

Summary
of
professional accomplishments

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Title of artistic achievement:

Remarks – Guide

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Introduction

In May 2017, at Ośrodek Działań Artystycznych [Centre for Artistic Activities] in Piotrków Trybunalski, I opened an exhibition entitled *Remarks* (from the series “97–300”, as part of the *Interakcje* International Art Festival). The clumsy-looking digits included in this sentence are important: “97-300” is the postal code of the city where I was born, and the series features contributions by artists from Piotrków. For me, however, “97–300” is significant for reasons other than simply geographical. Twenty years ago, at the gallery then called the Piotrków Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych [Artistic Exhibitions Bureau], as a participant of art classes, I learned the basics of easel painting and studio drawing, necessary to pass the entrance exams to the Academy of Art. Still, I owe the BWA with “97–300” in the address other experiences, too: namely the *Translacje* art festival organized there, which brought to the city interesting artists using in various media. With time I joined that event not just as a spectator, but as a volunteer. It was *Translacje* that gave me an opportunity to get to know contemporary art in as direct way as possible, through artwork created, and, importantly, through meetings with artists, often in a very friendly atmosphere. One might think that the biographical theme mentioned thus far is an output from a mine of sentiment; however, I am writing about it because it is precisely that personal story of relations with the place that for me is a buckle or a clamp that fastens the belt of time. The time that stretches within this summary, which is also a story of the possible consequences resulting from visiting that place.

The artistic achievement I have indicated is a guide to the exhibition entitled *Remarks*, along with the projects described in it.

The guide opens with a declaration: *This guide was created upon a request from the exhibition organiser. Usually remarks are exhibited without any additional information, in an approach fully open to cooperation. If you wish to enjoy the limitless semantic potential balanced on the border of understanding without any personal interjections from the author, don't read it.* And if it were not for the formal nature of postdoctoral procedures, I would sincerely like to begin this summary in a similar way. If not for the formal nature...

Let us try to go through with it.

I will lead.

Remarks – Guide

The indicated achievement is the *Guide* and the accompanying exhibition. This dualistic approach aims to emphasize the significance of the verbal aspect in the face of a possible multiform nature of the artifact. The *Guide* is a collection of reflections on which specific works were founded, and each of the points on the map of *Remarks* was initially delineated by the phrase in its title. That is to say, words, together with the element of the exhibition they indicate, create the semantic potential given to the viewer to use. Titles are equivalent to their material manifestations, and it is up to the active reader to determine the final sum of meanings. On the one hand, such an understanding of the work brings to mind model structures known from canonical theories of semiologists; on the other, it reveals an experimental field that offers an opportunity to answer the question of the scope of our habits in the process of perceiving artifacts.

Point One:

WSZYSTKO PO / EVERYTHING FOR*

Inscription on glass, 2017

I saw this kind of writing while walking along the streets of Łódź in places where different bric-a-brac had been displayed for sale, all at the same price, before the era of post-truth, post-internet and post-media began.

Wszystko po – How ‘vanitas’ is the tone of the wording!

** The Polish word ‘po’ could mean both ‘for’ and ‘after’.*

The inscription cut out from red self-adhesive foil according to the original pattern used in shops, was placed on the pane of the gallery window facing the street. It is a quotation referring to the passing, but also to the character of the place, different from the one in which it was placed as a result of artistic interference. The question arises: would people visit art galleries more often if everything exhibited there was available for the proverbial lump sum of three zlotys?

This question returned one month after the opening of *Remarks*, demanding a positive answer. At Galeria Czynna (of which I am a co-manager), during the Blask Brzask festival, in the centre of Łódź, not far from the windows of small shops that intrigued me, we presented a group of young artists Dom Mody Limanka (Limanka Fashion House). The artists opened a new shop at the weekend in the former secondhand clothing shop: a shop where art is sold by kilograms. We have put up hundreds of works collected from friends and acquaintances for sale at exceptionally low prices. Student projects, unfinished works, unused materials from photo shoots, paintings, drawings, graphic art, objects.... Everything for a penny, everything by kilogram. Throngs of visitors came, and the bell of the cash register rhythmically signaled subsequent transactions. Almost everything was sold. The aesthetic hunger of passers-by turned out to be enormous. There is no accounting for taste.

Point Two:

Podejrzany przechodzień / Closely Watched Passerby

Titled view from the window, 2016/17

It is enough to look and think,

Will he come into sight?

To what extent and in what sense will he turn out to be watched?

A work of chance or rather destiny?

How you are written about is how you are seen?

In the subsequent place the perception vector has a similar direction, although a different turn. I placed the title of the work next to another window, this time on the inside. Isn't it wonderful to be able to annex the image of the world of phenomena in a frame closed with a window frame without any additional devices? Each painting becomes truly unique after a while. Every figure is expected and extremely desirable. After all, it depends on both the viewer and the viewee whether the passer-by becomes observed.

In his essay "The Weak Universalism" for "e-flux" magazine, Boris Groys analyzes the achievements of the avant-garde of the early twentieth century by formulating the concept of "weak images"¹. Unlike "strong images", these are, in his opinion, the most timeless phenomena, because they are democratic. It is the extreme synthetic character of the form and the means used to create it that allows us to see the work in the most fitting way, experience it, understand it, and even, if necessary, produce it. Writing about "weak images", Groys often evokes the viewer's reaction to Malevich's *Black Square*: "Why should this painting be in a museum if my child is able to do it – or even does it?" This is an advantage, often not understood by art historians: the possibility not to go down in history with the completion of the work or the death of the author. The "weak image" also assumes a camouflage of sorts: it blends into everyday reality, and, thanks to its "poor visibility", it becomes immune to the seasonality of art, unambiguous assignments and spectacular classifications. A weak image does not teach, does not impose interpretation. A weak image is interesting for the viewers standing in front of it with their own baggage of possible interpretations.

Point Three:

Niestworzone* rzeczy / Incredible things

Titled space between other works presented at the exhibition, 2017

A philosophical question: do incredible things exist?

Experiencing an overabundance of stimuli on a daily basis, we hear about inconceivable things.

Perhaps it is nonsense, something improbable?

Or could it be powerlessness in the face of the immensity of possibilities?

Can emptiness equal fullness?

* The Polish word 'niestworzony' could mean both 'incredible' and 'not created'.

¹ <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61294/the-weak-universalism/> date of access: 03.12.2018

Going one step further, we will get to incredible things. This is an initially self-sufficient point. Placed among others, this title seems to say it all. It seems, but does it really say that? I want to believe that the tendency to reflect leads the conscious viewer to the issues that shape him or her every day. Let the *Kłopot z istnieniem* [Troubles with the existence]² by Henryk Elzenberg serve as an example here. Apart from the exposition model of the French salon, the free gallery space is usually a real boon for the collected works. In Katarzyna Kobro's artistic concepts, the object co-shapes the surroundings. Space. Today it is not much of a novelty, although it is still important, because invariably the best remedy for the feeling of excess is the lack. At the Piotrków gallery I placed the title of the work on an almost square wall. Its blackness surprised me when I visited the place beforehand. Again Malevich, again Groys. See, incredible things will never get old.

Point Four:

Mniejszości / Minorities

An eye chart used for visual testing

Arabic version, ?/2017

I spied it in a run-down antique shop during my research stay in Alexandria, Egypt in 2008.

I thought about my dear friend and mentor from my university period –professor Andrzej Chętko, who was a lecturer in typography. Andrzej's father is an ophthalmologist, so I considered it to be a fantastic gift idea which combined the aforementioned elements.

I recalled the object in my mind again while preparing last year's exhibition entitled "Minorities" organized by Artur Chrzanowski in the Museum of the Factory in Łódź.

It struck me then that in the times of mass migration, the Arabic eye chart together with the exhibition title may constitute an interesting artefact open to manifold interpretations.

Unfortunately, it turned out then that the eye chart had gone missing. Luckily, it has been found again recently and so it may now be seen thanks to the owner's courtesy.

However, do we see clearly?

Perhaps we don't look in the right way or there is something we don't understand?

In order to examine the sight using the Snellen chart, aside from covering one eye, the viewer must be at an adequate distance from the chart. The system of scaled characters is universal, accessible also to the illiterate from any part of the world. When displaying this finished item, I do not indicate the optimal distance. After all, this is not about the examination. The chart has typographic and aesthetic qualities. In the *Guide* I build up the narrative of this image by mentioning friendship, as well as on the loss and evolution that the meaning of this object can undergo. However, in this case it is more important that due to the ambiguity of the title, the object does not change its formal quality, but it does refer to the relative perception of otherness.

² H. Elzenberg, *Kłopot z istnieniem. Aforyzmy w porządku czasu*, Znak, Kraków 1963.

Point Five:

Hel jes

100 balloons filled with air + 1 balloon filled with helium on the day of the exhibition opening, 2017

The English expression of excitement in Polish transcription can be assigned to the balloon with extraordinary qualities: because it contains helium, it hovers above the rest.

The narrative of this work evolves in time.

In the the exhibition titled after Huxley “Brave New World” in Manhattan-Transfer Gallery in Łódź, the arrival of the crowd at the opening of the exhibition saw almost half of the collection release its last breath as the balloons burst with a loud bang.

The rest of them shrank and wilted gradually in the course of the following four weeks.

The extraordinary quality lasted a day shorter.

One wonders what will happen this time round.

Point Five is also focused on the issue of perception of otherness. One of the objects in the collection dominates over the others despite its identical appearance. Initially, the least likely to be repositioned or destroyed, it ultimately shares the fate of all other objects. The duration of exposure determines the points of view of mutual relationships. The Piotrków edition of *Hel Jes* turned out to be more favorable for the so-called majority. As the recording of Point Six indicates – discussed in more detailed below – we happen to know that the composition has undergone a dramatic evolution courtesy to a group of children visiting the gallery. It is moving when the form of a work can be so susceptible to interference. Jarosław Suchan, citing Stephen Greenblatt, American scholar who proposed to consider the relationship between “wonder” and “resonance”³, drew my attention to how to understand movement in contact with art: “By *resonance*, I mean the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by the viewer to stand. By *wonder* I mean the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention”.⁴ When a child’s sensitivity is confronted with a hundred balloons, one can count on “wonder”, probably at the cost of “resonance”, the potential of which seems to lie dormant in older audiences. However, of all the points of the *Guide*, this one has the most ready-made ingredients from the recipe for “wonder”. The others tend towards the “resonance” potentially resounding in the mind of an absorbed viewer.

³ J. Suchan, *Muzealium. Przedmiot znaleziony przypadkiem*, I Kongres Muzealników Polskich, Narodowe Centrum Kultury, Warszawa 2015.

⁴ S. Greenblatt, “Resonance and Wonder” in: *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Jan., 1990), pp. 11–34.

Point Six:

Fotopułapka/ Camera Trap

Interactive installation/video, 2016/17

Camera trap is a camera connected to a motion detector which activates the mechanism of taking photos or video recording the moment some movement is detected.

I used the device for the first time following an invitation from a photography research group at ASP in Łódź to prepare an exhibition in the Mała Czarna Gallery. The space itself is a few square metres in size and it can be accessed through a door with a framed porthole window the size of a human head through which exhibitions may be admired. This time around, the exhibition space was taken by the video recorder and the space for admiration was overtaken by brief bewilderment signified by a range of facial expressions and gestures subject to a viewer's personality. The resulting unusual collection of portraits was published by the gallery, ironically, on their Facebook profile as planned. In order for a communication process to be realized, both a sender and a receiver are needed. The work with the tautological title 'Camera Trap' allows for certain functions fixed through exposition conventions to blind. The receiver becomes the sender and their image becomes part of the message. It may produce amusing results – subject to a viewer's personality.

Point Six was used to absorb viewers or at least their images. The principle of its operation, described in the *Guide*, found application in the Piotrków gallery, albeit with some differences. The camera trap is placed at the lower end of the stairs leading to the basement. Pointing it out on the map of the exhibition directed the viewers' interest directly in front of its lens. As one can guess, the scale of interest determined the degree of the close-up.

In the recording, like a chorus from a forest camera⁵, also showcased the individual rhythms of the gallery employees. The whole recording is interwoven with a wide range of symptoms appearing on filmed faces: from joy, understanding, indifference, distaste to disappointment. What do these Dear People expect?

⁵Another term for traps is a forest camera. One of the applications of this device is to observe the behavior of woodland creatures.

Point Seven:

ŻYCZENIA (mam nadzieję, że możliwe) / WISHES (I hope it's possible)

*Two-stage interpersonal event, documentation of the first stage,
video 30 mins 28 secs, 2016*

What would you like to find in an art gallery?

Is it possible to live up to expectations?

Let's find out.

Let's come around.

To each other.

Mutually.

What do these Dear People expect?

Today I consider WISHES my most important artistic experience. In 2016, I prepared a plan for a Łódź gallery – Pracownia Portretu. A dream plan. For years I have been interested in the confrontation between the work of art and the expectations of the audience. What do visitors want? How to meet their expectations? I decided to test it. Literally. I planned the project in two stages, to be implemented in two different settings. In the first stage, using the space of the gallery consisting of two opposite rooms separated by a corridor, I delineated two zones: a public meeting room of the vernissage assembly and a separate room: a typical white cube behind closed doors, where visitors were expected to enter one by one. Equipped with a camera on a tripod, I asked them to answer the question: “What would you like to find in this place next week?” Eighty-seven people passed through the white room, despite my earlier fears that the willingness of visitors to join the project would be a scarce commodity. There were eighty-seven meetings, and I collected eighty-seven responses recorded on video. As it later turned out, this recording proved to be extremely valuable for my further work. But it has to be said that an unexpectedly large number of guests, resulting in a surprisingly large number of wishes, thwarted my original plans: even before this first stage, I had planned to produce and exhibit works in response to the expressed wishes. It quickly became clear that it would be impossible to create almost a hundred works in a week. What is more: it turned out that individual wishes were mutually exclusive. With a deep sense of commitment, I came to the conclusion that the best thing I could do was to meet every visitor from the first stage again, face to face. I abandoned the idea of materializing their expectations, but, paradoxically, it was this departure from the materialization of wishes that saved the wishes themselves.

In order to reciprocate their openness, I decided to devote these seven days separating the two stages of the *project WISHES* to prepare for the second meeting. The recording of the conversations from the first stage helped me to remember the names of all the visitors, link them to specific wishes and prepare individual answers. All this was meant to help me welcome everyone who decided to return to Pracownia Portretu. There would be no need for notes, there would be no risk of distraction: there would be directness.

After a week, visitors once again had two zones at their disposal. A recording from the previous week was made available in the adjacent room on a discreet monitor, with sound in headphones – everyone could now get to know the thematic scope of wishes from behind the door that had been closed in the previous week. The other room, where I once again invited people one by one, this time was no longer bright, but completely dark, and I could only find the two armchairs placed here thanks to the fluorescent visitors. To my amazement,

also this time the visitors formed in a long queue at the entrance. I responded to their wishes with photographs, films, props, anecdotes, instructions and microperformances. The sense of mutual closeness in most of the meetings was supposed to merge the sender, the message and the recipient into one. And it was not for show, but for real. For several minutes, but in its purest form. Some of the visitors were my friends, but many of them I met thanks to my *Wishes*, which in some cases resulted in acquaintance that lasts to this day. In addition, my openness and the a priori cordiality towards others increased, stopping at an elevated level. Inevitably, I only learned about the responses and behaviors of people who left the wish room later, from stories that were told to me – after all, I was still meeting more and more people in that dark, isolated room. And those responses and behaviors were all nice and cordial – wishes were considered fulfilled, although at the same time the participants were reluctant to share stories about what had happened only a moment earlier.

Several people from the first stage of meetings did not come to the second. Others appeared only on the second evening. In such situation I focused on telling them about the idea of the whole undertaking, realizing that full participation in the *Wishes* formula was no longer possible. If one wants to understand the essence of participation⁶ from an etymological perspective, one can come to the conclusion that it is not so much participation as co-ownership that is crucial. Perhaps this is why most of my wishing partners wanted to keep the content of our meeting in the dark only for themselves?

Wishes is kind of experience that cannot be fully expressed or repeated. Hence the decision to present it in Piotrków under the common banner of *Remarks* and to tell about the original event in just three ways: by means of a video documenting the course of the first stage of the event (expressing wishes), in factual reviews by Piotr Olkusz and Tomasz Załuski, and in a short poetic form included in the Guide. In this form, I consider Point Seven an echo that only evokes the memory of the momentary communicative perfection. After all, nothing is permanently perfect in the world of phenomena.

There is also a short biography of the author on the guide card. As it turns out, there was a typo – an error in the date of birth. Affirming the flawed nature of things, I decided to keep the hundred years of time difference in print, to the delight of perceptive readers.

By the way: do you know who else was born in 1879? Kazimir Malevich.
markings invisible to the

⁶ The Latin word *participatio* also means to “participate in”. Reflection taken from the paper: J. Suchan “Weakness – A Weapon of Resistance. Avant-garde vs. Spectacle”, paper delivered at the conference “The Avant-Garde. Aesthetic Strategies and Participatory Art”, Ośrodek Badań nad Awangardą UJ, Krakow, 8–10 December 2017.

Exit

Trust is a great thing.

Trust is a great thing, I thought of the sound of a loud voice coming from the mouth of a stroller. There was something spherical about that voice. One girl pointed out to me that I was following a circular path. I told her: "Life is not to be found on a straight path, but on winding roads. Only when something distracts us from the goal can we feel it and possibly show that we still had it in mind, that there is something in us like the permanence of character". Somewhere on the meadow there were several tombstones. These were family graves. How secluded they seemed. It was likely a long time since human eyes rested upon them. Therefore it was so nice of me to have given them my attention. I walked past the church. Maybe the parish priest was sitting drinking tea in his circle. He may have preached a powerful sermon before noon. A stroller considers it a mental achievement if he is able to keep his face for all he encounters. Sensitive people will feel what I mean. Fortunately, I don't write for the insensitive or the less sensitive. besides, they don't read my articles anyway.⁷

"Between. Recipient as a Work of Art"

This is the title of my doctoral thesis, in which I focused on the role of the recipient of the works. In the structure of each of the works described in it, I included a space that was to be filled by the participation of a person who came into contact with it. I treated my works as a bridge between subtle thought and action, making their full existence and final form dependent on the viewer. I understood the title "between" as an intermediate state, one I initially defined as the structure of works, which is developed through collaboration. *Recipient as a Work of Art* was a one-of-a-kind supplement to the final form of the works, as each viewer implies a different work with his/her uniqueness. Thus, in the center of my investigation was a human being – a physical, mental and spiritual entity, whose presence, activity and knowledge resulting from intellectual and spiritual experiences make up the essence of the exhibition. The scholarly theories from the field of semiology, perception, aesthetic experience, aesthetic object, Hansen's open form and interactivity listed in the text are still a source of inspiration for me and, to a certain degree, reflect my way of thinking. On the other hand, the earlier attachment to extremely impersonal gestures towards the viewer and reliance on other people's words, around which I used to build relationships of meanings, was replaced by openly drawing on personal experiences and my own vocabulary.

What has not changed is faith in my addressees, because it is still necessary to overcome the barrier of indifference and choose commitment in order for our shared work to come into being. Because we need "resonance".

And *Resonance*, partially by chance, is also the title of my earlier project implemented together with Daniel Koniusz in 2012, commissioned by the Museum of Art in Łódź. At that time, we developed a device that required its users to be connected. It was not, however, a Greenblatt's resonance. As part of the *Ekologie miejskie* [Urban Ecologies] project, the aim was to develop projects that would fit into the ecosystem of public space. In our device, the computer, equipped with Arduino module, appropriate software and a sound system, generated sounds as a consequence of physical contact between users. It was necessary to close the circuit in the electrical system that ended with two copper plates. Depending on the way they touched one another, participants triggered the consequence announced in the title:

⁷ Robert Walser, *Mikroramy*. Ha!art, Warszawa 2012, p. 57 (English translation based on the Polish edition).

the resonance. The flow of energy took place both on a purely physical and the communal level, generating social heat. On a daily basis, we do not grab strangers by their noses, nor do we play on their teeth. Our resonance rang, among other things, thanks to such gestures, and all that happened near a square where shortly afterwards a playground was built. The open form of our work soon found application in the Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej [Centre for Contemporary Art] in Warsaw, as part of the Zielony Jazdów program. Among the new users of our instruments was a group of dancers, who developed an appropriate choreography presented to the sounds from our catalog of audible equivalents of co-existence.

In the same year, also in response to an invitation from Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, I prepared a work under a catchy title: *Is Sound Audible?* The aim was to create a work to be placed at the Łódź Philharmonic during the Tansmann Festival. I composed a gong based on a tone scale from 250 to 8000Hz, corresponding to the scale of the tonal audiometer used by laryngologists for hearing tests. The original gong recording announcing each festival performance was replaced by a new one, which could potentially diagnose hearing loss in music lovers. Thus, in the natural environment of the Philharmonic, using the infrastructure of that place and its characteristic rituals of participation, the echo of relativity of sensual sensations sounded. The information about the special character of the festival gongs was provided by the announcer directly before the performances. An advanced hearing loss could have stood in the way until then, because earlier gongs informed the audience about the upcoming performance. A listener that was insensitive to that message could have been unable to enter concert hall, as the door would have been already locked by then.

Speaking of door, I presented a door handle, not the one from the Philharmonic, but an ordinary brass one, in a gesture referring to the 100-year-old readymade tradition, in 2013 as part of the collective exhibition *For Your Eyes Only*, organized by the Łódź-based club Szósta Dzielnica. The work was accompanied by the title of *Łódź. 34/36 Nawrot Street*, indicating the address of a nearby location. My composition was intended for a viewer that would like to respond to my suggestion of going to the indicated address. There is a gap between two abandoned houses there, blocked by a fence. Despite the fence, a large inscription is visible through the gaps in the planks: "Where is the handle?" This way, the second part of the work directs the stroller from Nawrot Street to the starting point. "Life is not to be found on a straight path, but on winding roads," wrote Robert Walser. The inscription on the wall was not made by me either. To this day, I still do not know what semantic key originally opened up the meaning of the question about the handle. And in this work I have made my own copy for my guests.

I used the address of another ready-made peculiarity in the collective exhibition *Things* held at Muzeum Etnograficzne i Archeologiczne in Łódź in 2016. It featured works referring to the collection of this institution. Finding them among the artifacts on the permanent exhibition was made easier by markings on the map made available to visitors. The point I indicated was entitled *State of things II*. It was accompanied by a note: "91 Piotrkowska Street – the original seat of the Łódź ethnographic museum, as a potential space for field research". At the indicated address, an extraordinary view awaits all curious explorers: the former weaver's house – a fundamental manifestation of the architectural culture of the textile origins of Łódź – has undergone a devastating construction mutation, which almost completely distorted its historic character. Instead of the historic façade, huge windows have been installed, all for the new function: a kebab restaurant and a shop with poor quality children's toys made in China. 91 Piotrkowska Street is an interesting point, not just for ethnographers, one that allows us to look at the fate of the past, the present and prospects for the future. The mission of the museum indeed.

I live in Łódź at Piotrkowska Street. I love walking and most of the stories I have described took place within a walking distance from my home. The observations I have made during the walks are like shopping in the carrier of consciousness. A package filled with articles I have noticed. I unpacked it first in Piotrków, and then in this text. Remarks – not only in the space-time stroll through the exhibition. Here or there, in order to have your share, you need to wander carefully, and never mind the stumbling when stepping off the beaten paths.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'L. G. S. K.' with a large, sweeping flourish above the letters.