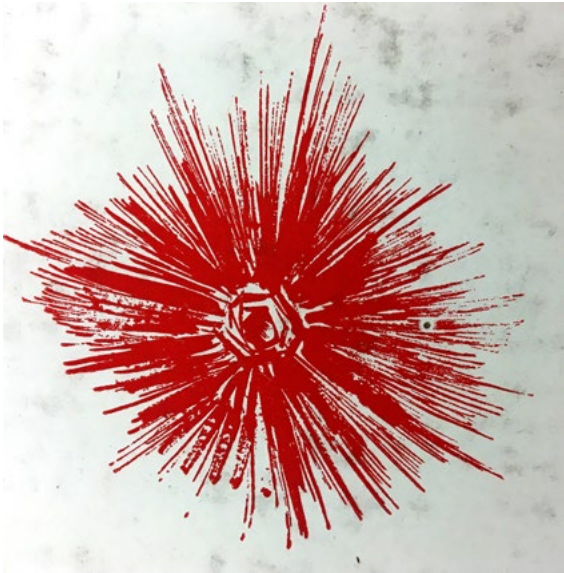


Dust Covers have a Score
Aikaterini Gegisian

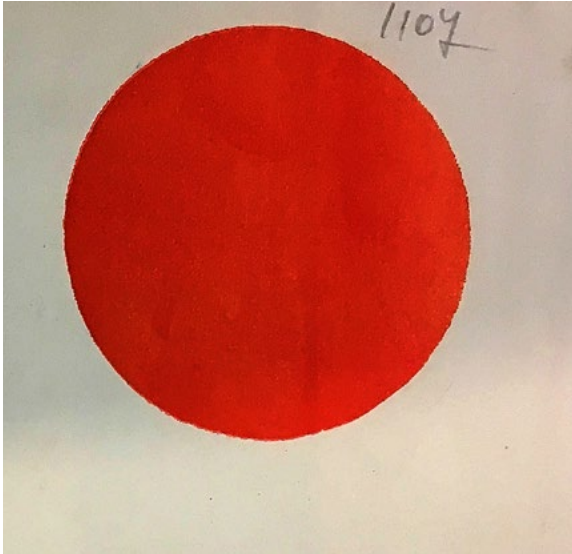
Sometimes objects, material, books are kept (saved) without any concrete idea of how they will enter archival knowledge. The dust jackets of books from Socialist countries, held now in the Grassi Museum of Applied Arts in Leipzig, are lumped together in a series of boxes without any contextual information. In the anecdotal realm, the collection was saved because of the passion of a publisher (concomitant with Leipzig as a publishing centre mythology), while the actual books were thrown away or destroyed. I got interested in this bizarre collection, precisely, because of its amorphous and random nature, a collection that includes books of many genres (history, religion, world arts, travel, science, literature) from a range of socialist countries, including books from the Soviet Union.

Researching the publishing history of East Germany, and especially the production of photography, I was not satisfied with the dominant reading of the cultural landscape of GDR through the prism of its relationship with West Germany. The collection of socialist dust jackets attracted me because it reveals a different set of cultural exchanges; the books that entered and circulated in East Germany from other socialist countries, provide a testimony (a trace) of relations, which break the West- East German binary. At the same time, looking through them, you can sense, a thematic commitment to and a continuation of the European humanist tradition, which represents a hegemonic model of knowledge production.

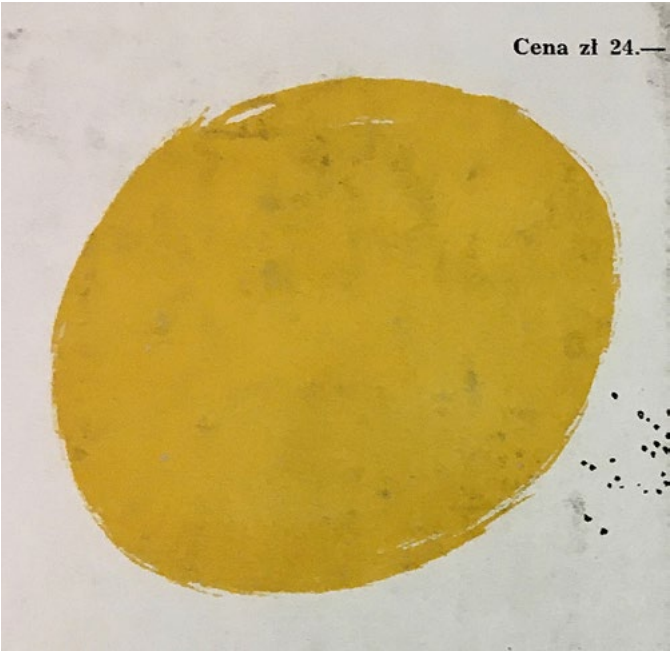
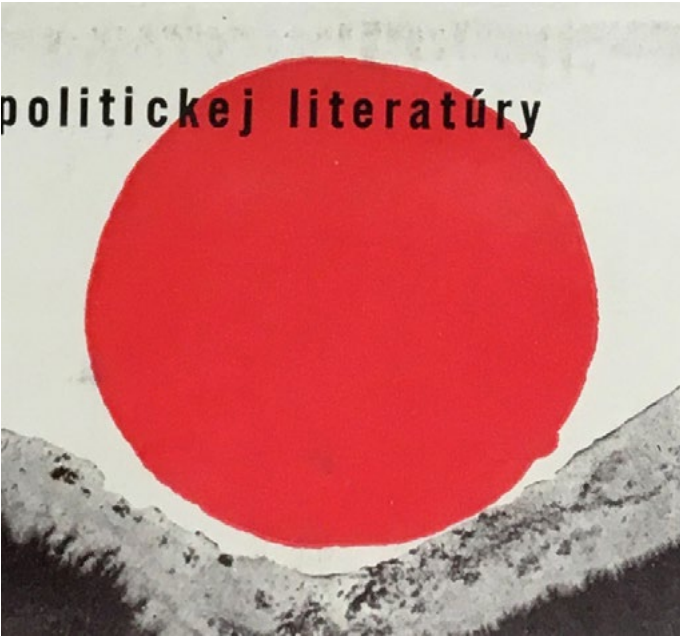
Tone Seliškar
People with red flowers
Slovenia, 1961



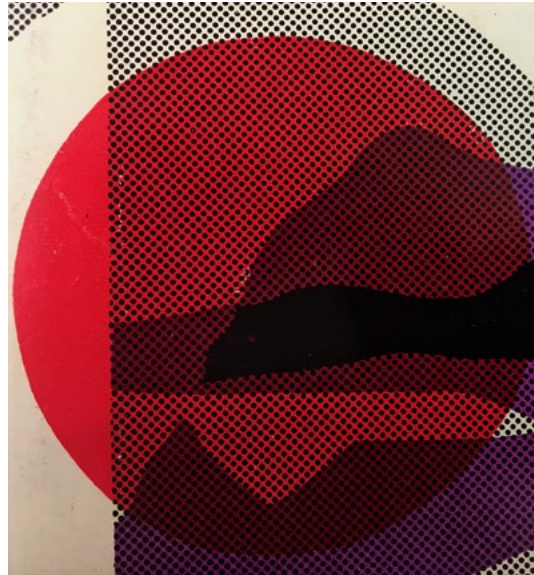
Boris Pinyak
The world is full of people



Ladislav Mňačko
Delayed Reportages
Czechoslovakia, 1963



Czesław Podgórski
Soldiers's Way
Poland, 1963



Otásek, F., Bajer, M.
Air inertization in unified mines
in the presence of methane
SNTL SVTL, Praha 1963



Miro Vladimír
Hot Sky
Czechoslovakia, 1969



Gustaw Alef-Bolkowiak
On the anti-Nazi fronts of the war
Album of postage stamps
Polland, 1972

To my eyes, the amorphous collection revealed a new visual vocabulary of graphic design, which guided my initial question: how to map the traces of cultural exchanges (that revealed a life outside the East-West Germany binary) through the development of a formal vocabulary. Doreen Mende's 'decolonizing socialism' methodology, introduced during the "Workshop Archiving Club Cultures from Late Socialism through the Era of 'Social Distancing'" was a first step in approaching the collection as a testimony of erased cultural relations. Aby Warburg's 'Mnemosyne Atlas', by now a cultural signifier in following a haptic, metonymic, intuitive reading of images, emerged as a guide in establishing a certain cultural logic of association.

In it often that I address visual pleasure when rereading archives but mostly as an afterthought. In the socially distancing life of the pandemic, the visual exuberance of connecting with the collection of dust jackets became my driving principle. This signifies an acceptance of embodied relations in the cohabiting with images and ideas, of meaning not only produced within established western knowledge structures. In other words, as the dust jackets open up a horizon of possibilities in re-imaging a set of relations and dialogues between diverse genres, forms and locations, my first attempt of making these connections visible is by allowing the material to become part of my visual vocabulary of possibilities.

Aikaterini Gegisian
February 2022