7 Banksy's Stencil Graffiti—Origins and Style

When Tristan Manco published his book *Stencil Graffiti* in 2002, Banksy became the most important representative of stencil graffiti in international and broader perception. Before the game-changer Banksy came on the scene, most European literature talked about "pochoir."[1] Banksy achieved worldwide fame with his Barely Legal show in Los Angeles 2006. "Stencil," "street art," and "Banksy" became nearly synonymous.

In this chapter, I try to answer the question "In what way Banksy did push the medium stencil graffiti further?" Still in 2020, even serious publications like *The New York Times* got carried away (quoting Francesco Bonami, a curator and critic) with statements like this: "'Great artists, I believe, invent a language and a grammar, […] Banksy did not.' [Bonami] added that his signature stencil style, developed by the French graffiti artist Blek le Rat in the 1980s, had been around for 'a long time.'"[2] Francesco Bonami is neither a specialist in Banksy nor in stencils nor in graffiti. Although this is stated often by many, Banksy was not inspired by Blek to start stenciling; furthermore, Blek was not the first to use stencils as an artist. Common sense dictates, however, that Bonami should have known that the act of using stencils alone does not make Banksy a copycat. Would he claim that the British painter Francis Bacon (1909–1992) is a copycat just because he worked in the same medium as Giotto (ca. 1267–1337)? As will be discussed in this chapter, Banksy was quite knowledgeable about the history of stencil graffiti, and was able to renew it, becoming the best-known artist to use this technique. To reduce Banksy's artistic output to stencils is similar to reducing Robert del Naja's artistic output to his graffiti years.

In several interviews, Banksy explains why he uses stencils at all and why he first switched to stencils. Banksy started tagging in the late 1980s,[3] but it is unclear when he actually switched to stencils. In 2005, Banksy wrote in his artist book *Wall and Piece*

1 See for example Solange Pierson, Guillaume Dambier: Pochoir à la une. Paris 1986; Nicolas Deville, Marie-Pierre Massé, Josiane Pinet: Vite Fait Bien Fait. Pochoirs/Stencil Art. Paris 1986; Christoph Maisenbacher: An die Wand gesprüht… "Pochoirs" Schablonengraffiti aus Frankreich. Frankfurt/Main 1987/88. Christoph Maisenbacher: Graffiti Kalender '89. Moers 1988 [jacket text]; Treeck/Metze-Prou: Pochoirs. Die Kunst des Schablonengraffiti. Berlin 2000.

2 Scott Reyburn: Banksy Is a Control Freak. But He Can't Control His Legacy. In: New York Times, 05.02.2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/arts/design/banksy-legacy.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

3 Banksy quoted in Steve Beale: Banksy and his crappy put-ups, in: Sleazenation, October 1998, p. 39; Banksy in the bio text he seemed to have written in Tristan Manco: Stencil Graffiti. London 2002, p. 76. In form and content this text differs significantly from all other text written by Manco himself in this book. When asked in 2021 by the author, Manco did neither confirm nor deny this.

that at some point he switched to stencils—after a moment of enlightenment—to be more efficient because he stated he was too slow.[4]

Banksy's name tag seemed to be the first thing he stenciled. In an interview with Japanese magazine *Studio Voice* Banksy stated in 2003: "In the beginning I only wrote my name with the help of a stencil, without a picture or message. At some point that was not enough anymore, so I started to leave pictures *and* [emphasis by the author] messages."[5] Still in the tradition of style-writing graffiti, Banksy just spread his stenciled name. In an early photo compilation of his stencil work in Bristol from the late 1990s, Banksy's stenciled name tag is sometimes the only motif or his tag is (also under image stencils) much larger than in later years.[6] An ant stencil by Banksy (fig. 44) without freehand elements, supposedly his first documented work, was dated by others to 1992–94[7], Banksy himself stated it is from 1997.[8] Another one, from the early to mid 1990s,[9] combines stenciled elements of a fishbone and somewhat Jody-esque heads with freehand elements and a freehand Banksy tag. In another early work dated by others to 1996,[10] Banksy added stencils for details like his tag and a bomb. Also dating to the same year[11] is an already stencil-signed, stencil-only Banksy work showing children robbing banks, a pun on Robin Banks, the longer version of Banksy's pseudonym.

The first documented works already contain stencils, i.e., he either used stencils from the beginning or his very early tags are not documented. Already in 2000, he said, "About five years ago [*i.e. around 1995, note by the author*] I saw an image in a newspaper, cut it out as a stencil, then painted it in half a dozen places. Purely from the reaction I got I realised it's all about efficiency these days. A tight image in 30 seconds is the way to go."[12] In 2023 Banksy told a variation of that story, this time dated to 1997.[13] This quote slightly contradicts the early date of the ant stencil (fig. 44).

In 2000, Banksy stated: "One of the reasons I use stencils is that they're very efficient—you have to split everything into black or white and eliminate all grey areas, it's a very good way to live your entire life by, in fact."[14] In 2001, Banksy also pointed

4 Banksy: Wall and Piece. London 2005, p. 13.
5 Banksy interviewed in 2003 by Touko Suzuki: Banksy Interview. Bad Interview. The connector of revolutionary ideas with street art. Studio Voice 8, Vol. 344, August 2004, p. 94–96.
6 See Banksy street stencils (1997–99) illustrated in graffiti magazine Big Daddy 04, 2000, unpaged.
7 Steve Wright: Home Sweet Home. Banksy's Bristol. Bath 2007; p. 60, for date see p. 63.
8 Banksy: Cut & Run. Glasgow 2023, p. 10.
9 Illustrated in Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 132; see also https://www.instagram.com/p/iuaOizsdgL/ (accessed May 1, 2024).
10 Steve Wright: Home Sweet Home. Banksy's Bristol. Bath 2007; p. 30.
11 Illustrated in Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 132.
12 Banksy quoted in Boyd Hill: The Enemy Within, Bristol's Banksy bucks the system. In: Hip Hop Connection 136, April 2000, p. 93.
13 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 10.
14 Banksy quoted in Fiona McClymont: Cheeky Monkey, in: The Independent, London, 27.05.2000.

to the history of stencils as a medium of dissent: "Stencils have a brutal feel to them which is good. Most art is too fluffy and open ended. I like everything to be black and white—either wrong or right. Stencils also have a good history of dissent. People used them to start revolutions […]."[15] This hint at stencil graffiti's history of dissent predates similar statements by Tristan Manco (2002) and Josh McPhee (2004).[16] When asked in 2002, "What prompted you to begin to use stencils rather than the traditional style spray painting?" Banksy replied, "All the stylistic developments I've ever made have been as a result of trying to evade security systems. The tools, the colours, the message."[17] In a similar vein goes a 2023 quote: "Everything about how my art looks has been dictated by the working conditions. The technique: cutting out the image beforehand as I'm a slow drawer. The colour scheme: it's easy to tell black and white apart in the dark. The subject matter: nobody risks arrest to paint abstract expressionism."[18]

Like 3D, Banksy also used stencils in his style-writing pieces, his early larger works, mostly for details, such as his name tag in his freehand-sprayed graffiti, which was heavily inspired by American graffiti writing. From 2000 onwards, this changed, similar to 3D's switch to stencils as his main technique in 1987. It was not until 2000 that Banksy mainly switched to stencils. Freehand elements never completely disappeared from Banksy's stencil works though. And Banksy never worked exclusively with stencils. Like 3D earlier, Banksy emerged from the British hip-hop, punk, and house music scenes.[19] Like 3D, Banksy often got attacked for using stencils. "I used to think other graffiti writers hated me because I used stencils, but they just hate me."[20] In 2012, he listed the question "Is it cheating to use stencils?" in the FAQ section of his website. His response was: "Stencils are good for two reasons; One—they're quick; two—they annoy idiots."[21] The second part of his response is a reference to the criticism stencils receive from style-writing graffiti purists, as exemplified in chapter 5.2.

In the following subchapters, the often-repeated accusation, including in *The New York Times*, that Banksy simply copied Blek le Rat, will be investigated in order to get

15 Banksy interviewed by Mike Dawson, Flux, No. 25, June/July 2001, p. 18.
16 Josh McPhee: Stencil Pirates. A Global Study of the Street stencil. New York 2004.
17 Banksy interviewed by Andrew Johnstone: Profiles: Banksy. N.D. [before 28.11.2002] http://web.archive.org/web/20071015072931/designiskinky.net/profiles/banksy.html (accessed May 1, 2024).
18 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 15.
19 BBC News: Banksy's Silent Majority fetches more than £445k in Paris, 01.06.2015. http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-32955713(accessed May 1, 2024); Si Mitchell: Painting and Decorating. Level Magazine 2000, p. 66.
20 Banksy quoted in Keegan Hamilton: illage Voice Exclusive: An Interview with Banksy, Street Art Cult Hero, International Man of Mystery. The Village Voice, 09.10.2013, https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/10/09/village-voice-exclusive-an-interview-with-banksy-street-art-cult-hero-international-man-of-mystery/ (accessed May 1, 2024).
21 Banksy: Frequently asked Questions, banksy.co.uk, 03.01.2012, https://web.archive.org/web/20120103163406/http://www.banksy.co.uk/QA/qaa.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

to the bottom of the origins of Banksy's use of the stencil technique. Banksy's own style and (early) handling of stencils will then be narrowed down with the help of his own stencil instructions.

7.1 Robert del Naja, Robert de Niro, and Rob[in] Banks[y]

In 2006, Banksy mentioned in an interview with *Swindle Magazine* that he was influenced by 3D: "When I was about 10 years old, a kid called 3D was painting the streets hard. I think he'd been to New York and was the first to bring spray painting back to Bristol. I grew up seeing spray paint on the streets way before I ever saw it in a magazine or on a computer. 3D quit painting and formed the band Massive Attack, which may have been good for him but was a big loss for the city."[22] In 2011, in the short documentary "B-Movie," included on the DVD of Banksy's movie *Exit through the Gift Shop*, Banksy repeated this: "There was always a lot of graffiti in my hometown growing up, I think 3D from Massive Attack had brought it back with him off tour in America and he'd been painting all over the city."[23] 3D was not really in New York at that time, he just watched music videos which showed New York-style graffiti writing.[24] In 2012, Banksy put the following FAQ on his website: "Did you rip off Blek le Rat?" His response: "No, I copied 3D from Massive Attack. *He* can actually draw."[25] This last sentence might be more a calculated insult to Blek because Blek had accused Banksy of stealing his ideas, and a wink at his predecessor del Naja at the same time. While Blek studied architecture and could draw, del Naja was self-taught and seemed not to be the best draftsman. The nature of his influence on Banksy and how it goes beyond his public role as 3D has not yet been further explored, which is also to be done in this project.

Years later, this influence seemed to have been the other way around. In 2015, on the last page of the booklet of del Naja's artist book in form and size recalling a vinyl record cover, del Naja put the mentioned Banksy quote from *Swindle Magazine*; in an interview within the booklet he stated: "I had hardly painted at all for eight years! In fact, it was really James Lavelle of UNKLE/Mo' Wax fame and Banksy that kept that candle burning by getting me to collaborate on projects in between. […] James and Banksy seemed determined that I not remain in my happy self-induced delusion of rock stardom. I'd get the call once or twice a year, so I'd get my shit together and knock

22 Banksy Interview with Shepard Fairey for Swindle Magazine, Nr. 8, 2006, p. 84; online: https://web.archive.org/web/20071027070144/http://swindlemagazine.com/issue08/banksy/ (accessed May 1, 2024).
23 Banksy in B-Movie (directed by Banksy, 13.41 min.), TC: 0.40 onwards.
24 Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 15–16.
25 https://web.archive.org/web/20120103163406/http://www.banksy.co.uk/QA/qaa.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

something up. The Santa's Ghetto shows [which were organized by Banksy, note by the author] and POW gave me a chance to try one-off pictures which seemed to be topical, depending on where they were put—in Jerusalem or London."[26]

Some early Banksy works could also be understood as homages to 3D/del Naja. Stencils by 3D's fellow Bristolian Banksy from around 2000 show a bank robber in a similar gun-slinging pose as del Naja's Park Row de Niro, sometimes with a monkey head,[27] sometimes with a clown head,[28] sometimes with spray cans instead of pistols as a self-portrait.[29] As mentioned, "Rob [in] Banks" is the long version of Banksy's pseudonym. It sounds like "robbin' banks."[30] Robert de Niro, Robert del Naja, and Robin Banks. The bank robber strikes a similar pose as Bickle/de Niro in the famous movie still from *Taxi Driver*, where de Niro's character points his gun at the viewer. In Banksy's stencil, the pose is based on a *Taxi Driver*-based homage scene from a later movie called *Dead Presidents* (1995, directed by Albert and Allen Hughes). The character featured in Banksy's stencil is Delilah Benson, a member of a communist militant group who, together with other characters, robs a bank wearing face paint—she holds a gun in each hand, like Bickle. Seconds later, she is shot by the police as she sacrifices herself for a friend. Like *Taxi Driver*, the movie is set in New York and also deals with the effects of the Vietnam War on veterans after they came back. Instead of a white veteran like in *Taxi Driver*, *Dead Presidents* centers on the stories of Black veterans and is partially based on a true story told in the book *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans* (1984) by Wallace Terry. The film also incorporates story elements from a real armed robbery that happened in 1981 involving the Black Liberation Army, and was also inspired by the Weather Underground, a radical left militant organization active in the late 1960s and 1970s.

In 2001, Banksy made a second, less obvious stencil homage to *Taxi Driver* and with it to de Niro and del Naja. "I Fought The Law and I w[on]" is a wall inscription on a stencil canvas work Banksy made in 2001 and issued as a screenprint in 2005.[31] Four men hold a fifth one on the floor who seem to have been caught "red handed" (actually orange in that Banksy work), after painting the inscription. "I Fought the Law" is the title of a 1979 The Clash song, del Naja's early favorite punk band, hinting at Banksy's (and del Naja's) visual punk roots. Banksy exhibited the work for the

26 Robert Del Naja in conversation with Sean Bidder, in: Robert del Naja: 3D & the Art of Massive Attack. London 2015. Unpaged [booklet page 3–4].
27 Illustrated in Banksy: Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall. London 2001. Unpaged.
28 Illustrated in Banksy: Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall. London 2001. Unpaged.
29 "Self Portrait" by Banksy. Photo by Ferdaus Shamim/WireImage. Photographed during the "Vision 21–Urban Art: Painting The Streets & The Art of Dissent" Exhibition, https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/self-portrait-by-banksy-news-photo/76627285 (accessed May 1, 2024).
30 Ulrich Blanché: Urban Art in a Material World. Marburg 2016, p. 209.
31 Banksy, I Fought The Law, Screenprint, 2005, 69,8 × 69,8 cm, https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2021/banksy/i-fought-the-law (accessed May 1, 2024).

first time in a show alongside punk designer Jamie Reid in Glasgow. Banksy adapted the five men in his "I Fought the Law" from a series of photos that documented the attempt to assassinate US President Reagan in Washington, DC in 1981. The assassin John Hinckley, Jr. (the figure on the ground in Banksy's work) was found not guilty by reason of insanity. The failed assassination was an attempt on Hinckley's part to impress actress Jodie Foster, whom he had seen in *Taxi Driver*, as in the movie de Niro's character Bickle tries to assassinate a politician as well.[32] De Niro's character was in turn partly based on an earlier assassin, Arthur Herman Bremer, who attempted to kill a US presidential candidate in 1972. John Hinckley, Jr., the man who wounded Reagan, owned a copy of Bremer's diary from 1972.[33] Both 3D and Banksy identify with Bickle, a fictional assassin that was inspired by a real one and that inspired a real assassin as well. This interplay of reality and fiction fits street art, an art form that is illegal and often political as well, as its background, the street, is not fiction but real life.

So, Banksy identifies with a Bickle-like bank-robbing character from *Dead Presidents* who hints at his pseudonym (Robin Banks) and who was based on real radical political activists. Furthermore, Banksy equals a mad assassin with his illegal graffiti. Like del Naja 15 years earlier, Banksy tries to prove that illegal graffiti is "no great crime" compared to murder or actual bank robbing. "It's No Great Crime" is the title inscription of a known graffiti by 3D from January 1984.[34] It was even reproduced in Henry Chalfant's influential book *Spray Can Art* from 1987,[35] a book most graffiti writers in the 1990s knew. In several early freehand pieces, del Naja dealt with the crime aspect of graffiti, for instance in the piece "3D"[36] from December 1984, as well as in pieces and sketches that center around the word "crime" until 1987,[37] but also in the mentioned de Niro piece "The Day the Law Died" that featured prominently

32 Portrait of an Assassin: Arthur Bremer, PBS, 2000, https://web.archive.org/web/20080613203506/http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wallace/sfeature/assasin.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

33 David Montgomery: Arthur Bremer shot Gov. George Wallace to be famous. A search for who he is today, The Washington Post, 03.12.2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/he-shot-george-wallace-to-be-famous-now-he-lives-in-silence/2015/12/01/700b1d26-78d7-11e5-bc80-9091021aeb69_story.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

34 Illustrated in Robert del Naja: 3D & the Art of Massive Attack. London 2015. Unpaged; Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 17; for alternative photos by Beezer see LM magazine, January 1987, p. 21 and https://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/east-bristol-auctions/catalogue-id-sreas10514/lot-df41501f-f557-4b33-a150-adc000e8125c#lotDetails (accessed May 1, 2024); photo uploaded by John Nation, 08.04.2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CNY6x_pBg5v/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

35 Henry Chalfant, James Prigoff: Spray can Art, New York 1987, p. 5.

36 Illustrated in Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 17.

37 Illustrated in Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 18 (*Crime*, magic marker on paper, 1984), p. 20 (*Crimes*, Birmingham, 1987), p. 35 (*Crime II*, Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol, 1985).

on the cover of Bristol's magazine *Venue* in July 1985.[38] In 1994, del Naja said in an interview: "I'd prefer to call it [graffiti, note by the author] positive vandalism—graffiti art has had a bad press, […] but all I'm doing is brightening the place up. There are worse things happening."[39] Banksy's concept of checkbook vandalism goes in the same direction. In his eyes, politicians who run the city and advertisers, the ones with checkbooks, are the ones doing vandalism with their large billboard ads, not the graffiti writers.[40]

Like 3D, Banksy, alias Robin Banks, has not only a hip-hop but also a punk background. He quoted punk frequently in his works, not just in his DIY approach but also visually and lyrically, especially in his works until 2003,[41] but even in October 2010,[42] Banksy referenced The Clash's iconic cover image of their record *London Calling* (1979). Banksy later exhibited and collaborated with some of the key actors in stencil history, Gee Vaucher from punk band Crass, Dutch punk stenciler Hugo Kaagman, and also the punk-inspired Robert del Naja, and he exhibited together with original punk artists Jamie Reid (Sex Pistols) or Jason p. Orridge.[43] Banksy quoted Penny Rimbaud[44] from anarcho-punk band Crass and named his second book Existencilism, an obvious homage to Crass label "Exitstencil Press." In his 2023 retrospective, Banksy pointed out Crass as a major influence in his "youth bedroom" where he showed his early pop cultural influences. On one wall, a Crass poster, actually an unfolded record cover designed by Gee Vaucher that also depicts a Crass stencil graffiti on a wall in the background.

So Banksy was probably introduced to the phenomenon "stencils" via British punk stencils, maybe on record covers like the one by Crass from 1979 (fig. 36) or through the stencil work of local Bristol graffiti writers such as 3D/Robert del Naja, as Banksy claimed in the above quote, or by less known Bristolian street stencil users like Jody, Nick Walker or Tristan Manco,[45] who were among others all active with stencils

38 Illustrated in Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 21.
39 Robert de Naja in: LM magazine, January 1987, p. 20.
40 Banksy 2002, unpaged.
41 In Ulrich Blanché (ed): Banksy—The Early Shows 1997–2005. Heidelberg 2023 I go into more detail on this aspect.
42 Banksy.co.uk, 19.10.2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20101019081307im_/http://banksy.co.uk/outdoors/outuk/images/TABLE/clash.jpg (accessed May 1, 2024).
43 Viva la Republique! Pagan images of the last Queen of the British Isles by her indigenous subjects, group show, 03.-30.05.2002, The Centre of Attention, Shoreditch, London, http://www.thecentreofattention.org/exhibitions/queen.html (accessed May 1, 2024).
44 Banksy: The Cans Festival. Street Art. Street Battle. 3rd 4th 5th May 2008. London 2008. Unpaged.
45 According to self report, Manco started stenciling in Bristol in 1986, as he mentioned in an Instagram post on 03.05.2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/B_ujTwAFJrB/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

on the streets of Bristol in the late 1980s and early 1990s[46]—not by Blek le Rat.[47] In Tristan Manco's book *Stencil Graffiti*, which was published in 2002, but was finished as a draft version in 1999, a number of other mainly anonymous street stencils from Bristol and other parts of England from the 1990s can be seen.[48]

7.2 Banksy and Blek le Rat

Blek le Rat and Banksy seem to be the best-documented stencil street artists (besides maybe Shepard Fairey, who also used stencils, but predominantly posters). By contrasting the work of Blek and Banksy, we may learn a great deal about both of them. Thus, a closer look at the relationship between these two prevalent stencil protagonists is necessary.

Examined in detail in this book, it became apparent that most achievements Blek le Rat claimed to have made were made elsewhere, by others, before him: Blek was not the first stencil graffiti artist (see graph 8), not even in France,[49] not the first to create life-size stencils (see graph 3, chapter 1.4, see also fig. 18), not the first to use rats on the street (see next subchapter), and not an inspiration for Banksy to use rats or to start stenciling.[50] In the ongoing discourse in street art and mainstream literature, however, Blek still holds a position as an important street art pioneer. He does so (to some extent) rightly, for example for inspiring many pochoirists in 1980s France (graph 1, chapter 1.4), but certainly not all of them, and the term "pochoirists" cannot be considered synonymous with the questionable label "L'école de Blek."[51]

Banksy's and Blek's motives to use stencils were different from the start. Blek did not state he started stenciling to save time, as Banksy did.[52] Blek, a.k.a. Xavier Prou, even pointed to the fact that police in Paris did not care about him using stencils in the early years, they only cared if he would have made political art.[53] Blek tried freehand spray-painting style-writing and chose stencils because of his lack of skill, as he said himself.[54] Prou studied fine art and later architecture. Preparatory drawings in his artist

46 Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 36–46, 98–100.
47 See chapter 6.2.
48 Interview of the author with Tristan Manco, 2020.
49 See chapter 1.2.
50 See end of chapter 5.3. and continue reading this chapter.
51 See chapter 1.3.1.
52 Banksy: Wall and Piece. London 2005, p. 13.
53 Sybille Metze-Prou (ed.): Blek le Rat. Getting through the walls. London/New York 2008, p. 14; Blek le Rat. Interview with David Hopkins. In: StudioOn [Oliver Walker, Nigel-Roberts] (ed.): The Street Art Stencil Book, London 2010, p. 7.
54 Prou interviewed by Johannes Stahl in: Johannes Stahl (ed.): An der Wand. Graffiti zwischen Anarchie und Galerie. Cologne 1989, p. 162; Prou in Metze-Prou, Treeck 2000, p. 69.

book prove he could draw,[55] but he could not handle a spray can freehand very well, as this requires quite a bit of training. Banksy, who supposedly began as a tagger who later switched to aerosol, was able to use a spray can freehand as well. Banksy was not such a bad freehand graffiti writer as he sometimes stated. He collaborated with high-profile graffiti legend Mode 2 and local graffiti hero Inkie already in the 1990s.[56] Only later, Blek/Prou told a more flattering origin story (for himself) about why he started using stencils—the technique would suit the walls of a European or French city better than style-writing graffiti in the American tradition,[57] a thesis more based on his personal opinion. It ignores an over 40-year-old tradition of style-writing in France started by Futura 2000 and Bando in 1981 and 1982[58]—about the same time Blek himself started stenciling—at least according to his own partly questionable origin story.

7.2.1 Rats in Street Art since 1968

As we will see in this chapter, neither Blek nor Banksy was the first to illegally paint rats on the street. In June 2018, Banksy sprayed a number of rats in the hometown of the pochoir technique, Paris, without mentioning Blek le Rat at all, even though they are Blek's heraldic animal, but also Banksy's since as early as 1998,[59] i.e., a few years before Banksy learned about Blek's work via Manco's book *Stencil Graffiti*. Before Manco met Banksy, he saw his stencils on the street. The first Banksy stencil Manco saw was CCTV rat,[60] still signed with the "capital A" Banksy logo which he abandoned at some point after mid-1998. Already in October 1998, a photo of this rat was illustrated in a magazine.[61]

55 See for instance Blek's drawings in Sybille Metze-Prou (ed.): Blek le Rat. Getting through the walls. London/New York 2008, p. 34, 39, 52.

56 Take the Money and Run, a graffiti piece showing running Bank robbers, painted with Inkie [as Inky] (lettering) and Mode 2, opposite the Old England pub, 43 Bath Buildings, Montpelier, c. 1998/99. Steve Wright: Banksy's Bristol, Bath 2007, p. 16–17; Martin Bull: This is Not a Photo Opportunity. The Street Art of Banksy. Oakland, CA, 2015, p. 16, 173.

57 Told for instance by Blek interviewed by Jon Reiss in Swindle Magazine 11, 2007. https://web.archive.org/web/20070701184245/http://swindlemagazine.com/issue11/blek-le-rat/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

58 Denys Riout, Dominique Gurdjian, Jean-Pierre Leroux: Le Livre du Graffiti. Paris 1985, p. 113.

59 Banksy's first documented freehandedly painted rats are eight ones on Lokey's caravan, which Banksy painted with Lokey at Glastonbury festival. Info and photo see Martin Bull: Banksy Locations (& a Tour). More Graffiti Locations from the UK, Volume 2, London 2010, unpaged.

60 Tristan Manco interviewed by the author, 2020.

61 Illustrated in Steve Beale: Banksy and his Crappy Put-Ups, in: Sleazenation, October 1998, p. 39–45.

One could also se Banksy's rat-spraying action in Paris in 2018 as a little revenge on Blek. Instead of mentioning Blek, Banksy wrote, "Fifty years since the uprising in Paris 1968. The birthplace of modern stencil art"[62] on Instagram, accompanied by a photo of a street work of his alter ego, a masked rat with a cutter knife, the tool of the stencil artist, in his hand. As exemplified in Chapter 1, it seems Banksy is right about his very short and pointed summary of stencil history.

A few years earlier, Banksy was not amused to hear Blek say he was counterfeiting him. In 2012, Banksy emailed Blek: "Blek, are you making fun of me? Stop saying that I take my ideas from you."[63] Comparisons of Banksy and Blek's work in an interview with Preston, which were intended to show Banksy's alleged artistic appropriation, are limping. The 1980s Blek stenciled mostly silhouettes of naturalistic rats that could almost be shadows of real rats,[64] as Prou even said himself: "I didn't draw rats like Banksy. Banksy's are more human rats."[65] Banksy's rat stencils are humanized, more detailed, doing human things, painting, acting, telling a story, and involve the place of their installation more specifically than Blek's, whose rats, by contrast, could be almost anywhere (at least before Banksy). Rats seem to be typical not only for Blek or Banksy but also for Paris 1968. A pre-riot cover of the daily newspaper *Le Parisien* from February 8, 1968 stated: "200,000 rats threaten to invade Paris (out of the 4 million that haunt the capital sewers)." Those rats were supposed to come from Les Halles, the Paris market halls, which were then planned to be demolished. In the 1970s and '80s, this large construction site (called "trou des halles") served as an area where, among others, pochoirists and street painters like Gérard Zlotykamien,[66] Marie Rouffet,[67] Jef Aérosol,[68] and VLP[69] expressed themselves illegally.

The enragés, a group of students signed a graffiti painted at Sorbonne University in May 1968: "We're rats (perhaps) and we bite."[70] This refers to "Ratonnade, a word

62 Banksy on Instagram, 26. Juni 2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/BkfY9AkhdMd/ (accessed May 1, 2024).
63 Matilda Battersby: Blek le Rat: Streetwriting man. The Independent, 25.04.2012, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/blek-le-rat-streetwriting-man-7675837.html (accessed May 1, 2024).
64 Prou in Blek Le Rat. Original Stencil Pioneer (29.52 min., dir.: King Adz) 2006, TC 11.50–12.00min. https://vimeo.com/41423944 (accessed May 1, 2024).
65 Prou in Blek Le Rat. Original Stencil Pioneer (29.52 min., dir.: King Adz) 2006, TC 12.00–12.06min.
66 Metze-Prou: Graffiti in Paris. Berlin 2000, p. 11.
67 Christoph Maisenbacher: Graffiti-Kalender `89. Moers 1988, p. 70.
68 On 23 may 2007, on his Flickr account, Aerosol posted a photo of a shared wall with Marie Rouffet subscribed with "Jef Aérosol 1986–Paris, les Halles", https://www.flickr.com/photos/jefaerosol/510896489/ (accessed May 1, 2024).
69 Jean Gabaret, Michel Espagnon: Vive La Peinture. Paris 2003, p. 9, 56–57.
70 "Nous sommes des rats (peut-être) et nous mordons. Les enragés." Quoted in Julien Besançon: Les murs ont la parole. Journal mural mai 68: Sorbonne, Odéon, Nanterre. Paris 1968, p. 16, translation: Henry Vale.

used only up until that moment in reference to the hunting of Algerians ('ratons' or 'little rats' according to the racial slur) by the police or army, is taken up to refer to similar police operations against students."[71]

Rats also appeared in 1968 street posters, in three of them as personifications of rigid governments, often placatively compared to WWII fascists: "vermine fasciste."[72] The most known of these 1968 rat posters had the inscription "action civique." It is quoted not only in a political mural in Portugal from the 1970s,[73] but served also as the poster of an exhibition by former Banksy photographer/dealer Steve Lazarides in 2018: "Mai 68. Posters from the Revolution"; in the accompanying text, '68 was linked to street art.[74] This happened only weeks before Banksy stenciled rats in Paris,[75] (like Lazarides' exhibition) marking the 50th anniversary of 1968. One rat carried a cutter, illustrating Banksy's mentioned quote on Instagram that 1968 gave birth to contemporary (i.e., also Banksy's) stencil art.

Years before Blek, punk graffitists Dr. Rat and Hugo Kaagman painted rats on the streets of Amsterdam in the late 1970s, Kaagman even with stencils,[76] at the same time as Christy Rupp's illegally attached rat screenprints appeared in the streets of New York.[77] Before Blek was known in New York, which was not the case before Banksy,

71 Kristin Ross, May '68 and Its Afterlives. Chicago 2002, p. 34–35.

72 Action civique. Vermine fasciste (on top of a vicious looking rat) student protest poster published by the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1968 in different sizes and colors, for instance lithograph on paper, 90 × 56 cm, E.132-2004, Collection V & A Museum, London, accessed 25.10.2023, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O102083/vermine-fasciste-action-civique-poster-atelier-populaire/ (accessed May 1, 2024); Jean-Marc Reiser (artist), Ecrasons la vermine fasciste. Ordre nouveau= ordre nazi (a shoe about to step on a rat) 1968, screenprint, 85 × 61 cm; Les etudiants balaient la vermine fasciste de leur faculte (rats beeing swept up by a broom), 1968, screenprint, 84 × 64 cm, BNF, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9018375t (accessed May 1, 2024).

73 Walter Grasskamp: Wilde Bilder. Graffiti und Wandbilder. Kunstforum 50, 1982.

74 LazInc. Gallery, Mai 68. Posters from the Revolution, 04.-12.05.2018, London, https://www.lazinc.com/exhibitions/mai-68-posters-from-the-revolution/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

75 Banksy on his Instagram account, 28.06.2018, https://www.instagram.com/p/BkfY9AkhdMd/ (accessed May 1, 2024), see also https://www.instagram.com/p/BkiZOE-B85N/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

76 Ilustrated in Te Elfder Ure 35–Jeugdkulturen, 1984. This rare book was exhibited during the show "Graffiti–New York meets The Dam", Amsterdam Museum 18.09.2015–24.01.2016, under the following link Dr Rat's rat drawings from the late 1970ies are visible: https://www.instagram.com/p/-JqJL5OOdI/ (accessed May 1, 2024), see also Dr. Rat graffiti in Luca Ciancabilla, Christian Omodeo (ed.): Street Art. Banksy & Co. L'Arte Allo Stato Urbano. Bologna 2016, p. 39.

77 Seno/McCormick: Trespass. A History of Uncommissioned Urban Art. Cologne 2010, p. 205–206.

known graffiti-writer Crash also painted a large rat on the storefront of the Fashion Moda gallery in the Bronx in 1982.[78]

Also, in 1980s France, Blek was not the only rat stenciler. Many other pochoirsts sprayed rat stencils,[79] for instance Jef Aérosol in Nantes in 1982. Some of his stencils were also lifelike (punk) rat silhouettes,[80] similar to (and inspired by[81]) the one on the back cover of the mentioned 1977 Stranglers punk album that Hugo Kaagman stenciled in 1979 in Amsterdam, too.[82] A rat stencil "what looks like an early Blek rat" [83] for Ellsworth-Jones in Huber's book *Paris Graffiti* (1986), which (according to Ellsworth-Jones) could have been known to Banksy early on, is actually a punk rat with a mohawk that is also illustrated in *Vite fait bien fait*,[84] ("quickly done is well done"), a book that featured Blek and quite a few stencils he authorized as his, not including the mentioned punk rat, which is depicted in a different section of the book. The rat looks not at all like an early Blek rat as it is very detailed, very humanized, very much like a caricature or a cartoon character—everything Blek, who made rat silhouettes instead, did only decades later (after Banksy). It's unclear when French punk band Les Rats, formed in 1982, painted other pochoirs of rats.[85] Les Rats named themselves after UK punk band The Ruts, and Les Rats singer Patrice drew rat graffiti on the wall of his school as a pupil.[86] In Bart Bosmans' 1992 dissertation on stencil graffiti in Brussels, he

78 Fashion Moda storefront 1982, rat by graffiti writer Crash [John Matos], in the other window a toxic waste barrel and skelleton stencil by John Fekner, photo by Lisa Kahane. https://bx200.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/11065923_167545386267801 7_657992777008394756_n.jpg (accessed May 1, 2024).

79 See Solange Pierson, Guillaume Dambier: Pochoir à la une. Paris 1986, p. 95; Maisenbacher 1987/88, p. 63; Maisenbacher 1988, p. 150; Tessier 1991, p. 49, 104, Nicolas Deville, Marie-Pierre Massé, Josiane Pinet: Vite Fait Bien Fait. Pochoirs/Stencil Art. Paris 1986 1986, p. 45 [three different rat stencils], 51.

80 Jef Aérosol wrote he stenciled "d'autres autoportraits, des rats, fourmis, chauve-souris, cafards," https://www.jefaerosol.com/biographie/ (accessed May 1, 2024), for photos of his bats and rats in Nantes, 1982, see https://www.wikiart.org/en/jef-aerosol/bats-and-rats-nantes-france-1982 (accessed May 1, 2024).

81 Jef Aérosol in Instagram conversation with the author, 18.08.2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/ChPLGansGpZ/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

82 A page in Hugo Kaagman's book Stencil King. Amsterdam 2009, p. 12 illustrates the punk "stencils and tags for the grand prix de graffiti Gallery Anus, 1979." See also p. 30 there.

83 Will Ellsworth-Jones: Banksy. The Man Behind the Wall, London 2012, p. 37.

84 Nicolas Deville, Marie-Pierre Massé, Josiane Pinet: Vite Fait Bien Fait. Pochoirs/Stencil Art. Paris 1986, p. 45.

85 Jose Iodewick: Pochoir et musique, 01.01.2014, https://joselodewick.wordpress.com/2014/01/01/14-pochoir-et-musique/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

86 Patrice interviewed by nyarknyark.fr (archived 2017).

also featured a non-Blek rat stencil.[87] Rats were a standard graffiti motif, not necessarily a homage to Blek.

Apart from Christy Rupp, all protagonists after '68 identified with the rats rather than seeing them mostly as enemies as they had been in the 1968 posters (but not, as mentioned, in 1968 graffiti). Like graffiti and protesters, rats in an urban context are usually unwanted by the majority. Rats are group animals, perfect for stencils, a medium made for repetition. Prou stated that Blek's rats referred to the Pied Piper of Hamelin, a story dating back to the middle ages. In the tale, a piper is hired to deal with a rat infestation in Hamelin by luring them away with his pipe. When he isn't paid what he's owed and is even accused of causing the infestation himself, he takes revenge on the town by bewitching the children and leading them away, just like the rats. Prou connecting this story with Blek's net of stenciled rat graffiti in Paris hints at the seriality of stencils, but also draws a parallel between the artist as a pied (multicolored) piper who brightens up a city, but who is also not treated properly by the (art) world and takes revenge with illegal actions, i.e., painting illegally.

Blek, however, was neither the first nor the only one to use rats in street art and graffiti, whether as a motif or stencil. And Banksy apparently used rats a while before he heard of Blek's work.[88]

7.2.2 Did Banksy Rip Off Blek le Rat's Stencil Technique?

In 2008, Banksy had invited Blek le Rat to a group exhibition called *Cans Festival*, which Banksy organized with Tristan Manco in London. They invited 39 stencil street artists from around the world. Banksy remarked on this occasion in a *Daily Mail* article: "Every time I think I've painted something slightly original, I find out that Blek le Rat has done it, too,[…] only Blek did it 20 years earlier."[89] Blek was the only *Cans* artist honored with a Banksy quote, and Banksy had not explicitly honored many street artists by that time or afterwards. This quote was often and for a long time

87 Bart Bosmans: Aspecten van graffiti: een empirisch-sociologisch onderzoek naar de communicatieve waarde van illegale sjabloongraffiti in Brussel. Vol. 1. Brussels 1992, p. 270 [fig. 174].

88 Banksy seemed to have known Blek's rats not before 2000. Banksy's first rat seems to be CCTV rat from ca. 1995/96, according to Tristan Manco. In 1998, at Glastonbury festival, Banksy painted eight freehand rats on a caravan (with Lokey). Martin Bull: Banksy Locations (& a Tour). More Graffiti Locations from the UK, Volume 2, London 2010, unpaged. The caravan was Lokey's. in 2008, a photo of these rats was on Lokey's/Jerforceone's Flickr account https://www.flickr.com/photos/jerforceone/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

89 Banksy interviewed by Lee Coan: Breaking the Banksy: The first interview with the world's most elusive artists. Daily Mail 13 June 2008, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1024130/Breaking-Banksy-The-interview-worlds-elusive-artist.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

misunderstood, for instance in *The New York Times* in 2020.[90] Banksy did *not* admit in this quote that he stole from Blek, or that he was influenced by Blek at all—only that Blek had ideas similar to Banksy's earlier, without Banksy knowing about it. In the same *Daily Mail* article, Blek states: "People say he copies me, but I don't think so. I'm the old man, he's the new kid, and if I'm an inspiration to an artist that good, I love it."[91] Blek also admitted in the same source that he had a comeback because of Banksy. Just four days after the *Daily Mail* quote, author and Blek biopic filmmaker King Adz wrote in an auction catalog that he asked Banksy about Blek: "Contrary to popular belief, Banksy says he was not influenced by Blek Le Rat, as he was unaware of Blek's existence until reading about him in the book 'Stencil Graffiti' by Tristan Manco, and this was published long after his work had already evolved to stencils."[92]

A few months before the *Daily Mail* article, before Banksy's invitation for Blek included a free first-class flight ticket to the *Cans Festival*, Blek seems to have been jealous, at least jokingly, of Banksy's financial success: "I can tell you now that I have a stock of good ideas for him. Really, I do! I have many good ideas but this time he will have to pay because we all know that he is fucking rich. (laughs) He takes, but we all take from someplace."[93] A few years later, Blek became more aggressive about Banksy: "I see where he takes the idea," said Blek about Banksy in an interview with Jane Preston (2011) with reference to Banksy creating rats or a Madonna and Child. "It's difficult to find a technique, a style in art. So, when you […] see that someone else is taking your style and reprocess it—you do not like that. I'm not sure about his integrity,"[94] he continued. Parts of Blek's comments seemed to have been taken out of context. It's possible that Preston's leading questions encouraged him to get a bit carried away, criticize his more successful colleague, to whom he'd previously admitted he owed his comeback. Blek suggests that Banksy stole his ideas and his stencil style. To find out if this is possible, a little fact-checking is necessary. To start, let's investigate when Banksy first became aware of Blek's work.

90 Scott Reyburn: Banksy Is a Control Freak. But He Can't Control His Legacy. New York Times, 5.2.2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/arts/design/banksy-legacy.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

91 Banksy interviewed by Lee Coan: Breaking the Banksy: The first interview with the world's most elusive artists. Daily Mail 13 June 2008, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1024130/Breaking-Banksy-The-interview-worlds-elusive-artist.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

92 King Adz: Brief History of Urban Art. In: Dreweatts: The Urban Art Sale Catalog 17.06.2008, p. 6.

93 Manuel Bello: Blek Le Rat Interview, fecalface.com 02.04.2008, accessed 25.10.2023, http://www.fecalface.com/SF/index.php?id=1056&option=com_content&task=view (accessed May 1, 2024).

94 Blek interviewed by Jane Preston: Graffiti Wars. Banksy vs Robbo, 2011, 46.44min, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x32a43y (accessed May 1, 2024), TC: starting 16.38min, especially 19.10min.

The question "did Banksy rip off Blek's stencil technique?" is closely linked to the question "when did Banksy become aware of Blek's work?" According to one Blek story, Banksy's fellow Bristolian Tristan Manco, later author of the book *Stencil Graffiti* (2002), saw a pochoir by Blek (his tango couple) during a student exchange in Paris in the mid-1980s and passed this on to Banksy.[95] According to Ellsworth-Jones, Prou believed another story, that Manco had shown Blek's work to Banksy at "the end of the nineties."[96] According to Manco himself, he bought Joerg Huber's book on French pochoirs *Sérigraffitis* the same year it came out, 1986 (the English version, also published in 1986, was called *Paris Graffiti*).[97] This is the same year Ellsworth-Jones suggested earlier as the starting point of Banksy knowing Blek's work,[98] but Manco only got to know Banksy around ten or more years later, when Banksy was already using stencils.[99] Manco saw Banksy's CCTV rat stencil on the street *before* he met the person Banksy.[100] Huber's book contained only anonymous pochoirs. Ellsworth-Jones assumed some of them would be by Blek, among them, a rat pochoir.[101] In a previous chapter I argued why this rat was not by Blek.[102] There is actually only one work by Blek in *Sérigraffitis*—his red runners[103], which were neither a rat, nor labeled as Blek, nor identified by Ellsworth-Jones.

The most plausible moment when Banksy first heard of Blek seems to have been, as Prou said in his second story, in the "late nineties." This could have been 1999, to be more precise, when Manco's first version of *Stencil Graffiti* was ready to find a publisher (it did not get printed until 2002),[104] with Banksy and Blek both featured in it. But at that point, Banksy was already using rats and stencils. Prou varied this story in another street art compendium: "In 1999 Blek receives a phone call from writer Tristan Manco, who's busy working on his book, Stencil Graffiti, and wants to meet him. Manco tells him about the massive stencil movement that has developed in the UK, more specifically in Bristol. More importantly, he mentions that an anonymous artist, working under the name BANKSY, is becoming increasingly famous and giving him

95 Blek in conversation with the author at art Karlsruhe, 16.02.2017.
96 Will Ellsworth-Jones: Banksy. The Man Behind the Wall, London2012, p. 37.
97 Maria Fernanda Gonzalez, Baylee Mckeel: Interview with Tristan Manco. In: Fresko Magazine, No. 1, November/Dezember 2018, p. 7.
98 Will Ellsworth-Jones: Banksy. The Man Behind the Wall, London 2012, p. 37.
99 Manco in personal conversation with the author at Urban Art Biennale Völklingen, 24.10.2017.
100 Manco interviewed by the author, 2020.
101 Will Ellsworth-Jones: Banksy. The Man Behind the Wall, London 2012, p. 37.
102 See chapter 6.2.1.
103 Joerg Huber: Paris Graffiti. London/New York 1986, p. 50, the same runners are illustrated as Blek's in Nicolas Deville, Marie-Pierre Massé, Josiane Pinet: Vite Fait Bien Fait. Pochoirs/Stencil Art. Paris 1986, p. 7.
104 Maria Fernanda Gonzalez, Baylee Mckeel: Interview with Tristan Manco. In: Fresko Magazine, No. 1, November/Dezember 2018, p. 7.

full credit for his inspiration. This tribute gives a fresh start to BLEK LE RAT's career and today, the world honors the pioneer he was in stencil, which is an indisputable chapter of contemporary Street Art."[105] Well, it *is* disputable. In 1999, Banksy was not yet famous—outside of Bristol. Blek's career reboot also came years later. A massive stencil movement in Bristol? How come it is documented in neither Manco's book (2002) nor in *Children of the Can* (2008), a book about Bristol's graffiti scene since the beginning? It is true there are many stencils in Manco's book, including several from Bristol, but also from other parts of the UK or the world. Banksy gave Blek "full credit for his inspiration"? Why did he state differently than in 2008? If Banksy's statement is understood literally, we have to assume that Banksy believed Blek to have started stenciling in 1981—which is debatable.[106] Blek could only have done something "20 years earlier"[107] in 2001, when Prou claimed Blek started in 1981.[108]

By the early 1990s, Blek's fame in France had already faded, and he was never very famous in England before Banksy. The pochoir boom in France was essentially limited to the 1980s, because starting in 1988 at the latest, the US style-writing graffiti movement prevailed.[109] Blek did not influence Banksy to use stencils, but Banksy enabled Blek's comeback.[110] In fact, Blek's work started to look more like Banksy's:[111] His beggar in a hoodie from 2005 looks similar to Banksy's Tourist Information hoodie guy from 2004,[112] also Blek's work for the *Cans Festival*: "Blek le Rat is […] spraying an image of a homeless man in a style so familiar you'd be forgiven for thinking it's a Banksy."[113] Later, Blek even combined a rat with a gun in a classical Banksy manner, not in classical Blek manner.

It was military and package stencils, Paris 1968, and punk that primarily inspired individual artists, with or without a punk background, at the same time in Poland, the US, the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands to use stencils on the street—before

105 Magda Danisz, Mary-Noelle Dana: From Style Writing to Art. A Street Art Anthology. Rome 2010, p. 321.
106 See chapter 1.3.1.
107 Banksy in Lee Coan: Breaking the Banksy: The first interview with the world's most elusive artists. Daily Mail 13 June 2008, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1024130/Breaking-Banksy-The-interview-worlds-elusive-artist.html (accessed May 1, 2024).
108 See chapter 1.3.1.
109 See chapter 1.3.
110 Magda Danisz, Mary-Noelle Dana: From Style Writing to Art. A Street Art Anthology. Rome 2010, p. 321.
111 Tristan Manco mentioned this also in an interview with the author, 2020.
112 Blek's beggars are illustrated and dated in Sybille Metze-Prou (ed.): Blek le Rat. Getting through the walls. London/New York 2008, p. 111–112, 115; Banksy: Cut it out. London 2004. Unpaged [illustrated on one of the last pages].
113 Lee Coan: Breaking the Banksy: The first interview with the world's most elusive artists. Daily Mail 13 June 2008, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1024130/Breaking-Banksy-The-interview-worlds-elusive-artist.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

Blek. Banksy was inspired to use stencils not by Blek, but by 3D (fig. 42) and Crass (fig. 36), i.e., punk or graffiti writers who were inspired by punk, which was itself inspired by 1968.[114] That makes it plausible for Banksy to give credit to 3D and May 1968 as the origin of his stencil graffiti, not to Blek.

The question "did Banksy rip off Blek's stencil technique?" is furthermore close to the question "is it possible to rip off the stencil technique?" Even in 2020, as mentioned, Francesco Bonami did not shy away from stating similar things as Blek in the Preston interview.[115] Bonami confused artistic technique and style. And he reduced Banksy to his stencil motifs without realizing their equally important time- and site-specificity, or their illegal performance character. It is not only important that Banksy used stencils, but also *how* he did—similar to how Francis Bacon used paint and brush. As the knowledge about traditional painting is much deeper and more widespread than about stencils, and because of the copycat and shortcut reputation of stencils, it is easy and common to ridicule stencil use.

7.3 DIY Stencil Manuals—How to Make a Stencil

7.3.1 "Do It Yourself" and Gimmick Stencils (1912—Banksy)

Short "How to Paint with Stencils" manuals for young laymen, especially addressing boy scouts, appeared on a cigarette card in the UK already in 1913:

"How to Cut a Stencil. By means of stencilling any scout can make effective designs for troop notices, programmes, &c. All that he needs is a sharp knife, glass,·and some stont cartridge or brown paper. In sketching out care must be taken to leave 'ties' to hold the letters, &c., in place. The stencil should be cut over glass. Printing is affected by means of a 'stubby' brush (see picture), and water-colour or ink. Brush should be used as dry as possible."[116]

According to Stefan Krankenhagen, the "aesthetic figure" and "deprofessional hero" of the do-it-yourselfer appeared around the same time, in 1912,[117] in the magazine

114 See chapter 5.

115 Bonami quoted in Scott Reyburn: Banksy Is a Control Freak. But He Can't Control His Legacy. New York Times, 5.2.2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/05/arts/design/banksy-legacy.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

116 Cigarette card, Ogden's Cigarettes, 7 × 3.5 cm, Boy Scouts series, 4th series of 50, No 196, 1913. Illustrated in Ulrich Blanché (ed.): Stencil Stories. A Stencil History of Street Art/Geschichte des Schablonen-Graffiti. Exhibition catalog. Heidelberg 2021, p. 32.

117 Stefan Krankenhagen: Prosumers, Participants und Do-Lt-Yourselfers, in: Stefan Krankenhagen, Jens Roselt (eds.): De-/Professionalisierung in den Künsten und Medien. Formen, Figuren und Verfahren einer Kultur des Selbermachens. Berlin 2018, p. 28–43. Translation by the author.

Suburban Life.[118] In the early 20th century, the United States witnessed the prelude to a wave of independent property ownership among blue- and white-collar workers, many of them immigrants:[119] "By the late 1920s, for the first time, it was possible to speak with qualification of home ownership as a social norm, the American dream."[120] Before the Great Depression of the late 1920s brought about a necessity for do-it-yourself methods, a plethora of popular magazines and how-to literature had already emerged on the American market in the 1910s and 1920s, establishing the twin pinnacles of do-it-yourself culture: home and garden.[121] The magazines were appropriately named *The House Beautiful* (1896), *House & Garden* (1901), *The Craftsman* (1901), or *Popular Mechanics* (1903).[122] In the 1960s, Europe was also confronted with figures and the figuration of a "do-it-yourself" culture.[123] Printed stencil templates, cardboard or plastic stencils about sewing, stitching, quilting, home, furniture and food decorating, especially on cake decorating,[124] but also for children to learn drawing, or as toys, were issued starting in around 1900.[125]

In 1935, in the UK, Carreras Ltd. issued three related cigarette cards about stenciling in a large 50-part DIY series called *Tools and How to Use Them*. Besides the use of stencil knives and stencil brushes, this series also dealt with stencil spray, although spray paint had not reached market maturity yet: "The use of a Stencil Spray is a much quicker method than the stencil brush, and is very suitable for spraying on delicate material, as it does not injure the surface in any way. Pin up the work to be sprayed on a board at a suitable angle. Having half filled the bottle with the colour required (a range of indelible inks will be found·very suitable), inflate the larger bulb, by placing the finger over the nozzle so as to get a fine spray from the start. Now hold the spray about

118 Garrett Winslow: Practical Decoration for the House Interior, in: Suburban Life, the Countryside Magazine 15 (October 1912), p. 187–188, 227.

119 Ibid.

120 Richard Harris: Building a Market. The Rise of the Home lmprovement lndustry 1914–1960. Chicago 2012, p. 9.

121 Stefan Krankenhagen: Prosumers, Participants und Do-Lt-Yourselfers, in: Stefan Krankenhagen, Jens Roselt (eds.): De-/Professionalisierung in den Künsten und Medien. Formen, Figuren und Verfahren einer Kultur des Selbermachens. Berlin 2018, p. 3031.

122 Richard Harris: Building a Market. The Rise of the Home lmprovement lndustry 1914–1960. Chicago 2012, p. 4 7–53; Steven M. Gelber: Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America. New York 1999, p. 208–217.

123 Helmut Gold (ed.): Do lt Yourself: Die Mitmach-Revolution, Catalogue Museumsstiftung Post und Telekommunikation, vol. 29, Mainz 2012.

124 Adolf Heckmann: Modeko. Die moderne Dekorkunst in der Konditorei [picture book plus many stencils plus recipes],Nordhausen/Harz 1923; Mickey Mouse Cake Decorators. & Different [Stencil] Designs, W[iliam]L[evene Ltd.] Housewares, London, 1960s.

125 Johann Merkenthaler: Hauptwerk über Stickerei-Schablonen. Nuremberg, ca. 1900.

two feet away from the work and release the finger from the nozzle. Keep on working the bulb until all open parts of your stencil are coloured to your requirements."[126]

It is possible to draw a seemingly unlikely line from pre-World War II boy scouts and youth stencil manuals to WWII resistance stencil graffiti and post-war comic magazines with do-it-yourself stencil gadgets to the DIY attitude of punk and anarchist newspapers of the 1970s and '80s that resulted in Banksy issuing gimmick stencils with interviews in glossy magazines around 2000.

In WWII, Nazi resistance in, for instance, France or Poland was practiced also in underground newspapers and as graffiti on walls. In France, the magazine *Le Jeune Patriote* was conceived as a journal of the French Communist Party, first published illegally during the German occupation of France, from January 1942 onwards.[127] Like the UK cigarette cards with stencil manuals that was addressed to boy scouts, in Poland also "Little Sabotage" and graffiti was conducted by the illegal youth organization Wawers, and/or illegally operating boy scouts like Szare Szeregi [Gray Ranks], an underground paramilitary Polish Scouting Association.[128] "Mały sabotaż" [minor sabotage] was the headline of an often quoted article in the main Polish underground newspaper *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, issued in November 1940. The Weisse Rose in Germany were young students who used stencil graffiti as well.[129] The origins of the freehand and stencil resistance V graffiti campaign were done by Belgian youth who wrote RAF [Royal Air Force] on walls.[130] The V song and its illustration[131] is a DIY manual on how to write the V graffiti in France. The mentioned French resistance paper *Le Jeune Patriote* (The Young Patriot) was later renamed *Vaillant* (1945–69) and even later *Pif Gadget* (1969–93).[132] "From the first issue [of Vaillant, note by the author], you will find tales, drawn novels, a sports and outdoor page, an aviation section, a DIY corner ['un coin du bricolage'], games, and anything else that interests you."[133]

126 Cigarette card, »Stencil Spray«, Carreras Ltd.,7 × 3.5 cm, series Tools and how to use them, series of 50, No 29, 1935. Illustrated in Ulrich Blanché (ed.): Stencil Stories. A Stencil History of Street Art/Geschichte des Schablonen-Graffiti. Exhibition catalog. Heidelberg 2021, p. 33.

127 Richard Medioni: L'Histoire complète 1901–94 : Les journaux pour enfants de la mouvance communiste et leurs BD exceptionnelles. Triest 2012, p. 86.

128 Tomasz Stańczyk, Piasek sypany w oczy. In: Rzeczpospolita, Dodatek Specjalny, 29.05.04, no. 125; https://web.archive.org/web/20080526145431/http://www.rzeczpospolita.pl/specjal_040529/specjal_a_7.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

129 See chapter 4.2.2.3.

130 See chapter 4.2.2.1.

131 Ibid.

132 Richard Medioni: L'Histoire complète 1901–94: Les journaux pour enfants de la mouvance communiste et leurs BD exceptionnelles. Triest 2012, p. 86–311.

133 "Dès le premier numéro, vous trouverez des contes, des romans dessinés, une page de sport et de plein air, une rubrique d'aviation, un coin du bricolage, des jeux, et tout ce qui peut vous intéresser." Quoted after Richard Medioni: L'Histoire complète 1901–94: Les journaux pour enfants de la mouvance communiste et leurs BD exceptionnelles. Triest 2012, p. 91.

The first 33 issues of short-lived German *Primo* comic (1971–74) were distributed together with a toy supplement/gadget/gimmick called "Schnick-Schnack" inspired by the earlier *Vaillant* successor *Pif Gadget*.[134] The *Primo* "Schnick-Schnack" gadgets of issue 25 and 26 were ABC cardboard stencil letters. On the front page of issue 25, the comic character Jojo [André Franquin's Gaston Lagaffe] is dealing with letter stencils: "Damit schreibt ihr wie gedruckt!" [Your writing will look as if printed!]. He holds paintbrushes and an exclamation mark stencil in his hand, and on his table are paint buckets and more letter stencils, apparently made of brass like the commercially available ones that served as a model for this gadget. Included in the booklet are a craft sheet with the pre-cut cardboard letters A through T. The follow-up issue #26, dated September 17, 1971, featured another cardboard craft sheet with the missing pre-cut letters (U through Z) and number stencils 1 through 10. On the #26 cover, the cartoon character Baldo, a Canadian Mountie, throws around letter stencils.

Stencil tools had already been used as a gimmick in the well-known satirical American cartoon magazine *MAD*. The 5th Mad Follies anniversary issue of 1967 simply shows the head of *MAD* mascot Alfred E. Neumann on the cover—its visual appearance looks spray-painted with a stencil, similar to the gimmick stencils enclosed in the magazine, called "bonus" there. The booklet itself features a combination of text and image stencils, primarily intended to satirically alter/comment/question existing content like billboards or signs. A Dada Duchamp mustache, human and bird footprints, a thumbs-up (or thumbs-down) hand, and aggressive one-words enhanced by capitalization and exclamation points are included, such as the ambivalent or subversive FINK, ECCH!, CONDEMNED!, LOVE! and DON'T, which recall prohibition street signs [DON'T] or rubber stamps [CENSORED!, CONDEMNED!] in different fonts that echo those stamps or signs.

Both *MAD* and the *Primo* booklets also feature stenciling instructions tailored to the respective readership. While the more serious children's magazine *Primo* gives the greatest possible freedom of design with the letters, for example, to write one's name on clothing, bags, toys or tableware, with the respective matching colors or pens, *MAD* shows that satirical vandalism with a spray can on walls, advertising posters or even the paternal television set, is possible. Civil disobedience, questioning of visual messages, adbusting, and slogan graffiti are demonstrated here—propagated and parodied at the same time.

As exemplified before, gimmick stencils as addition to music records had a tradition especially in the UK that started with punk rock bands like TRB (fig. 38) and The Clash (fig. 39), but then also "Heavy Metal, and many groups that emerged under this banner took a leaf out of the punk DIY handbook"[135] and occasionally used gimmick stencils, but also rap rock and hip-hop, for instance Run-DMC single ("Mary

134 http://www.kaukapedia.com/index.php/*Primo* (accessed May 1, 2024).
135 Record Collector, September 1990, No. 133, p. 74.

Mary," 1988) or the Australian version of Beastie Boys' *License to Ill* (1986).[136] Banksy mentioned this album as an early influence to do vandalism: "Practically every kid had a VW badge hanging around their necks that they'd stolen off a car in town."[137] In his 2023 retrospective the only proper visible single record Banksy draped in his "youth bedroom" showing his roots and early influences was "Mary Mary."

Banksy's later use of gimmick stencils is based on both kind of gimmick stencils, the rather educational, playful approach for kids in *Primo* magazine and even more the satirical, political approach in *MAD* are a few examples. Banksy quoted a photo from an anarchist 1980s UK newspaper.[138] In this newspaper, there are DIY manuals not about making stencils but about shoplifting, "Killing Kops," "Getting Away," or the correct use of petrol bombs.[139] Already May 1968 graffiti contained DIY manuals on walls: "Gas-soaked rag + soap powder + soil + fuse = Molotov cocktail"[140], other slogans from a 1968 context in Germany are similar:

> EIER SCHLÜRFEN, FARBE REIN [SLURP EGGS, PAINT IN]
> GIPS ZUM DICHTEN, FEUER FREI [PLASTER TO SEAL, FIRE FREE]
> and
> WATTEBAUSCH, BENZIN UND PULLEN [COTTON BALLS, GASOLINE AND BOTTLES]
> FÜRCHTEN DIE FASCHISTENBULLEN [FEAR THE FASCIST COPPERS[141]

In 2002, Banksy and an agency called Third Planet helped the Greenpeace "Safe or Delete" campaign with graphics and a DIY guide, i.e., activism online, protest postcards, stickers, club nights in support of Safe or Delete. They also offered a "How to

136 Beastie Boys – Licensed To Ill, CBS – 450062 1, Def Jam Recordings – 450062 1, Australia 1986, "This version includes a limited edition Beastie Boys stencil." https://www.discogs.com/de/sell/item/1865437528 (accessed May 1, 2024).

137 Ossian Ward: Banksy interview, Art, Time Out London, 01.03.2010, https://web.archive.org/web/20161105115614/https://www.timeout.com/london/art/banksy-interview-art-time-out-london (accessed May 1, 2024).

138 Attack: The Voice of Respectable Moderation, [Anarchist Newspaper] London, November 1987, p. 13. https://issuu.com/randalljaykay/docs/attacknovember1987 (accessed May 1, 2024).

139 Attack: The Voice of Respectable Moderation, [Anarchist Newspaper] London, November 1987, p. 9, 10, 20. https://issuu.com/randalljaykay/docs/attacknovember1987 (accessed May 1, 2024).

140 Julien Besançon, Tom McDonough (Hg.): The walls have the floor: mural journal, May '68. Cambridge, Massachusetts 2018, p. 57.

141 Both quotes are from Uwe Wandrey: Kampfreime. Hamburg 1968, unpaged.

make a stencil" manual and a stencil template to download.[142] Maybe Banksy himself stenciled it next to a signed Banksy stencil graffiti in London.[143] As a guest, Banksy also designed and storyboarded *The Simpsons* titles in 2010,[144] a TV show highly influenced by *MAD* magazine's approach.[145] Banksy combined not only the playfulness of children's comic gimmicks with the satirical anarchist *MAD* attitude described by Art Spiegelman: "The message *MAD* had in general is, 'The media is lying to you, and we are part of the media.' It was basically … 'Think for yourselves, kids,'"[146] but also the direct-action stencil manuals of anarcho punk band Crass (fig. 37) and manuals from Anarchist newspapers how to get away in reality. Banksy combined "think for yourself" with "do it yourself."

Banksy designed gadget stencils that were published in lifestyle magazines four times between 1999 and 2002, the last two combined with a Banksy interview. Banksy was, however, not the first stencil graffiti artist to add gimmick stencil templates to a publication. Already in 1986, the pochoirist Kriki of the group NukléArt added a "pochoir à decouper" (pochoir to cut out) to the book *Pochoir a la une*,[147] in 1987 punk fanzine *On A Faim!* followed with a "On A Faim! Gadget"[148] pochoir template. Banksy's gadget stencils and their manuals combined the notion of stencils as a learning tool, a children's game, a homemaker's task (cake decorating) with the do-it-yourself tradition of home handymen (furniture decorating), fandom, political graffiti activism and vandalism.

142 https://web.archive.org/web/20021005024612/http://www.saveordelete.com/active_stencil.html (accessed May 1, 2024); https://web.archive.org/web/20020810102834/http://www.saveordelete.com/active_download.html (accessed May 1, 2024); see also photos here: https://notbanksyforum.com/thread/2578/banksy-save-delete (accessed May 1, 2024); for a better photo see https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10158630121266097&set=oa.1280718065836400 (accessed May 1, 2024), this cardboard copy was exhibited in 2022 in Manchester at the unauthorized "The Art of Banksy" show. Photo by Jay Tompkins.

143 Banksy, Save or Delete, Old Street, London, photo by Steve Cotton, 2003: https://www.artofthestate.co.uk/archive/banksy-2/banksy_helicopter_save_or_delete/ (accessed May 1, 2024); other photo, same location, uploaded by Arthunter999, 04.03.2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CasNTLUpbte/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

144 https://web.archive.org/web/20101012092857/http://www.banksy.co.uk/asseenontv.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

145 The Simpsons producer Bill Oakley quoted in John Ortved: The Simpsons: An Uncensored, Unauthorized History. New York 2009, p. 283, see also p. 83, 190.

146 Art Spiegelman quoted in NPR: Intersections: Of 'Maus' and Spiegelman. '*MAD*' Inspired Comic Book Look at the Holocaust. 26.01.2004, https://www.npr.org/2004/01/26/1611731/intersections-of-maus-and-spiegelman?t=1646212587160 (accessed May 1, 2024).

147 Solange Pierson, Guillaume Dambier: Pochoir à la une. Paris 1986.

148 On a Faim!, punk fanzine, No. 6, January 1987, between page 8 and 9, https://fanzinotheque.centredoc.fr/index.php?lvl=bulletin_display&id=13943 (accessed May 1, 2024).

7.3.2 A Commented Summary of Banksy's Stencil Manuals 1999–2005 (+ His Gimmick Stencils)

Like punk band Crass' three "stencil manuals" (fig. 37), Banksy published—from 1999 until 2006—six DIY instruction manuals on how to use stencil graffiti tools, in some cases combined with a stencil template. After that, the internet made these manuals obsolete as people could find more and more on YouTube, etc. These Banksy instructions, between around 50 and 500 words long, allow one to look at Banksy's own artistic stencil graffiti practice. In the appendix of this book, I attached the complete texts of all these Banksy stencil manuals in chronological order, as some manuals are not easy to access, mostly because they are part of magazines that are collector's items. Only the last one, in Banksy's book *Wall and Piece*, is well-known. As late as 2012, authors like Paul Gough believed it to be the only Banksy stencil graffiti manual.[149]

The aim of the polit-punks Crass (fig. 37), and later of Banksy, was not only to spread lo-fi do-it-yourself stencil messages in public space, but also to encourage others to make their own stencils.

Along with this came self-empowerment in general. This approach is similar to the Each-One-Teach-One principle used in graffiti style writing, although Each-One-Teach-One has older roots in self-organized reading/writing learning in developing countries.[150] The imitation and self-empowering or the empowering of others who own the knowledge of stenciling becomes particularly clear here. Apart from that, many well instructed followers also increase Banksy's fame and can be used as a/n (self-) advertising tool.

In 1999, Banksy added a first mass-produced paperboard stencil designed after his specifications as a gimmick, not to a record but to a lifestyle magazine, *Sleaze Nation* [SN], which he provided with instructions how to work with stencils.[151] Banksy's photographer at that time recalls the circumstances of this first Banksy gimmick stencil: "Back when I was photo editor at *Sleaze Nation*, we did a collaboration with adidas where we got a bunch of emerging urban artists to create work around sport. The SN team insisted on a late addition from a little known up and comer from Bristol. […] The stencil itself is of an angel with adidas trainers on."[152] So Banksy's first gimmick

149 Paul Gough: Banksy. The Bristol Legacy. Bristol 2012, p. 138.

150 The missionary and illiterate teacher Frank Laubach (1884–1970) invented Eoto (Each One Teach One), also called "Chain System" or "Laubach Method." He used it since 1935 in the Philippines, inspired by one of his Students in Lanao, Kakai Daganlangit, who proposed Each One Teach One when Laubach said that he could not continue teaching due to budget cuts. Ramon C. Cabag (ed.): Nonformal Education. Quezon City 1999, p. 176.

151 Banksy quoted in Sleazenation Magazine, Vol. 2, Issue 18, July 1999, p. 2.

152 Steve Lazarides quoted on his website in 2020, https://lazemporium.com/collections/stuff/products/the-new-art-of-leisure-with-free-banksy-stencil-july-1999 (accessed May 1, 2024).

stencil was not only stencil graffiti, but also a [guerilla] advert for a company, meant to be illegally spray-painted by fans.

For his stencil instructions, Banksy chooses the jargon of cooking recipes when he speaks of "serving suggestion." Again and again, Banksy makes fun of the formalized, stencil-like language of instruction manuals, but he also pays tribute to it, as he claims to have gained his knowledge of pictures and art in a public library instead of studying art;[153] like stencil spraying, a do-it-yourself approach. In a portrait photo of Banksy next to one of the gimmick stencils and a short stencil manual in *Flaunt* magazine he disguises his face with a book by W.R. Hudson, *How To Paint Graffiti And Get Away With It*. There is no such book by an author of this name,[154] i.e., it is a fictitious "non-fiction" (in terms of genre) DIY book. Banksy used the same idea to get text into a photo in another disguised portrait photo around May 2001. This time the fake book cover bore the title *Painting Graffiti and Getting Away with It: A Beginners Guide*.[155] Accordingly, Banksy called his stencil graffiti manual a year later "advice for young persons wanting to make a start in the world of stencils" which he averted with the pun "will you just cut it out?" which means not only "Just cut out the stencil!" but also "Now stop it."[156]

Banksy's last "Advice on Making Stencils" of 2005 and 2006 had more the character of a manifesto than actually giving concrete instructions. A printed meter measure in his book reinforced the non-fiction and do-it-yourself character of his advice list. The Banksy book should be used as a tool.

153 Banksy interviewed by Trevor Jackson [alias The Boy Lucas]: Gunfight 29, Issue 3, 16 March 2000, unpaged.

154 A scientific author called W.[illiam].R. Hudson never wrote about graffiti, but he was affiliated with University of Bristol and appeared as co-author of several articles on meat processing, see https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/W-R-Hudson-2163784499 (accessed May 1, 2024). Banksy stated several times he was trained as a butcher. https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/W-R-Hudson-2163784499 (accessed May 1, 2024).

155 The blurb on the back cover read as follows: "The indispensable guide to making your mark in the world today. A step by step manual which fully explains all the techniques, styles and originality you will need to make yourself a household name. Featuring over 100 full color illustrations and top tips from some of the biggest names in the graffiti world today. A complete legal section provides speci and insider techniques on destroying evidence. All you n[eed] to know and so much more. Comprehensive for all bidding […][graffiti?, note by the author] art terrorists–People Today […]–The Scotsman." The photo with the book cover was illustrated for the first time in Steve Lazarides: Capturing Banksy. London 2019, p. 256. A different photo from the same session was published in The Face magazine, June/July 2001, p. 146–147.

156 Banksy: Will you just cut it out. Advice for young persons wanting to make a start in the world of stencils. Banksy.co.uk/18stencil.html (11.04.2003 or earlier). https://web.archive.org/web/20040214202416/http://www.banksy.co.uk/17stencil.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

In his manuals, Banksy mentions the ideal ingredients, describes what has to be prepared in advance, how to act in situ, and he explains the dos and don'ts of how to act before and afterwards to avoid prosecution. In the following I combined his manuals,[157] omitted repetitions, dashes, and things that seemed irrelevant for our understanding of stencils, chose the most detailed version of each advice and put them in order, i.e., I start with the stencil preparations in advance, then go on with the on-site directions, i.e., on the street, each time including Banksy's advice on how to avoid prosecution.

Banksy talks about the creative process and tries to avoid graffiti writer's block. "Mindless vandalism can take a bit of thought."[158] Stencil graffiti needs preparation; it would not be a good idea to cut a stencil in the street and attach it afterwards as one might be arrested very soon. "First off, stencil anything. If you wait for the perfect idea you will be waiting for ever. Besides, cleverness is never as entertaining as blatant stupidity, failure and public humiliation."[159] "Think from outside the box, collapse the box and take a fucking sharp knife to it."[160] Like in his stencils, also in his aphorisms Banksy starts with a cliché ("Think from outside the box") just to give it a funny, new twist.

Banksy also talks about the ideal constitution of the work tools and the actual process of stencil cutting at home or in a studio. "Draw or copy your image"[161] or "artwork"[162] "on a piece of paper. Glue the paper onto a bit of card using good glue."[163] "Acetate is apparently quite good but any sort of free cardboard is okay. Stiff 1mm to 1.5mm board is ideal."[164] "Much fatter and it is to difficult and boring to cut. Any thinner and it gets sloppy quick."[165] "Cut out black areas"[166] and "cut straight through the drawing and card at the same time using a very sharp"[167] "x-acto"[168] "knife. Snap off blades"[169] "of british

157 I quote only six as "Painting with Stencils" is just a reduced version of the one in Banging your Head against a brick Wall 2001.
158 Wall and piece 2005.
159 Banksy.co.uk 2003 = Banksy: Will you just cut it out. Advice for young persons wanting to make a start in the world of stencils. (11.04.2003 or earlier). https://web.archive.org/web/20031001202044/Banksy.co.uk/17stencil.html (accessed May 1, 2024).
160 Wall and piece 2005.
161 Banksy: Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall. London 2001, unpaged.
162 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
163 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.
164 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
165 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.
166 Flaunt Magazine, December 2002.
167 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.
168 Flaunt Magazine, December 2002.
169 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.

steel"[170] "are best. The sharper your knife the better your stencil looks."[171] "Blunt knives result in fluffy pictures and make the whole process long and boring."[172]

In the next piece of advice, Banksy explains a particular gimmick stencil of a rat. "Add to your collection by cutting more comrades for this character. Serving suggestion: rat with hammer, rat with crowbar, rat with thermo-nuclear device."[173] One could rephrase this piece of advice in a more general way: Don't stick to someone else's stencil template, for a first step adapt it to your wishes, make changes and add details. Stencil always has a collage element. The gimmick stencil tool attached to the magazine in this case should not only be used as is, but could be modified in a do-it-yourself manner. If the rat is holding a shovel here, according to Banksy, one could also put other devices in its claw. The gimmick stencil is used here only as a starting point to ignite one's own creativity. The best submitted photo of a stencil image made with this stencil also won a prize. Banksy's stencil manual approach is similar to the alphabet that Crass provided (fig. 37), as a variety of messages are possible with them. Banksy's instructions recall the technical language of instruction manuals for technical tools but also cooking recipes ("serving suggestion").

He also explains what to do just before one leaves the house to go out street stenciling. "Get a small roll of gaffa tape, pre-tear small strips and stick them on your shirt inside your coat."[174] A Lazarides photo of a disguised Banksy at work in 2000 shows a man with a dozen pre-torn strips of black gaffa tape on his overalls.[175] Banksy gave this very stencil-specific piece of advice also to save time—time not to get caught. "Shake and test cans of paint before you leave. Cheap British paint is fine but some brands bleed more than others. Matt finish comes out best + dries quicker."[176]

"Nothing in the world is more common than unsuccessful people with talent,"[177] "leave the house before you find something worth staying in for."[178] Both deal with motivation. "Leave home at 3pm concealing the stencil inside a tabloid newspaper[179] or "find a suitable piece of card to act as a folder"[180] "to hold your stencil in…"[181] A folder protects the stencil during the graffiti trip and it protects the artist from the dripping of the stencil as well. The less suspicious the folder looks, the less likely you

170 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
171 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.
172 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
173 Banksy in Jim Carey: Britain's most wanted Graffiti Artist. In: Bizarre Magazine, June 2002, p. 62.
174 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
175 See photo in Steve Lazarides: Banksy Captured. Vol. 1. London 2019, p. 12–13.
176 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.
177 Wall and piece 2005.
178 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
179 Banksy quoted in Sleaze Nation Magazine, Vol. 2, Issue 18, July 1999, p. 2.
180 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
181 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.

are to be caught with this piece of evidence. This section also has some dos and don'ts to avoid prosecution to think of before one leaves the house. "For instance when using red paint cut the stencil into the bottom of a pizza box so when you get paint all over your fingers its not so suspicious."[182] "Wear a hat."[183] This advice helps against dripping paint on your head and the hat could also function as a disguise. "Be aware that going on a major mission totally drunk out of your head will result in some truly spectacular artwork and at least one night in the cells."[184] All of these are things to consider before leaving the studio. Stencil graffiti is not a spontaneous mindless vandalism, rather a guerrilla action with every detail thought out.

The second large section of advice consists of directions in situ, i.e., on the street. The first pieces of advice aim at the location. "Find a nice clear spot on some public property."[185] "Ensure surface is free of dust. For best results, deploy image in highly visible locations."[186] "Try to avoid painting in places where they still point at airplanes."[187] In an interview with Norwegian newspaper Dagbladet, Banksy states the opposite of this advice. He illegally stenciled in the small city of Bergen in 2000 and "months later, I still got emails from people wondering what that meant. I really should go around to lots of small towns instead of big cities. Things get more important there."[188]

The next advice, "attach stencil to wall in vermin-type location,"[189] is again due to a concrete rat gimmick stencil. More generally speaking, this advice points to focus on the location, i.e., to attach the stencil in a site-specific way—a rat runs on the ground, so paint a rat stencil accordingly on ground level. Finding the perfect location does not have to occur on the same day one actually goes out stenciling—it might be less suspicious to check out locations a few days before. In 2000, Banksy stated: "I keep a lot of books now which I store my images in, and then I'll see a wall and think of an image that I have that would fit it."[190]

182 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
183 Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall 2001.
184 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
185 Banksy quoted in Sleaze Nation Magazine, Vol. 2, Issue 18, July 1999, p. 2.
186 Flaunt Magazine, December 2002.
187 Wall and piece 2005.
188 Original Banksy quote from Kine B. Hartz: Apestreker. Dagbladed, 07.03.2003, https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/apestreker/65872781 (accessed May 1, 2024): "Og åtte måneder senerer fikk jeg fortsatt e-post av folk som lurte på hva det betydde. Jeg burde egentlig dra rundt til masse små byer i stedet for storbyer. Ting får mer betydning der." [Translation by the author]
189 Bizarre Magazine, June 2002.
190 Banksy in an interview with Gunfight 29, Bristol, 16.03.2000.

"Tape up stencil and spray"[191] "very lightly"[192] and "carefully from a distance of approximately six Inches"[193] or "approx. 10 cm" [ca. 4 inches][194]or "8 inches."[195] Also in the newest manuals from 2005 and 2006, Banksy sticks to the 8 inches [20.32 cm]. He also points to the fact that one can use stencils two-sided, which can sometimes have different effects, something Blek already, though rarely, used in his early days.[196] "Reverse the stencil for a twin image logo feel or offset two stencils for a drunken feel. Repeat as desired but bear in mind that overkilling it makes you look boring."[197] He also points to the cost and efficiency factor of stenciling. "A regular 400ml can of paint will give you up to 50 A4 sized stencils. This means you can become incredibly famous/unpopular in a small town virtually overnight for approximately ten pounds."[198]

There are also dos and don'ts to avoid prosecution on-site: "Having someone acting as lookout is always a good idea but its not necessarily as easy as it sounds. Being too careful is as bad as being too careless. If every taxi sign on a car roof is turning into police lights you won't get much work done. Being a good lookout is all about reassurance. Standing ten foot away from the painter pretending to talk into a mobile phone saying 'yeah..yeah..cool..sure' is a nice touch. If things start looking sketchy you say 'now you just hang on one minute' into your handset."[199] "If you're in a place with lots of security cameras wear a hood,"[200] "don't hang about,"[201] "move around the city quickly and act like a sad old drunk if you attract attention."[202] "The easiest way to become invisible is to wear a day-glo vest and carry a tiny transistor radio playing Heart FM very loudly. If questioned about the legitimacy of your painting simply complain about the hourly rate."[203] "When explaining yourself to the police its worth being as reasonable as possible."[204] Like the aforementioned advice "Wear a hat," these pieces of advice hint at the performance character of not only stencil graffiti. Like John Fekner did in the 1970s,[205] Banksy often wears a costume, for instance of a construction worker, and plays a role to avoid prosecution. Another piece of advice, not from

191 Flaunt Magazine, December 2002.
192 Banksy quoted in Sleaze Nation Magazine, Vol. 2, Issue 18, July 1999, p. 2.
193 Flaunt Magazine, December 2002.
194 Bizarre Magazine, June 2002.
195 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
196 See chapter 1.3.3.6.
197 Banksy quoted in Sleaze Nation Magazine, Vol. 2, Issue 18, July 1999, p. 2.
198 Wall and piece 2005.
199 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
200 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
201 Bizarre Magazine, June 2002.
202 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
203 Wall and piece 2005.
204 Banksy.co.uk 2003.
205 John Fekner interviewed by Lorraine Inzalaco and Leslie Lalehzar, in: Queens Council on the Arts (ed.): Queens Artists and Their Studios: A Documentation. New York 1980, p. 21–27, here p. 23.

Banksy's manuals, but from an interview[206] and documented for instance by helpers, was to paint the most provocative part last.[207]

Although Banksy's aim with these manuals was also to entertain the reader and to highlight how much work and danger illegal stenciling requires, his manuals also can be used simply as practical advice and they give an insight into the work practice of an experienced stencil graffiti artist.

7.4 Banksy's Use of Stencils

Contrary to Bonami's and Blek's comments cited in a previous chapter, Banksy did invent an artistic language and a grammar in his work, not only in his stencils.

In the following subchapters I trace Banksy's development as a stencil artist following the 1980s punk stencils known and used by graffiti writers in Banksy's hometown Bristol, over his small repetitive early stencils to the large-format, to multicolor and to the storytelling single-use (early example: fig. 45) stencils of Banksy in the 2010s. I will introduce some of the features of stencil graffiti and how Banksy deals with these features, including adapting or renewing them. What did he add to the handling of stencils? How did Banksy use stencils?

If we follow his anecdotes, especially in his retrospective exhibition/catalog Cut & Run, Banksy's development as a stencil graffiti artist happened in shortform as follows: First he stenciled his Banksy tag, than stenciled stand-alone ants as an equal to a graffiti tag. Parallel he used stencils as details in his freehand works until 2000. Then, in 1997, for his "Easton Hit Squad" stand-alone stencil, he added text. With it appeared a story made up in the minds of the viewers. All these stencils were used in a quantitative, repeditive way, without a very strong site-specifity ("Easton" already referred to the part of Bristol they were painted). Around the same time, Flower Bomber, still at modest size, was the first stencil motif where he did not junxtapose a found image with text but two images. Banksy realized he could get rid off painting backgrounds as every wall is already a background, even more so if the used motif is site-specific. This also safed time and led to experiments: "how much background can I claim by splitting two elements across a wall, making·everything in between part of the picture. What's the largest picture I can make with the smallest amount

206 "I painted that elephant right in the middle of San Francisco during the daytime and I kind of painted the elephant first, so it looked kind of cute. Then I painted most of the bomb but without the thing that made it look like a bomb and then I painted the white area of the speech bubble and then I painted the rest of it really fucking quick and ran away." Banksy interviewed by G-Force in Lowdown Magazine, No. 30, unpaged.

207 Jim Paine quoted in Steve Wright (ed.): Home Sweet Home. Banksy's Bristol. Bristol 2016, p. 31.

Fig. 45: Banksy, Mindless Authority Figures in Operation, large single use stencil mural, from: Banksy. Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall. An exhibition of Graffiti, Lies and Deviousness, Club Cargo, Rivington Street, London, June 22 to July 5, 2001. Source: photo by Steve Lazarides, uploaded 13.06.2019, https://www.instagram.com/p/BymnPkUlqwz/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

of paint?"[208] In 2000, his first (datable) large scale stencil, the Mona Lisa, appeared. After spring 2001, Banksy stated he stuck with life-size figures,[209] which were in a way always basic level size-specific, a signature feature of Banksy works from then on. In 2003 his bleeding stencils followed, he mostly stopped signing his street works, painted more and more single-use stencils since 2010 mostly tailormade for one specific location. The last two steps occasionally happened earlier as well, but became standard Banksy later. For a while he also left space for viewers in his works so they could be photographed in the context of the works.[210]

208 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 35.
209 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 28–31.
210 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 48–51.

7.4.1 Ants—Banksy's First Stand-alone Stencil Graffiti

Circa 1992 to 1994[211], or circa 1996–97,[212] the young Banksy sprayed the mentioned ant (fig. 44) on a brick wall in his hometown of Bristol. It already bears some characteristics that became typical for the later stencil artist. Banksy was already mixing freehand and stencil technique. The white spot, the "stage" of the ant, seemed to be sprayed freehand because it has no clear-cut edges. The insect also has a white dot on its head, where the background was probably masked out as light to make the head appear more three-dimensional. The black of the ant's body corresponds to the gray of its shadow. Banksy used three colors and clearly two different stencils, one for gray and one for black.

To use stencils at all is Banksy's do-it-yourself attitude from punk. His freehand elements and rather showy style of using multiple colors point to Banksy's style-writing graffiti background. As bricks in the UK are by default 6.5cm high with 1cm mortar in between, the ant (fig. 44) proudly measured 33 cm in height—making it a monster. Even the element of humor, which later becomes so important for Banksy, can already be found here, a gigantic ant in an absurd, theatrical spotlight. Ants are not usually found indoors, but on the street, like Banksy's ant. However, the site-specificity of this work, a feature that would later become typical for Banksy, is not yet overly obvious. Also, a social commentary, typical of later works by Banksy, is visible in his ant stencil. The ant could stand for the thoughtless worker, a counterpart to the artist individual. An ant could also be one of many, like each copy of a stencil graffiti, one could point to many, to a movement, which could be a good or a bad thing. Like rats, which Banksy would paint a little later, ants are not typically found alone. Banksy painted them instead of a graffiti tag everywhere.[213] So Banksy depicted quite an ambivalent animal, like his later rats or monkeys, especially in this size. The ant stencil seemed to be Banksy's first photographically documented work,[214] and his first stand-alone stencil graffiti.[215]

211 Steve Wright (ed.): Banksy's Bristol.Home Sweet Home. Bath 2007, p. 60.
212 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, inprint, p. 4–7, 10.
213 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 10.
214 Felix Braun, Steve Wright (ed.): Children of the Can. Bath 2008, p. 60.
215 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 4–7, 10.

7.4.2 Repetition, Banksy's Tag, and the Apparent Paradox of the Single-Use Stencil

His tag seems to have been Banksy's first stencil,[216] before he used ant stencils as a tag.[217] Stenciling one's name tag makes special sense, as the signature name is under every work and the stencil is a work tool that is designed for repetition and for recognition value. Traditionally, what is stenciled is what is so important that it has to be said again and again in different places, for instance "NO TRESSPASS." It becomes a mantra.

Banksy created a largely freehand-sprayed work dated (by others) to 1996.[218] Again, Banksy used stencils, but in contrast to the ant stencil, only for details—probably for a depicted bomb and certainly for his name lettering.

From his start as "Banksy" circa 1996, in both kinds of works, the mostly freehand ones and the independent stencils, Banksy used a stenciled name tag—at least after the first two, his a graffiti tag replacing ants and the Easton Hit Squad.[219] Until 2003, apart from some exceptions where he signed freehand, not at all, or very rarely with another more common stencil font, Orbit-B BT (with a lowercase "b"), Banksy used his own variations of a heavy futuristic sans serif stencil-like display font called "Stop."[220] This more advanced font was designed by the known Italian type designer Aldo Novarese (1920–95) in 1970 or 1971:[221] "Stop's forms are vaguely stencil-like, and some of them only read as letters when used in combination with each other."[222] This is also the case for the B and the k which Banksy used, which look rather like a "3" and a quotation mark without further (con-)text in the same font. Like Orbit-B BT also "Stop has a real computer-technology feel to its design. It should be used exclusively for headlines or logo work."[223] Banksy's graffiti tag (fig. 46) is both a stencil and a logo. Banksy seems to have been unhappy with the capital letter "A" in the "Stop" font, which he changed to a small "a" (fig. 46). First, he tried variations of the letter "a" from the Orbit-B BT font which also had that computer-technology appearance, later he created a small "a"

216 Banksy interviewed in July 2003 by Touko Suzuki: Banksy Bad Interview. In: Studio Voice, 8, vol. 344, August 2004, p. 94–96.
217 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 10.
218 : Steve Wright: Banksy's Bristol, Bath 2007, p. 30.
219 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 4–7, 10.
220 I stated this already in my 2010 book "Street Artivist Banksy." Banksy illustrated the Stop font in his 2023 retrospective catalog Cut & Run, p. 8. He seemed to have found it in a 1980s edition of W. Turner Berry, Werner Pincus Jaspert, Alfred F Johnson: The Encyclopaedia of Type Faces, originally issued in 1953. This book was on display in Banksy's "youth room" in the exhibition showing his influences.
221 https://www.linotype.com/de/1505/stop-schriftfamilie.html (accessed May 1, 2024).
222 https://www.linotype.com/de/1505/stop-schriftfamilie.html (accessed May 1, 2024).
223 https://www.linotype.com/de/1505/stop-schriftfamilie.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

Fig. 46: Banksy, Authorized Grafitti [sic] Area, Did someone say extreme sports ? (incl. Mona Lisa stencil), Urban Games, Clapham Common, London, 04–06.08.2000. Source: Photomerge reconstruction by the author. Based on http://www.letthemhang.co.uk/images/banksy.jpg (accessed May 1, 2024); Graphotism, No. 22, 11–12/2000, p. 72 and flyer, Lots at the Urban Art Sale, Dreweatts Auctions, 17th June 2008.

which was open on the ground (fig. 46). Banksy really made this font his own. Today his tag is more famous than the Stop font itself.

Sometimes Banksy integrated the name stencil into the stencil tool of the motif, as in one version of HMV Dog, a stencil from circa 2000.[224] During this time, before the breakthrough of the internet, Banksy actually sprayed stencils more often. Banksy usually had an extra signature stencil, or the signature is even—as in the case of style-writing graffiti—the work itself. Banksy had single-signature stencils in different sizes,[225] which he used for most work until 2003, and almost never afterwards. To sign stencil works was for 1980s stencilers in Poland a sign of capitalistic, ego-centric yuppiedom and an increasing focus on "me" instead of "we." Banksy's tag seems to have been a leftover from his American style-writing beginnings. By the time his "getting-up" (a style writing graffiti term) was complete, around 2003, when his work started to be seen more and more through his website and the media and less on the street, his tag had become redundant.

Repetition in an urban space creates nets, connecting lines between what is being repeated. With these connecting line networks, the individual stencil works are

224 On May 31, 2000, Banksy stenciled this motif as part of the self-authorized outdoor exhibition "Banksy–Graffiti Art Live and Direct in London. An Illicit Outdoor Gallery Experience" in Rivington Street London. Illustrated in Banksy: Banging your Head Against a brick wall. London 2001. Unpaged.

225 Banksy exhibited a row of different sizes in his fake studio in the Banksy vs. Bristol Museum exhibition in 2009.

mutually supportive. If you only see a rat once, you may miss it. When seen in the same quarter of a city 15 times, the motif gets meaning through its stencil-like repetition.[226] Still, any of these 15 rats had a differently chosen background, structure, and context: "Because stencils are sprayed directly onto the real world, this world is read into the image like a second subject and so influences the image's interpretation. Sprayed onto the surface of a workshop wall, esteem for […][the subject of the stencil] rises and falls with the success of the shop. Sprayed onto a tree trunk, […] [the stencil] is interpreted within the force of nature itself. An image of […] [it] sprayed on the gateposts of a wealthy house means one thing while the same image sprayed on the wall of a peasant's shack suggests something quite different."[227]

In contrast to his early stencil works, around 2003, Banksy only spray-painted works more than once in exceptional cases (an early example is fig. 45), even though the medium of stencil is actually designed for economic repetition and was created in the majority for that in its history. Since the early 2000s, this repetition happens for Banksy works online, where his stencils are shared in large numbers. However, their visual qualities, which need to be studied and analyzed in detail, are for a quick and superficial viewer—what an online viewer often is. The online user is more a digital flaneur; his perception is ephemeral. He/she is much like a passerby on the street, the original environment of a stencil, he/she has little time. Messages must be immediately understandable and often have a recognition effect, something that the stencil often delivers more than a freehand-sprayed work. With the digital distribution of the single-use stencils (fig. 45), which emphasize their artwork character and their uniqueness, they also lose their site-specificity in terms of their visibility—typical of street art—because in a photo online the exact location context is not typically transported, unless by caption or with additional images, such as detail or context shots. Although Banksy's stencils are still made for a specific place, they are no longer bound only to their reception on-site.

As stencils are pre-cut, the artist can correct him/herself or try out the stencil tool in the studio to see how it will look. Since Banksy slowly gave up repetition stenciling around 2002/2003, he cut more and more made-to-measure stencils for locations he photographed before (fig. 45). This becomes apparent in photos in his books and on his website/Instagram account that show a before and after photo of Banksy's intervention.[228] Banksy can apply a draft of his stencil on the photo of the location before he spray-paints there. Besides the photo, Banksy can secretly measure the wall to get the right proportions. This way, he can simulate the stencil work in his studio

226 Jean-Christophe Bailly in Jörg Huber: Paris Graffiti 1986, p. 8–9.

227 Joel C. Sheesley: The Image of Sandino in the Streets. In: Ibid. et al. (eds.): Sandino in the Streets. Bloomington/Indianapolis 1991, p. XXII.

228 This first thing that is visible when opening Banksy: Banging your Head Against a Brick Wall. London 2001. Unpaged.

within (a photo of) the actual background. This makes his stencils made-to-measure and site-specific and it minimizes spontaneous composition or color problems in situ, i.e., it reduces confusion in situ as well as the duration of attachment, like the stencil technique in general. This technique also follows the train of thoughts of the main viewer of Banksy's work, i.e., not the passerby or the local resident on the street, but his online audience who views his work on a similar photo like the one Banksy shot before he made his draft and made-to-measure stencil.

7.4.3 Speed and Immediacy

Banksy uses stencils to not get caught, or to minimize the time this could happen, so that he can apply his illegal works in as short a time as possible. The illegality is a major part of the artwork; anyone can take his time and paint forever in a studio. The spray stencils thus reflect the illegality of the attachment. Instead of stenciling with a paintbrush and paint bucket, Banksy uses only a spray can and stencil; carrying and using one item less saves time. Several times Banksy documents how little time it took him to install large format street stencils. In 2002, Banksy stenciled a life-size, two-color Queen's Guard, including freehand Anarchy signs, in three minutes and 34 seconds.[229] In about seven minutes he illegally spray-painted a huge rat stencil around 2004, taller than a man, with a toxic waste barrel.[230]

As in the case of slogan graffiti, fast attachment corresponds to a reduction in means, while maximizing content as desired. "In content, form and intentions […] [stencils, note by the author] are related to ancient forms of aphorism and that of the epigram, characterized by brevity, pointing and surprising combinatorics. Their conciseness may be dictated by the breathlessness of the attachment, but it leads to a text that remains in memory. The linguistic compression of the pun, which allows evocating two statements simultaneously in a puzzle-like manner, fits this particularly. […] The more disparate the levels of meaning, the stronger the comic effect in general. […] Pointing and surprising combinatorics often come about through antithesis and paradox […]. Playing with expectations and their pleasurable disappointment, as it is characteristic of the discharge processes of the joke, is indispensable to the graffiti writers and leads to specific forms of the one-liners […] and the parodic allusion to literature, advertising or famous graffiti."[231] The speed requirement strongly influences form and content. The stencil applicator has little time and passerby viewers are also often in a hurry. The street is not a gallery where viewers take time to look at artworks. Stencils have a precise shape that is fast and easy to recognize, even if you just want

229 Photo documented including time code in Lowdown magazine, No. 30, 2002, Unpaged.
230 Banksy: Cut it Out. London 2004, unpaged [p. 1].
231 Harald Beck: Graffiti. Stuttgart 2003, p. 5f.

to get quickly from A to B. A web surfer online also has little time and often a small display—perfect for viewing street stencils. Due to sensory overload and little time, the old stencil technique is particularly suitable for the digital space. In contrast to elaborate graffiti pieces, the majority of elaborate stencil works are immediately understandable, even as a thumbnail, precisely because they are stencils.

Speed is the most important aspect of stencil graffiti. However, not only the speed of attaching a stencil to a wall is crucial, immediacy is also paramount. Most stencil graffiti is not as detailed as a screen print, a technique that evolved from stenciling. Instead, in stencils, content is often more deduced, thus instantly readable. According to Anton van Dalen, he wanted his stencils "to operate like traffic signs, you absorb the meaning before you even know it."[232] Manco argues in a similar way: "The other important stylistic feature of stencilled art is its immediacy, which is part of the general compositional over-layering that occurs with graffiti. As […] Shepard Fairey puts it, 'the image is integrated with the texture of the street'."[233] Also Banksy used this immediacy of industrial utilitarian stencils "for mocking authority, generating satire, or just creating mischief by altering official signage,"[234] for instance in his works "Beware Trapdoors in Operation" and "This Wall is a Designated Graffiti Area."[235]

7.4.4 Life-size resulted in Site-specifity and Life-likeness

In 2000, Banksy began working at a scale larger than life for the first time with his Mona Lisa stencil (fig. 46).[236] On average, Banksy's illegal stencils in 2002 were much larger and more elaborate than almost everything that was stenciled illegally by individuals before on walls, which is why the urban context of the street was much more evident than the mass of stencils which usually did not exceed A3 size. Due to their size, small stencil works in public space could usually only be photographed close-up (fig. 44). Thus tere often was little, if any, reference to the location. Like some of the stencil pioneers (see graph 3, chapter 1.4) before him, Banksy's stencils were more or less oriented to the dimensions of the figures they would have, if they were real, or he usually designed them to be larger-than-life to emphasize them for photo documentation and distance effect. In his own words: "In the spring of 2001 I made a stencil so bad it prompted a radical re-think. Although not to the extent of changing the subject matter, style or technique. Instead I upscaled the idea of a Horse Guard with his trousers falling down, from ten inches high to life-size, and added urine. Remarkably this

232 MacPhee 2004, p. 23.
233 Manco 2002, p. 15.
234 MacPhee 2004, p. 23.
235 Manco 2002, p.13.
236 Illustrated in Julio E Abajo (Ed.): Graphotism. The International Graffiti Writers Publication 22 (11–12/2000), p. 72.

did the trick. […] After that first success I stuck with life-size figures."[237] With life-size came not only site-specifity but also life-likeness. "Graffiti is essentially art made to be viewed from a moving vehicle, and if you were sat on a bus and caught one of these from the corner of your eye they appeared for a moment almost lifelike. […] As well as scale it became clear the action was significant. These figures needed to be caught in a frozen moment—either deep thought, a clinch or some other stillness that prolonged the 'lifelike' illusion."[238] At that point, like Fekner decades earlier, Banksy also became a "road artist" after being a "street artist" and a graffiti writer, like Fekner's stencil graffiti art his could be understood also when sitting in a vehicle—mostly because of its large size and its reduced form. Contrary to Fekner's conceptual approach, illusion was more important for Banksy. More site-specifity does not only attach the stencil work stronger to the location, it also allows to reduce a painted motif even more, when features of a particular wall are included to tell a story.

Like many other street artists, Banksy probably first takes a photo of potential locations for the desired location and then uses computer simulation to prepare the desired motif in the appropriate size. His stencils were tailor-made, site-specific for a particular location. Banksy's stencils are the opposite of the graffiti stereotype of spontaneity. The medium stencil allows control. Attaching large works illegally on prestigious, hard-to-reach, busy or highly regarded urban sites is easier (and sometimes only possible) if things go very quickly. Banksy can test large and elaborated stencils beforehand in the studio and he can test how much time and spray paint he would need. Size, speed, and increased visibility go hand in hand with stencils—although larger stencils need more time in situ.

If, on the other hand, art uses the street only as a photo background, if it is so small that it is barely visible and not necessarily intended for passersby, but for an Instagram viewer,[239] the "frame" is created by Instagram's userface and hashtags, or the overall Instagram profile of the one uploading—not on the street.

7.4.5 Authorship and Stencils

For his first major London exhibition in 2000, which he illegally installed in a tunnel, Banksy said, "I'll also put some on canvases and then burn the limited-edition stencils."[240] Already then, Banksy was aware that as long as his stencil tools physically existed, someone else could repeat them at any time. One-off or limited editions can

237 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalogue, Glasgow 2023, p. 28–31.
238 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, p. 28–31.
239 Like in the case of works by British street artist Slinkachu, see https://slinkachu.com/ (accessed May 1, 2024).
240 Banksy quoted in Fiona McClymont: Cheeky Monkey. In: The Independent, 27 May 2000.

only be prevented by destroying the stencil. In his 2023 retrospective it became obvious he did keep them: ""I've kept these stencils hidden away for years, mindful they could be used as evidence in a charge of criminal damage. But that moment seems to have passed, so now I'm exhibiting them in a gallery as works of art."[241] For a while, Banksy also issued stencil templates or tools in magazines free for everyone to use and to change.

Banksy also delegated works. Friends and associates such as EINE (Ben Flynn), Chu, or Olly Walker executed screen prints according to Banksy's instructions. Early Banksy, at least, saw portable/sellable works more as souvenirs of his street works, not as the real thing,[242] and he enlisted friends because they were more skilled at executing screen prints than Banksy. It is possible that Banksy gave his collaborator EINE a set of stencils for an exhibition in a gallery in Copenhagen. We know Banksy did this in Vienna. In 2020, EINE wrote as a comment under a TV video still of a Banksy performance during his Vienna exhibition: "Smashing car windows in Vienna,"[243] i.e. he admitted to working for (and as) Banksy. In a short Austrian TV feature on the show, EINE acted as Banksy and even stenciled Banksy's signature tag life on camera.[244] He is masked but identifiable by his tattoos and his voice.

There, EINE attached the stencils, apparently with more or less detailed Banksy instructions, similar to the underground mail distribution of stencil tools in Poland in the 1980s.[245] In the late 1970s, John Fekner sent a stencil to a gallery in Sweden, which applied it there according to his instructions.[246] Alex Vallauri's partner, Brian Kaufman, did stencil graffiti with Vallauri's acrobat stencil in the early 1980s.[247]

In freehand graffiti, this would be a no-go, as personal style and execution are inseparably merged, although tagging under a crew name goes in a similar direction. Banksy himself played with delegated authorship possibilities of stencils when he published industrially punched-out stencils according to his specifications in several cases

241 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog, Glasgow 2023, backcover.

242 "But I guess what I learnt is that if I paint pictures, they're kind of like the tea towels and the ashtrays of my work really, you know, like the souvenirs of the work. The work is the real thing, and then some people with money will buy that thing on a canvas to go in their kitchen 'cause it looks okay, and it's kind of, I quite like it like that. I'm alright with it like that." Banksy Speaks Transcript, published on the BBC Channel 4 website when they screen the Squall produced Alt world, 4 min. Video about Banksy on 31.08.2001.

243 EINE [Ben Flynn] on Instagram, 11.10.2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/CGNWXyeM_bA/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

244 Report on Banksy's Bad Press show in Vienna, Tipp–Die Kulturwoche, ORF television report, 29.06.2003, 2.35min.

245 Krzysztof Skiba in Sikorski/Rutkiewicz 2011, p. 71; see also Dariusz Paczkowski in Sikorski/Rutkiewicz 2011, p. 74–75.

246 John Fekner interviewed by the author, 2021.

247 Brian Kaufman: Alex Vallauri Art & Memorabilia, Youtube, 22.01.2009, https://youtu.be/kRFXu1coJkE?t=49 (accessed May 1, 2024).

as an addition to interviews in magazines.[248] The works produced seemed indistinguishable from those by Banksy. Banksy, however, did not use those magazine edition stencils himself, but variations of them. In 2002, frequent Banksy collaborator Tristan Manco cut a Banksy stencil for the book launch of *Stencil Graffiti* in Paris,[249] where Banksy was listed as a participant of a stencilist group show in a small bookshop where artists from the book stenciled on the wall.[250] In Manco's words: "Banksy did not give me a stencil—it is a radar rat stencil that I cut myself using the Flaunt Magazine template."[251] Manco stenciled it on behalf of Banksy,[252] using one of the mentioned magazine gimmick stencils. The radar rat stencil is visible on floor level in photos from the show,[253] recalling Banksy's instruction in the magazine: "It is life-size of a rodent and should ideally be placed at floor level in rodent-type situations."[254] The stencil tool received a "©Banksy" inscription above it.

Authorship is challenged playfully by Banksy, as is the character of the respective work. What is the work of art, if anyone can do it with a stencil? This question is always a byproduct of the question "Which part can be sold?" The work of art is more than the stencil tool—the moment it appears, the location where it appears, the placement on the wall, the virtuosity of attaching a stencil under pressure, and the invention of the motif before the stencil-cutting process are all important as well. And the stencil tool is just a set of opportunities. When there is enough time in situ, one can cover some parts, use only others, or use some parts more often, use some parts mirrored. As the stencil bears the opportunity to correct mistakes after the first layer of spray-paint, the stencil user can even repair or extend it in the studio or in situ with masking

248 In four cases, Banksy published gimmick stencils with his own motifs as supplements, for example to interviews with himself, see Sleazenation Magazine, Vol. 2, No. 18, July 1999, Bizarre Magazine, June 2001, Flaunt Magazine, December 2001 and Creative Review, April 2002.

249 Manco interviewed by the author, 4.11.2020, Manco as Stencil Graffiti Handbook, 04.02.2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CK3QOv_Fn2x/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

250 Stencil Graffiti Paris Exhibition, curated by Tristan Manco, ARTAZART bookshop/gallery, Paris, 21.02.–13.03.2002. Exhibitors included from Paris: Miss Tic, Hao, Alain Design, Nice Art, Space Invader & Jérôme Mesnager with later additions to be made by Némo & Blek. From the UK: Stencils by Banksy, Pablo Fiasco, Sniper, Paris & Nick Walker. From the US: Logan Hicks, Chris Bettig & Gerardo Yepiz, https://web.archive.org/web/20111006015903/http://stencilgraffiti.com/info.html (accessed May 1, 2024); https://web.archive.org/web/20111018005725/http://www.lapanse.com/pages/graffitis/artazart_stencil_graffiti/stencil_graffiti_menu.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

251 Manco in an email to the author, 12.11.2020.

252 Manco interviewed by the author, 4.11.2020.

253 See photo scan in post by Instagram user stencil_graffiti_handbook [Tristan Manco] on 04.02.2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CK3QOv_Fn2x/ (accessed May 1, 2024); see also photo on https://web.archive.org/web/20101007205935/http://stencilgraffiti.com/popups/expo03.html (accessed May 1, 2024).

254 Banksy quoted in Aidin Vaziri: Off the wall. In Flaunt Magazine, December 2002, p. 64.

tape or folding flaps to gain even more opportunities to alter or vary the resulting stencil image.

According to Adorno, authorship, genuineness, and originality become important in just such a time as mass production prevails,[255] for example because religious norms slowly dissolve. Stencils reflect mass production or pretend to be mass produced. The "genuineness ideal" is a construct with a pseudo-character, an abstraction. "The untruth lurks in the substrate of genuineness [Echtheit] itself, the individual [Individuum]."[256] Genuineness often protects the existing order. "To equate genuineness [Echtheit] with truth is not tenable."[257] It is not clear who the author behind the pseudonym Banksy is, and if it is no longer clear what exactly the work is and who its author is in the case of a stencil work, there is a problem. Works cannot be sold as they might be by someone else. The stencil technique unmasks the fetish of originality and authenticity as a tool to sell stuff. "Being yourself is overrated,"[258] said Banksy. According to Adorno, the real self's "character of appearance [Scheincharakter] can be understood from the historical implications of the concept of genuineness [Echtheit] as such. In it hides the idea of the supremacy of the origin over what is derived. This is however already connected with social legitimism. All ruling elites claim to be the eldest of all, autochthonous."[259] So if one questions or gives up concepts such as the individual and the genuineness ideal within the context of Banksy and the stencil for example, it is possible, if one follows Adorno, to overcome those in power. "What is human is attached to imitation: a human being turns into a human being first by imitating other human beings. In such behavior, the Ur-form of love, the priests of genuineness scent traces of that utopia, which could shake the apparatus of domination."[260] Using stencils always has a notion of imitation. Through repetition on unclear authorship stenciled messages could even become stronger as they appear as a mass movement, as a Polish 1980s stenciler recalled: "I founded the Animal Liberation Front, an informal ecological movement, and made a stencil with a skeleton of a white eagle and the inscription

255 Theodor W. Adorno: Goldprobe. Kapitel 99. In: Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben. Frankfurt [1951] 1970, p. 174, translaton: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1951/mm/ch02.htm (accessed May 1, 2024).

256 Theodor W. Adorno: Goldprobe. Kapitel 99. In: Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben. Frankfurt [1951] 1970, p. 174, translaton: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1951/mm/ch02.htm (accessed May 1, 2024).

257 Theodor W. Adorno: Goldprobe. Kapitel 99. In: Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben. Frankfurt [1951] 1970, p. 174, translation: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1951/mm/ch02.htm (accessed May 1, 2024).

258 Banksy: Existencilism. London 2002. Unpaged.

259 Theodor W. Adorno: Goldprobe. Kapitel 99. In: Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben. Frankfurt [1951] 1970, p. 174, translation: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1951/mm/ch02.htm (accessed May 1, 2024).

260 Theodor W. Adorno, Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben, Frankfurt 1951, Aphorismus 99: Goldprobe.

'Poland has not died yet'. I could attach it 40 times a day, so after a week it was in many staircases in my neighborhood. There was a rumor that a new, large, opposition organization was doing it. The undercover men started sniffing at my neighborhood."[261] Banksy told a similar story in 2023, talking about one of the first stencils he made in 1997: "I'd been stencilling ants instead of writing my name as a tag […] when […] I came across an ad in the back of the Mirror for a security company. Something about it appealed to me so I went to the library, enlarged it on the photocopier, added the motto 'Easton Hit Squad' and spent a few weeks blasting my neighbourhood with it. The effects were immediate. In the queue at the Post Office I heard people talking about the Hit Squad in the same revered tones as the local crime family. Around the pool table in the pub there was a rumour they were behind the recent theft of a cash machine with a JCB digger. The Easton Hit Squad never did anything more dangerous than sharpen a pencil. I was the founding and only member, but it was clear the most powerful thing I could do was to carry on painting and keep my mouth shut."[262]

This becomes clear also in the title of Banksy's collaboration with EINE in Copenhagen: *Banksy Vs. EINE*. Use of the term "versus" was, at the time, widespread in mash-ups, or "bastard pop" to indicate sampling of famous artists. Their consent and that of the rights holders and record companies is not always given, as mash-ups, like street art, are often illegal. A mash-up could be called, for example, "Stayin 'Alive In The Wall (Pink Floyd vs. Bee Gees Mashup)" as in the song created by Wax Audio based on samples from Pink Floyd and the Bee Gees.[263] Banksy collaborated in 2005 with electronics producer Danger Mouse, who may have delivered the most famous mash-up album. His *The Grey Album* of 2004 is a mix of *The Black Album* by rapper Jay-Z and *The White Album* by The Beatles. Although in retrospect, all (still living) sampled artists gave their artistic approval, this was not true for the record labels, who wanted to prevent its dissemination, even though critics loved it.[264] Banksy's stencils are visual mash-ups, also illegal, initially difficult to exploit commercially, except as photos or cut from walls. Most are stencil-translated collages based on sampled photographs or other illustrations. If Banksy gave EINE his stencils and the sprayed result worked under the name "Banksy Vs. EINE" then it is no longer clear how high Banksy's share was in this exhibition. Stencils are stored creativity—similar to a digital audio file, they can be accessed decades later and independently of the artist in almost unchanged

261 Dariusz Paczkowski in Sikorski/Rutkiewicz 2011, p. 75.
262 Banksy: Cut & Run. Exhibition catalog. Glasgow 2023, p. 10.
263 Stayin' Alive In The Wall (Pink Floyd vs Bee Gees Mashup) by Wax Audio, Youtubevideo (3.22 Min.), 6 October 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U13xOvDa19U (accessed May 1, 2024).
264 Jillian C York: The fight to protect digital rights is an uphill battle, but not a silent one. The Guardian, 24 April 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/apr/24/the-fight-to-protect-digital-rights-is-an-uphill-battle-but-not-a-silent-one (accessed May 1, 2024).

quality, similar to a score or a novel manuscript, which lives as well as the score of duplication, repetition and distribution, but also in the way the particular artist, the interpret, handles a particular stencil tool.

Later, Banksy changed his attitude a bit. After promoting an exhibition in New York in 2008 with four large murals, which he had executed by professional advertising painters, he said five more years later in an interview that this was a mistake. "I totally overlooked how important it was to do it myself […]. Graffiti is an art form where the gesture is at least as important as the result, if not more so. I read how a critic described Jackson Pollock as a performance artist who happened to use paint, and the same could be said for graffiti writers—performance artists who happen to use paint. And trespass."[265] With the additional elements of "trespass" and "performance," the stencil is not just a stencil. The stencil fits both "trespass" and "performance" as it can be applied quickly.

The stencil technique can be collage-like whenever several voices, several authors speak at the same time, not merged—more like a choir or a loud fight. Banksy creates not only many, but very diverse stencils. Humor, surreal breaks, contradictions, gimmicks, light provocations, one-second dramas, playing with familiarity, playing with locations, and also playing with different authors. Stencils are particularly suitable for humorous representations as they always contain a part that is known or stereotypical—a cliché, cut and dry, exaggerated—and longs for recognition from the viewer. This known can in turn be combined with something new or something inappropriate.

7.4.6 Optics of Command and Authority

The majority of Banksy's stencils are "fluffy in a militant way,"[266] as he himself says in an early interview. Summarizing Banksy's style as a stencil author, this would put his stencils to the point. Banksy always combines something friendly with something unfriendly, such as animals, children, something playful, with weapons, forbidden, provocative things. Stencils already have a visual "militant way" in their history, as they have been widely used for military inscriptions and always seem like an imperative, which is reinforced in English by the frequently used capitalization of command stencils (fig. 46). "Stencil letterforms are […] closely associated with the US military, as well as the police and fire departments."[267] Capital stencils seem like a visual yelling

265 Banksy interviewed by Keegan Hamilton: Village Voice Exclusive: An Interview With Banksy, Street Art Cult Hero, International Man of Mystery. Village Voice, 9. October 2013. https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/10/09/village-voice-exclusive-an-interview-with-banksy-street-art-cult-hero-international-man-of-mystery/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

266 Banksy interviewed by Si Mitchell: Metaphysical Graffiti. In: Squall Magazine, No. 5, July/August 2000, p. 7.

267 Steven Heller/Louise Fili: Stencil Type. London/New York 2015, p. 10.

of short, precise orders. The individual, artistic, pictorial, "fluffy" of Banksy's approach meets the authoritarian stencil style, which is planned, efficient, commanding, un-individual, representing uniformity and thus the opposite of classical expression of the singular artist genius, for instance oil painting. Banksy needs a counterpart, an authority or a wall against which he can stencil: "Banging Your Head Against a Brick Wall."[268] He breaks with conventions in a playful way, be it visual conventions as in the museum or urban space, or conventions with regard to the medium.

The person who applies a message with stencils in urban space is as important as the message itself, as Banksy himself realized in later years. Because stencil sprayers and stencil cutters do not have to be identical, and stencil cutting always requires planning and preparation in the studio, stencils are more deliberate than handwritten messages that have the appearance of spontaneity and fleetingness. The majority of street stencils are influenced by groups, from propaganda campaigns such as the Mussolini stencils in fascist Italy that Blek le Rat saw, to punk stencils, which British graffiti writer 3D used, and the Paris 1968 stencil-like posters, the different groups that inspired pochoirists (graph 1, chapter 1.4), and Banksy. Groups need to be coordinated, stencils need to be cut in advance. All this requires preparation, the opposite of spontaneity. If there is a group behind something, it appears more important, more powerful.

The majority of street stencils seen by passersby in urban space over the last 150 years have not been street art but advertising and signage, even more so in the Mediterranean and Anglo-Saxon area than in northern and eastern Europe. Maybe that's because the traditionally warmer climate allows stenciled messages on walls to last longer. The patrons and executors of these majority and utility stencils were people of power, the city council, which cut bans and clues in stencils, since their cues were valid for many places, were important, leading to non-compliance with penalties. Traditional stencil typefaces, in particular, have gained power and authority the time they have spent over the last 150 years on military, signage and advertising signs. Street artists and their viewers perceive this power of familiar stenciling. Banksy plays with it: "I'm working on the concept of alternate signage. People like to do what they're told and if you put up an official looking stencil that says 'This wall is designated graffiti area order of the EEC' It 's open season. I've done and it works."[269] Banksy created alleged authorized graffiti areas (fig. 46) that playfully diverted the authoritative power and credibility of the stencil style. Since street sign stencils should normally be very clear—no humor, no irony, no ambivalence—images are not as prevalent in sign stencils; written slogans/orders dominate. Images are too ambivalent, so if images are used they are reduced to icons, pictograms, which are somewhere between writing and image.

268 Title of Banksy's first artist book (London 2001).

269 Mark Robertson: Let Us Spray, in: The List. Glasgow and Edinburgh Events Guide, 1–15.03.2001, Issue 408, p. 24.

7.4.7 Color/Fields

The majority of street art stencils are spray-painted in black color on a lighter surface (e.g., fig. 13, 26, 32). This has to do with the already executed point "speed," since each additional color usually requires an extra stencil and also the time for the first color to dry, before one can complete a second.

In 2001, Banksy published his first artist book in black and white, probably not necessarily for cost reasons, but rather for ideological reasons. He saw color as a weakness in art in the first years of the new millennium.[270] Sometimes a stencil composition needed color, for instance red, a signal color to point to a detail (fig. 46, 47). During this time, most of his work on the street was black and white. On canvas and in shows, he also often used bright monochrome backgrounds, reminiscent of Pop Art, for a street stencil motif. Few of his motifs on canvas were multicolored. The picture carrier often brings colors, for example the kitschy flea market paintings with which he began in 2001. More and more, he added another color, often the signal color red, which pointed not only to Banksy's first name Robin (red like the bird of the same name), but also to his rather leftist attitude and the English sayings "to get caught red-handed" or "to paint the town red." Then multicolor stencils slowly start to pop up in his work, with the non-colors white and gray, but multicolored stencils still rarely occur in Banksy's work. This is a classical development for a stencil artist, according to Pablo Fiasco: "if you are just starting, stick to black, white and red. Traditional protest colours and they stand out."[271]

Stencils, even if their motif is dominated by a line drawing, are generally color fields or shapes separated by bridges or larger color-free areas. Stencils have this in common with painting, which is often made up of areas of color and not of lines like a drawing. The stencil tool itself, on the other hand, has something of a sculpture-esque, bas-relief-like quality about it due to the process of its creation. *Carved Paper*[272] is the title of a book about Japanese stencils.

270 Banksy interviewed by Shok1: A chat with Banksy. Big Daddy Magazine #7, 2001, p. 57; Emma Warren: Need to know: Banksy, Graffiti Artist, Observer Magazine, 26 May 2002. http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/UKNB/0F3D3AE9DF5AEDB3/0F8BFF-68D3921800?p_multi=EOLL&s_lang=en-US (accessed May 1, 2024).

271 Pablo Fiasco interviewed by the Author, February 2021.

272 Susanna Campbell Kuo: Carved Paper. The Art of the Japanese Stencil. Santa Barbara 1998.

7.4.8 "Bleeding" Stencils

For the majority of his stencil work on the street, Banksy preferred a flawless attachment—clear, pristine, perfect, virtuous finish (fig. 44–46). This guaranteed an optical appearance that could be done by an authorized professional (fig. 45), for instance by a council worker. And clearly painted stencils are easier and faster understandable for a passer-by or online viewer. If stencils are attached in a clean way, they do not appear so much as vandalism and are less likely to be rejected by viewers, and it often takes longer until they get overpainted as they do not fulfill all criteria of graffiti. A flawless appearance ironically contradicts the notion of dirt, spontaneous scribblings, amateurism, mindless vandalism—characteristics often attributed to graffiti. This, however, can also arouse anger of property owners.

Around 2003, Banksy used so-called paint noses or drippings (fig. 47) as a stylistic device, "bleeding" stencils, usually an undesirable side effect of rushing, lack of spray can control, poor weather conditions, misjudgment of the surface, or material weakness. Just as Banksy plays with the authoritarian visual style of the stencil (fig. 45), he also blurs the precision requirement that the stencil demands, since this is exactly what

Fig. 47: Banksy, Stockphoto Zombie Couple with fork, bleeding stencil graffiti, Rivington Street, ca. 2003. Source: photo by Bibsta, uploaded 10. September 2003, https://www.flickr.com/photos/biblicationz/4025693315/ (accessed May 1, 2024).

it makes possible. Inaccuracy is what is usually blocked by the stencil; it is a tool that renders inaccuracy invisible. The stencil on the street is a stylistic device of uniformity, a "policeman" in letter or icon form (fig. 45).

Banksy, on the other hand, demonstrated these spray "mistakes" as a means to "liquify" the inner mendacity and horror of so-called stock photos and the "stencil-like" cut-and-dry ideas of love relationships (fig. 47), friendship or family life conveyed on those stock photos. Although Banksy did these color dripping stencils on the street, the majority of these experiments happened in gallery contexts, also to unmask the flawless, transferring the breathlessness and energy of the street into the gallery space. Inside stencils need flaw, outside, the stencilist should avoid flaw. On the street, it is an advantage if images and messages are clearly recognizable, since passersby have little time and hardly anyone takes the time to take a closer look at "smearing" (if it is more painterly) or "scribbling" (if it is rather writing or drawing). Art on the street often has to be clearly identified as such, otherwise it is only hidden as visual noise, in contrast to the gallery, where art is expected, no matter how it appears formally. They are clearly characterized by their clear shape as aesthetically designed, sometimes even for road workers.

7.5 A Short Summary: Banksy's Signature Stencil Style

According to stencil graffiti artist Pablo Fiasco, Banksy is a rare exception of a stencil graffiti artist who knows and has deeply researched the history of stencils and graffiti.[273] Banksy already pointed to stencil graffiti's history of dissent in 2001, before Tristan Manco's or Josh McPhee's books came out from 2002 to 2004. In Manco's *Stencil Graffiti*, Banksy pointed indirectly to uprisings like Paris '68 ("to start revolutions"[274]) and protest stencils in Nicaragua ("to stop wars"[275]); in 2018, to the "begin of modern stencil art in Paris 1968."[276] Banksy renewed stencil graffiti, partially because and thanks to the fact that he knew a lot about its history, and he also made the stencil technique more known than any artist before.

In his self-curated group exhibitions and collaborations, Banksy cooperated repeatedly with significant artists from stencil/graffiti history, like members of Crass, Hugo Kaagman, Robert del Naja or Blek le Rat. Although he started in a style-writing graffiti context, he never seems to have been a graffiti purist. Although the use of stencils was frowned upon in this scene (and still is), he chose the pioneer del Naja as someone to follow, who used stencils as details (fig. 42) but also alone for their own

273 Pablo Fiasco interviewed by the author via email, February 2021.
274 Banksy in Manco 2002, p. 76.
275 Banksy in Manco 2002, p. 76.
276 See chapter 1.1.

artistic features, in the years Banksy started looking at graffiti in the streets of Bristol. Banksy was not limited to hip-hop graffiti and seems to have known punk graffiti and stencils as well. He started at the same point where most stencil graffiti pioneers already finished—with few-word poetry stencils like John Fekner (fig. 26–27) or SZ group (fig. 22), signature name tag stencils like Jerzy Treliński (fig. 21), image signature stencils like Chaz Bojórquez (fig. 25), Alex Vallauri or David Wojnarowicz (fig. 30), small pictorial stencils meant for quantity and stenciled silhouettes like Vallauri's boot (fig. 34), signing his work with a stenciled tag like Blek le Rat (fig. 18) or King Pin (fig. 24), site-specific stencils like John Fekner (fig. 27), from 2000 onwards life-size stencils (fig. 45) like Alex Vallauri (fig. 31), John Fekner (fig. 28), King Pin (fig. 24), Kohlhöfer (fig. 35) or Blek le Rat (fig. 18) did earlier (see graph 3, chapter 1.4), stencils that made more and more explicit reference to their locations like Fekner (fig. 27). What Banksy really started on a large scale and in all his works differently from others was that he tells stories in his stencil graffiti, something Vallauri (fig. 31) and Wojnarowicz (fig. 29) had done a bit already, although they basically told the same few stories again and again. Although Banksy still does work illegally, his works have grown bigger and become more technically advanced than the works of most other stencilists who are still active and stencil illegally.