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CONFLICT AND PERFORMING ARTS – CLASS ACT PROJECT – UKRAINIAN THEATER AS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEFENSE



ABSTRACT: Class Act is a project implemented in Ukraine and addressed to young people. The idea behind it is to organize playwriting workshops for teenagers affected by the war in the eastern part of the country. This project makes use of the therapeutic potential of the theater, facing such problems as political prejudices, social stereotypes, and children's traumatic war experiences. Participants in the workshop classes are enabled to understand the nature of the negative stimuli shaping their emotions. Moreover, they learn, e.g., the causes of social phenomena and their harmful effects, thus introducing a humanistic factor to their observations.

KEYWORDS: anthropological defense, hybrid war, art therapy



INTRODUCTION

Acts of violence, both individual and collective, have been the object of philosophical, psychological, and anthropological considerations. During these discussions, both the causes and results of acts of violence have been identified.¹ Acts of collective violence, in a broader sense, are known as *war*; in a narrower sense, as *armed conflict*. War is understood here as a state of dispute or disagreement. This state possesses a gradual (i.e., one characterized by different degrees of intensity of operation, ranging from open to hidden) and a specialized

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¹ B. Malinowski, *An Anthropological Analysis of War*, "American Journal of Sociology" 1945, Vol. 46, No. 4, pp. 521–550.

(that is, one affecting various aspects of human life) character. Armed conflict, on the other hand, is always open, meaning that one can point out, without fear of contradiction, not only the parties to the dispute but also the aggressor. The fundamental difference between war and armed conflict is that, in the latter case, armed forces (regular or irregular) are involved.² However, this nomenclature, in the case of collective acts of violence in an anthropological context, requires clarification, because collective violence is not always equivalent to armed conflict, although the former may lead to the latter. Anthropology takes the position that a state of social conflict is a permanent state, whereas its intensity and the means employed are subject to change. To clarify this, the term *anthropological war* is used here. Most generally, an anthropological war may be: (1) internal – the dispute refers to various factors within the social structure; or (2) external – the dispute refers to various factors external to the social structure. In other words, an internal dispute concerns members of the same social group, whereas an external dispute is one between members of different social groups.³ We mentioned above that anthropology takes the position that states of social dispute are permanent states, differentiated by their intensity and means employed. Such a state is called *anthropological aggression*, by which we mean actions aimed at domination in the areas of economics, politics, education, academia, information, etc. This aim requires structural and strategic planning as well as the involvement of specialists in various fields of social sciences. In this sense, one can say that anthropological war makes use of anthropological aggression as a tool of domination. Any form of domination over specific social structures encounters resistance, called *anthropological defense*, which may be organized or spontaneous. Among the forms of organized anthropological defense, e.g., in Europe, are actions in the area of cultural activity. In this article, we would like to present actions within the scope of anthropological defense, using contemporary Ukrainian theater as an exemplary material and the hybrid war in Ukraine as an analytical context.

Theater in a country in which a war is being fought often accomplishes objectives which go far beyond artistic activity as traditionally understood. Since 2014, the beginning of the war with Russia, Ukrainian theatrical groups have had to face tasks that they had never dealt with

² Cf. R. Kelly, *Warless Societies and the Origin of War*, University of Michigan Press 2000.; K. Otterbein, *The Anthropology of War*, Waveland Press, Kindle Edition 2009.

³ More detailed distinctions are also possible; however, we will not discuss them in the present article (see R. Kelly, *op. cit.* and K. Otterbein, *op. cit.*).

before. One of them is the prevention or elimination of psychological trauma resulting from the violence of war, as well as the integration of members of society in the face of external threats. Any emotional shocks, e.g., acts of violence, inevitably leave traces in an individual human being's consciousness, affecting his continuing relationships not only with those close to him, but also with the social environment. The mechanism of repressing a negative stimulus, as a natural human defense mechanism, is not always sufficient. Unprocessed emotions can consequently lead to unconscious repression, concealment, and, from a long-term perspective, to displacement, e.g., of a similar object, which may cause the recurrence of traumatic memories. In such cases, specialized therapeutic help, extended over a long period, is necessary; however, in some cultures this is considered shameful as well as arduous, as it requires commitment and co-operation. In addition, one condition for effective therapy is its implementation within a stable social environment, which exists when the primary conditions of social security are met, being then known as cultural security. It guarantees a human being the protection of fundamental values, such as the right to life, the right to peace, tolerance, etc.

The next challenge they came up against was the problem of stereotypes that divide Ukrainian society. The source of these stereotypes is both historical conditioning and the powerful Russian information assault. Additionally, there are factors that exist apart from the war, for example, the social exclusion of poor regions of Ukraine. All of these elements can be considered from the point of view of cultural security or, more broadly – from the point of view of anthropological defense.⁴ In any case, such an approach is represented by the organizers of the Class Act project in Kyiv who use the therapeutic potential of the theater. Participants in the workshop classes are enabled to understand the nature of the negative stimuli shaping their emotions and confront and overcome mutual stereotypes. Moreover, they learn, e.g., the causes of social phenomena and their harmful effects, thus introducing a humanistic factor to their observations.

Humanism in this case emphasizes the dominant role of the individual human being, calling attention to the universals common to all people of cultural security in the axiological field. The universals of the security of culture include, e.g., fear concerning one's own life and the right

⁴ A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, R Boroch, *Ukrainian Theatrical Projects as an Example of Anthropological Defense in Terms of Anthropology as Contemporary Social Warfare*, "Security Dimensions. International & National Studies", 2017, No 24, p. 122-136.

to defend it. In addition, the humanistic factor draws attention to deeper problems concerning, e.g., the exclusion of social groups, which may have a cultural basis, e.g., the attitude of the young generation to older members of the community, or a political basis, e.g. the exclusion of specific social groups as a result of anthropological aggression.⁵

Whatever the reasons for social exclusion, it should be emphasized that every form of violence is, in reality, dehumanization, leading to deterioration in the quality of relations between social groups or diminishing the quality of social life, which becomes unstable and hostile to the individual, whose existence may be threatened. One of the ways to counteract this state of affairs is Class Act Project, which should be regarded as activities in the field of anthropological defense.⁶

CLASS ACT PROJECT — HISTORICAL BRIEF

In October 2015, at the initiative of the German director George Genoux, two Ukrainian playwrights, Natalia Vorozhbyt and Maksym Kurochkin as well as Oleksii Karachynskyi, a military psychologist, the Theater of Displaced People (hereinafter referred to as TDP) began its activity in Kyiv. The main idea behind this project was to deal with the problems of people who have escaped from the Russian-Ukrainian war in the eastern part of Ukraine, or that are still living there under the constant threat of violence. With time, increasing number of people joined the TDP — both the residents of Kyiv and internally displaced people (hereinafter referred to as IDPs) from Crimea and Donbas. They got involved at various levels of the activity: in the organization of the performance, its direction, and participation in it either as actors or as viewers.

From the beginning of its existence, the troupe organized several theatrical and paratheatrical projects with the IDPs, inhabitants of the war zone and soldiers fighting on the frontline. The projects were designed to integrate newcomers into a new environment, to carry

⁵Anthropological Aggression (AA) — aggressive actions aimed at gradual ideological control over an opponent's information space. Depending on its level, aa is characterised by different forms of action. Cf. R. Borocho, R. *Analytical Futurology as a Tool for Strategic Planning in Social War Games*, "Security Dimensions. International & National Studies" 2017, No 24, p. 62-75. doi: 10.24356/SD/24/3

⁶Cf. A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, R. Borocho, *op. cit.*

out therapeutic activities for war victims and to combat stereotypes that exist between Ukrainians from the eastern and western regions of the country⁷.

Several projects of the TDP were addressed to children and youth. One of them was Class Act — a Scottish educational program adapted to the current Ukrainian conditions. It was founded in 1990 in Edinburgh by Nicol McCartney. Since then, over 1,400 young people from over 70 schools in Edinburgh have taken part in it (Class Act). The idea behind Class Act is to organize playwriting workshops for high school students who write their own texts under experienced playwrights' guidance. The plays written by the students are then prepared for the stage by professional directors and performed by professional actors.

This format was chosen for use by Ukrainian playwrights and theatrical organizers for their work with Ukrainian teenagers. However, the specificity of the Ukrainian variant consisted in the fact that apart from the purely educational dimension, it also has the features of an anthropological defense tool and is facing such problems as political prejudices, social stereotypes, and participants' traumatic war experiences.

In Kyiv three times (in 2016, 2017, and 2018), the Class Act project occurred in every case drawing twenty teenagers — half from the eastern cities and a half from the western towns. In the Ukrainian conditions, this meant that the youth spoke two different languages (Russian and Ukrainian) and were raised in other socio-political realities. During those workshops, the TDP management was represented by Natalia Vorozhbyt. She was the head of the Class Act project. She learned about the project's concept and technology while she was taking part in the Russian edition of the project in Russia. She then worked out the Ukrainian methodology, which emphasizes problems connected with the war and internally displaced people.

Every year she invited various Ukrainian playwrights to form a team of specialists who worked with children. In general, they were representatives of the so-called New Ukrainian Drama — an artistic movement that focused on contemporary social and political problems. In 2016 and 2018, Nicol McCartney was also present at the workshops as the member of a playwright team.

⁷ One of the basic stereotypes is the division of the country into pro-Russia Russian-speaking eastern regions and nationalistic Ukrainian-speaking western regions. For more about the language issue. Cf. L Bilaniuk, *Ideologies of Language in Wartime*, [in:] *Revolution and War in Contemporary Ukraine*, ed. O. Bertelsen, Stuttgart 2016, p. 139-160

Ukrainian Class Act was a social project and is financed by cultural grants every year in a different way; for example, twice (2016 and 2017) it was supported by Volodymyr Borodyanskyi, the general producer of the STV television station. It was also financed by the American Embassy in Kyiv, as well as by the British Council. The organizers have also received governmental grants from the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and the Department of Culture in the city of Kyiv.⁸

METHODOLOGY

This is an introductory article that precedes in-depth and more detailed research. The authors collected material in the form of press releases, tv footage, video recordings, and dramas written by participants in the Class Act project. It was then put under the critical analysis of discourse. The participant observation was held only partially during the 2017 edition when Anna Korzeniowska-Bihun took part in the workshop and observed how the organizers were working with teenagers on their plays. This article aims to sketch the idea behind the Ukrainian version of the Class Act project and focus on the literary material created by young authors. We treat it as a key to understanding their emotions and their vision of the world, including the problems connected with the war in the eastern regions of Ukraine.

The authors of this article did not interview teenagers. The oral material was collected only during the conversations with adults (the organizers of the workshop and the children's teachers) and during the participants' observation when teenagers were in the presence of their guardians. The teenagers came to Kyiv under the care of their teachers, who – as the organizers of the workshop – had the children's parents' permission.

This article will focus on the first two editions of the Class Act project, which were held in 2016 and 2017.

1st Edition: Novovolynsk and Popasna

Teenagers from two small towns — Popasna in eastern Ukraine and Novovolynsk in the west – were selected for the first edition (only one participant was from the eastern Ukrainian city of Mykolajivka). Popasna and Novovolynsk are unique places. Popasna was located in the

⁸ K. Konstantynova, *Nataliya Vorozhbyt: "Chytajesh dytyachi istoriji – i volossya staye dubom"*, „ZN,UA” May 26 2017, www.zn.ua, (access: 14.02.2021)

ATO⁹ zone and borders the newly created Lugansk People's Republic, while Novovolynsk is a small mining center in the west of the country. From the windows of the bombed school in Popasna, the last Ukrainian checkpoints could be seen and the students played on a court damaged by bullets. Novovolynsk is far from military operations, however, its inhabitants had to take part in them as conscripted soldiers.¹⁰ Natalia Vorozhbyt describes it as follows:

Novovolynsk is a mining town near the border with Poland, the mines are being closed, and our teenagers' parents are going to earn a living in Poland — and yet other parents are going to war, the same war, in the East.¹¹

Expeditions of the organizers went to both towns. In Popasna they found the most damaged school in the town, and they worked in it with the older students for a week:

We played with them in theatrical games — Natalia Vorozhbyt says — we organized workshops. And then we asked [the children] to write plays. However, at the very beginning we told them not to write school essays that they are accustomed to writing. We needed interesting stories.¹²

One of the slogans which were to stimulate teenagers to think differently about literary texts was, for example, the topic: "The adventure that I will not tell my parents about". A similar scheme was used in Novovolynsk. Participants in the project were chosen based on the works written during the workshops. The selected authors were invited to Kyiv, where the event's main part occurred on June 17-21, 2016.

Teenagers wrote eleven plays during five days. Some of them were co-authored - that form was encouraged but not imposed on the project's participants. Professional drama supervisors were Natalia Vorozhbyt, Iryna Harec, Dima Levyckiy, and Kira Malinina (Byrzul 2016).¹³

⁹ Antiterrorist Operation Zone – in 2014-2017 this was the official name of the zone in Donbass where the Russian-Ukrainian war was going on.

¹⁰ N. Worozhbyt, *Emocja miesiqca: Korona dla nastolatka*, „Teatr” 2016 No. 7, p. 94.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² O. Vesnyanka, I. Solomko, *Pidlitky pyshut pro viynu ta socyalnu nespravedlyvist*, "Hromadske radio" July 1 2016, www.hromadske.radio, (access: 14.02.2021)

¹³ Yu. Byrzul, *Class act: Shid-Zahid*, "Vomne" June 29 2016, www.vomne.net, (access: 14.02.2021)

The work with teenagers proceeds as follows: the young authors chose their dramas' titles and sketch the initial problems. Then this was discussed with the professional playwrights who try to give the text the right dramatic shape by asking questions of the participants. The teachers paid attention to the compositional cohesion of the teenagers' dramas, but they did not impose their ideas on the texts' subject matter. After completing their dramas, the young authors took part in the first obligatory rehearsal, and the next rehearsals were optional. Generally, the organizers' main goal was to develop co-operation among children to combat the stereotypes among residents of the western and eastern parts of Ukraine.

The works of the teenagers from Popasna and Novovolynsk can be divided into two groups. The first group is the one in which the theme of the war is raised and the heroes are – or are supposed to be – involved in it as soldiers. The second group is the dramas dealing with other aspects of young people's lives; they deal with children's fears, unfulfilled hopes, or with the fight for children's rights to pursue their dreams. It should be noted that the children chose the subjects themselves. Thus, the subject of the war appeared spontaneously both among the participants from Popasna and those from Novovolynsk. When Natalia Vorozhbyt asked the western Ukrainian teenagers why they were interested in that problem, she heard the answer: "Because our fathers are fighting there!".¹⁴

The texts present an image of teenage playwrights as very observant witnesses of life experiences. The young authors drew attention to the general situation in Ukraine: war, poverty, and social injustice.¹⁵ They critically assess the Ukrainian state's condition and the fact that the Ukrainian government neglects its basic duties towards its fighting soldiers. In the play *Blokpost (Checkpoint)* — authored by Sasha and Oleh (two boys who signed their text-only with their first names) — a desperate soldier decides to write on Facebook:

I want to tell you how our authorities "help". We have no clothes, no shoes, no light, no water. We buy everything ourselves: food, clothes, shoes. We are living in clay trenches. The weapons are very old and often fail during the fight. I believe that our authorities will wake up, there will be peace in our country and everything will be as before.¹⁶

¹⁴ O. Vesnyanka, I. Solomko, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ Sasha i Oleh, *Blokpost*, Manuscript written during the 1st edition of the Class Act project in 2016.

In the play *Ni shagu nazad (No Step Backwards)* by Maryna Dunay and Bohdana Ostrovska, a disabled veteran who will not return to the frontline gives his personal equipment to another soldier who cannot afford to buy, for example, a bulletproof vest.

Poverty, which teenagers paid attention to in their work, did not affect only soldiers. Because of poverty, the mother forces her daughter to marry a man she does not love (*Cherez bil do zirok [Through Pain with the Stars]* by Vlad Volshchenko, Inna Yakobchuk and Bohdan Mazurek). Lack of money pushes a vegetarian to take part in a bet which violates his ethical standards (*Lishniaya zhertva [Unnecessary Sacrifice]* by Yaroslav Cherkashenko). The cause-and-effect relationship is not unequivocal here, because it is challenging to determine arbitrarily whether the war is the result of poverty or whether the poverty is the result of the war.

In the play *Na puantakh (On Pointe Shoes)* by Nastiya Kryhlova and Zhenia Stryzhkova, the poverty is also an experience of the parents' generation. The transformation, which the mother undergoes in the final scene of the play, is the result of her empathy created by the poverty which had destroyed her own dreams about her artistic career.

The war also involves the problem of refugees, which is presented in the plays by young playwrights too. In the text *Kamen (A Stone)*, Vitaliy Shmytko draws attention to the inability of newcomers to assimilate with the inhabitants, who "consider them beasts".¹⁷ The main character desperately searches for acceptance by his peers who cynically treat his "fairytales about Donbas" and stories about "how poor and unhappy we are".¹⁸ Trying to show off to them, he hurts a random person with a stone.

In the previously mentioned play *on the Pointe Shoes*, the mother does not want to leave the shelled city because she is afraid of rejection by people in their new home and the lack of prospects in the new place: "Do you think they are waiting for us with open arms?" — she says to her daughter — "Who needs us? We will not have a place to live. I will not have a job".¹⁹

Another important motif, appearing several times in the dramas of young authors, is the story of a single woman/mother whose husband died or serves on the front. In the play

¹⁷ V. Shmytko, *Kamen*. Manuscript written during the 1st edition of the Class Act project in 2016.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ N. Krylowa, Z. Stryzhkova, *Na puantakh*, Manuscript written during the 1st edition of the Class Act project in 2016.

Checkpoint, a wife visits her husband, a soldier in the ATO zone. In *On the Pointe Shoes*, a single mother worries about her daughter. Moreover, in the drama *A Stone*, a son is worried about his mother, who will be utterly alone if he goes to prison, and his father does not come back from the front. In the play *No Step Backward*, a desperate mother says to her son: "Do you want to leave me alone? (...) I do not want to lose you. The fact that I am a widow is bad enough".²⁰ In another context, the theme of the lonely, overworked mother also appears in the play *Unnecessary Sacrifice*.

If one considers the depth of the children's reflection, it is evident that the authors do not remain indifferent to various aspects of the reality of war, social disorganization, and the disintegration of the teenagers' world. The simple but precise language used to describe the misery of wartime injects one more message into the narrative — we want everything to be "just like before". This dominates in the plays mentioned above. The young authors believe that the war took away their previous lives and their families. They lost a stable world, a sense of security, and their home "where even the walls keep you warm".²¹

However, there are also authors who distance themselves from this "just like before", showing how trivial and irrelevant the daily activities of their heroes were if one confronts them with the new reality in which nothing is the same anymore.

In the play *Narnia*, a hero, who is immersed in the deceptive world of a book, ignores his girlfriend and does not notice her "manicure, pedicure" and the efforts she puts into her appearance. The order of his world has been shaken, although there is not a single word in the drama about the war and the protagonist does not reveal the sources of his alienation. This is not an isolated case in the collection of works from the Class Act project. If we look at the values which are presented in them and which are valid in the "old" world from the perspective of the war, we see that they have been diminished. The boy, who stays in a different aesthetic dimension, is not impressed by the beauty of the girl and does not care about the possible social consequences of his attitude.

Similarly, in the play *On the Pointe Shoes*, the heroine devoted entirely to the art of dance does not care about success with the opposite sex. In the drama *Moya startova cina (My Starting Price)* by Vova and Alina, the traditional understanding of a professional career is the

²⁰ M. Dunay, B. Ostrovska, *Ni shagu nazadu*, Manuscript written during the 1st edition of the Class Act project in. 2016.

²¹ N. Krylova, Z. Stryzhkova, *op. cit.*

subject of deconstruction – the hero does not want to be a surgeon. However, it is a prestigious profession in the social sense. He needs a confirmation of his value as a painter. The contrast between what is happiness today and what was happiness yesterday is evident. Reflections of a material and social nature are replaced by thoughts of a spiritual and transcendental character. Another loss is inextricably linked to such reevaluation — rejection by friends or rejection of friends. Involvement in activity, which is incomprehensible to others, severs the heroes' ties with their peers. Protagonists lose interest in their friends or become victims of social ostracism. In the play *On the Pointe Shoes*, the hierarchy of values, which the protagonist presents by putting dances first before boys, is undermined and ridiculed by her best friend.

And the last subject — war as a reality one can get used to. It is clearly articulated in the drama *On the Pointe Shoes*:

— Nikol (the daughter): They are still shooting at this shithole!

— Valentina (the mother): (...) Let them shoot. Thousands of people have lived, live, and will live here.²²

Adaptation to the war occurs in the play *Checkpoint*. A soldier buys a cake trying to restore at least some "normality" to the world he came across.

Common and immutable themes of the teenagers' work are conflicts with adults and their traumatic dominance of their children. This topic connects all the participants in all the editions of *Class Act*. External violence, e.g., war violence, often becomes a metaphorical picture of domestic violence. An extreme example is the play *My Starting Price*, where the excesses of the father's ambitions and his cynical manipulation lead to the tragedy — the hero's suicide. In the play *Po tu storonu realnosti (On the Other Side of the Reality)* by Yana Solonenko, the parents' aggression takes on the physical form of the evil ghost, who also brings the heroine to her death.

2nd Edition: Klesiv and Shchastia

In 2017, the organizers focused their attention on two places: the eastern Ukrainian town of Shchastia and the western Ukrainian town of Klesiv (in the Rovno region). The first town is located near the frontline and was the target of intense shelling during the war operations,

²² N. Krylova, Z. Stryzhkova, *op. cit.*

while the second is a center of illegal amber extraction in Ukraine. Natalia Vorozhbyt characterizes these places as follows:

In the town of Shchastia, which is a few kilometers from the borderline, one can see many soldiers — people wearing camouflage. You come to Klesiv and you also see that almost all men are wearing camouflage, with covered faces, riding quads, and many of them are armed. (...) There is a completely different war in the Rovno region, and there is a completely different Ukraine there.²³

Contrary to the previous towns (Popasna and Novovolynsk), where the organizers discovered the everyday experiences of the residents because of their participation in one war, even if it does not occur on their territory, Shchastia and Klesiv present two completely different situations, and it is difficult to reduce them to a common denominator, because apart from the purely external appearance of militarized men, nothing connects them.

It is worth noting how different the description of the two western Ukrainian cities is, although it may seem that they are culturally close. In Novovolynsk there is "the same war" as in eastern Ukraine, in Klesiv there is "a completely different war and completely different Ukraine". This diagnosis will be confirmed in the message that will be revealed in the teenagers' dramas.

While the dominant theme of the plays written during the first edition of *Class Act* was the war, in the summer 2017 project, not a single work was devoted to it, but in two dramas written at this time the young authors raised the issue of illegal amber extraction and the Ukrainian "gold rush" triggered by this. The first of them *Kak sdielat pravilno? (How Can We Do It Right?)* by Natalya Isniuk and Denys Shadskyi is entirely devoted to this subject. In the second, *Nevezuchi na druziv (No Luck with Friends)* by Oksana Tarasiuk, there is a small plot referring to it. These are the only works written during the second edition of the project, which critically refer to such clearly defined Ukrainian situations, presenting heroes who struggle with everyday life difficulties.

Similar to Natalia Vorozhbyt, the authors of the play *How Can We Do It Right?* compare the illegal practices of amber extraction with the war in eastern Ukraine, and, like their teacher, they pay close attention to the presence of men in military uniforms. The danger connected

²³ K. Konstantynova, *op. cit.*

with this occupation is comparable with the threat of warfare. The large holes described in the play, which remain after the amber extraction, inadvertently resemble shell craters. The hero, a young man from eastern Ukraine, who flees from the war to the western Ukrainian town of Klesiv, at the end of the play, returns to his city, escaping from the dangerous amber mining people. "I do not want to be here anymore, I want to go to Shchastia to my parents",²⁴ — he says to his cousin.

Apart from very precise reflections on the realities of life in Klesiv (together with details connected with the technology of amber extraction), attention is also drawn to the fact that the play presents the Ukrainian geopolitical reality on a linguistic level: characters from the east speak Russian and those from the west speak Ukrainian. However, it is not a communication problem for the heroes. This is one of the elements that organizers focus on, treating language issues as secondary in relation to other problems and not emphasizing them in work with young people²⁵.

The rest of the dramas, although also embedded in contemporary Ukraine, do not refer literally to the Ukrainian socio-political context. Stories told in them have a universal character, that is, they do not have a specific Ukrainian flavor connected with contemporary Ukraine, and people with various cultural backgrounds can identify with the problems raised in the plays. These issues are more a reflection of the internal concerns of the young authors in relation to their families and school matters than the criticism of Ukrainian politics, which was so clearly emphasized in the previous edition of the Class Act project.

The topic the young people paid the most attention to was family relationships. During the workshop, five plays were written in which various connections between children and their parents and/or among children themselves were analyzed. The works shed light on the problem of the use of psychological oppression in the family or the utilitarian treatment of its members, which works in both ways, i.e., the victims of this approach are both children and adults. An important phenomenon is also the way the young authors see the family. In their works, each of the families is deficient in certain areas. Children in different circumstances

²⁴ N. Isnyuk, D. Shadskyi, *Kak sdelat pravilno?* Manuscript written during the 2nd edition of the Class Act project in 2017.

²⁵ A. Korzeniowska-Bihun was an observer during the second edition of the Class Act project. The organizers did not touch on the language issues, leaving everyone (both participants and lecturers) with the right to choose a language. During the workshop, the Ukrainian language dominated among organizers, while most of the plays were written in Russian.

(sometimes unmentioned) lose their parents and are brought up by grandmothers or other relatives. This is what happens in the play *Brat (Brother)* by Kateryna Zhylyko, Svitlana Pavluchenko, and Andriy Hundertailo, where the sister, after the death of her parents, sacrifices her own life to obtain funds to support her little brother. The motif of the death of the closest relative also appears in the aforementioned play *No Luck with Friends*. Its protagonist – a girl who mourns her dead sister, is living in the home of her relatives and is used by them to do hard work. In the drama *Tancor (A Dancer)* by Nastiya Trishchuk and Dannil Volkov, the young man, brought up by his grandmother, decides to repay her for her efforts and learns the steps of the waltz to dance with her on her birthday. In the already mentioned work, *How Can We Do It Right?*, properly functioning families are broken up by the war.

In the play, *Pryzrachnyye sokrovishcha (Imaginary Treasures)*, Nadia Sherstiuk and Maksym Dovhan discuss the opportunism of the youth and the special importance of a family's past. The protagonists are a granddaughter and a grandson who come to the house of their dead grandmother to retrieve her valuables. They only find worthless objects, but in an unexpected way the objects have for them a sentimental meaning. Thanks to this, the protagonists change their attitudes towards their family and its past. Therefore, the problem of a dysfunctional family for children seems to be much more important than issues of language or regional differences that so often appear in adults' official discourse. It connects young residents of eastern and western Ukraine and clearly resonates in both editions of the Class Act project.

The works of the participants of the 2016 and 2017 editions of the Class Act are connected to another important subject – the image of the world that has ceased to be a safe place. This can be seen not only in the descriptions of the heroes' family homes, but also in the way the young authors present their schools and relationships among their peers. In the second edition, three works were devoted to this problem, whereof the two plays are a meticulous analysis of school bullying. In the drama *Spletnica (A Gossiping Girl)* by Iryna Kolodko and Vlad Cuman, the heroes must deal with a friend who spreads rumors about them, and in the play *Istoriya tolstushky (A Story of a Fat Girl)* by Viktoria Berehovych, Anna Horelova and Artem Kyrylovych, an obese girl becomes an object of mockery by her school friends. However, it should be noted that in both cases there is a happy ending, following the pattern of a triumphant victim and defeated oppressors. The drama *Holos (Voice)* by Tetiana Lishchuk also has a positive message – a mute girl meets an older friend, thanks to whom she gets rid of her disability.

Nonrealistic subjects which appeared in the teenagers' works are also noteworthy, because they show how incomprehensible and unfriendly the outside world can be for children. For example, in the play *Zhyva hora (A Living Mountain)* by Nazar Vorbyov and Mykhaylo Abdulin, a threat appears in the form of a mind-control machine. In the work *Chuzhe tilo (A Foreign Body)* by Dasha Makaruk and Vlad Rozhkov, the protagonist impersonates other people in an unclear way.

The artistic and social aspects of the project

According to the playwright Natalia Vorozhbyt, the organizer of the project, it had two important aspects. The first was the artistic dimensions. Thanks to them, teenagers, who never had any contact with the theater, or had limited contact with third-rate theatrical teams, first encountered modern thinking about theater, which gave them a chance to have a proper artistic education, and initiated the emergence of a new, conscious viewer with sophisticated artistic tastes.

The second was the social dimension. The Class Act project functioned as a kind of teatrotherapy for children affected by the war. Still, also it built a bridge between two groups of teenagers from two different regions of Ukraine. As already mentioned, these differences – both in the social and linguistic aspects – are very often given as the cause of any unrest in Ukraine, or even used for political purposes to divide the country. According to Vorozhbyt:

The children have an opportunity to express themselves in this project, talk about their problems, and learn a new profession. When we connect children from different opposite regions, a new tiny country emerges before our eyes — a peaceful country in which there are no misunderstandings. The children speak different languages, but despite this, during the whole project, there was never any problem associated with it. The children communicate without intermediaries. There should be hundreds of such projects in Ukraine, because with them we could build our future.²⁶

²⁶ Natalia Vorozhbyt's statement during a press conference on June 23, 2017 in Kyiv.

In another interview, given just before the start of the Kyiv staging of the second edition of *Class Act*, Natalya Vorozhbyt emphasizes:

During the common creative process, the teenagers become friends, and one of the aims of the project is to connect children who have a different set of myths about themselves. After a week of talks, the myths disappear. Last year, the children said they would not write texts with those people and they would not be friends. However, when they were going home, they cried, it was hard to separate them.²⁷

This way of thinking about theater can be seen in every TDP project, especially in those addressed to children and teenagers. This group of IPDs is the most important for the organizers for two reasons: 1) it is most vulnerable in the face of war and adult conflicts; 2) it has a potential that cannot be missed. The war in eastern Ukraine created a situation when people burdened with mutual stereotypes can meet directly *en masse* and learn about each other without intermediaries. For the theater, it is essential to use this opportunity to build a civil society that begins with children and teenagers' education.

CONCLUSION

Class Act was an important project in the field of the anthropological defense of Ukrainian society, aiming to protect it against far-reaching internal divisions and the dehumanization of social space. The *Class Act* project drew attention to the needs of the individual and brought social groups closer together, enabling them to become acquainted with one another and become accustomed to the uncertainties in the lives of their members. Such activities undoubtedly contribute to improvements in the quality of human capital, drawing attention to human beings' needs, making them the focus.

Class Act Project showed, in a tangible way, that the dehumanized person on the opposite side of a conflict is actually the product of 'aggressive factors', which are difficult to point out directly; this enables the realization that the actual victim of the conflict is a human being, who can be found on both sides of the barricade, a human being who must oppose the propa-

²⁷ K. Konstantynova, *op. cit.*

information war or the ethos developed for the needs of the moment, e.g. glorification of the soldier dying for his homeland. Theater once again discloses the naked truth that nothing is glorified in death; there is only a vast amount of harm to humanity, stories left unfinished, dreams unfulfilled. Traumatic experiences require emotional purification: catharsis. In building tension by introducing the factor of uncertainty regarding another person's reaction, the co-creators of the spectacle sensitize one another to fundamental humanistic problems. In the theater, the feeling of danger (Greek *Photos*) seems natural, yet not accurate, because it gives way to everyday experience (Greek *Oleos*), which is the essence of catharsis.

Apart from the axiological and aesthetic values of the Class Act project, in the aspect of cultural security, it has proved an extremely effective and powerful tool to counteract the growth of social stratification and the escalation of potential conflicts. In this sense, the Class Act project serves as a positive counterbalance to the information and propaganda war.

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