

Kritiku a negativitu je možné vidět ve dvou základních aspektech přístupu CAP. Prvním je popření stylu jako jedné ze základních hodnot graffiti. CAP deklarují touhu nemít styl. Překonání stylu, tedy eliminace veškerých prvků, které v sobě nesou známku zvyku, v případě CAP ovšem zůstává stále spíše teorií. CAP se sice podařilo oprostit od zátěže existujících stylů graffiti, zato však dospěli k vlastnímu nezaměnitelnému projevu. Jejich odmítání stylu se tak projevuje pouze v ojedinělých případech záměrného přivlastňování tvarosloví jiných writerů. Druhým aspektem, v němž je možné vidět kritičnost přístupu CAP, je ironická *tupá* kreativita. CAP vyhledávají co nejinfantilnější nápady, hraničící s úplnou idiocií. Dovádějí stupiditu motivů i jejich provedení do krajnosti a tím ukazují primitivismus graffiti v celé nahotě jeho jediného sdělení – „jsem tady!“

Fakt, že CAP přenášejí své působení z viditelných míst do skrytu továren, je možné interpretovat jako metaforu pasivity graffiti. Jde o projev uznání planosti nadějí, které někdy bývají do graffiti vkládány. Pokud graffiti dokáže vytrhnout chodce z pravidelného rytmu pohybu po městských ulicích a přimět jej, aby se na chvíli zastavil a díval, nemůže a nechce mu nabídnout nic víc než holou pravdu o přítomnosti na konkrétním místě. Skulina s možností úniku ke svobodě je naznačena a ihned zase neprodyšně uzavřena.

The waves of mass protest against contemporary society at the end of the 1960s in western countries represented the last mobilization of the modern consciousness in an effort to instigate a total transformation of the world. In the ensuing decade, resistance fragmented into *new social movements* focused on specific issues and local contexts. At the same time, a wide range of subcultures advocating particular lifestyles began to proliferate. This was no longer an *alternative way*

*of life* that challenged the values of mainstream society, but only a partial escape from stereotypes, one limited to a few spectacular attributes. Young people identifying with new urban subcultures no longer believed in the possibility of changing the social and economic coordinates of their existence. Instead, they tried to find a way to have fun in the place in society that they had been born into. They didn't see the entire world as their canvas for self-realization; this stage had been reduced to the range of a few surrounding city blocks. In place of the modern *universe*, a post-modern *neighbourhood* had arrived. Modern man had defined himself through this or that master narrative – “I am a socialist” or “I am a patriot.” In 1971 in the first interview on the subject of graffiti from the pages of the New York Times, post-modern man announced:

“I am Taki from 183rd.” Post-modern man is no longer interested in taking part in any whole-scale project to change the world. This task is left to the self-motion of economic growth; the most any individual could do is to gain *fame* in a certain particular domain.

Graffiti is an activity that damages private or public property, and as such is an enemy of the capitalist order. But it would be a mistake to interpret it for that reason as a manifestation of revolt. Graffiti isn't some form of criticism against property relations or even a representation of an alternative attitude; instead, it is a demonstration of bare presence. The creator of graffiti conveys nothing more than “I exist, I live on this street.” Graffiti isn't critical (i.e. modern), but a conservative reaction to the capitalist order. It doesn't aspire to challenge predominant values, but represents values that are much deeper and more primitive. Its psychology is that of the gang, family, or tribe. Typical in graffiti are attributes of archaic society such as loyalty to the *crew*, the quarter or city, the competitive battle, meticulous care for history preserved in the form of



Our task in the *post-historic* era is not to propel history but to learn how to have fun. So if we ever hear word of a *revolution* in connection with any exploit on the graffiti scene we know that such a claim has about as much weight as an advertising slogan about a *price revolution* for some commodity. To consider stylistic innovation in graffiti as a manifestation of unbounded creative freedom is roughly the same as regarding an expansion of goods on the market as evidence of growth in the possibility of free choice. Regional forms of graffiti differ to approximately the same extent as various local mutations of products from multi-national corporations. Like graffiti styles clothing fashions change from season to season without causing any fundamental modification in society's stereotypical perception of the body. Graffiti has gone global since its beginnings. The neighbourhood on which it is focussed is no longer just a physical location but includes hyperlinked web pages on the Internet. Nevertheless, it has remained a particular niche where the same rigid rules apply.

In the 1980s, the doors to museums and galleries were opened to graffiti artists. This was made possible as a consequence of the critique of large modern narratives, including the history of art, and a turn toward a multicultural *identity politics* advocating the rights of marginalized groups to *narrate their own stories*. However, the effort of permanent integration of graffiti in the official structure of the contemporary art world was not successful. If we disregard the fact that placing graffiti in museums robs it of its character as an illicit street intervention, this failure can mostly be chalked up to the dictates of novelty that govern the institutionalized management of contemporary art. In order for an artist to maintain a position in the sun he or she must perpetually exceed him- or herself, a requirement that is in logical conflict with the essence of graffiti. To subject themselves to corresponding changes would simply mark the end of creating graffiti. The expansion of graffiti onto the art

market of the 1980s added just a few names to the history of art and the majority of these artists were painters that in fact had little in common with real graffiti writing. This peripeteia in the history of graffiti reveals its essentially conservative nature. In order for graffiti to remain what it is, at least part of the original context in which it was created must be preserved. The world of official art must be kept at arm's length to protect graffiti's own self-interest. Young people from the ghetto must not get better access to education, work opportunities, and travel; otherwise they might no longer consider graffiti as a satisfactory form of self-realization. The ghetto, that is the spatial expression of economic and racial inequality, must not disappear from the map of the city. Graffiti is an ostensible revolt against an unfair system, one that in fact supports this system.

Along with other forms of social deviation like street gangs and drug addiction, graffiti can be defined as a symptom of post-industrial megapolis culture, i.e. an excess that is an essential component of the system. Power requires the illusion of danger in order to be sustained or reinforced. The scrawled-upon walls of private buildings or scratched out windows of public transportation represent an excellent argument for bolstering police surveillance. Naturally, the system can derive advantages not only from the vandalizing nature of graffiti, but also from its creative element. Graffiti represents an addictive form of escape from the oppression of everyday existence, and thanks to this becomes a guarantee of the passivity of groups of people that might otherwise become the detonators of insurrection. As long as kids paint nonsensical messages on trains they won't begin to paint banners; as long as they form crews they won't establish political parties. And as long as they tinker around with airbrushes and cans of spray paint they won't make Molotov cocktails. Therefore, just like other apparently anti-establishment subcultures, even graffiti fundamentally



represents a form of mass entertainment, albeit one with a piquant tinge of criminality. Unlike the 1960s, when for a short time mass culture became a public platform for disseminating certain ideals of world transformation, today it functions unequivocally as a tool of control, even in manifestations that seemingly refute the values of mainstream society (Satanism in heavy metal music or gangs in hip hop). The designation of legal surfaces for graffiti became standard work for city councils. Writers provide a free service to city hall by painting the enticing grey walls of the city periphery. Today visitors to the big city are no longer greeted by the fuliginous stretches of train corridors but by festively colourful curved images. Graffiti has become an urban decorative fixture.

In the Czech Republic, graffiti became an expression for the first post-November generation, a content generation whose credo wasn't to fight the regime but to *be cool*. Graffiti arrived here at the beginning of the 1990s as a part of the new experience of freedom and the free market. People became familiarized with graffiti on trips to other European cities (the greatest inspiration for Prague was Berlin), in popular magazines for teenagers, and in American films and music videos. The first group of people to become actively involved in graffiti in Prague wasn't comprised of troubled adolescents from the ghetto but students at secondary art schools. The calculated stylization of the early years, which often included a good dose of overstatement, soon earned the aura of authenticity as the scene began to grow. A community arose and created its own virtual ghetto. The Czech scene now has its own recorded and published history, myths, heroes, dogma, rules of etiquette, and a deep-rooted intolerance for those that do not respect it – just like any true ghetto. The only difference being that after venting on the street, local writers return to the comfort of their parent's middle-class homes. For many of these individuals, graffiti becomes

the beginning of a successful career in graphic design or architecture. Denizens of real ghettos, Roma, are not involved to any great extent in graffiti.

The birth and strengthening of the community, battles with the law, the creation of a style, *muséification* and the commercialization that has played out in Prague over the course of approximately a decade (beginning in 1993–1994) has roughly followed, with a few modifications, the pattern of New York from the 70s and 80s. The difference was that the Prague protagonists must have known how things would turn out from the very beginning. Nevertheless, they acted as if the collapse that ended any effort to move the borders of graffiti had never occurred. Since the end of the 1990s, there has been a growing need among a number of aging members of the *old school* to *elevate* graffiti to some higher level. In addition to a few gallery shows that didn't really cause any great stir, it is necessary to mention, above all, the spatial realizations in the city produced by Point. The work of this prolific writer can be considered an example of a formal shift of borders that also preserves the essence of graffiti. At the same time, it represents a confirmation and consolidation of the status of graffiti as a form of urban décor. If we are to believe that these autotelic experiments are the best that the contemporary Prague graffiti scene has to offer, this would imply that the local scene is experiencing a period of stagnation. The over-production that can be seen particularly in legal zones does not offer evidence of a raging struggle for recognition but rather desperate attempts to hang on to life in a scene that is quickly fading into the past. It appears as if most energy is now being spent on organizing and promoting large-scale events such as public *battles* or on attempts to set various records like joint efforts to paint the largest wall with similar motifs. The overall impression of the contemporary scene is one of lifeless academicism, technically skilled work with occasional



elegance that is nonetheless vapid. Although the Prague scene arose as a secondary product of a media depiction of classic New York graffiti, it is sometimes more rigid than its legendary prototype.

A desire to return to the original rawness of the New York graffiti of the 1970s was the aim that brought together a group of younger generation writers that united under the designation of CRY CAP in 2005. The crew was composed of the writers Blez, Mosd, Masker, Dize, Key, and Crap. The choice of their name reflected the confrontational nature of their unification. CAP was the tag of a New York writer in the 1970s who specialized in going over other writers with primitive throw-ups. Members of the crew have used the tag CAP far more often than the entire appellation and it is this abbreviated version that has entered the general consciousness.

At the beginning, the work of CAP was strongly inspired by the formal appearance of the New York old-school graffiti. But the crew points out that their goal was not to mimic the style of the pathfinders but to approximate their rawness and spontaneity. CAP omits signs of existing styles and instead sets out in their own direction, an approach that radically sets them apart on the Prague scene. The crew's identifiable signature is simplicity of form accompanied by a strong figural component and ironic detachment. CAP reduces the materials they use to the essential minimum. They make do with outline and fill paint, often with a penetration coat and white latex. Crew writers prefer paint rollers to spray cans and caps. Typography is simplified to the basic shape of letters, which are then embellished with figural elements. The drawn motifs play the same essential role as the letters. Characters in fact often precede the lettering and determine its form. In this way CAP has achieved a hybrid status between graffiti and street art. While in graffiti, characters

create an overall insignificant complement to the inscription, in street art repeated motifs and characteristic handwriting represent the label of the writer, just like tags in graffiti. CAP uses the element of surprise, humour, and irony in selecting motifs, the manner in which they are tied to letters, and in connecting the piece to the specific environment in which it is created. They try, with varying degrees of success, not to repeat themselves. Nevertheless, favourite motifs appear on a regular basis, especially Shar-pei dogs and wood logs. CAP also stands apart in their choice of locations. The crew doesn't strive to be visible on the streets of Prague and their work only sporadically appears on legal surfaces. The majority of their pieces are produced on closed factories or deserted buildings on the outskirts of the city. Work from these locations is accessible to viewers exclusively through photography published on the Internet. This sends the signal that the work of CAP is not primarily intended as the provocation of ordinary people on the street. CAP has renounced one of the essential aspects of graffiti – the effort toward maximum tag visibility in the city. Besides the satisfaction they derive from the process of painting, the crew sees the meaning of its work in the confrontation with a narrow circle of graffiti enthusiasts and in questioning the limits, motives, and possibilities of this activity.

The relationship of CAP with the majority of the Prague scene was already tense before the actual founding of the crew, starting from the point when the typical features of the CAP approach first began to take shape in the works of its future members. During the two years of their existence so far, this confrontation has intensified to the point where CAP has become virtually isolated. From the beginning the target of this indignant reaction has been the visual appearance of the crew's pieces, which are devoid of any decorative attractiveness and signs of masterly skill. The brownish tones resulting from



the use of penetration coatings seemed to taunt the polished colouring of surrounding pieces on legal surfaces. This annoyed several members of the scene so much that they labelled the style of CAP as "shit splattering." Certain purists refused to accept their pieces as graffiti, using the argument that CAP does not use spray paint. Even moderate opponents were reluctant to recognize the work as graffiti and proposed that CAP's pieces be considered as a derivative discipline such as street art. More sophisticated critics then articulated a hypothesis that CAP produced a type of conceptual *toy graffiti* whose purpose was to provoke the scene and gain recognition in some other, for example, artistic environment. As the confrontation became fiercer, the intolerance of the scene shifted from the actual work of CAP to the radical positions the crew championed. In discussions on the Graffneck website that ensued in reaction to a minor critical comment made by one member of the crew to the monstrous Cosmoproduction project, CAP formulated a detailed position and presented an exhaustive critique of the Prague scene and graffiti in general. Another confrontation erupted in the autumn of 2006 when CAP slashed several pieces at Těšnov with images of wood logs. In subsequent discussions, both sides only confirmed the mutual irreconcilability of their positions.

Even CAP was induced to experiment by the need to *shift* the borders of graffiti. However, this was meant to be a *shift* of a radically different nature than attempts by Prague mainstream practitioners. While the spatial realization of Point can be labelled as an expansion of the existing form of graffiti to include different materials, CAP categorically rejects the status quo. The first case is an effort to "move things forward" inspired by the desire to be an ever greater *king* – to have it bigger, more colourful, more 3-D, and more visible. CAP's resolution for change is based on an apparently naïve lack of understanding

for why certain predetermined rules should be respected and why all efforts should be taken to solidify the current status of matters. These juvenile queries express a radical change in their position. CAP articulates the need to view graffiti in the *broad context*. As such the crew oversteps the boundaries of the given subculture in its particular niche. It ostentatiously declares its contempt for the context of *neighbourhood* and seeks to identify the meaning of graffiti for society as a whole. Their unflattering response to their own question is: *Graffiti today is nothing more than urban décor*.

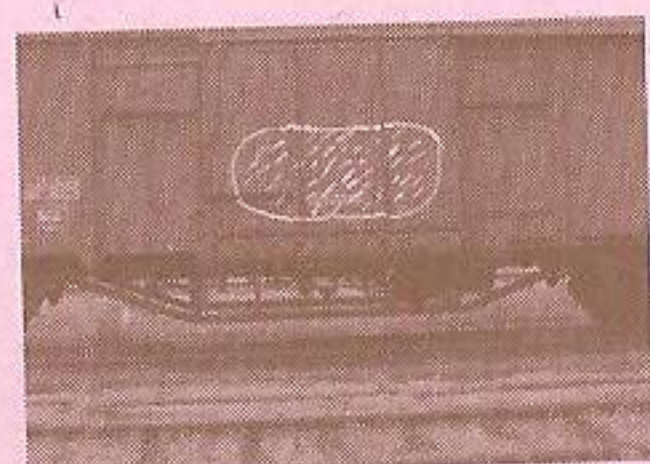
The position voiced by CAP is paradoxical for graffiti. CAP's pieces in this light can best be described as *anti-graffiti*, or as graffiti that contains its own self-critique. As was the case with the Dada movement, which declared itself *anti-art* but could only function as such in the context of art, the approach of CAP is an attempt at the negation of graffiti that only makes sense within this particular discipline. It isn't about breaking beyond the limits of graffiti, but rather an effort to establish new critical lines in the field.

Censure and negativity can be seen in two basic aspects of the CAP stance. The first is the denial of style as one of the fundamental values of graffiti. CAP declares a desire not to have a style. The transcendence of style, or the elimination of all elements that carry a sign of habit, naturally remains in the case of CAP a matter of mere theory. While CAP has managed to disengage itself from the burdens of existing graffiti styles, in doing so the crew has created its own unmistakable form of expression. Their denouncement of style therefore manifests itself only in isolated cases of the calculated appropriations of morphologies from other writers. The second aspect in which it is possible to see the criticalness of the CAP stance is in their ironic *dull* creativity. CAP searches for the most infantile ideas

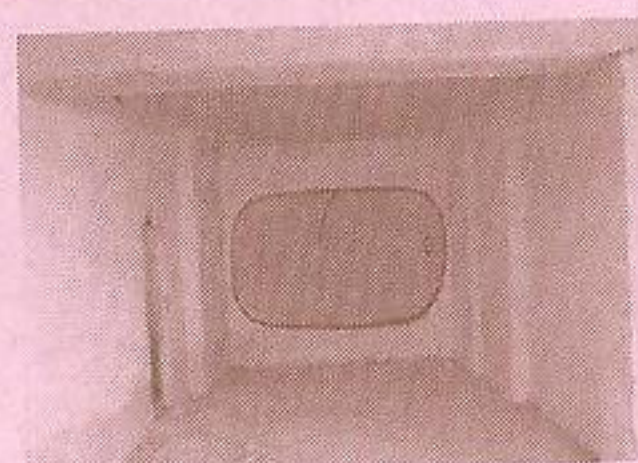


flirting with complete idiocy. They cavort in the stupidity of the motifs and take their artistic execution to extremes, thus exposing the bare primitiveness of graffiti with its sole message of *I am here!*

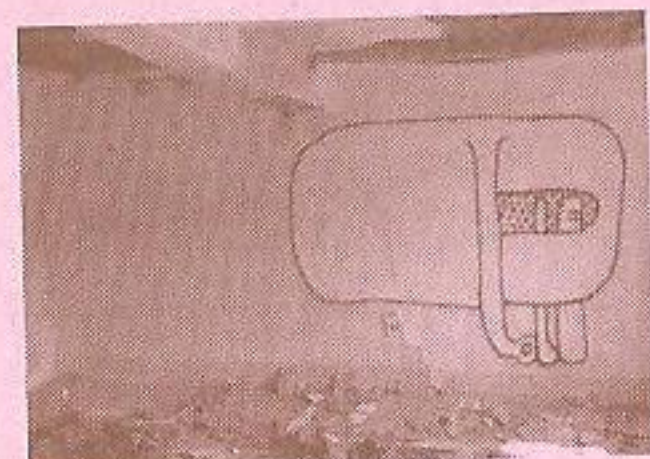
The fact that CAP performs its activities under the cover of old factories away from highly visible locations can be interpreted as a metaphor of the passivity of graffiti. This is an expression of the dearth of hope that is sometimes read into graffiti. If graffiti is able to disrupt a pedestrian from the regular rhythm of his movement through the city streets and make him stop for a moment and look, it cannot and doesn't aspire to offer him anything more than the naked truth of presence at a specific location. A cracked door offering a chance of escape is fleetingly suggested and then just as quickly slammed shut.



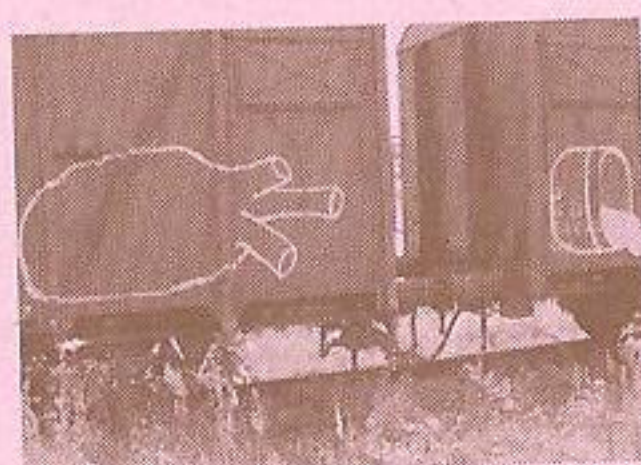
Blez  
Prague  
Czech  
2005



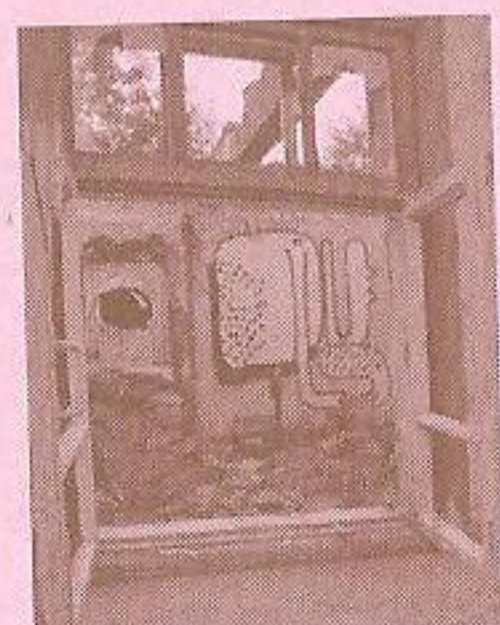
Blez  
Prague  
Czech  
2005



Ble  
abandoned village  
Ukraine  
2005



Blez  
Prague  
Czech  
2005



Apl/Ble  
abandoned village  
Ukraine  
2005



Blez  
Odessa  
Ukraine  
2005



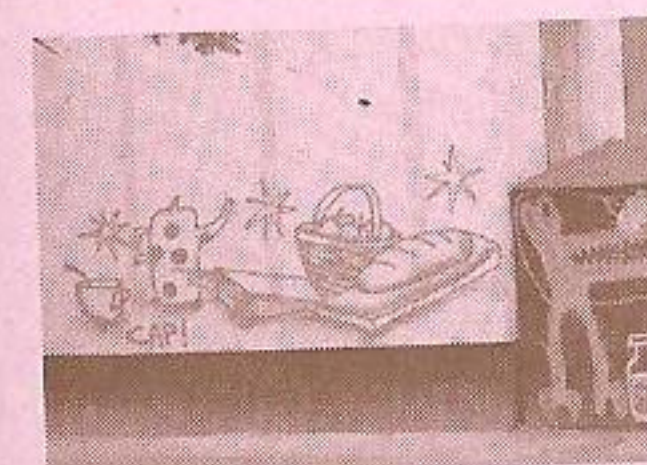
Blez  
abandoned vill  
Ukraine  
2005



Blez  
abandoned village  
Ukraine  
2005



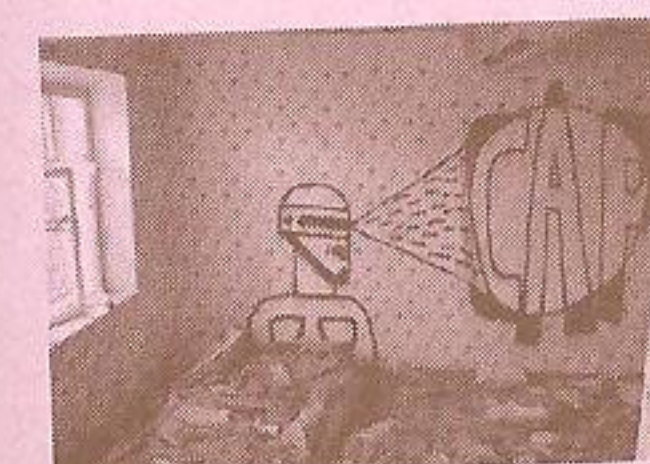
Pot  
Mosd  
Prague  
Czech  
2006



Kto  
Moscow  
Russia  
2006



Cap  
Mosd  
Prague  
2006



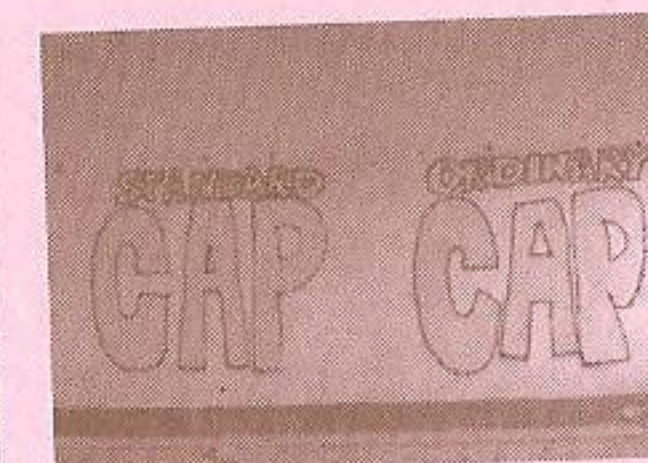
Cap  
Blez  
abandoned village  
Ukraine  
2005



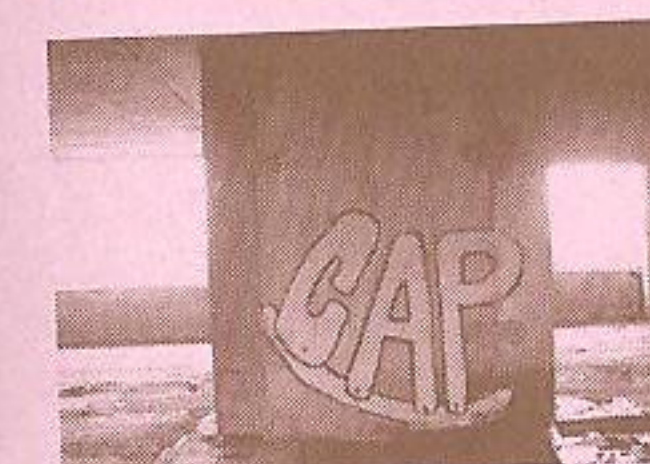
Cap  
Blez/Mosd  
Malekino  
Ukraine  
2006



Kep Cap  
Mosd  
Prague  
Czech  
2006



Cap/Cap  
Mosd/Blez  
Milovice  
Czech  
2007



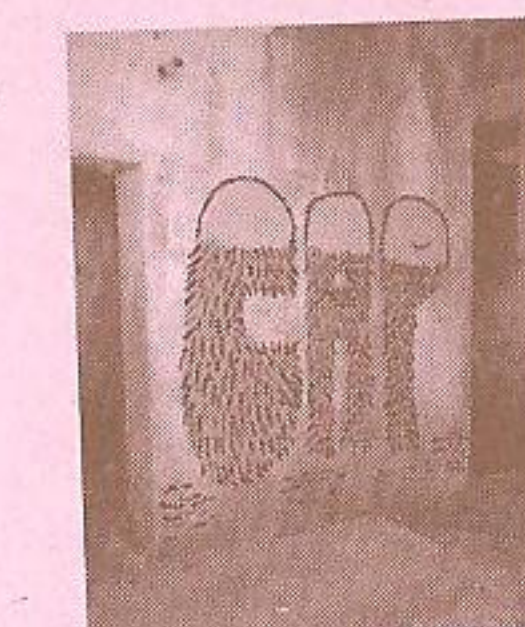
Cap  
Mosd  
Prague  
Czech  
2006



Cap  
Mosd  
Prague  
Czech  
2006



Cap  
Key  
Prague  
Czech  
2006



Cap  
Blez  
Prague  
Czech  
2005