

Rafał Solewski*

Metaphysical cognition in hermeneutic interpretation: remarks on Grzegorz Sztabiński's *The Writing of Nature – Transcendence III*¹

Summary

The article contains a hermeneutic interpretation of the art of Grzegorz Sztabiński, a contemporary Polish artist creating drawings, paintings and installations. It starts with definitions of transcendence, hermeneutic interpretation, metaphysical cognition, and artistic installation. The main section is comprised of descriptions and interpretations of the artist's works, created throughout his career, including his own comments and those of his critics, especially in relation to the cycle *Pismo natury – Transcendencja* [The Writing of Nature: Transcendence]. The text explains how the artist finds the signs of writing to be traces of transcendence concealed in nature and how the relationship between the artwork and the place is used to build the new contexts of each exposure (serving always to discover the transcendence). Finally, the game of models of distinguishing the object of metaphysical cognition is described and in conclusion the metaphysical cognition discovered in the hermeneutic interpretation of an artwork is found as a way of being in the world proposed by art.

Key words

hermeneutic interpretation, metaphysical cognition, artistic installation, nature, trace

* Fine Arts Department
Pedagogical University in Cracow, Poland
Email: rafal.solewski@gmail.com

¹ The article was inspired by Grzegorz Sztabiński's *The Writing of Nature – Transcendence III*, an exhibition at Otwarta Pracownia [Open Studio] in Cracow, which opened 10 June 2016.

Preface

It is the aim of the present article to discuss a contemporary attempt to uncover the transcendence hidden in traces present in the world. Concentrated observation of such traces in nature may lead to reflection on the secret scripture organising the presence of metaphysical signs around us. As such scripture or writing is hardly visible or readable, it requires a special observer and interpreter. The article asks whether an artist can find traces of metaphysics present as writing in nature, as one particular artist, Grzegorz Sztabiński, suggests in the titles of his works. Can we find only observation in his works, or hermeneutic interpretation as well? Are such works helpful in finding these traces and showing them to viewers interpreting these works? Are the viewers brought any closer to metaphysical cognition thanks to their interpretation of an artwork? Perhaps my interpretations below can answer these questions.

The question of transcendence

Grzegorz Sztabiński is a contemporary artist working in the media of drawing, painting, and installation. In his works, the focus is placed on their semantic determinants: the decision behind employing a particular medium, particular materials and tools, the place and time of display, and, finally, the role of the constructed image and the words used.² His works provide food for thought; they invite reflection, as do the exhibitions within which they are presented. Sztabiński's exhibitions, original concepts conceived by the artist himself, become akin to installations (with drawings and paintings as parts thereof).

In their ambition to present complex meanings, Sztabiński's installations and authorial displays share a great deal with Conceptualism, although they seem to move beyond concentration on art as such.³ In his comment on the exhibition that inspired my remarks, 'Everything re-

² On installation art and its definition see: G. Dziamski, *Sztuka u progu XXI wieku* [Art on the threshold of the twenty-first century], Poznań 2002, pp. 175–184; G. Sztabiński, "Sens sztuki instalacji" [The meaning of the art of installation], *Format*, 1998, 3–4 (28/29), pp. 2–4.

³ On the Conceptualists' opposition to art's function of expressing content other than that related to art see: J. Kosuth, "Art After Philosophy", [in:] *Conceptual*

sults from my own encounter with the place and that of my works',⁴ the artist points to the role of the interplay between the work and its context. At the same time, the air of mystery which inextricably arises when the viewer confronts Sztabiński's exhibitions (which is often mentioned by their creator) further accentuates the necessity of making multifaceted and unavoidably subjective attempts at understanding his works, attempts that perhaps surpass the artist's intentions (which, in any case, might be mysterious to him as well). If 'attempts at understanding' are defined as above, then my explanation of the 'complex meanings' of Grzegorz Sztabiński's installations and exhibitions, that is, the type of food for thought they provide, their meaning, elucidation of which is the actual purpose of this article, must of necessity employ a method of hermeneutic interpretation that posits consideration of the context and moves beyond identification of the author's intention.⁵

For the purpose of this text I assume that such hermeneutic interpretation of installations and exhibitions aims to explain and understand – that is, to determine – the meaning of a perceived structure through linguistic description (translation into language and text) and to identify elements that carry symbolic meanings (juxtaposed then to form metaphors); to evoke intellectual and emotional reactions; and, finally, to induce metaphysical experiences. The last-named objective may prove to encompass ultimate meanings that submit only partly to linguistic understanding, for they transform understanding into metaphysical cognition – cognition that concerns transcendental features of being.⁶

An overt suggestion to the viewers to direct their interpretation towards the transcendent can be found in the title of Grzegorz Sztabiński's exhibition, where, for the third time in the series, the artist directly refers to the word *transcendence*. Although he leaves it intentionally unclear whether he under-

Art: a Critical Anthology, eds. A. Alberro, B. Stimson, Cambridge and London 1993, pp. 158–178.

⁴ Quoted from an email sent to the author, 23 June 2016.

⁵ See for example: F. Chmielowski, "Hermeneutyczny wymiar podstawowych pytań estetyki" [The hermeneutic dimension of the basic questions of aesthetics], [in:] *Estetyki filozoficzne XX wieku* [Philosophical aesthetics of the twentieth century], ed. K. Wilkoszewska, Cracow 2000, p. 95.

⁶ Cf. M.A. Krąpiec, "Metafizyczne poznanie" [Metaphysical cognition], [in:] *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii* [Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy], [online] <http://www.ptta.pl/pef/pdf/m/metafizycznep.pdf> [accessed: 16.06.2013].

stands it 'in the ontic or common sense of the word (e.g. as an ordinary transition of the status of one place towards something different)',⁷ transcendence will be understood in this article as tantamount to the metaphysical, as a dimension 'above and beyond' reality, an infinite realm of ideas and, ultimately, as the Absolute, whose dimensions can nevertheless be penetrated by empirically experienced reality.⁸ Traces of such penetration can be cognised, investigated, and understood (e.g. by means of intuition and observation of nature, 'its empirical experience', which will prove important in the case of the art discussed below) if one comes to realise the transcendent aspects of being, the transcendentals (such as Being, Unity, Truth, Goodness, Beauty...), that is, when one engages in metaphysical cognition (accepting also one's own ultimate impotence in the face of the Mystery).

This way of thinking about interpretation and metaphysical cognition evokes an idealistic tradition. For instance, Schelling suggested that art itself is 'an emanation of the Absolute',⁹ whereas an artwork is a real presentation or objectification of the ideal Absolute, which means that artistic activity can present and manifest what cannot be understood through rational scientific thinking. In this way, art is 'the route to an

⁷ Quoted from an email sent to the author, 23 June 2016.

⁸ Transcendence is commonly defined as 'going beyond ordinary limits, being beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge, or the universe or material existence', (*The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, [online] <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transcendent>, accessed: 13.07.2016). In this article, metaphysics is understood as 'rationally valid and intellectually verifiable cognition of the world existing in reality (including the affirmation of the Absolute Being), aimed at discovering the ultimate cause of its being, whose traces human reason finds in empirically available objects'. Cf. M.A. Krąpiec, A. Maryniarczyk, "Metafizyka" [Metaphysics], [in:] *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, [online] <http://www.ptta.pl/pef/pdf/m/metafizyka.pdf> [accessed: 21.03.2016]; A. Maryniarczyk, "Transcendentalia" [Transcendentals], [in:] *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, [online] <http://www.ptta.pl/pef/pdf/t/transcendentalia.pdf> [accessed: 16.06.2013]. In this article, I will be considering the transcendent (metaphysical); however, I will not be following Immanuel Kant's distinction between the transcendent (being beyond the reach of experience) and transcendental (related to the *a priori* cognition rather than to the object of cognition).

⁹ F.W.J. von Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, ed. and trans. D.W. Stott, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989, p. 19.

understanding of what cannot appear as an object of knowledge',¹⁰ and may also be a philosophical tool.

This tradition was transformed in hermeneutics, which is important for this particular article. Heidegger, who was critical of the established understanding of metaphysics, saw art – which is always poetry – as offering a disclosure and an opening in the 'midst' of being, giving us the power to 'name the gods' and stretch 'above our heads, up in another world' – he saw poetry 'as the proclamation of world in the invocation of God'.¹¹ On the other hand, the 'being' of the work of art was itself essentially metaphysical.

Symbol 'alludes to beauty and the potentially whole and holy order of things',¹² says Gadamer concerning the need for completeness of the *symbolon*, the poetic tool essential for art. Beauty, the whole, and order are strictly the objects of metaphysical cognition. Joyful and festive celebration of the community of all participants of art in 'the mystery' which 'lies in this suspension of time' and 'represents a genuine creation',¹³ are also the traces of metaphysics present in the reality.

While 'the understanding' was the basic way of being-in-the-world for hermeneutics, interpretation of art and its poetry seems to be a hermeneutic way of finding metaphysical traces in reality, or a mode of disclosing and revealing the level of metaphysical ideas.

Therefore, hermeneutic observation of nature, resulting in the discovery of metaphysical traces in reality and then in the transformation of such traces into art, may present a specific way to follow these traces and consequently to disclose the level of ideas in metaphysical cognition.

The 'observation of nature' mentioned above is also referred to in the title of the exhibition, which contains the phrase *The Writing of Nature*. Taken as a guideline in the hermeneutic interpretation of the installation and exhibition, it enables the discovery of yet another dimension

¹⁰ A. Bowie, "Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [online] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schelling/> [accessed: 11.01.2017].

¹¹ See: M. Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, [in:] idem, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. and trans. A. Hofstadter, New York 1975, p. 70; idem, *Holderlin and the Essence of Poetry*, [in:] *Elucidations of Holderlin's Poetry*, ed. and trans. K. Hoeller, Amherst 2000, p. 65; idem, *Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. W. Brogan and P. Warnek, Bloomington 1995, p. 109.

¹² H.-G. Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, trans. N. Walker, London 1986, p. 32.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

of hermeneutic interpretation present in Grzegorz Sztabiński's art. Discovering this dimension is equivalent to explaining the meaning of his art (which is the particular purpose of this article, in which hermeneutic interpretation is treated as an explanation of the meaning of particular installations and exhibitions, as well as the broader senses and goals of his art). As it happens, the artist himself also attempted to interpret or discover the meaning, but his interpretation involved nature – observing it, searching it for 'intellectually verifiable' traces of transcendence (e.g. 'Being' or order), and exposing these traces in an artistic structure that is perceived as image and interpreted verbally (in yet another interpretation, or in the next stage of interpretation) by the viewer.

Naming transcendent features of being, that is, the transcendentals, consists of establishing tools that serve metaphysical cognition. Meanwhile, the discovered trace of the presence of the transcendent can be seen as 'the aspect of things that is the object of research and which is identical with being' which occurs when the object of metaphysics is being distinguished.¹⁴ It seems that if we recognise the value of such tools and accept the presence of the trace as an object of metaphysical cognition, indicated by the artwork, then taking an accurate cognitive stance towards the work, as well as towards transcendence accepted in its metaphysical form, will require us to apply hermeneutic interpretation. Ultimately, this perspective (as this article manifests) may employ tools belonging to metaphysical cognition in order to, for instance, identify the presence and role of 'Being' in an artwork where the artist followed his metaphysical intuition and traced transcendence hidden in nature. The 'Being' uncovered in the process of interpretation may lead us to an answer regarding the nature of the Mystery.

This would occur in opposition to common opinions that posit hermeneutics as a substitute for metaphysics, as well as to some theoreticians' arguments against Idealism and their concentration on the world and its history.¹⁵ Significantly, such an approach fails to account for Heidegger's recognition that the metaphysical cannot be avoided or for his attitude to poetry (described above), whereas Gadamer acknowledged how art reveals the highest universal values, and, thus, the transcendent (clearly present in poetry, or in the 'afterlife' and persistence of classic

¹⁴ On the subject of 'distinguishing the object of metaphysics', see M.A. Krąpiec, A. Maryniarczyk, "Metafizyka", op. cit.

¹⁵ See, for example, P. Bytniewski, *Metafizyka hermeneutycznej interpretacji* [The metaphysics of hermeneutic interpretation], [online] http://www.ptta.pl/index.php?id=symp_str_6 [accessed: 11.06.2016].

patterns).¹⁶ In this article, I will attempt to show how directing the hermeneutic interpretation of an artwork towards transcendence (that permeates both art and nature and leaves traces of this penetration) may lead to metaphysical cognition, to identification of the transcendentals, and to distinguishing the object of metaphysics.¹⁷

Grzegorz Sztabiński: the contemporary artist in relation to transcendence hidden in nature

Grzegorz Sztabiński, artist and philosopher, is gifted with intuition and sensitivity to metaphysical traces, which renders him capable of interpreting nature in which these traces are hidden, as well as expressing this interpretation in art. This is despite the fact that, in the eyes of a contemporary human being, nature, the starting point for his works, is ordinary, everyday, and obvious. It is useful, yet easily exhaustible. Usually, it is appreciated, yet it is often threatening, in a simple but effective manner or as a 'sublime horror'. It can be used, conquered, or controlled. It can be financially exploited. It is obvious that nature is there.

However, it is not so common for a philosopher and artist who seeks to access this everyday occurrence to find signs of metaphysical ideas and who intuitively senses transcendence hidden in nature. In Grzegorz Sztabiński's early works, the geometrical rules he seemed to impose on nature (repeated in subsequent stages of his work) were attempts to identify traces of the perfect order, a universal model, a metaphysical pattern whose reading is neither merely a result of inspiration by shapes formed by nature nor an attempt to rationally approach data collected by the senses, but which stems from a cognitive intuition of metaphysical design and order of things inherent in the world and perceived as a composition of phenomena with inherent rules.

Order, model, pattern, rule – these seem to be fundamental aspects of geometrical forms present in *Logical Landscapes*, made in the 1970s and 80s, in which the artist showed how mimetic treatment of 'natural'

¹⁶ See for example: P. Dybel, *Granice rozumienia i interpretacji. O hermeneutyce Hansa-Georga Gadamera* [The boundaries of understanding and interpretation: on the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer], Cracow 2004, pp. 314–337, 415.

¹⁷ This is my own proposition, although it follows the general thesis that hermeneutics refers to 'the tradition of approaching values as transcendentals' and belief in their connection and organic interdependence; see F. Chmielowski, op. cit., p. 92.

landscapes in drawing and painting was insufficient for the apprehension of the rules of existence and attempts to understand them.

Forms that preserve traces of past *Landscapes* were again recalled, in a purer, more synthetic manner on grey-brown or light green canvases exposed in a regular rhythm on the walls of Cracow's Otwarta Pracownia [Open Studio] gallery in 2016, marking yet another stage in Grzegorz Sztabiński's work.

Meanwhile, this early stage in the artist's development already contained a question that invited interpretive reflection and a search for the transcendent. Initially, it seemed paradoxical: is nature, with freedom as its essence, subject to form as an ordering power? However, the alogical logic of the paradox – so pronounced in the early *Logical Landscapes*, with its reformulation of the figure of the tree according to geometrical figures that are, in any case, suggested by the shape of the tree even if they seem to be imposed on that shape or inserted 'under' it – is, indeed, the metaphysical order, the cosmos that imposed order onto chaos – a transcendent order, belonging to the primary and finite rules of existence, somewhat opposed to the sense of paradox and incompatibility of ideal and rational geometry with 'picturesque', irregular, unconstrained, and dynamically changing nature.

Wandering: relationality

At the preceding stage of his work, paradox and conclusions about 'incompatibility' led the artist to distortion and imbalance, which he readily acknowledged.¹⁸

However, in time, the resulting state of confusion, as Grzegorz Sztabiński referred to his investigations, led to a discovery whose processual actuality can be seen in his recent works and is supposedly illustrated (not literally) in the passage through the consecutive rooms of the exhibition at Otwarta Pracownia.

Initially, this involved the discovery of relationality, which may uncover, from 'between different kinds of reality',¹⁹ what is transcendent

¹⁸ Cf. G. Sztabiński, "Lata osiemdziesiąte" [The 80s], [in:] *Retrospekcja. Grzegorz Sztabiński. Obrazy, rysunki, instalacje* [Retrospective. Grzegorz Sztabiński. Paintings, drawings, installations], Łódź 2007, p. 49.

¹⁹ S. Marzec, "Malarstwo jako wizualna refleksja" [Painting as visual reflection], [in:] *Retrospekcja*, op. cit., p. 93.

in them. For if the artist retained 'belief in the existence of reality that is more than merely a product of piling up rhetorics',²⁰ yet he still believed in transcendence inherent in space, revealed by relationships, and also expressed with the symbols of tree, cross, and hexagram, which were featured in ink drawings containing layered forms made (with carbon paper) in the 1980s – symbols that were to resurface later on, subtly developing their ambiguous references to metaphysics by including triangular and pyramidal forms in the exhibition at Otwarta Pracownia.

Thanks to interpretation, which plays a crucial role here, religious symbols that are part of the order of things discovered through the relational overlapping of layers of carbon on paper, construed as both uncovering and resulting, opened doors to transcendence that meant being both beyond and above, but also to the type of reality where sublime metaphysical sacredness is revealed gradually (temporally and in consecutive layers of experience and cognition) as something permanently inherent in memory, spiritual elevation, and prayer, as well as in sacrifice, pain, suffering, humiliation, loneliness ... It is revealed in human perseverance in and towards them, which hermeneutic interpretations often emphasise.²¹

A multiplicity of meanings enables interpretations to reveal new layers of works, along with their relationship with and their permeation by the transcendent order of things, almost willingly submitting to being expressed through a seemingly infinite number of rhetorics. In any case, the rhetorics proved to be countable, unlike transcendence, which is infinite, even though we can become acquainted with its real, concrete, finite, and countable traces. Nevertheless, we never get to know the Mystery, which has always featured in interpretations of Grzegorz Sztabiński's art. This way, the impression of its being explicable in terms such as 'relationality', which can then be treated as one of the rhetorics,²² should include the word *almost*.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ See: e.g. J. Ratzinger, "Kto mnie zobaczył, zobaczył także i Ojca" [Whoever has seen me has seen the Father] (J 14,9). *Oblicze Jezusa w Piśmie Świętym* [The face of Jesus in the Scriptures], [in:] idem, *W drodze do Jezusa Chrystusa* [On the way to Jesus Christ], trans. Father J. Merecki S.D.S., Cracow 2005, pp. 33–43.

²² See: S. Marzec, p. 93 and N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. S. Pleasance and F. Woods, Dijon 2002.

Wandering: repetition

Later, the artist's 'wanderings' led him to discover memory, which, in preserving the past, preserves traces. There are also repetitions possible because of the memory. Repetitions that reveal the transcendent: memory itself (for we remember what we intend to repeat), time (for we repeat that which has already taken place), and identity (for something repeated, though it is just like the earlier event, is not the same). However, it was not merely for the sake of such universal categories that the artist repeated his own motifs in *Self-Citations*, for repetition, a trace of metaphysical activity as such, reveals the transcendentals primarily by being. Through being repetition, it is and 'belongs to the moment that is infinity'.²³ *Is* will prove a very important term in relation to the described works.

Nevertheless, recollection as such has not lost any of its meaning over time, for it endures and penetrates Grzegorz Sztabiński's art, in particular his exhibition at *Otwarta Pracownia*. This exhibition contains retrospective repetitions of geometrical motifs, symbols, and self-citations, as well as developing the 'writing of nature', which emerged most recently (but still some time ago) in a clearly announced relationship with transcendence. It is noteworthy that the presence of works at the exhibition in three different rooms illustrates both the process of moving through consecutive stages in the artist's practice and the transcendent order inherent in his development and art understood as a complete process. It also manifests hermeneutic faithfulness to the task he posed for himself and continuously recollected, faithfulness to a task as relevant as a promise.²⁴ The task remains: to capture, through art, the ungraspable transcendence. This confirms the exhibition as a complex work that constitutes a uniform iconic statement.

²³ Cf. E. Jedlińska, "Sublimacja myśli. Myśl sublimująca. Spotkanie ze sztuką Grzegorz Sztabińskiego" [Sublimation of thoughts. Sublimating thought. An encounter with the art of Grzegorz Sztabiński], [in:] *Retrospekcja*, op. cit., p. 100.

²⁴ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *O sobie samym jako innym* [Oneself as another], trans. B. Chałstowski, Warsaw 2005, pp. 33–34, 190–191, 233 and introduction: M. Kowalska, "Dialektyka bycia sobą" [The dialectics of being oneself], pp. XI, XX, XXXIII.



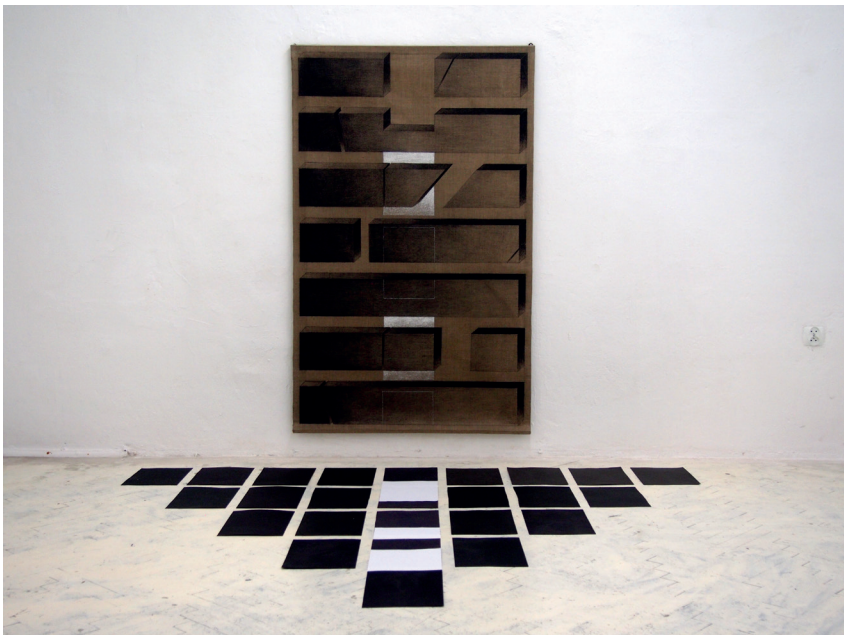
Exhibition: Pismo natury – Transcendencja III [The Writing of Nature – Transcendence III], Otwarta Pracownia Gallery, Cracow, 10 June 2016.



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The writing of nature

In *The Writing of Nature*, Grzegorz Sztabiński searches for, collects, and arranges fragments of wood and dry branches – tree parts he has always liked to observe and study – and reads them for traces of transcendence, inscribed in nature as in a book, or as in cave paintings or hieroglyphs. He keeps them, intuitively reading the alphabet of the Mystery hidden in nature. Outstretched branches, pieces of timber, forming everyday picturesque or functional wholes and quite unnoticed in their complete forms, are now ‘isolated’ and made independent, each spread out on an individual surface in the shape of a geometrical figure. The artist repeats and changes the symbolic, black or white geometric background of isolated parts of writing, and leaves free spaces in between signs required for syntax. It is for the sake of order where transcendence is being realised, although this order is not finite and hence we can only sense it intuitively.

The Writing of Nature, deciphered and developed from 1993 on, is a manifestation of such intuition. Regardless of the place, condition of matter, and time of events, Grzegorz Sztabiński transcends the weakness of works and the ordinariness of everyday reality, enabling innumerable traces of infinite transcendence to be synthesised into particles of writing, signs that later recall transcendence and bring it to the surface, emerging at successive exhibitions as autonomous signs that construct new, artistic statements – statements formulated in an installation, in a work of art, in a medium seemingly separated from nature, yet, indeed, making use of nature and, as it happens, enabling the capture of the transcendent aspect of nature. Thus, nature interpreted by the artist acting upon his intuition reveals its hidden transcendence, which permeates and organises it, and provides at the same time a trace of metaphysics.

Finally, art encourages the viewer of the work and exhibition-as-work to investigate and interpret ‘the writing of nature’. Art presents ‘the writing of nature’, whose synthesis into signs serves to open up a different reality and its order, which is a fleeting foundation of creation, organisation, connections and disconnections, binding and liberating. Interpretation suggests that the capacity of writing to connect means that it can impose ties as well. It can wrap itself around us with lines, symbolically present in the installations; lines that tie, combine, tightly adhere, save, but also press painfully, captivate...

Transcendence called by its name

In the most recent presentations of the series *The Writing of Nature*, in which the word 'transcendence' features in the title, organised after the presentation of 'tying and 'binding' writing at the Marienkirche in Frankfurt in 2014 (in a temple – a place most fitting for posing questions on the possibility of epiphany, questions about an opening up to transcendence), the artist moved his work to an unspecified, transitory', abandoned building in Frankfurt. He inquired whether the writing of nature, with its transcendent capabilities of opening and connecting, justifying its interpretation as a book of meanings, would also fill that 'non-place', allowing it not only to re-connect, but also to open up – to reveal the traces that can be hidden even in what seems to be emptiness, loneliness, or the irrelevant presence so typical of contemporaneity.²⁵ The artist asked whether this writing would continue and whether it would be transcendent. The answer contained the final conclusion that the art present in such a way that it demands to be noticed and reflected upon, to be confronted in a meaningful relationship with others who also want to experience it, restores, more than anything, the significance of existence. It also confirms it in the rules of writing, regardless of how difficult they are to grasp, regardless of simplifications imposed by art – art that offers food for thought, provokes reflection, and works as a catalyst for interpretation, but which ultimately, however, merely *is* there.

Perhaps Cracow's Otwarta Pracownia gallery links the two Frankfurt locations. Seemingly austere and challenging, it is also open to being filled, working as a venue for art and for those who want to encounter works of art, other people, and in this way themselves as well, and, finally, to discover the meaning of being. The latter is effected in the encounter with an interpretation of an artwork, the ultimate goal of which, just like the ultimate goal of writing, should be to uncover the transcendence that permeates the work, the place, artists, and viewers alike: transcendence stemming from the word *is*. By offering a place for art that emphasises the role of relationality as well as presence, Pracownia turns out to be a place for an epiphany of a transcendent meaning of being.

²⁵ On abandoned, undomesticated spaces with no relationality despite their presence (typical of postmodernity or supermodernity), see: M. Augé, *Non-Places. Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. J. Howe, London and New York 1995, pp. 75–114.

The viewer of the exhibition *The Writing of Nature – Transcendence III* initially notices works executed in the medium of drawing and painting on linen, unprimed and unframed, austere, ‘natural’ canvases. Placed upon them are stereometric triangular forms, executed with distinct contours and subdued colours. Their cut forms, their sharp angles directed upwards, point to what is ‘above’, evoking the mystical symbolism of triangles, pyramids, and crosses, as well as clasped and outspread hands. Much like a uniform white belt running along the canvas like an unmoved and all-penetrating rule, they recall once-appreciated symbols. The belt is most typically found among cuboids that populate other canvases as well, painted in a horizontal pattern (again with a ‘break’, with the use of fading black and white), or placed horizontally in space, in the form of a block (wrapped with a symbolically binding rope), inviting reflection on order and power. These cuboids exist in spite of everything, contributing to the whole structure of the exhibition, which contains the consequences of *Logical Landscapes* and of relationality, though its axis is introduced by *The Writing of Nature* and its installation features.

Ultimately, looking at this series enables one to draw the conclusion that the artist, by installing *The Writing of Nature* in various spaces, seems to employ artistic iconic and spatial elements as tools for hermeneutic interpretation conducted to reach an epiphany. First, he uses them in his own interpretation that uncovers the transcendence of writing hidden in nature; when he presents the results of his own interpretation, they become a catalyst whose meaningful presence (which breaks with the lightness of non-relational presence) helps transcendence to reveal itself. Transcendence penetrates the writing, nature, and each of the discussed places. Artistic elements merely ‘help’, for the artist always leaves it to free will to connect signs into words, sentences, and statements, and to read the context. He knows that the will realises its potency by repeating the given order. The order which is there, however, may also escape cognition; alternatively, it is given in order to be known metaphysically, which is the purpose that art is meant to serve.

The game of models of distinguishing the object of metaphysical cognition

The ‘writing of nature’, which Grzegorz Sztabiński’s artistic installation attempted to decipher, seemed initially only an intuitively sensed as-

pect in a metaphysical abstraction; when understood as an ideal order it seems to momentarily change into an unavoidable, transcendent factor. Meanwhile, 'the discovery and isolation of necessary and common (transcendental) factors'²⁶ typifies the method of separation in establishing the object of metaphysical knowledge. However, this takes place within an artistic installation, an artwork, or within an exhibition that proves to be a complete installation work. In its momentary perception, a work of art allows for such a reading, such an interpretation, to last only momentarily, for then a rather metaphysical abstraction returns, the treatment of writing as an aspect, as a trace of universal order, perhaps its reflection, perhaps its realisation ...

It turns out, then, that perhaps it is in the artwork and in its interpretative perception that the game of the models of distinguishing objects of metaphysical cognition is revealed, which increases the need for hermeneutic interpretation and is revealed in this kind of interpretation. The game corresponds with the poetic nature of the paradox of 'artificial' and ordering writing and untamed ('natural') nature. Therefore, in his experience of this cognitive game and poetic qualities, the viewer is provoked to perform interpretation in two different ways. At the same time, these ways reveal various aspects of relationality in art, which was so intensely investigated by the artist at an earlier stage of his career.

In the discussed exhibition of Grzegorz Sztabiński's work, the cognitive game, linked with the poetically sensitive act of interpretation, seems to conclude the search for the rules of writing in nature, as well as for the writing's ultimate existence. Admittedly, because we are dealing with art and because a cognitive game and process of hermeneutic interpretation take place, an impression of capturing the Mystery in the ungraspable infinity is produced, with the naturally allogical logic of reading the unreadable. However, it turns out that such an interpretation, this form of capturing and reading, typifies attempts at gaining metaphysical knowledge, which Grzegorz Sztabiński's art clearly manifests. Ultimately, it proves to be an attempt to read the non-cognisable meaning of the word *is*, inherent in nature and penetrating innumerable traces, places, and connections.

²⁶ M.A. Krąpiec, "Metafizyczne poznanie", op. cit.

Metaphysical cognition and interpretation

The described revelation of the transcendence of writing hidden in nature stands in contradiction to the Kantian argument that 'the understanding does not draw its (*a priori*) laws from nature, but prescribes them to it'.²⁷ Instead, it proves that hermeneutic interpretation conducted by an artist with metaphysical intuition may work as a tool of metaphysical cognition. Hermeneutic interpretation, therefore, which rests in the work of intuition, in finding traces of metaphysics, in uncovering transcendence, and in seeking metaphysical cognition, presents itself as a notion invested with metaphysical meaning.

At the same time, within the artist's installation and exhibition, a hermeneutic circle (which bears a curious resemblance to the artist's wanderings, repetitions, and recollections) is effected, for once writing as an order inscribed in nature is presupposed, it is discovered and realised in various paintings, installations, exhibitions, and places, and then the artist goes back to the hermeneutic prejudice,²⁸ one concerning writing – the order, the being, the meaning hidden in things – the meaning of the primary and ultimate rules of being.

This confirmation of the prejudice, on the other hand, is to be discerned and discovered in the interpretation of the artwork by a viewer who experiences the game of models of distinguishing objects of metaphysical cognition. Sztabiński interprets nature and provokes interpretation of an artwork in which he himself has interpreted nature, so that a metaphysical cognition occurs, so that the meaning of the word *is* is understood.

Metaphysical cognition as a mode of being in the world

Transcendence cannot be seen. Grzegorz Sztabiński's works confirm, however, that one can approach it through metaphysical cognition. Such an approach is taken by the artist, led by metaphysical intuition, who finds through his hermeneutic interpretation traces of metaphysics, for instance in the transcendent order of nature, which can be defined as its writing.

²⁷ I. Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science*, trans. G. Hatfield, Cambridge 2004, p. 72.

²⁸ On the notion of hermeneutic prejudice [*Vorurteil*] see: H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer, D. G. Marshall, London 2004, pp. 267–298.

It is discovered as a transcendent order not only through sensory experience and rational cognition, but also through the interpretation of nature in art and, ultimately, through opening up an artwork (which interprets nature itself) to interpretation.

In this way, the viewer of the work also takes on the challenge of interpretation. First, he or she interprets the work, and then, encouraged by its reception, where art points to the intuitions and traces of metaphysics, also takes up an interpretation that discovers the transcendent order of nature, previously predicted and confirmed by the artist. In this way the rule of the hermeneutic circle is realised, and, at the same time, hermeneutic interpretation confirms its metaphysical being, for it suggests an approach of metaphysical cognition, one which has to be taken towards transcendence.

Grzegorz Sztabiński's installations confirm that the appropriate approach towards transcendence is to take up the task of metaphysical cognition and accept it as an appropriate way of being both in nature and in the world.

Conclusion

In the art of Grzegorz Sztabiński, his conceptual reflexivity appears to correspond and synergistically co-operate with hermeneutic interpretation. Perhaps this is because the artist includes the poetic sensibility in his observations and artistic practice, and, as a result, in observing and interpreting nature, sees signs of transcendental scripture appearing in surprisingly different spaces. Sztabiński recognises traces, signs, and writings, and transfers them into artistic installations; then he plays with different modes of metaphysical cognition. Such a cognitive game, linked with the poetically sensitive act of interpretation, makes both the artist interpreting nature and the viewer interpreting the artwork look for universal metaphysical sense. The viewer wants to follow the traces, to adjust them, and to connect them into a unified whole, as in Gadamer's *symbolon*. Sztabiński seeks to be close to the Mystery and to the Absolute beginnings of the writing of nature in order to decide about its existence, its 'is', its 'being', and its order, as if the writing was an emanation of the Absolute – requiring, however, a revelation in the artwork and its interpretation, so that it might turn into what Gadamer referred to as celebration. Idealism, which derives its tenets from hermeneutics,

seems to exceed the conceptual rigor of the installation. On the other hand, the artist is aware that ultimate cognition of the Mystery is impossible. Nevertheless, his art may suggest that not only understanding, but also orientation towards metaphysical cognition, through interpretation may be the best way of being in the world proposed by art.

Translated by Karolina Kolenda

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List of illustrations

1. *Exhibition: Pismo natury – Transcendencja III* [The Writing of Nature – Transcendence III], Otwarta Pracownia Gallery, Cracow, 10 June 2016.
2. *Exhibition: Pismo natury – Transcendencja III* [The Writing of Nature – Transcendence III], Otwarta Pracownia Gallery, Cracow, 10 June 2016.
3. *Exhibition: Pismo natury – Transcendencja III* [The Writing of Nature – Transcendence III], Otwarta Pracownia Gallery, Cracow, 10 June 2016.
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