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EXPLORING UNREALISTIC DRAMA: THE EKMATEDOS PERSPECTIVE

The Experimental Workshop for Theater Studies, known as "EKMATEDOS," was established under the Faculty of Performing Arts at the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture. This theater school holds a legal patent. On June 30, 2023, the Academic Council of the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture officially approved and supported the decision to grant and license this status. As a result, the "EKMATEDOS" Theater Studio can now not only utilize the experience gained throughout its existence (with the initial steps towards establishing an experimental workshop for theatrical research taken during the department's early days) within the scope of scientific seminars, colloquia, and practical performances, but also showcase its activities in national and international professional areas of scientific and practical work. It can also participate fully in specialized competitions and festivals.

The workshop employs a unique method for training and nurturing future young theater artists. EKMATEDOS serves as a research laboratory for the scientific and practical exploration and enhancement of actor's techniques in creating a stage persona during the educational journey of students who aspire to become actors in drama theater and cinema. This is achieved through emotional and energetic improvisations in the actor's parallel world within the performance context. Addressing the meaning of life, unraveling the philosophical significance of pressing issues through artistic and imaginative solutions, and influencing the psycho-emotional state of the audience are the challenges that future specialists tackle at EKMATEDOS. The primary focus is on discovering the actor as a creative individual with unconventional thinking, who is conscious of their role in the broader human experience. This is accomplished through a well-established and rigorously tested scientific and practical approach.

The initial steps towards establishing the experimental theater research workshop (ECMATEDOS) were taken during the production of L. Ukrainka's play "Obsessed" in the early years of the Department of Actor's Skills. The staging of O. Oles's "Autumn Love" in 2008 marked a continuation of this laboratory's creative exploration, serving as a significant test of the theory and practice of studying the Parallel World of Existence (PASWE). Subsequently, through theoretical and practical classes and individual training sessions, student actors gradually learn to immerse themselves in the environment of the parallel world of future performances, gradually shedding layers of consciousness filled with real-life experiences. It's important to note that catharsis is achieved through both physical and psychophysical training, with the ultimate goal of preparing individuals, both physically and spiritually, for entering the environment of the parallel world of existence (PASWE) in a play or film.

The essence of ECMATEDOS's research methodology has been extensively documented in numerous studies and articles in scientific journals. It has also been a topic of discussion at various roundtables and conferences, both in Kharkiv and in other cities across Ukraine. A more comprehensive and specific understanding of the new methodology and work system within ECMATEDOS is further substantiated through the scientific and practical monograph "The Sacrament of Creating an Actor and

Director" (2020) by Igor Boris, the Dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts at the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, creative director of ECMATEDOS, and Honored Artist of Ukraine.

Today, ECMATEDOS is dedicated to rigorous scientific, theoretical, and practical research. The work undertaken within the experimental theater research workshop (ECMATEDOS) involves an in-depth examination of both established, well-known theater schools and practices (both domestic and international) as well as the exploration of innovative techniques and systems in actor's craft.

Throughout its rich history, EKMATEDOS has not confined itself to a single direction or methodology. The artistic research conducted by this theater studio is polyphonic, encompassing elements from various European and worldwide schools and movements, as well as domestic developments.

National schools, in this context, are regarded as a complex spectrum of directions in the evolution of theater art. Elements from pre-Christian pagan culture, blended with an authentic archaic approach imbued with religious undertones (before the eleventh century), have found their place within this framework. While it was somewhat experimental and not yet fully professional, it possessed characteristics that offer insights into the formation of the worldview of those involved in creating spectacles, rituals, and phenomena. This period of exploration eventually evolved into a structured system of professional theater and dramatic development in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries. Key inspirations from this period include figures such as I. Kotliarevskyi and H. Kvitka-Osnovianenko. Additionally, an essential component is the establishment of professional theater in 1882 under the leadership of M. Kropyvnytskyi, marking the point where Ukrainian theater emerged as an independent entity separate from Polish and Russian theater, thus forming the basis for what is known as the national theater of luminaries. Subsequently, building upon the distinctive characteristics and methodologies established by theater pioneers, the national theater school absorbed the innovations of Les Kurbas, as well as the creative experimental theater Berezhil and its various branches across Ukraine, after 35 years of historical development.

Unfortunately, the entire structure of Les Kurbas's and Berezhil's experimentation and reformism came to a halt in 1935, giving way to the dominance of the realistic-psychological approach within Ukrainian theater. This suppression of independent expressions within the Ukrainian theater school continued until the 1950s. Following the war, a cultural resurgence occurred during the Khrushchev Thaw, leading to interesting developments in literature, poetry, and drama. Notable figures during this period include I. Drach, D. Pavlychko, M. Stelmakh, O. Honchar, P. Zahrebelny, V. Yavorivsky, O. Kolomiets, M. Zarudny, I. Kocherha, and others who have contributed to the literary foundation. In cinema, the phenomenon of O. Dovzhenko and his students, directors like Y. Iliencko and L. Osyka, along with younger generations in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as artists creating film imagery after Ukraine's independence, have made significant contributions.

This period of artistic revival allowed a return to Kurbas's work, albeit without delving deeply into his experimental work at Berezhil (theater of transformation, theater of accentuated influence, and the concept of the "clever harlequin," with actors playing roles ranging from philosophers to acrobats). These explorations remained limited to occasional experiments in various theater groups in cities like Lviv, Kharkiv, Kyiv, and others. Unfortunately, this did not become a widespread phenomenon or a prevailing trend in the revival of the national school following Ukraine's independence, even in contemporary pre-war and post-war contexts. However, the heroic-romantic trend that emerged after World War II, particularly during the wartime, served as a response that combined poetry and theater while preserving national culture, theater, and film traditions, incorporating elements from luminaries such as M. Kropyvnytskyi, M. Sadovskyi, P. Saksahanskii, M. Zankovetska, I. Karpenko-Kary, M. Starytskyi, and others. This heroic-romantic trend paved the way for the distinctive path undertaken by EKMATEDOS.

Within the Experimental Workshop of Theater Research, we have strived to maintain polyphony by integrating various international, European, and domestic trends, schools, and explorations. In the

current phase of EKMATEDOS Studio Theater's activities, we have begun to delve deeply into the intricate aspects of technique and technology specific to actors' work in the realm of unrealistic theater and the parallel world of existence. This has been a focus of our experimental workshop for over 15-20 years and is extensively covered in the author's monograph titled "The Sacrament of Creating an Actor and Director."

In our quest, we have drawn from our practical experience working with actors through the teachings of Gordon Craig, Jerzy Grotowski, Les Kurbas, Bertolt Brecht's system, the study of Kabuki and Noh theaters, the fundamentals of Indian theater, the nuances of Arab and African theater, as well as the achievements in Scandinavian countries, both in theater and film. In 2022-2023, we continue to incorporate these valuable insights into our educational activities within the Department of Actor's Skills at the Faculty of Performing Arts of the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, all validated through the legally sanctioned ECMATEDOS workshops.

To fulfill this purpose, we embarked on a study that aligns with our objectives. We selected Jean-Paul Sartre's work "Behind Closed Doors" for its suitability. We found this particular drama intriguing as it provides an opportunity to explore the lives, thoughts, behaviors, and emotional transformations of its characters. Notably, it doesn't merely portray the characters' reality; rather, it suggests that these characters, as the playwright indicates in the text, inhabit another realm. We can refer to this realm as "hell." Here, they are not human beings but rather their souls, embodied in a specific structure through the actors. This phenomenon is exceptionally compelling. People become lifeless characters in this drama, while actors breathe life into them, navigating the theater of the absurd, interpreting their thoughts according to the principles of this theater, and conveying the essence of their behaviors and emotional complexities. We aimed to create a framework for thinking, a logical approach to behavior, and the portrayal of emotions in the context of unrealistic drama and the theater of the absurd.

We executed this work in video format, considering the circumstances of the aggressor's military invasion in Ukraine. The choice of video presentation proved to be advantageous, as it allowed us to delve into the philosophical concept of the "subconscious stream." This concept explores how these souls exist and behave, brought to life through the actors, revealing their actions within this "hellish" space. There's no redemption, confession, or significant punishment involved; instead, it serves as a test of each individual's masochism, as they attempt to identify the negativity in others while justifying their own. The flow of the subconscious is explored through the actors' portrayal of the characters' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, as if these souls didn't truly belong to the realm of hell. We titled our work "The Others." The characters included the Corridor (portrayed by Yulia Shevchenko, a master's student at the Faculty of Performing Arts at the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture), Ines and Estelle (played by third-year students at the Faculty of Performing Arts at the Kharkiv State Academy of Culture, Sonya Lystopadova and Oleksandra Lyubchenko). The online format allowed us to materialize the subconscious flow, hidden emotions, thoughts, and emotional responses of Sartre's characters, thus presenting not the realistic plot of their past lives, but the negative emotions and behaviors they harbored in reality. This was made possible through the medium of video.

This work resonated with both audiences and professional critics. In the summer of 2023, the work secured first place at the CHARMING VIENNA international festival-competition in Vienna, Austria. In the fall of 2023, it received the Grand Prix at the Stars of Paris international festival-competition in France. However, the journey continues at EKMATEDOS Studio Theater, with new creative achievements on the horizon. The studio theater's members encompass not only students but also professional actors, directors, and specialized discipline instructors.