

## The genesis of Picasso's *Guernica* and its possible interpretations in the light of Conceptual Blending Theory

By: Álvaro Corral Cuartas  
Humanities Department  
Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano  
Mail: [alvaro.corral@utadeo.edu.co](mailto:alvaro.corral@utadeo.edu.co)

¿How can we understand creative processes in the genesis and comprehension of the works of art? We will try to answer both questions with the help of Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The underlying hypothesis here is that the cognitive processes which are run by spectators of works of art seem to be similar to the cognitive processes of the artist, in order to mean what he wants to communicate to the public. In the particular case of Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) we have the special coincidence that a series of more than forty sketches are available for us. After the Nazis bombed the small Spanish town of Guernica in April 1937, Picasso worked feverishly for a period of six weeks in a mural to protest against violence. In the sequence of the sketches, which are dated and numbered by Picasso himself, we can observe how the painter developed his movements forward and back to the stage of the final version. In his classical interpretation of this process Rudolf Arnheim (1962) proposed that the figures of the painting are characterized by different expressive attitudes. He speaks therefore of 'characters', 'attitudes' and 'sentiments'. In his interpretation Arnheim tried to explain how abstract 'sentiments' could be attached to 'characters'. When we look at the upright standing and forward seeing bull on the left of *Guernica*, we want to know how abstract sentiments of courage, pride and stability can be attached to the figure of the bull. With the help of the Conceptual Blending Theory we would be able to offer an alternative interpretation of this cognitive attachment of some 'sentiments' and abstract meanings to the figures depicted.

In order to demonstrate the sequence of this exclusively human cognitive process we will take the dominant figure of the bull and show how Picasso struggle with himself, as it is well documented by the sketches, in order to paint something more than a simple bull observing the devastating scene depicted on the canvas. During this creative process Picasso considered the possibility to show an anthropomorphic bull as it is known in one of his previous paintings (the *Minotauromaquia* of 1935). In other sketches of the bull Picasso shows clearly human-like characteristics or 'sentiments' which were cognitive 'blended' in the final version of the painting. It is interesting to observe that in this cognitive blending those anthropomorphic characteristics of the bull were put aside by Picasso in the painting, meanwhile their implicit reference to the 'sentiments' as courage, pride, stability remain attached to the final figure of the bull, as they are clearly explicit in the sketches too.

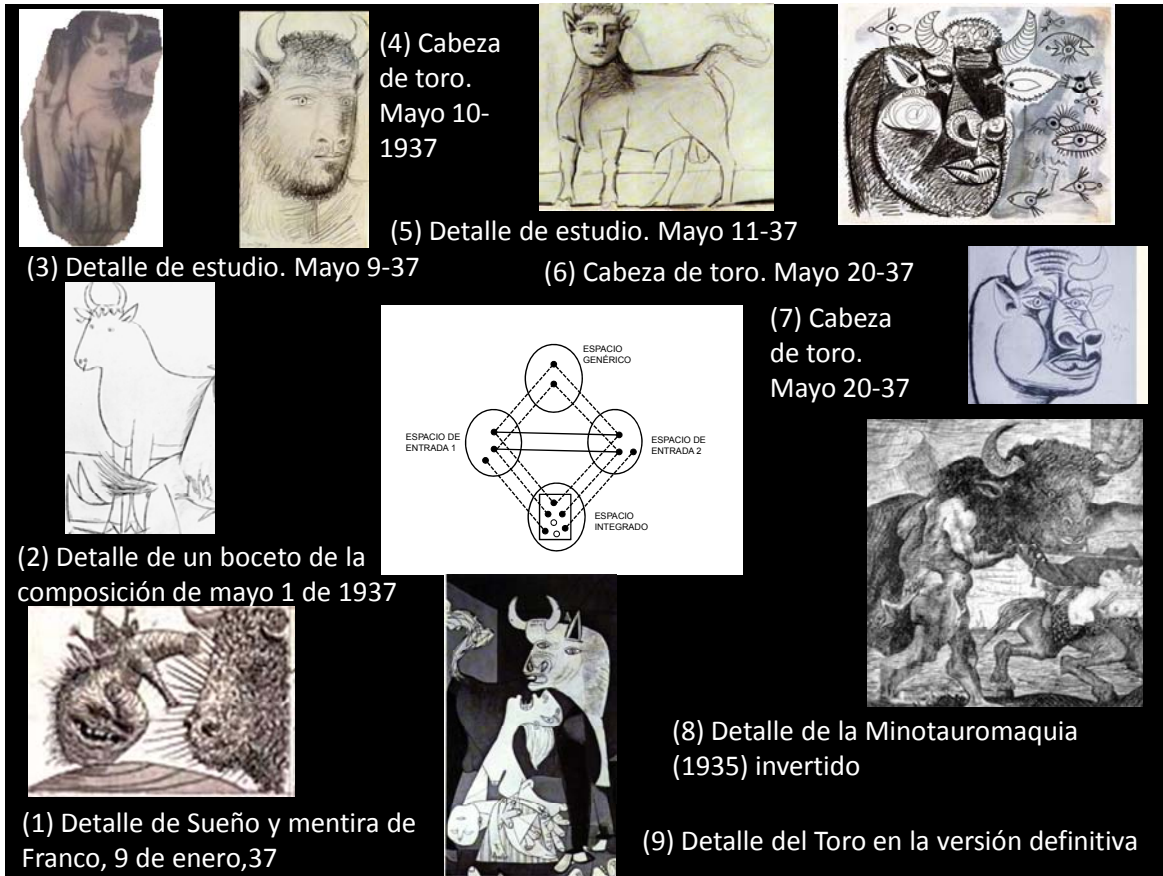


Figure 1

We expand here the Conceptual Blending diagram of 4 mental spaces (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) so: Pictures (1), (2) and (3) shows the *Input Space 1*. Picasso paint different figures of the bull. Pictures (4), (5), (6), (7) and (8) are different examples of *Input Space 2*. Picasso paint different anthropomorphic *Sentiments* attached to the figure of the bull. In the *Blended Space* of the *Guernica*, the bull (9) is not only a 'character', but it refers furthermore to some 'Sentiments'.