

SUMMARY

Katarzyna Szychta-Mielewczyk

“Image as a Weapon. Visual Messages of Independent Prints in Poland in the 1980s.”

Rebellion against communism in Poland in the 1980s took on various forms. One of the most important, and most influential, resistance elements was the issuing of independent publications, including stamps and postcards, leaflets, posters, and banknotes, which carried various images.

This thesis is an in depth examination of these types of independent prints. Obtaining, analyzing, and systematizing the content placed on such media is the key to further considerations of, e.g., how they influenced individuals, particular groups, society, and the construction of oppositional identity.

The work consists of three chapters.

The first chapter attempts to contextualise independent creative activity, including historical examples of the use of images to construct specific messages affecting society; particular emphasis is placed on images used during periods of conflict.

The second chapter is the core of this thesis. In this chapter, the material acquired during research is presented. It is divided into two main categories, i.e. the iconography of events and the iconography of figures (2.1. and 2.2.), which are complemented by other subsections devoted to, e.g., commemorative publications (2.3.). Of a slightly different character is the subsection on the ‘Solidarity’ sign designed by Jerzy Janiszewski (2.4.) – it collects various examples of the use of this symbol on independent artifacts, indicating selected variants, which are modifications and transformations of the original design.

Chapter three brings together the conclusions of the search. These are divided into three areas, each covering a different interpretive scope. In the first (3.1.), the focus is on visual practices – the reactions occurring at the image-human point of contact expressed in the form of actions taken by people about specific media on which the images were placed; these may include,

e.g., collecting, hiding, or destroying. The second (3.2.) briefly characterizes the senders and recipients of independent publications and presents selected mechanisms accompanying the creation of visual messages – these include, e.g., the affirmation and negation of particular figures, events, or ideas. In the third (3.3), the issue of the discussed independent prints is placed in a broader perspective, indicating that it is only one of the areas comprising the image-based communication system. One of the themes considered is also the use of the term “propaganda” in the context of activities carried out by independent creators.

In the literature, one can find statements confirming the conviction of the important, or even crucial, role of underground prints in the fight for freedom. Wiesław Kukła, author of a catalog of underground banknotes (*Banknoty opozycji w Polsce 1982-1988*, Poznań 2011), dedicates his publication to printers, addressing them as follows: ‘In the memory of the printers of the underground who made freedom come earlier.’ Of course, independent publishing was not the direct cause of the overthrow of the communist system, which was the result of various factors. Still, the role played by underground prints should not be underestimated. It could be said that independent publishing fuelled the subversive activities that broke the communist monolith. Every manifestation of independent thinking left a mark on it, heralding the downfall of the People’s Republic of Poland.