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AESTHETIC THINKING ACCORDING TO WISŁAWA SZYMBORSKA¹

Abstract: The starting point for the considerations undertaken here is Wolfgang Iser's concept of "aesthetic thinking". Iser, referring to the findings of Kant and Nietzsche on the cognitive capacity of man and the fictional nature of reality, claims that it is an aesthetic project, a phantasm established each time in human experience. Hence the fluidity, instability of the world and, consequently, the impossibility of its full cognition. From the perspective of this reflection, the Author of the paper looks at the poetry of Wisława Szymborska, who invariably poses the most fundamental questions of a philosophical nature, regarding existence, meaning, truth, human cognitive capabilities, and human relations with the world and other entities. By tracing some of the themes present in Iser's concept and their literary transformations in selected poems by Szymborska, the Author essentially reconstructs Wisława Szymborska's "aesthetic thinking".

Keywords: Wisława Szymborska, experience, cognition, aesthetic thinking

"we believe that we know something about the things themselves (...) and yet we possess nothing but metaphors (...) which correspond in no way to the original entities"²

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² F. Nietzsche, *Pisma pozostałe 1862-1875*, transl. B. Baran, Wydawnictwo Baran i Suszczyński, Wydawca Inter Esse Kraków 1993, p. 187. Translation from: [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche;_On_Truth_and_Lies_in_a_Nonmoral_Sense_\(German:_Über_Wahrheit_und_Lüge_imaussermoralischen_Sinne\)_by_Friedrich_Nietzsche,_1873\)](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche;_On_Truth_and_Lies_in_a_Nonmoral_Sense_(German:_Über_Wahrheit_und_Lüge_imaussermoralischen_Sinne)_by_Friedrich_Nietzsche,_1873)).

Elusive reality and the possibility of knowing and experiencing it have always fascinated philosophers and humanists. In their works, artists and writers have sought to learn the hidden meanings of the world beyond the relations of logical veracity and referentiality revealed in fictional representations of imaginary worlds. As Bożena Tokarz writes, what is external in artistic creation becomes internal in a special way and vice versa, although this applies to the general regularity of human perception based on selection. Thus, the belief that there is a describable reality, a larger external whole, is invalidated, as there is no key to it, since it exists only in terms of imagination. The Kantian assumption that we commune not with reality itself, but only with its representations resounds here. This is because Kant proved that a thing exists solely through a subject, that it does not manifest itself but through its representations. He thus changed the relationship between the object and the cognizing subject.

Reality, as human material environment, determines human existence in terms of all action and mentalemotional functioning. At the same time, it provokes, as Tokarz points out, reflection on the issue of correspondence between things, states, phenomena, people, and their adjudication. However, depending on the perceiving subject, his or her sensory and mental experiences, as well as on various cultural patterns, the truth about the world acquires different facets.³ It can be said that it always remains a purely individual and disposable version of reality. Modern humans are fully aware that they can only experience the world in a manner mediated by human cognitive powers and language. Their perception is fragmented, unstable and changeable, and consequently their identity is also unstable and changeable – perceiving and experiencing reality appears, in fact, as constructing an evernew and ever-unfinished story.

Addressing the question of human cognitive capacity, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that the human mind is incapable of reaching the truth, since it always feeds on illusions, delusions and dreams. The philosopher also stressed that cognition invariably has an anthropocentric dimension, since humans are unable to adopt even the perspective of a bird or insect perceiving the world quite differently. Moreover, it is impossible to decide which perception would be more accurate, since there is no criterion for the accuracy of perception. Truth, therefore, turns out to be merely a human product, the sum of human relations with the world, which have been embellished and transposed by them,

³ Cf. B. Tokarz, *Artystyczna interioryzacja rzeczywistości: przypadek poezja [in:] Estetyczne impresje. Powtórzenia - powroty - perspektywy*, edited by M. Błaszczak, P. Dobrowolski, I. Górska, E. Szkudlarek, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2022.

and ultimately declared valid. Truth remains an illusion, summoned by the human "army of metaphors", which they recognize as things in themselves. Thus, it can be said that the cognition of their essence is inaccessible to humans, since it is humans who produce forms of cognition of the world which they then attempt to describe through these very forms. Cognition is thus essentially a metaphorical activity,⁴ and human projects of reality are aesthetic in nature.

Manifestations of this Nietzschean reflection can be found in Wolfgang Iser's concept of aesthetic thinking. The author of *Aesthetics Beyond Aesthetics* poses the argument that reality is fictional and constitutes an aesthetic construct, but, importantly, the researcher returns to the source understanding of aesthetics and sees it primarily as thematization of all sensory, everyday, sublime, spiritual perceptions belonging to both the world of art and the lived world. For him, aesthetic thinking means a kind of reflection, in which aesthetics, understood in this way, constitutes its very essence.⁵ Iser assumes that a significant portion of various elements of reality undergo aesthetic transformations. Moreover, reality itself becomes an aesthetic project.⁶ Following in the footsteps of Immanuel Kant, Wolfgang Iser emphasizes the importance of aesthetic moments for human cognition of reality and argues, taking up Nietzsche's thought, that "reality is a construct that, like an artist, we produce by fictional means," and thus human cognition becomes an essentially metaphorical activity.⁷ Iser points out that both cognitive acts and reality itself go all the way back to forms of intuition, projections, phantoms, and images. These forms thus determine human cognition and experience of the world. We can only experience what is given to us in them, and in what we ourselves have previously put into them. Iser thus argues that reality is not some fixed quantity, an independent entity given in advance, but always remains a construct that we ourselves continually constitute in our experience. Iser writes: "Ever since we realized that not only art, but also other forms of our activity, including cognition, have the character of production, aesthetic categories – categories such as 'semblance', 'mobility', 'variety', 'groundlessness' or 'vacillation' – have become the basic categories of reality".⁸ Undoubtedly, uncertainty should also be added to this list, for the world, constructed again and again in images, projections, phantoms, and metaphors, always remains unstable and no fixed point of reference can be found in it. In the view pro-

⁴ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Pisma pozostałe...*, pp. 183-199.

⁵ Cf. J. Balbierz, *Myślenie estetyczne Wolfganga Isera [in:] Odkrywanie modernizmu. Przekłady i komentarze, introduction by R. Nycz* (ed.), Universitas, Kraków 2004, p. 464.

⁶ Cf. W. Iser, *Estetyka poza estetyką*, transl. K. Gućzalska, Universitas, Kraków 2005, p. 32.

⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 62; retranslated from Polish in this paper.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66; retranslated from Polish in this paper.

posed by Nietzsche and Welsch, it always exists in an anthropocentric perspective. This is also how Arnold Berleant described it: "The world in which we live is necessarily the world of man, a world that we cannot avoid or evade".⁹

An interesting literary transformation of the above reflections is proposed by Wisława Szymborska in her poems, in which one can find selected leads present in Nietzsche's thought or in Welsch's concept of "aesthetic thinking". On the one hand, contrary to Welsch's claim, Szymborska repeatedly emphasizes the fact that the world exists "beyond the reach/of our presence" (cf. the poem *The Railroad Station*),¹⁰ independent of human perception, experience, and consciousness, and is simply some kind of a neutral entity. On the other hand, however, much of its focus is on the human experience of an ever-escaping reality, which in this view loses this neutrality and acquires a fictional character. Humans generate this reality, name it, describe it, and translate it into codes that only they understand and which they subordinate to themselves. "The image of the world is tainted by the human perspective to which we have been condemned, and which seems to be a genetic burden and a major obstacle to the knowledge of reality – after all <inhuman> in an overwhelming part".¹¹

Szymborska uses the potential of Welsch's findings in her own peculiar way, most often juxtaposing or rather often interweaving them within a single poem. She depicts the world as non-anthropocentric, while presenting human consciousness in constant conflict with it. She shows the world in its immeasurable abundance and multiplicity of diverse entities, and at the same time, often with irony, exposes the bottomless abyss that separates humans from it, being stuck, as it were, outside it, having no access to it and watching it as if through a glass.

So, one might say that Szymborska evokes poetic realities that have the character of aporia. Therefore, it can be claimed that humans create a fictional reality out of neutral elements, marked by their own signs. This reality then turns out to be a peculiar edition of the world constituted only once, for a moment, and only in the human perspective and experience – a world composed of partial, incomplete, and changeable truths. The anthropocentric view of the world excludes the possibility of in-depth complete cognition. Reality, mediated

⁹ A. Berleant, *Wrażliwość i zmysły. Estetyczna przemiana świata człowieka*, translated by S. Stanekiewicz, edited by K. Wilkoszewska, Universitas, Kraków 2011, p. 126; retranslated from Polish in this article.

¹⁰ W. Szymborska, *Dworzec* [in:] *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku. 102 wiersze*, Wydawnictwo a5, Poznań 1996; transl. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh.

¹¹ P. Michałowski, *Wzruszający szczegół niewzruszony* [in:] *Radość czytania Szymborskiej. Wybór tekstów krytycznych*, edited by S. Balbus and D. Wojda, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 1996, p. 196.

by language and perceptual conditions, as Monika Żmudzka-Brodnicka noted, turns out to be incomprehensible, unobvious, and inaccessible to humans.¹²

The issues outlined above are represented by numerous poems written by Szymborska at different periods of her life. In many of them, the poetess emphasizes, above all, the impossibility of truly authentic human experience of the world. All human attempts to get closer to reality remain mere attempts, not to say more bluntly that they end in failure. In her poetry, Szymborska constantly reminds us that nature does not speak any language that would fit into some transcultural code and would be understandable to humans in a natural unlearned way.

This happens, for example, in *The Silence of Plants*. Szymborska points to insurmountable onesidedness of human relationship with the world of flora, for which humans are nobody, after all. The fact that she assigns various names to plants ("I have names for you: maple, burdock, liverwort, eather, juniper, mistletoe, and forget-me-not"), deals with their structure ("I know what a leaf, petal, kernel, cone, and stem are"¹³) does not bring humans closer to this world. It remains alien, mysterious and inaccessible. It is governed by its own laws, and humans only try to organize and catalog it for their own use. Although, as Szymborska argues in the poem, humans and plants are united at least by the fact of existing under the same star or casting shadows according to the same laws, all explanation and description of the commonality of human and plant fate does not lead to a solution. Plants are silent and never ask basic questions, such as what it means to see with the eyes, why a human heart beats and why, as beings, humans remain unrooted. *Homo sapiens* cannot contact them and will never give answers to questions not asked by plants. Although, as we infer from the poem, conversation with them is necessary, it remains impossible at the same time.

Undoubtedly, one of Szymborska's better-known poems, *Conversation with a stone*, also remains a particularly telling example in terms of the issues raised, but also in the context of *The Silence of Plants*. The poem is essentially a small philosophical treatise. While plants are silent, the stone carries on a conversation, although here it also represents the existence of extrahuman reality, not modeled, as Stanisław Balbus writes, by the "Cartesian mind", which recognizes the world only as an object subordinated to subjective consciousness.¹⁴ However, one can look at the matter a bit differently. Although the stone is

¹² Cf. M. Żmudzka-Brodnicka, *Wisława Szymborska i niewyraźalne*, Athenae Gedanenses, Gdańsk 2014, p. 27.

¹³ W. Szymborska, *Milczenie roślin* [in:] *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku...*, p. 178; transl. Joanna Trzeciak.

¹⁴ S. Balbus, *Piękna niepojęta (Epistemologia jablonki)*, "Przestrzenie Teorii" 2006, no. 6, p. 145.

obviously a creation of nature, the fact that the subject of the poem knocks on its door introduces an anthropocentric perspective. The assumption that the stone has a door seems to be purely human. Through this door, it would be possible to get to know the nature of the stone. The heroine of the poem knocks on it several times, variously arguing her desire to learn about the stone, but the stone sends her away each time, answering that knowledge of its nature is inaccessible to humans. For this to be possible, a sense of participation is needed, the stone argues, and humanity does not have it. Human senses are fallible and imperfect, and therefore even sight "heightened to become all-seeing" is not useful, as seeing is quite different from experiencing, or participating. Sight cannot replace this sense of participation in nature's identity, which, as Tadeusz Nyczek writes, essentially means understanding beyond culture, or the language of imagination. Meanwhile, only the stone remains in the realm of nature, while humans have largely moved into the realm of culture. Consciousness and speech which distinguish them from the natural world, and which they perceive as a good thing, are also an obstacle that prevents them from fully uniting with other entities.¹⁵ Therefore, contact and understanding are not possible.¹⁶ The subject of the poem uses her own logic, not only when she assumes the existence of the stone's door, but also when she speaks of its palatial interiors and great empty halls, beautiful but seen by no one. The stone, however, appeals to its own logic when it insists that there is no room in these great empty halls. This logic of paradox ultimately leads to discrediting and humiliating the poem's protagonist, not only because the stone points out the limitations of her cognitive abilities, but mostly because in the last line she confesses that there is no door, which, after all, she has knocked on many times.

Issues posed in *Conversation with a Stone* are certainly elaborated on in the poem *View with a Grain of Sand*.¹⁷ The grain is a speck of stone, its molecule, as the stone pointed out in *Conversation...*, emphasizing that even broken into pieces, or grated to dust, it will remain just as unattainable to a human. Both poems, moreover, expose the complexity of nature of the stone, which can be a hard unshakeable rock or crushed sand, thus symbolizing permanence, or impermanence, as well as transience and inconstancy.¹⁸ The grain of sand is

¹⁵ Cf. I. Górska, *Człowiek wobec tego, co nie-ludzkie w twórczości Wisławy Szymborskiej i Tadeusza Różewicza*, [in:] *Człowiek w relacji do zwierząt, roślin i maszyn w kulturze. Od humanizmu do posthumanizmu*, vol. 2., edited by Justyna Tymieniecka-Suchanek, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice, 2014, pp. 187-203.

¹⁶ T. Nyczek, *Tyle naraz świata. 27 x Szymborska*, Wydawnictwo a5, Kraków 2005, pp. 60-61.

¹⁷ In the context of the poem *View with a grain of sand*, I refer to the findings of S. Balbus, „PrzestrzenieTeorii” 2006, no. 6, p. 146.

¹⁸ See A. Berleant's interesting comments on the nature of stone, its semiotics and „soft side”. Cf. *Wrażliwość i zmysły...*, pp. 115-129.

shown in the poem as a neutral entity, existing outside human experience. It does not know that humans define it as such, giving it a name which has no meaning for it. Neither can a human gaze or touch make it feel noticed or touched. "And that it fell on the windowsill is only our experience, not its".¹⁹

The same is true of a view from a window, which does not exist outside of human vision; it is always a view constituted by and from a human perspective. It becomes a view only because it has been directed and framed by the human gaze. This view, the poetess writes, does not see itself.²⁰ Water in a lake is also indifferent to whether it is wet or dry, and the sun does not know that it should set. It sets, after all, only because that is how humans perceive it and what they call it. Time, on the other hand, appears in the poem as an imaginary messenger, but this is again only a human view. Time is a product, a human idea, related by humans to their own existence: "A second passes. / A second second. / A third. / But they're three seconds only for us".²¹

The poem *Early Hour* from the volume *Moment* also seems to be particularly interesting in the context of the issues addressed here. Its first words "I'm still asleep, / but meanwhile facts are taking place"²² directly state the obvious truth that regardless of human consciousness and will, without people's participation, a night is followed by a day, brightness comes, space previously shrouded in darkness becomes visible. This fact is referred to in the poem as a miracle. Why a miracle, one might ask. After all, it happens every day and should not surprise anyone. And yet... Following in the footsteps of Tadeusz Nyczek's reflections, one can say that this is in fact a poem about the birth of dawn, light and life, creation of the world through separating light from darkness, as it happens in various religions (such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism). But who establishes this world of the poem? When the heroine sleeps, the world emerges from the darkness, but she does not participate in this miracle. The miracle, she states, "happened", the world "was established" and the dawn "was changed". The passive voice used here excludes the participation of some creator or demiurge in the miracle, indicating that everything happened spontaneously.²³ However, we must place a specific creator of this reality in opposition to this spontaneous appearance of the light of day, as suggested by the description of the various elements of reality appearing successively with the waking day.

¹⁹ W. Szymborska, *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku* [in:] *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku...*, p. 107; transl. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²² W. Szymborska, *Wczesna godzina* [in:] *Chwila*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2002, p. 7; transl. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh.

²³ Cf. T. Nyczek, *Tyle naraz świata...*, pp. 245-250.

This is a description of the world arranged by humans, given from an anthropocentric perspective. The poetess writes about dawning planes of walls and the ceiling, distances between objects, separation of shapes, left to right, the first glints twittering on the doorknob and tumbler, a gradual return of colors. "Only the details have not yet entered the field of vision"²⁴ – human vision, one must add. This is because the world that appears is established and arranged by humans. Here, Szymborska shows two perspectives on the world's creation through the separation of light and darkness. In the first one, the world appears spontaneously, independent of human beings, while in the second one it is constituted by human perception. In the former it simply is, in the latter it exists only when it has an observer. This rhetorical device also recurs in another poem entitled *Consciousness*, where the poetess decidedly shows the world's more frightening nature. She emphasizes that it is relentless and terrifying by its inalienable, indelible nature. It gets human beings everywhere. While it is possible to wake up from the most nightmarish dream, escape from consciousness is impossible, Szymborska argues.

The poem *Sky* is undoubtedly a somewhat perverse example. The speaker attempts to describe it from a non-anthropocentric perspective. While in human terms the boundaries of the sky are defined by the range of human vision and the horizon line, in the poem the sky is everywhere, even in the dark, when it cannot be seen. It exists equally for a mole or an owl, there is so much of it everywhere that it becomes almost incarnate, it becomes food, it is "behind me, and close at hand and on my eyelids", it tightly wraps us. The speaker draws the conclusion that:

"Dividing earth and sky
is not the right way
to think about this wholeness".²⁵

One might add that it is a purely human division established for human use. However, if one adopts a slightly different interpretation and asks whether the sky is limited or boundless for humans, the answer, as Berleant notes, will depend on whether one is asking about what is accessible to human vision or knowledge. Undoubtedly, however, each of these interpretations remains anthropocentric.

²⁴ W. Szymborska, *Wczesna godzina* [in:] *Chwila...*, p. 28; transl. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh.

²⁵ Eadem, *Niebo* [in:] *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku...*, p. 141; transl. Joanna Trzeciak.

In addition to the ambiguity of the concept of experience,²⁶ reflection on it should also consider the fact that it is always a "relational structure," as Barbara Skarga wrote. It always arises only in relation of a subject to an object, and thus requires direct presence of the experience.²⁷ Experience is a kind of activity through which new objects appear before the subject who is simultaneously involved/trapped in the process of their formation.²⁸ This inalienable subject-object nature of experience also makes us recall such features of experience as its immediacy, ambiguity, and uniqueness. Let us also add that there is an extremely important nuance in the Polish word *doświadczenie* (*experience*). Namely, it can be understood as a testimony, or being a witness. Thus, one can witness something that one directly experiences, at which one is present. Importantly, however, it must be, as Barbara Skarga writes in her *Kwintet metafizyczny*, conscious presence that will be understood, to which some meaning will be attributed.

Immediately, however, many (mainly epistemological) problems arise, related to what seems simple on the surface. In essence, testimony always remains an interpretation, an expression of some understanding, probably fully subjective. This fact makes experience problematic. After all, it always involves some "pre-judgments", a priori structures of human thinking, beliefs, and prescribed behavior. Consequently, cognition to which experience would lead turns out to be superficial, incomplete, and always imperfect.²⁹ Following Nietzsche, we are only slipping on the surface of things and thus feeling them cannot lead us to truth.³⁰ Getting to the core, to the source of pure senses of the world, proves impossible. The world invoked in forms constituted by humans reveals itself only through these forms and only through them can it be recognized, at least to some extent. This aspect is also present in Szymborska's poems. Plants are silent and the stone, whose door the heroine knocks on, actually has no door. The door is only an illusion, a human phantasm, just like the sky that supposedly exists above our heads. Human fate is completely indifferent to grains of sand, water, a view from a window and consciousness, which is the natural space of human existence. These phenomena exist independently, they simply exist for themselves. Human attempts to learn about them, to get closer to them, turn out to be, in fact, a form of subjugation.

²⁶ In philosophical thought, experience has been identified, among other things, with a kind of intuition, e.g., Kant's pure view or Bergson's naked perception, and its foundations have been sought in sense impressions, somatic sensations, or innate ideas of the mind.

²⁷ Cf. B. Skarga, *Kwintet metafizyczny*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2005, pp. 119-120.

²⁸ Cf. S. Critchley, *Nieustające żądanie. Etyka polityczna*, transl. R. Dobrowolski, M. Gusin, Wrocław 2006, pp. 34-35.

²⁹ Cf. B. Skarga, *Kwintet metafizyczny...*, pp. 120-122.

³⁰ Cf. F. Nietzsche, *Pisma pozostałe...*, p. 184.

The selected poems of Wisława Szymborska analyzed and interpreted here convincingly prove that the lyrical subject of these poems often seems to be thrown into a reality that is silent and remains inaccessible to human experience, one that copes perfectly well without humans. The need to name and understand the world in one's own way is a purely human need, although it essentially puts us in a weaker position in relation to the world. As Anna Węgrzyniakowa wrote, Szymborska's poetry proves that humans are unable to grasp the whole both in everyday experience and in thinking about the world. Humans always see only fragments which, however, do not allow us to establish any definitive version of the world.³¹ This world, as described by Małgorzata Baranowska, is improbably ambiguous, seeming "huge and small at the same time, tragic and ridiculous, permanent and constantly falling, transient, changeable. Above all, it is subject to constant scrutiny of reason".³² In her poems, Szymborska constantly poses the question of human cognitive capacity in the face of phenomena of a "purely objective" world given directly. Constant juxtaposition of approaches to such a world with anthropocentric attempts to model, name and describe it from a human perspective is undoubtedly a specific feature of her creative work.

Szymborska's poetry proves that humans, unable to "penetrate the laws and truths of the nonhuman",³³ want to arrange the world according to their own concepts. Disregarding the surrounding reality, humans usurp the right to rule over nature, but the power they gain is in fact apparent. Human order, after all, is incapable of encompassing the non-human, so at least the borders of states remain open to clouds, sands, and pebbles:

"Can we talk of order overall
when the very placement of the stars
leaves us doubting just what shines for whom?"³⁴ – Szymborska asks.

The order of the world in a purely human sense proves impossible. The anthropocentric perspective, placing humans above other entities, the desire

³¹ Cf. A. Węgrzyniakowa, *Nie ma rozpusty większej niż myślenie. O poezji Wisławy Szymborskiej*, Towarzystwo Zachęty Kultury, Katowice, p. 44.

³² M. Baranowska, *Tak lekko było nic o tym nie wiedzieć... Szymborska i świat*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1996, p. 70.

³³ S. Balbus, *Świat ze wszystkich stron świata. O Wisławie Szymborskiej*. Aneks Wisława Szymborska *Dwadzieścia jeden wierszy*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1996, p. 68.

³⁴ W. Szymborska, *Psalm*. In: Eadem, *Nic dwa razy...*, p. 182. It is worth adding in this context that Szymborska, when asked if she was jealous of this freedom of nature, replied: "– No. Oh no. I wouldn't want to be on the spot... It's very hard to swap with any entity at all." (W. Szymborska, *Jestem po stronie ludzi*. Anna Rudnicka and Tadeusz Nyczek in conversation with Wisława Szymborska, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 7 October 1996).

to exercise control and bring human order to the natural world, can in fact be seen as an expression of human powerlessness and impotence. As the author of *A Great Number* argues, humans are accompanied by a tormenting feeling of inability to identify with their object of admiration, i.e., the world in all its manifestations. Therefore, satisfying the desire to know and fully understand other entities is not given to humankind. In essence, humans remain deeply lonely and alienated among other creatures. Szymborska's poetry irresistibly reinforces a conviction about the deficient – if one can put it that way – nature of human existence.

Although Szymborska is undoubtedly "on the side of the people",³⁵ she expresses opposition to the anthropocentric worldview in her poems, showing disrepute of human belief in our unique position. As Wojciech Ligęza puts it: "Wisława Szymborska, without respecting anthropocentric superstitions, emphasizes that our culture, in comparison to the long duration of nature, is younger and random",³⁶ and further: "In these poems, continuity and difference, identity and separateness, domicile and exile, delineate the full dramatic relationship between humans and nature".³⁷ One may think that because of this relationship all human existence bears a dramatic trait.

The fact that the problem of epistemological accessibility of the world is also present at the linguistic level is certainly significant here. It stems from the very foundations of language as the primary tool of contact and cognition. Words, however, as Ligęza wrote, register only superficial sensations; all views of things are never summarized in them.³⁸ It can be said that words always express only some single possible version of the world among the unspoken hundreds of other options. Perhaps, as Karen Barad wrote, "too much power has been granted to language".³⁹ Karen Barad asks, among other things, what makes us believe that we have direct access to the world, that we trust linguistic representations of matter more than matter itself and, finally, what makes us willing to grant forms of representation other than language more power in

³⁵ Cf. Eadem, *Jestem po stronie ludzi. Anna Rudnicka and Tadeusz Nyczek in conversation with Wisława Szymborska*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 7 October 1996.

³⁶ W. Ligęza, *Teoria naturalna według Wisławy Szymborskiej*, „Dekada Literacka” 2003, no. 5-6, p. 14.

³⁷ W. Ligęza: *Teoria naturalna według Wisławy Szymborskiej*, „Dekada Literacka” 2003, no. 5-6, p. 13.

³⁸ W. Ligęza, *Świat w stanie korekty. O poezji Wisławy Szymborskiej*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2001, p. 116.

³⁹ K. Barad, *Posthumanistyczna performatywność: ku zrozumieniu, jak materia zaczyna mieć znaczenie*, translated by J. Bednarek [in:] *Teorie wywrotowe. Antologia przekładów*, edited by A. Gajewska, Poznań 2012, p. 323.

determining our ontologies than they deserve.⁴⁰ We also find this argument in Arnold Berleant's reflection. He notes that it is in language that human beings fabricate worlds, which they then try to explain and justify, but which, ultimately, remain only artificial constructions. He writes: "To put it bluntly, we build a world that fosters our social goals, satisfies our psychic needs and fulfills our dreams, all through the magic of words".⁴¹ The only thing at our disposal is perceptual experience, which, however, is always ordered precisely by language, and this invariably falsifies reality.⁴²

"Everything's mine [...] as long as I look"⁴³ – the poetess writes in *Travel Elegy*, primarily exposing visual experience. To put it more broadly, however, one could say, paraphrasing these words, that everything is ours insofar as we experience it. The world is always given to humans in experience, which, however, is never pure, never exists in an uncontaminated form. It always remains entangled in an anthropocentric circle, and no epistemological, ethical, or cultural attributions can be eliminated from it. Moreover, as Szymborska proves in her poem, the quantity, variety, and unfathomable nature of various entities offered by the world overwhelms humans, which is perhaps most evident in the poem *Birthday* ("So much world all at once").⁴⁴ The world can even be seen here as a certain oppressive force that almost attacks human beings, raining down on them from everywhere – hence our constant attempts to organize, select and arrange it in our own way. Excess of entities offered by the world surpasses our cognitive capabilities, exceeding human experience ("How to line them all up, how to put them together?", "How is a living person supposed to play with it?"⁴⁵). Following Wojciech Ligęza, one can say that "The limits of the world in Szymborska's poetry expand beyond the ordinary. This world combines existence and non-existence. Szymborska mixes the seemingly bizarrely ordinary empirical with what is potential or belongs to the areas of culture; she places things and categories on the same plane, reveals the dialectic of knowledge and ignorance".⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 324-325. In the context of this dilemma, Karen Barad proposes a performative account of discursive practices that challenges the representationalist view that words have the power to represent pre-existing things. This is because performativity „criticizes the granting of excessive power to language to determine what is real.”. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁴¹ A. Berleant, *Wrażliwość i zmysły...*, pp. 78-79.

⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴³ W. Szymborska, *Elegia podróżna* [in:] *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku...*, p. 19; transl. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh.

⁴⁴ W. Szymborska, *Urodziny* [in:] *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku...*, p. 60; transl. Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴⁶ W. Ligęza, *Świat w stanie korekty...*, p. 125.

The author of *A Great Number* is undoubtedly a philosophical poetess, as her poetry, in line with the belief that "there are no questions more urgent / than naive questions",⁴⁷ constantly returns to age-old philosophical issues. She poses fundamental questions about existence, being, the meaning and cause of existence in one form or another (human as well as nonhuman), about human relations with other entities, attempts to communicate with and to contact them, and asks about the possibility of knowing them in their mutual relations and entanglements. Changing the perspective of the view, however, one can look at this question quite differently, and even go so far as to say that the anthropocentric mind, which constitutes its own worlds, appears at the same time as a perpetrator/torturer essentially degrading reality in this poetry. The cognitive subject treats the world in a fragmentary way, names only selected elements of it and segregates them, imposing its human dimension on them.⁴⁸ Moreover, the subject projects his/her own cognitive abilities, needs, as well as ontological, axiological, and pragmatic properties onto them, making them, as it were, integral object features of this reality. However, the more a person appropriates the world, the more it turns out to be inaccessible to them. Experiencing various phenomena reveals their temporality, transience, inaccessibility and ontological separateness, which cannot be transcended. Thus, human cognition can never be fully realized, and a truly authentic experience of the world turns out to be an impossible experience, "postponed for never".⁴⁹

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⁴⁷ W. Szymborska, *Schylek wieku* [in:] *Widok z ziarnkiem piasku...*, p. 121.

⁴⁸ Cf. I. Szczepankowska, *Człowiek, język, wizja świata w poezji Wisławy Szymborskiej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Białystok 2013, p. 25.

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MYŚLENIE ESTETYCZNE WEDŁUG WISŁAWY SZYMBORSKIEJ (streszczenie)

Punktem wyjścia dla podjętych rozważań pozostaje koncepcja „myślenia estetycznego” Wolfganga Welscha. Badacz odwołując się do ustaleń Kanta i Nietzschego dotyczących możliwości poznawczych człowieka i fikcjonalnej natury rzeczywistości, twierdzi, że jest ona projektem estetycznym, fantazmatem ustanawianym każdorazowo w ludzkim doświadczeniu. Stąd płynność, niestałość świata, a co za tym idzie, niemożność jego pełnego poznania. Z perspektywy tej refleksji Autorka przygląda się poezji Wisławy Szymborskiej, która niezmiennie stawia najbardziej fundamentalne pytania natury filozoficznej: o byt, sens, prawdę, możliwości poznawcze człowieka, o jego relacje ze światem, z innymi bytami. Tropiąc niektóre wątki obecne w koncepcji Welscha i ich literackie przetworzenia w wybranych wierszach noblistki, Autorka tekstu rekonstruuje w istocie „myślenie estetyczne” Wisławy Szymborskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: Wisława Szymborska, doświadczenie, poznanie, myślenie estetyczne

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