



“Liberté, Égalité, Cable TV”: An Analysis of Banksy’s Adaptation of
Jacques-Louis David’s *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*

Bachelor Thesis Arts and Culture Studies

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Introduction

At the end of June 2018, mysterious stencils started to appear around the city of Paris. The works were made in the style of the British street artist Banksy, but they were not signed, so it could not be established that he really made them. However, after some time, the artist posted pictures of the works on his Instagram page, confirming that it is indeed his work. Some of these stencils include his characteristic rats, others refer to political events such as the terrorist attacks on the Bataclan theatre or the uprisings of May 1968 that took place 50 years earlier.



Fig. 1. Banksy. *Untitled (1)*. 2018, Paris.



Fig. 2. David, Jacques-Louis. *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*. 1801, Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison.

In this bachelor thesis, I will focus

on one stencil in particular (fig. 1). It depicts a figure who is sitting on a rearing horse, while covered by a red mantle. The work refers to the early nineteenth-century painting *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* by Jacques-Louis David (fig. 2.) Banksy also drew attention to this reference because he added a picture of David's equestrian portrait to the Instagram post of his own stencil.

With this research I will focus on the possible meanings of Banksy's work in relation to the work by David. More specifically, I will examine the way in which Banksy uses David's portrait of Napoleon Bonaparte in a contemporary political context to create new meanings. My research question will therefore be, "How can the artistic dialogue set up by Banksy's stencil *Untitled* with Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* be understood in its political context?"

To examine this, I will firstly have to answer the more general question, “How can Banksy’s art be understood in a political way?” followed by, “What are the possible meanings of the other stencils that Banksy made in Paris in 2018?”. Then, I will examine the work to which Banksy refers by answering the two questions, “How can Jacques-Louis David’s *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* be understood?” and “How does this image of Napoleon still play a role in contemporary culture?”. Finally, I will use these findings to analyse how Banksy’s stencil adapted David’s painting, and to get a better understanding of the stencil in its own political context.

This research contributes to the field of Arts and Culture studies because academic publications on Banksy’s oeuvre are very limited. Moreover, no research has been done on this particular series in Paris. There is one academic publication on the political dimension of Banksy’s work, which focusses on consumer culture and capitalism called *Urban Art in a Material World* by Ulrich Blanché. Other books are often aimed at the larger public and give overviews of his work in an informative and amusing way. An example of this is *Banksy: You Are an Acceptable Level of Threat*, written by Patrick Potter and edited by Gary Shove. This book offers interesting ideas and information, but these ideas are not substantiated by academic research.

The research that has been done on David’s *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, on the contrary, is very elaborate. The political, artistic and historical aspects of the work are discussed by many scholars and a reoccurring topic in this research is how Napoleon saw the potential of visual art to create a certain image around his persona. Prominent publications on this subject that I have used are *Art in an Age of Bonapartism* by Albert Boime, *Jacques Louis David: Empire to Exile* by Philippe Bordes and *Jacques Louis David: New Perspectives* by Dorothy Johnson.

The methodological framework that I will use is based on adaptation studies and theories on intertextuality, because it allows me to analyse the dialogue of Banksy's work with the painting by David. There are a lot of theories in the field of adaptation studies, but as Timothy Corrigan discusses in "Defining Adaptation," more recent definitions describe adaptation as "an act of reception in which the reading or viewing of that work is actively adapted as a specific form of enjoyment and understanding" (23). In this way, people may realize that works of art can have a different meaning in a different context (23).

Corrigan refers to an historical shift in textual reading in the early modern period. He argues that a more productive way of interpretation develops as a kind of criticism, which also influences the form of adaptations (26). Examples are adaptations as quotation, as allusion, as embedding, as appropriation, and as palimpsest (26). Corrigan's definition of appropriation would best fit Banksy's work, because he defines appropriations as "transformative adaptations that remove parts of one form or text (or even the whole) from their original context and insert them in a different context that dramatically reshapes their meaning" (26).

To analyse this transformative form of adaptation, I will use Gerard Genette's theory on hypertextuality as discussed in *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Hypertextuality is a form of intertextuality, and Genette defines it as "any relationship uniting a text B (which [he calls] the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A ([he calls] the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (5).

In "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," Robert Stam also uses hypertextuality to research the concept of adaptation. He argues that the hypotext is being transformed by a "complex series of operations: selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, analogization, popularization, and reculturalization" (68). The hypotext is produced in a specific medium, in a specific historical context, and the hypertext can have its own specific medium and historical context. Stam argues that the source

text forms a “dense informational network,” which the adaptation can choose to take up, amplify, ignore, subvert, or transform (68). In order to examine the meaning of Banksy’s stencil, I will therefore specifically examine the choices he made in his transformative adaptation of David’s painting.

Both concepts of intertextuality and adaptation originate in literary studies, but they can be applied to visual art as well, because artworks can be read as visual texts (Allen 169). In *Patterns of Intention*, art historian Michael Baxandall also discusses relationships between artworks, and warns to avoid using the term ‘influence,’ because by saying that painting X influences painting Y, it seems as if X did something to Y, rather than Y to X. It would imply that painting X is acting on painting Y, whereas painting Y is “the more lively reality”. When thinking of Y as the agent, the vocabulary becomes richer and more diverse. One could for example say that painting Y quotes, refers to, adapts or appropriates painting X (59). That is why I will ensure to focus on Banksy’s stencil as the agent, rather than David’s work.

The way in which Banksy presents his art to the public is also part of the context of the work and that is why the second post of this stencil on Instagram is important to consider as well. It shows a man who is walking past the work, while he looks at his phone. The caption of this post says “LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, CABLE TV” (Fig. 3). Banksy often comments on consumer culture and the consumption of media, and by referring to the cable TV, he also seems to relate these concepts to the stencil of Napoleon (Blanché 194). That is why, I will use two Marxist theories that discuss the role of visual culture in a capitalist society for my analysis.



Fig. 3. Banksy, “LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, CABLE TV”. 2018, Instagram, Paris.

The first will be Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's theory on the 'culture industry' as discussed in their chapter "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception". The second theory that I will discuss is that of the 'society of the spectacle' as introduced by Guy Debord in his book *Society of the Spectacle*. Both theories discuss the influence of images and visual culture on society and help us to explain Banksy's stencil and its dialogue with the painting by David.

In the following three chapters I will firstly discuss the political dimension of Banksy's oeuvre in combination with the two theories by Horkheimer and Adorno, and by Debord, followed by an examination of the other stencils in Paris. In the second chapter I will focus on David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alpes* and on the use of the Napoleonic figure and iconography in (popular) culture after his reign. Finally, I will discuss different layers of meaning in Banksy's stencil by relating it to the context of David's painting, and by examining the work in its contemporary political context.

Chapter 1

Art and Politics

Banksy can be considered a political artist, because he often comments on capitalist society by visualising ironic or cynical relationships between consumption and power (Blanché 190). This critique on capitalism is also visible in one of his most famous subjects: rats (fig. 4).

In western culture, rats are often associated with negative conditions such as bad hygiene or diseases. Banksy sees this differently: “Rats represent the triumph of the little people, the undesired and the unloved. Despite the efforts of the authorities they survived, they flourished, and they won” (qtd. in Blanché 120). Banksy often humanises these animals in his works and in this quotation, he describes them as a metaphor for outsiders of society (120).



Fig. 4. Banksy. *Untitled (2)*. 2018, Paris.

In addition, rats can be seen as a symptom of consumer culture, because they live from the garbage that people throw away (121). As Banksy describes it himself: “Rats symbolise all that’s raw, putrid and vile in our throwaway, decadent dirty culture (even if they’re actually rather cute to look at). They spread disease. They thrive because we can’t be bothered to throw our fast food cast-offs into a bin, because our rubbish piles up on every street corner, because we have too much, but know the value of nothing” (qtd. in Blanché 121). The fact that one of his most common subjects could be regarded as a comment on consumer culture clearly indicates that capitalism and its excesses play an important role in his work.

Because of this relation to capitalism, Marxists theory may offer an interesting perspective on his work and I will therefore discuss two of those theories in relation to Banksy’s

oeuvre. Firstly, I will focus on Horkheimer and Adorno's theory on the 'culture industry' and secondly, I will discuss Guy Debord's theory on the 'society of the spectacle'.

Both these theories are rooted in Marxist thought. As Michael Hatt argues in "Marxism and the Social History of Art," the two keywords for all forms of Marxist theories about art are 'class' and 'ideology'. The word 'class' originally refers to the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that, according to Marx and Engels, was caused by their different relations to the means of production. The bourgeoisie owned them, whereas the only thing that the proletariat owned, was their own labour. More recent theorists have realised, however, that this division is not that simple and clear (124).

The other keyword, ideology, is not so easy to define, but the central meaning, according to Hatt, is that for Marxists, "it is a kind of 'false consciousness' by means of which the inequalities of power characteristics of class societies are preserved. It is the false consciousness that makes people believe that their interests are the same as those that oppress them" (125). The question for Marxist art historians arises then, whether art also plays a role in this ideological system (126).

The Culture Industry

In their analysis of the culture industry, Horkheimer and Adorno examine this, and they argue that works of art are ideological to the extent that they represent the existing order as the absolute truth. Their main focus is on popular forms of culture such as film, radio and magazines, which they believe form a system that is "infecting everything with sameness" (94). According to them, this sameness is connected to industrial production with standardised products (95).

The strategy of this industrial production, they argue, is to propagate differences to keep everyone satisfied, while essentially all products are the same. The culture industry also uses this strategy according to them, and in doing so, it contributes to the ideology of the industrial society. By using the same strategies as industrial production, the culture industry generates a false consciousness that keeps reproducing the ideas of the existing order. Moreover, this industrial society is based on those with the most economic power, so the culture industry reproduces the ideas of the ruling class and therefore keeps class differences in place (95).

The function of the culture industry in this society is to uphold power by incorporating the idea of unity of production in culture as well. A film, for example, should create the illusion that it is an extension of the real world, while at the same time it is “passed through the filter of the culture industry” (99). In this way, agents of the industry make sure that people do not start to think about society and the power relations that are in place, because the same ideas about these relations keep getting reproduced (100).

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that because of the culture industry, this constant reproduction of the idea of unity not only happens during labour, but also during leisure time (98). According to them, all forms of entertainment have been taken over by the industry to control consumers (108). Leisure time is the only way for labourers to escape from their work, but “to be entertained means to be in agreement,” so it makes people powerless (115). Amusement feels like an escape, but Horkheimer and Adorno argue that it only distracts people from thinking about resisting authorities (116). So, the ideology of the industrial society is being upheld by the culture industry through the constant reproduction of the same ideas about unity.

Similar ideas can be found in Banksy’s work, and an example of this is that he often uses the TV-set as an expression of media consumption (Blanché 156). In one of his works he comments on the medium of television by writing “there is all this noise... but you ain’t saying

nothing” (fig. 5). It depicts a television with empty speech bubbles, which seems to hypnotise its viewers through the green waves that it is sends out. The work could therefore be regarded as a visualisation of the television as a device that turns people into passive human beings that are controlled by consumption (Blanché 157).



Fig. 5. Banksy. *There's All This Noise...But You Ain't Saying Nothing*. 1999, Bristol.

In his project *Dismaland*, Banksy examines ideas about amusement; a theme that is also discussed by Horkheimer and Adorno (fig. 6). As Florian Freitag argues in “Critical theme parks: Dismaland, Disney and the Politics of Theming,” Banksy’s theme park is not just a critique on Disneyland, as its title and use of imagery might suggest. Freitag identifies it more as an attempt to politicize theming in general. According to him, Banksy explores the possibility of making the theme park a place for social and cultural critique. This is in complete opposition to Horkheimer and Adorno’s theories about amusement as a distraction from critical thinking. However, by combining these two contrasts in one project, Banksy invites people to think about the meaning of a theme park or amusement in general and in that sense, his work does seem to agree with Adorno and Horkheimer’s thinking.



Fig. 6. Banksy. *Dismaland*. Weston-Super-Mare, 2015.

There is, however, also a difference in their viewpoints when it comes to the distinction between high and low culture. Horkheimer and Adorno address their appreciation for high art, because they believe that a “great work of art” strives for identity and can offer resistance to the ruling order by expressing suffering. Their critique is on “inferior” art, which, according to them, relies on its similarities to others. The culture industry is then seen as even more inferior, because they believe that it is nothing other than imitation (103).

Banksy does not share this view on the distinction between high art and other forms of culture such as film or music. On the contrary, he argues that “we the people, affect the making and the quality of most of our culture,” through watching films and buying records for instance. Art, however, is made by only a select few. “When you go to an art gallery you are simply a tourist looking at the trophy cabinet of a few millionaires” (Banksy, 170). This also explains his way of working, because street art is available for everyone and it is not owned by anyone or tied to art institutes.

The Society of the Spectacle

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord, agrees with Horkheimer and Adorno about the fact that there is no real liberation from work through leisure time in the ‘society of the spectacle’ (10). He defines this spectacle as “the visual reflection of the ruling economic order” (5). More elaborately, it is “the ruling order's nonstop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life” (7). This domination is manifested in news, propaganda, advertising and entertainment (4). The ruling order in this case is the world of the commodity (14).

He argues that the commodity – an essential component of consumerism – displayed by the Industrial Revolution’s division of labour and mass production, is a power that was

“dominating social life”. It not only became visible, but it is the only thing that people can see (16). This means that the ideology of the commodity presents a fixed reality that cannot be questioned (4). It alienates the spectators and is able to subject them because “the economy has already totally subjugated them” (5). The more the spectators identify with these controlling images, the less he thinks about his own needs and desires (11).

In addition, there is a relationship between the spectacle and people’s identification with appearances. According to Debord, in the first stage of the economy’s domination of social life, there was a degradation of ‘being’ into ‘having’. This means that people sought fulfilment in their possession rather than their own being. In the stage of the society of the spectacle, this fulfilment shifted from ‘having’ to ‘appearing’, so someone’s appearance became the “ultimate purpose” of all possessions (5).

This relationship between commodities and appearances is also present in the work of Banksy. An example of this is the work *IKEA Punk*, which shows a boy who could be called a punk because of his clothing style and his mohawk (fig. 7). He is standing next to a box which has the logo of IKEA on it in a modified form: IEAK. The box contains a “large graffiti slogan” and the boy is reading the instructions on how to put it together, like you would with a product from IKEA. The words of the slogan are seen on the wall behind him, but they are all mixed up and do not form a concrete slogan. By using words such as ‘capital,’ ‘system’ and ‘police’, the



Fig. 7. Banksy. *IKEA Punk*, 2009, London.

work refers to typical leftist slogans such as “smash the system” or “no police” (Blanché 101). In this way, Banksy comments on the commercialization of leftist movements such as punk, because he is constructing the slogan that he has bought instead of doing it himself.

A similar message can be found in the work *Festival*, where people with alternative clothing styles buy a t-shirt that says “destroy capitalism,” (fig. 8) As Blanché argues, the “Swedish IKEA equivalent of clothing,” H&M, has sold a lot of items that are traditionally considered punk, such as shirts of punk bands or studded belts. The movement has become a commercial fashion trend, which demonstrates the paradox within capitalism, because it is supplying products about its critique (102). With works such as this, Banksy critiques the fact that former rebellious movements have become part of a society like Debord’s society of the spectacle. These movements are only used for outer appearances, to construct a certain identity, like one would



Fig. 8. Banksy. *Festival*. 2006.

construct a table form IKEA.

The contradictory idea that capitalism is critiqued through its own use, as discussed above, is not only commented on by Banksy, but also visible in his own work. The name “Banksy” is a brand in itself and his work gains recognition through the distribution of images in the media and on the internet (Blanché 197). His designs take advantage of the rules of media, which makes them perfectly suitable for media reproduction (194). He appropriates well-known, even cliché, images to visualise and reproduce, but at the same time he comments on them through caricature or irony (193).

Banksy’s art is made to be reproduced and the person behind Banksy also needs money to “exist” in the capitalist system (198) He sells merchandise, for example, with his work or name on it. In addition, he has released a book with an overview of his work, accompanied by his comments (198). Horkheimer and Adorno also admit that art, even though it negates the “commodity character of society,” is at the same time always a commodity in itself (127).

Paris 2018

These theories by Horkheimer and Adorno, and by Debord, not only relate to Banksy's earlier oeuvre, but also to the series of stencils in Paris. The stencil of Napoleon is part of this larger series, and therefore, I will first discuss the series as a whole, before addressing the particular stencil on its own.

A reference to the events of May 68, a work on the door of the Bataclan, and the use of the swastika symbol establish the political character of Banksy's stencils in Paris. The work about May 68 is particularly interesting in relation to the theories discussed above, because the uprisings of students and workers in that time were fuelled by their resentment towards the capitalist society (Jackson 35).

The rapid growth of the French economy after the Second World War caused the spread of material prosperity and turned France into a consumer society (Reader 5). Due to industrialisation, the division of labour increased, which caused protesters to demonstrate against the exploitation of workers by the people who controlled capital (Jackson 35). For students, the number of people attending university grew, but resources stayed behind (Reader 5).

Another theme that was addressed by the protests was the subordination of people's lives by the market, which turned them into anonymous and interchangeable bodies that were controlled by the economic system (Jackson 35). These themes correspond with Marxist theories about the division of class and ideology and relate especially to Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, which was published in 1967 in Paris.

In Banksy's stencil of "1968," the "8" has fallen down on the head of one of his characteristic rats, making it look like a Minnie Mouse (fig. 9). In *Banksy: You Are an*



Fig. 9. Banksy. *1968*. 2018, Paris.

Acceptable Level of Threat, Patrick Potter suggest that this might refer to the “Disneyfication of Paris. In addition, he relates this to Jean Baudrillard’s concept of ‘hyperreality’ in his work about Disney and Watergate, because he had worked at the University of Nanterre in May 1968 (“Banksy – Paris 1968 Revisited”).

An important thing to consider when researching street art, is that it is often site-specific, and Banksy used site-specificity to refer to the events as well. One of the stencils is placed at the Sorbonne University, where the first conflict between students and police occurred in Paris (Reader 4). It depicts a man in a suit, who tricks his dog into believing that he gets a treat, while in fact it is his own leg (fig.10). This could be read as a metaphor for capitalism.



Fig. 10. Banksy. *Untitled (3)*. 2018, Paris.



Fig. 11. Banksy. *Untitled (4)*. 2018, Paris.

Another work in which site-specificity is important is the stencil at Porte de la Chapelle (fig. 11). It supposedly depicts a refugee girl (it seems as if she is sleeping there), who is covering up the swastika symbol with the pattern of a Victorian wallpaper. This was the first stencil that was found in Paris on 20 June, World Refugee Day. At Porte de la Chapelle, there are a lot of

makeshift camps where migrants and refugees are living in bad conditions, so with this stencil

Banksy seems to suggest that situations such as this, or maybe even fascist behaviour – based on the swastika symbol – are getting covered up (Chrisafis).

When looking at the series as a whole, these works in Paris seem to refer to various historical and political issues in France, such as the terrorist attack on the Bataclan, the current political situation concerning immigrants and the historical and political events of May 1968. In addition, Banksy refers to the time of Napoleon with his adaptation of David's equestrian portrait, but to understand this stencil of Napoleon and its role in the 2018 Paris series, I will firstly address David's political portrait.

Chapter 2

The Legend of Napoleon

Since there is a hypertextual relationship between Banksy's stencil and Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, it is important to first get a better understanding of David's work, in order to understand Banksy's adaptation of that work. In addition, Banksy would not have chosen this particular painting if the image of Napoleon did not still carry certain connotations in contemporary society. That is why, in this chapter, I will first focus on David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* and then on the way in which Napoleon's persona and iconography have been used after his reign.

During the last years of the French Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte started to gain more power. In March 1796, he seized control of the Army of Italy, and his first Italian campaign was very successful, which gained him a lot of popularity in French society (Boime 4). Because of his victories and the money that came with this, his political position also became more prominent. Eventually, in 1799, he became the First Consul of France after a successful *coup d'état* (7).

In these first years of his political career, it already became clear that visual art was highly valued by Bonaparte. He brought artists with him to document his expeditions and he attended almost every Salon opening (Johnson 133). As one of the most appreciated artists of that time, David came to play an important role in Bonaparte's career. His portrait *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* is one of the earliest examples of this. The painting was commissioned by the king of Spain, Charles IV, who wanted David to paint a full-length portrait of the First Consul to hang in the "Salon of the Great Captains" in the Royal Palace in Madrid (135). It was

an homage to the First Consul, who had become an intimidating neighbour for Spain. Together with other diplomatic initiatives, the commission was meant to charm him (Bordes 85).

When David received his commission from the Spanish Crown, Napoleon saw an opportunity to have a monumental portrait of himself made, especially since it would be placed alongside portraits of other great leaders (Johnson 134). The event of the Alpine crossing was chosen as the subject, and David turned it into an idealised heroic portrait. He depicted Napoleon on a rearing horse, for example, even though in reality he travelled on a mule, as historical records prove (134). In doing so, the artist deliberately placed the painting in a tradition of equestrian portraits and sculptures of great leaders (135).

David was very familiar with this genre, because earlier in his career, he had made sketches of portraits such as van Dyck's *Tommaso Francesco of Savoy* and of Étienne-Maurice Falconet's statue of Peter the Great in Saint Petersburg (fig. 12, fig. 13). Moreover, the viewers of that time were familiar with these kinds of images, so they would certainly recognize and appreciate the link



Fig. 12. Van Dyck, Anthony. *Tommaso Francesco of Savoy*, 1634, Musei Reali di Torino, Turin.

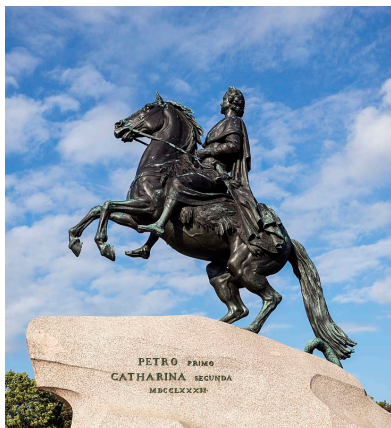


Fig. 13. Falconet, Étienne-Maurice. *Bronze Horseman*, 1768-1782, Saint Petersburg.

with this tradition. Clockmakers even sold small-scale bronzes,

inspired by these kinds of compositions (Bordes 86). By depicting Napoleon in this monumental style, David wanted to show the public that the First Consul had the same status as those great leaders who were depicted in a similar way (Johnson 135).

In addition to the monumental style of the painting, David also placed Napoleon in a tradition of great leaders by referring to the historical tradition of rulers who crossed the Alps. The name Bonaparte is inscribed in the stones that are depicted in the bottom-left corner of

painting, together with the names of Hannibal and Charlemagne, who also led their armies across the Alps. With this detail, David again places Napoleon in a historical tradition of great leaders (Johnson 135).

In the time that this portrait was made, truth in representation was highly valued, and as the famous critic Chaussard declared, “the duty of the painter, like that of the historian, is to be faithful” (qtd in Johnson 134). David played with this by painting in a style that Boime refers to as a “new realism” (37). He painted the exact uniform Napoleon wore at Marengo, for example. Furthermore, the fact that the Consul only wears a glove on his left hand, gives the painting a realistic character, because in an idealized picture, he would have worn two gloves (41).

This combination of realism, together with the heroic components of the portrait painting and the names that are inscribed in the stones result in a hybridized tension (Boime 38). On the one hand, the painting seems to present an historical event, but at the same time, it is loaded with political meanings. As a result, the painting could be perceived as a form of propaganda, because by using the visual language of the equestrian portrait, Napoleon is inserted into the historical tradition of great leaders, which elevates his status to that of a monarch (xxv).

Art as Propaganda

The use of visual arts for propagandic purposes was only possible because of the central cultural role of art in French society in that time. Throughout the eighteenth century, biennial Salon exhibitions held in the Louvre had become very popular for people from all levels of society (133). In addition, Napoleon had seen how art was used during the Revolution and the Republic to educate citizens about government policies and reforms by organizing cultural

festivals. As deputy to the National Convention, David had also played an important role in the organisation of these events (132).

The ideas that were represented by the Revolution still played an important role when Napoleon rose to power, but he could benefit from this. His rise to power was seen as a direct result of the reforms of the Revolution. He grew up in Corsica as a French citizen and became successful through his rise in military ranks. His power was therefore not gained through birth right, but through his own achievements. For many people, this made him the perfect example of the modern French self-made men, because his success was based on talent and courage rather than his descent (131).

As *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* shows, Bonaparte realised from early on in his career that art had a political potential and he used it to establish his legitimacy as leader of the French nation (133). As Johnson argues, he saw how images could be used to present historical events or people of great significance before the emergence of mass media, which is interesting in relation to the earlier discussed Marxist theories of Horkheimer and Adorno, and Debord (133).

Even though mass media as it is known today did not exist yet in Napoleon's time, it could be argued that it was emerging. As discussed above, Bonaparte carefully constructed an image of himself and he made sure that this image was spread around. An example of this is that David made four additional versions of *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* and that many engravings were made.

This representation of Bonaparte as a hero already started before his coup *d'état*, through newspapers, engravings, pamphlets, plays and paintings (Dwyer 398). This was, however, not only caused by Napoleon himself, because artists and journalist were inspired by his heroic character and they also contributed to the widespread representation of him as hero and saviour (420).

In *Art in the Age of Bonapartism*, Albert Boime focusses on these propagandic layers of Napoleon's career. He deliberately chose to use the term 'Bonapartism,' which he defines as "the ideological system fostered during the period of his power" (xxi). He not only discusses Napoleon's "cultural imperialism", but he also mentions how French youth was controlled through education and how newspapers, literature and theatre were censored (5, xxiii, xxv). In addition, he discusses how Bonaparte helped to strengthen bourgeois domination, which also relates to a Marxists way of thinking (xxii).

In addition to visual art, architecture and monumental buildings also played an important role in Napoleon's cultural influence. The Panthéon, for example, was used to symbolize the same myth as David's painting: that of Napoleon as the great leader of France. During the Revolution, the Church of Sainte-Geneviève became the Temple of the Great Men, based on the Pantheon in Rome, and Napoleon used this for his own benefits. (Avner Ben-Amos 62). When he was in power, he adopted this meaning to attach certain 'great men' to himself, to legitimize his position. This is still traceable, because more than half of the men whose bodies still survive were included by Bonaparte (Brouwers 92).

The Creation of a Legend

After Napoleon was sent into exile in 1815, he became the object of a popular cult, which celebrated him as hero and upholder of the values of the French Revolution. This started with republican groups during the Restauration period, but it was taken over by official institutions of the July Monarchy and the Second Empire, with his nephew Louis-Napoleon in power (Hazareesingh, "Napoleonic Memory" 748). It was the beginning of the Napoleonic legend and he became a symbol of French patriotism (Hazareesingh "Memory, Legend and Politics" 72).

Later, during the *belle époque*, this legend was still alive, and it flourished in popular culture such as literature, theatre and fine arts (Datta, 2). However, its meaning changed. Bonapartism was not a prominent political movement anymore, and Napoleon got turned into a figure “above politics” (3). His roles in popular culture reduced him to an ordinary man and depoliticized his character. This allowed people across the political spectrum to adopt his legend, which made Bonaparte a symbol of national unity (3-4). In this different historical context of the *belle époque*, the Napoleonic legend became an essential part of France’s national memory and self-image and Bonaparte became a hero of the democratic age (7).

Another way in which Napoleon’s legacy survived, is through leaders of France who are compared to him. As Nick Hewlett argues in *The Sarkozy Phenomenon*, French history since Napoleon is filled with authoritarian and populist heads of state, which he calls “Bonapartist figures”. He writes about Napoleon III, Philippe Pétain and Charles de Gaulle, and he discusses them in comparison to the career of Nicolas Sarkozy. When looking at this political history of France, Hewlett sees a repeated pattern of revolutions and authoritarian leaders. He also refers to the term ‘Bonapartism’ as discussed by Marx to describe how one individual steps in to claim power during unstable situations (Hewlett ch. 2).

Hewlett’s analysis shows that after Napoleon, the idea of the Bonapartist leader kept playing an important role in France’s political culture. This is also evident in the news and in popular culture, because many cartoons were made to compare French leaders to Napoleon (fig. 14, 15, 16). Through the comparisons of these later figures to Bonaparte, his image and the legend surrounding his persona stay alive. In addition, the repeated pattern of revolutions and authoritarian leaders is also interesting in light of the events of May 68, because this uprising was a reaction to the regime of Charles de Gaulle.

When looking at the significance of Napoleon in contemporary society, his relation to culture is also still evident, because political leaders continued to engage with culture for



Fig. 14. Kichka, Micha. Cartoon of Macron as Napoleon. May 2017, <https://vesuvienne.wordpress.com>



Fig. 15. Ferjac, Pol. *Le Sacre de Charles Quinquin (d'après David)*. 1958, *Le Canard enchaîné*, Paris.

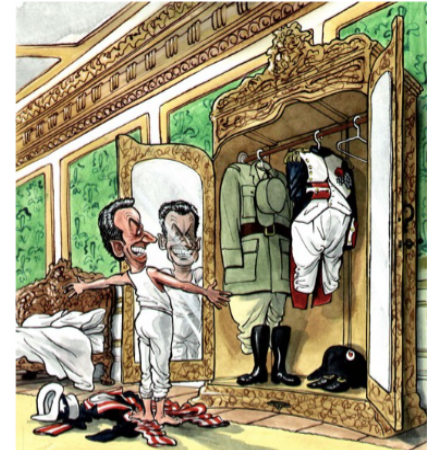


Fig. 16. Davey, Andy. *Guises of Sarkozy*. E!Sharp magazine.

political reasons. The meanings of monuments in Paris such as the Panthéon, kept being reformed by authorities in accordance with their own political viewpoints. Consequently, these monuments became important indicators for French identity, because of the political significance that leaders continued to attribute to them (Avner Ben-Amos 76).

In addition, new cultural projects have been initiated, such as the *Grands Projets* of François Mitterrand, or Georges Pompidou's centre of modern art, that was later named *Centre Pompidou*. This also shows that the president's role is still important when it comes to culture, because only he has the power to make big decisions like that (Biasini 562). As Emile Biasini argues in "Les Grands Projects: An Overview," the role of the President was very important in the French system of Mitterrand's time and from a cultured man such as him, it was expected that he is invested in the cultural sphere (562).

Chapter 3

Interpretations of Banksy's Adaptation

In this last chapter, I will give an analysis of Banksy's stencil as an adaptation of David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps*, by using the information of the previous chapters. When discussing an adaptation, it is important to also focus on these backgrounds, because both works are also part of a larger framework. They are made in their own specific medium and in their own historical, political and cultural contexts. As artist of the hypertext, Banksy can choose to take certain elements from this large network of the hypotext to place them in a new context, which allows for new meanings to be created.

It is therefore useful to look at the choices that Banksy has made in the process of making his adaptation. For example, which elements he did or did not use or how the (possible) meanings of certain elements from the original context change in the new context. These choices are related to the visual language of the work itself, but also to the way in which it is presented to the public.

As a contemporary artist who often resists conventional art institutes, Banksy actively makes use of the popular social medium Instagram to reach the public with his art. This particular stencil was presented in two different ways. First, he shared a picture of the stencil together with the third version of David's work without any caption (fig. 17). Then, he also shared another picture of the work with a man who is walking by while he looks at his phone (fig. 3). The caption of this last post says "LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, CABLE TV".



Fig. 17. David, Jacques-Louis.
Napoleon Crossing the Alps. 1802,
Palace of Versailles, Versailles.

These pictures and this caption also belong to the choices that are made by the artist and are thus also part of the larger context of the work. In order to answer the question of how the artistic dialogue of Banksy's stencil with David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* can be understood in its political context, I will first analyse the visual elements of the stencil by specifically focussing on Banksy's choices. Secondly, I will look at the textual elements that are part of the context of this work; one of them being the caption "LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ,

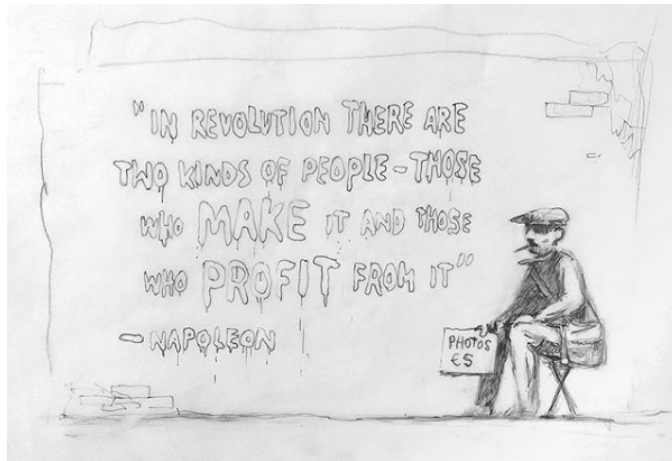


Fig. 18. Banksy. Cartoon in with quotation from Napoleon. Instagram, 2018.

CABLE TV". The second textual element is a cartoon that Banksy also posted on Instagram in which he quotes Napoleon (fig. 18). Finally, I will connect these analyses to the contemporary political context of the stencil.

Visual Elements

When looking at the visual relationship between the two works, the differences regarding the mediums already become evident. David's work is a traditional portrait painting with a fully painted background and many details. Banksy, instead, works with stencils, so there are less details and the wall on which it is placed forms the background. The result of this is that the focus really lies on the figure on the horse.

Banksy made the choice to depict this figure that originally represented Napoleon, and this raises the question of why he wanted to adapt a portrait of this particular leader. Since the stencil is part of Banksy's larger oeuvre of Marxist critiques on consumer culture and

capitalism, the ideas of Karl Marx himself on Bonapartism can help to understand Banksy's choice of depicting this figure.

In his book, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx addresses the relationship between Bonapartism and revolutions in relation to the *coup d'état* of Napoleon's nephew Louis Bonaparte. He argues that "The Bonaparte dynasty does not represent the revolutionary" (104). One of his critiques is on the Napoleonic form of ownership, which started after the Revolution. He argues that it began as the emancipation of the French rural population, but later developed into enslavement and poverty. According to Marx, this material condition turned Napoleon into an Emperor, but undermined parts of the French population (106).

Since the political movement of Bonapartism declined, the figure of Napoleon is not necessarily seen as a symbol of this movement anymore (Datta 3). However, the idea of the Bonapartist figure is still present in French society, and many French leaders have been characterised by this (Hewlett ch.2). It could therefore be argued that Banksy's figure on the rearing horse does not simply represent Napoleon, but rather the Bonapartist figure, or even more generally the leader of France.

A striking element of Banksy's representation of this Bonapartist figure is the mantle, since it is the only element of colour, but also because its function has changed. The famous art critic of David's time, Chaussard, wrote that "The cloak of [Bonaparte] is thrown to make one imagine (...) the wings of a demigod gliding the air" (qtd. in Bordes 185). However, in Banksy's version, the mantle does not seem to represent wings. On the contrary, the figure is captured and even blinded by it. This is a clear example of why Banksy's adaptation is an appropriation of David's painting, which Corrigan defines as a "transformative adaptation" (26). Banksy took the element of the cloak but transformed its function and inserted it into a

different context. This changes the meaning of the work, because it no longer depicts a visionary Bonapartist figure, but a figure without any (political) vision.

Banksy's second interesting choice about the mantle is the colour, because in David's first painting it was yellow but in the second, third and fourth version, he chose to change the colour into red (fig. 17). It is not clear why Banksy chose this colour but there are several possible reasons. It could be said that red is a more contrasting colour in relation to the white horse than yellow, which makes it stand out more. Another reason might be that Banksy believes that the versions with the red cloak are better known by the public.

However, it is also possible that the choice for the colour red is based on symbolic meanings of this colour. In forms of popular media, it is often suggested that the colour red is the colour of courage, strength and pioneering spirit, as well as anger, violence and brutality; words that could also be associated with a revolution (O'Connor 231). This can be linked to the symbolic meaning of a red flag, which warns for danger, but which also represents revolution, socialism and communism (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). Students of the 68 protests used this symbolic meaning as well when they marched with red flags (fig. 19).



Fig. 19. Students protesting with red flags, 1968, Paris.

Textual Elements

When looking at the caption “LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, CABLE TV,” it could firstly be argued that it is a reference to the French Revolution, where the French motto “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*” finds its origins. Together with the symbolic meaning of the colour red and the

references to May 68 in Banksy's other works, it seems that this stencil hints towards France's vivid history of protests and upheaval.

This reference to revolutions also returns in the cartoon in which Banksy quotes Napoleon's statement "In revolution there are two kinds of people – those who MAKE it and those who PROFIT from it" (fig. 18). Considering Banksy's critical stance against those in power, in combination with the choice of the cartoon as the medium, this drawing could be read as a sarcastic statement from Banksy, in which he suggests that Napoleon himself was the one to profit from the revolution.

In addition, he stressed the words 'make' and 'profit' and in combination with Banksy's position regarding capitalism and mass production, this could indicate that he believes that the ones who make products are not the ones to profit from it. Moreover, the quotation is presented as a work of graffiti, for which the owner asks money: "photo's €5". In this way, Banksy also places the cartoon in an artistic context, through which he seems to suggest that those who make it, the artists, are not the ones to profit from it.

Secondly, Banksy changed the motto of "*liberté, égalité, fraternité*" by replacing "*fraternité*" with "cable TV". The word "*fraternité*" refers to the relationship between people in which support and social solidarity are important. In addition, it is "more a word of the 'left' than *liberté* or *égalité*," because these last two words are often associated with individualism (Roberts 336). In Banksy's slogan, there is still freedom and equality, but fraternity is replaced by the cable TV. As discussed earlier, Banksy has criticized how the TV-set 'captures' people, so it could even be argued that he believes that the television keeps people from uniting like they did in earlier protests and revolutions.

In addition, the man on the picture is looking at his phone; a device that also plays an important role in media consumption. In contemporary society, the smartphone has become a symbol of (social) media consumption, and it is often critiqued for enhancing individuality. By

replacing the word “*fraternité*” with “cable TV,” it seems as if Banksy shares this critique and expresses that media consumption negatively influences the relationship between people. These textual elements should not only be evaluated separately, but especially in relation to the visual elements of the stencil, and an important aspect of this is Banksy’s critique on media consumption together with the propagandic potential of images.

It is in this concept of mass media that the references to Napoleon and Bonapartist politics on the one hand, and to present-day consumer society on the other hand, meet. Mass media did not yet exist in Napoleon’s time, but the spreading of images and stories did play an important role in his career. Bonaparte deliberately made use of newspapers, visual art and other forms of culture to legitimise his position and to reach a large number of people (Boime xxv).

When looking at David’s portrait in particular, it is telling that four copies, and multiple engravings were made. The image was meant to reach the public, because it could help to establish Napoleon’s position as the leader of France. By inserting himself into a tradition of great leaders before him, Napoleon saw how he could attain the same status as them (Johnson 134). This was only possible, however, if these images could be seen and understood in this way by the larger public.

During the nineteenth century, the distribution of images developed, which eventually resulted in a mass culture under the capitalist society of the twentieth century. Through political democratisation and popular education, the sharp line between the common people and the aristocracy started to blur and the masses became part of the political stage (Macdonald 2). Because of the democratisation, these masses needed to be controlled, and as argued by Horkheimer and Adorno, and by Debord, this happened through the culture industry and through mass media such as propaganda, news, advertising and entertainment.

When looking at this concept of mass culture in Banksy's stencil, it is striking that the medium of street art uses similar strategies as billboards and other advertisements in the urban space. As Ulrich argues, street art seeks to reach a broad audience "like its commercial sibling, advertising, or its political siblings, propaganda and activism". Banksy, however, uses these strategies as a critique; targeting both the use of such popular media itself and the political goals that they serve. By using these strategies in an artistic context, he changes their function and exposes them to the public.

So, by taking an element of David's propagandic artwork, and by placing it in the critical context of his own oeuvre, he seems to criticise the propagandic potential of art. Moreover, by relating this to the TV-set and the smartphone, he also ascribes this propagandic potential to contemporary mass media and media consumption. In addition, by referring to the figure of Napoleon, he seems to criticize developments that are associated with him, such as French patriotism, imperialism, or the importance of great leaders and prominent people in the history of France. Banksy uses the propagandic potential for a different political purpose, while at the same time he also criticises this form of media.

Contemporary Political Issues

These interpretations of Banksy's work as critique on the propagandic potential of the media can also be related to the contemporary political context in which this stencil was made. Based on the locations and subjects of other stencils in Paris, it seems as if Banksy refers to issues surrounding immigration. When combining these two contexts of media consumption and immigration, it could be argued that Banksy criticises the role of the media in the political debate surrounding immigration, or the way in which political leaders influence the discourse

about this subject in the media. Research has shown that issue emphasis strategies of political parties are reflected in mass media and election news coverage (Merz 456).

France has a long-standing history with immigration, and it has become one of the most multi-ethnic societies in Europe (Fetzer and Soper 65). During the nineteenth century, France colonised many countries, especially in northern Africa. Later, during World War I, many inhabitants of these colonies immigrated to France and after World War II, French employers started recruiting people from those colonies, since there was a labour-shortage in France (63).

During the years that followed, there have been many attempts by the French government to reduce immigration by tightening the requirements for becoming a French citizen (65). This caused many young immigrants to create a counterculture of protest, and there have been many rebellions in large cities (67-68). Likewise, problems surrounding immigration and the global system of imperialism were on the agenda of the protesters in 1968 (Jackson 94).

Banksy's references to immigration are especially evident in his first work in Paris, which was placed there on World Refugee Day at Porte de la Chapelle (fig. 11). Together with his reference to the Bonapartist leader, these two works seem to suggest that political leaders in France fail to recognize the problems surrounding their immigration laws and that they try to cover this up.

News articles on Banksy's works in Paris also suggest that the red mantle covering the face of the figure is a reference to France's ban on full-face veils in public areas (Quinn, Vermaas). Many former colonies of France are Muslim countries, and the integration of the Islamic culture into the French culture has been difficult, because French policy on state accommodation of religious practices is governed by *laïcité* (Fetzer and Soper 69). In *Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany*, Joel Fetzer and Christopher Soper argue that the societal and political environment in France is "surprisingly" hostile to Muslim culture in comparison with Britain and Germany and the 'veil law' is an example of this (62,78).

Another possible reference in this stencil could be the attempts of refugees earlier that year to walk from Italy to France by crossing the Alps. They chose this route because the border at Ventimiglia was closed. This closing of the borders also led to a protest by the activist group No Borders, who marched from Claviere to Montgenèvre alongside the refugees (Masiello). There is a clear relation between this occurrence and Napoleon's Alpine crossing, which makes it another possible intertextual reference in Banksy's work.

With his stencil, Banksy seems to connect these issues surrounding immigration to French leaders and the propagandic potential of the media, and it could even be argued that he tries to evoke action. Through the 1968 stencil, the cartoon and the red mantle, Banksy repeatedly refers to protests and revolutions. He therefore seems to warn people – 'raise a red flag' – to not be passive media consumers, but to unite and take action against these forms of injustice in the French society like the protesters did in 1968.

Conclusion

In this Bachelor thesis I have tried to examine Banksy's adaptation of Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* as part of the series that Banksy made in Paris in June 2018. This research ties in with the current debate surrounding Banksy's art that focusses on his critique on consumer culture and media consumption. In addition, I have related this to the political context surrounding immigration in France.

The methods that I have used to analyse this were based on adaptation studies and hypertextuality, and this has allowed me to analyse how Banksy transformed certain elements of David's painting, and how this created new meanings in a contemporary context. The disadvantage of this method was that the theories originate in literary studies, so they were not originally formed to analyse visual artworks.

For the theoretical framework I have used several Marxist theories, and this was useful in relation to Banksy's critique on consumer culture and media consumption. What I found difficult, however, was that these theories were not directly applicable to the context of David's portrait of Napoleon, because they were developed in a later historical context.

Finally, the question that I have tried to answer was "How can the artistic dialogue set up by Banksy's stencil *Untitled* with Jacques-Louis David's *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* be understood in its political context?" and the answer to this question has many different layers.

Through its artistic dialogue with David's work, Banksy's stencil not only seems to refer to Napoleon, but to the history of Bonapartist leaders. However, Banksy does not idealise them like David, but instead portrays them as figures without any (political) vision. Because of the larger context of the series, this blindness can be related to issues in France surrounding immigration. Moreover, Banksy seems to criticise the role of the media in this political debate,

and not only because he believes that it influences people, but also because it distracts them from uniting like protesters did fifty years earlier.

Future research on this subject could relate this stencil to other works by Banksy that refer to immigration. This could then be analysed in a different theoretical framework of, for example, post-colonialism.

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