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## The Polyphonicity of Artistic Practice and Interpretation as a Tale about It: The Art of Piotr Jargusz in the Context of the Thought of Władysław Stróżewski and Roman Ingarden

### Abstract

The text discusses the painting-performative art of Piotr Jargusz and the polysensory and immersive way of its reception and interpretation planned by the artist to be formed as a tale. The art and the tale are presented as a two-voice whole with a standard polyphonic set of aesthetically valuable qualities (according to Roman Ingarden's terminology). Such a whole goes beyond the division into areas of perception determined by the senses and domains of arts, ultimately revealing the essential sense of reality. It is discovered by the mythos of art (represented by the artist's actions) and the mythos of art science (represented by the tale-interpretation). The concept of *mythos* is introduced by the philosophy of Władysław Stróżewski, Ingarden's student and associate. The paper offers a proposal to classify several planes of polyphonicity based on the described situation.

### Keywords

Sense, Art, Polyphony, Piotr Jargusz, Tale

### **Logos and Sense as Given to Be Discovered**

One of the fundamental assumptions of Władysław Stróżewski's<sup>1</sup> philosophy is the conviction that "the world is governed by a hidden sense given to the

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Władysław Stróżewski (born 1933) is considered the greatest living Polish philosopher. In 1957 he started working at the Department of the History of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. Student of professors Stefan Swieżawski, Mieczysław

human to discover" (Stróżewski 2013, 134). From the response to this "task," call, and challenge, a myth is born, i.e., a manner of grasping the mystery of sense or *Logos* by the human being's cognitive faculties (according to the philosopher, *Logos*, translated as Word, should also be translated as sense). Stróżewski's idealistic attitude allows one to assume that the metaphysical ideas of good and beauty, which define the goals and obligations of the human being living in reality, are appropriate for *Logos*.

The sense-revealing (*Logos*-revealing) response from which the myth is born is "translated" into discourse or symbols. Therefore, the myth, its form, is a product of translation.

Alongside the myth of a religious nature, the cognising of which facilitates direct participation in the primordial beginning and thus a direct experience of the *Logos* or sense, a host of various *mythoi* arise. These *mythoi* are different ways of "understanding the hidden sense" (Stróżewski 2013, 136). Stróżewski discusses the *mythoi* of philosophy, science, and poetry separately.

### **The *Mythos* of Art and the Work of Art**

Although the philosopher does not say so explicitly, it is also possible to distinguish the *mythos* of art or the visual arts, i.e., to perceive art as "a way of understanding a hidden sense" or a way of discovering the sense that governs the world.

In the *mythos* of art, the response to the call to discover the sense would be translated into artworks, most often into images, or—in contemporary terms—into artistic practices, often processual, understood here as works, usually designed for polysensory reception.

As works of art, according to the thought of Ingarden adopted by Stróżewski, they are intentional creations whose reception and concretisation are determined by their stratified nature (Ingarden 1936, 165-166). In a work of literature (whose physical ontological material has the form of printed books or recording carriers), Ingarden distinguished between a stratum of verbal resonances, a stratum of the meaning units (words and sentences),

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sław Albert Krąpiec, Roman Ingarden and Izydora Dąmbska. Editor-in-chief of the Philosophical Quarterly and chairman of the Polish Philosophical Society. He lectured at the Jagiellonian University, the Academy of Music and the Ignatianum Academy in Krakow. Above all, he continues the tradition of Ingarden's phenomenology. The most important issues developed by Stróżewski include the issue of negation and non-existence, the issue of creativity, the axiological structure of humanity, hermeneutics of divinity, beauty and basic ontological categories.

a stratum of schematisations (or schematized visual aspects, simply and colloquially speaking, these are the “appearances” of objects and characters) and, finally, a stratum of represented reality and states of affairs (represented entities) (Ingarden 1936, 165-166, 184). On the other hand, the primary component of a painting (regarding the painting as a material entity) are colour patches, in which the stratum of schematisations is constituted, and indirectly also the stratum of represented objects (Ingarden 1966a, 33). The following strata are fundamental: the literary theme, i.e., the life situation presented in the painting, and the stratum of the historical theme, which refers to the reality outside the painting (Ingarden 1966a, 9-13).

Aesthetically valuable qualities and qualities of aesthetic values can be found in every stratum of artworks. “Aesthetically valuable qualities” are the experienced and assessed formal qualities, such as color, weight, but also harmony, contrast, symmetry, deformation ... These qualities constitute “qualities of aesthetic values” such as beauty, sublime, which may be a “supra-aesthetic” or “metaphysical” value (as the idea of beauty). Such a “metaphysical value” may be a quality of the Absolute. The qualities interact with each other, enabling the subject of aesthetic experience to create the so-called qualitative juxtapositions. Ingarden identified “the polyphonic harmony of aesthetically valuable qualities” with the “idea of the work” and its aesthetic authenticity derived from construction in which nothing can be added or subtracted, that is, from the content of the congruence of qualitative moments (Ingarden 1936, 165, 179, 183; 1966b, 405). Authenticity can serve truth as an idea—a supra-aesthetic—metaphysical value (Stróżewski, 1983, 76–78; 2002, 198–202).

### **The *Mythos* of Art Studies and Interpretation**

The discourse of critics, historians, and theorists who deal with art by describing, analysing, and interpreting it, seems to construct a separate *mythos* of art studies (“knowledge of art”). This *mythos*, however, is conditioned by the pre-existing *mythos* of art.

Aestheticians, who can separate the strata of artworks that comprise the *mythos* of art and capture the polyphony of aesthetically valuable qualities and qualities of aesthetic values, seem to fall in the category of the co-creators of the *mythos* of art studies. In the *mythos* of art studies, the response to the call to discover the sense would translate into a description, analysis, interpretation, and critique of the work of art, assisting the work in revealing the sense or revealing this sense mainly on its own, as a statement

of one's own aesthetics, for which the artwork merely serves as inspiration. Such an utterance is close to interpretation, i.e., to the search for the sense revealed by a work of art through understanding, this fundamental human "way of behaving in the world" (Chmielowski 2000, 95); it, however, can expand its framework, remaining in "polyphonic correspondence" with the intentions of the artist and with their work.

Recognizing the *Logos* as essential sense to be discovered makes an interpretation that uses a word (lower case *logos*) an appropriate way of discovering meaning. Such an interpretation-utterance can also become a polyphonic tale to reveal sense. The tale will be analyzed further, not the story, although the described artistic practices are not fictional. However, the interpretation develops these artistic practices creatively, making them close to the realm of fiction. The discovery of meaning described further is also appropriate for the tale because it does not follow the "plot" to solve the mystery, as it is popular in a story. It works by the described further: polyphonic multiplicity of the qualities of actions, images, and words, digressiveness, interdisciplinarity, atmosphere and mood, and finally, the relational involvement of two different people.

I want to point precisely to a situation in which the mode of perception designed by the artist, activating polysensory sensitivity and understanding—the characteristics of intermediality of contemporary art, expands the polyphonic stratification of the work. The interpretation arising as a result of such perception peculiarly serves to find the essential sense. It takes on the character and form of a statement-narrative. Enclosed in the form of a tale, with its aesthetic qualities and values that may lead to metaphysics, the understanding is expanded in fact. Interpretation becomes cognition, also metaphysical. Ultimately, it will turn out that the artist's driving force is a pursuit determined by good and love. It is not about erotic instinct but about striving for good and beauty (metaphysical values), although not always understood in a simple and obvious way.

I want to describe the emergence of such an interpretation bearing the characteristics of a tale using the example of Piotr Jargusz's art and a narrative about it which happened to be my share.

## The Art of Piotr Jargusz

Piotr Jargusz is first and foremost a painter.<sup>2</sup> He paints pictures with acrylic paint on ordinary, grey-brown wrapping paper, not treated in any way, usually one metre by one metre, sometimes bigger. Sometimes he uses layers of posters and placards taken down from billboards and advertising poles as support, forming them into “screens” or oblong shapes of pipes or trumpets. The bare and crude nature of the support influences the physical ontological material of the picture (painting) and allows for production in excess, ease of public exposition, and reuse.



Fig. 1. Piotr Jargusz, *Street Paintings* from the cycle *Man and Woman* (Krakow, 2011–2012)

Courtesy of the artist (photographed by Piotr Jargusz).

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<sup>2</sup> Piotr Jargusz is a painter and professor, was born in 1960 in Krakow, where he still lives. He studied at the Faculty of Painting and Graphic Arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. The artist implements the ideas of painting in social space. His works are rendered on simple gray, wrapping papers glued on poster pillars.

He realizes social animation and ecological projects, and defines himself as an artist of Polish identity. Professor Jargusz leads the Institute of Painting and Artistic Education at the Pedagogical University in Krakow. He is the author of about 80 individual exhibitions and projects. In his works “intensely” and surprisingly present in public space in Krakow, Poland and Central European countries, in the urban and “natural” environment, existential, historical, social and erotic themes meet with references to metaphysics.

The stratum of colour patches results partly from the character of the support because the left empty background of the grey-brown paper matter is such a patch indeed. Its characteristic and aesthetically valuable qualities are economy and limitation. The fruit they bear is austerity as a quality of aesthetic value.

Yet, applied in patches and splashes with vigorous strokes, streaks, and patches of red, navy blue, white, black, and orange appear against the background of raw sheets of paper (see, for example, Fig. 1). When the paint is applied thickly, it can occupy the full support of the canvas. More often, however, most of the background remains empty. The streaks are applied thinly, in a jittering line, as if out of control and understated but often “forced” into an orderly contour. Contrast, deliberate “understatement,” disharmony, imbalance, and excess are aesthetically valuable qualities that serve such qualities of values as expressivity, vehemence, and primitiveness. The latter two, as aesthetic values, seem to contrast with the austerity of the background. However, when the background’s austerity is understood as exposed leanness, it belongs to primitiveness. The background, too, as a contrasting counterbalance to the dynamic patches of paint applied with a vigorous “gesture,” actually enhances the element of expressive intensity. Even the ultimate control of the whole is an expression of power, capability, efficiency, expansiveness, and vehemence.



Fig. 2. Piotr Jargusz, *Street Paintings* from the cycle *Man and Woman: Venus* (Krakow, 2013). Courtesy of the artist (photographed by Piotr Jargusz).

Identification of the schematisations and the objects they represent is rendered more difficult by colour contrasts and frequent simplifications, deformations, exaggerations (another aesthetically valuable quality). Schematisations, therefore, suggest rather than resemble the colours and shapes of objects.

Yet, the images identified using the titles acquire meanings, usually through symbolism and poeticism that characterise the literary themes of the cycles. These may be *Święta Polskie* (*Polish Holidays*), the motif of *Siedzący* (*The Sitting Person*), but often also erotic motifs, female shapes, and ordinary stones.



Fig. 3. Piotr Jargusz, *The Peasants* (10<sup>th</sup> Artistic Meeting organized by the Folk High School for Craftsmanship in Wola Sękowa, 2015) Courtesy of the artist (photographed by Grzegorz Danielewicz).

These works appear on advertising pillars and billboards as *Obrazy Uliczne* (*Street Paintings*; see Fig. 2) (taken down together with layers of other advertising materials, they are reused). The screens, sheets, and raw painted canvas are also planted or mounted in the natural space outside the city, e.g., in the greenery of Białowieża or amidst sub-Carpathian fields (for example, see Fig. 3). The artist also posts small fragments in public spaces, as he did, for example, while visiting Russia and Germany. In such places, symbolic motifs in the paintings acquire meaning through the context (for example, the stones under the Reichstag in Berlin), thus forming a historical theme. Travelling is an element of artistic practice that extends throughout

his conscious artistic life. Within it, the artist often returns to the term *Viatoris*, which was the title of one of his projects (see Fig. 4), but is also constantly intended to mean that he is on the road, a pilgrim.

When exposed, aesthetically valuable qualities polyphonically correspond with those of the paintings. In addition, however, they are enriched with paradoxical subversiveness (Dziamski 2001) as raw and expressive “interjections” into the discourse of mass messages present in the public space induce tranquillity in their recipients and redirect their thinking. Thus, the quality of subversiveness can be considered a tool of the aesthetic value of poeticity.



Fig. 4. Piotr Jargusz, *Viatoris in Teremiski, Street Paintings* (2011)  
Courtesy of the artist (photographed by Olga Jargusz).

In the “diary-raptularius” kept by the artist, we find the first answer when questioning which actions reveal “supra-aesthetic” metaphysical values (in which “classically” understood beauty is difficult to grasp). It is irregular, but its parts bear literary characteristics. The flow of words and sentences often uttered abruptly and in excess is nevertheless fluent and lively. This aesthetically valuable quality affords expression to the aesthetic values of excess and dynamic urgency, constrained by the power of ordering, to present the seen and multi-sensorially experienced, learned world, persons, situations, and emotional qualitative states. Ultimately, the state of emotions is shown, whereas the indicated aesthetically valuable qualities and aesthetic values reveal the metaphysical worth of love, lustful and much-anticipated.

One feels a polyphonic congruence of qualities corresponding to a particular manner of expression when holistically considering the works (including the diary entries), the (sometimes shown) process of their creation, and how they are exhibited. The cause of such a feeling could be the energy of love. The artist's actions are usually aimed at binding art recipients, local community members, collaborating artists, creators, and interpreters together. Unification, despite its diversity, shows both the "One" and the "Good." This is also why the painter's and performer's energy can be identified as love, the pursuit of good. The truth about love as a metaphysical value, and not only an erotic instinct, is present (however, the power of the instinct revealed in gendered relationships is also present in Piotr Jargusz's art). Finally, the overall structure of a given project (including the design of life) also seems to exhibit the features of authenticity—the value of truth. Thus, the described works, actions, and notation of Piotr Jargusz form his response to the call of the sense, finding it in truth and love. This response is the purpose of the *mythos* of art as expressed by the Cracovian artist.

### Invitation and Encounter

However, the part of the word explicitly spoken or written down in Piotr Jargusz's art does not end with the diary entry. This continuation is because the artist constructs situations in which viewing his artworks and activities (including those recorded on film and in photographs) is combined with visiting his home or atelier and listening to a tale about his achievements and intentions. Circumstances of such an encounter are staged; they become known through seeing, listening, touch, smell, and taste (possible dishes connected with the visits)—even the timbre of the voice matters. The whole situation creates the feeling of immersion in the activities being explored or penetrating them. Such immersion (Ostrowicki 2006, 204; Agrawal *et al.* 2019, 2-3) is a value constructed by qualities of the antiquity of Cracovian interiors, the memorabilia brought, the dimmed light, the roaring of the fire burning in the stove, the low and "purring" voice, the closed space suddenly opened by the window overlooking the park. The qualities experienced during the encounter participate in the polyphonic harmony of the whole processual work realised in various media within the framework of the project the meeting relates to (e.g., the *Viatoris* project). In the case of several visits, the author paid the artist; the visits yielded a tale that, together with the circumstances of its creation, will now be described.

The encounter and the tale had the purpose of partaking in and continuing this narrative, which the artist invited us to do. The information acquired and the reception of the situation “through one’s whole self,” polysensorily and immersively, or in synaesthetic reading (Ball 2009, 849), had the analytical description and interpretation of Piotr Jargusz’s artistic practices fulfil their hermeneutic tasks in a particular way. The designed situation and the participation to which one was invited caused the situations described by the artist, together with their qualities, to be empathically received and accepted as one’s own and combined with one’s feelings, images, memories, and thoughts. It was as if an intermedial merging transpired, not only of the artist’s already different horizons (Higgins 2000, 117; 1966) but also of the matter which, in the case of two different people, became “incubated” in memory and subconsciousness for possible participation in the creative process.<sup>3</sup>

It was possible to experience a community of afflation that Władysław Stróżewski detected mainly in the field of poetry (Stróżewski 2013, 144-145). The encounter to which the artist invited, designing an appropriate atmosphere, could facilitate a joint surrender to the direction of the “magnetic needle” (Miłosz 1998, 30, after: Stróżewski 2013, 145) of poetic sensitivity proper for the realisation of the contemporary version of “poets’ criticism” (Porębski 1983, 156-157).

Consequently, an interpretative text came into being in line with the artist’s intention. Its subject is related to several projects carried out using the painting and performative-expository artistic practices described above or an artistic “life project.” Yet, through its aesthetically valuable qualities present already in the linguistic stratum (verbal resonances and meanings of words and sentences), the text itself became a tale. In their form and enriched content, these qualities seemed to the author to correspond best with the artistic practices described.

### **Interpretation—a Tale**

In words about Piotr Jargusz, i.e., the interpretation of his actions, the narrator’s presence describing the characters and actions was clear; the narrator himself, as a literary figure weaving the tale, provides a parallel for the powerful subject the artist can be considered to be. Already at the beginning of the book about the artist, the narrator gives expression to his own experiences:

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<sup>3</sup> This concept means that experiences are processed unconsciously by the human mind, and that they ultimately “reach the mind in an act of an epiphany” (Nęcka 1995, 19).

The first meeting with Piotr Jargusz is a handshake. Strong but not crushingly unpleasant. Yet still more than just manly. Maybe macho and dominant? The handshake of a conqueror?

Or maybe more of a knight? A nobleman? A soldier?

Undeniably strong, but at the same time thought provoking. Or perhaps one that foreshadows what is about to happen?

For Piotr himself is able to break firmly and vehemently into every space of the world that can provide him with experience material. Enter it in an importunate, aggressive, pressing and invasive manner. Frequently and passionately. It is his own style and way of being. Quickly, confidently and often against the rules (Solewski 2016, 167).

In the narrator's tale, rhetorical questions appeared to reinforce the intensity. At the same time, escalating enumeration of words describing qualities or signifying presence, constructed gradations, and hyperbolisations abounding in the entire narrative. By retaining elements of vowel assonance or onomatopoeia, such figures describe, for example, rustling grey papers, rough on one side but smooth on the other:

Smooth green and glassy lines on a gray-black background of vibrating paint create *The oven in my kitchen*—its contours suggest the shape and the smooth and lucent texture of the lines echo the surface of the tiling covering the oven. But besides them it is mostly black, here and there with a bit whitened, sometimes matt, sometimes smoother and slicker. Indeed, you will be able to recognise the small door or some dishes on the plate. But the essence of the oven is much better caught by the paint, the duct of the brush, the way the colors were painted. A nervous, vibrant, trembling, gushing, jumping, hot and dangerous way. Although it is a picture of a specific thing—an oven—one of the most beloved fetishes, on which experience and memory are based on and through its own work gives something necessary for life—like heat for example, it is also a painting of adjectives and the quality of things. And mostly verbs Actions. (Solewski 2016, 176-177).

But also an intimately hushed voice, humming purringly:

It is for the best when it is read out loud by the author. Maybe a little bit too fast but life happens so fast, so much at once and so much has been recorded in the diary... The timbre of his voice, the modulation, some murmurs here and there a bit more intense, the rhythm that sets the atmosphere, as if it were a sort of preparation for a trans... the text flows... its fragments have been underlined because the artist reads only, what he wants to be heard" (Solewski 2016, 185).

Multiple adjectives, often used for comparison, could suggest the vehemence of gesture and excess of production:

The sheets hung by *Viatoris* were glowing with the intensity of colors as the screens in juicy green of Teremiski once did. But this time on a straw-yellow stubble field they looked like they were to announce the begin (...) and call for a campfire—burning twigs, but also some tribal banners or eventually protective screens and entanglements of protective encampment..." (Solewski 2016, 265-266).

Inversions in the syntax, twists in the content of the chapters, colloquial metonymies, but also paradoxical metaphors, also corresponding to the subversive poetics, show the energy, excess, and coercion to reflection:

Motherhood, Pietà, a grandmother with her grandchild—maybe Saint Anna? It is a classic theme in an expressive, wild manner of thick strokes like the women by Willem de Kooning. But this is not de Kooning, it is a painting by Piotr Jargusz hanging in Andy Warhol's Museum. In Medzilaborce, in the Ruthenian, Central European and Eastern Slovakia, where the American critic of "splashers" and the "brightest" comes from, a documentalist of Anglo-Saxon pop and commercialised culture—the quintessence of the West. As if many worlds crashed into each other. Often contradictory ones. And none of them managed to dominate Piotr Jargusz, because he wants to dominate them all. Maybe paradoxically by proving how much the West owes to the East, and the progress of civilisation, determined by a greed for profit precedes or even outruns, the chaotic, explosive and expressive pulsating of energy and emotions, ruled only by force (Solewski 2016, 191-192).

The described aesthetically valuable qualities enriched the epic narrativity (corresponding to the processuality of the projects, particularly the treatment of life as an artwork), imbuing it with the quality of poetic values towards which the already described encounter steered.

When elements of poeticity appeared in the interpretation, their presence could confirm the turning of the aforementioned "magnetic needle" of the work and of the tale towards the metaphysical "pole of the sacrum," which is characteristic of poetry (Miłosz 1989, 87).

To maintain the requirements proper to the *mythos* of art studies in its contemporary form, the interpretation should have mentioned the stylistics typical of the neo-expressionism of the Neue Wilde or Leon Golub, with his drawings-paintings and inscriptions executed in *Bad Drawing* style on raw canvas. Moreover, it should note the extension of the field of art, or the critical interruption of the spectacle of mass culture, performativity, and a powerful subject, or the mentioned intermediality and immersiveness (Solewski 2016, 179, 190).

However, it is precisely thanks to these last two qualities, including poeticity, and above all else, thanks to the invitation to "participate in the work," that the interpretive tale of the artistic practice creating this work trans-

cended the boundaries of the *mythos* of art and art sciences and synergistically participated in the qualitative harmony of each of the projects it described and, simultaneously, in the totality of the artist's life becoming his work.

### Planes of Polyphonicity

In the above text, polyphony is understood primarily as the aesthetic "polyphonic harmony" that Roman Ingarden wrote about. However, "starting" from the philosopher's thoughts and combining them with the musical and popular understanding of polyphony allows us to capture a different aesthetically valuable quality (or an aesthetic category)—polyphonicity. Therefore, some of the possible ways of experiencing it are indicated.

In the situations described, polyphonicity can be perceived in several ways. Firstly, it occurs in the work as a congruence of aesthetic moments. This work must be treated as a process combining painting, performative action, and spectacular and critical exposition. It would be a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Furthermore, in the case of Piotr Jargusz's art, the work as a whole, especially if one treats the total of conscious, artistic life as artwork, within an even further extending stratification should include his diary, i.e., the material written down in words and sentences, suggestive of the strata of schematisations and the represented world.

The polysensory and immersive reception of activities understood as artworks also means that the harmonious congruence of which Ingarden wrote encompasses the experience of qualities perceived by different senses. In this context, polyphonicity means the synaesthetic transcendence of the boundaries set by the division into senses and the stimuli characteristic of them (which is often the basis for the delimitation of fields of art). This is the second plane of polyphonicity.

The interpretation of the work, taking on the characteristics of a tale in the manner described, allows for literal and colloquial use of the term polyphonicity. Thus, two voices resound around and within Piotr Jargusz's artistic practices: that of the artist and that of the interpreter who explains, evaluates, explicates, and participates in the wholes: specific projects and artistic life treated as an artwork. This dichotomy of the artist and the interpreter is the third plane of polyphonicity.

In this context, polyphonicity appears for the fourth time, understood as a harmonious congruence of aesthetic moments both in Piotr Jargusz's artistic practices and in the literarily valuable tale of the interpreter invited to

participate in the work. This congruence is because, ultimately, such a polyphonic whole in the literal sense is a whole with its own aesthetic polyphony, harmoniously integrating the aesthetic moments of the vast number of strata of the extended work.

It is a work of precisely this kind, extended because it is interpretatively explicated by co-participation in the narrative that constitutes an intentional whole concretised by the viewer. At the same time, it ascends to the universal level on which love (sought and found in the totality of practice but named in the diary and the interpreting tale), i.e., the supra-aesthetic and metaphysical value that is the cause of artistic action, is revealed. The truth of the overall harmony of the realisation and interpretation of projects and life as artwork corresponds with it on the metaphysical level.

The border between the *mythos* of art and the *mythos* of art studies is transcended in the situation described. This transcendence seems to correspond to the understanding of intermediality and expand the notion of interpretation. Only when expanded by a tale does a work of visual, performative, or polysensory art acquire polyphonic and veridical fullness, simultaneously being testament to the Logos, that is the Word, due to the fact that the tale uses words. An attempt at grasping the harmonious relationship between artistic practices and the tale about them was possible thanks to the use of tools characteristic of Roman Ingarden's philosophy. The use of the notion of *mythos* and the way Stróżewski understood it has shown that, although upsetting at times, transcending borders has its value if it serves the purpose of revealing the sense that responds to its call.

*translated by Maciej Czuchra,  
quotes from the book translated by Inez Olkuszka*

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