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THE ART OF FAILURE – THE VICTORY OF THE LOSERS

Abstract: The article describes the phenomenon of the art of failure. Traditional narrative focuses on the experience of winning, while marginalizing everything that is weak, mediocre, lost. The change comes with the end of art understood as a decomposition of the historical structures organizing artistic discourse (cf. Arthur C. Danto, Gianni Vattimo, Jean-Luc Nancy). In the post-historical plurilogue, the art of failure becomes a means of expression of the groups which have been traditionally excluded (Judith Halberstam). This in turn leads to a multi-level game between the participants of cultural life and its institutions. The author goes on to present and analyse specific examples of the art of failure accentuating their subversive-emancipatory potential.

Keywords: art of failure, end of art, queer

The discourse of modernity finds its justification in the history of victories: of democracy over non-democracy, liberalism over non-liberalism, capitalism over non-capitalism. The narrative of success, strictly inscribed into the structures of power, is present not only in the mass-media, the educational system, or state institutions, but also in art – which legitimizes the progress of civilization towards a utopia. Any trace of failure, mistake, weakness, is pushed outside the limits of language. The discourse of power transforms the past without exceptions for the sake of control over the current situation. Mass contentment and satisfaction serves as the guarantor of the safe *status quo* as the current success legitimizes everything that has led to it. Thus, the paradigm of winning has become an organizing principle of the North Atlantic civilization.

Cultural institutions are under its influence as well, and contemporary art therefore sometimes resembles an arms race. Artists master their art in order to

jump the bars set high by their predecessors or by themselves. Competitiveness, so widespread in post-industrial society, also becomes a model in the world of art. Because of this, painting, sculpture, or photography take on the character of sports disciplines, where expert bodies grant awards: cultural institutions decide who will be placed in the center, and who on the peripheries of the art scene. Success also has its economic aspect, which forces artists to constantly consider their market environment. The creator, as a producer and maker, becomes established and judged in the context of tradition, of other works, of the critical narrative, but also in the context of commodity exchange. These circumstances can serve as a trap for the art itself. It is in the interest of the artists to attain a central position and then to preserve it as long as possible. However, this is decided by the expert bodies which influence the distribution of the financial means: directly through awards, grants, and subsidies, or indirectly through their opinions which impact the market of the potential recipients/buyers. Thus, contemporary art becomes both an element and a reflection of the neo-liberal society of the 21st century.

The relentless rules of the market dictate, however, that every success is balanced by somebody else's failure. In the discussion on the global balance of power, we can hear the increasingly audible voices of the excluded groups: the disabled, the racial, ethnic, or sexual minorities, and all the others who used to be disqualified in the historical race to success. The point of reference in the construction of their own narrative may become the failure itself – understood as the set of phenomena unspoken, silenced, or displaced from collective consciousness, which reveal the vulnerability, weakness, limitedness, and helplessness of the Subject. This perspective opens possibilities for new forms of expression, which have until now been relegated to the peripheries of the art scene. Currently, whatever is far from the desired aesthetic values, or even from conforming to the rules of artistic correctness becomes noticed and appreciated more frequently. Thus, we can speak of a turn in the modern artistic discourse – a turn towards failure.

1.

The concept of failure as a narrative-organizing rule is possible due to the historical changes in the understanding of art that occurred in the 20th century. The key to understanding these changes is a close reading of the idea of *The End of Art* proposed by Arthur C. Danto, among other theoreticians. According to this American philosopher, the modern narrative on art came to an end together with the birth of Pop art.¹ When Andy Warhol exhibited the *Brillo boxes*

¹ See A.C. Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2014, pp. 117-134.

in 1964 in the Stable Gallery, he blurred the demarcation line between art and reality. Since then, every item shown by an artist had the capacity to become art. Of course, cases of using *ready-mades* were known before that; however, the context of Andy Warhol's gesture is crucial here. The revolution of the 1960s in the field of art was encrypted onto the entirety of the civilizational changes that had occurred in the post-war Europe and North America: changes such as the substantial improvement of the living standards, the loosening of class divisions, and the unification of life styles. Together with the liberalization and democratization of social structures, the world of art became open to all of those who previously had had no access to it – because of their limitations with regard to artistry (the mimetic paradigm) or intellectual level (the philosophic paradigm).

This revolutionary move by Warhol showed that art history told in a traditional way is only one of many possible perspectives. For instance, the choice proposed by Ernst Gombrich focuses on the artworks deriving from the European culture in the last 3000 years whose authors were mainly white men. From its early beginnings art was of elitist character. Aesthetically valuable objects produced by the representatives on non-privileged groups were appreciated as folklore rather than the result of artistic activity in itself. This rule is most vividly manifested in state institutions such as museums, where artifacts produced by foreign cultures are placed in separate rooms, specially reserved for this purpose. At the same time, the works of European authors are classified and systematized according to the tendency of progress – the development of technology, both literal and artistic, and of artistic self-consciousness, which has its aim in confirming the historical success of the Western civilization. Those artists who do not fit the story are subject to exclusion. Nevertheless, with the extension of the notion of art itself, the narratives that have been thus far marginalized have been reappraised.

This change applies not only to the subjects undertaken by new authors, but also to the way in which they are presented. Consider the example of the 1993 exhibition of Mary Jane Jacob, entitled *Culture in Action: New Public Art in Chicago*.² The curator asked representatives of various social groups to create works which would represent their values in most specific ways. One of the most controversial works was titled *We Got It!* and it was a candy bar prepared by twelve workers of the 552nd team of The Bakery, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers' International Union of America, perceived by the authors as “the sweet of their dreams”. Placing such an object in institutional(ized) space would have been impossible and even unthinkable before the Pop-art turn-over.

² See J. Scanlan, “Culture in Action”, *Frieze* 1993, vol. 13, November-December, available from http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/culture_in_action/ [accessed 8 Aug. 2015].

Moreover, prior to it such an object would never be able to trigger the interpretative processes accessible to the viewer in 1993. Events such as Jacob's exhibition present a chance to articulate and listen to narratives which until now could not have been encompassed by the historical tale on art, and the presence of their authors is thus more noticeable in the public space. As Danto has stressed, "To imagine an artwork is to imagine a form of life".³ Basing our judgment on post-historical art, we can try to reconstruct and understand the global society of the new millennium, with all its apories and nuances.

The change that has occurred in the art of the 20th century is merely a sign of the weakening of discourse – so characteristic for late Modernity. The borders between particular disciplines become blurred. Art penetrates science, philosophy, and other social practices, loosening/losing its essence. In consequence of technological changes, including digitalization and advanced reproduction techniques, it is difficult to precisely determine the demarcation line between the harsh reality and the virtual one. This phenomenon is labeled by Gianni Vattimo as an *explosion of aesthetics*: "No longer is art to be rendered out-of-date and suppressed by a future revolutionary society; rather, the experience of art as an integral aesthetic fact is immediately to be sought out".⁴ The internal divisions are becoming blurred as well. Art becomes not so much interdisciplinary as a-disciplinary. Inter-genre hybrids such as land art or body art are still far from the unequivocal division sustained by the state-owned institutions of culture. What is more, the means typical for mass media, or genres seen as "worse" are more and more often in use as a form of artistic expression. Such is the case of *Made in Heaven* by Jeff Koons who, together with his wife, recreated some scenes known from porn movies in his work.

The autonomy given to the work of art by 18th century aesthetics has become dispersed. Its status versus reality is ambiguous, remains in constant renegotiation. One of its consequences is the performative character of post-historical works. The works of art currently *happen* rather than being created; their structure is more flexible and changes together with the processes that initiate their emergence. The work of art adapts in form to the circumstances in which it is to happen, and to the goal which it aims to achieve. Banksy's murals can serve as one of many examples of this phenomenon. The British artist is always referring to the context in which his work is supposed to be created. The circumstances allowing the work to appear become its immanent part. It would be difficult to imagine that the dove of peace in a bulletproof vest would shake us equally strong within the museum space as it does on the "safety

³ A.C. Danto, *After the End...*, p. 203.

⁴ G. Vattimo, "The Death or Decline of Art", transl. J. R. Snyder, in: *The Continental Aesthetics Reader*, ed. Clive Caseaux, Routledge, London, New York 2000, p. 188.

wall” surrounding Palestine. In the case of Banksy, the close, even unbreakable tie between aesthetics and politics is revealed. The post-historical work of art becomes a source and a mirror of facts and reality, a moment of intensification of the meanings that function in the culture: both now and throughout history. “In short, the work of art is the ‘setting-into-work of truth’” – as Vattimo notes referring to Heidegger’s art theory – “because in it the opening up of a world as a context of referrals – like a language – is permanently connected to the earth as the ‘other’ of the world”.⁵

Viewed from this perspective, “the end of art” seems to be one of the borderline points in its development and cannot be associated with a crisis, atrophy, or depletion of the creative potential of humanity. The motif of the end of art is already present in Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*, according to which the process of forming truths of progressively higher generality is accompanied by the reduction of the sensual valor. Art abolishes itself and thus it assimilates itself into religion and philosophy.⁶ This does not, however, lead to its negation, but rather to producing a larger variety and subtlety of the forms that it uses. This Hegelian concept was evoked by, among others, Jean-Luc Nancy, who used to consider the thus understood end of art as a starting situation, predestined each time. As Tomasz Załuski observes, “the end of art receives the meaning of an event which inaugurates the history of art – inaugurating it constantly anew, in a repetitive manner”.⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy claimed that there is no art form that would be able to fully express art’s perfection. Thus, the selective look, or an attempt at a synthetic approach, precipitates whatever is manifested within the indefinite multitude and factuality of the particular cases. “Each one of the arts exposes in its way the unity of ‘art’, which has neither place nor consistency outside this ‘each one’ – still more, the unity of a single art is exposed in this sense only in its works one by one”.⁸

The post-historical art revokes the institutional frame. It bursts the structures that had assured its further development from the inside. The moment of exposing the narrative character of the tale about the victory of the white man’s civilization enabled art and its history to become the object of artistic action. The examples include the activity of the inventors of *sotsart*, the Russian duet of Komar and Melamid, who travestied the convention of socialist realism, using it to expose the propagandist character of art as such. The work

⁵ Ibid., pp. 193-194.

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. I, transl. T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988, p. 7.

⁷ T. Załuski, „Powtórzenie i motyw końca sztuki w filozofii Jean-Luc Nancy’ego”, in: *Estetyka i Krytyka*, no. 1 (2/2006), p. 149.

⁸ J.-L. Nancy, *The Muses*, transl. Peggy Kamuf, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1994, p. 31.

always speaks on somebody's behalf, it is never politically neutral. Bearing this assertion in mind, the post-historical artists abandon museums and galleries, heading towards life as it is. The existential experience of being based in specific socio-economic and political background becomes a factor impossible to exclude from the analysis of current aesthetic situation. And since the world has been divided into civilization's centre and peripheries, this should also be mirrored by and in art.

2.

The categories of success and failure are strictly connected with the capitalist worldview which equates the ability to accumulate and multiply material capital with social usefulness. However, in this binary arrangement of success and failure both qualities are strictly interconnected: somebody's win comes at a price of somebody else's failure, which is best seen in the post-colonialist balance of power on the geopolitical map. The wealth of Western countries would not be possible without the economic exploitation of the population of third world countries. It is in the interest of the institutions supporting the capitalist structures to create a discourse which would legitimize its functioning. Thus, the official narrative puts the stress rather on the success of the centers than on the failure of the peripheries. As Scott Sandage notes, the success becomes symbolically multiplied when it becomes embodied by the discourse; therefore, those who have attained it cannot stop talking about it.⁹ In an order thusly understood, the only correct means of communicating failure is silence. The narrative of failure becomes audible when the propaganda of success becomes silenced.

Describing the resistance movement of peasants in South-Eastern Asia, James C. Scott noticed that the weaker use different and less spectacular strategies while fighting the oppressive system, than is the case of the entities of equal rank.¹⁰ What at first seems to be passiveness, ignorance, or even acceptance of oppression, can in fact be hidden sabotage. For instance, such anti-activities can consist in slowing down the tempo of the work, or in the negligence of duties. The situation described by Scott shows that weakness and failure are a resistance against the values proscribed by capitalist institutions. These values are supposed to ensure efficient and safe functioning of the system; they become a norm that regulates the worldviews. Whatever is placed outside of this horizon is supposed to be rejected. In the North Atlantic culture, the

⁹ See: S. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2005, p. 9.

¹⁰ See: J.C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1987, p. 29.

recommended model proposes success understood in terms of self-development, capital accumulation, organization of private life in the form of a family, ethical activity, structured plans about the future. Any deviation from this path equals exclusion. José Muñoz considers the rejection of life pragmatism to be one of the utopian strategies of queer culture.¹¹ If the goals offered by social structures are unattainable, and one could perceive the attempt at organizing homosexual desire within the frames of heteronormative institutions as such, then a different, alternative model should be found or created. The failure of the queer culture is based on the fact that it will never attain its final realization and durability of heterosexual structures. The compensation is to be found in art. According to Judith Halberstram, queer art is an enormous opportunity for using the social potential of disappointment and resistance against the reality of such rigorous standards of normalcy. “The queer art of failure turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being”.¹²

One of the examples of rejection of the common sense pragmatism is to be found in *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh.¹³ Renton, the main character of the novel, rejects the path of social development facilitated by such institutions as school, work, or family. He motivates his idleness by disagreement with the illusion of freedom promoted by capitalist propaganda. Having to choose between a job in a corporation, a mortgage loan, and social benefits – he chooses nothing and succumbs to the destructive joys of drug intake and nightclubbing with other disenchanting people. Within the capitalist logic, the moral life becomes opposed to the fall and decay, order to banditry, control over sexuality to promiscuity, and consciousness to intoxication. Renton cannot allow himself to choose what is commonly preferred; therefore, he tries to revoke the system by his passiveness and apathy. His strategy somehow resembles the resistance techniques used by the Asian peasants. The young Scotsman sacrifices his career, health, and other emblems of life fulfillment in order to sabotage the capitalist machinery. Here one can also notice some elements of fight against British colonialism. *Trainspotting* is set in the milieu of Edinburgh clubbers who tend to associate the standards of economic efficacy with British society rather than with their own homeland. It is interesting that resistance against imperialism takes a form of self-weakening, unlike most of the post-colonial narratives, which strengthen their identity by turning toward nationalism.

¹¹ See: J.E. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, New York University Press, New York 2009.

¹² J. Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2011, p. 88.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 90.

Another realm where the dictate of success is clearly manifested, according to Halberstam, is sport. And although the idea of modern Olympic Games is referring to purely humanist values, what matters in the final stage of its realization is who will win. The Olympic Games have themselves often been an arena of international struggle, whenever the conflict which could not manifest itself openly was sublimated as sport rivalry. If we look closely at the narrative organized around various tournaments, we shall see that what lies at its very center is the extremely oppressive mechanism of exclusion: the podium is reserved only for the first three results. Other participants form an anonymous mob of rivals offered – as a consolation prize – a hope for a future win. The severity of this division was captured by the Australian photographer Tracy Moffat. In her extremely interesting work titled *Fourth* the artist presented the sportsmen from the Sydney Olympics at the moment of their realization that they have only managed to take a place excluding them from the podium. The position of a person whose distance from winning can be measured in seconds or centimeters is symbolically more difficult than that of those who have performed much worse and stayed far behind. It is always impossible to know – until the last moment – who will be granted the fourth place, and when the bitter announcement is made the failure of the loser is particularly exposed.

Searching for alternative narratives, Halberstam turns towards child fantasies. The works designed for the youngest audience are often marked by the reversal or annulment of the logic of success and failure. In the movie *Shrek*, the main character, an ogre, decides to reject the possibility of being transformed into a beautiful prince. If one can interpret this tale as a voice of a young spectator, the world of a child seems to be devoid of the sentiment and nostalgia for the win. “The beauty of these films is that they do not fear failure” – notes Halberstam – “they do not favor success, and they picture children not as preadults figuring out the future but as anarchic beings who partake in strange and inconsistent temporal logics”.¹⁴ It is worth mentioning that many characters from contemporary tales for children are outside the box of widely understood models of normalcy. One of the most interesting examples is Babe, an orphaned piglet who considers itself to be a shepherd dog. Of course the identity project Babe, as is the case of most queer utopias, is condemned to fail. As the British actor Quentin Crisp stated, if at first you don’t succeed, failure may be your style. Being queer is designed to fail, but failure is also queer in itself, as a standing-out way of life, sort of non-conformism which creates space for articulating whatever does not fit the official discourse. For instance, the sabotaging activity of drag queens which uncovers patriarchal oppressive mechanisms aimed at women is possible only through undertaking a task which

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 120.

will never be entirely fulfilled. The cross-dressing performer will always remain an actor on the scene of the “as if” mode. A wider perspective could include in this assertion all the homosexuals who fight to be included into the structures of the “normal” society by using heteronormative regulations. Keeping the *status quo* is in the interest of the traditional narratives: exclusion is an infeasible feature, and whoever was born to fail will remain as such. As Guy Hocquenghem claims, “Capitalism turns its homosexuals into failed normal people, just as it turns its working class into an imitation of the middle class”.¹⁵ The queer strategy remains torn between the rejection of the optimistic projects of heteronormative narrative, and their own recycling. A chance for discovering new models that would dodge the rigid logic of failure and success can be found in post-historical art.

3.

The models of exclusion typical for the discourse of success are also present in art. They function according to several criteria, with the economic ones – understood as access to the means of production – being one of the most crucial. Preparing a full-length movie which would circulate in the official realm is directly linked to the budget that would allow for hiring a team of qualified specialists in various fields. The source of financing such actions is rarely limited to private funds. The money often comes from state funds, or is given by various firms and corporations which form their own demands regarding the project, such as the condition of profitability. Another criterion for presence in the discourse is artistry and the artisanship of the author, or his proficiency. In order to be able to perform the simplest piece of classical music, one must be trained for a specific amount of time in order to attain technical ability, allowing the person to perform or create a work. The third criterion is the intellectual one. Access to the contemporary world of art is often connected with a specific discursive background, which enables one to read the meanings rooted in tradition and other disciplines of human activity. These criteria can be reduced to an economic denominator. All in all, the acquisition of artisanship and theoretical tools is a form of work, and as such it can be seen as a ratio of monetary value to the time sacrificed to attain the ability. The capitalist system owns the structures which facilitate and regulate participation in the world of art: the denominated criteria can only be fulfilled through the acquisition of the means available within this system. If the process can be completed according to the recommended model, the result should be positive.

¹⁵ G. Hocquenghem, “Capitalism, the Family, and the Anus”, in: *Homosexual Desire*, transl. Daniella Dangoor, Duke University Press, Durham 1993, p. 94.

For art it means reaching the audience, being acclaimed by the experts, and the profit of the creators. Of course, participation in the structures does not guarantee the preferred outcome; however, deviations, aberrations, or, in the worst case, failures of any kind, remind outside the rhetoric of the capitalist institutions. Hence, whatever has no place in the discourse of success becomes expressed by the art of failure.

One of the examples of the voices audible in this case is the project of Katarzyna Kozyra, bearing the title *In Art, Dreams Become Reality (W sztuce marzenia stają się rzeczywistością)*. In the period between 2003 and 2009 this Polish artist prepared a series of works in which she acted as an opera singer and a cheerleader. It is worth mentioning that before the project she had never been trained in or had never performed classical singing or acrobatic dance. The time-consuming process of acquiring the new abilities enabled her to finally perform in these disciplines with proficiency, though without a trace of virtuosity so awaited and expected from the artists. Kozyra documented her failure in a series of videos. In one of those, *Il Castrato*, Kozyra impersonates a young boy who becomes castrated in front of half-naked men so he can effectively perform Schubert's *Ave Maria*. The artist thusly reminds us about the cost which has to be undertaken by any creator who tries to achieve the heights of artisanship and artistry. Several hundred years ago, opera singers used to sacrifice their own bodies; nowadays they sacrifice their socio-economic potential.

Another artist who is equally ready to expose the discourse of success is Dorota Masłowska. The protagonists of her literary works are struggling with the inability to fulfill the standards posed by the society. Their failure is usually expressed according to two schemata. The first model is based on ineffectual pursuit of consumerist happiness, as in the story of Farah, the protagonist of the novel *Darling, I Have Killed Our Cats (Kochanie zabiłam nasze koty)*. A young city woman in her twenties cannot handle the painful feeling of loneliness. Any timid attempt at improving her situation ends in spectacular fiascos, discouraging her from undertaking any further attempts. As a result, she follows the flow of everyday life, ignoring her own needs. Another proposed model for social norms is their rejection. Self-destruction which characterizes Andrzej Silny (Andrew the Strong), the protagonist of *Polish-Russian War under the White-Red Flag (Wojna polsko-ruska pod flagą biało-czerwoną)* coincides with the tendencies expressed by Renton from *Trainspotting* by Irvin Welsh.

One of the objections raised most frequently by Masłowska's critics is her excessive fascination with weakness, averageness, failure. Masłowska is using literature to record reality with ruthless honesty, which however stays very far from the dispassionate form of documentary. The condensation of the qualities that Masłowska attempts to capture usually results in the grotesque.

Thus, mediocrity, colloquialism, and failure are appreciated as a form of existential experience. While mentioning the motif of failure in Masłowska's artistic activity one must also mention her musical project entitled *The Society Is Unkind* (*Spółczesność jest niemile*). After becoming unquestionably successful as a writer, Masłowska decided to become a vocalist. Her experiment resulted in an album with a dozen songs composed, produced, and performed by Masłowska herself. In the lyrics she used similar thematic range as in her novels and theatre plays; however, this time her own weaknesses (namely the vocal ones) have been exposed. The banality and failure present in the text is complemented here by the form. Thus, the work is a reliable recording of the experience of everyday life – making it possible for every member of the audience to identify him- or herself with the artist. Moreover, when constructing her scenic persona, Masłowska ironically uses the strategies typical for the language of pop culture. The overt aestheticization aiming at concealing everything which deviates from the preferable norm becomes a pastiche and thus an unmasking of the artificial reality of the mass-media.

Another example of artistic toying with the mainstream can be found in the activity of Sana el-Azzeh-Siekierska in her *LiTut Project*. The author asked children attending schools worldwide to take photographs of their closest environment. The cameras were sent to Mauritius, Sechelles, and Palestine. Most media reports from the Middle East concentrate on the conflict between the Arab states and Israel. Thus, the narrative of the Western media is full of dramatic scenes of war maneuvers which would serve as material for war movies. However, the works made for El-Azzeh-Siekierska's project concentrate on landscapes and portraits of family members. Children were focused mostly on everyday life artifacts, excluding war activities, which – to a distant observer – seem to be more attractive than pictures of a desert, or a group of laughing teenagers. Whenever we decide to preserve an image, it seems important to us, and worth memorizing. The lack of images of aggression or war can be the result of the child's suppression of the trauma. *LiTut Project* is also worth mentioning as regards the technical aspect of the photographs. They were often blurred, burnt or badly framed. Sometimes, the young artists would accidentally cover the image with their own finger. Those pictures, according to the criteria of artisanship and mastery should be excluded from any professional circulation. Here, however, they gain additional meaning, underlining the uniqueness and authenticity of presented perspective.

The rule of competence has been delimiting the borders of art for several centuries, making this domain inaccessible for certain groups. Some of these limitations were caused by genetic predispositions. The change in this matter occurred in the second half of the 20th century with the demolition of the historical narrative. The Warsaw Theatre 21 co-created by artists with autism

and the trisomy of the 21st chromosome takes up the subject of the social exclusion of people with inherited intellectual dysfunction in various aspects of everyday life. One of their shows: *Falls. Episode 2 (Upadki. Odcinek 2)* talks about the mechanisms of oppression in the realm of finance and banking. The actors are granted money for a trip to Mongolia where they stay in an *all-inclusive* hotel. The money they possess guarantees each of them the use of all the facilities offered by the complex. However, a problem occurs when the protagonists are to perform their first financial operation. In a series of self-ironic scenes and monologues the actors show their problems with recognizing the value of the particular bills, or with performing the most basic arithmetic operations. Finally, the trip results in failure. Weakness and inability become a component of everyday experience of the excluded in their everyday struggle against their limitations. The theatrical medium offers a chance to communicate this situation while sustaining the subjectivity of the participants.

Capitalism divides its participants into winners and losers. The narrative on art, just as any other story, is being told by the winners. However, together with the decomposition of the dominant discourse, the formerly excluded voices become audible. The 20th century “explosion” of aesthetics contributed to the extension of the notion of art itself. Thus, the representatives of the eternal peripheries become deponents of the artistic means necessary to articulate their own perspective. The queer theory seems to be especially important for this recognition, as it perceives failure as an alternative to the dominant narrative.

The rules of the free market force us to chase the ever-changing ideal of life fulfillment. Any moment of stoppage or slowing down in comparison to the overall tempo means disqualification from the global race for success. In these circumstances the art of failure can be seen as a relief valve, a reservoir of models and strategies used for taming crises. The win is usually a result of multiple attempts, which often end up far from the imagined mark. Ignoring the moments of weakness, exhaustion, or even boredom, becomes a manipulation with dangerous consequences. The art of failure gives us a chance to bring back fullness to our existential experience. It allows us to expand the image of reality and include elements which have been so far placed outside the frame.

Due to the aesthetic forms of representation, the marginalized groups have a chance to participate in the “distribution of the sensible”.¹⁶ The art of failure,

¹⁶ See: J. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*, transl. G. Rockhill, Continuum International Publishing Group, New York 2004.

realizing its subversive-emancipatory potential enters a perverse dialogue with the institutions of control. Thus, the private becomes an element of the political game; it influences its further development. Of course, such situation poses a certain danger. Those with no access to the means of production will create low-budget art, confirming and reproducing their economic status. As a result, despite undertaking a subversive action in the symbolic order, on the economic level, the *status quo* remains preserved. Thus, the art of failure can function only as one of many aspects of the real process of struggle for equal rights and emancipation.

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SZTUKA PORAŻKI – ZWYCIĘSTWO PRZEGRANYCH (streszczenie)

Przedmiotem artykułu jest opis zjawiska sztuki porażki. Tradycyjna narracja stawia w centrum doświadczenie sukcesu, marginalizując jednocześnie to, co słabe, przeciętne, przegrane. Zmiana następuje wraz z końcem sztuki rozumianym jako rozpad historycznych struktur organizujących dyskurs artystyczny (Arthur C. Danto, Gianni Vattimo, Jean-Luc Nancy). W posthistorycznym wielogłosie sztuka porażki staje się środkiem ekspresji grup zwyczajowo wykluczanych (Judith Halberstam), co prowadzi do wielopoziomowej gry między uczestnikami życia kulturalnego, a jego instytucjami. W dalszej części artykułu autor przedstawia i analizuje poszczególne przykłady sztuki porażki, akcentując ich subwersywno-emancypacyjny potencjał.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka porażki, koniec sztuki, queer