Workshop 2

CCP1

During the Minitremu art camp Răzvan worked with a series of images in books from the Medias Jewish library. Together we had made an initial selection of images which could be relevant – generally focusing on images that reflect an aspect of local Jewish life (signatures, inscriptions, stamps, sketches) while also being of interest visually. Răzvan made the final selection. One of the images was a stamp (found inside a book, prob. stamped by a child) reading „kosher sheep“ with “kosher” in Hebrew and “sheep” in Romanian. I (Julie) was outside when Răzvan began his presentation with the students. When I entered the room I heard a man, who had already rubbed me the wrong way by interrupting my earlier talk multiple times to make inaccurate observations (minyan number, etc), interrupt Răzvan and begin to explain kosher food and slaughtering. (I later found out he was one of the co-founders of the camp, at the time he had not been introduced and I could not understand his connection to the group, at the very beginning I had thought he was a self-important tourist). Since I had walked in during the middle of the conversation I did not want to interrupt in case I was misunderstanding what was happening, both from a contextual and linguistic perspective, but my fragmented impression of what he was saying sounded fundamentally and stereotypically anti-Semitic – lots of blather about blood, lots of phrases that Othered anything related to Jews - beginning with the food they ate. When I brought this up with the others later, Matei Bellu, the ethnographer who was in the room at the time, also confirmed that the man’s words somehow brought to mind the blood libel stories, so much talk about blood and strange, foreign, mysterious customs.

This would be one of several instances in which images (from our archives and books) we have chosen for use in our work, acquire a secondary, unexpected meaning that can and may easily make the initial, more superficial meaning quickly irrelevant. Other examples are a picture of the well-known and generally hated Ana Pauker (will introducing her image, with a caption in Yiddish, here in this Jewish space, reemphasize her Jewish origin and confirm, for some, the Jewish-Communist conspiracy?) or an image of a corpulent, Hassidic Jew, on the cover of a biography for the Vijnitzer rabbi (does it bring to mind anti-Semitic cartoons or act to confirm the “otherness” of religious Jews by way of their dress, body type, etc )?