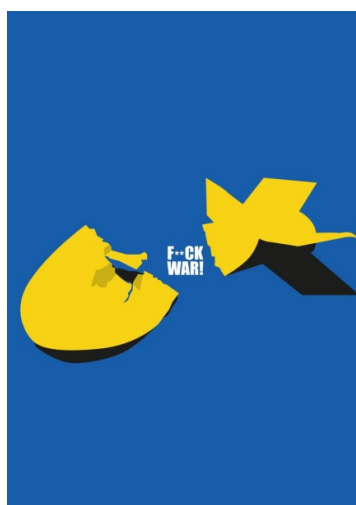


Figure 6. Peace poster artwork. Source: https://stopwarposters.org/?page_id=2



Figure 7. Peace poster artwork. Source: <https://old.ipbp.org.cn/2017award9/>

3.2 Interaction of images in peace posters

The interaction of the image refers to the relationship between the viewer and the image. According to W.J.T. Mitchell (2018), the desire of the image is to exchange places with the viewer, to stun or paralyse him or her, to turn him or her into an image for the image to gaze at, which has been called the 'Medusa effect'. From the point of view of poster design, the purpose of communicating a message can only be achieved by captivating the viewer, which is also in line with Mitchell's statement. Michel's statement. In the case of posters, if the image in them interacts with the viewer through the eyes or the body, it is engaging the viewer. In the famous American recruitment poster Uncle Sam, the image of Uncle Sam looks directly at the viewer with his eyes and his strong fingers pointing at the viewer, commanding and admonishing. The text at the bottom is the purpose of the image's active interaction, i.e. to send the viewer to war. In Figure 8, the opposite image of Uncle Sam is made, in which Uncle Sam is badly injured, limping with bandages, holding out his hand to the viewer and staring at the viewer with lifeless eyes, the image of an old man in desperate need of help. The text at the bottom has been changed to "I WANT OUT". Figure 9 uses the same tactic as the military recruitment poster, the superhero, like Uncle Sam, has his eyes and fingers pointing powerfully at the viewer, but the text at the bottom reads "Lay Down Your Arms", which is the exact opposite of Uncle Sam's purpose.



Figure 8. Peace poster artwork. Source: https://m.sohu.com/a/149489387_257199/



Figure 9. Peace poster artwork. Source: <https://old.ipbp.org.cn/2017award9/>

Not all of the images in the Peace Poster are willing to actively interact with the viewer. Seemingly indifferent to the viewer, concerned with their own inwardness, they get what they want by acting superficially unwanted, by pretending to want nothing (Mitchell, 2018). In the image of the two boys, one with his eyes downcast and the other whimpering in pain (Fig. 10), the two boys in pain, whose own pain is unwilling to interact positively with the viewer, are more interested in relieving themselves of their own pain, in escaping from the viewer's gaze. They are more interested in relieving themselves of their pain, escaping from the viewer's gaze, and ending the viewer's possession of the image, because their presence in the image risks dramatising their pain. It is also a silent indictment of the viewer; does the viewer make fun of the image of pain without concern for himself? If the image remains outside the frame for the viewer, Figure 11 forces the viewer into the space of everyday life. The busy farmer is engaged in his work, as the text at the top of the picture attests. The rockets in the lower left corner are extremely incongruous in the picture and, given the history of the war, this is very likely to have happened. All the farmers avoid the gaze of the viewer, they do not want to interact with him, their expressions are focused on their work and they seem to be used to this environment. The image of busy farmers is no different from what one sees in everyday life, they seem to be one's neighbours, friends and family. The tranquillity of the image makes the viewer think about how they would deal with this scene if it were to occur in their own lives.



Figure 10. Peace poster artwork. Source: <https://old.ipbp.org.cn/2017award9/>



Figure 11. Peace poster artwork. Victor Gally. Source: <https://www.shejjingsai.com/2022/05/789413.html>

It is not only the look and feel of the image that triggers the viewer's interaction, but the image can also engage in a dialogue with the viewer, speaking directly to the viewer about what it wants to express. Figures 12 and 13 both speak directly, with the image of ruins in Figure 12 saying "WHY? Figure 13 is more direct, saying "STOP" and creating an anthropomorphic crying face. The image in both peace posters wants to be heard, not just seen by the viewer, but heard by the viewer, and in this process the image is personified, it is the speaker, and the viewer is the object of its speech. Figure 12 speaks in the address of ruins, asking why the original house is in ruins and expecting an answer. Figure 13 appears as a weeping face, its own face is what is being said, seeking comfort.



Figure 12. Peace poster artwork. Victor Gally. Source: https://stopwarposters.org/?page_id=2



Figure 13. Peace poster artwork. Victor Gally. Source: <https://www.shejjingsai.com/2022/05/789413.html>

In addition to the dialogue with the viewer, the images in the peace posters show more lifelike movements. The barrel of the rifle in Figure 14 faces itself in contemplation in the mirror as it examines itself. The vitality embodied in this action is striking because only a human being can understand through a mirror that the image he sees is himself, and has the capacity to engage in self-examination. It embodies at least three pieces of information: it is alive, it knows who it is, and it has the ability to think for itself. Most importantly, it leaves the judgement of the results of its own self-examination in the hands of the viewer, who has the right to judge whether what it has done and is now reflecting on is right or wrong. The viewer is both a voyeur caught in the act of watching and the judge of the image, and because of the allegory of the image, the viewer's judgement of it is in fact a judgement of war.

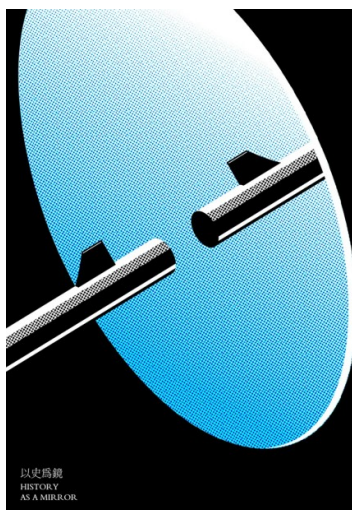


Figure 12. Peace poster artwork. Victor Gally. Source: <https://old.ipbp.org.cn/2019award5/>

4. Conclusion

A functional structure made up of holons is called holarchy. The holons, in coordination with the local Peace is not only a deep reflection on the bitter memories of war, but also a conscience and spirit that people must uphold

in the process of world development. Today's world situation is undergoing profound and complex changes, and although peaceful development has become the mainstream of the times, but the friction and contradiction between local regions and countries are increasing, triggering new crises and challenges, peace is still a theme worth cherishing and thinking about. Peace posters, as a kind of power, a weapon against war on a two-dimensional level, build a bridge of communication with the viewers, and the rich images spread the idea of peace in reproduction and interaction, which is a kind of silent trumpet.

Image reproduction is art's mapping of the objective existence or conceptual world, which carries rich cultural and historical information. From an academic point of view, it is not a mechanical copy of the original, but a creative representation in a specific cultural context. Each reproduced image contains the ideology of its era, and is a visual representation of the collective social consciousness. Image interaction is a complex semantic field constructed by the interrelationship between the elements in the image. In this field, images are no longer isolated, but echo, collide and intertwine with each other in various ways. It involves multiple dimensions such as pictorial composition, visual guides and symbols. This interaction does not only exist within the picture, but also extends to the viewer and the picture. When interpreting the image, the viewer unconsciously participates in this interaction and becomes part of the generation of meaning. The rich imagery in the peace posters allows viewers in different times and places to reflect on the events and situations of war in different times, and vividly conveys the people's resistance to war and their cries for peace, which is of great significance for the promotion of peace and development.

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