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THE AMBIGUITY OF “SUCCESS” IN BIOGRAPHICAL STORIES OF POLISH ÉMIGRÉ ARTISTS

Abstract

What factors determine artistic success? How do the artists themselves interpret this issue? How is this issue viewed by émigré artists? This article is an attempt to answer to these questions. By examining biographical research conducted among Polish émigré artists living in Berlin, London, New York, and Paris I try to show the ambiguity of the term “success”. This concept is variously interpreted by the different narrators and in each instance requires contextual concretization in relation to the biography of the particular artist. This article distinguishes between the objective and subjective dimensions of experiencing success. When taking into consideration the subjective understandings and individual expectations, the category of success changes its meaning depending on the fate of the individual artists. It cannot be narrowed down to only the artistic dimension, because many other aspects of the life of émigré artists are strongly intertwined with it. The fate of those who have succeeded may be understood only if we compare their stories with the stories of artists who remain on the periphery of the art world.

Keywords: success, émigré artists, life satisfaction, biography, art creation

INTRODUCTION

In comparing the number of people living in the Poland with the number of Poles living abroad, the Polish diaspora is one of the largest in the world [Chodubski 2003: 55]. For many generations of Poles emigration has been a major biographical

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experience. This process has also had a great impact on the micro-, mezzo- and macro-structures of Polish society. The thought of either a permanent or temporary abandonment of the 'homeland' is an ever-present element of the Polish identity. Writer Jerzy Pilch aptly describes this state of mind in the following dialogue:

The normal Pole is thinking of emigration at least once in a lifetime.

The normal Pole, sir, is thinking of emigration at least once a week. In my opinion, entertaining frequent thoughts about emigration is a sign of both normality and Polishness [Pilch 2008:120].

Taking into account Poland's recent history, the scale of artists' emigration is indeed significant. In proposing a methodological and theoretical perspective of a biographically-oriented sociology of art, I would like to formulate some questions and point out some problems. Among others, to what extent does the fate of émigré artists have typical characteristics, common for this social group, and to what extent is each artist's experience exceptional and unique? Artistic mythologies lead us to believe in the uniqueness of each author – not only their works, but also their lives [Golka 2008: 81]. Is it then possible to look for common biographical patterns for such a diverse social group? I also try to show how moving to another country affects the output of the artists, their identity and feeling of strangeness. But above all I focus my attention on the issue of 'success' viewed from various émigré artists' perspectives.

In seeking answers to these questions this article refers to the biographical research I conducted in the years 2008–2012 among Polish artists who settled in London, Berlin, New York and Paris. In carrying out this research I drew on the theoretical inspiration and methodological instructions of several prominent scientists, among whom I should mention Fritz Schütze [1997], Kaja Kaźmierska [2004], and Alicja Rokuszevska-Pawełek [2002]. The participants in the study come from different artistic fields, such as photography, graphic design, painting, film, literature, poetry, dance, sculpture, video art and multimedia. Among the 60+ artists I was able to interview, some are well known and live among the cosmopolitan elites of the artistic world and are able to fully devote themselves to their artistic careers, while others have a limited audience for their work and have been often forced to look for "non-artistic" jobs to survive. My choice of the biographical interview method was an intentional research strategy, stemming from the belief that getting to know the social worlds of émigré artists would only be possible by collecting the stories of people with different career paths. It should be noted that the persons chosen for study started their émigré lives and careers at different points in time, from the 1970s to the first decade of the

21st century. Clearly the time frame affects the circumstances of their emigration, their expectations, and further consequences stemming from their decisions.

The biographical interview method used in this research requires the anonymization of the narrators; therefore fragments of biographical stories that appear in the article are labelled only by artistic genre and the name of the city in which the given artist resides. This study of Polish émigré artists included 40 men and 21 women. The process of finding respondents was based on the method of snowball sampling, which is nothing more than a system of choosing subsequent participants based on information received by previous respondents. The ratio of males to females was largely a matter of chance in this case, which does not mean that there were a lot of important questions to be asked linked to gender. We know that the art world favors male careers, which has resulted in a disproportion in terms of power, prestige, income, as well as the scale of professional success. Taking into account the women artists who participated in this research, one of the recurring topics was the need to care for their children, which often rested entirely on the women's shoulders. Therefore single mothers who decided to emigrate had to solve this problem above all. Among the passages from interviews cited in the article, only two are from women, but this doesn't mean that they have not succeeded. Despite the lack of such stories, conclusions, or codas in the analyzed material, many of the women artists have achieved a stable position in the art world, some even at the international level.

STUDY OF POLISH ÉMIGRÉ ARTISTS – A FEW INITIAL REMARKS

Studying émigré artists is both fascinating and complicated. Both as a social group and as individuals, artists are very versatile and elusive. Over time, the meaning and range of the notion *artist* has been constantly changing, which makes the artistic profession difficult to characterize. While exactly the same problems are faced with respect to the definition of art, nonetheless for the purposes of this research I had to accept one definition. In 1980 UNESCO formulated a definition of the status of an artist, as follows:

Artist' is taken to mean any person who creates or gives creative expression to, or re-creates works of art, who considers his artistic creation to be an essential part of his life, who contributes in this way to the development of art and culture and who is or asks to be recognized as an artist, whether or not he is bound by any relations of employment or association [UNESCO 1980].

There are many criteria which are not taken into consideration in this definition, such as education, social esteem, presence in artistic environments, talent, income, and many others. Yet although this definition seems to be very broad, it might be a good starting point, with a basic sociological assumption that “being an artist” is a matter of social recognition. As mentioned above, over 60 artists took part in the entire study (among them 40 men and 21 women artists). All biographical interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed.

Explaining the reasons for migration was usually the starting point in each narration. In analyzing each individual story I tried to identify three main elements of biography: *milieu* (social environment, local perspective); historic factors (macro-historical dimension); and personal factors (individual aspects of the decision to emigrate) [Czyżewski 1996: 46]. These three elements appeared, with different intensity, in the majority of the collected narrations. This made it possible to distinguish the main migration drivers, predominant factors, and attendant conditions accompanying them. In accordance with Everett S. Lee’s theory [Lee 1966: 47–57], a group/set of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors were identified. This set of reasons and explanations changed across decades with respect to incoming social cohorts. Among the dominant migration drivers (push factors) in Poland during 1970s and 1980s, the most important were: political repressions and surveillance; censorship; lack of the possibility of free artistic expression; limitations on contact with the outside world (for example a very restricted passport policy); the introduction of martial law in 1981; and of course the general economic decline of the country. The dominant pull factors included: a close relationship with a person living abroad; psychological predispositions toward emigration; curiosity about the external world (breaking out of the Iron Curtain); and the will and ambition to pursue further artistic education abroad.

As seen above, one of the most important drivers leading to the thought of leaving Poland was having relatives abroad. This was not a matter of participating in a ‘chain migration’, but rather a psychological factor that facilitated the decision to leave. Another reason was the desire to test one’s capabilities in other art markets, in a different artistic environment surrounded by different people. Another factor which was emphasised in many of the stories was a specific cosmopolitan atmosphere in the family home. Social capital and inherited *habitus* proved to be important factors in the psychological preparation to leave the homeland. A cosmopolitan attitude which favours readiness to emigrate is very often associated with the process of early socialization. None of the respondents mentioned economic issues as the most important factor in their emigration. Some of them had a relatively stable professional position in communist Poland. The

financial issue was referred to in several biographical stories, however, mainly by artists who have achieved a certain success at this level. Generally a dominant factor pushing for emigration is the desire to improve the material conditions of one's existence, but in the case of artists we must specify a number of other, equally if not more important, motives. Often political and economic factors intertwined to create a strong impetus inducing them to think about emigration and pushing them out of Poland. It should also be noted that settling down abroad is not always the result of a deliberately implemented biographical plan. Sometimes it is the result of a spontaneous decision, the consequence of suddenly emerging opportunities or an action that was initially treated as merely temporary.

The collapse of the communist system in 1989 ended the period of political emigration, opening a new chapter in the history of Polish emigration. Therefore, the nature of emigration changed, as well as the configuration of push and pull factors. While following Poland's accession to the European Union on 1 May 2004 the mobility of Poles within the EU countries significantly increased [Świętochowska 2007: 127], the process of leaving the country at will started already at the time of the political transformation in 1989. One of the most popular directions of migration was London,¹ especially for the younger generation of Polish artists. For them, leaving their homeland was no longer the same dramatic personal uprooting as for the older Polish migrants, who refused to live under communism. Still, like their predecessors, representatives of the new transnational migration did not leave for economic reasons only, although this sphere remained (and still remains) important. Equally significant was (and is) the openness to new experiences, the search for an optimal place to live life, not only in their own country but also away from it. Young artists, like all immigrants, have to think about acquiring the resources needed to support themselves in their new land, but they also make an effort to attain a lifestyle that is not determined only by economic objectives. This makes them different to some extent if we compare their fates with those of the predominantly economic migrants. In their biographical plans creativity and art remain important values, even if they are not always their main or sole occupation.

Several themes emerge from the data collected, the most significant of which are problems of alienation, issues of assimilation, identity processes, and issues

¹ The Polish Diaspora in London consists of several social worlds coexisting together that occasionally contact one another, while remaining substantially separated. The various generations of migrants, and the subsequent incoming compatriots from Poland each time constitute a different social world, based on different principles, ethos, and other purposes.

concerning the different social worlds in which the artists find themselves living. An immigrant artist in a new country often has to contend with the stigmatic burden of ‘otherness’. On one hand, this strangeness can create a great artistic power, provide an opportunity for new insights and imbue the artist with an air of mystery, all of which combine as factors conducive to the development of creativity. However, it may also represent a major barrier against adopting the new culture, traditions, mentality, or language, which under certain circumstances can develop into an experience of isolation. Thus émigré artists are a particularly interesting social group for this kind of research because of the dichotomy of their otherness, which originates not only from their coming from a foreign country but also from their creative inclinations. The term “alien” commonly refers to an individual who comes from a different cultural and social background or does not belong to a group, and often conveys a pejorative meaning which raises strong emotions. The concept of “other” on the other hand, commonly means an individual different in some way from social norms, but not subject to such strong evaluative judgments and emotional reactions as “aliens”.

The biographies compiled in my research reveal not only a complexity and diversity in the fate of Polish émigré artists, but also the unique nature of each case, the individuality of which escapes typology and precludes any attempts to create a comprehensive model fully explaining the phenomenon of artists living in exile. An institutional theory of art is not sufficient to reflect the complexity of the world of an artist, because it describes only one of its aspects. The World of Art cannot be separated from the other worlds in which such artists exist, since these overlap in a variety of complex ways and on many levels. Perhaps investigating these interdependencies may over time become a central task in any biographically-oriented sociology of art. These narrations show an account of events that cannot be described in determinist terms, but instead point to the use of probable categories or even require us to consider the phenomenon of coincidence; a set of circumstances, an intervention by others, a random event, or an accidental meeting which changes the life of the narrator. All of these remain atheoretical and very often unpredictable.

Each city where the research was undertaken also creates different conditions that affect the plans of the artists and reveal, in various configurations, the cultural and historical contexts specific to their setting. The tales of artists living in Paris made it possible to reconstruct the social world of each emigrant artist from a professional, artistic angle. Referring to the institutional theory of art, I have tried to identify the circumstances that affect the successful development of their artistic careers. The tales from London show a chronological shift in the Polish

Diaspora and its multi-generational character, and subsequent generations of émigrés refer differently to the problems of maintaining Polish traditions. For a long time post-war migration was of a national and political nature, and the London narratives reflect this change, while at the same time revealing something more. One can see, *inter alia*, that the relationship with the country of settlement and the country of origin goes beyond the traditional separation – assimilation paradigm, and that instead we have to deal with a complex range of relationships. The biographies also reveal how changes in the recent history of Poland have contributed to the migration process.

In the post-EU era, Polish émigrés have enjoyed a full freedom of movement. This does not mean, however, that they do not experience identity problems, exclusion, and social/professional degradation. Emigration contributes to social and cultural fragmentation, which has become one of the principal elements of modern man's existential experience. It also suggests the existence of a specific model of identity (inspired by the works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner), defined as 'liminal identity'. It describes a sense of life constantly in "suspension" or "being in between", at the intersection of different worlds [Ferenc 2012: 172–183]. Those finding themselves in such situations do not identify with a new culture or society, and cannot or do not want to change. Manifestations of such identities appear in statements such as: "we are neither here nor there", "we are in between". "Being in between" may become a kind of creative strategy, a source of inspiration, a theme for artistic implementation, but at the same time may also be a constant source of mental discomfort, prompting thoughts of further migration or a return to Poland.

Artists living in Berlin drew attention to the historical-political specificities of the emigration of Poles to Germany. The proximity of West Berlin attracted emigrants from the People's Republic of Poland because it was the closest bridgehead of the Western world [Baumgartner 2010: 73]. This "island" city became an important centre of independent art in Europe, a place where Polish artists found freedom and opportunities to have contact with other artists, while at the same time remaining close to Poland. Emigration to Germany was particularly difficult for Polish people of Jewish origin, as one narration shows. The stories from Berlin also depict one more issue connected with the history of recent migration, namely the departure of young children and teenagers, forced to resettle as a result of their parents' decision to move there.

The 20+ interviews collected in New York made it possible to discover how artistic systems function, and give a clearer view of the consequences of transcontinental emigration. This material highlights the stories of artists'

successes, wanderings, trajectories, and suspensions of careers, all of which leads to the proposal of a typology of narrative tales [Ferenc 2012: 385].

The use of narrative interviews is an attempt to overcome the limitations of the sociology of art as traditionally understood. The purpose of this research was not to negate existing theories, but to attempt to enrich them with new elements. Sociology of art should not focus solely on art, defined as the production, circulation, and reception of objects defined as art. Sociology of art may be understood also as the sociology of an actively functioning person, as a science seeking to understand the social nature of a creative person. Narrative interviews make it possible to better understand the phenomenon of being an artist and provide greater insights into their social worlds. They also show the ambiguity of basic categories, such as career, assimilation, otherness, and success.

WHAT FACTORS DETERMINE ARTISTIC SUCCESS IN THEORY AND IN PRACTICE?

At the outset it should be stressed that it is impossible to list and name all the factors determining artistic success. As was said earlier, success in this field of symbolical production is unpredictable and atheoretical, and in most cases arises from a combination of various elements. But at the same time the question of determinants of artistic success is interesting and contemporary. What conditions must an artist fulfil to achieve success and to be able to continue his/her career? Before we answer these questions, we have to establish which elements comprise a successful artistic career. According to Marian Golka, these elements are: self-esteem, including satisfaction with success as well as a sense of existential security; resources of social prestige; popularity and public resonance; autonomy in making choices (as well as the importance of such choices, i.e. their scope of power in social micro- and macro-structures); personal income level (manifested in the lifestyle and character of consumer behaviour); and the range and social performance of the work of a particular artist [Golka 2103: 109]. For example, where does a given artist display his or her works of art and how prestigious are these venues for safeguarding the future circulation of the artworks? Similarly, Natalie Heinrich stresses that nowadays a successful, professional artistic life is manifested not only in the ability to sell one's art, but also in being identified and recognized as an artist. The peak of such a career is the presence of an artist's art in important and prestigious art institutions: museums, galleries, academies, official competitions and jury awards. Of course Heinrich is aware that even such achievements might be questioned and do not translate into stable, solid,

unshakeable and indisputable position. This is why a successful artistic career means presenting future generations with a real model, in which both the artist and his/her works are equally important [2010: 112].

In the case of émigré artists everything seems to be much more complicated and uncertain. Hence the question arises: What circumstances are conducive to the development of careers for such artists? Firstly, an important factor for achieving success is a professional artistic education acquired in the country of origin. If it is supplanted by further education in artistic academies abroad after immigration, the chances for a successful career are usually higher. The knowledge and skills acquired in the country of origin provide a solid basis for further artistic work, while continuing education abroad allows one to hone these skills, acquire cultural competence, and create a local network of contacts. Put simply, it helps to 'plug in' to the local artistic environment, which might be crucial for the émigré-artist. This is also an important process conducive to assimilation. Another essential factor that facilitates a new start in a foreign country is knowledge of the language. People who are able to communicate in a foreign tongue usually start their lives abroad from a better and safer social and professional level. Another element facilitating, though of course not guaranteeing, success is a relationship with a person from the country of migration. Living with a native, i.e. someone from the host society, usually helps to normalize one's life abroad and to gain the status of a resident or citizenship (which was very important before Poland entered the EU). Such a relationship also helps to learn some rules of the new social environment and to gain cultural competence. In this case the migrant might feel more protected and guided in the new world. Stories about the 'significant others' in migrants' lives popped up several times in the narratives. Such a person is able to influence the biography of an artist by helping, advising, and intervening in difficult situations. Gaining artistic success is usually the result of a complex and multivariate chain of events. Alongside social factors, equally important are mental aptitude, talent, determination, ability to cope with failures, and finally something that can be described as 'coincidence'. This last element is crucial in many stories, for example in the narrative of an artist who lives and works in Paris:

After nine months, I met the director of the Théâtre National de la Colline-Jorge Lavell, who was a friend of Witold Gombrowicz and who introduced him as a writer to France. He was in love with Polish culture. He offered me a job in the public theatre; designing newspapers, seasonal brochures, posters etc. So since then, in 1994, I started my career as a poster designer. And that's when all the knowledge about posters acquired in Poland and the whole poster story began to take shape in my projects [Interview 4, Painter, art editor, poster designer, Paris].

The point in time when an artist settles in a new place is another important factor. For example, an artist from Paris mentioned several times a brief but strong expansion of sympathy and support for Polish émigrés in early 1980s, after martial law was introduced in communist Poland on December 13, 1981. The time context evokes other significant issues, for instance what kind of artistic competence is required at a given time, what are the dominant fashions and trends, and how strong is the art market and economy of the country in question. All of these factors significantly affect one's career course. One of the artists mentioned this in his biographical story, as follows:

I came in such a good moment for the American illustration, which was flourishing at that time, that I didn't have any difficult times financially, contrary to everyone else's experiences. Immediately I began to earn good money and I never had a moment that would make me take just any available job because of a lack of food. I was doing what I did in Poland, only in a much higher league, extra world-class, and not the fifth league in Poland. That was the difference [Interview 1. Painter, poster designer, New York].

However, early successes are hardly predictors of further career development. Only their long-term strengthening can create a more stable position for the artist. At the same time, lack of success does not have to denote the interruption of creative, artistic work, or weaken its intensity. Many artists experience something that could be called a "suspension of career". These artists usually manage to live on the periphery of the artistic world; they organize exhibitions or publish, but their work remains outside of the mainstream. This "suspension" has nothing to do with any artistic qualities, but refers primarily to the biographies of the artists, reconstructed on the basis of interviews. It should be emphasized that the "suspension" could be a temporary state, but may also become a kind of artistic/biographical strategy and turn into a permanent state. "Suspension" may have different reasons, not always clear even to the narrators themselves. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from a narration:

For 10 years every day I've kept thinking I could handle this, but I haven't. I had my artistic works in the Drawing Centre, and they liked them very much, and I had my portfolio in the gallery, an important institution. But every year you must renew the portfolio and I haven't shown my face there for 10 years. I could even have had my drawings hung in a museum, but I stopped going there. I have no idea why [Interview 11. Painter, New York].

Another artist undergoing a period of "suspension" might continue his or her creative activity, but has to combine it with another line of work. However, art remains crucial for him/her; (s)he considers it a must to remain an artist and to develop his/her artistic path. Creative work thus becomes a kind of biographical

necessity, and the narrator strives for this continuation, in spite of life's trials and tribulations.

I paint, actually for myself. I cannot imagine forgoing art; that would be a total disaster [Interview 13. Painter, New York].

A "suspension" might have many causes and many different variants. The reasons and course of this biographical process notwithstanding, it is always connected to a subjective sense of life satisfaction and individual self-esteem. Many émigré-artists didn't manage to repeat the successful artistic lives they enjoyed in Poland. For them, from an artistic point of view, emigration meant also disappointment. But as will be shown below, life satisfaction and the understanding of success are much more ambiguous than they seem.

LIFE SATISFACTION AND THE SUBJECTIVE UNDERSTANDING OF SUCCESS

Émigré-artists' life satisfaction is not simply a consequence of their professional success. Development of creative potency and an artistic career aside, it is also important to pursue other social roles – as a spouse, partner, parent, and so on. Next to art, what is very important in the ultimate life balance of many artists is the family and upbringing of children:

It is also important to be fulfilled as a human being, to have children and a wife. It was important to me. It is my greatest happiness that I have a son and I shall have a daughter and perhaps another son. Somehow I am fulfilled as a human being who has a family. A child is like a memorial stone. Then you can do something more, but this is the base [Interview 9. Photographer, Paris].

Another artist understands success differently. As a writer who lives in Paris, success in life means mainly independence, manifested in having free time and achieving a stable level of financial security.

I know what I want to do and I try to do it. Of course, I am filled with guilt and remorse that I'm doing it poorly and that I should do a lot more, but I worked out one tremendous thing, and I think many people can envy me this: I have time. I believe that this is the greatest treasure that can be achieved. This is independence. I don't complain about lack of money. I have a little – not too much, but enough for me. I hope it will be like this till the end of my life (...) [Interview 2. Writer, scientist, Paris].

This sense of independence is an extremely important issue which surfaces in many of the biographical stories recorded. However, in contrast to the passage above it is described more often as a goal than as something already achieved.

In fact, the ability to survive abroad is very often considered a success in itself. It was heavily stressed in the biographical stories of artists who emigrated from Poland in the 1970s and 1980s. For instance, the move from communist Poland to England in the early 1980s brought with it highly stressful systemic and cultural changes. A process of serious social and psychological transformation was required. A successful adaptation could thus become a source of satisfaction, considered by the narrators as a huge biographical success:

When crossing from one system to another, because when I was leaving [Poland – T.F.] the system was still very Eastern there, and here it is very Western. It was so confusing that a person had to set his priorities again, and it takes an awfully long time, almost like being born and growing up again. So that is a success to me [Interview 2. Sculptor, London].

The metaphor of ‘growing up’ appeared several times, in different stories from different cities. In the initial stages of emigration, apart from administrative complications there is an entire set of other problems that need to be solved. This first period is typically fraught with difficulties and full of activities that are supposed to ease the emigrant’s life; but all of this takes place under conditions that are unknown to the emigrant, who has to face an alien environment that he/she does not understand. All of which adds to his/her confusion.

Making it through this period of long and intense biographical work is emphasized in the stories as an extremely important achievement, a key experience in constructing a new identity of an immigrant. For young artists, migration becomes an important biographical experience of living in international, metropolitan surroundings. It is also a major life test, which may lead to a mental boost. Huge effort aside (which was repeatedly mentioned by artists in their narratives), they also described various biographical benefits of leaving their home country.

I learned a lot and certainly I wouldn’t have learned it in Poland. I’m more confident and probably stronger. Artistically I have more freedom. Here I have more opportunities; I’m able to relate to different parts of the world. I simply know more, and not only from books but from people [Interview 13. Poet, London].

Emigration is often described by young émigré artists as a process of biographical strengthening, conducive to self-discovery:

I really got to know myself in London. For that I’m thankful to the city. I really got to know myself here [Interview 11. Photographer, London].

Representatives of the younger generation of Polish immigrants are able to move about more freely in a globalizing world, adjusting their life strategies to current conditions. Most of them have to work for a living and therefore they

cannot be full-time artists, but every one of the narrators makes an effort to find time and resources to keep his/her artistic work alive:

Now is good. I have the comfort of stability. We go to work, come back, do not worry about money. We can afford to do what we do. After-hours, if we are not tired, we paint, for example [Interview 10. Painter, London].

An individual sense of failure and success is usually ambivalent and hard to clearly qualify. Objective signs of success, such as publications, exhibitions, positive reviews, sales of works, or an active presence in the field of artistic production are not necessary for an artist to feel a subjective satisfaction with the course of his/her career. However, the exactly opposite situation is also possible. Some artists who have achieved objective success depreciate their achievements to some degree. What at some stage of their careers was regarded as significant, over time becomes only a part of the stories of the past and no longer contributes in any significant way to the present. Thus, an objectively measurable success, even in the form of prestigious awards, publications in important opinion-forming journals, exhibitions in well-known galleries, etc., may bring with it ambiguous feelings as well. Such a thread was revealed in the story of an artist who, taking into account objective categories, achieved a considerable success, artistic and commercial alike.

I developed a taste for the fact that I started to make money, the fact that I was doing important, visible things for *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*. You think you're on top of the world. Then it turns out that as you have another cover, no one really looks at it. You are part of the media machine, and you think that it is important [Interview 1. Painter, poster designer, New York].

In observing the careers of émigré artists we can distinguish several potential scenarios of building a successful career. Of course, these scenarios take different forms in individual cases, but we can indicate common elements that make it possible to speak about different degrees of artistic and professional success and several types of careers, and even more broadly about some biographical models. On one hand there are artists who have managed to seamlessly continue their professional and artistic careers, begun in Poland, and quite quickly settle into their new reality. On the other side of the spectrum, there are artists who have already completed a full professional education in Poland and then began their artistic career only after the migration, building it up gradually.

An artistic success is undoubtedly a consequence of talent, the work put into it, and originality of ideas; but talent and determination notwithstanding, an adequate confluence of events is also needed. Artists must encounter people (agents of the symbolic field, as Pierre Bourdieu would put it) who have an impact on what

happens in a given period in the fields of artistic production. Therefore, what is often mentioned in the narratives as an important factor for success is luck, which we can understand as a fortunate combination of all the factors mentioned above.

Consistency, hard work – in being an artist this is 98 percent, the rest is luck [Interview 19. Painter, Paris].

An artist has to be seen at the hub of things and at the same time work intently, build a network of contacts, and be patient, waiting for the right favourable configuration of these factors. Although this does not guarantee success, it can at least provide an opportunity to present oneself and one's skills. This work on presentation opportunities was described in one of the stories. The key is to enter a suitable environment and try to be as close as possible to the field of artistic production in which the artist would like to participate.

You have to be able to maximize the situation at the right moment. Know with whom it is worth it, and with whom it is not. And do what you can. Show what you have without being intrusive. In my dossier were my pictures from Poland, then I started taking pictures here. People liked them. At that time, still a boy, I had some talent, and I was aware of it. There was something in these pictures, and it helped me a lot. Not just my personality, but I had something on paper, as they say. Something that was not Polish, and it was not American – it was mine [Interview 3. Photographer, New York].

An artist must therefore gain an excellent understanding of the social world in which (s)he wants to participate, must know the distinguished artists, curators, art critics, collectors, and gallery owners who may at some point may become 'significant others'. An artist has to be recognized as original and worthy of being promoted by institutions of art. Success requires professionalism and mastery of technique, but apart from that social support is equally important. Finally, and what is probably key to success, he/she has to offer something expressly individual – an original aesthetic proposal.

In almost every single narrative success is defined differently. Sometimes artists in their biographical stories mention its objective dimensions, such as publications in prestigious journals, important exhibitions, selling or showing their works in important collections of art, or good reception of his or her works by the public. In other cases, success is defined as achieving independence and a strong position in the Art World, or achieving financial security (which is not always the same thing). An important, and in some cases a key aspect for the narrators is continuing their intellectual and artistic development.

My success lies in the fact that I am who I am. I did not give up in the face of all this stress, failures. I'm only doing what I like; I make documentaries like I want to, not the way someone

wants me to. I come up with them, or someone comes up with an idea and then I work on it. This is precisely success – and not the rewards, when someone happens to like a given idea at a given point in time [Interview 16. Director of documentary films, New York].

Another artist defines success similarly. In this case the primary determinant and sign of success is the ability to be completely focused on one's creative work:

Success boils down to the fact that I do what I want. I have a strong feeling that everything is consistent, one thing comes from the other and vice versa [Interview 18. Graphic designer, New York].

One of the most important determinants of an artist's success is the ability to shape his/her future. This means, among other things, to have financial independence and, concomitantly, the possibility to choose one's place of residence. The ability to move freely, not only in the country of settlement but throughout the entire globe, is also crucial. Zygmunt Bauman calls it the freedom to choose one's routes in life. This means that "the main and decisive factor of stratification is nowadays freedom of choice" [Bauman 2000: 125]. This applies of course also to artists, maybe even to a greater extent than to other people.

CONCLUSIONS

The narrators revealed several strategies for developing their artistic careers. One of the crucial decisions that most of the artists had to concern themselves with was their relationship with the local Polish community and institutions of art. What was frequently repeated in their stories was the idea of separation from the Polish community, in both the social and artistic dimensions. Such declarations appeared in the narratives of artists living in each of the four cities. They emphasized that only an attempt to enter the local artistic environment could open up opportunities to move about in wider circles of reception. This applies especially to the artists dealing with the visual arts. The situation is different in the case of writers, although even in this situation exceptions might be observed. This is why we may distinguish artists who, despite remaining outside Poland, have oriented their artistic work to audiences in their country of origin (i.e. Poland), as well as those who focused on building their career in their new country of settlement. The latter path may also lead to the development of a global career and entry into the supranational system of cosmopolitan elites. Émigré artists have thus been able to develop three kinds of careers: oriented toward their country of origin (Poland); oriented toward their country of residence; and cosmopolitan-oriented. These three levels are not mutually exclusive, and we

may note their diachrony and synchrony. We have to keep in mind that for many Poles, the Polish community constitutes an important support structure, without which it would be extremely difficult for them to operate in their new country of settlement. This also applies to those artists who find their customers, potential buyers of their artistic works, and get all kinds of institutional support from the Polish émigré, ethnic community. For many artists this is the only chance of entry into the circulation system of institutions of art, even if its range may be limited to a narrow ethnic circle.

According to Nathalie Heinich, nowadays success in the arts is not only the ability to monetize one's work, but also being identified as a recognized artist. The peak of an artistic career is one's presence in major art institutions: museums, elite collections, or art academies. But a truly successful career, according to Heinich, "is not expressed only in the possibility of imposing certain aesthetic solutions as mandatory on other artists, but also proposing to the future generations a real model in which both the individual artist and his work play an important role" [Heinich 2007: 112].

A subjective sense of success does not necessarily translate into objective manifestations (such as a position in the field of artistic production, a specific number of exhibitions, publications, etc.). On the other hand, objective signs of success do not necessarily mean an equal subjective feeling or considering it as an important achievement. Moreover, success is a concept that we cannot narrow down only to its professional or artistic dimension. Individual narrators define the concept of success differently, stressing different aspects and mixing its subjective and objective dimensions. The fate of those who have 'succeeded' may be understood only if we compare their stories with the stories of artists who remain on the periphery of the art world. Each of these cases is individual and escapes easy categorization or attempts to create a typology. This problem also applies to attempts to understand the category of success, which will change its meaning depending on the fate of individual artists. The ambiguity of this category, in the context of the biographical stories of artists, seems to be inevitable. This is mostly because this concept is so open to interpretation that it remains largely out of focus; each time requiring a more precise definition and concretization in relation to the biography and the circumstances of a given artist.

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NIEJEDNOZNACZNOŚĆ „SUKCESU” NA PRZYKŁADZIE BIOGRAFICZNYCH OPowieści POLSKICH ARTYSTÓW EMIGRANTÓW

Streszczenie

Jakie czynniki wpływają na artystyczny sukces? Jak interpretują go sami twórcy? W jaki sposób odnosi się to do artystów emigrantów? W artykule podjęta została próba odpowiedzi na te pytania. Odnosząc się do wyników badań biograficznych przeprowadzonych wśród polskich artystów emigrantów mieszkających w Berlinie, Nowym Jorku, Londynie i Paryżu ukazano wieloznaczność

terminu „sukces”. Ponieważ kategoria ta jest różnorodnie interpretowana przez narratorów za każdym razem musi być odnoszona do szerszego kontekstu biograficznego. W tekście wyodrębnione zostały obiektywne i subiektywne aspekty doświadczania sukcesu. Biorąc pod uwagę subiektywne odczucia, kategoria ta zmienia swoje znaczenie w zależności od losów indywidualnych twórców. Nie może także być zredukowana jedynie do wymiaru artystycznego, ponieważ inne aspekty życia artysty emigranta silnie z nią interferują. Wychodząc z założenia, że los tych którzy odnieśli sukces może zostać zrozumiany jedynie w kontekście losów tych, którzy pozostali na peryferiach świata sztuki w artykule przytoczone zostały wypowiedzi jednych i drugich twórców.

Słowa kluczowe: sukces, artyści emigranci, satysfakcja życiowa, biografia, działalność artystyczna