

Banksy's Propaganda Muscle

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Abstract

This paper examines two wholly different perspectives, their vision of individuals and society, their actions and reactions, and how they relate to one another, if at all. The subjects are propaganda and the graffiti artist known as Banksy. To illustrate the point, I will assess the two topics through the placement of some of their features in propaganda's process model, a systematic tool that can help to confirm the proposition that Banksy is a competitive propaganda agent.

Keywords: Banksy, Propaganda, communication, message.

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Introduction

Common sense is the way in to persuasion and propaganda. Isn't the former merely a human tendency? We become agents of persuasion once we hit childhood. Values, tradition and knowledge are passed from generation to generation, as well as identities, styles and patterns. Some of this might erode through time while some is deeply rooted in our psyche, and therefore difficult to change. But what is common sense? It is reason and sound judgment in practical matters. As individuals we are entitled to have it and use it as we wish, the only restriction being that it must comply with the boundaries set by society. It is true that the society we live in differs from others located elsewhere, but in current times, with open markets, mass media expansion, easier travelling, the internet, globalisation etc., we cannot deny that local society is no more, and that society has a wider meaning in terms of borders. Scheuerman, in allusion to Heidegger, refers to this phenomena as "the abolition of distance"¹: time helps us to overcome physical separation and, through the use of the internet for instance, our connection to a specific location is minimised, squeezing distance and generating a disassociation of space. We travel virtually, eroding local and international boundaries. Therefore acceptance of a new member into a particular society – which before might have been seen as unthinkable – becomes possible, and values, knowledge and traditions are mixed together, creating more tolerance, resulting in the shaping of a far more permissive common sense; an international one, that can be standardized.

Physical frontiers are disappearing – one of the repercussions of globalisation – and when we talk about divided lines we allude to intangible and abstract forms such as religion, space, ideology. Today the strength of the mass media is to feed us the "wow factor" of events that happened elsewhere in the world (the place is usually unimportant) and that can potentially be duplicated. In other words, we are becoming viral, a copy of a copy, one after another, endlessly and, most of the time, pointlessly.

¹ Scheuerman, William, "Globalization", on **The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy**, 2010,

The word propaganda has many negative connotations (e.g. brainwashing, lies, Nazis), but this paper will assess it from an objective angle, with the intention of using it more as an instructive reference in examining Banksy's position.

The paper starts with introductions to both Banksy and the concept of propaganda, before moving on to a more in depth analysis of Banksy's individual aesthetic and communicative qualities, in order to identify the aspects that will help to make a correlation between the two. Following this analysis a more empirical approach is presented and finally a set of conclusions.

1. An insight into the topics

1.1. Introduction to propaganda

Firstly, propaganda is concerned with influencing opinions², by using suggestions and arguments, in order to provoke an action. The goal might be good or bad, but the presence of an argument is the tell-tale sign of propaganda. Its employment through human history ranges from Alexander the Great to George W. Bush. The Greeks used it through rhetoric as much as Edward L. Bernays disguised it as Public Relations Counsel³.

The rise of mass media during the Industrial Revolution ignited the use of propaganda, and, as it became easier to spread a message and reach the masses, propaganda agents began to take advantage of this, integrating themselves into the process of communication in order to gain control of the way information flows⁴.

Advertising is closely related to propaganda since its original purpose has changed from being informative to persuasive. American tobacco companies used to channel large amounts of money into it and, in current times, the Super Bowl (American football's biggest celebration) is a vivid example of the massive expenditure, resources and time spent on advertising. The expression "jump on the bandwagon" describes the willingness of an individual to accept, like *everybody else*, an argument presented by propaganda. The fact is that the word *bandwagon* is a label, along with *the magic bullet theory*, *name calling*, *card stacking* and *plain folks*, just to mention a few, used to name popular devices for propaganda.⁵

After what has been learned from the past, the need to control the minds of the masses prevails. Man is distinct from animals because of his capacity for reason, allowing him to conquer whatever situation he is put in. The IQ test measures the intelligence coefficient of a human being, with uncanny results. But propaganda challenges this conclusion, showing that rational thinking is overrated and what counts is the desire, needs and feelings of an individual. Therefore, jingles on the radio, television commercials or other adverts, are usually manufactured to make a personal connection, by appealing to emotions in order to achieve the acceptance of the

² Nicholas J. Cull, David Culbert & David Welch, *Propaganda, Definitions of Propaganda and mass persuasion: a historical encyclopaedia, 1500 to the present*. ABC-CLIO Inc., California, 2003, p. 318.

³ The Century of the Self, *Happiness Machines*, TV Mini-Series Documentary, BBC & RDF Media, UK, 2002.

⁴ Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda, The New Propaganda*, Ig Publishing, New York, 2004 p. 19 – 31.

⁵ Parlindungan Pardede, "Developing Critical Reading in the EFL Classroom.", *Detecting Propaganda Devices*, FKIP-UKI English Department Bimonthly Collegiate Forum, Indonesia, 2007, p. 10.

propagandist's argument. They do not only attempt to use emotions, they also take advantage of our beliefs, looking to create new values on top of the old ones. Values help us discern between right and wrong, good or bad, and, when confronted with conflicts, we tend to assess the pros and cons of a decision. Propaganda can use these elements to secure its goals. People's attitudes are also taken into account by the propagandist; once a person forms a belief about an idea, for example, there develops an entitlement attitude towards that idea, and propagandists and persuaders tend to deliver arguments encouraging attitude changes. Finally, behaviour is very important for propaganda to work, and creating models based on patterns in our behaviour helps to predict how we will be more likely to act in the future. Through this paper, and by using Banksy as example, hopefully a clearer idea of how propaganda works can be achieved.

1.2. *Introduction to Banksy*

Little is known about the artist's identity. It has been acknowledged that he is English, and, from the little information available on the internet and in biographies, that he was born in the mid 70s and grew up in Bristol. His father worked as a photocopier technician, and one of Banksy's former occupations was as a pork butcher. He started to do graffiti during the late 80s as a freehand graffiti artist and member of Bristol's DryBreadZ Crew⁶. Banksy's style shares similarities with another artist, known as Bleck le Rat, who is a pioneer of the stencil graffiti, and, like Banksy, uses rodents as a favourite motif. But why graffiti? Many see it as vandalism and as disrespectful to public spaces, but for Banksy it goes beyond the chance for recognition and aesthetical gain – he sees it as meaningful to people, granting them power of speech that can lead others to take the initiative to start revolutions. Banksy recognised the political aspect of stencilling and its uses, in his book *Banksy: Wall and pieces*, he confesses to favouring the use of stencils to make his pieces after realising it took him less time to complete the work⁷. The display of his creations ranges from outdoors to museums, graffiti to physical prop pieces. In addition to England, Banksy's pieces can also be seen in other parts of the world. The composition of his works are based on the iconography of pop culture, animals and people, and they are often complemented by text. He has also published several books and directed a film. Further insight into his work is described below.

⁶ BBC Bristol website, "*Banksy's Bristol*", on **BBC**, 4 April 2008, retrieved 18 march 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bristol/content/articles/2008/04/04/banksy_feature.shtml>.

⁷ Banksy, Banksy; *Wall and Pieces*. Random House Group Limited, London, 2005, p. 13.

2. Banksy and his work; identifying elements.

Jowett and O'Donnell in their book "Propaganda and Persuasion" designed a set of steps to help in analysing and recognising the major elements of propaganda⁸. In this chapter I will be applying some of those steps to Banksy's case.

2.1. Ideology



Fig. 1 Show me the Monet

One of the main purposes of propaganda is for people to accept the ideology the propagandist is presenting, in order that they adopt its beliefs and attitudes⁹. In that way we see that Banksy looks to agitate people into taking action; by advocating for peace, justice and freedom¹⁰. He is making the point that people are not aware of their true attitudes and feelings and therefore discussion is out of question. He questions authority and the establishment and condemns advertising for its manipulation and disrespect, harassing culture with its big unwanted slogans. That is why he has felt the urge since his teenager years to express himself and illustrate awareness, realising that it is possible to leave his mark with a spray can and a wall¹¹. The clever use of the graffiti art form helped cement his reputation and legitimise his status, while challenging the rules imposed by society and without being condescended to by the establishment. Authority establishes rules for the sake of a better world, and his activities are justified in the name of an aesthetic goal – to make the world a better looking place¹². In his introduction on organizing chaos Edward L. Bernays says "conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in [democratic] society¹³". In terms of an ideology Banksy can be perceived as radical and progressive. Let's take Picture 1 as example; in 2003, Banksy engineered a famous stunt in the Bristol British museum, by hanging, among the existing collection, a series of *subverted paintings* of famous pictures. He inserted in each scene elements that are not supposed to be there, as in the image in Picture 1,

⁸ Garth S. Jowett & Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion, How to Analyze Propaganda*, Sage Publications, California, 2006, p. 269-287.

⁹ Jowett & Victoria, p. 271.

¹⁰ Banksy, p. 29.

¹¹ Banksy, *Banging your Head Against a Brick Wall*, London, 2003, p. 16.

¹² Banksy, p. 9.

¹³ Bernays, p 9.

originally painted by Claude Monet in 1899. In doing so Banksy is objecting to the implication that art is not made by the audience, but controlled by a select few that have all the say regarding what is good, what can sell and therefore what can be a success¹⁴. He seeks to stimulate people to act and stop being apathetic. He brings the ideas, the execution is left to the audience. The stencil art is how most people know of Banksy. The work defies authority; you can do it everywhere, it doesn't care about social status, and all you need is a cut-out model and a spray can – the rest is imagination.

2.2. Context

For propaganda to be effective it needs to be relevant to the contemporary and so it is



Fig. 2 Police with happy faces.

necessary to be aware of events that occurred during Banksy's formative and later years in order to understand how he interpreted them through his work.

As he was growing up, Banksy's Bristol was going through rising unemployment – a consequence of the decline of the traditional manufacturing industry and the rise of the financial service sector¹⁵. Between the 60s and the 80s Bristol was also struggling with racial problems. A particular event that may have helped to shape his opinions, and especially in relation to the role of the police, was the St Paul riots – an event sparked by the condition of poverty and social injustice among ethnic minorities in Bristol. Allusion to revolt and riot are very much present in his work, and in Picture 2 a police riot line is depicted with happy faces, as if they are enjoying their job of repression and maintaining order. The portrayal of the police in Banksy's work is common and usually has an ironic tone, for instance two policeman kissing, or another spraying a wall with the text "thug for life"¹⁶.

During the 80s the graffiti movement began to expand, starting in New York and Philadelphia before spreading all the way to other major cities, including Bristol, and presenting a menace to local administrations. A major incident happened to the graffiti community in Bristol in March 1989, when British police executed the biggest

¹⁴ Banksy, p. 70.

¹⁵ Wikipedia contributors, "History of Bristol", on **Wikipedia**, 2012, retrieved 19 March 2012, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=History_of_Bristol&oldid=472326102>.

¹⁶ Banksy, p. 25, p. 31.

anti-Graffiti manoeuvre in history, named *Operation Anderson*¹⁷, and consisting of house raids on suspected “writers”¹⁸. After that, several significant events had an impact on Banksy’s work: the Guantanamo Bay complex in Cuba, the monarchy in UK, the invasion of Iraq, London’s anti-capitalist demonstration on May Day 2000, the raising of Israel’s West Bank Wall, and several others concerning environmental issues, child abuse, the role of advertising, and mainstream culture. Artists are usually seen as special, because of a combination of their talent and how they appear to us, which creates an enigma that makes us curious to try to know their views. That mystery characterizes Banksy and his work. He uses monkeys to represent intelligence, linking them with evolution. In Picture 3, a monkey is shown as Queen, a representation of a myth of entitlement and superiority, which is given by default, not by achievement. The race is not fair, if someone has that kind of privilege and the biased support of others, and that is why people give up and placidly become part of the audience.



Pic. 3 Who sacked all the clowns?

2.3. Identity

The source of propaganda is most often an institution or organisation, with the propagandist as its leader or agent. Banksy started to spray as the member of a crew, and during that time graffiti artists wanted their own governing body¹⁹, their own domain, to openly conduct the spread of their message, and they were motivated by recognition and communication. Banksy’s message changed once he decided to work on his own; tackling broader subjects and goals in a quest for activism and revolution. I can’t prove that Banksy belongs to an organisation, but he has disclosed that a lawyer, an agent and a crew help him on his tasks²⁰. Banksy’s own identity has not yet been confirmed, although speculation has been made since British newspaper *The*

¹⁷ “A review of 2010, by Bristol Graffiti & Street Art.”, On **Street Art London**, 2011, retrieved 17 March 2012, <<http://streetartlondon.co.uk/blog/guest-post-bristol-street-art-graffiti-2010/>>.

¹⁸ Writers is a term given to people who used to write their name on walls, latter labelled as graffiti artist. A polarity still exists between this two classifications.

¹⁹ Jon Naar, *The Birth of Graffiti, In a War Zone Wide-Awake*, Prestel Publishing, New York, 2007, p. 12.

²⁰ Swanson, Chad, “Banksy”, retrieved 1 April 2012, <<http://www.lonelycolours.com/artists/banksy.html>>.

Daily Mail published an article with a photograph claiming to reveal who he is²¹. Banksy cannot escape from being depicted as someone who is following an agenda, or building a brand, or damaging the reputation of street art, especially after the release of the film “Exit through the gift shop” and the profit gained from the sales of his work, both of which are discussed further on. Robbo – another renowned English graffiti artist – described Banksy as, “just a toy with a PR team²²”.

2.4. Structure of graffiti

At this moment it is uncertain whether Banksy is behind an organisation, but it is suspected that he does not work alone, and that the scope of his contributors ranges from the likes of music producer Danger Mouse to street artist Shepard Fairey and film editor Chris King, among others. I think it is valid to go back to the origins of graffiti in order to understand its basic organisation and methods of communication. In New York, the first street art movement was made up of “writers”. They sprayed all over, but their main focus was in subway cars, because of the potential to reach out to the community. The transit system suddenly became an information route expressed as visual communication.²³ Sometimes they targeted a specific train in order to circulate their painting to a designated area. These groups of painters were multi-ethnic groups from different classes and neighbourhoods who passed on their knowledge by organising training groups and developed their style by the interchange of ideas with other colleagues²⁴. In order to access the subway they usually dressed as train station workers. They did all this in order to be heard, and as a reaction to the contemporary conditions of New York: the Vietnam War had taken place, and there were issues such as poverty, racism and sexism. All these factors contributed to the manifestation of graffiti as a model for social action based on liberty of expression, ethnic integration, perseverance, political awareness and equality. It is important to describe all this in order to understand the success of producing a consistent message

²¹ Joseph, Claudia, “*Graffiti artist Banksy unmasked... as a former public schoolboy from middle-class suburbia*”, on **The Daily Mail**, 12 July 2008, retrieved 19 Mars 2012, <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1034538/Graffiti-artist-Banksy-unmasked---public-schoolboy-middle-class-suburbia.html#ixzz1pgqIA5ts>>.

²² Fuertes-Knight, Jo, “*My Graffiti War With Banksy*”, **Sabotage Times**, 28 February 2012, retrieved 28 Mars 2012, <<http://www.sabotagetimes.com/people/king-robbo-exclusive-interview-my-graffiti-war-with-banksy/>>.

²³ Naar, p. 12.

²⁴ Ivory L. Miller, *Aerosol Kingdom; Flippin’ the Script*, University Press of Mississippi, Mississippi, 2002, p. 4, p. 28.

throughout its structure. Describing the background of graffiti, provides a chance to understand Banksy's distinctive view on life, and the system of informal rules and values that had been taken on since Banksy decided to use graffiti to express himself. The graffiti pioneers created rituals that give us examples of what their beliefs and principles were.

2.5. *The target audience*



Pic. 4 Blur's *Think Tank* cover art

The effect on select target audiences is relevant to Banksy's message. Traditionally graffiti has acted as a medium of mass communication, since it is created in public spaces. Banksy started as member of a crew that sprayed on walls, but as his reputation grew, his audience changed; by doing stunts at museums he reached a crowd that may have been slightly more educated, and other artists; in doing exhibitions abroad his appeal went beyond the local population; while activists started to show more interest as he displayed images through different subjects and locations like animals and zoological parks. In 2003, Blur's seventh album *Think Tank* featured a spray painting by Banksy on its cover, ensuring an even broader exposure. The album was well received in the United States and in 2007 the album's cover art was sold, setting a new auction record²⁵.

²⁵ "Banksy artwork sets new benchmark", on **BBC**, 26 October 2006, retrieved 28 March 2012, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/6087120.stm>>.

2.6. Media utilisation techniques

Banksy has control of the flow of his information, with the exception of footage on CCTV cameras and articles generated by newspapers and magazines. Although the choice of media utilisation changes, he has maintained a consistent record of his work; starting with the publication of several books containing pictures; images grabbed by CCTV cameras that have appeared on television; he has been involved in film production and worked with video; and although he rarely does interviews, there are often articles on him in the media. Currently one of his main channels is a website²⁶ where he receives feedback from the public. Some of these messages are displayed in Banksy's own publications, demonstrating that a channel for communication is open.

2.7. Special techniques to maximize effect

There are several propaganda techniques that can be applied to Banksy's work. I am going to approach those most relevant to Banksy's subject and his purposes.

2.7.1. Creation of a resonance

Being in accordance with past and current events, and coming from a source that is within the audience, Banksy's message complies with the principal of the creation of attitudes in a predisposed audience. When he changed his working patterns it had an impact on the public's opinion of him, generating an interaction that depended on the depth of his work. For example; the release of the documentary he directed *Exit through the gift shop*, a film narrating the story of Thierry Guetta and his obsession with street art, and his transformation from amateur filmmaker into a street artist himself, generated a mixed reception. For instance, it got nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary feature, but, at the same time, Banksy's reputation and integrity was on the line, as the film was perceived as hoax and a scheme to promote the commercialisation of street art²⁷.

²⁶ <http://www.banksy.co.uk/>

²⁷ Ryzik, Melena, "Riddle? Yes. Enigma? Sure. Documentary?", on **The New York Times**, 13 April 2010, retrieved mars 19, 2012, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/14/movies/14banksy.html>>.

2.7.2. Source credibility

Instead of being a weakness, the anonymity of Banksy contributed to his influence on people. His followers seem to see him as inspiring, and identify themselves with his cause. He does not complicate his images and there is a message behind them that strikes the understanding of the audience. Product replacement, a technic used in advertisement, derivate from a device in propaganda called *testimonial*²⁸, which is exercised by taking advantage of the popularity of an individual to make the audience accept a message. In January 2012, Barack Obama, as he took the stage at a fundraising event, sang a line of Al Green's hit *Let's Stay Together*, prompting a sale boost of 490%²⁹ for the song the next day. In 2006, for Banksy's *Barely Legal* exhibition in Los Angeles, a invited-only launch party was organized for the night before the opening. Dennis Hopper and Brad Pitt³⁰ were among those attendees who bought Banksy's pieces, creating an interest among other celebrities to purchase Banksy's art.

2.7.3. Visual Symbols of Power

The utilisation of iconography is one of Banksy's trademarks, and he has been dubbed the Warhol of our generation. English royalty, fashion figures, food chain mascots, cartoon characters, painters and their subjects, authority figures, animals, people and military equipment are some of his most recognised subjects. Through these themes his argument challenges how iconic images are used. Alberto Korda's photograph of Che Guevara has been widely used for merchandise, a hipster logo ironically promoting revolution, and Banksy's stance on the subject was to repeatedly stencil it on a bridge in Bristol, the same image side by side, the ink gradually dripping down, ending in an unrecognisable face, copy after copy, until the meaning is lost. Visual symbols are necessary for the propagandist's desired image³¹.

²⁸ Pardede, p. 10.

²⁹ Caulfield, Keith, "Obama Bumps Al Green's 'Let's Stay Together' Sales by 490%", on **Billboard**, 26 January 2012, retrieved 1 April 2012. < <http://www.billboard.com/news/obama-bumps-al-green-s-let-s-stay-together-1006001552.story#/news/obama-bumps-al-green-s-let-s-stay-together-1006001552.story> >.

³⁰ "Brangelina' spend £1 million on Banksy work at contemporary art auction in London", on **The Mail Online**, 12 October 2007, retrieved 28 March 2012. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-487230/Brangelina-spend-1-million-Banksy-work-contemporary-art-auction-London.html#ixzz1qRawFDI4>>.

³¹ Jowett & Victoria, p. 283.

2.7.4. *Language Usage*

Banksy complements his images with text, sometimes going as far as using entire paragraphs. His tone is usually ironic, funny and philosophical. The source for the texts can be himself, stories from different sources, text on public signs, and sometimes quotes from well-renowned artists.

2.7.5. *Arousal of emotions*



Pic. 5. Can't beat the feeling'.

One of propaganda's main goals is to appeal to the emotions³². Undoubtedly, that relates to Banksy. A illustration depicting Jesus Christ on the cross holding shopping bags, two English policeman kissing, the Queen seated on somebody's face as an innuendo to

oral sex, are some examples of his attempt to appeal to emotions like guilt, curiosity, anger, nostalgia, love, joy, fear, satisfaction, pleasure, desire and optimism. Emotions are impulses deriving from the sense, and these two help us to connect and communicate with other human beings. Propaganda, like other forms of human interaction, need to appear sensible and honest in order to be effective.

2.7.6. *Effect and evaluation.*



Pic. 6 Wilson Chucker by Banksy

In this part I will be giving some examples of how Banksy's works have generated reaction from the public.

- The arrival of another graffiti artist called Hanksy, who combines Banksy's iconic images with the face of Tom Hanks.
- The real estate companies that change the price of housing in the locations near Banksy's artwork³³.
- Putting fake legal graffiti on an unauthorised area lead other graffiti artists to fill the wall with their art.

³² Anthony Pratkanis & Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda; The Everyday Use and Abuse of Persuasion, A Glut of Influence*, Holt Paperbacks, New York, 2001, p. 14.

³³ "Banksy graffiti doubles derelict pub's value", on **The Telegraph**, 2 December 2008, retrieved 20 March 2012, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/houseprices/3541901/Banksy-graffiti-doubles-derelict-pubs-value.html>>.

- Vandalising an oil painting lead to harsh comments by art critics.
- Mr. Brainwash thanked Banksy for having inspired him to stop filming videos and start making his own art exhibitions.
- The British Museum in London agreed to show permanently some of Banksy's pieces as part of its exhibition galleries.
- The purchase through auctions and the merchandising sale of Banksy's works by art collector and celebrities.

3. Application of propaganda theories to Banksy's Work

In this chapter I will be presenting different propaganda theories and comparing them with Banksy's frameworks and how they affect the audience.

In the previous chapter I provided an in depth insight into Banksy's work, and I pointed out his use of iconographic images and the similarity between how his work and propaganda both look to appeal to the emotions.

3.1. Stencil style as Banksy's medium

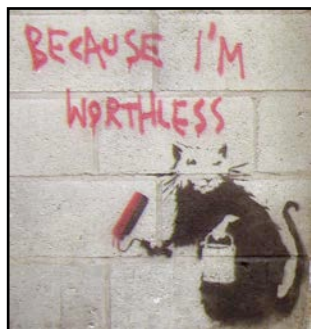


Fig. 7 "Graffiti remains gloriously unspoiled by progress" Banksy.

To achieve effectiveness in mass persuasion, it is necessary for the propagandist to use symbols to generate influence. Stencil graffiti involves the use of paper and cardboard to create an image that is easy to reproduce. The image is carved into the surface and a spray can or roll paint is used to print it³⁴. The motivation behind the use of stencils is that it is a quick method to produce a, usually political, message.

Blek le Rat is considered the originator of stencil graffiti and he and Banksy share a particular subject in their pieces: rats. With hidden meaning, the rats are stencilled everywhere and viewed as common objects, serving as a trigger for action³⁵. The motif of rats in Banksy's stencils are used to be transmitted as a recollection of meaning and reproduction which, through repetition, is useful in social and political ways. He clearly adopted the idea from Blek le Rat, a French-born artist who is considered to be the originator of street art and who started in the 1980s in

³⁴ Norman, James, "Graffiti goes upmarket", on **Fairfax Digital**, 16 August 2003, accessed 15 March 2012, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/08/13/1060588454223.html>>.

³⁵ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders, So Ad Men Become Depth Men*, Ig Publishing, New York, 1957, p. 47.

Paris, using rats in his decorations as an analogy of intrusion³⁶. Propaganda, for the majority, needs to be elemental, with a narrow focus, repeated several times, and concentrated on those emotions that seek attraction³⁷.

3.2. A wall is a weapon



Pic. 8 Bethlehem 2005, Israel's West Bank barrier.

the wall – and the pictures, help us to form a meaningful proposition by means of visual syntax. The wall, representing “reality”, acts as a canvas for the set of ideological strokes that are contained in the illustrations. Edward Tufte in his book “Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative” talks about the integrity of visual evidence:

One way to enforce some standard of truth-telling is to insist that the innocent, unprocessed, natural image be shown along with the manipulated image, and further, that the manipulators and their methods be identified.³⁸

We can identify Banksy’s intention as well, and this event helped to forge a perception of him as an opinion leader with a message likely to be accepted by his audience.

³⁶ Opera Gallery London, The Street Art Show, *Biographies; Blek le Rat*, exhibition in London, 17-30 June 2011, p. 54.

³⁷ Bernays, p. 46.

³⁸ Edward Tufte, *Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative*, Graphics Press, Connecticut, 1997, p. 25.

3.3. *Borrowing ideas*

I mentioned earlier that in the beginning of the graffiti era, artists used to borrow ideas from one another, because usually their work was displayed on subway cars, and they often sat down at a specific train station to contemplate the work and sketch their ideas on paper. The use of iconography is not something new, as explained by Ivor R. Miller (2001):

Trains, spray cans, and manufactured popular culture are all products of industrial societies that coerce people to work...or buy products. Writers manipulated these industrial artefacts, designed to be passively consumed by them, by reshaping them to produce their own culture.³⁹

Taking notice of ad campaigns, writers borrowed not only images but also the technique used in advertising, very similar to the practices of *Detournement's* artist. An icon makes the ground for sign-making, represented in a form, and the ways these forms are used to realise meanings. In semiotics, these notions are identified as *signifier* and *signified*⁴⁰. Banksy's compositions attempt to set off the subconscious and his message to the audience is to remember, is like a doctor recommends when one is having a panic attack, the solution; simply to breathe.

³⁹ Ivor L. Miller, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design, A social Semiotic Theory of Representation*, Routledge, New York, 2000, p. 7.

4. Conclusion

I can now connect several elements presented both in the arguments of propaganda and Banksy. Firstly it is proven that an appeal to the emotions occurs, exemplified in the reaction to Banksy's methods and the outcome of his works, also that he himself is working for a revision in our beliefs; his sometimes outraged illustrations attacking our values and generating conflict. People tend to have thousands of attitudes, and Banksy's singleminded attitude is one that can be admired, and can be used as anchor to promote attitude changes. In motivating people through his art, behaviour can also be changed. Devices that are used to maximise the effect of the message in propaganda also apply to Banksy's work. He presents an ideology that is easy to identify, he has gained credibility and presented himself as an opinion leader. There is a control of information, he is aware of methods of disclosure and takes advantage of them. A proper audience and a social network exists with a predisposition to his message. No specific agenda had been brought to life, therefore I can state that he implements a *White propaganda*⁴¹, although his identity still remains uncertain. Metaphors and imagery are vitally important in the formulation of an argument in propaganda and also in Banksy's pieces. Disinformation is becoming prominent in the flow of communication, and as a result an anxiety occurs, people look to those around them to guide their behaviour and support them through change, and Banksy's work presents the opportunity to realise that we have been cheated. As he puts it: "A lot of people never use their initiative because no-one told them to."⁴²

⁴¹ White propaganda comes from a source that has been identified and the information in the message tends to be accurate, a propaganda with truth that emphasises on credibility, the public know that an attempt is being made to influence (Pratkanis & Aronson, p. 425).

⁴² Banksy, *Banging you Head Against a Brick Wall*, London, 2003, p. 22.

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Pic. 8 Banksy; Wall and Pieces. Random House Group Limited, London, 2005.