

## New Polish Theatre on the Small Screen: the TV series *Artyści* (*Artists*, 2015)

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The article describes the phenomenon of the Polish TV series *Artists*. Created by the theater creators Strzępka and Demirski were their TV debut. The series has become iconic among the theater community. Analyzing the series I show its sources, which are stuck in the extraordinary recent development of Polish theater dramaturgy. I also try to show how the series opens the directing to new dimensions of creativity. The changes that have taken place in the Polish theater allow to replace the dominant models of affirmation and subversion with an affective approach to art whose frame I become experience.

KEYWORDS: dramaturgy, affection, experience, television, series

The relationship between Polish theatre and television has a long and honourable tradition. Since its beginning in 1953, television theatre has familiarized the imagination of Poles with the convention of merging the specificity of a theatre production with the possibilities of a film camera. In 2015, this relationship was presented from an unusual angle when theatre as an institution and a milieu rather than a genre became the object of television story. This happened by means of an eight-episode TV series *Artyści* (*Artists*), which centers on the operations of a fictitious Popular Theatre within the setting of contemporary Polish reality. The series did not attract a massive audience, with viewership numbers at less than four hundred thousand, a number that fails to impress given the millions of fans that follow some popular series in Poland. Yet reviews of both theatre and film critics turned out to be very good and often even enthusiastic. Some saw *Artists* as one of the best Polish examples of the television series form; there were also those who thought it equal to the best-known television shows world-wide. Its positive reception is one reason why I want to look at contemporary theatre in Poland through its prism. *Artists* is not only an excellent realization of the television series format, but also an intriguing reflection on the reality of present-day Polish theatre. Certainly, the short history of the fictional Popular Theatre does not encompass all of the theatrical phenomena and currents in Poland. Nonetheless, what the series chooses to show is indic-

ative of the vast area of theatre activity (on institutional and milieu levels) that has been affected by the last two decades' revolution in theatre arts.

While it is exceptional, *Artists* is not the first Polish television series about theatre, nor – all the more so – the first such production on a global stage. Films that make use of the subject of theatre arts, or which are built around various types of stories about actors' lives, are plentiful. Not too long ago, in 2000, the series *Twarze i maski* (Faces and Masks) was broadcast in Poland, which presented the history of theatre during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Despite enjoying a much larger audience than *Artists*, it did not resonate as strongly within theatre circles. *Artists* stands apart for having a modern dramatic form, and in this it differs not only from *Faces and Masks*, older by fifteen years, but also from the majority of films that, to varying degree, approach theatre by way of reflecting on the human condition, or use it to craft stories within stories. The series under discussion here places theatre at the centre of its interest to use as an example of social life, rather than its parallel or metaphor. *Artists* is an attempt to speak truthfully about theatre and the people behind it. This truth is not objective, of course, but it is nevertheless important and impactful in a real way.

The change in the means of representing reality and, consequently, in the way that truth in theatre arts is understood, can be observed already in the titles of the two mentioned TV series. The phrase “faces and masks” clearly underlines the division between a real and a fictional world. Even if we are aware of an ambiguity arising from the fact that an open face can metaphorically also be seen as a mask, the series nevertheless establishes a certain prototypical order where the truth of our open face is confronted with the masks that we don on the stage of human life. The decision to present the story of a theatre under the title *Artists* creates an entirely different departure point for its interpretation. The word “artists” escapes all manner of clarifications. Artists are people who are given considerable respect on the one hand, while on the other the word is sometimes used pejoratively. It is also difficult to decide who exactly falls under the label. After all, the show's plot includes events from the lives of not only actors and play directors, but also the theatre's director, its technical crew, and other staff, who are all presented as equal characters within the story. The matter is further complicated since the frequently ironic portrayals of actors in the series also refer to some degree to the real actors playing them. This kind of a title seems to fit well the already deep-rooted aesthetics of postmodernism. And this is in fact the case with *Artists*. Yet postmodernism is only one of many contexts that can illuminate this title's sense. The specific ambiguity of the term *artists*

just outlined corresponds equally well with the character of the artistic process in contemporary Polish theatre.

In writing about new, contemporary theatre, I do not intend to present its full panoramic view; at this time, such a task would require a sizeable book. Using the perspective presented by the series *Artists*, however, I want to focus on what is meant, in some approximation, by the notions of *new drama* and *artistic theatre* in Poland. Neither category constitutes a defined term within the field of Polish theatre studies, although they do appear in both academic and popular discussions: *new drama* by way of describing the transformations that have taken place in theatre's artistic methods, and *artistic theatre* as one of its representative currents, developing alongside documentary theatre. This said, it is not the classification or the ordering of trends in Polish theatre that is at stake here, but rather the attempt to describe an important phenomenon that is significantly changing both the manner of theatre artists' work and our attitude toward the way that contemporary Polish theatre presents and comments on our reality.

The lively reaction of the theatre community to the series confirms the usefulness of *Artists* as a point of departure for reflections about Polish theatre. It is also not insignificant that it was created by two excellent theatre artists: Monika Strzépka and Paweł Demirski, a director and a playwright, respectively, who have been working together on theatre productions for many years and have thereby attained both popularity and the status of the most recognized artistic duet in Polish theatre. Their debut in a new medium of television was thus a significant event, while their exhaustive knowledge of theatre work, evidenced by their remarkable accomplishments, from the onset added to the authenticity of presented stories. This is not due to the supposed objectivism of representing reality well-known to both of them, but the expected honesty of actors portraying a world that constitutes the centre of their life's activity and the space of their successes. The issue of authenticity together with the weight of the presented stories is raised by the series' creators. In an interview given before the series aired, they underlined that they do not see a great difference between popular shows about surgeons and their story about actors. Responding to a remark from the interviewer that "everyone is a patient occasionally, but not everyone is part of a theatre audience", they replied that "perhaps everyone will want to be a theatre audience member after seeing the series" (Mrozek 2019). In their other public statements they explain that the theatre milieu was a pretext for them to weave a story about life in a human community, within Polish realities. While the attempt to popularize theatre by means of television cannot be seen as a success given the series' limited viewership numbers, viewers' comments confirm that the created world closely reflected Polish re-

alities. The viewers underlined that such details as the normal apartments and average cars of the artists allowed them to glimpse on the television screen a more familiar reality than that presented in other Polish series, where characters reside in elegantly furnished apartments and drive cars straight from the dealership regardless of their social position and income. This simple gesture of honesty in representing the lives of Poles does not exhaust the repertoire of solutions that contribute to the creation of a reality that boasts the virtue of authenticity. The way in which Strzępka and Demirski reach the audience is much more complex and stems the practices that have established themselves in Polish theatre in recent years as well as the incredibly skilful interweaving of these theatrical methods with the format of a contemporary series.

One of the more characteristic elements of *Artists* is its anecdotal aspect. Many of the episodes are about events that make the readers think they are based on real life and in most cases their suspicions that the authors must have borrowed the scene from somewhere turn out to be correct. The veracity of events is enhanced already by the series' promotional strategy. Popular media outlets provide access to interviews with the people behind the series, who reveal the real-life sources of specific events. The director Monika Strzępka has divulged that the character of the neurotic accountant who hides from the new theatre director in a closet, played by Agnieszka Glińska, has the surname of an actual employee of a Polish theatre (who hid from actors, however). These types of situations and characters who are based on real individuals are numerous in the series, which is perhaps not surprising in these types of productions.

Worth noting, however, is the positioning of these anecdotes vis-à-vis the main current of plot development. While in the traditional narrative order, anecdotes usually serve only as asides that add colour to the action or its broader background, in *Artists* they are an inherent part of the story's main, expansive current. While this effect speaks to Demirski's writing skills, it is in fact largely the result of contemporary approaches to working on dramatic composition that have developed in Poland in the recent past. From individual statements made by the show's creators we find out how they shared their experiences and observations in constructing particular characters and developing specific plot lines. Their comments reveal the sources of chosen elements within the represented world as well as recall the mentioned artistic method of developing the dramatic arc of a show with reference to various interpersonal relationships that emerge in the course of working on a show (in this case, on the series' screenplay). This is not a case of "writing on the stage" that is popular in some avant-garde theatres, however, nor an instance of collective creation. Rather, the work

on the final version of the screenplay and on the dramaturgy of performance is a series of reflections by the cast members on a given topic as well as of tensions between them, which shape the dramatic course of the performance. Certainly, conversation and the actors' improvisation, which the playwright preserves in the form of a final script, are the prototypical means of this process. Its essence, however, nevertheless resides in the extraordinary dynamic of coming together to work on a new theatrical (and in this instance, a television) project.

A complete description of the types of dramaturgical work present in contemporary Polish theatre is a task yet to be realized. In the context of reflections on the series *Artists*, however, two examples from the field of theatre are worth noting by way of supplementation, for they allow to more clearly see what artists with theatre experience have brought to this television form. The first performance I want to reference to illustrate the significant traits of contemporary Polish dramaturgy is the play *Dyplom z kosmosu* (A Degree/Diploma in Space [Studies]), put on by the National Academy of Theatre Arts in Kraków. Its fairly clear model of working on the script allows to discuss the character of dramaturgical work that leans on the statements and reflections of actors on the subject of the performance. The play was conceived as a musical. Tomasz Jękot and Patrycja Kowańska, who were responsible for the script, used pop songs as their departure point. The actors were asked to choose songs that expressed their situation of being lost in the space of feelings and to comment upon their choice. Such simple conversations give rise to the plot along with the entire world of the musical, which on the one hand becomes, as could be expected, an expression of the actors' reflections about their lives, but which simultaneously serves as an ironic commentary on the characters that they create, namely lonely people who are somewhat lost in the contemporary world. The specific eclecticism of the play was well suited to conveying the image of being lost in an incongruous world. For instance, the neon signs characteristic of the 1970s, which comprised part of the set design, served as the background of an ironic scene of group therapy, which is so popular nowadays. In this manner, the somewhat nostalgic stories inspired by the songs were given vitality within a framework of self-ironic elements of the script as well as the young actors' performance. The natural liveliness of young age along with their individual physical conditions, which sometimes aided the creation of a moving image of a character and at other times served as obstacles, become a counterpoint for serious reflection about the complexity of the world in which they live. Both characters' personalities and the plot trajectory emerged from rehearsals that not only provided the playwrights with materials, but established the directions for dramatizing the represented world.

The vitality of actors overcame the reflexive trajectory of contemplating our surrounding reality, while the initial metaphoric concept of “the space of feelings” (“kosmosu uczuć”) was developed in the course of rehearsals in varied directions. Among other things, this allowed for the inclusion of two aliens as characters in the play, who, in observing the earthly protagonists, become a prism that disturbs any simple way of understanding the represented events. It is impossible to summarize in a few sentences the stories that the play gave rise to in the form of memories and promotional materials. Their significant number is proof of the great dynamic of the working process on the dramaturgical form of contemporary plays. In the end, it is not a list of meanings that can be derived from conversations, rehearsals, or improvisations that is at stake, but rather the energy that comes from these experiences and the number of connections between both particular elements of the action and all aspects of the play’s production process and public reception. From a general perspective, it is this that distinguishes classical dramaturgy, which focuses primarily on action and treats remaining elements of the play’s life (its program, press materials, the work of the entire technical crew) as supplementary, from new dramaturgy, which has a more total character and is born from a broad range of creative activities, including those that accompany the process of a play’s production.

The second means of setting in motion the dramaturgy of a spectacle relies on the tension generated when working on the script. In a subsequent play staged by the National Academy of Theatre Arts in Kraków, based on Chekov’s drama *Platonov*, its two playwrights – Małgorzata Maciejewska and Tomasz Jękot – decided to present the story of how Russia’s declining bourgeoisie lived through the prism of the cult American series *Dynasty*. Both saw the history of an American multimillionaire’s family as an after-image of a similar disappointment as Chekov’s characters grappled with. In order to uncover the full motivations of the play’s creators, it must be noted that *Dynasty*, made in 1981, appeared on Polish television only at the onset of 1990s, when a new capitalist order was being established following the bankruptcy of the earlier regime. For many Poles, the American television series constituted an object [representative] of a desired prosperity that the political transformation was to secure. The creators of the Polish *Platonov* belong to a generation that recalls the fascination with the world of *Dynasty* as their parents’ experience. When they grew up, they were hit by disappointment stemming from unfulfilled promises “made” by the American series. As a departure point for working on *Platonov*, this experience turned out to be foreign to the younger still actors, whose age precluded them from remembering well the huge popularity of the series about the Carrington family. This divergence in experiences, however, in the end be-

came one of the sources of the play's dramatic composition. Explanations of the creators' ideas thus had less impact on the play's dramatic composition than working through the differences, misunderstandings, a sometimes conflicts arising from disparate life experiences of the cast members in the course of rehearsals; it was the latter that added intensity to and enriched the performance with new perspectives. The story, which at the onset focused on disappointment, gained in range through the dynamic portraits of lost characters trying at all cost to both find themselves, and stand up for themselves, in a new and adverse world. Similarly to the first discussed example, therefore, the perspective of this performance became significantly more multidimensional.

A look behind the curtains of theatre work is often necessary to see the multiple aspects of contemporary dramaturgy and to understand their function. Nevertheless, a performance or, in this case, a television series can also have a qualitative effect. Watching *Artists*, it is difficult not to notice the breadth of its represented world. The events, portraits, and situations to consider are so numerous that the material would suffice for several seasons. The excess speaks to the extraordinary imagination of its creators and prompts the question: were Demirski and Strzępka not worried about potentially tiring viewers with an "action overload"? Nothing of the kind happened, as is clear from reviews and viewers' comments. To the contrary, the series is described as light and engaging. One reason behind this effect is the ability, which theatre work develops, to incorporate what was usually treated as incidental – for instance anecdotes – into the unified current of a play's dramatic composition. Due to this strategy, it is difficult to speak of unnecessary elements of action, since they are all rendered dramaturgically important. New dramaturgy thus diverges from the classical model of action, which was characterized by hierarchical structure according to the Czech Structuralists, while developing another aspect of the structure of literary works, namely its dynamic character, not only in the syntagmatic aspect, but primarily in the synchronic one. Speaking metaphorically, the work becomes a more democratized space.

The issue of an anecdote in contemporary dramaturgy serves as a good example of changes that have taken place over the last two decades in both the structure of the theatrical work and in working with actors on roles. A closer look at subsequent elements of the show reveals, however, that the development of its dramatic composition is more complex, and that it simultaneously demands the creation of a new language, since in many cases existing research paradigms turn out to be insufficient.

Differences between the classical and the new model of dramaturgy are noticeable also in the specifics of narration. They are easy to see when

*Artists* is compared to the another Polish series dedicated to theatre, *Faces and Masks*. The latter, broadcast on Polish television in 2001, presents the history of Polish theatre during the last quarter of the twentieth century. Each episode revolves around a chosen performance and successive figures. *Artists* follows the popular format of contemporary television series and during one season (in eight episodes) develops a continuous course of events.

The main storyline of the series concerns the matter of filling the position of director of the Popular Theatre after the unexpected death of its previous holder. The theatre as an institution constitutes the centre of action both as the place in which the titular artists function and as the subject of external manipulations by city authorities. Already in the first scene of the job competition it is apparent that some candidates are more familiar with the selection committee while others are outside of their social circle. To everyone's surprise, the directorship is given to one such outsider, a young director from the provinces, Marcin Konieczny. It quickly transpires that his choice was not based on merit or respect, but rather the city's plan to close the theatre under the pretext of poor performance. The theatre is handed over to an inexperienced director on the assumption that he will not be able to handle a large city institution, thus giving cause for its liquidation. The city employees conspiring against the theatre simultaneously try to discredit its new director, setting a financial inspector an adversarial journalist on him, with the latter presenting a catastrophic image of the Popular Theatre's new leadership in the press. The director struggles not only with external enemies, however, but also with theatre employees who treat him almost as an intruder. These struggles constitute the main dramatic trajectory of the series, fuelled by a mystery surrounding the identities of the conspiring members of the authorities. The story in its entirety, however, consists of many, simultaneously developing storylines about romantic, professional, and private life.

This construction of *Artists* makes its dramaturgy significantly distinct from the one present in the earlier series *Theatre and Masks*. An episode summary from the older series can help to grasp these differences:

"Year 1974. The director of the City Theatre introduces its cast to Radosław Wieluński, a well-known director they were able to engage, not without difficulty, for a production of "Saint Joanne". The title role falls to Agnieszka Horn, an actress without much experience. The girl knows that this is a huge opportunity for her. Her enthusiasm soon undergoes a trial by fire. The young actress's preparations for the play are made much more difficult by a sick mother who requires her care. The famous director, in turn, turns out to be a real sadist who psychological tortures his young subordinate. Days pass one after another. Agnieszka's resilience reaches



its zenith. The girl begins to seriously think about quitting not only the part, but theatre altogether. Despite a nervous breakdown, she manages to last until the premiere. She walks on the stage and... performs without a hitch. She is a great success" (Film Polski).

Pointing out those motifs in *Artists* that are similar to ones mentioned in the above summary can begin the comparison between the specific dramatic construction of these series. The acquisition of a new resident director by the City Theatre parallels the arrival of both a new theatre director at the Popular Theatre, and of two new resident directors: a promising young Krzysztof Schiller and a world-renowned Maria Richter. Each of these three cases comes with some difficulties, though their scale is not emphasized as much as in the case of Wieluński's, who the City Theatre had to solicit. Similarities also exist between the situation of the young actress, Agnieszka Horn, who has the chance to play the main part in a play in *Theatre and Masks*, and the actors of the Popular Theatre, who are also faced with various professional and artistic opportunities. The title role is never at stake in *Artists*, however. As a result, the fight to secure opportunities becomes more a matter of daily routine than the defining question of an actor's existence. There is no "sadist" in the guise of a ruthless director to be found in *Artists*. While Maria Richter is an uncompromising person and the rejected star of the Public Theatre is deeply affected by his loss, her decisions do not intrude on the private sphere of the actors' work. Richter is demanding, but she never torments anyone.

On the basis of the supplied and still incomplete list of analogies the two series, some important differences in their specific dramatic construction can be sketched out. In *Faces and Masks*, all of the dramatic events concern one main protagonist, which strengthens their cause-and-effect relationships. In *Artists*, similar experiences are split between many different characters, as a result of which they seem more like life's vicissitudes than the momentous twists and turns typical of a hero's life. The heightened tension of action in *Faces and Masks* is conveyed well by the language used to summarize it. The opportunity facing the actress is *huge*. Her enthusiasm undergoes a *trial by fire*. Eventually her resilience reaches its *zenith*. As already mentioned, however, it is not only the stakes of the heroine's experiences that set the specific dramatic trajectory of the series, but also their interweaving into the young actress's single lifeline. In effect, the story gains a clearly moralistic character. Despite many challenges, Agnieszka is able to last until the end and finds "great success". Her suffering is thus morally recompensed. In *Artists*, the categories of "success" and "failure" cannot be applied to any of the characters' lives. This does not mean that their experiences are easy, or that a moral perspective is not part of the

viewer's perspective. Its function does change, however, and with it the task facing the viewer. In *Faces and Masks*, the judgement of the main protagonist's character is decisive in nature: her work ethic as well as care for her mother are rewarded with the great success she finds on the stage. In *Artists*, moral dilemmas are not resolved with either punishment or reward. Viewers are not given a chance to settle their anxieties about the order of the world. To understand the shift that takes place between traditional dramaturgy and its new form in Polish theatre well, it must be underlined that the latter's lack of resolution to narrative action does not translate into an openness of the work, in which the absence of a conclusion prompts the recipient dwell on what happened next. Instead, giving up on clear resolutions that typify classical dramaturgy serves to shift the recipient's activity from deciphering and understanding its meaning and toward an experiential dimension. Questions about the validity of protagonists' choices, which emerge from attempts to understand their actions and motivations, and from the inherently discursive contemplation of how one would act in their place, are replaced with reflection expressed in the following questions: "How do I feel about what I am watching?" and "What happens to me when I enter the fictional reality of the represented world, and why does it happen?". The series *Artists* provides us with a backstage view of the institution of theatre not just so that we can understand it, but so that we can also touch and experience it.

The dramaturgical shift toward experience is due not only to the tempering of the inflated action found in classical drama. A good description of the phenomenon must also consider the characters and those who enact them. *Artists* offers a wealth of interesting casting solutions and relations between the characters in its represented world. Undoubtedly, Michał Czarnik, who plays the part of the Popular Theatre's new director, has received the most attention. Among general praise for his role, of special note are the critical voices that can be heard from time to time. In his review of the series, Łukasz Drewniak admits that "[I am] unable to reconstruct the development of Czarnik's character after eight episodes since he becomes ever more cynical on the one hand, and ever more marked by the theatre on the other. Always caught in-between. Lost, good-and-bad, a wronged wrong-doer. In the end, we start to root for other characters". Other reviews also underline a sense of distance toward the character of Director Konieczny. In the case of Drewniak's assessment, the statement about the impossibility of reconstructing the character's development is symptomatic. The fact of the matter is that such a reconstruction would go against the new dramaturgical model, which has been able to escape the didactic function of the dramatic arts that survives since the times of bourgeoisie

tragedy until the present, ruling supreme over all types of fictive popular arts. What would be the consequences of the director's potential character development, or – in the language of the poetic of drama – his character transformation? As a boy growing up in the provinces, he could have fallen to the pressure of a large city and joined its elites. In that case, he would turn out to be a traitor. In a different variant, his jealousy of the authority wielded by the exceptional Richter could result in hatred or, to the contrary, in overcoming of his weakness. By means of projection, viewers would then have a chance to consider how they would behave in a similar situation. Such approaches, however, lead to a simple identification with a character, which the new dramaturgical current in Polish theatre pushes to the background for being less pertinent to experience than the viewer's encounter with the work itself. The character of the director does not encourage identification with it, nor invites us to walk in its shoes. He remains someone who we meet and carefully observe, without stepping beyond the border that separates our identity from the construct of a fictional protagonist. If the dramaturgical world pulls us into the space of its action, it is not as spirits inhabiting the bodies of fictional characters, but rather as passersby invited into someone's world.

This type of relation linking the viewer with the represented world is not limited only to an arbitrarily adapted convention of reception, but arises from the character that work on the new dramatic construction assumes and from its effects. We learn from interviews given by Czerniak in his capacity as the series' lead actor that, in working on the character of a theatre director, he drew on examples of people known to him who play such a function in the real world. He also mentions that his own experiences are the basis for another character in the series, an actor at the fictional Popular Theatre in perpetual financial straits. To this we can add that the part of a bookkeeper at the Popular Theatre is played by a former artistic director of a different Warsaw theatre, whose conflict with the administrative director concerned, among other things, financial issues. Taken together, we start to notice that beside the traditional model of working on a role, in which an outline of a fictional character given by the script is filled out by the actor using a framework of personal experience, something that could be called a migration of individual experience, or its proliferation, becomes an important element in the creation of a represented world.

Clearly, both theatre and film actors have always shared their personal experiences with one another as well as with other participants in the creative process. Looking at *Artists* in light of Czarnik's statements as recalled above, it is possible to see, however, that experience ceases to be only one of the sources that an actor uses in working on a role. Instead, it becomes

something vital and present during the performance process, be it on the stage or in front of the camera, something that the actor must contend with all the time. The inclusion of a character of an actor-in-debt that is based in part on Czarnik's experiences means that in playing a director he had to constantly confront his own life experiences as recalled, however, not only in his memory, but also through the acting work of a colleague on the set. Agnieszka Glińska was in a similar situation when she embodied an anxiety-ridden theatre book-keeper, thus playing the part of a person that she had confronted not long previously under dramatic circumstances in a real theatre that she had directed. One can risk stating that the dramatic construction of such a fictional world arises from the tensions that are born in the field of personal experience of the show's creators. At the core of this type of dramaturgy is the entrance onto the private sphere of someone else's experience, or the recognition of oneself in the experience of a person encountered in the real world, which must now be performed on the stage.

The importance of the dramaturgical tool that is the act of entering the field of someone else's personal experience finds confirmation, for instance, in the task assigned by the currently most accomplished Polish director, Krzysztof Krupa, to his students of directing and dramaturgy. They were first asked to write a short narration about their private life. Subsequently, the stories read out in class were rewritten by peers in the group, who had to recreate it anew from the perspective of one of its secondary characters. This fairly simple exercise in narrative construction based on a new perspective came loaded with an unexpected charge. While the rewriting of someone's story is a well-known practice in the literary realm, the act of incursion into a peer's text that, to boot, concerns an account from private life, becomes an intervention that transgresses the boundaries of intertextual play. Giving a text a new narrative form requires assuming a certain position toward it; when this text is an expression of private experience, we enter into the private space of the given person. The exercise that Lupa assigned to his students allowed them to develop their literary abilities as well as opened them onto the confrontation with the other's living experience. It forced the students to mobilize their sensitivity in order to recognize when the dramatic construction of someone else's experience is creatively innovative, and when it can begin to interfere with the boundaries of another person's privacy.

One could list many more examples of work on *experiential dramaturgy*. In this context, of significance is the fact that the experience of entering someone else's reality is not limited only to the illusion created for us by means of theatrical (or performance-based) conventions. The examples of creating a theatrical world based on private experiences exchanged among its creators [**extends**] also toward the audience.

Małgorzata Maciejewska's research into affective experience proves useful in describing the hypothetical model of the dispersal of experience in a theatre or performance space. In characterizing affective experience, she explains that it "often follows the tracks of previous affects with impossible to ascertain representational referents, which increases the body's pleasure in finding repetition beyond interpretation." This illuminating explanation helps to see that the methods of dramatic construction based on experiences of the work's creators depend on the affective stimulation of actors. Affectivity thus becomes the axis around which both past and present experiences revolve. Since affectivity appears to have a collective character, the audience is also stimulated, mobilizing their own affective experiences. It is possible to see in the model of affective experience similarities to the concepts of "flowing energy" and *techne* known from other theories. Affective experience differs from these concepts significantly, however, as Maciejewska's quoted explanation helps to see, since it does not aim for a specific effect. In the case of "flowing energy", the often underlined goal is the aspect of community building in the course of theatre performance. The actor's "throughline" that Stanislavsky speaks about, in turn, serves the construction of a believable character on stage.

As Maciejewska aptly puts it, however, affect escapes the order of representation, since the pleasure that flows from it depends on "repetition beyond interpretation". The affective track that Maciejewska writes about constitutes the kernel of collective experience of both actors and spectators. Its effect is not subject to verification in the form of comparison with the experiences of other spectators or artists due to the lack of a definitive interpretation of its effects. As Maciejewska notes, experience is "always only partial and it never ends".

On returning to the examples that show what kind of experiences the creators of *Artists* referred to and how they did it, some point of connections with Maciejewska's convincing theory are noticeable. If the actors did not construct their characters on their own experience, but rather shared in the private experiences of other cast members, or played the part of people they had encountered in real life, the memory of these experience always remained partial. The pleasure that arises in a confrontation with a spectacle that is structured in this way acquires the character of affective experience that "never ends". The basis of thus evolving pleasure of watching *Artists* can be easily seen in the figure of the Popular Theatre's director. Marcin Czarnik who plays the part explains in an interview that that character is inspired by "observations of real theatre directors" (Czarnik 2016), although the fictional version does not resemble any one of his prototypes in the end. Despite being based on real people, the character remains essentially in-

effable. Łukasz Drewniak's article "Alphabet scattered, or *Artists*", which creates a panorama of the series, speaks to this point loudly in dedicating the whole entry for "C" to Czerniak's protagonist. He mentions at the start that Konieczny is a very ambiguous hero and presents a long list of dilemmas that Charniak's character provokes. "It is hard to like him," writes Drewniak at the beginning, explaining further that "it is unclear what he is fighting for, the theatre or his own survival. He is not fair towards his woman and child and he is punished for it. We do not know whether he can be a good director. The vice president catches him on lacking in knowledge of children's literature (*The Neverending Story*) and his own daughter accuses him of not reading adult books. Throughout the eight episodes, he learns backstage games, blackmail, nepotism, and favoritism. He is afraid, but breaks the law with premeditation. He has a complex about having grown up on a housing estate. He rubs shoulders with criminals and fascists. He threatens people with dismissals, agrees to sacrifice the theatre's unstable bookkeeper in order to save it and his own social circle. He does not know the French language. He is jealous of Richter for having the love of the cast and for her premiere and subtly undermines her authority". The experienced reviewer ends by admitting that he is "unable to reconstruct the development of Czarniak's character after eight episodes since he becomes ever more cynical on the one hand, and ever more marked by the theatre on the other. Always caught in-between." Yet it is precisely the undefined quality of the director's character that allows the viewer to move beyond the horizon of hermeneutic interpretation. Here it must be added that the character created by Czarniak is not a type of antihero or an effect of deconstructing the traditional model of dramatic characters. Drewniak's extensive description serves to show just how dramatic the character of director Konieczny actually is despite the simultaneous impossibility of making a definite judgement about his character or his actions. The success of a role constructed in this manner does not depend only on cleverly eluding the viewers' interpretive minds, however, but also on the actor's ability to portray a character whose intentions cannot be unambiguously discerned, but who all the while remains a source of dramatic effects. Describing this new dramaturgy demands new kind of acting skills that constitute one defining element of the newest Polish theatre. Describing the space of "migrating experiences" that is established between the stage and the spectators is based on the concept of "affective experience" as formulated by Maciejewska, whose understanding of affect follows from Spinoza's proposed definition of it as "the stimulation of the body and the simultaneous ideal of this stimulation". This is the definition that Brian Massumi recalls in his book *The Autonomy of Affect*, where he seeks to define affect as autonomous in respect

to emotions. While such clear separation of affect from emotion brings a lot to theoretical reflection about human affect, in the case of analyzing the specificity of theatre in the context of experiential dramaturgy, the emotional aspect often plays a similar function to that of affect.

The show *Artists* provides a lot of interesting material for analysis in this regard. Its creators faced a very difficult task in having to present the realities of contemporary theatre as well as theatre productions. There are four large-scale plays staged during the course of one season. The first two do not cause significant issues since they present types of theatre that are easily signaled with standard elements of their respective style. The subsequent two productions, however, represent the authorial theatres of two renowned Polish directors, Krzysztof Garbaczewski and Krystian Lupa, as Polish theatre lovers can easily tell. The challenge of showing another accomplished artist's theatre work on film stems from the fact that every production that is seen as worse than the copied original remains no more than a poor imitation. Should the new version prove better, in turn, then by virtue of the function of art it would stand independently of the copied work and thus lose its ability to represent it. Strzépka and Demirski chose not to imitate the style of renowned artists, however. It is difficult to find elements characteristic of Garbaczewski's and Lupa's theatre work in the fragments of plays that are part of the series. For the show's creators', the affective function seems more important than the function of representation. They thus unceremoniously use in Lupa's fictive play a carousel from the stage design of their recent theatrical production. Beside the references and interpretations that this element evokes, the carousel also creates a beautiful performance space for the actors, which speaks more convincingly to the high artistic value of a play by Poland's most renowned theatre director today than an attempt to mimic his style would have done. The carousel thus functions on the basis of an "affective trace" that Maciejewska describes and defines as the act of looking for the original source that is inherently "always positive". Regardless of whether the source of the citation is identified, the key element of the spectators' experience remains the essentially affective moment of searching for it.

For the creators of *Artists*, the main means of confronting the viewer with the theatre of Garbaczewski and of Lupa, however, involves shifting the focus from performances to the directors themselves. Garbaczewski's portrait parodies his anecdotally-known indecisiveness in articulating his directorial feedback and ideas. It must be emphasized, however, that the amusing scenes aim to solicit sympathy toward the young director and that his character in the series is much more complex. To begin with, it is played by a woman, with the character also suffering from a terminal illness. The

character's terminal condition points to the director's advanced age, on account of which each of the great artist's new works gives rise to the thought that it may be his last. The way in which the character is presented does not urge toward reflection about the transitoriness of human life, but rather gives rise to strong feelings among the spectators stemming from their relationship to the hero on screen. Similarly as in the case of the viewing the beautiful carousel as an element of the set, it promotes affectivity rather than understanding. The character of this affect is decidedly closer to emotions. Of greatest significance in the reception of the mentioned directors' characters is the attitude taken toward them, which finds expression also in the work on the play and its presentation. A broadly understood affective aspect thus rules over the sphere of representation. This finds confirmation also in an interview with Demirski, where he reveals that the main inspiration for the show beside western examples was the Polish series *House (Dom)*, which follows the lives of the residents of an apartment building on ul. Złota (Gold St.) in Warsaw. The character of the theatre concierge Popieła in *Artists* is a direct reference to the older Polish series, since he is the heart of his theatre community much like the building manager in *Dom* was for its residents. For Strzępka and Demirski, his character becomes the centre of feeling "the warmth between people, which is rarely encountered. Warmth that arises despite political narrations". Although the series does tell a story with a strong critical potential regarding the politics of self-governance, the atmosphere created by the show generally counteracts the politicization of its stories. This is surprising given Strzępka's and Demirski's previous active engagement in social issues. On the other hand, however, the mentioned atmosphere of the series fits their new mode of thinking about the tasks facing contemporary theatre in Poland, which should bring to the people more positive experiences rather than awareness born from counternarrations, reworked memories, or political manifestos.

The opinions of Strzępka and Demirski as well as the broader discussion about the needs of Polish society that theatre should address today are separate from the fact that this kind of "emphatic" presentation of theatre's history became possible to a large extent because of the degree to which Polish theatre works have shifted from the position of representation, or of subversion that stems from it, toward a theatre that I call here the theatre of "experiential dramaturgy". This type of dramaturgy, developed in Polish theatre over the last two decades, not only shifts the specific reception dynamic of a television series toward affective experience, but also accounts for the phenomenon of the reality effect that both viewers and reviewers so frequently note. This effect does not arise from the precise recreation of the so-called realities of life, or from rhetorical devices,



as much as from the character of the experience that, in Maciejewska's framing, is never identified and never ends. An interpretation taken to its conclusion replaces the represented world that was its basis in our memory. Experience keeps in our memory those experiences that accompanied our reception of a work. And while often altered and unclear, for this reason they become a part of our life and of everything that seems familiar and for that reason real.

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