

CBS Fan Club Project
by Kathryn Nussdorf

Today more than ever, famous people and groups are marketed and packaged as consumer goods. Their personalities, wealth and privilege are fed to us and, obediently, we buy the products they promote. Feeding people's fantasies is effective advertising, and by it, society dictates who to admire: certain images saturate the media and is perpetuated by wearing the logos, paying any amount of money to see the current idols and consume things "associated" with them. But it's really about consumerism, about making money out of people's need to idolize someone bigger than themselves, a material hero-worship. It's mass behavior that even children are displaying.

I have found a group that represents the opposite of all this pre-packaged idolry and consumerism. It is a graffiti group in Berlin whose work is really great. I am intrigued by them, by the anonymity they have to preserve and the mystery behind all their messages and intricate graffiti. I've been following their work and photographing it. So far I have collected over 100 photos, but their work is so prolific, I could take 100 more. They are very creative but, in spite of the fact that they leave large, colorful messages all over town, almost nobody has noticed them. I have come to consider them like a famous pop group and I decided to make a "fan club" about them and exhibited it. But by being anonymous, socially critical and making public art for free, they stand in direct opposition to those for whom fan clubs are usually made.

Their graffiti is recognizable. Green monsters, yellow fists, cartoon faces and elaborate, colorful lettering styles is typical of them. Even their stickers are always making a statement, though it's open to interpretation. They can be socially critical (see graffiti of plane crashing into CBS buildings, Fig. 25), politically cynical (see sticker series to vote for them, Fig. 13, 14) or simply anti-establishment (Fig. 16, 17, etc). They are constantly designing new graffiti, messages, cartoons and lettering styles, as well as designing and printing stickers and posting them all over town. One can't walk 5 meters in Prenzlauer Berg or Mitte without seeing one of their signs.

What they do is illegal, yet they make such large, colorful, detailed graffiti that they are obviously taking a big risk. If they got caught they could pay up to 3,000 € in fines. Some complain about graffiti, but what really is the aesthetic difference between a colorful graffiti covering the side of a building and the huge advertisements covering entire building facades, including the windows? Why is one thing abhorrent and the other, which intrudes on the building's inhabitants and says nothing more than how to spend your money, attractive? Companies today can even leave their advertisements up way beyond renovations (recall the Brandenburger Tor's "renovation", when it was completely blanketed by a Deutsche Telekom ad for over two years).

As they must remain anonymous, they use pseudonyms to sign their work. The individuals have no glory, except among themselves and their friends. The group takes precedence over the 6 individual members (their most common sticker says "CBS above everything"). And keep in mind, they are obliged to work under less than ideal circumstances and of course at night. In the end, they have no control over how long their work will remain. Some has been around for years; some was destroyed a few hours after it was finished. To them it's just important to do it. They do it all of their own volition, and without any kind of fame or recompense. But because it is not allowed, not official art, or advertising, they are not acknowledged. Nobody sees them, though they are all around you.

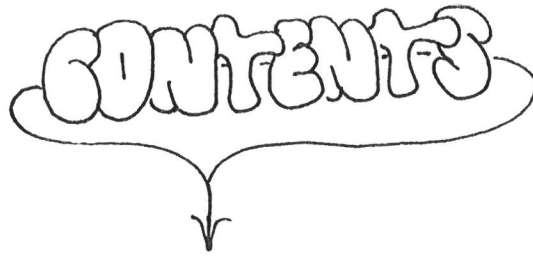
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About the Author

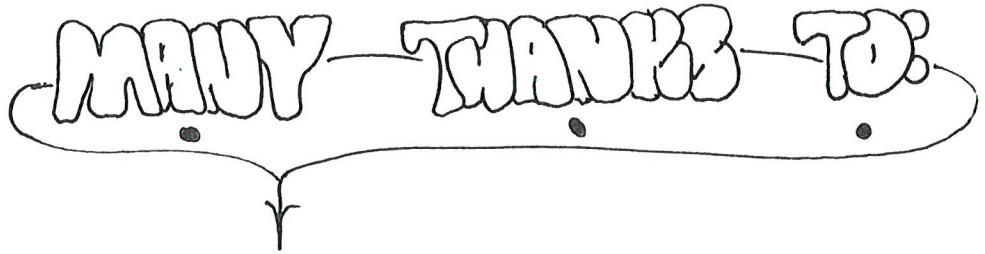
Kathryn Nussdorf was born in 1968 in Connecticut, USA, has a bachelor of science degree in architecture and design from MIT and a Master degree in Fine Arts from the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee. A practicing artist, she writes and illustrates the MSA English Training books for German high school students. Additionally, she teaches technical English at Beuth Technische Fachhochschule and business English at Bayer Pharma Healthcare. She currently lives and works in Berlin.

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Wex, for putting me in touch with the CBS crew.

Zedrik, for the insight.

Professor Neugebauer, for making me prove the group exists.

Thomas B., for his insider experience.

The City of Berlin, for leaving graffiti up for all to enjoy.

• • •

Proceeds from this book and merchandise go toward the CBS crew so they can continue their free expression, and for paying fines if they get caught.

• • •

T-Shirts, posters, postcards and stickers are available at the following locations:

- *Tonikum Records*, Pappelallee
- *CBS Headquarters*, Berlin
- Directly from the publisher
- Directly from the author

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All events related after this page are true.

Chapter V: Interview with Zedric

A few days later Wex called me and said he had gotten in touch with the CBS guys, but that they didn't want to meet me. They wanted to remain anonymous and had nothing to say. I pleaded with him. "Tell them that I'm just an art student and I'm doing this project not just for school but because I really like their work and want to know more about it." I think I even told him that my professor and the students don't believe the group exists and think I'm just imagining the whole thing. He promised to relay the message but said there was little hope. I was disappointed and reconciled myself to the fact that the project would just be about the photos, and I'd have to live with my opinions about what all the messages mean, instead of finding out their real intent.

A couple of hours later the phone rang again. "Hello." "Hi, this is Zedric from CBS. Wex tells us you're an art student and are interested in our work." I felt like Madonna was on the phone. "Yes. I'm really interested in your work and I've been following it and would love to talk to you about what it means." He said, "Yeah. At first I didn't want to talk to you about it because Wex said you're just doing it for a school project." I answered, "It *has* become a school project for me but it developed that way because no one has noticed your work or believes you exist. I really started following you because I think your work is great, and I've taken like 200 pictures." So then he proposed to meet in a couple of hours at a U-Bahn station and go to a park. He said he would bring his photo album and I should bring mine. I was totally excited and of course agreed.

. . .

We met on the U-Bahn platform, as planned, on a sunny holiday afternoon. He was young, I thought 23, dark hair, good looking. We bought drinks and decided to go to Mauer Park. He had his photo album with him, a huge book with over one hundred photos of the graffiti he and his group had done. I had many of the same photos but there were some nice shots of work I hadn't seen before. He said that all sprayers document their work in photo albums, but can't keep them at home because they can be used as evidence in a raid. Then he looked at my pictures. As it turned out, I had a couple of photos *he* didn't have because it was too difficult for him to shoot them (fig. 20,21,22). Figure 20 and 21 I got by asking the hotel across the train tracks if I could go up to their roof and take a photo, which they let me do. Figure 22 was taken when the train had by chance stopped right in front of the CBS letters on the side of a building otherwise impossible to see. He was impressed by my photo collection. I was honored to give him photos he didn't have.

Then he began to talk about the group. He told me that he and another CBS member had just gone to Rome and sprayed trains there with an Italian group. That they only slept, partied and sprayed. In Rome, the trains aren't washed off like in Berlin so it's more satisfying to spray there. The same is the case in Poland and Russia, so they went there, too, with an Italian sprayer.

He said they do graffiti out of boredom and because it's fun: it's illegal and therefore challenging. He pointed out that graffiti is a phenomena found mostly in rich western countries rather than in war-torn, poor countries because they have too many other problems. He explained that graffiti was originally associated with the hip-hop scene and started out as a rebellion, a protest against the establishment.

The original idea for the group came from someone named Zoom who had a lot of ideas, but who is doing music now and is no longer with them. Zoom, Zedric and Cauze (Drama) were original members. Then came Kripoe, Kobra (Ehsone), and Monky. Each has their own specialty: Kripoe does the yellow fists, Kobra and Monky do faces, Zedric (also Z'ric) does letters. The letters CBS don't have one particular meaning. Like "*CBS über alles*" (fig. 1-3) comes from "*Deutschland*

über alles” and means that the group is more important than family or friends. “*Bomben bis der Arzt kommt*” (fig. 15 and cover) means they are crazy about spraying: they’ll spray until they are sent to the hospital. C.B.S. = *Can’t Be Stopped* (fig. 0) or “*CowBoyS*” (fig. 24) or even “*Cnast BrotherS*” (*Knast* means jail)

They spray in groups of 2 or 3 or even alone. First they do the outline, and sometimes they have to come back to finish it, which he said is annoying. Zedric likes to stylize letters. He originally sprayed trains and even had to change his name so as not to be caught by the police. For example, he got hold of a key to the train depot at Warschauerstrasse station and did a train one night. Trains are still done in Berlin but now they are washed within a few hours, so you rarely see graffiti on them anymore.

He explained how they go about doing it. Take the example of the CBS letters on the three chimneys of an apartment building across from the Prenzlauer Allee S-Bahn station (fig. 23). It was especially difficult because he has a fear of heights! The roof was also too steep. So they put on safety belts and wrapped them around the chimney. The others held Zedric while hung down below the chimney and sprayed the letters. He said he almost fainted.

It’s really a group thing, he said. Some get the ideas while others style the words or characters. The giant CBS graffiti of the two fists giving the finger (fig. 16, 17) was done with rollers from the roof. The neighbors watched them do it and in the end the boys were full of paint.

Zedric isn’t so active in the group anymore because he’s older now and has a child. He said he can’t stay up all night and then get up the next morning for work, and that has been the case with many of the guys in the group. They all started as teenagers right after the wall came down, as a protest against capitalism infiltrating their neighborhoods. They are trying to make people think, not necessarily to make a statement or give their opinion. Like for Sept. 11, they sprayed a plane flying into pink CBS letters stylized as buildings (fig. 25). They just wanted to show it.

I told him about some of my ideas for this project. For instance, they could make a video where they black out their heads and instead put in graffiti-drawn heads (see Photo-Ops section). I told him I wanted to make a fan-club as though CBS were a pop group. They promote themselves as a pop group who sells nothing. As anti-capitalists they spread their messages and give their art away for free. They use DDR symbols for notions such as brotherhood (handshake), equality, spread the wealth (sausage for everyone), and the group over the individual (CBS above everything).

. . .

At the end of the semester, I had an exhibition called *The CBS Fan Club*, and made posters, t-shirts and postcards using their designs and logo styles. I hung all the photos on the wall, had a slide show, guest book and Ostmarks strewn on the table. I invited Zedric to the exhibition and he told his buddies. The result is a lot of graffiti and stickers done by them anonymously in my guest book, which is now this book.

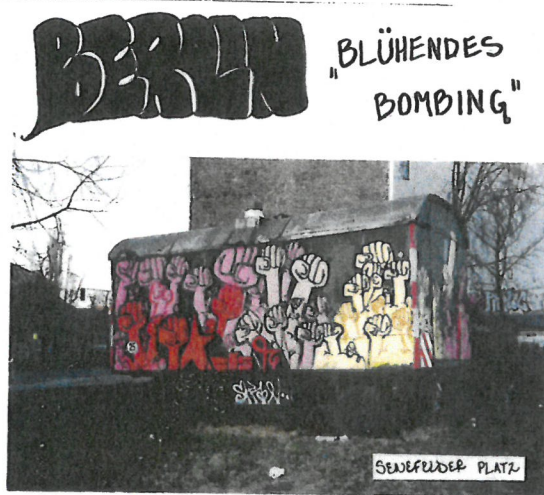
Later I was contacted by the group to do a film extolling the artistic merit of the CBS group and to explain why I wanted to make this project, as part of an idea to open a graffiti museum. Since the exhibition a number of graffiti artists have been accepted into art schools, and graffiti has taken off as a valid art form (see Akim and the clipping from the *based in Berlin* catalogue, 2011).

THE EXHIBITION: The CBS Fan Club

- Postcard (see below)
- Guestbook including original graffiti by guests (following 7 pages and at end of book)
- Photos of the CBS Fan Club exhibition showing:
 - Photo collection
 - Posters
 - Clothing with logo
 - Display table with Postcards, T-shirt with logo, Ostmarks, Slide show, Magazine on graffiti with article on CBS
- Poster prototype (watercolor on paper)
- Photo Op sessions
- Photo collection of CBS graffiti and stickers around Berlin
 - Monsters
 - Fists and faces
 - Letters
 - Names
 - Stickers
- Original stickers (kindly donated by CBS members)



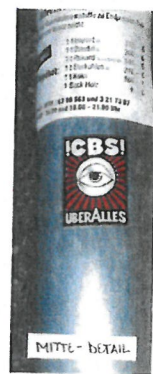
POSTCARD



RAUBERFACH



ALTER BAHNHOFSEITE GESUNDHEIT



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Exhibition Photos

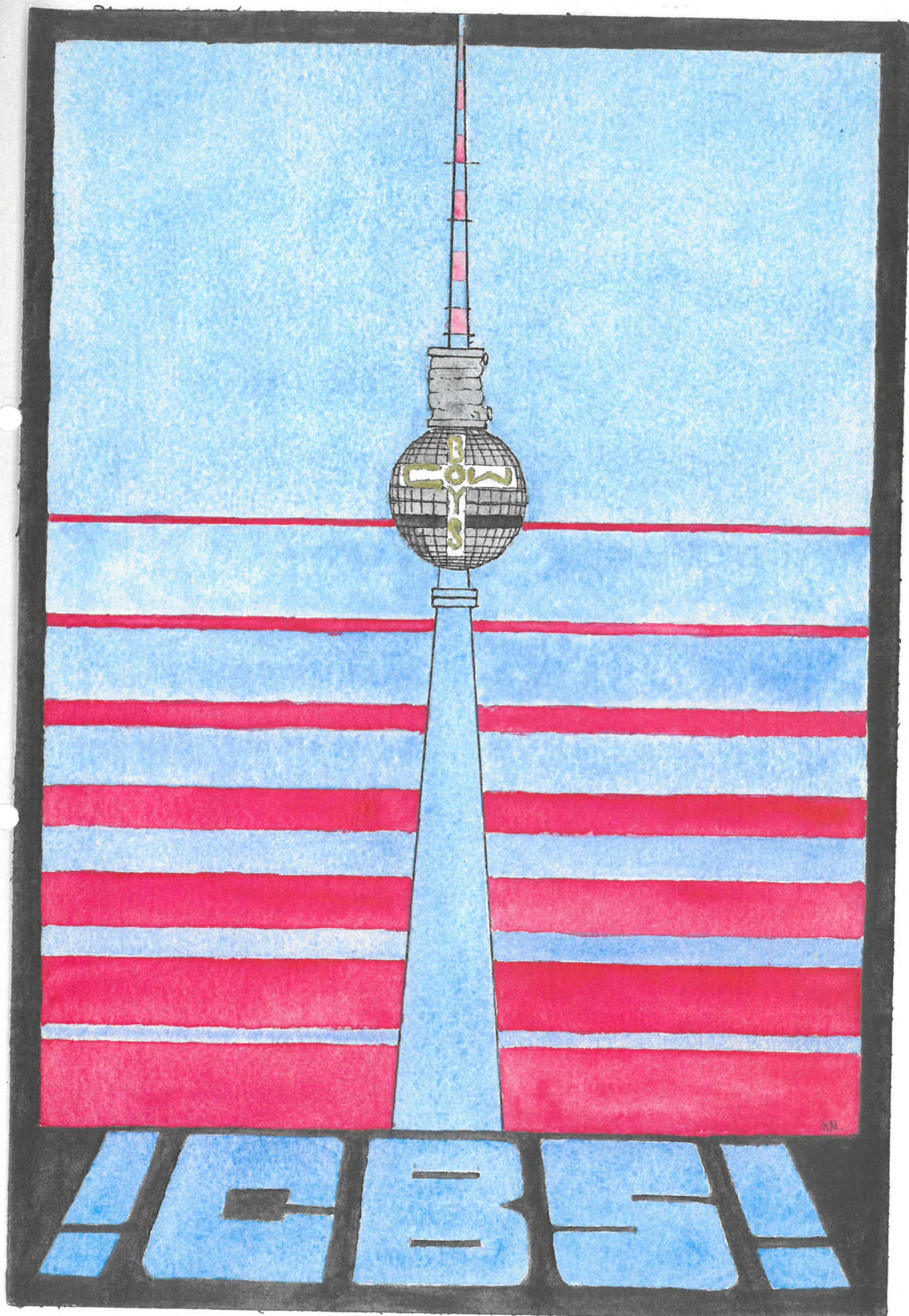




T-SHIRT + JACKET
BASED ON CBS
DESIGNS.

(TEXTILE PAINT ON CLOTH)





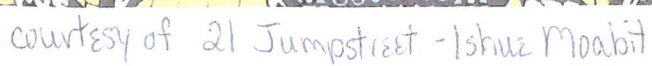


PHOTO OP



The author with Kripoe



Monky, Cauze and Zedvic

Fists + Faces



Fig. 40 Senefelderplatz



Fig. 41 S-Westend



Fig 62 Hackescher Markt,
arches



Fig. 63 Prenzlauer Berg

Names



Fig 64 Prenzlauer Berg "Monki"



Fig. 65 Prenzlauer Berg "Cobra"

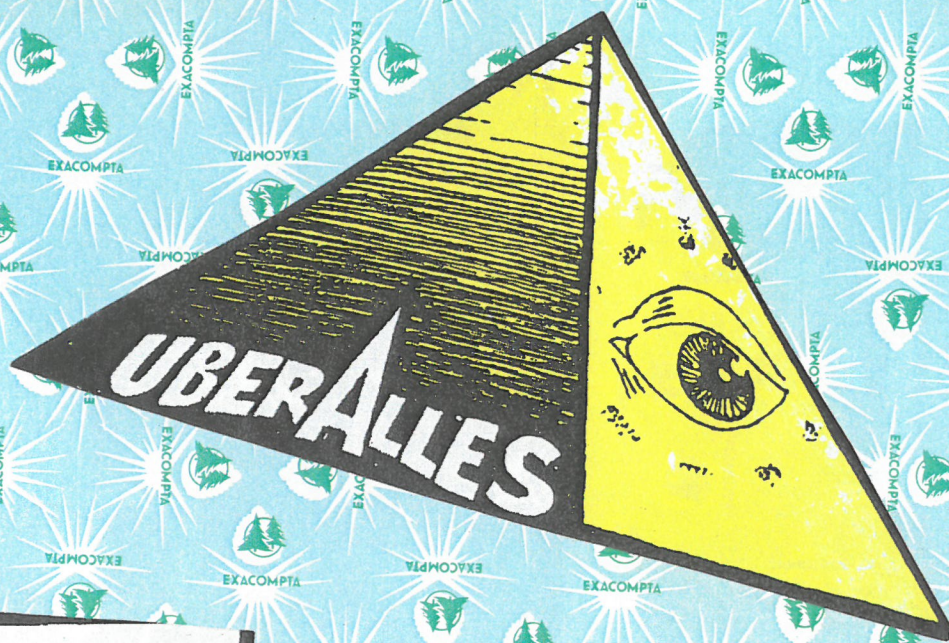
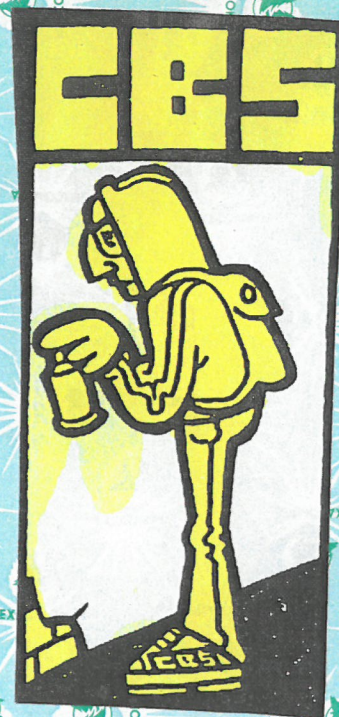




Fig 13 "elect CBS"
Fig. 14 "Berliner elect CBS"

