

ULRIKE GROSSARTH

Current interests:

- Bartering and its basics, values in general, their origin and the rules governing the economic language for the exchange of goods.
- Subject-constitutive conditions derived from economic contexts.
- Practical preparation of Central-Eastern European archive material in seminars, exhibitions and actions at original locations.
- 'blank space productivity' (Sylvia Krämer) in the Salle des Mères.

From the beginning of my artistic work, I have been interested in methods and forms permanently allowing for the creation of an open space in which non-closable and ephemeral structures may emerge.

A prerequisite for this is the acceptance of the continuous transformation of forms developed, for instance, by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition*, as variables that still need to be developed in culture. In her systematic analysis of the three fundamental activities of *labour*, *work* and *action*, she describes the concept of action as the "actual underlying human capacity [...] to start new unprecedented processes whose outcome remains uncertain and unpredictable". This "new science" (Hannah Arendt) cannot be purely theoretical to be then transferred, in an exemplary way, to the world of bodies; it results from a labour that is aware of its relationships and conditions.

The detection of this vacant space in the traditional sets of rules of western societies, where they exist as unconscious zones or fallouts that are bridged by abstractions has been the basic theme in my work since the 1980s and is further developed by projects in south-east Poland.



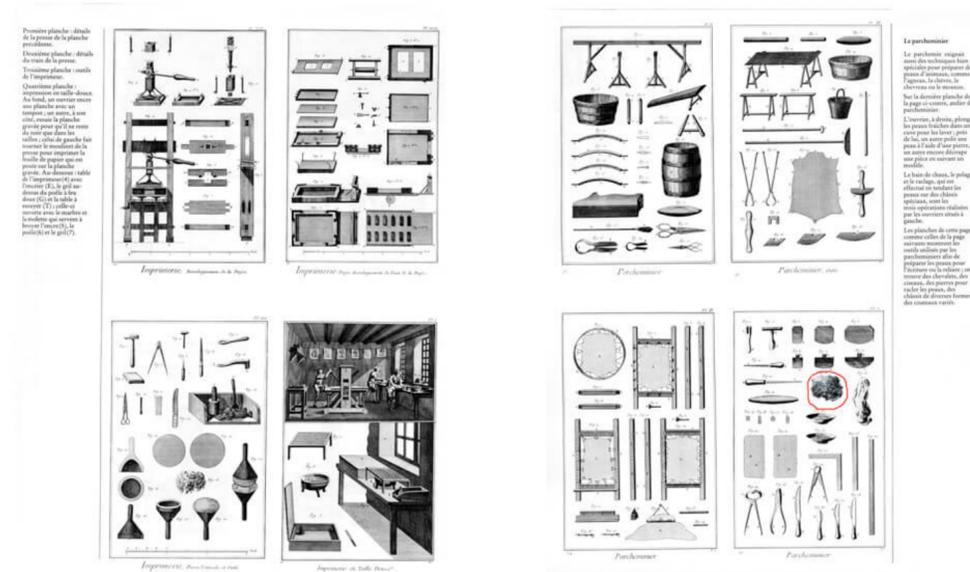
ulica Nowa 17, Lublin 1930s, Photo: Stefan Kielsznia



ulica Nowa 21, Lublin 1930s, Photo: Stefan Kielsznia

The photo archive of Stefan Kielsznia

In 2006, I chanced upon the photographic work of Stefan Kielsznia in Lublin, Poland. It testifies to a phase in the interwar period during which multiple ethnicities naturally coexisted next to each other in Poland. Since then I have been working with this archive in a variety of ways; I was also able to publish in book form in 2011. Over a period of 14 years, I have further collected a stockpile of photos, posters, newspaper clippings and photographic research results from the Central-Eastern European regions. My intention here is to process and interconnect these various materials which next to texts mainly comprise visual media such as drawings, projections, development of symbols, allegories and figures, and which are reflected in performative formats and the staging of social events. Understanding any kind of form not as absolute but as conditional has allowed me to comprehend that connections and cultural milieus emerge from the peculiarities of the elements involved. Especially in the "Polish" projects undertaken in Poland and the Ukraine since 2006, this approach has become the key to the possibility of complex links between different cultural, geographic and mental-historical strands. The motifs and figures from the illustrated books of the *Encyclopédie* by Diderot & D'Alembert from 1751 play an important role in this approach.



„Imprimerie” and „Parcheminier” from „Diderot und D’Alembert, Encyclopédie”, Paris 1751

The confrontation of the "Polish and Ukrainian material" with this western European "cultural preserve" creates a milieu of multiplied categories, through which the traditional thinking model of modernity, which is necessarily changing in general, can be expanded and unconscious but still powerful details of historical events are allowed to surface.



ulica Nowa 17, Lublin 1930s, Photo: Stefan Kielnsznia – *running Lubartowska*, Dresden 2010, Photo: David Brandt

In the street photography of Stefan Kielnsznia which is devoid of any desire for representation, reveals an urban space where no alienation seems to have taken place. The character of the advertising panels, in which the writing and the depiction of products are given equal emphasis, reveals an even co-existence of different degrees of abstraction, yielding an “evenly flowing” structure in which chains of functionality appear to have been suspended by the natural juxtaposition of Polish and Jewish stores with their painted advertising panels and typographies of (trade) names. My interest in it is, among other things, the visualisation of the layers of meaning preparatory to the exchange transaction.

With a quote from Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Warenform und Denkform* [Commodity Form and Thought Form], I became aware of the paradoxical attributions of properties and qualities to a product before and during its exchange.

“A commodity priced at a certain price, for the period during which that price remains unchanged, is based on the postulate of unchanged material identity. In fact, its pricing suggests that the commodity is ready to be bartered as it exists. Its useful physical condition must therefore not be changed. [...] [it] extends [...] itself to nature, which, for the sake of our social affairs, is expected to hold its breath within the bodies of commodities.

Another reference to the spatio-temporal preparation of variable, irrational intermediate states in causal processes can be found in Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, where the direct exchange of goods is mentioned: “The only sort of trade that would cost nothing would be simple barter, since in that case the goods are wealth and have value only for the brief instant during which the exchange is made.” To me, the seemingly de-contextualised moment discussed here is a derivative of the normal continuum of consciousness, a highly intense “vacuum” from which emerges a completely different reality whose quality can be described as a presence. This kind of presence could be experienced if such a “breakpoint” were given a certain duration from which other strategies for possible follow-up actions could manifest themselves.



Market stall during the action *SYMBOL gotowe/ trading* in Drohobycz, (Ukraine) 2012



word-skirt in the store „Zakład Zegarmistrzowski”, project: *Bławatne z Lublina*, Lublin 2011

Subject/ Subjekt.



Subject of Study, Bayerisches Staatsschauspiel, München 1999
„Wiener Festwochen”, 1999

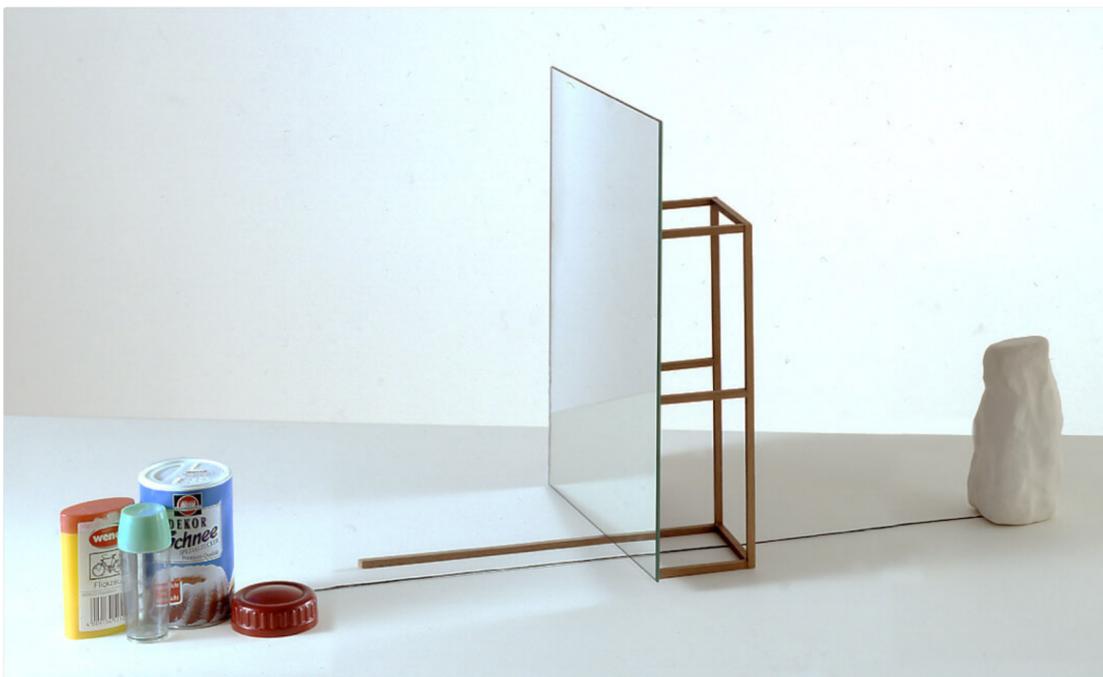


Handstudien/ hand studies, Berlin 1994

At the moment I refer again to my visualisations of pseudo-economic models and fictitious transactions which, during the 1990s, I used for the *public exercises* in Berlin. What was at stake there, too, was the question of added value as an abstract construct, which in everyday practice occurs as a social "illusion".



Idealbeet/ ideal bed, detail from BAU I, Berlin 1989 - 1999



Mehrwert/ added value, model, Berlin 1994

Even then I was particularly interested in the **subject-constitutive** elements derived from, or related to, economic contexts. An important reference was Hannah Arendt's observation that only those who own something which is commodity and can be exchanged have access to the public space.

This topic, defined from a completely different perspective, arose in 2017 from the discovery of a poster in a Polish online archive.



Posters, Lublin 1927



The poster that otherwise announces events of the shopkeepers' guild, contains another hint that is crucial for me, namely the name, 'subiekt', which is here unambiguously used as a term for the mediators between customers and goods, i.e. the persons performing the exchange. This confirms many of my reflections and conjectures in a way that seems unbelievable, even to me.

SYMBOL gotowe/ sklep

To make this theme an occasion for extensive investigations and study the moment of exchange to bring about a diversification of the process, I decided 2015 to rent a former Jewish tailor's studio in the old town of Lublin.



SYMBOL gotowe/ trading, Lublin October 2015



SYMBOL gotowe/ trading, Lublin October 2015

A quote from Karl Heinz Brodbeck's essay "Das Geld, die Null und das Subjekt der Moderne" (Money, Zero and the Subject of Modernity)

It "shows that the monetary calculation, from its inception, was an international and intercultural business. Traditional cultural ties were transcended just through the commercial practice of exchanging and billing." The prerequisite for this would be to give this "break point" a permanence and to try other strategies for possible follow-up actions, by first abandoning the natural bridging of this social agreement through symbols.

In a backyard of Lubartowska Street, next to other small shops, I initiated my space for temporary, often only hourly interventions and exhibitions under the name *SYMBOL gotowe / sklep* (gotowe> finished, sklep> shop). The thematic concerns are processed by the variety of perspectives and the productivity of a growing group of people in Lublin. Especially against the background of increasing nationalist tendencies, we jointly form criteria for the dynamization of culturally rooted resentments and the impossibility of an idea of "objective identity".

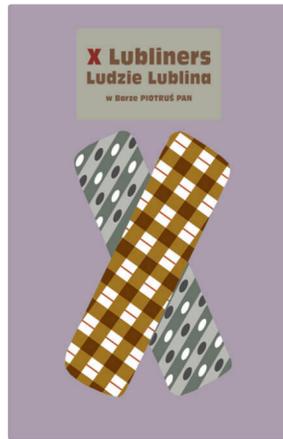


Courtyard in ulica Lubartowska 31, Lublin 2017



seminar and exhibition vacated space, Lublin 2017

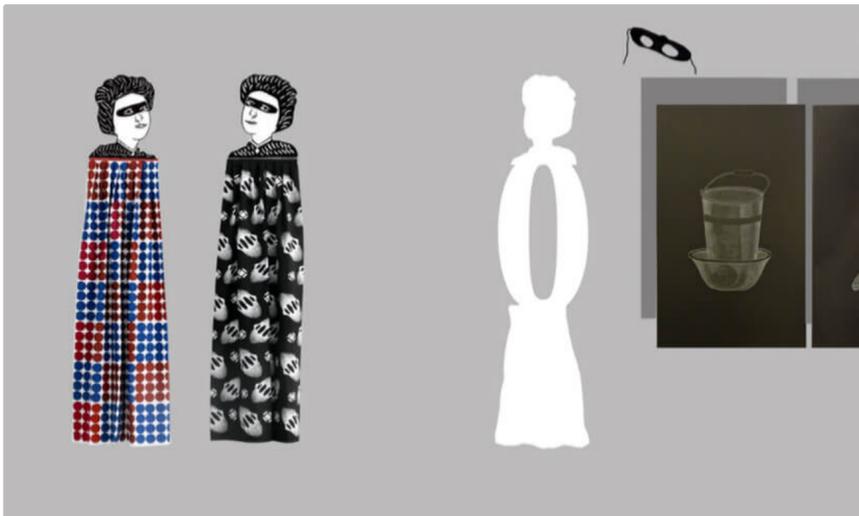
X Lubliners



Project *X Lubliners*, Lublin 2016,
Photo series of 70 Lubliners with a combination of reanimated fabric samples from the 30s.

Zero

In my work for the exhibition *Circular Flow* in the 'Kunstmuseum Basel/ Gegenwart' I apply the Zero as another figure of the vacant zone in socially regulated processes, as described above.



Esther and Ruth/ merchants unmasked, Lublin 2019



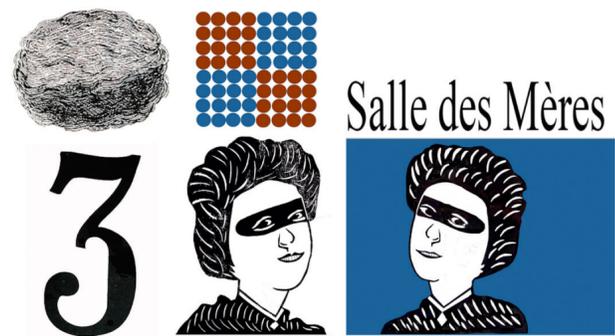
Subjektaggregate/ Subject aggregates, Berlin 2019

Salle des Pères/ Salle des Mères

Another project is to develop a *Salle des Mères* in addition to the *Salle des Pères* (2005) by reproducing my shop in Lublin. In it, the principles and qualities of "blank space productivity" (Sybille Krämer: *Money and Zero*) are to be shown as materiality, means presence, fluidity and event.



Salle des Pères, replication of the *Salle blanche* by Marcel Broodthaers, with heads made out of stucco of Duchamp, Magritte and illustrations of tools from the *Encyclopédie* Diderot and D'Alembert, Paris 1751.



Logo of *Salle des Mères*

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[Ulrike Grossarth: symbol gotowe / sklep](#)

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