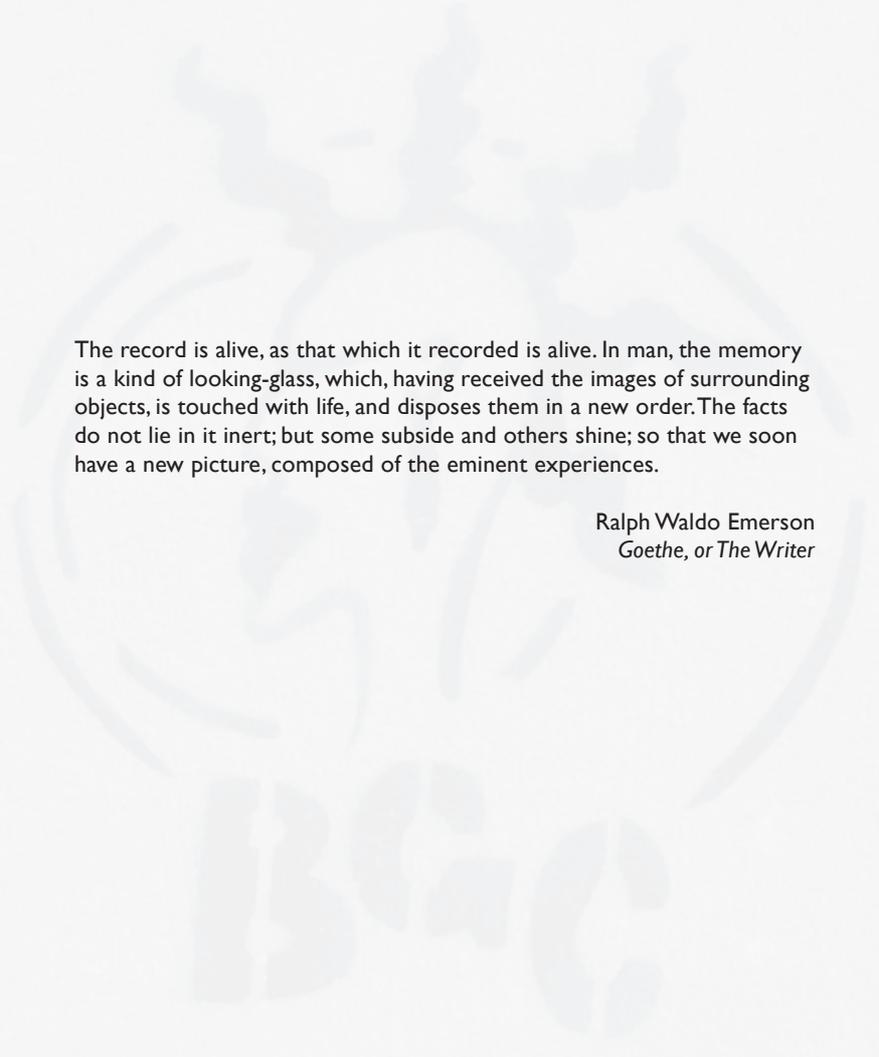




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Caroline Koebel
Kyle Schlesinger

Chax Press
Tucson
2005



The record is alive, as that which it recorded is alive. In man, the memory is a kind of looking-glass, which, having received the images of surrounding objects, is touched with life, and disposes them in a new order. The facts do not lie in it inert; but some subside and others shine; so that we soon have a new picture, composed of the eminent experiences.

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Goethe, or The Writer



WORDS INFUSE VISION. The sight of these glyphs fracture over time and over time these hairlines recede into memory. A streaming recollection uncoiled in the streets of Berlin beckons back to New England in the early 80s. Come to think of it. Sunder and lightning.

A makeshift light box fashioned from an old desk drawer in the sunroom. Patterns traced on onionskin paper. Graphite inscribed leaves set upon sheets of transparent Mylar and incised precisely. Doves, hearts and other emblematic glimpses of Colonial Americana interwoven with vegetative borders appearing on the kitchen table, stools, stairs, bathroom walls, and on various headboards about the premises. Fated, faded, haggard. Colloquial, familiar, setting into. Place this locating quality, or the particular scent of these paints becoming the resin of an irrevocable impression. The freeze frame comes in mid-air—but in writing this, I have yet to scratch the surface.

If only I could recall my awakening to the stencil's specificity within Berlin street art, then I could begin this writing by not only retracing, but also revivifying that decisive shift from dimness to enlightenment, becoming an initiate. This passage is instead labyrinthine; from my current perspective of keen consciousness of the city-as-stencils, it is a futile exercise to invoke Berlin as blankness.

Subtle yet profound was the progression. This still new city cannot be experienced apart from the art and activism on its pores, nor from a search without end for the as-yet-to-be-known: a movement from non-existence to vague acknowledgment, to engaged curiosity, to semi-obsessive collecting, cataloging, classifying.

PRINTER'S PUN: But if writing resists forgetting, what are these words contesting? Printing from moveable type began here, in Germany, 450 years ago. *Druck* (“push” in German) is at the root of *Drucker*, or “printer.” As Gutenberg reached the closing stages of the first printing of the Bible, his associate John Fust foreclosed on their venture, forcing Gutenberg out of the business. Hoping to turn a quick profit, Fust took the Bibles to Paris where he sold several (misrepresenting them as hand copied manuscripts) to Louis XI. But the King’s officials observed that individual letters were identical in appearance and claimed that the ornamental caps, in their sensuous redness, were written in blood. Fust was accused of witchcraft, imprisoned and later freed by Louis after he disclosed the secrets of letterpress printing. From the outset, print was relatively inexpensive and posed a threat to the longstanding monastic practice of copying by hand. Skeptics maintained that Fust was in cahoots with Satan, and to this day “black art” remains synonymous with the practice of printing.

The technology of the stencil and pounce (a sack filled with colored chalk, charcoal or an alternate powdery substance) began at least as early as the seventh century, and like most sustaining print technologies, its principle has remained relatively stable since its inception. A design drawn with a brush was pin pricked to create a permeable outline, then set upon another flat sheet. The pounce

was dusted lightly over the holes, transferring the original design to form the negative that could then be traced, punched and painted with remarkable accuracy. Akin to the marks produced by the letterpress, rubber stamp, lithograph, potato stamp, mimeograph, and silkscreen, the stencil creates the illusion of uniform reproduction. Variation is an innate attribute of each of these printing methods, yet prints maintain an ambiguous status in the “official art market,” shelved somewhere between unique works and reproductions, or in the “original multiples” section. Unlike fine prints, the *Schablone* (German for stencil) is not produced in a limited edition nor does an “original” signature by the artist mark its authenticity—although the designer’s alias occasionally appears as part of the stencil itself.

Stencilists cannot be reduced to a unified politic (differences in style and subject alone suggest otherwise), yet the city itself serves as a collective context for their spirited disavowal of controlled means of exhibition and distribution. They embrace a Do-It-Yourself ethos disruptive of dominant power structures. Their communications reinvent the public sphere’s imaginary and initiate conversations across an indeterminate and disparate group, making commentaries, questions, associations, and digressions happen amidst, alongside, atop, and below more prescribed elements of the public realm. There is no gateway to pass through

to make contact. Stencil artists are cultural rebels inhabiting non-sanctioned spaces. The ordered mass connoted by “the public” is inevitably fissured by cracks of individuality. Singular bodies create fluxus through, or rather in opposition to, the official metropolitan order of zoning, privatization and urban planning. Anarchic sign-stencils unlock the bolt of the authoritarian street. They mark, narrativize, gape, and—departing from de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*—act as “local authorities” that “haunt urban space like superfluous or additional inhabitants.” These extra/alter-citizens are “the object of a witch-hunt, by the very logic of the techno-structure. But their extermination (like the extermination of trees, forests, and hidden places...) makes the city a ‘suspended symbolic order.’ The habitable city is thereby annulled.” Indeed, *Schablonen* produce “an area of free play (*Spielraum*) on a checkerboard that analyzes and classifies identities.” Stencils (like their makers) cause disorder in the totalitarianist system, permitting breath through a chaotic network of (e)vents. Moreover, it is the act of stenciling—the performance of saying something—that is the “discourse” of “local authority.” These murmurs “insert themselves ‘over and above’ and ‘in excess,’ and annex to a past or poetic realm a part of the land the promoters of technical rationalities and financial profitabilities had reserved for themselves.” Language “makes places habitable.”

DEFINITION: A stencil is a thin sheet of metal, cardboard, plastic or other impermeable material with one or more openings cut into it so as to allow the paint applied to its back to fill its negative spaces, creating a positive image on the print surface. Through the repetition of this procedure, multiple colors can be overlaid. The simplicity of stenciling makes it a primal form of communication, while its utilitarian disposition and rudimentary method of application does not preclude a sophisticated aesthetic.

Berlin stencil artists favor spray paint (with its clanky ball bearing stealthily removed), and some use it in conjunction with sponges or a traditional flat brush with stiff bristles as is customary in folk art traditions. These public prints are usually applied directly to a given surface, yet not unlike painters of the fine arts, a layer of gesso is occasionally brushed on beforehand, creating an alabaster background.

At least 800 years preceding the Rosetta Stone's carving (196 BC), the Cueva de las Manos (Cave of the Hands) was a sacred site for the Tehuelches in what is now the Province of Santa Cruz, Argentina. Plant one hand firmly on the cave wall while the other paints (or use your mouth to "spray") mineral pigments onto the back of the hand at rest, intentionally leaving a splattered space around it. Once removed, a brilliant negative space surrounded by a cloud of

vibrant red, violet, green, yellow, orange or ochre is revealed. A trace is always linked to that which is no longer or not yet present—for if an object does not leave a trace, it could never be known, nor could it serve as a signifier. The moment of encounter between the painter and the negative reminds me of Barnett Newman’s “zip” paintings—it’s what you *don’t* see that astonishes. Lyotard has written of Newman, “The inexpressible does not reside in an over there, in another word, or another time, but in this: in that (something) happens.” In Mitte, I observed the same principle at work in a performed geometry enacted by lifting masking tape from hazy purple circles painted on a wall near the U-Bahn—but that’s another point of departure.

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At the Ministry of Makers of Playing Cards in 18th century London, sheets were printed 20-up on a press before a stencilist applied color to (or “enlivened”) the card’s faces and ornaments. Naturally, another member of the crew would use a guillotine to “cut the deck.” In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Art Deco and Art Nouveau movements popularized a refined form of stenciling (*pochoir*) in France. Using metals such as aluminum, copper or zinc (later celluloid and plastic) to create a template, the pages of fashion journals were graced with crisp lines and vibrant colors that retain the opacity of fresh gouache nearly a century later. In an effort to refine my savage handwriting, grade

school teachers gave me plastic stencils of the alphabet. Logos for professional hockey teams are stenciled beneath the ice, and one google search result advises that, “If you will be using a stencil to carve your pumpkin, select a pumpkin that is large enough and as close to the same shape as the pattern you’re going to carve. It should be as smooth as possible, and free of scratches, dents or gouges.” The stencil’s status ranges from high art to low, from sacred to everyday objects, and it is that tension between the exotic and the ordinary that makes the life of *Schablonen* quixotic.

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The juxtaposition of word and image (akin to a film’s subtitle or comic book’s caption) is common, while examples of integration (as in the works of William Blake or a psychedelic poster with the words “Fillmore West” sprouting from Jimi Hendrix’s afro) are extraordinary. Wits play between cryptology and typography—you can have your double take and eat it too. Look closely at the cross stroke of the “T” in the “GAT SUCKED?” *Schablone* and an automatic weapon appears. In the vernacular of American rap music, a “gat” (derived from the Gatling, a machine gun used during the Civil War) refers to any gun, while its homonym, GATT (Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) comes from the infamous gathering of industrialized nations in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire in the summer of 1944 to discuss economic strategies for ending WWII. Three circles with one quarter missing from each appear

above the phrase; the first in the form of a person with a “W” for a face, the second a pram with a “T” in a balloon tied to its handle, and the third reminiscent of Pacman (that insatiable celebrity from Atari’s video game craze of the 80s) with an “O” for an eye. Akin to the trading posts established by the British (circa 1740) to replace goods produced by the indigenous Cherokees, “free trade” is a global threat to everyone’s environmental, social and cultural integrity—read WTO (World Trade Organization). In this case, the most provocative semblance between the medium and its message is its subtlety, which is not the same as invisibility or absence. The “GAT SUCKED?” stencil is an interventionist ‘piece that asks us to read, and read again, noting that nothing is as it seems under the codes of deregulation imposed by a dominant unelected body.

Military units have used the stencil to make simple labels and instructions in the field, and many of the digital stencil fonts on the market today are stylized after this utilitarian aesthetic. As I write, the death count of noncombatants in Iraq murdered by US soldiers continues to climb, and the soldiers of Berlin have it out in the streets where they flex their formulaic bodies in substantial numbers. According to Manco, “‘The Art of Urban Warfare’ was set up by Influenza as a collective game to promote street interventions in the name of art, under the motto ‘the street belongs

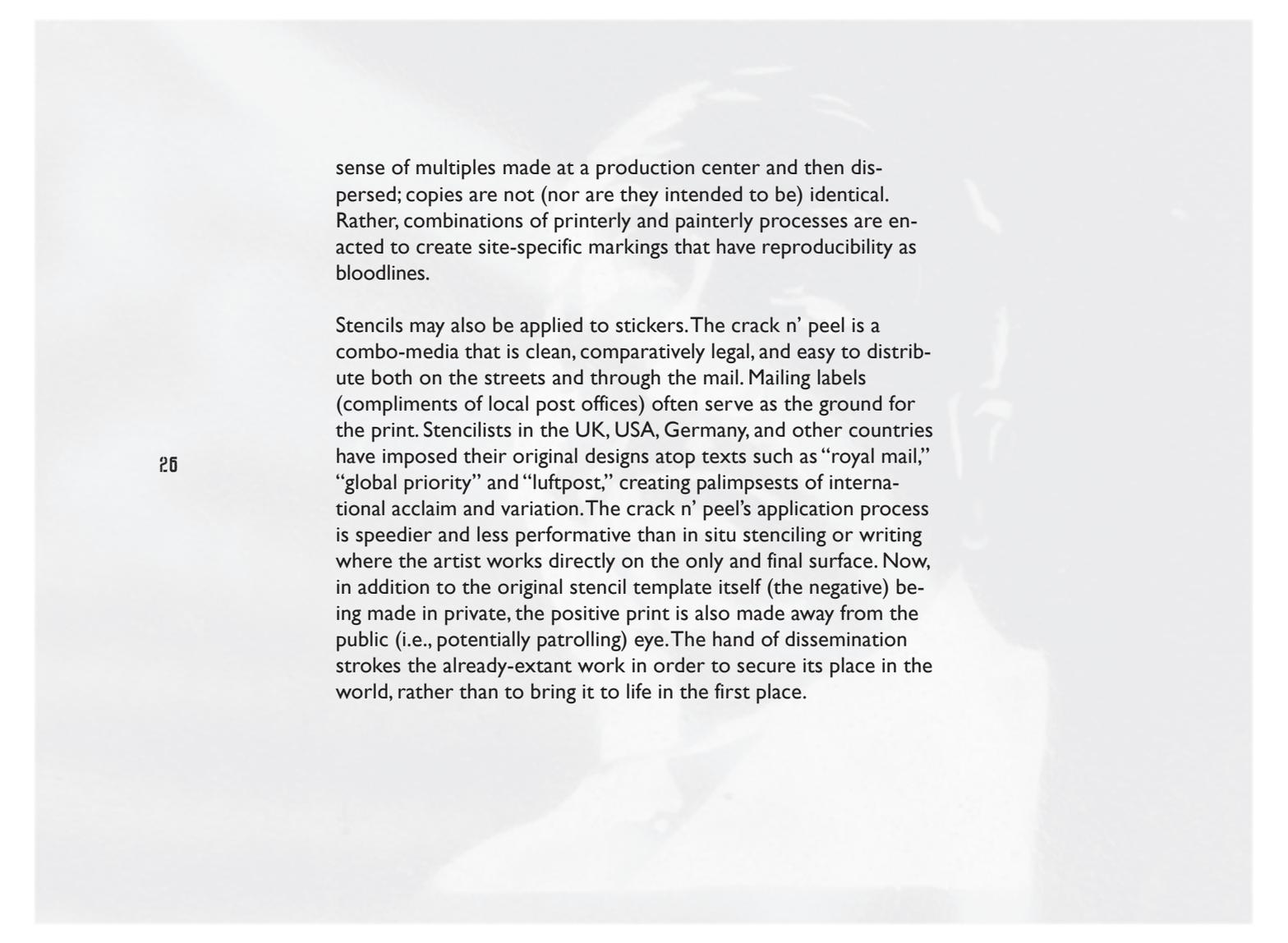
to us.’’ Although the intent is the conquest and free use of public space, the soldiers become as oppressive as they are omnipresent. While they liberate surfaces from their unadulterated blankness, their reterritorialization simultaneously dominates and overwhelms, as if there were no means of escape. Discrepant political, representational and aesthetic practices have eloquently stormed the walls—stunned into meaning as the sun crosses a luminous puncture wound. Night light. Out house. *Licht raus*.

Materials are inexpensive and infinitely available. Contemporary stenciling shares an affinity with the broadside, paste-up, and other forms of ephemera as an efficient medium for urban distribution, yet when the stencil is applied to a surface, it becomes both a multiple and site-specific work of art, distinguishing it from portable forms of printed matter. Its temporality differs from that of an ordinary print, as a separate set of environmental factors may alter its condition over time. *Schablonen* exist in a realm of chance. Maintenance crews whitewash walls, tags slash faces and lively scripts reorient the artists’ original designs. Unlike the archivist’s emphasis on stasis (presentation and preservation), vernacular forms of art privilege kinesis, becoming more vital with every new alteration. Evolution (including desecration) is essential to a work’s duration, and with age, the accumulation of forces acting on the stencil and its surroundings contribute to its originality by making exact reproduction impossible.



The question of time is not only key to the reception and effect of stencil art, but also to its production and conception. Graffiti (at least larger-scaled, multi-layered) demands more time in situ on the street than stenciling, which is closer to the act of “point and shoot” photography. Hold the stencil with one hand (or tape) against the surface-frame of choice, and guide a can of spray paint across it with the other. Don’t delay in sharpening focus, adjusting the light meter, or deliberating between low and high angles; aesthetic choices are largely predetermined, and authorship (read “authority”) gives way to anonymity (read “anarchy”). The technician is on par with the artist. Like the magician pulling the white rabbit out of the hat, the elaborateness of the amassing of the stencil is belied by the simplicity of the hand’s gesturing in thin air. What was once not there is now there. Proceed to the next scene.

Paint application is an embodied rather than machine driven process; cans of spray paint extend limbs and multiply orifices. The stencil brought from home becomes the mediating apparatus between the artist’s body and canvas-surface. In order for the image to materialize as desired, the artist must transform empty (albeit delimited) space into a positive plane, accounting for all of the form’s openings, gaps and absences. Yet unlike conventional printing and photography, place(ment) is everything. “Printing” here does not follow the precepts of mechanical reproduction in the



sense of multiples made at a production center and then dispersed; copies are not (nor are they intended to be) identical. Rather, combinations of printerly and painterly processes are enacted to create site-specific markings that have reproducibility as bloodlines.

Stencils may also be applied to stickers. The crack n' peel is a combo-media that is clean, comparatively legal, and easy to distribute both on the streets and through the mail. Mailing labels (compliments of local post offices) often serve as the ground for the print. Stencilists in the UK, USA, Germany, and other countries have imposed their original designs atop texts such as "royal mail," "global priority" and "luftpost," creating palimpsests of international acclaim and variation. The crack n' peel's application process is speedier and less performative than in situ stenciling or writing where the artist works directly on the only and final surface. Now, in addition to the original stencil template itself (the negative) being made in private, the positive print is also made away from the public (i.e., potentially patrolling) eye. The hand of dissemination strokes the already-extant work in order to secure its place in the world, rather than to bring it to life in the first place.

PHYSICAL GRAPHEIN: The artist needs no mediating institutions. She represents herself. The city acts as her distributor. Her body is the printing press: corporal, portable and intelligible. It is fueled by her own adrenalin, and limited by the imagination alone. Stenciling requires no special training and fosters the sense of exhilaration that comes with other expeditious forms of publishing, such as the mimeo magazine or blog. Since its inception, print has had the power of mobilizing masses around subjects of common concern with unprecedented immediacy—an immediacy that accelerates with the indoctrination of every technology. This is a post-live transmission.

The term “stencil graffiti” naturally alludes to the two lineages that have most prominently contributed to this phenomenon. “Graffiti” is the plural of “graffito” (literally a drawing or writing *scratched* into a surface) and although the singular form is less common, both have their origins in Italy where ancient scrawl has been uncovered on the walls of Rome and Pompeii. The homemade is that which comes “from scratch,” while scratching, mixing and sampling are the signature techniques of dub reggae and hip-hop. Like DJs, stencilists remix found and altered material, creating new patterns and repetition in urban space. In turn, “graphic” is derived from the Greek *graphein*, “to write,” and while all forms of writing are graphic, not all graphics are forms of writing.

Rather than “historicize” graffiti stencils, this book seeks to replicate the experience of understanding a syntax, which like language at large, cannot be reduced to a single sign, author or theme. The shift from orality to literacy, “...began to occur with the invention of writing itself, and it came to a crisis point with the introduction of the Greek alphabet.” Havelock elaborates, “An act of vision was offered in place of an act of hearing as a means of communication, and as the means of storing information. The adjustment that it caused was part social, but the major effect was felt in the mind and the way the mind thinks as it speaks.”

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The stenciled text within earshot of Zionskirche’s bells “my mother taught me well so i rebel” parodies the conservative’s conflation of graffiti artists and vandals, kids gone rotten by, say, an overdose of discipline. “Mother” could be the political system of the East (where this neighborhood once was) or lingering social mores still popular in the reunified Germany. “She” could be speech; in German one’s native language is feminine (*Muttersprache* means “mother language”), while one’s native land is masculine (*Vaterland* means “fatherland”). This catchy, one-line aphorism that a web search eventually aligns with spoken-word poet Saul Williams enacts its message with a humorous feminist sensibility.

As I take photographs at Mariannenplatz of a *Schablone* depicting a clenched fist power symbol, a graffiti artist (or “writer”) approaches and asks why I’m interested in street art. In revealing plans for the book you are holding, my subject positioning as audience reverses in the Kreuzberger’s mirroring inquiry. Present are qualities both formal and illicit about the process of becoming visible. My identification as audience has more to do with being part of the initiate than with divisions between makers and receivers, writers and readers—as if by taking active interest in street practice, I am already transgressing conventions of art and the public. This destabilizing of cause and effect speaks precisely to how the charting of my daily life by signs activates me as a subject attuned to the activities of others within the *Schablone* subculture. Outed as an avid reader, I become a writer, in a sense, myself.

The aforementioned *Schablone* at Mariannenplatz rests against a gessoed concrete wall to serve as the ground for the fist and caption “VEGAN” in green. Note the amateurish dribbles from overspray, and the faint rectangular trace of the stencil’s perimeter. Someone’s attempt to retort (“*Fleisch, Bier, Haschisch, Sex!!!*”) may have failed because of an expiring black marker, but the scrawl indicates that the resourceful agitator found a blue marker and retraced her words, inadvertently adding emphasis and shadow to the phrases punctuated by an anarchist symbol. The

writing's spiraling tilt plays off the stencil's radiant beams, while the retort is constricted to the dimensions set by the stencilist. Opposing political views are naturally brought into a single picture plane—quite unlike the “demonstration” of conflict wrought by a lone author. The original politic and its refutation create a site for debate (i.e., vegan v. meat eater), as the stencil becomes not merely a speaker, but a dialogic receptacle. Interjection provokes a rift, and dispute loses the abstractness it can otherwise have if the “message” appears only to issue forth and not simultaneously open itself to direct public interaction and visual interrogation.

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Behind every text is a texture: brick, stucco, wood, stone, sodden paper, paint, and concrete are the ground for collage work, palimpsests, diatribes, cancellations and erasure. The wall is a site where intertextual forays flourish. Dialogues transcend space and time—from the most grandiose signs cast in luminescent paint by learned stencilists to the smallest addendums inscribed in pencil by schoolchildren, the wall becomes a site and a sight for public discourse.

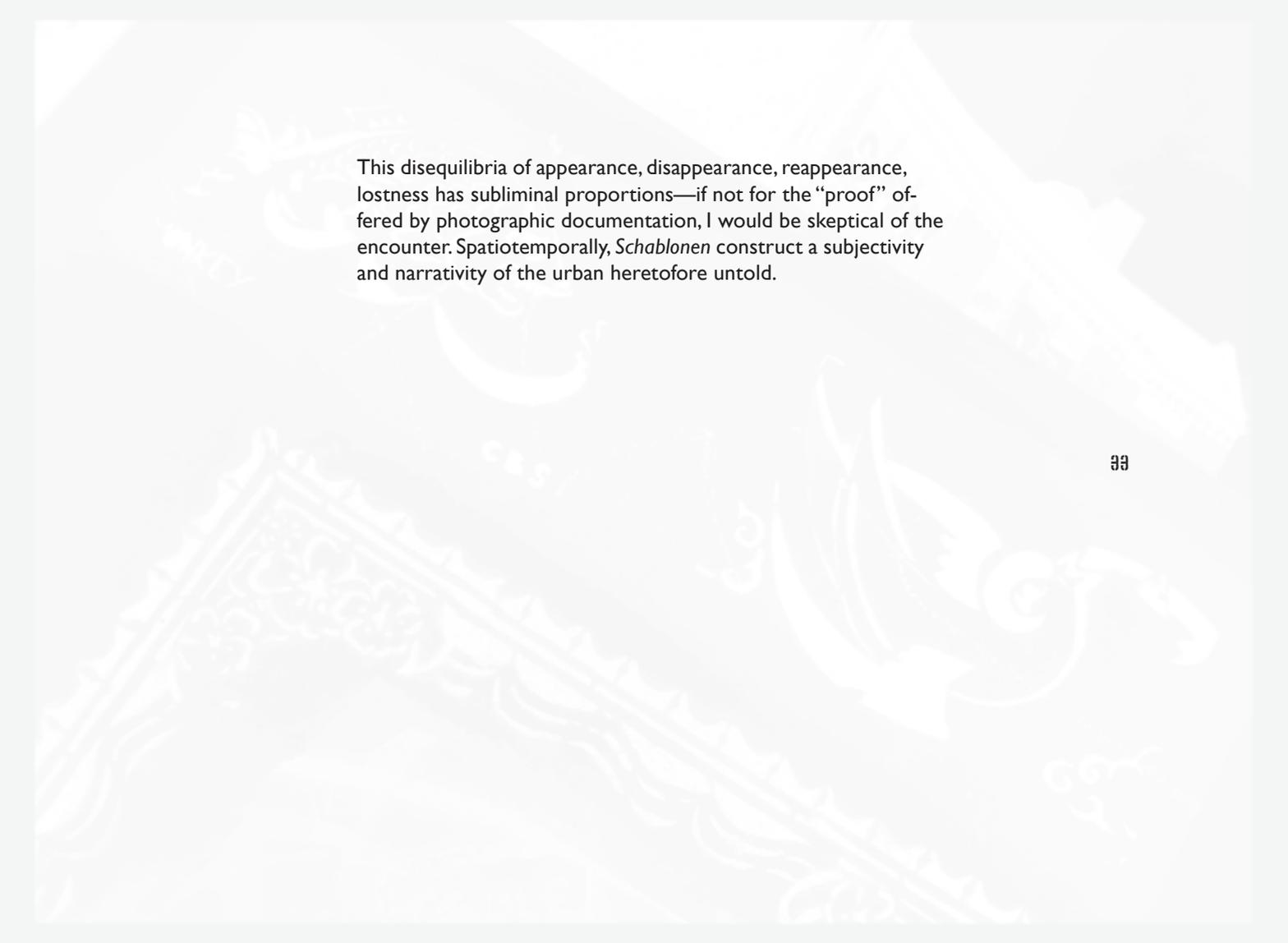
Stencils form a site-specific, situationist guide to the city of Berlin. Cognizance of these underground markings means mapping one's peregrinations not only by distinct *Schablonen*, but also by their collectivity. Streets and neighborhoods (i.e., Kreuzberg, Mitte, Prenzlauerberg, and Friedrichshain) dissonate and resonate accord-

ing to their particular stencil compositions, inducing visual rhythms, codas and syncopations. Divisions between the figuration of sites in the imaginary blur, especially when similar stencils manifest in different locales (streets kilometers apart become linked narratively by the coexistence of dachshund *Schablonen*).

Finding stencils is a serendipitous activity. A circuitous detour through an alley in Kreuzberg is akin to a Boolean word combination punched into a search engine, creating a pictographic urban narrative. Read as a sequence, these signs form a hypertextual syntax, where one point of reference invariably leads to another. The closer one reads, the more apparent it becomes that one is simultaneously being read. As I jaunt through the streets, a rough taxonomy forms: global, political, textual, abstract, sexual, colorful, facial, playful, environmental. Texts inhabit contexts in the city I imagine, for it is in the imagination that habits and habitat converge. The civic interior is an actual place that gives contour and shadow to places in time—now you see it, *now you see it*. As Deleuze and Guattari note, “A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all, becoming does not occur in the imagination, even when the imagination reaches the cosmic or dynamic level.”

Take for example, a mouse at street level just beside an open-air duct, or the infamous image (gracing the doorway of an anarchist cafe in the otherwise gentrified Prenzlauerberg) of a döner kebab chef with the calligraphic caption “Eat the Rich” inscribed below. The murderous gleam in the eye of the cook winks both ways, as anti-capitalist and pro-vegan signage coalesce masterfully. Riding through Alexanderplatz, I halt before an electric power box featuring falling rat capitalists stenciled in black over fluorescent green paint. This spot near the Asian grocery store is my regular turf, but never before have I observed this particular instance of *Schablone* art. Did this site come into being overnight? Curious that this moment of temporal disjuncture revolves around rat stencils: for weeks I had practically been pilgrimaging for the elusive scavenger, after having had the mind’s eye initially imprinted by such. Rats had indeed been sighted early on only to retreat rapidly into the bowels of buildings and other hiding places until one day they returned in the time-honored tradition of the rodent’s birth rite—en masse. Rat colonies now ruled quarters of Berlin’s *Schablone* districts: the rat capitalist, the NY Yankee rat, rats painting anarchist signs, others shooting rose love hearts out of rifles.

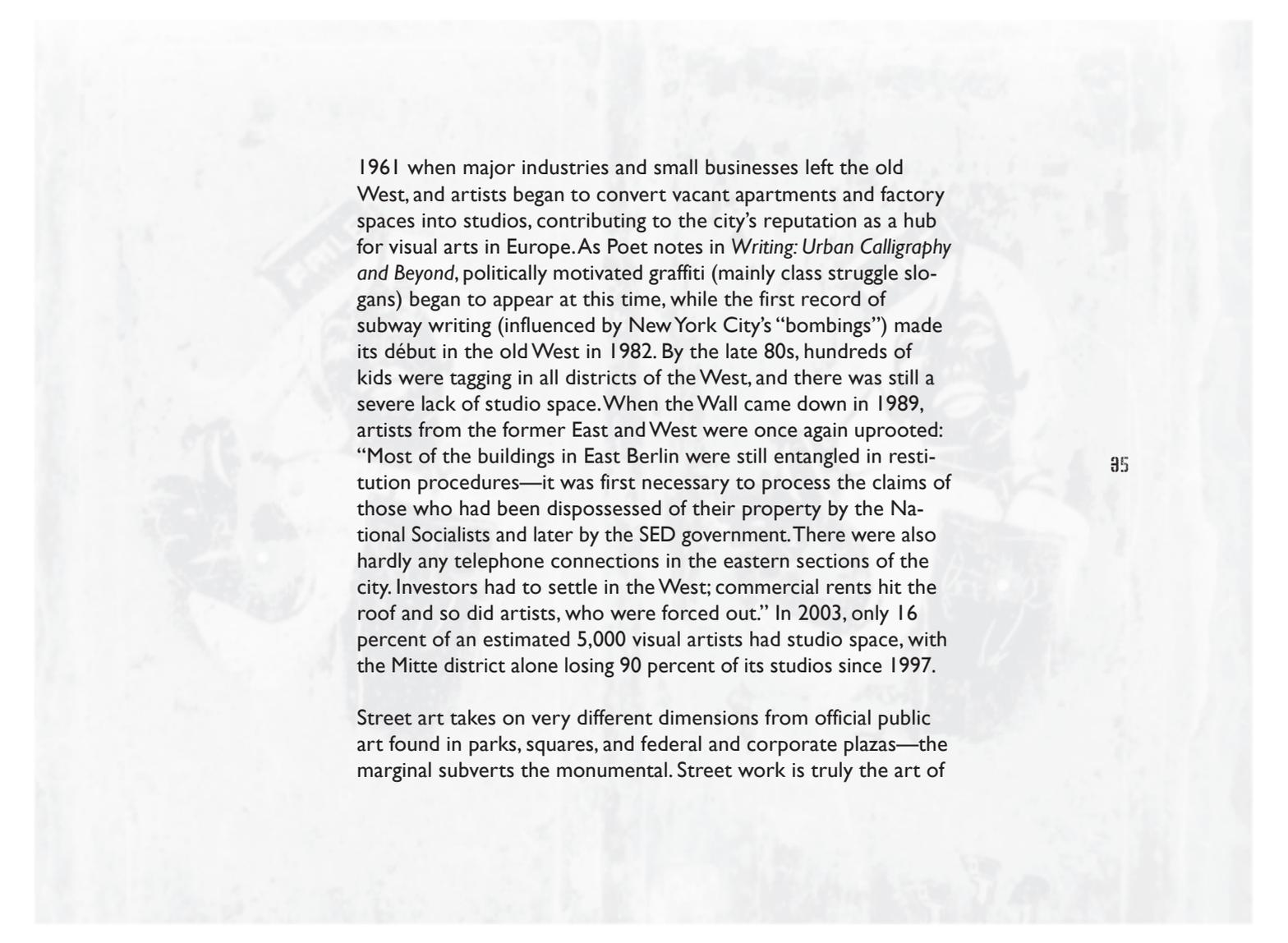
Inverse to the rats-over-green’s spontaneous materiality at Alex, stencils go missing, their lives blotted out by authorities and sanitizers, consigned to darkness by movie posters and fresh paint.



This disequilibria of appearance, disappearance, reappearance, lostness has subliminal proportions—if not for the “proof” offered by photographic documentation, I would be skeptical of the encounter. Spatiotemporally, *Schablonen* construct a subjectivity and narrativity of the urban heretofore untold.

CIVIC SPACE & THE POLITICS OF PLACE: The application of these subversive forms of relief register in the public space, intruding on the prescribed, or at least medicated habits of everyday textual absorption. Smirk, shutter, shriek. There are things thought only when one finds oneself alone in the dark, painting in her own public privacy—the city an open studio. This is the writing on the wall reading the writing on the wall. Public signage gets the reader out into the streets, as the “Love Shock” stencil arrests readers outside the public library on Brunnen Straße.

According to the Berufsverband Bildender Künstler Berlins (Professional Association of Visual Arts Berlin), Berlin artists have always had to contend with a shortage of studio space, and although the wellspring of street art practices does not reflect this condition directly, the struggle to occupy and reterritorialize space is central to the historical development of the city's arts at large. After the Nazis decimated Berlin's cultural life, attic studios of the absent artists were occupied by the Third Reich's top dogs. Even the artists' building on Schöneberger Ufer (founded by Käthe Kollwitz and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff) became the home of a Nazi Colonel. The post-war rebuilding of the heavily bombed city largely ignored artists' demands for work space. Ironically, the studio shortage was eased by the construction of the Berlin Wall in



1961 when major industries and small businesses left the old West, and artists began to convert vacant apartments and factory spaces into studios, contributing to the city's reputation as a hub for visual arts in Europe. As Poet notes in *Writing: Urban Calligraphy and Beyond*, politically motivated graffiti (mainly class struggle slogans) began to appear at this time, while the first record of subway writing (influenced by New York City's "bombings") made its debut in the old West in 1982. By the late 80s, hundreds of kids were tagging in all districts of the West, and there was still a severe lack of studio space. When the Wall came down in 1989, artists from the former East and West were once again uprooted: "Most of the buildings in East Berlin were still entangled in restitution procedures—it was first necessary to process the claims of those who had been dispossessed of their property by the National Socialists and later by the SED government. There were also hardly any telephone connections in the eastern sections of the city. Investors had to settle in the West; commercial rents hit the roof and so did artists, who were forced out." In 2003, only 16 percent of an estimated 5,000 visual artists had studio space, with the Mitte district alone losing 90 percent of its studios since 1997.

Street art takes on very different dimensions from official public art found in parks, squares, and federal and corporate plazas—the marginal subverts the monumental. Street work is truly the art of

everyday living, and therefore is situated in a humble relationship to (the idea of) audience—not calling upon a specific set of conditions in order for audience to qualify (i.e., art critics and artists who have a personal and professional investment in keeping conversant with currents in art, or tourists who follow checklists of cultural sites in their guidebooks). Audience, conceivably anybody living amidst stencil art, does not necessarily self-identify as such. They read the various lo-fi printed texts, pictures, signs, icons, and symbols as belonging to the general sociocultural landscape (psychogeography); in other words, not as self-conscious forms of artistic expression.

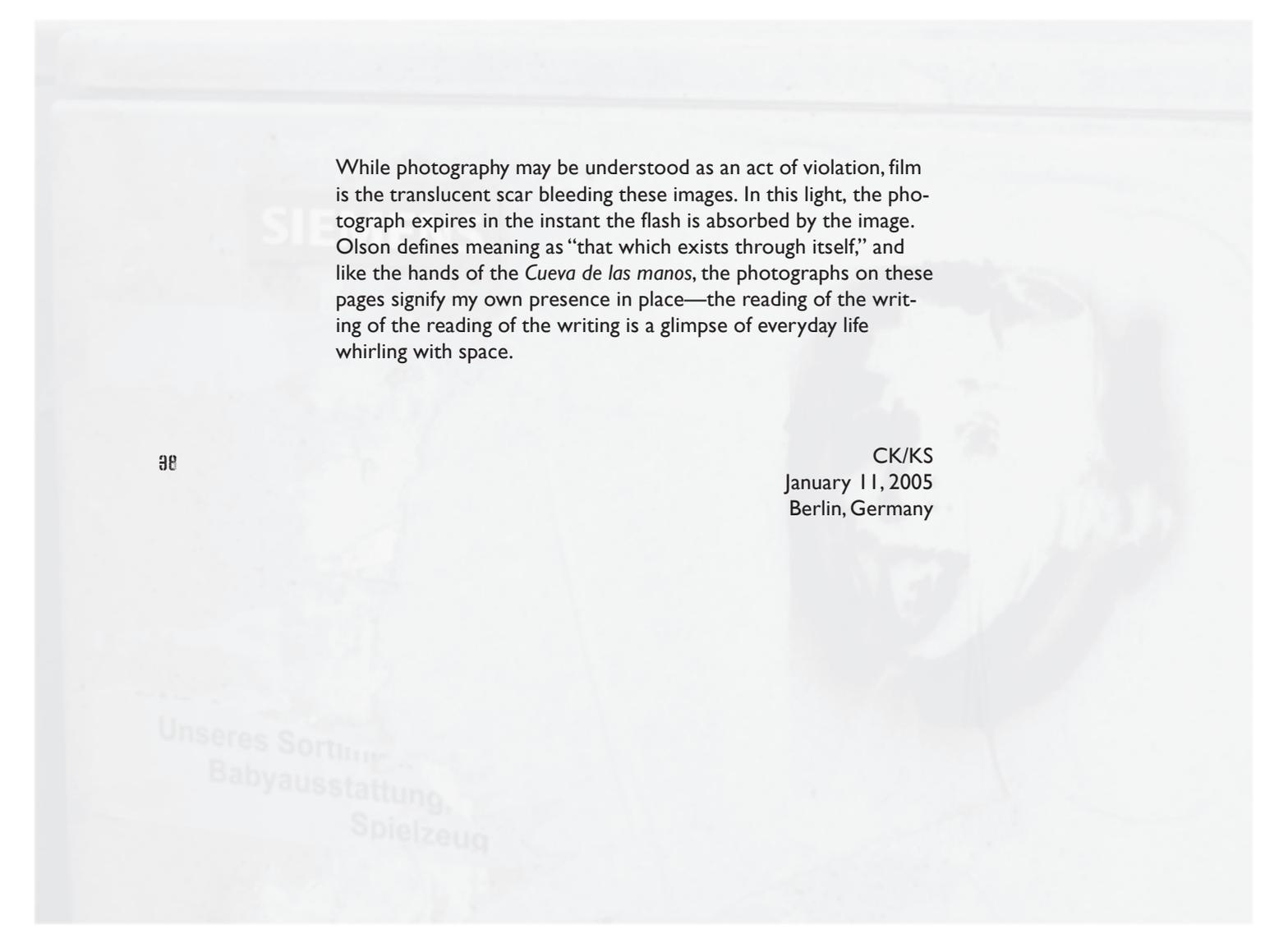
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Web publishers and stencilists find common celebration in the virtue of “instant” distribution. The Internet has transfigured urban writers’ space; torquing the cleave between the second and third dimensions, while the co-occupation of virtual and actual space has obscured the rift between local and global frontiers. The horizon is rife with the potential to blur the boundaries between monitors and masonry, pixels and paint, techno and litho. Protest stencils can be downloaded by ardent activists, while customized laser-cut stencils can be ordered online and image-editing software can be employed to subvert corporate images, but as Dworkin notes in *Reading the Illegible*, “...one should be vigilant to remember that a *détournement* can itself always be *détourned*.”

Why is the chaos factor so noteworthy here? Void of a contained audience, stencil art is resistant to commodification. References to, let alone actual representations of, Berlin street art were lacking at the 2004 Kunst Forum (an art fair where Berlin gallerists exhibit alongside national and international counterparts). Stencils roughen the smooth products for consumption of the art market and the ad industry, while often borrowing from them. Certain stencilists follow both advertising (particularly the concept of corporate branding) and fine art in that they mark multiple surfaces and structures with many instantiations of the same stencil and/or of a variety of related stencils that can be identified as “belonging” to the same source.

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Whereas pop artists sought to make art *out of* the everyday (i.e., packaging and advertising as fine art subject matter, on view for the most part within the white cube), street artists seek to make art *into* the everyday. Not unlike Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, stencilists further the proliferation of pop icons (i.e., Clint Eastwood, Marilyn Monroe, Johnny Cash, Marlene Dietrich), but contrary to these art giants who have in turn become pop icons, stencilists disseminate their work to autonomous public sites that make private or institutional ownership impossible.



While photography may be understood as an act of violation, film is the translucent scar bleeding these images. In this light, the photograph expires in the instant the flash is absorbed by the image. Olson defines meaning as “that which exists through itself,” and like the hands of the *Cueva de las manos*, the photographs on these pages signify my own presence in place—the reading of the writing of the reading of the writing is a glimpse of everyday life whirling with space.

ae

CK/KS
January 11, 2005
Berlin, Germany

SIE
Unseres Sortiment
Babyausstattung.
Spielzeug

POSTPUNK: Do you ever even hear “sell-out” these days? My impulse for reading Berlin stencils as D-I-Y, subcultural and anti-establishment is born out of the punk credo of the Reagan years, but times change, and so it is conceded that stencil graffiti is not altogether immune to commercialism. The post-punk generation, after all, has come of age when corporate powers have long since co-opted “independent.”

April 7, 2005: Berlin, with the support of mayor Klaus Wowereit, hosted the first International Anti-Graffiti Conference. According to the *Deutsche Welle*, under current German law, “...graffiti is only punishable if it can be proven that the spraying itself or the removal of the graffiti resulted in damages to the surfaces under it.” Conference attendees sought to define graffiti solely as attacks on property and subsequently called for harsher legal recourse against “sprayers” or “graffiti vandals.” With the rally cry “*Graffiti ist kein Verbrechen!*,” street artists, activists and delegates of the Green Party demonstrated at the Mauerpark against the Anti-Graffiti Conference.

Labeling the street artist “criminal” should put authorities on edge given Berlin’s unique history: i.e., epicenter of the Third Reich, the suppression of free speech and the pervasive spy culture in the former East, destination for young men evading the

Bundeswehr, and the smug glorification of Wall graffiti as democratic expression by the former West. Could these truths explain Berlin's relative openness to nonconformity and otherness? How should the city be governed today? I call for dialogic streets as opposed to the automated sounds of the Berlin Wall cum Big Bill's Guardtower.

NYC mayor Ed Koch attests in *Style Wars* (1983): "I suggested that they put a dawg in the yard to keep the graffiti vandals out. The MTA (Metropolitan Transit Authority) rejected it...they said the dawg will bite them. Well, I thought that's what the dawg was for, but if you're afraid that the dawg would bite such a vandal—and here I called upon my prodigious memory—what you should do instead of using a dawg, you should use a wolf because studies have shown that unless rabid, a wolf will not bite a human."

A dog in Friedrichshain barks, "Go fuck a peanut."

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