



JANUS

Autobiographical Theatre

Directed by Domingo Ferrandis (SOLIS SRLS)



Co-funded by
the European Union



Project Number: 2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000154837



JANUS

by Domingo Ferrandis (SOLIS SRLS)

Ephemeral on stage, yet enduring in consciousness.



Let's engage in some mental hygiene. Let's make theatre



Is it **uncertainty, solitude, mistreatment, economy, existential void, social media, rejection, failure, disillusionment, drug consumption, addictive behaviours, consumerist persuasion**? Are they all and none in particular? Toxins that contaminate your neuronal broth with impurities of microtraumas and persistent desires. Heavy residues deposited in the unconscious.

We are machines of desires, constrained by a culture, by systems. You have to integrate, be accepted, progress, succeed. And the self drifts away from its harmony. Identity fragments. Autobiographical theatre, as a Kintsugi art, leaves the broken parts visible as the beauty of resilience.

Your **fragilities, your weaknesses, your needs** are threatened, limited, contaminated by the needs of others, by what they project onto you, by the demands they impose on you. It pushes you towards self-exploitation and self-consumption, and a recurring self-unhappiness settles within you.

Self-narrative—what happens to you, along with what you imagine and project into the future—are particles of neuro-narratives that form the constellations of your mental health. Who you are, how you relate, and how you behave. Imaginative personal films, with catastrophic scenes and defeatist or alarmist endings.

Young people, in co-created autobiographical stage productions inspired by their stories, expose what, from fiction, allows us to recognise what almost illogically unbalances your mind. And as a tribe, with live art, let's generate a **limbic synchronisation**, you, me, everyone, to metabolise and speak without taboos, without prejudices or stereotypes about the sufferings of consciousness.

What makes us feel bad? What pushes us to shut ourselves in a room, in our imagination? What makes us foolish, sad, irritable, and violent? Why do we end up contemplating suicide? Where do these destabilisers come from that destroy our psychic harmony?



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A Call to the Stage Vocation

Beyond Fame

This message is addressed to performing arts educators, students, and actors. One of the greatest challenges in this profession is access to work. Only about 10% manage to practice regularly; another fraction, more sporadically. Most are forced to combine their vocation with other jobs. The most common one tends to be the hospitality industry, due to its flexible hours that allow attendance at castings, rehearsals, or shoots.

From drama schools, we must cultivate a different kind of awareness: theatre and the performing arts are not merely a springboard to success or fame. They are a social good. An ancestral necessity. When an actor studies and trains, they acquire fundamental skills for life in community. They learn to reflect on themselves, to inhabit their body, and to manage their emotions. They immerse themselves in archetypes, character traits, and temperaments. They take personalities apart

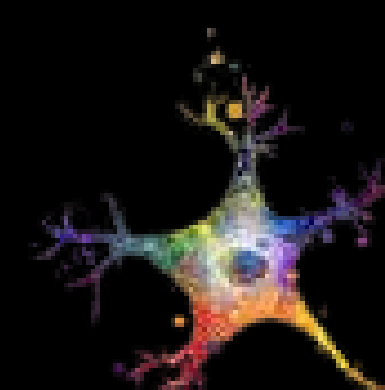
That is why I invite schools, students, and performers to refrain from squandering their talent in professions alien to their craft—during the silences between productions, rehearsals, or shoots—and instead pour their knowledge back into society. To work with what they have learned. To give back what they have received. There lies the potential of dramatherapy. There lie the expressive and performing arts applied to clinical, social, educational, or community contexts. There is the Theatre of the Oppressed, playback theatre, documentary theatre, community theatre, and autobiographical theatre. These are paths to transform, to accompany, and to heal.

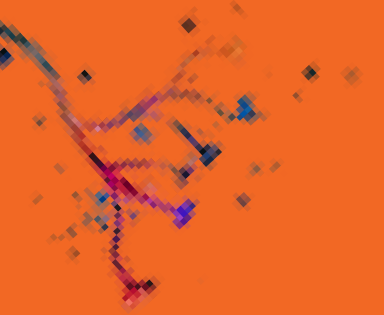
Everything has a place: dance, circus, physical theatre. Language is secondary. What matters is the performative act as a channel, as collective action. Languages intertwine, combine, to convey something that goes beyond the discipline: the message.



That's why I share what I've lived. To invite others—other artists, actresses, directors, educators—to restore hope and a sense of wonder to the people, and to return the fire to the people. So that theatre may once again touch the earth and merge with everyday life.

Not everyone will attain fame. Not everyone will live off cinema or from a major stage production. I wish they could. And may those who do succeed also find a way to reconcile both dimensions. But in the meantime, may the knowledge not go to waste. May the craft not be shelved. May what has been learned also serve the common good.





About the Project

Janus aims to respond to the growing need for support for vulnerable young people (VYP) facing mental health challenges. The project promotes Autobiographical Theatre (AT)—a therapeutic methodology developed by Domingo Ferrandis (SOLIS SRLS)—specifically targeting young people with mental health difficulties, helping them build resilience and socialization skills in response to the crises they experience.

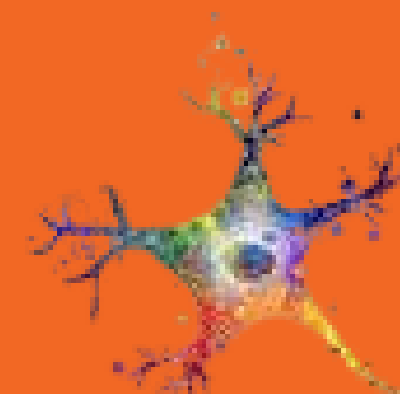


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Erasmus Plus Project Youth
vulnerabilities in a Europe without
borders Acronym: JANUS



Project Objectives

JANUS wants to promote Autobiographical Theatre (AT) as a therapeutical methodology and specifically address young people with mental health to help them in developing resilience and socialization skills in reaction to the crisis that they face



The activities envisaged by Janus are:

Autobiographical Theatre: Training of trainers
Adaptation of AT methodology in Romania and Cyprus
Co-creation of JANUS methodology
Implementation of Janus methodology in Romania and Cyprus
Local Testing workshops in Italy, Romania and Cyprus

- 2 Autobiographical theatre performances in Romania
- 1 Autobiographical theatre performance in Cyprus Digital platform
- 1 e-booklet Set of videos
- 1 Janus Festival of Autobiographical theatre in Romania





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JANUS has been progressively developed since late 2023. Cofunded by the Erasmus+ program (Youth sector), JANUS offers an innovative response to the mental health challenges faced by young people across Europe, through a specific methodology created by Spanish director Domingo Ferrandis: Autobiographical Theatre (AT), combined with dramatherapy tools, in what he calls the “Bidirectional Methodology.”

The process began with an international creative residency in Limassol, Cyprus, in February 2024, organized by partner ShipCon Ltd., where the technical and artistic teams from the entire consortium gathered:

1. **Universitatea de Arte din Târgu Mureș** (coordinator, Romania),
2. **Fundatia Professional** (Romania),
3. **ShipCon Limassol Ltd.** (Cyprus),
4. **and SOLIS SRLS** (Italy), responsible for methodological design.

During this residency, the teams were trained through an intensive program exploring expressive arts used in dramatherapy such as improvisation, writing, movement, dance, dramatization, and co-creation. The training concluded with a collective stage showcase. The goal was that from this shared experience, three autobiographical stage pieces would emerge, later developed locally: two in Târgu Mureș (Romania) and one in Limassol (Cyprus).

After the residency, the partners returned to their respective countries to apply the methodology. Each organization conducted a casting selection following inclusion and gender equity criteria:

1. **At Universitatea de Arte** din Târgu Mureș, acting and directing students participated, guided by professors Lia Contiu, Cristina Maria Iusan, and Traian Penciu.
2. **Fundatia Professional** worked with a group of young people in vulnerable situations, coordinated by Erika Domokos and Viorel Cotoara.
3. In Cyprus, **ShipCon** selected a group of five young women with training in contemporary dance and a strong connection to body language, guided by Patricia Jimeno Fernández.

Each group began working locally, following the structure of the first six phases of Autobiographical Theatre: trust building, story collection, transcription, research, narrative creation, and aesthetic work. The stories created were rooted in the real experiences of the participants, revolving around the project's thematic axis: mental health and psychological well-being of youth.

In October and November 2024, a second series of in-person artistic residencies took place. Domingo Ferrandis and Ana María Solís (SOLIS SRLS) visited Târgu Mureș and Limassol to accompany and facilitate the narrative and aesthetic phases of Autobiographical Theatre through workshops on improvisation, stage research, and collective composition. By then, the pieces were already advanced and their final structures were defined.

“JANUS has enabled young people from diverse contexts, genders, cultures, and backgrounds to become authors and protagonists of their own stories, challenging stigmas, reclaiming voice, and making visible seemingly normal lives that suffer inwardly and often remain offstage. Theatre here is a place of confrontation, entertainment, and yes, also of encounter, transformation, and an act of resistance.

Since then, the teams have continued working in their respective countries, preparing the final staging. Currently, the project is in the production and dissemination phase. A digital platform (<https://projectjanus.wixsite.com/janus/s-projects-side-by-side>) is being developed, where generated materials, a methodological e-booklet, and a series of videos with testimonies and fragments of the creative process will be accessible.

The process will culminate in June 2025 with the JANUS Autobiographical Theatre Festival in Târgu Mureș, presenting the three stage creations. Performances will be followed by participatory discussions with the audience, creating a collective dialogue space about mental health, youth, identity, and artistic creation from an autobiographical perspective.



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The human being is inherently cubist, like a Picasso painting with a Janus-faced head that gazes in opposite directions. We are capable of both loving and hating, creating and destroying, giving life and taking it away — and perhaps the most terrifying or magnificent part is that we possess the conscious will to do so. We have conceived gastronomy, music, art, architecture, literature, humor, and storytelling, among many other wonders. Yet alongside these pleasures, we have also devised instruments of terror, harm, and death. We are as dual as the perception evoked by Goya's *The Dog Half-Submerged* — our minds hesitate, unsure whether it is sinking or rising from the mire. Humans are polyhedral beings, capable of simultaneously perceiving multiple dimensions of a polymorphic reality, substances woven into the architecture of our neural networks. The lives we lead, the addictions that corrode us from within, the impulse toward self-destruction, suicide... Mental health reveals how labyrinthine we truly are. Humanity is a vast spectacle: immense, haunting, dazzling, unruly, playful — full of enveloping abstraction and a magical realism so strange it borders on the surreal. You never know where we'll appear next.

We are about to co-create autobiographical theatre exploring mental health in young people — at a time of particular vulnerability for Generation Z and millennials, besieged on multiple fronts: automation, consumerism, isolation, individualism, violence, existential emptiness, and the use of drugs as both escape and amusement. All these weigh on minds that oscillate between reality and abstraction, longing and disillusionment, dread and hope.

Series like Sam Levinson's *Euphoria* have gained prominence for tackling themes of addiction, sexuality, and mental health among Generation Z. The show offers a raw, unfiltered look into the lives of young people, depicting lovelessness, toxic relationships, emotional instability, and substance dependence. It also examines loneliness, anxiety, the perils of digital life, and the pervasive fears haunting adolescence.

Streaming platforms have become the new Roman theater, and TV series are how today's youth consume narratives and recognize themselves in characters. Shows like *Euphoria*, *Sex Education*, *Skins*, *Heartstopper*, and *Élite* explore family dysfunction, drug abuse, mental illness, sexuality, violence, and trauma with emotional depth and urgency. The incel ideology turns male frustration into violent misogyny. With simplistic explanations like the 80/20 theory —only 20% of men “succeed” while the rest are rejected— it channels resentment into hatred. That rage often turns into violence. The UK series *Adolescence* shows, without filters, how fiction can expose the process of youth radicalization.



LOGO



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The Boiling Frog Fable: A Metaphor for Youth Well-being

One day, a frog jumped into a pot of boiling water. Immediately, it leapt out to escape. Its instinct was to save itself, and it didn't last a second in the pot.

Another day, that same pot was filled with cold water. A frog jumped in and swam calmly in the water. It was happy in its makeshift 'swimming pool'.

What the frog didn't know was that the water was gradually heating up. So, after a short while, the cold water turned lukewarm. The fire began to heat the water very slowly, almost imperceptibly for the frog. The temperature rose only one degree at a time. The frog adjusted to each tiny change, its body adapting to the increasing warmth. It felt a little warmer, but not enough to be alarmed or to feel the need to jump out of the pot.

As the water became hotter and hotter, the frog grew more lethargic, more dazed. It had spent its energy continuously adapting to the subtle changes. It felt increasingly weak and no longer had the strength or the will to react as quickly as it had at first.



This fable serves as a **powerful metaphor** for the current plight of our youth. The "modern frog" isn't leaping to safety because it's **anaesthetised by a pervasive digital hum**—with its apps, incessant entertainment, films, series, and online platforms fostering absorption and passivity—and also by an **increasingly hostile and turbulent socio-political environment**.

While absorbed in this media-driven reality, the subtle escalation of **multiple real-world threats** goes unnoticed. The **erosion of social well-being** is compounded by politicians and media outlets that often **incite hatred and fear**, creating a climate of **constant uncertainty**. Young people face **overwhelming demands** within a precarious context, experiencing palpable **anxiety about a difficult future** for achieving independence and finding stable employment. The shadow of **climate change** adds an existential layer of anxiety, while armed conflicts and global economic crises are perceived as distant yet unavoidable threats.

The alarming **suicide rates**, which have become the **leading cause of unnatural death among Spanish youth aged 15 to 29 since 2019**, with 354 deaths in 2023 (INE, 2024), coupled with the worrying rise in **behavioural addictions** (4% of 14-18 year-old students show signs of problematic gambling, and 20.5% report problematic internet use in 2023 [PNSD, 2023]), and **substance abuse** (with 77.9% of 14-18 year-old students having consumed alcohol and 25.4% cannabis [OEDA, 2023]), are clear indicators of this growing danger. The constant bombardment of **online aggression, hatred, and bullying**—affecting around 1 in 10 young Europeans monthly (EU Kids Online, 2020)—further dulls their sensitivity, leaving them oblivious to these aggressions and contributing to 59.3% of Spanish youth reporting some mental health problem (Fundación Mutua Madrileña and Fad Juventud, 2023).

This collective blindness isn't solely their fault; it's a shared responsibility. We, as a society—educators, families, content creators, media outlets, and legislators—have allowed these environments (both digital and socio-political) to become a mass sedative and a breeding ground for distress, effectively masking the mounting pressures.

As **Naomi Klein**, the renowned Canadian journalist and activist, argues, confronting these systemic problems requires **building broad coalitions** against the "machineries" (corporate, technological, media, and political structures) that exploit attention and monetise young people's time, often at the expense of their mental health. Klein, known for her critique of corporate capitalism and her analysis of how power systems prioritise profit over human well-being (*No Logo*, *The Shock Doctrine*), calls upon us for a collective and organised response.

If we fail to **reframe the narrative** surrounding these dangers and **unite our efforts** to resist these insidious forces, we risk seeing an entire generation "boil" without ever having the opportunity to leap. The urgent task for initiatives like ours is not only to reveal the increasing heat, but to inspire the vital leap towards a healthier, more conscious future.

Stage Fiction Unveils Uncomfortable Truths

The historian Yuval Noah Harari suggests that large social, political, and cultural systems have often been built on fictions, not on truth. For him, truth can be painful, unappealing, and very costly to assimilate, whereas fiction is "cheaper" and "easily sidesteps obstacles." Harari argues that truth is often "very convoluted, because reality is tremendously twisted," demanding multiple layers of analysis that people often reject in favour of simple explanations. Moreover, truth can be uncomfortable: "Many times we don't want to know the truth about ourselves," or about societies.

It is precisely in this analysis by one of the great historians that we find the key: Why is stage fiction so valuable for addressing matters of reality that disturb, hurt, generate division, confrontation, and controversy? When people seek simplifications in the face of immensely difficult events to understand, performing art breaks through.

Here, among the most absurd human behaviours, unjustified reactions, seemingly baseless sorrows, self-constructed paranoias, and emotional swings — from saying "I love you" to shouting, from euphoria to feeling that life is rubbish — is where we find the young people in our project. They live on an emotional rollercoaster, compounded by the little agency they have over their free will, their lives almost random in the face of external forces, whether real, digital, or imagined.

Therefore, when truth in reality is difficult to tell and to believe, the fiction of performing art is more manageable, understandable, and accepted than truth in a lecture, a newspaper, or an expert opinion. In theatre, there's no one indoctrinating you, nor suspicions about political, ideological, cultural, or corporate agendas. Here, there are characters, and as a spectator, you decide what resonates with you. While manipulation can always exist, as in the Hollywood cowboy and Indian films of the 1950s that altered history, the audience chooses what is valuable from the fictional story they have just witnessed. Theatrical fiction offers a space for emotional truth, a truth that resonates beyond mere facts, because it is experienced, not imposed.



Brain

It's **astounding** that so much happens within that gelatinous consistency of folds, compressed inside the skull. It's a **true cerebral stream**, broadcasting films and series featuring ingenious, perverse, malicious, amusing, suffering, resilient characters; narratives that erode, dissect, entertain, or bring joy. Plots inspired by your life, science fiction, horror, love; those that make you cry, and futuristic ones, with storylines set in what's to come. All this internal projection is the starting point of our exploration.

Autobiographical Theatre

Becoming part of an autobiographical theatre **won't cure you**. You won't find immediate work, you won't stop tormenting yourself thinking you're worthless, nor will those sadistic thoughts disappear. Money won't rain down on you, you won't suddenly be loved, nor will you find a partner.

There are no magic panaceas or false hopes. What there is, is feeling, embodying, reflecting. What there is, is narrative. These are alternative ways to deal with what you cannot cope with, methods to **give body to the oppressions** that gnaw at you. There's a **visceral synchronicity** between the character you portray and the audience's vibrational reaction: a resonance that brings something new and revealing back to you.

It's a **laboratory of expression and narrative**, both internal and collective, where fiction places you at a necessary distance from who you are. It allows you to **contemplate what truly bothers you in its entire panorama**. From there, it's easier to glimpse the specificities you previously refused to see. To release what harms and absorb what nourishes. To **be a sea sponge**.

It's the **ecosystemic idiocracy** seen by Democritus, who laughs, and Heraclitus, who weeps. Consumer **neuromarketing**, infantilisation. The **theatrocracy of persuasion**, promoting hatred, envy, success. You'll discover the **intricate** love-hate relationship between your gut and your brain. Sugars, junk food; stress, anxiety, depression, grief, absences, failures. Autobiographical memory, self-awareness, autonoetic consciousness in your self, swinging in the salience network, pendulumming between the default mode network and the executive network, between pleasure and horror. From fiction, **profound** mental disorders will be seen, both predisposed and acquired. Also dual pathology, addictions, the **labyrinthine** details of shamanic tourism. A world **"pill-popped"** to wake up, function, sleep.

There will be history, on madness, barbarisms, humanist treatments, the latest. Myth, art, faith, abstractions that took us to the moon and the nuclear bomb, from caves to prefabricated lives where we often find no place. Money, work, debts; **self-domestication** to coexist en masse.

Mental Health

Disheartened, disappointed, discouraged, unhinged, unsettled, saturated, weary. This is the reality. Perhaps you suffer from low self-esteem, overwhelming (or non-existent) optimism, you don't face problems, you shirk responsibilities, you infantilise conflictive situations, procrastinate, or deceive yourself. Maybe you punish yourself, carry guilt, feel shame, or discredit your own achievements. Or perhaps you're at the other extreme; believing yourself superior, ranting, ridiculing others, overwhelming, lying, manipulating, throwing tantrums, or blackmailing.

Here lies your **undiagnosed mental health**, a daily life that overwhelms you, flaws, unresolved issues and grievances that you drag along. Grappling with past experiences, perverse soliloquies, dystopian projections about what's to come. Other psychological threats emerge in this culture of image and obsession with validation in liquid modernity: **sexting, sextortion, grooming, scams, fake news...** It's you and your mobile phone, hyperconnected, encapsulated. The **Gen Z trap**: *kawaii* fashion, bland memes leaving no space for the truly messed up. **AI and robotisation** accelerating what you cannot assimilate. **FOMO**, your new addiction. The age of leisure, addiction. They want you a **dopamine junkie**.

They snatched away your free will.

Birth of Janus

I have spent thirty years studying the brain, but not from within—neither its neurobiology nor its neural circuits. My focus is the physicality of living fiction on stage. I observe how neurons, up there in performance, become subjective, intersubjective and intrasubjective. During this time, I have worked with people from disparate corners of the planet—people with diverse cosmovisions, cultures, religions and ways of understanding the world—and also with varied circumstances, conflicts and situations. I have confirmed that, beyond lived experiences or doctrinal teachings, once you scrape away social layers, the substances that sustain human well-being are profoundly mundane. In the end, everything boils down to avoiding suffering: nobody longs for pain or the loss of a loved one. To be well, people need to feel cared for, loved, respected, useful, and to find inner calm, a home, belonging—and to know how to let go of the past in order to cope with the uncertainty of the future.

You, me, anyone, carries a past that is sometimes melancholic, other times painful. That burden weighs on the present, distorts what has been lived, twists what will come, terrifies the future, and tints personality with hatred, fears or fragilities. Thus was born this methodology of autobiographical theatre.

I did not wake up one morning and say, “I’m going to create a new theatrical methodology.” Things arise from necessity. I had already worked with Jo Salas and Jonathan Fox’s Playback Theatre, where the audience tells their story and actors and a musician honour it with scenic improvisation. I was also familiar with Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed—the “spectator-witness” model that proposes the audience cease being passive and participate actively in the play as “spect-actors” or witnesses who can intervene, comment, or even act. In my approach, the protagonist does not address the audience directly, but tells them a referential fiction or autofiction inspired by their own narrative. And at the end of the piece, a debate opens up with the audience so that everything that moved them does not remain hidden at home, but is shared and discussed.

The Inevitable Duality

Why Janus? Because its two-faced head looks at the past and the future simultaneously. It represents thresholds, gateways, transitions... the spirit of beginning something new without forgetting what has been lived—which is why June bears his name. But Janus also refers to the duality within us: we can love and hate, caress and destroy, give life and take it away. The most terrifying part is having that choice. The most anguishing part is that these contradictions can coexist at the same time.

Precisely through these experiences and observations, I understood it was crucial to bring on stage voices that are normally neither heard nor made visible—voices expressing urgent needs in communities marked by disappearances, murders, physical and mental health problems, prisoners with dual diagnoses, gender-based violence, LGBTI violence, and hundreds of other invisible daily realities. These affect vast populations—from multiculturalism to climate change and exploitation, among many others.

The Journey of JANUS: Theatre to Heal the Collective Soul

I was invited to direct *Pedro y el Capitán*, Mario Benedetti’s only theatrical work, at the Festival Diez Sentidos in Valencia. That edition, titled “**Bestias**”, referred to the perverse creatures that dwell within us. The festival organisers also proposed that I create a live-arts piece with the NGO ÁMBIT—supporting formerly incarcerated individuals facing mental health issues, dual diagnoses, homelessness and other adversities. With them, we created *Un mundo aparte adentro del mundo*: a dystopian space where they live trapped within the city—hidden from society, yet painfully real, although nobody wants to see it.

This Project Could Not End There

With Erasmus funding, we replicated the experience in six countries, with different collectives, and the results—for participants and for the audience—were revelatory. Together with Ana María Solís, we decided to continue this work, now focusing on training professionals to create their own productions. The intention was to empower people beyond my own figure, allowing the methodology to become a rhizome freely growing in all directions and enabling others to use this powerful scenic resource.

I call it a **bidirectional methodology of dramatherapy and autobiographical theatre**, because dramatherapy—through expressive arts—connects the early phases of autobiographical theatre: trust, personal history, narrative. It begins essential, intimate work with individuals and communities before bringing it to the stage and out into society.

We live in turbulent times, where climate change, wars, and inequalities spring from the same root: vanity, laden with arrogance and folly. It's easier to see them in others than in oneself. We witness it in politicians who promote hatred, selfishness and pride in a world where “the naked king remains king.”

The Greeks Understood

The Greeks—the birthplace of politics, medicine and philosophy—let myth become flesh in theatre to reveal Athenian psychology. They used two masks—comedy and tragedy—embodied in Democritus, who laughed at human stupidity, representing life's absurdity and mocking our flaws, perturbations and perversions; and Heraclitus, who wept for the same—idiocy—representing injustice, cruelty and barbarism. Janus reflects that stupidity, that clumsiness that gives rise to so much evil. Someone said: “I prefer one intelligent villain to thousands of fools, because without fools he couldn't govern.” That is why theatre has always been the voice of the people: to expose ridiculous and deformed archetypes, to disarm them with grotesque sarcasm, to strike the collective unconscious and imagination; to generate limbic synchrony by moving and breaking rigid circuits of misunderstanding, prejudice and stigma. Its power lies in shaking your principles, your beliefs—even your identity. This is the value and necessity of this theatre.

The Post-Performance Colloquium: Dialogue and Collective Reflection

Beyond the stage, the colloquium between actors and audience becomes an affective catalyst and an essential space for theatrical pedagogy. Held immediately after the performance, in the same space, this gathering transcends the theatrical experience. Here, the performers may share aspects of the creative process—always without compromising the autonomy of the characters they have just embodied.

The value of this space lies in the possibility of generating a collective reflection on the themes of the work—but always from the perspective of the artistic process, never through personal confession. The actors speak about the construction of their characters, the interpretive challenges, or the dramaturgical decisions. The audience, in turn, may ask about the fictional universe, the techniques employed, or the meanings that emerged from the aesthetic proposal.

This post-performance debate functions as a catalyst for awareness, sensibility, and education regarding the dangers that threaten our psychological equilibrium. It allows everything that surfaced in the mind of the spectator during the play to be shared—both among the audience and with the cast. Everyone present knows that what they have just witnessed is inspired by the cast's own lived experiences, and that there may be people in the room going through the same, or who know someone who is, but who were unaware of it, deny it, or fear asking questions.

Here, in the theatre, they can speak, ask for advice, express prejudices or stereotypes.

This dialogue about the plot and subplots of the fiction, about what happens to the characters, enables people to observe their own lives. Fiction becomes a means to address real-life issues and, in doing so, dismantle the stigma surrounding mental health.

“Theatre is a question asked in public.” — Peter Brook

This post-performance exchange extends the theatrical experience into a reflective dialogue, where the audience collectively processes the emotions and thoughts stirred by the performance. The presence of the actors in this context does not shatter the illusion, as they have already returned to their role as creators, now detached from their characters. The colloquium becomes a space for critical elaboration: the audience shares their understanding of the work, and the performers receive feedback on the impact of their artistic contribution. This method of closure expands the theatrical experience, amplifying both its aesthetic resonance and its transformative potential in the spectator.



Limassol, Cyprus. 6-16
February 2024
**Co-living Residence
Training Lab 1**
Autobiographical Theatre



First Transnational Project Meeting 5th of February 2024

The first Transnational Janus Project Meeting was held in Cyprus on 5th February 2024. The coordinator - Universitatea de Arte Târgu Mures (Romania) and the partners SOLIS Srls (Italy), ShipCon (Cyprus) and Fundatia Professional(Romania) met to overview the project activities, to discuss about the project visibility & communication, as well as the quality assurance plan. The first results - the report of semi-structured interviews with a panel of vulnerable Young people from all the partner countries were presented.



And during our free time we discovered the beauty of Limassol, Millomeris Waterfall, Omodos village, Nicosia and new Shipcon headquarters – Kelos model farm.

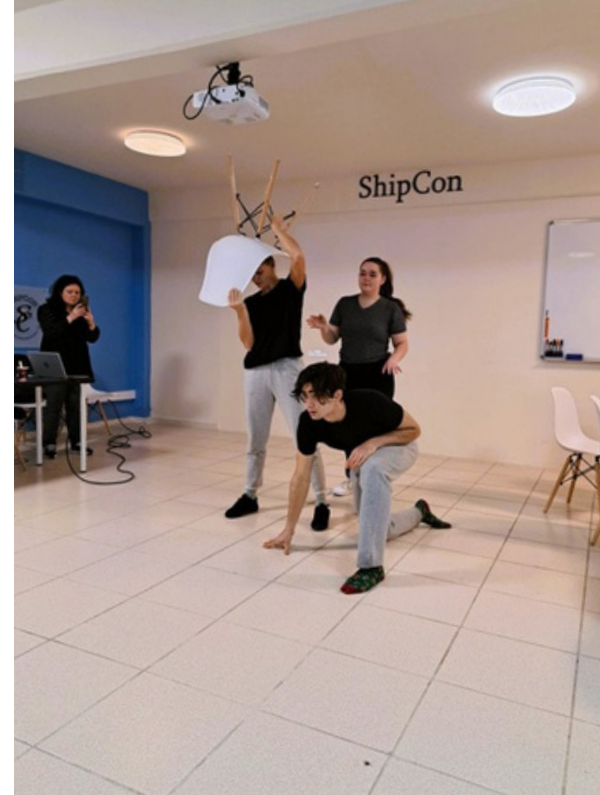
Training of Trainers 6-16 February in Cyprus

Training of trainers - Exploring Autobiographical Theatre and Youth Mental Health was held in Limassol, Cyprus, within JANUS Project, at the SHIPCON headquarters.

First week was dedicated to laying the foundations of trust, expression, and shared understanding through a series of carefully curated activities. Our days were punctuated by Circle Time, or what we affectionately call our "Tribal Plenary." This sacred gathering allowed us to share our reflections and stories eye-to-eye, fostering a unique bond and promoting empathy within our group.



Second week was governed by the words of director Domingo Ferrandis - "If you can't talk to a person , speak to them through art". In Autobiographical Theatre, our personal stories find a voice beyond verbal language, a voice that emerges through movement, expression and presence.



The final part of the training culminated in a performance showcasing all the skills, techniques and personal journeys explored during the project. This performance aimed to be a testament to the transformative power of theater and the deep connections we created through shared vulnerability and artistic expression. At the end of the performance, we shared emotions, thoughts, vulnerabilities, and difficulties that we experienced during this creative process with the young people who participated in this event. The conclusion of the evening was that art can capture and communicate the complexity of these experiences, providing a powerful platform for empathy and understanding.



Coexistence Residence Local Training Lab

Autobiographical Theatre Adaptation Methodology

Within JANUS Project, **Universitatea de Arte Târgu Mureș** started to work with the target group in order to adapt the AT methodology. We used different approaches for each working session. We explored different paintings by artists who struggled with mental health issues and the students wrote down the words that came to them when they saw those artworks. Then we focused on Vincent Van Gogh's *Sorrowing Old Man (At Eternity's Gate)*. The exercises we carried out with the students focused on intuitive drawing and writing, related to their emotions when they saw different painting.



Iusan Cristina Maria (who participated in “Training the trainers” held in Cyprus) worked with the students and the emphasis was on expressing through their body various words they had on paper. At the end, guided by Iusan Cristina Maria they linked their movements in a choreography that expressed their feelings.





ShipCon started to work with the target group in order to adapt AT Methodology. Our participants are 5 young women from Limassol (Cyprus), that are very well connected with the arts, and the use of the body as a way of expression of deep emotions, that sometimes we cannot explain with our own words.

We spoke about mental health and the use of dramatherapy to help people to show and share what they are feeling and what they went through.

We reconnected with ourselves, diving into an internal journey by drawing our vital stories as a river, that we shared among each other, later on. In the river, we presented our past, our present and our future, shaping the difficulties and beautiful moments we have been experiencing since we were born, and visualizing our future as the “end” of the river. We watched some previous autobiographical performances, to realize that each of us feel in a different way depending on our vital experience. Our youngsters experimented with their personal stories, establishing their personal milestones in the life timeline, those that have forged their personality in the present. After that, they created a detailed story that embody their personal current situation, and they exchanged the stories among each others to be able to experience in their own bodies what the other members of the team have been going through.



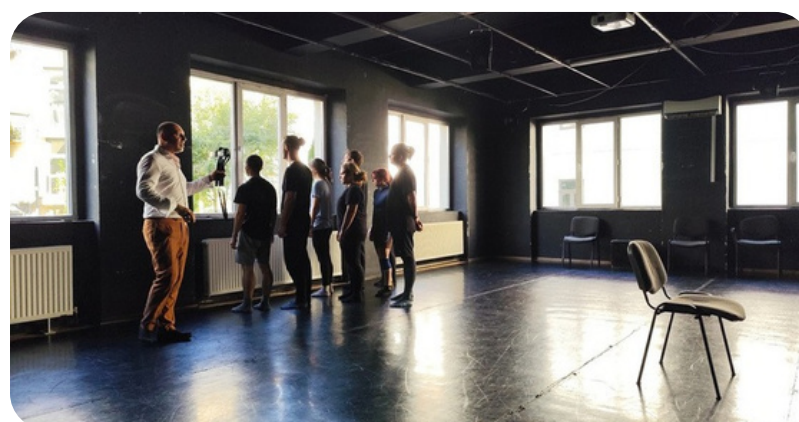
Romania and Cyprus

Co-living Residence

Training Lab 2

Autobiographical Theatre

As part of the JANUS Project, Ana María Solís and Domingo Ferrandis from SOLIS SRLS conducted a series of workshops in Romania and Cyprus between October 23-27 and November 1-4, 2024. These visits strengthened the implementation of the Autobiographical Theatre (AT) methodology and fostered international collaboration among project partners. This innovative approach uses art as a tool to address youth vulnerability and mental health, preparing participants for the much-anticipated Janus Festival in June 2025.



The journey began in Târgu-Mureș, Romania, where the activities were coordinated by Universitatea de Arte din Târgu-Mureș (UAT) under the leadership of project coordinator Lia Contiu. For five days, Ana María and Domingo worked closely with the local team, including teachers Cristina Olar and Traian Penciu, who contributed with their expertise to the creative and group dynamics. These sessions were not only about artistic development but also about building trust and emotional connections among participants. On October 23, the first day of the visit, Ana María and Domingo met with the target group and the UAT project team while visiting key cultural venues such as the Studio Theatre and Theatre 2.1, which will host the Janus Festival in 2025. These visits were crucial in linking the artistic activities to the rich cultural context of Târgu-Mureș, inspiring participants and facilitators alike.

The workshops explored themes of invisibility and emotional transformation. Guided by Domingo and Cristina, participants reflected on what it feels like to be "invisible," identifying how these emotions manifest physically and mentally. Through a carefully structured process, they embraced and transformed these feelings, stepping into visibility and self-affirmation. On October 25, participants took a significant step by standing before their peers, looking them in the eyes, and declaring: "This is me, and I am not afraid to be seen." This process not only empowered individuals but also created a shared space of vulnerability and connection.

On October 27, the final day in Romania, participants began integrating their personal experiences into narratives that will be showcased in future performances. With the support of Traian Penciu, they started shaping stories that reflect their transformative journeys. These narratives will be presented at the Janus Festival, forming the core of a celebration that highlights cultural diversity and personal growth. Lia Contiu emphasized the importance of this work in validating and adapting the methodology within the Romanian cultural context.



Workshops in Cyprus

Following the workshops in Romania, activities continued in Limassol, Cyprus, from November 1-4, 2024, organized d by ShipCon under the supervision of Patricia Jimeno Fernandez. Over four days, Domingo led intensive sessions with local beneficiaries, focusing on preparing a unique performance to be presented at the Janus Festival. These workshops adapted the JANUS methodology to the Cypriot cultural context, allowing participants to develop personal stories that resonate deeply with their experiences



Through Local Workshops

Testing the Janus Methodology

As part of the development and validation process of the **JANUS Autobiographical Theatre Methodology**, four local workshops **were successfully implemented** across partner countries in early 2025. These sessions represented a key milestone in disseminating the methodology to professionals working directly with young people affected by mental health challenges—including educators, artists, youth workers, social workers, and therapists.

Each workshop was designed to present **both the theoretical foundation and practical application of the JANUS methodology**, which unfolds through nine progressive phases. These phases guide participants on a journey of personal storytelling, emotional reflection, and creative expression, culminating in the co-creation of autobiographical theatre performances.

During the workshops, participants engaged with the methodology through presentations, facilitated discussions, and case studies based on pilot experiences. The sessions provided a clear illustration of how the approach could be adapted to different social and cultural contexts, demonstrating its flexibility and relevance across diverse settings.

Participants were invited to reflect on how the method could respond to the specific needs of their local communities, especially when working with vulnerable youth facing depression, anxiety, addiction, or social exclusion. The **workshops also fostered interdisciplinary dialogue**, offering a space for professionals from various sectors to exchange insights, raise critical questions, and share practical feedback.

This collaborative and reflective environment strengthened the project's community-based ethos and expanded the network of practitioners committed to using artistic tools to address youth mental health.

The feedback and insights collected during these workshops are now being used to refine and adjust the JANUS methodology, ensuring it remains accessible, effective, and rooted in real-world practice. Beyond validation, these sessions helped lay the foundation for stronger local engagement and set the stage for the upcoming JANUS autobiographical theatre performances with young people across Europe.



Local Testing Workshop – SOLIS SRLS (Italy)

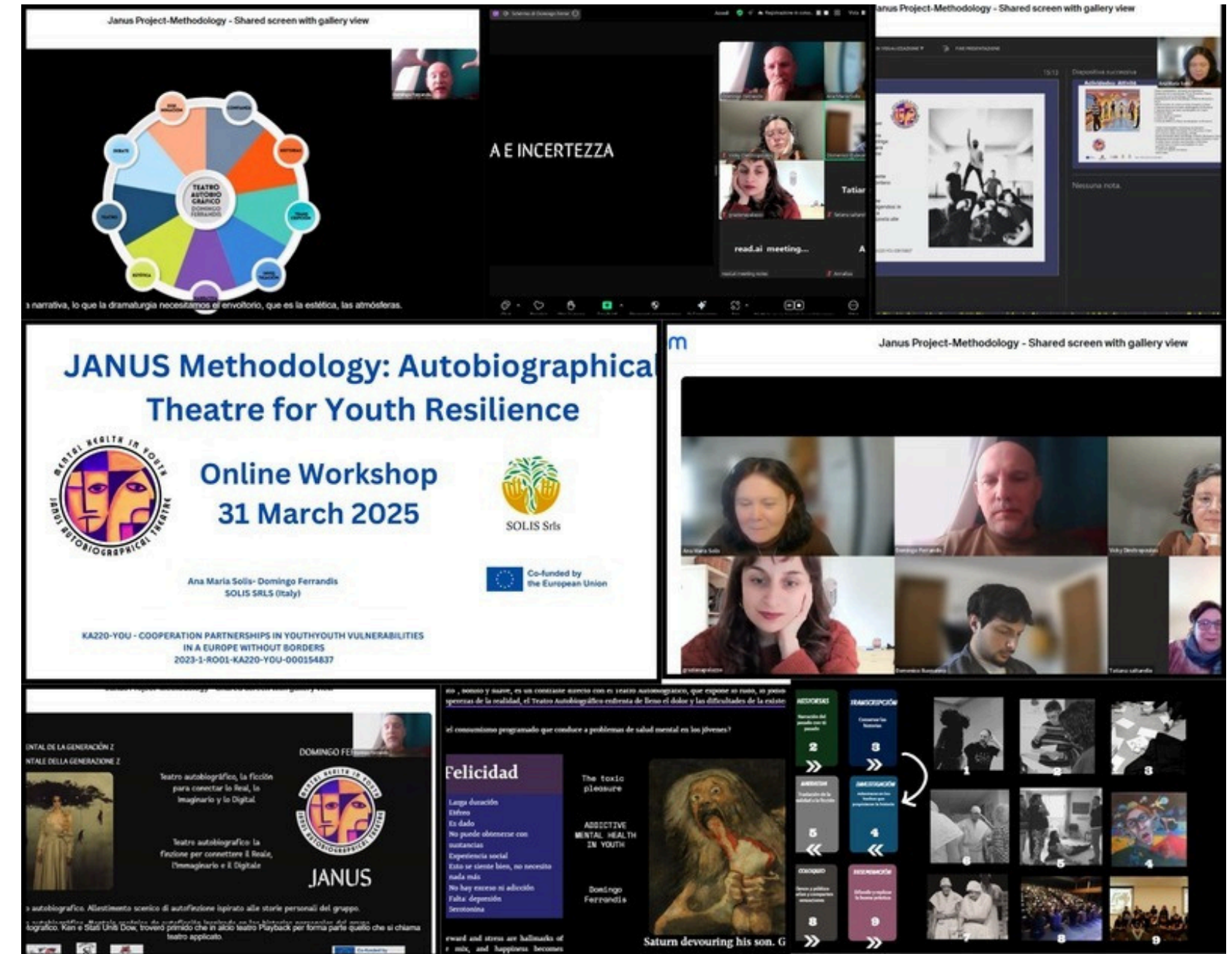
On **March 31st, 2025, SOLIS SRLS** held an online local workshop to introduce the JANUS Autobiographical Theatre Methodology to 35 professionals from various Italian and Spanish regions. Participants included educators, youth workers, psychologists, theatre practitioners, and community facilitators. The event functioned as both a training session and a space for dissemination and critical reflection.

Ana María Solís opened the workshop by contextualising the methodology within the post-pandemic emotional landscape affecting youth. She emphasized the need for creative, symbolic, and ethical tools that move beyond clinical diagnosis, positioning JANUS as a method that merges dramatherapy and social theatre to support young people's expression and resilience.

Domingo Ferrandis, creator of the methodology, delivered an in-depth presentation exploring the intersection between mental health, digital culture, and youth vulnerability. Drawing on real-life data and cultural references—including series such as 13 Reasons Why, Euphoria, and Sex Education—he unpacked the risks of algorithmic exposure, online hypersexualisation, emotional isolation, and the erosion of identity among Generation Z. He then presented the nine phases of the JANUS methodology, from trust-building to public dissemination, with real-world examples drawn from projects involving women survivors of violence, incarcerated individuals, migrants, and Alzheimer patients.

Participants reflected on the relevance of the method in their professional practice, appreciating its structured yet adaptable approach. A shared interest emerged around the use of fiction as a protective and expressive tool, enabling participants to address personal experiences safely while promoting collective understanding. Many recognised elements of their own practices—such as storytelling, metaphor, and creative writing—now given a coherent framework through JANUS.

Feedback highlighted the methodology's ethical clarity, emotional safety, and potential for application across diverse contexts, including schools, youth centres, and therapeutic environments. Several participants expressed interest in piloting the methodology within their organisations and continuing the dialogue through new collaborative networks.



Local Testing Workshop - University of Arts (Romania)

On **March 4th, 2025, the University of Arts** organized a local workshop to introduce the JANUS Autobiographical Theatre Methodology to 24 professionals from Mureş County, including educators, psychologists, artists, and social workers. The event served both as a training and dissemination session.

Lia Conțiu opened the workshop with an overview of the JANUS project, followed by a presentation on Autobiographical Theatre (AT).

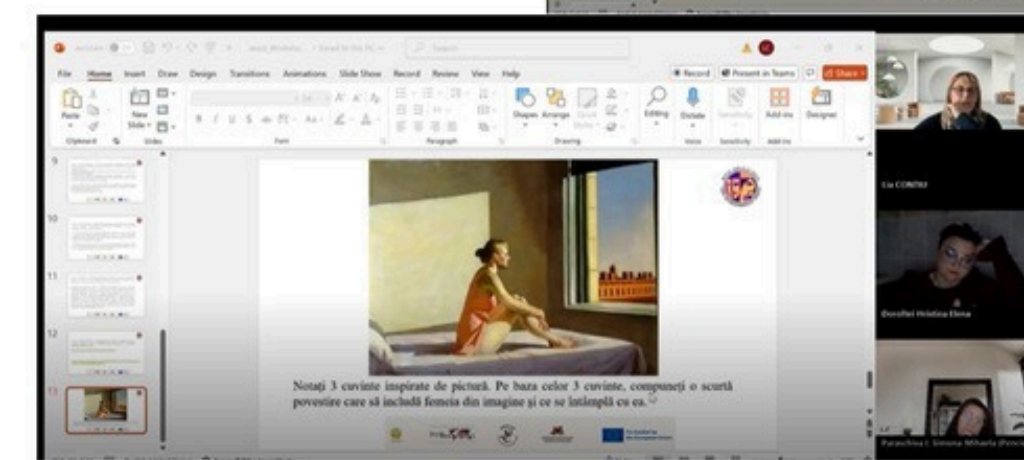
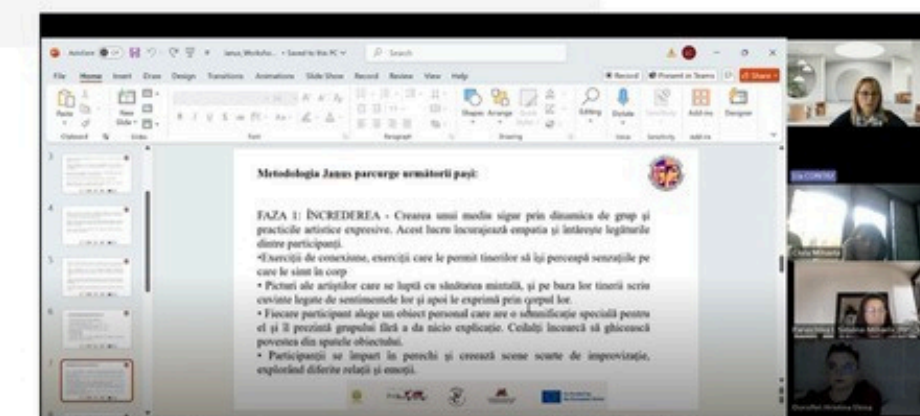
The workshop addressed youth mental health, highlighting the challenge of dual diagnosis—the intersection of mental disorders and substance use—and presented the nine phases of the JANUS Methodology. The University of Arts team shared their experience applying the method with students to create a theatre performance.

A practical exercise invited participants to respond creatively to a painting, illustrating the method's ability to stimulate imagination and emotional insight.

Feedback highlighted the methodology's accessibility, flexibility, and potential in educational and therapeutic settings, while also emphasizing the importance of professional facilitation, emotional safety, and group trust.



JANUS METHODOLOGY
MARCH 4 2025
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
THEATRE FOR YOUTH
RESILIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF ARTS



Local Testing Workshop - Fundația Professional

On **March 31st, 2025**, **Fundația Professional** held a local workshop to test and present the JANUS Autobiographical Theatre Methodology. The event brought together 31 professionals — mainly from Târgu Mureș—working in education, psychology, the arts, and youth services. Of these, 24 completed the full session.

The workshop featured an online introduction by Angela Cotoară, outlining the project and its nine phases, illustrated through a case study involving six teenage girls. Viorel Cotoară emphasized the role of autobiographical storytelling in fostering self-expression and reflection.

Participants expressed strong interest in creative, inclusive methods for working with adolescents, particularly those from vulnerable backgrounds. They valued the workshop's blend of theory and practice, and highlighted the importance of continuous professional development and emotional engagement in youth work.

Overall, the event encouraged participants to apply the JANUS methodology across various settings—from classrooms to community programs—to support the emotional wellbeing and empowerment of young people.





Local Testing Workshop - ShipCon Limassol Ltd

On **April 1, 2025**, **ShipCon** hosted a local workshop for the JANUS Project in Cyprus, led by Patricia Jimeno Fernández, with 30 participants from education, youth work, social services, mental health, and the arts. The workshop introduced the JANUS Autobiographical Theatre Methodology, developed to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of vulnerable youth.

Through interactive exercises such as visual prompts, reflective writing, and group discussions, participants explored practical applications in educational and therapeutic settings. Special attention was given to ensuring emotional safety and adapting the method for different ages and cultural contexts.

The workshop also highlighted the broader benefits of Autobiographical Theatre as a tool for self-expression, empowerment, social inclusion, and raising awareness around mental health. Participants discussed how the methodology can help reduce stigma, foster empathy, and give young people a voice in often marginalized environments.

Feedback showed strong enthusiasm for the JANUS approach, with participants valuing its flexibility and potential to be adapted across various fields.





Janus Local Workshops

Participants: Italy (SOLIS Srls): 35 registered, 20 completed, Romania (University of Arts): 24 completed, Romania (Fundatia Professional): 31 registered, 24 completed Cyprus (ShipCon): 30 completed.

Activities: Presentation of the JANUS methodology and the nine phases, Case studies and practical examples Interactive exercises: storytelling, reflective writing, creative narratives, Group discussions on adaptation and emotional safety, Media analysis linking youth challenges to social issues.

Feedback: High interest in applying the method across education, mental health, arts, and youth work, Methodology praised for being ethical, trauma-sensitive, flexible, and adaptable, Valued balance of theory and practice with emphasis on emotional safety, Recognized potential for youth empowerment, emotional expression, empathy, and social inclusion, Need for professional support when handling sensitive topics acknowledged.



Janus theatrical project

The Janus theatrical project is inspired by close experiences of crises, trauma, and other psychic ailments, without labeling the young actors with mental disorders or inclusion issues. The primary aim of autobiographical theatre is to bring visibility to personal situations and conflicts, without falling into victimization, while showing the causes that arise during moments of weakness.

The autobiographical Theatre explores an intimate and often taboo topic—something rarely examined or discussed until it becomes undeniable. Through metaphors, it illustrates the extreme situations young people may face, walking the delicate line between well-being and the abyss. Through the stories of young actors, personal experiences are addressed that, although marked by crises and trauma, are not meant to be diagnosed or labeled. Instead, they expose very common situations: drugs that shift from fun to addiction, obsessions with mobile phones, overwhelming sadness, fears that dominate your life, and disturbing thoughts that lead to strange acts or suicidal ideas. These are situations we are familiar with but that are often silenced or minimized in daily life, despite having a profound impact on their lives. The stage piece invites the audience to reflect on these close, quiet, sometimes invisible experiences that only emerge in moments of vulnerability or when it's already too late.

Residency programs are the experimental lab where autobiographical theatre emerges. A space to explore yourself, express, and share with others in an atmosphere of freedom, co-creation, and networks that exist only in that moment. With support from the team and director, spontaneously arising stories come to life through engaging narratives, captivating aesthetics, and atmospheres that envelop the audience. All the technical work transforms experiences into something that captivates and enchants.

On stage, what once anchored you to the past, what twisted your thoughts, becomes a dialogue with the audience. Something incredible happens: you can look at those listening and silently say, "This is happening, and you are part of it."

That's why it's so valuable that not only everyday people attend the theatre, but also politicians, educators, and specialists. Because in that shared space, something arises that can change perspectives, move hearts, and maybe even transform realities.

In the black box, an intimate bond forms between the audience and the characters carefully sculpted during the residencies. Autobiographical theatre doesn't need great authors like Shakespeare, Chekhov, or Ibsen, nor professional actors dissecting scripts.

Here, anyone can be the author and actor. Participants reshape the plot with precision, passionately emphasizing what they want to highlight on stage. They craft every atmosphere, choreography, and dreamlike vision, sculpting their characters so they move and speak with sincere organicity, carrying their experiences and acting as avatars of what they wish to express.

They may not portray their own story, but rather that of a peer, a stranger, or a metaphorical, surreal, or symbolic character. Still, their essence shines through. The plot, conflicts, and situations find parallels. They may be set in other times or contexts—magical realism—with events seemingly far from their reality, but what these characters embody resonates with universal force.

What the audience sees may not be a masterful script or acting, but instead they are moved by distilled truth—a declaration of what they want to be seen, felt, heard, and understood.

This is autobiographical theatre. This is its purpose. And to close, there is always a talkback—a vital space for anyone who wishes to express what the piece stirred in them, sharing reflections with the cast and other spectators. This final dialogue turns theatre into a tribal act, a space of meeting and communion.

It returns theatre to the people, reviving that human instinct that once lit up the stage: signs as language, theatre as connection between the intimate and universal. It becomes ancestral—storytelling around the fire, resurfacing in the talkback, where everyone brings their voice, perception, and experience.

In the end, we are nothing more than that: storytellers; mythographers of histories, sharing them to build community and forge affinities.

Both **Dramatherapy** and **Autobiographical Theatre** share the premise that artistic expression and performative practice offer individuals and communities a means to explore, understand, process, and express thoughts, desires, lived experiences, and emotions. This methodology promotes self-care and self-observation, facilitating cognitive embodiment—the integration of experience into the body, where what is lived, thought, and felt align somatically in a coherent way.

The theatrical process activates multiple dimensions of the psychic and neurocognitive apparatus. It stimulates shared creativity, collective intelligence, and elastic thinking, encouraging key functions such as social cognition, shared intentionality, cultural intelligence, and theory of mind. It supports the development of metacognition, interoception, self-awareness, and the ability to imagine possible worlds, rehearse alternatives, and construct new personal narratives.

But—there's always a but. As beneficial as daydreaming may be—generating inner films of love, triumph, and resilience, or engaging in an internal dialogue that is pleasant and constructive—it has its dark side of the moon.

When this constellation misfires—due to trauma, neglect, poverty, rejection, failure, excessive demands, obsession, or addiction—the imagination may become hijacked by dysfunctional narratives. Distortions arise that make the past feel like a constant threat or the future appear catastrophically bleak. Inner worlds proliferate where one blames oneself, self-harms, or relives injury again and again. The body becomes hostage to these invasive fictions.

On a cerebral level, this involves a dynamic interplay between complementary functional networks: from the central executive network (responsible for attention, task control, and distinguishing fiction from reality) to the default mode network, associated with reflective thought, autobiographical memory, imagination, and autonoetic consciousness—that is, the capacity to mentally travel in time and view oneself from a subjective perspective. This network is also linked to interoception, metacognition, theory of mind, self-awareness, the unconscious and its shadows, and the imaginative realm—processes that are essential to a coherent and integrated sense of self.

This dynamic balance is mediated by the salience network, which acts as a switchboard detecting relevant stimuli (internal or external) and enabling smooth transitions between networks depending on contextual needs. When the salience network is dysregulated, the system loses flexibility: the mind either gets trapped in mechanical routines or is flooded with disturbing ruminations and terrifying fictions that override reality.

One key principle we maintain in both Dramatherapy and Autobiographical Theatre—whether during free artistic expression or in crafting fictional narratives and building character biotypes—is to always infuse them with subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and intrasubjectivity. These are fundamental for understanding personality, behavior, and habits.

Each person lives inside their own head—with their thoughts, memories, quirks, and internal conversations that no one hears, but which weigh heavily. That's subjectivity: what you see, feel, and understand about the world based on what you've lived. The challenge begins when that lens clashes with someone else's. That's where intersubjectivity comes in: the attempt to build a shared language, to understand each other without fully knowing how the other has lived. And we often fail at this. That's why it often feels like no one truly gets you. And you don't fully get them, either.

At the same time, inside you, there's a deeper layer: intrasubjectivity. What you tell yourself, what you withhold, what you doubt, what you hide. It's not a monologue—it's a crossing of inner voices that sometimes can't stand each other. And in that inner parliament, everything is decided: whether you move forward or freeze, speak up or swallow your words, show yourself or hide.

In the methodology of Autobiographical Theatre, we pay close attention to the interplay between how you perceive the world, what happens in your relationships with others, and what unfolds inside your own mind. These dimensions are not separate—they intertwine, influence each other, and sometimes contradict one another.

Therefore, theatre does not merely represent: it transforms. It doesn't only entertain: it repairs. It doesn't just narrate: it confronts, connects, cleanses, and rebalances. In its autobiographical and therapeutic form, it acts as a technology of the self, reconnecting imagination with the present, restoring agency over one's story, and crafting a narrative more inhabitable for one's life.

From mental frieze to abstraction

"I don't work from drawings or color sketches... I want to express my feelings rather than illustrate." —
Jackson Pollock



"I want to touch
people
with my art. I want
them
to say: 'he feels
deeply,
he feels tenderly.'"
—**Van Gogh**



"Each person must be
allowed to express
themselves according
to their inner
motivations." —**Pina
Bausch**

From mental frieze to abstraction

"They will love me for what destroys me." —
Sarah Kane, 4.48 Psychosis



Dots are solid and infinite. They
are a form of life. Sun, moon,
stars— hundreds of millions of
dots. Every human being is also
a dot. Dots cannot exist on their
own; they can only exist when
they come together with others.
—**Yayoi Kusama**



"I am inhabited by a cry. Nightly it
unfolds." —**Sylvia Plath, Elm**

«Bidirectional Methodology Dramatherapy – Autobiographical Theatre»



«Dramatherapy» The first phase is oriented toward the individual and the group, without aiming for a stage performance. It is centered on the therapeutic process: metabolizing what has been lived, releasing what weighs us down, accepting what hurts. This is a resilient phase that strengthens and empowers.



«Autobiographical Theatre» The second phase is directed towards society and the community, and it requires a performance before an audience. Its focus is not clinical but ethical and social: it seeks to raise awareness, foster empathy, and denounce or warn, activating the emotional force of fiction—one that resonates.





TRUST
Building intimacy
and affectionate
bonds

1



STORIES
Revisiting your
past with your
own voice

2



TRANSCRIPTION
Recording the
stories

3



RESEARCH
Delving into the
facts behind the
story

4



NARRATIVE
Transforming reality
into fiction

5



DISSEMINATION
Spreading and
replicating best
practices

9



COLLOQUIUM
Cast and audience
share feelings and
reflections

8



THEATRE
Rehearsing and
performing the
piece live

7



AESTHETIC
Creating atmospheres
to dress the plot

6



Autobiographic
al Theatre



1. Trust

The first step is to create a safe, intimate, and respectful environment. Only when there is a climate of emotional openness and support can people express themselves authentically and share meaningful life experiences.

2. Stories

Once bonds of trust, complicity, and solidarity have been established, space is opened for narrating life fragments, recognizing one's own voice as a vehicle for reconstruction and validation of personal experience.

3. Transcription

The shared stories are recorded, preserving the autobiographical and testimonial value of the material. This step is essential to safeguard the emotional and narrative memory of the process.

4. Research

The stories are explored in depth: contextualized, connected to data, and examined for their roots. This stage enriches the material by incorporating social, historical, or cultural layers that amplify its symbolic resonance.

5. Narrative

Personal experience is transformed into theatrical material. A coherent dramaturgy is constructed collaboratively, selecting what matters most and weaving the storylines with a sensitive, critical, and structured lens.

Autobiographical Theatre

9. Dissemination

The final step seeks to expand and replicate the practice, inviting new groups and communities to engage with theatrical language as a way to express, transform, and share their stories. This phase aims to multiply access to symbolic and restorative resources.

8. Colloquium

After the performance, dialogue with the audience completes the journey. A space for exchange emerges, where the scene resonates with those who have witnessed it. The colloquium sparks reflection, activates questions, and opens new meanings, highlighting the collective dimension of the process.

7. Theatre

This stage includes both the rehearsal process and the public premiere of the piece. During rehearsals, actions are fine-tuned, conflicts embodied, and the story brought to life. The premiere marks the culmination of the creative process, sharing the work with an audience.

6. Aesthetic

The atmospheres that will support the performance are designed. Music, lighting, costume, video projections, or props are integrated with artistic intention to give form to the emotions and meanings within the story.



Main Causes of Psychological Imbalances in Young People (18–29 years)

Youth psychological distress is multi-causal, a constellation of personal, biological, familial, cultural, social, geographic, structural, and digital factors that interact dynamically.

Economic Instability and Precariousness

High levels of unemployment, precarious contracts, and difficulty achieving economic independence and accessing housing are sources of chronic anxiety and low self-esteem. «Financial insecurity is a significant predictor of depressive symptoms and anxiety among young adults» (Volkow & Baler, 2015, p. 348).

Problematic Substance Use

Alcohol, marijuana, designer drugs, and the non-prescribed use of psychotropic medications are linked to a higher risk of affective and psychotic disorders. Youth is a time for socializing, and substance use is common among friends and in dating contexts. Shyness and embarrassment can turn casual substance use into a norm.

Social Isolation, Emotional Breakups, and Loneliness

Social rejection or romantic breakups at this stage negatively impact emotional regulation. «Affective disorders frequently emerge following experiences of loss and dissolution of significant relationships in early adulthood» (Bakare, 2024).

Exposure to Extreme Digital Content and Social Media

Intensive use of social networks is associated with anxiety, body image disorders, FOMO (fear of missing out), and social dysmorphia. «Digital overexposure affects self-image, fosters constant comparison, and reinforces harmful self-evaluation mechanisms» (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Violence, Harassment, and Psychological Trauma Experiences of physical, sexual abuse, verbal mistreatment, abandonment, and online violence (cyberbullying, doxing, revenge porn) are linked to PTSD, anxiety, depression, and substance use. In some cases, victims may become perpetrators.

Catastrophizing and Anticipatory Anxiety

Concerns about the future, climate collapse, wars, AI, and global crises generate existential anxiety and adjustment disorders. “Many young people internalize globalized fear, leading to catastrophizing thought patterns and anticipatory fatigue” (So et al., 2025).

Identity Crisis and Pressure to Succeed

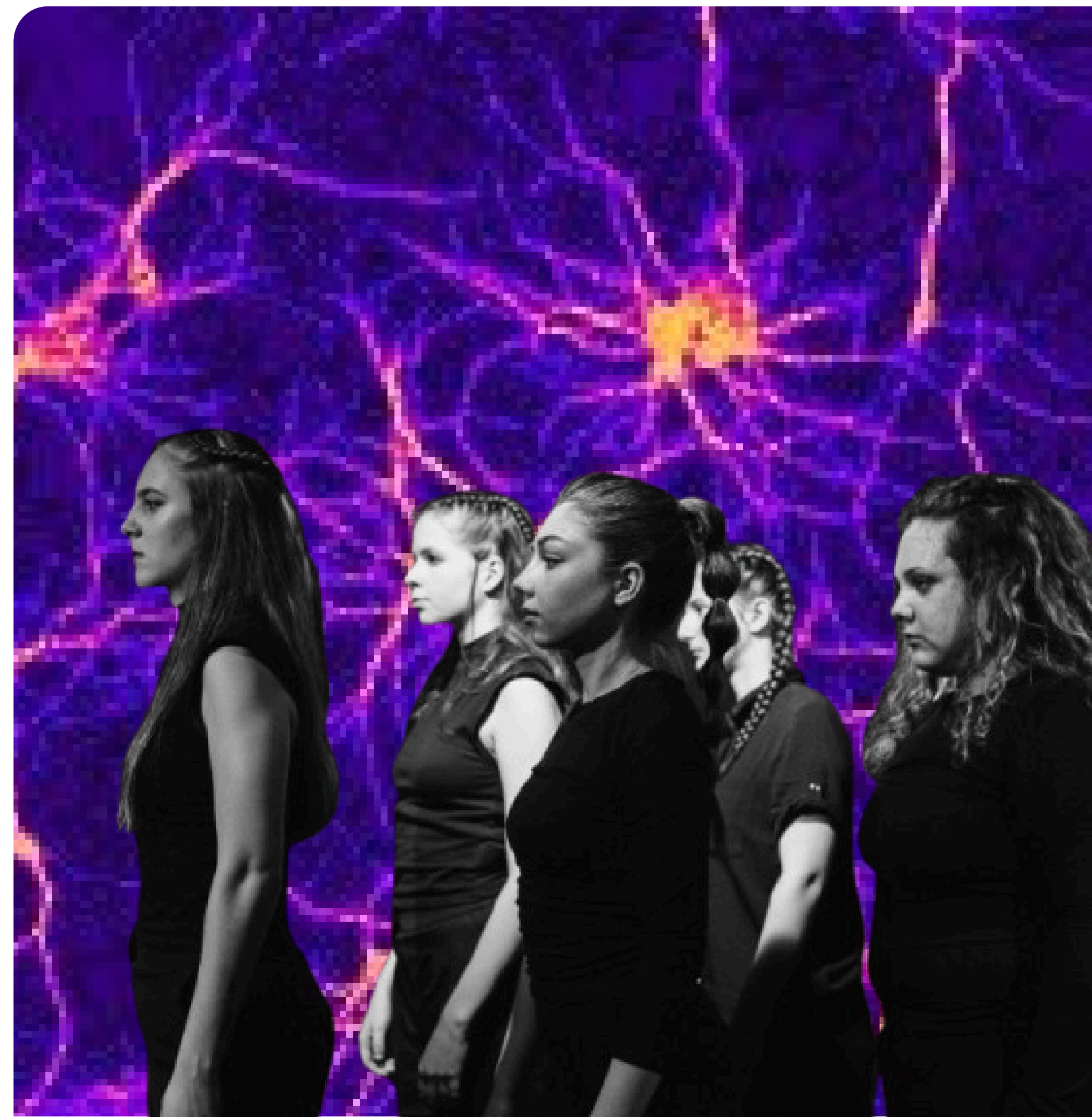
In a hypercompetitive and comparative culture, failure or uncertainty causes distress, especially in contexts of high academic or professional demand.

Unequal Living Conditions and Discrimination

Structural inequalities (race, gender, disability, sexual orientation) increase the risk of depression, stress disorders, and suicide (Chipalo, 2024).

Streaming series, the new Roman theatre for youth

Streaming platforms have become the new Roman theatre, and TV series are how today's youth consume narratives and recognise themselves in characters. Shows like Euphoria, Sex Education, Skins, Heartstopper, and Élite explore family dysfunction, drug abuse, mental illness, sexuality, violence, and trauma with emotional depth and urgency. The incel ideology turns male frustration into violent misogyny. With simplistic explanations like the 80/20 theory —only 20% of men «succeed» while the rest are rejected— it channels resentment into hatred. That rage often turns into violence. The UK series Adolescence shows, without filters, how fiction can expose the process of youth radicalisation.



Comparative Table: Causes of Psychological Imbalance in Young People (18–30 years)

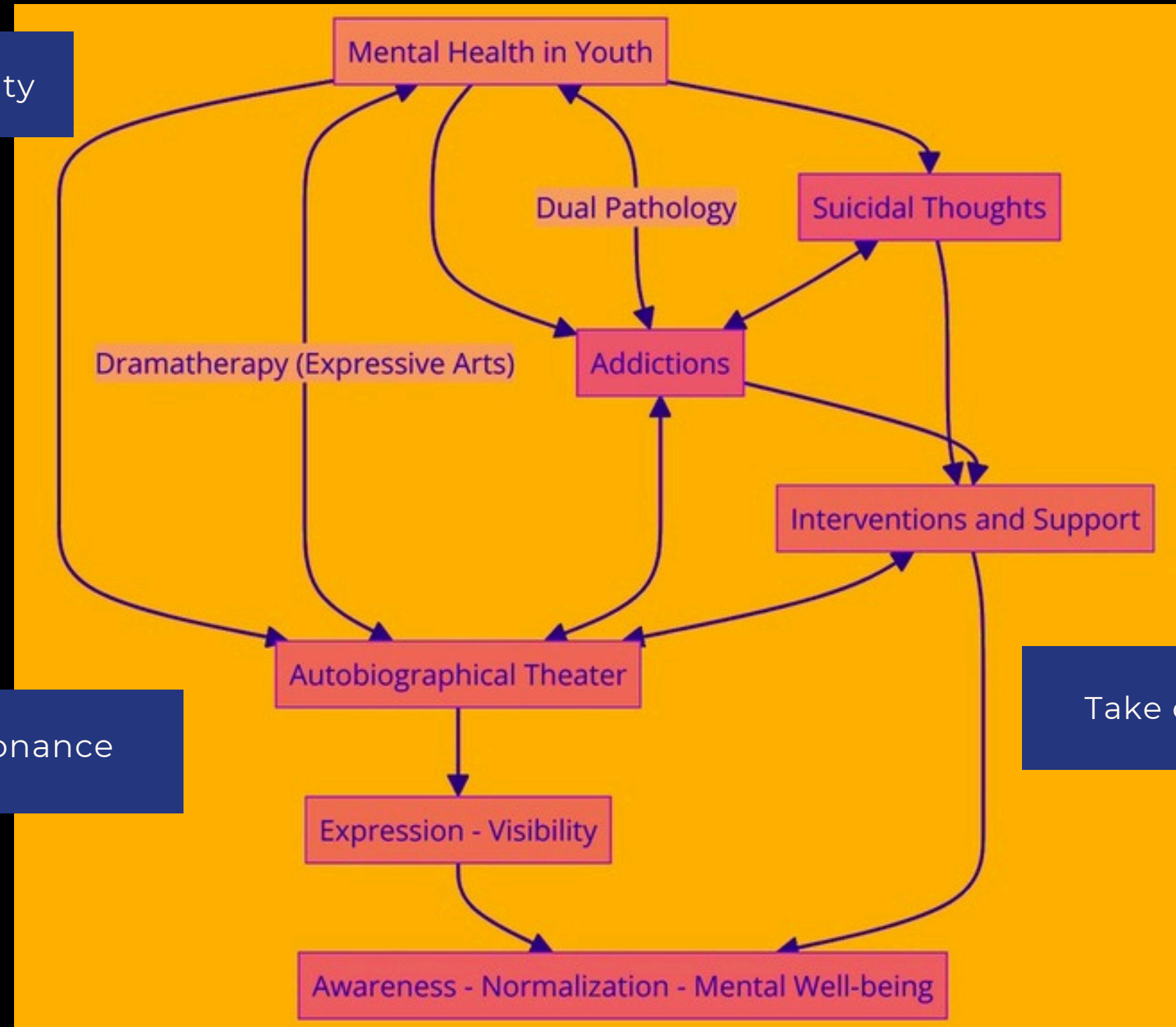
Cause of Psychological Imbalance	Source of Origin	Psychological Impact
Economic instability and precariousness	Environment (real life)	Anxiety, depression, chronic stress
Problematic substance use	Environment (real life)	Affective disorders, psychosis, dependence
Social isolation, emotional breakups, rejection	Environment (real life)	Sadness, anhedonia, emotional isolation
Exposure to extreme content on social media	Mobile (digital life)	Dysmorphia, social anxiety, FOMO

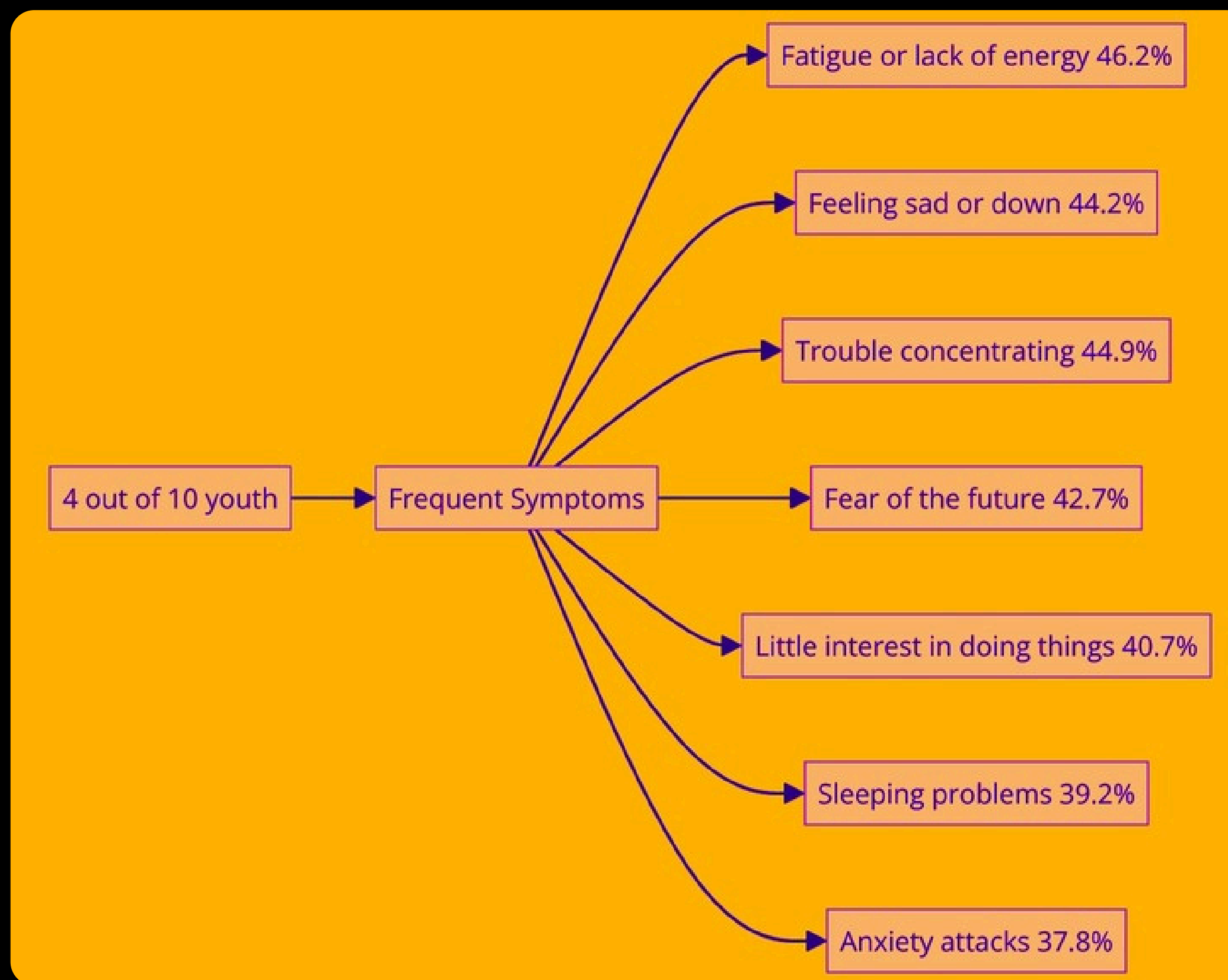
Cause of Psychological Imbalance	Source of Origin	Psychological Impact
Violence, abuse, harassment, and psychological trauma	Mobile / Environment (mixed)	PTSD, panic, agoraphobia, insecurity, introversion
Catastrophizing, anticipatory anxiety, eco-anxiety	Mind (internal life)	Rumination, anger, insomnia, adjustment disorders
Identity crisis and pressure to succeed	Mind / Mobile (mixed)	Low self-esteem, burnout, existential frustration
Discrimination and structural inequality	Environment (real life)	Depression, suicidal ideation, social anxiety

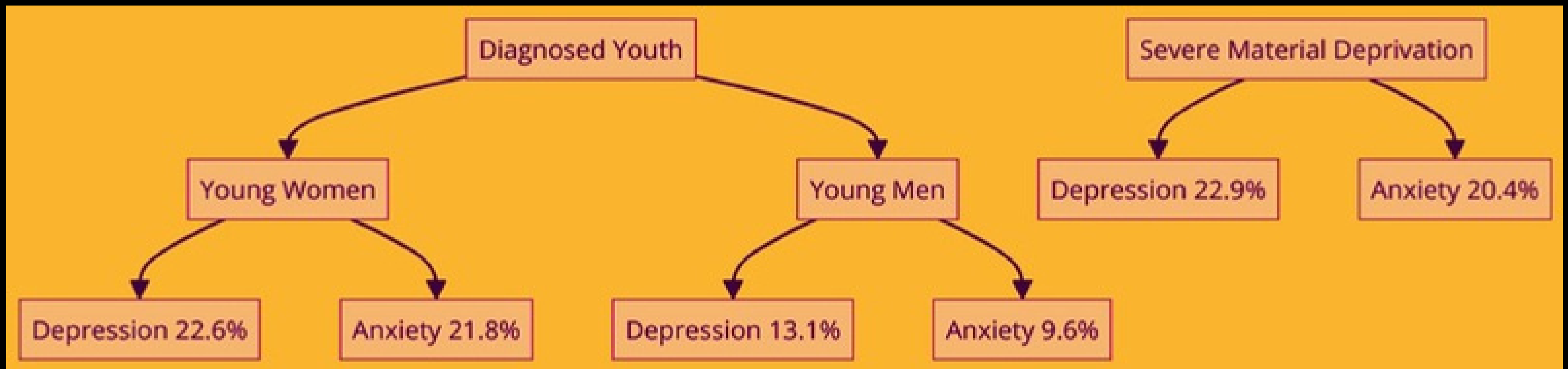
Fiction to deal with reality

Affective spur and limbic resonance

Take outside, explore and expose





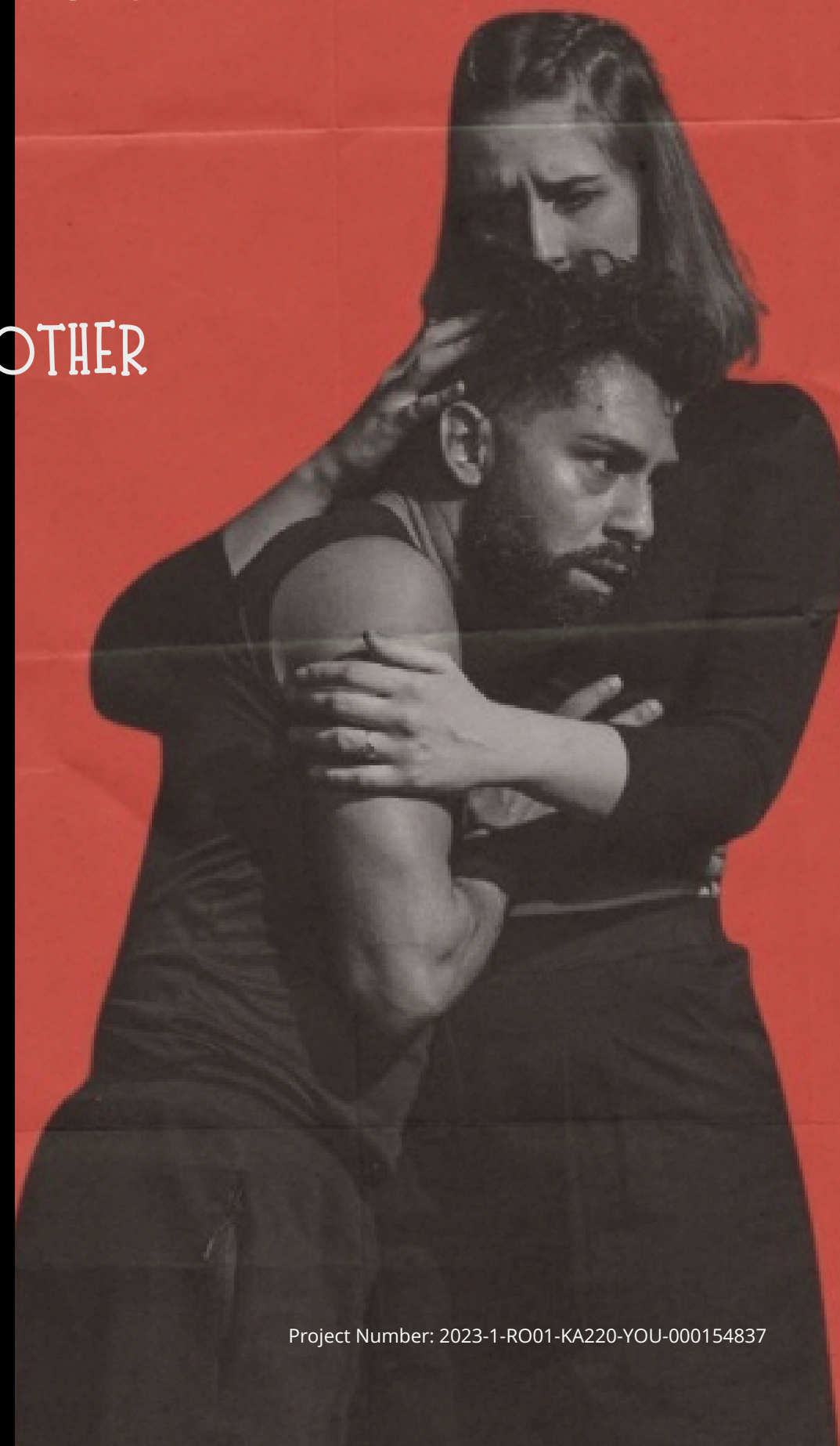




IF YOU FEEL SOMETHING'S NOT RIGHT,
ASK FOR HELP

MENTAL HEALTH IS JUST ANOTHER
KIND OF ILLNESS

Wisława Szymborska: Nothing Twice
Nothing happens twice, Nor will it
ever. For this reason, We were born
without proficiency, And will all die
without routine. Though we be the
most obtuse Pupils in the school of
this world, We will never be held back
to repeat A single winter or summer.
No day will be repeated; There is no
such thing as two similar nights, Two
identical kisses, Two equivalent gazes
into someone's eyes.



We might see everything in shades of grey—or pitch black—when facing a breaking point or a devastating illness, but we must fight not to lose ourselves down the boulevard of broken dreams. Life isn't measured in minutes, it's measured in moments, wrote Scott Fitzgerald, and that's all we really have —moments, good or bad. How we move through them depends on our inner strength. Cortázar captured it in Hopscotch: life is lived whether we like it or not. Sometimes, though, the shadows are too thick to face alone, and that's when we must reach out for help.



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Project Number: 2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000154837





Co-funded by
the European Union

JANUS PERFORMANCES



Spargerea Tăcerii

Directed by Erika Domokos

Six lives unveil the brutal truth of adolescence,
which isn't so happy. Anxiety, pressures, violence
Stories resonate and stir. What do you do with
what you keep silent?



Birthday Party

Directed by Laurențiu Blaga

A collective exploration of the birthday as
a rite of passage, weaving affective memory.
Embodied present, and future longings.



PERSONA

Choreographer by Melina Nicolaidou

A dance about turbulent female puberty.
Choreographing hormones, validations, loves, losses.
A glimpse into the chaos and beauty of growing up.



Shards of Light

Choreographer by Cristina Olar (Iușan)

A Bodily journal of fragility. Memory and
after trauma. Intimate dance, through shadow
, silence, and the stubborn pursuit of light.



Project Number: 2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000154837





Co-funded by
the European Union

Festival of Autobiographical Theatre and Youth Mental Health

University of Arts of Targu Mures | JANUS Project | SOLIS srls | Fundația Professional | SHIPCON

We organised a theatre festival focused on mental health and young people. All performances were autobiographical. We worked with real stories, created and performed by young people based on their own experiences.

In addition to the individual posters for each piece, we created a general poster for the festival and within the framework of the JANUS Project, carried out in collaboration with the University of Arts of Targu Mures and the consortium partners: SOLIS srls, Fundația Professional, and SHIPCON.

We also produced a printed handout for the audience, where we explained the project, why we did it, what we aimed to achieve, and why this kind of autofiction theatre matters in this context. We prepared an anonymous audience questionnaire with five scale questions (from 1 to 5 “not at all” to “completely”), and a blank space for writing, drawing, or expressing anything they wanted.

We set up a photocall and a post-performance debate space after each show. Additionally, we organised an open meeting with the media, artists, and consortium members in a café club format, held in the theatre foyer.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL THEATRE
JANUS FESTIVAL**
Inspired by the methodology of Domingo Ferrandis - SOLIS SRLS

Monday, June 2, 2025, 7:00 PM
Professional Foundation, Târgu-Mureș, Romania
Performance – Breaking the Silence
Directed by: Erika Domokos

Tuesday, June 3, 2025, 2:00 PM
Press Conference – Presentation of the Janus Project

Tuesday, June 3, 2025, 7:00 PM
National College of Arts, Târgu-Mureș, Romania
Guest Performance – Birthday Party
Coordinator: Prof. Laurențiu Blaga

Wednesday, June 4, 2025, 7:00 PM
ShipCon, Limassol, Cyprus
Performance – ???
Directed by: Patricia Jimeno Fernandes

Thursday, June 5, 2025, 7:00 PM
University of Arts, Târgu-Mureș, Romania
Performance – Shards of Light
Concept and Choreography – Cristina Iușan (Olar)

Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the ANPCDEFP. Neither the European Union nor the ANPCDEFP can be held responsible for them.
Project Number: 2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000154837

Photo: Cezar Buliga



Project Number: 2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000154837





PROGRAMME

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Concept and Choreography – Cristina Iuşan (Olar)

Studio Theatre

 **2-5 June 7 pm**
 **6 Köteles Sámuel street, Târgu-Mureş**
 **Free Entrance**



JANUS



Co-funded by
the European Union

**Fiction to Address Vulnerability
With the Possibility of Resilience**

ERASMUS PLUS
PROJECT NUMBER:2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000154837

TEAM

Festival coordinator: University of Arts
Project coordinator: Lia Codrina Conțiu

Technical Team of the University of Arts
Technical Director: Emil Mureşan
Light Technicians: Szász Endre, Kovács Attila
Sound Technicians: Strete Claudiu, Frunză Marius
Prop Technician: László József
Stagehand: Birta Ladislau.

**Creator and director of the
autobiographical theatre methodology:
Domingo Ferrandis Facilitator: Ana María
Solís both from SOLIS SRLS, Italy**



Autobiographical Theatre Festival

Directed by Domingo Ferrandis



ABOUT JANUS

JANUS is a European project that uses Autobiographical Theatre to make young people's mental health visible, to raise awareness and sensitize, to represent what is silent. Fiction as an emotional trigger. We offer voice and stage to young performers to create narratives and characters that give shape to the causes and consequences of psychological and emotional suffering. A creative experience that unites Romania, Cyprus and Italy through four partners committed to social and personal transformation.

PARTNERS JANUS

University of Arts (Coordinator, Târgu-Mureș, Romania)
Partners
Professional Foundation (Târgu-Mureș, Romania)
ShipCon Limassol Ltd. (Limassol, Cyprus)
SOLIS SRLS (Modena, Italy)



We are machinery of desires, constrained by a culture, by systems. You must integrate, be accepted, progress, triumph. And the self drifts away from its harmony. Identity fragments.

Autobiographical theatre as kintsugi art, makes the broken parts visible as a beauty of resilience.

Your fragilities, weaknesses, and needs are threatened, limited, contaminated by the needs of others, by what they project onto you, by the demands imposed on you. It pushes you towards self-exploitation and self-consumption, and a recurring self-unhappiness settles within you.

Self-narrative—what happens to you alongside what you imagine and project into the future—are particles of neuro-stories that shape the constellations of your mental health. Who you are, how you relate, and how you behave.

Personal, imaginative films, with catastrophic scenes and defeated or dramatic endings.

Young people, in autobiographical scenic co-creations inspired by their stories, expose what, through fiction, allows recognition of what mentally destabilizes you in an almost illogical way. And as a tribe, through live art, let's generate a limbic synchronization—you, me, all of us—to metabolize and speak without taboos, without prejudices or stereotypes about the suffering of consciousness.

What makes us feel bad? What pushes us to lock ourselves in a room, in our imagination? What turns us into stubborn, sad, irritable, and violent beings? Why do we end up contemplating suicide? Where do these destabilizers come from that destroy our psychic harmony?

Is it uncertainty, loneliness, mistreatment, economy, existential emptiness, social networks, rejection, failure, disillusionment, drug consumption, addictive behaviors, consumerist persuasion? All of them and none in particular?

Toxins that contaminate your neuronal broth with impurities from microtraumas and persistent desires. Heavy residues deposited in the unconscious.

Let's practice mental hygiene. Let's do theatre

Autobiographic THEATRE

WE ARE NOT MADE OF ATOMS, BUT OF PARTICLES OF STORIES

Theatre, like a kinetoscope, allows you to observe reality through the lens of fiction. Theatre as a palimpsest rewrites the past and what has happened to you, in order to build a new resilient narrative.

The Autobiographical Theatre Model is based on cast stories transformed into fiction and includes several stages: 1 Trust; 2 Stories; 3 Transcription; 4 Research; 5 Narration; 6 Aesthetics; 7 Theatre; 8 Colloquium; 9 Broadcast; 10 Dissemination

Autobiographical Theater: the identity stage



Autobiographical theatre is a microscope to observe the brain: how it sees and tells history, how it relates with others.





SPARGEREA TĂCERII



Spargerea Tăcerii (Breaking the Silence)

On stage, six characters unfold a history that has shaped their path, a history that could well be your own. Word by word, they dismantle the myth of happy adolescence, revealing what often remains hidden in silence: the paralysing anxiety, the brutal pressure to conform, feigning joy when everything crumbles within, the unnamed violence, the panic of others' judgment, wanting to be heard without anyone attempting to fix your life.

Each experience is deeply personal, yet it resonates in the voices of the others. Through intimate objects, everyday gestures, light, and shadow, the stage transforms into a safe space where what burns within can finally be articulated.

In the end, they look at you and ask: what will you do with what you keep silent?

This is testimonial theatre where the narrative does not seek to instruct, but rather to stir.

Cast

Directed by Erika Domokos

Marieta Ujica - Actor 1

Anisia Chivu - Actor 2

Alexandra Beianu - Actor 3

Maia Stefania Șoș - Actor 4

Sergiu Borz - Actor 5

Miruna Truță - Actor 6







What started as an experiment in the art of storytelling turned into an emotional and deeply creative experience for everyone involved. The play "Breaking the Silence" is the result of the lived stories of these six young people, later enriched with the particularities of theatre. Sharing personal stories in such a vulnerable way was something entirely new. In this phase, we used simple but effective activities to relax their minds and bodies. Exercises such as mindful breathing, group movement games, and even silent eye contact taught them to feel safe. Step by step, we observed how their initial hesitations began to fade. By the end of this stage, they were smiling, laughing and, most importantly, starting to trust in this Process and one another.



Watching them bring their stories to life on stage was an unforgettable experience, both for the participants and for us. We wanted the play to be as authentic as the participants themselves. Thanks to their contributions, we created an atmosphere that reflected the personal and authentic nature of their narratives.

Connecting with the audience is, for the participants, a validation of their stories, while audience members shared how deeply moved they were or how they felt at certain moments. The six young people from the Papiu Theater Club reminded everyone that stories have the power to inspire beyond any stage. They create sound waves, connecting people in ways we can't always predict. The spread and success among the audience are entirely thanks to these six young people, aged 16 and 17.

It is worth highlighting the prominent role of the artistic director Erika Domokos, an artist from the National Theatre, and the contribution of the Professional Foundation represented by Angela Cotoară, who organized this event.

By Angela Cotoara



BIRTHDAY PARTY

collective creation

Cast: Ilinca Bălcescu, Adrian Murariu, David Nichita, Alexandru Nicoară, Verona Obreja, Luca Suci, Raluca Troncotă.

Coordinator: prof. Laurențiu Blaga

Târgu-Mureș National Art College - Acting Department

BIRTHDAY PARTY is the result of a devised theatre laboratory developed during the period of February - May 2025 as part of the acting art classes with the participation of students of the XI class (Târgu-Mureș National Art College). Using elements of autobiographical theater, the students questioned the importance of the birthday in everyone's life through a nostalgic incursion into the past but living the present with a look into the future.







PERSONA

A dance piece about turbulent female puberty.

The Adolescent Transformation

a dance piece about turbulent female puberty. A choreography of changes, hormones, validations, loves, losses. A gaze into the chaos and beauty of growing up.

During puberty, your female body shifts without warning. While prey to hormones, you feel how they upheave every cell, producing surges of estrogen and progesterone, triggering a transformation: breasts develop (thelarche), pubic and underarm hair appears, hips widen, your first menstruation arrives (menarche). You either shoot up or remain hobbit-sized. All this unfolds with a brain still evolving.

Psychological and emotional shifts provoke irritability, sadness, or sudden euphoria. Body insecurity stalks the physical changes. One morning you wake euphoric; two hours later, tears fall because someone glanced at you wrong. Self-esteem sways wildly, and every comment feels definitive.

Some girls grapple with polycystic ovary syndrome: androgen excess, irregular periods, acne. Others face precocious or delayed puberty. Each of us wrestles with unpredictable mood swings on that emotional rollercoaster, neurotransmitters soaring and plummeting uncontrollably

Hypersexualization and overexposure on social media breed a brutal paradox: you're expected to show yourself, but if you do it "too much," you're condemned. Your body becomes "normative" or "hegemonic," embodying dominant cultural standards of beauty—often narrow and exclusionary. "Desirability" slips into "objectified body," making you a consumable object, especially for the male gaze. That damned song from girl to woman. Show yourself, and you get labeled; don't, and you vanish.

Amid the sexualized and decontextualized fragments of your identity lie first loves, jealousy, breakups, the loss of childhood friendships, the fear of exclusion... first disappointments, peer pressure. All while trying to get good grades, choose a career, sometimes even working for money just to "fit in." Experimentation unfolds: with alcohol, drugs, first nights away from home, and travels.



At home, your parents wrestle with their own chaos: divorces, money struggles, or simply not knowing what to do with you. Perhaps they never spoke about sexuality—shame or culture held their tongues. Rebellion emerges as survival, a way to say, “I’m beginning to be myself.” You change style every month, shift urban tribes, confront teachers and parents. You seek an authentic version while everyone expects the model daughter, perfect student, ideal friend.

Some develop eating disorders seeking control. Others fall into anxiety or depression. Many feel lost in a spiral. Moments of beauty and days you want to die.

Here, five dancers have forged something extraordinary: transforming that jumble of hormones, changes, and experiences into movement... into choreography that fiercely unleashes our nature.

For the girls in the audience, we hope it tears out truth. They understand their experiences matter, that their story deserves to be told, and what happens to them is genuine—and happens to all of us. For the boys, to feel a world they misunderstand. To understand that friend whose moods shift, that sister who cries, that girlfriend who is more than a whim. For adults, a reminder that female adolescence demands real respect and support. That behind every “teenage drama” lies an epic transformation.

We have all been that girl, lost between two worlds, trying to decipher who we are while the world dictates who we should be. Seeing it through dance, with rhythm and beauty, liberates those years where everything seemed life or death. Because it was.

CAST:

Choreography by Melina Nicolaidou

Marieleni Demosthenous

Paola Sawidou

Melina Ioannidou

Irene Leontiou





SHARDS OF LIGHT



Cast:

Bianca Baci, Constantin Bucătaru, Ștefania Burduș, Adriana Burlacu, Maria Constantin, Alexandru Cruceru, Irisz Kovacs, Timea Moga, Mihai Rădoi, Raisa Simionov, Bogdan Țenț, Ariana Vintilă, Polya Zubati

Concept and choreography – Cristina Iușan (Olar)
Project coordinator – Lia Codrina Conțiu
Video design – Paul Beică
Photo credit – Raul Blaga
Poster design – Alexandra Conțiu

Vlad Grecu Lighting
Szász Endre – Lighting Technician
Strete Claudiu – Sound Technician
László József Props Technician
Birta Ladislau – Stagehand



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Project number: 2023-1-RO01-KA220-YOU-000154837



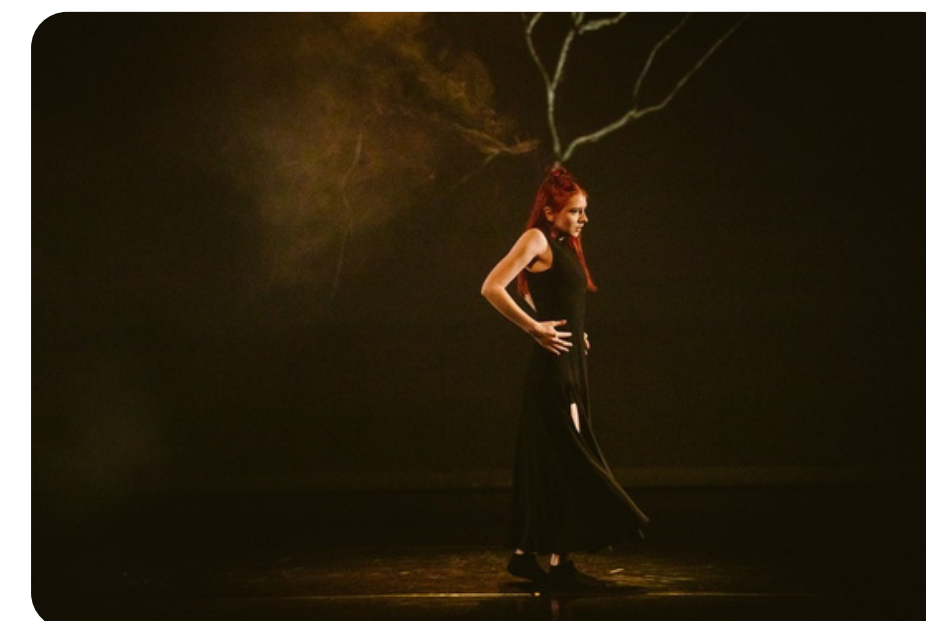
This is a piece about embracing vulnerability, about finding strength in fragility, and about the slow, determined act of rebuilding balance—even in life's darkest seasons. Multimedia elements are used throughout, deepening the emotional landscape and drawing the audience closer.

CAST:

Bianca Baci,
Constantin Bucătaru,
Ștefania Burduș,
Adriana Burlacu,
Maria Constantin,
Alexandru Cruceru,
Irisz Kovacs,
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The performance Shards of Light began with the nine steps of Autobiographical Theatre.

From the very beginning, our work was rooted in personal truth. Through a series of workshops, we created a safe space for vulnerability—where performers could step beyond the surface, listen to their inner voices, and let those voices shape movement. The process was not just about crafting a performance but about revealing what lies beneath: fragments of life, often unspoken, that needed form and release.

Improvisation became our language. With each session, we dove deeper—into the tension between the physical and the emotional, between presence and absence, silence and expression. We explored how the body carries memory, how gestures can become testimony, how breath can hold meaning when words are no longer enough.

Choreographic moments emerged gradually, born from individual experiences that we translated into movement. These pieces—intimate, raw, and sometimes fragile—were shaped and reshaped, like shards of glass reflecting different shades of the self. Slowly, they began to connect, like a mosaic of stories waiting to be told. This is a piece about embracing vulnerability, about finding strength in fragility, and about the slow, determined act of rebuilding balance—even in life's darkest seasons. Multimedia elements are used throughout, deepening the emotional landscape and drawing the audience closer.

Shards of Light is a performance that speaks through the body—through silence, breath, and movement. Built from deeply introspective moments, it unfolds as a living journal of an inner odyssey. Where words fall short, the body finds its voice.

The themes explored—loneliness, despair, confronting the self and the past—intertwine with memories of childhood, dissimulation, fear, and a restless search for meaning. We meet inner demons, painful silences, invisible fears, and emptiness that aches. We look for answers in the tremble of the body, in pauses, in the faltering rhythm of a heart learning to beat again.

Through therapy, memory, and the courage to face oneself, a fragile but meaningful return to the self becomes possible—a quiet, luminous journey back to light.

The 13 actor-performers take the stage to share a visceral struggle with absence, trauma, and anxiety—a collective confession about the power of vulnerability and the possibility of change. Above all, though, this is a performance about hope. About the courage it takes to look into a fractured mirror and say, “I’m still here.”

Shards of Light doesn’t offer clear-cut answers, but instead opens a space for reflection, empathy, and recognition. It invites the viewer to face their own shadows—and to know they are not alone.

Choreographer: Cristina Olar (Iușan)



Autobiographical Theatre: Why the Body as Protagonist?

We chose dance and physical theatre for autobiographical works on youth psychological challenges and to shape our narratives. Movement, gesture, and plasticity (the visual form of the scene) provide what words cannot. There are pains, fears, internal knots that verbal language swallows, which find no outlet.

"A world apart within the world"—the fractal foliage from which other autobiographical theatre productions emerge. We confirmed that the body, both in character creation and in composing the plot, relationships, and messages, was our best narrative thread. For individuals for whom speaking and memorising were difficult, we observed that choreographies and psychological actions were better internalised and closer to their world, imbuing the story with a physicality, naturalness, and truthful organisation that terrified and moved the audience simultaneously.



Exploration laboratories

Movement, dance, theatre

Training Phases and Application of Techniques

The JANUS methodology is structured in phases and was developed across several mobilities:

Phase 1: Forging the Embodied Tool in Directors

The initial mobilities served as residential retreats for the aspiring directors. Here, they experienced intensive physical training in their own bodies. The objective: to assimilate the methodology at a visceral level so that, subsequently, they could apply the initial phases of Autobiographical Theatre with their groups in their respective countries: Trust, Transcription, and Research.

During this phase, we applied the following practices to mould their expressive capacity:

Skinner Releasing Technique (SRT): For us, SRT is liberation through metaphor. We use guided imagery to release tensions and expand the expressive range. We explore how the body surrenders to weight and gravity, generating effortless movement. Through floor work and subtle contact, we seek radical authenticity, shedding physical and emotional blockages.

Slow Tempo (Shogo Ota): Slowness is a portal. We work with extremely decelerated movement to deepen internal perception and presence. We listen to the environment, our breath, and the subtle bodily weight, resisting inertia. This allows the internal reality to surface with unique intensity, revealing intimate layers of lived experience.

Contact Improvisation (Steve Paxton): This is kinesthetic conversation. From physical contact, we explore spontaneous movement, shared weight, and listening to our partner. Falls, recoveries, and constant fluidity from the centre of the body allow us to discover authentic responses in interaction, revealing relational dynamics on stage.

Viewpoints (Mary Overlie, Anne Bogart): These are the parameters of improvisation. We use these viewpoints of time (tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition) and space (shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, topography) as a vocabulary for composition. This enables directors to organise emotional chaos into clear and meaningful scenes, giving a visible skeleton to the invisible and fostering spontaneous creation.

Laban Movement and Eight Efforts (Rudolf Laban): With Laban, movement is energetic language. We break down action into its qualities of weight, time, space, and flow. Directors learn to "read" and "write" movement, using the Eight Efforts (punch, slash, dab, flick, press, wring, glide, float) to construct sequences that communicate intentions and emotions with astonishing clarity, imbuing each gesture with nuance.

Physical Actions (Michael Chekhov): We transform psychology into gesture. Starting from an internal quality or an archetype, directors embody complex emotional states. The body becomes a direct transmitter of the character's psychic universe, allowing emotional truth to manifest without exclusive reliance on words.

Physical Storytelling (Complicite, Frantic Assembly): This is narration through the body. We explore how story is built through physical action, ensemble work, and devising (collective creation). This influence allows us to generate dynamic images and expressive scenes where the body not only complements but sometimes replaces words, imbuing the narrative with cinematic theatricality and visceral emotional impact.

Phase 2: Narrative and Aesthetics – From Reality to Scenic Fiction

Subsequently, I rejoined facilitator Ana María Solís to participate in new residential retreats. This time, we were joined by the directors and participants who were already in the phase of translating reality into fiction – that is, Narrative and Aesthetics. Our role was to support the directors in this process of creating fictional pieces. Here, we began to introduce advanced fictional narratives, more specific acting techniques such as working with archetypes and character composition, choreographic development, and the construction of immersive atmospheres. All of this was combined with video art and objects to create scenic ensembles that were assembled, eliminated, polished, and added elements, thus refining the final performance.

The Aside: A Scenic Confidence

In our more textual and narrative theatre works, directors employed the aside as a fundamental pillar. It's as if the character is speaking to themselves, but in reality, they are sharing their most intimate thoughts with the audience, breaking the theatrical "fourth wall."

The character, addressing the proscenium, seeks to establish intimacy with the audience, like someone revealing a secret. Meanwhile, the other characters may remain frozen, out of focus, or continue with their routines, highlighting the exclusivity of this connection. This revelation of thoughts, laden with emotions, intentions, or judgments, allows the character to confess their story in relation to a past, a problem, or something they need to reveal but dare not tell the surrounding characters—be they parents, partners, or friends. It is the space to say: "I was abused," "I have disturbing thoughts," "I feel completely lost," or "I miss my past so much I cannot live in the present." This confession by the character to the audience makes them complicit in a secret, and one can almost hear, from the darkness of the stalls, voices urging them to speak, to ask for help, to find the courage to say, "this is happening to me."

Breaking the fourth wall in the context of psychological afflictions is, in fact, fundamental. In our performance "Silencio" (*Silence*), which addresses the psychological aftermath of gender-based violence through autobiographical theatre, this technique was revelatory. We made the audience an active part of the patriarchal abuse and violence: attendees came down to the stage and held the threads that formed a web where women were trapped. In the final act, the characters spoke and sang from the auditorium seats, and the audience, now alone on stage, listened directly, switching roles and feeling that the message was personal and inescapable.

In another of our works, "Culinary," the audience's experience was elevated to a multisensory plane by marrying theatre and cuisine. Attendees became a group of diners who literally devoured the stories. As they savoured each dish, the character confessed the intimate connection between the taste and their own lived experience of immigration, the pain of having to abandon their home.

Before each bite, diners were given a main ingredient to touch, smell, and taste. This act, evoking Proust's famous madeleine effect, made them participants in that umbilical cord linking food with childhood and roots. This is why every person far from their family always carries the flavours of home with them. By eating alongside the characters and directly learning the horror of war, violence, hunger, and the urgency of fleeing, immigration ceased to be distant news. It transformed into an act of confession and respect, a shared experience that transcended mere observation.

Research

I've Spent Thirty Years Studying the Brain—From the Stage, Not the Inside

I have spent thirty years studying the brain, not from within—its neurobiology or neural circuits—but through the corporeality of the stage and the living fiction. I see those neurons as subjective, intersubjective, and intrasubjective. During this time, I have worked with people from vastly different corners of the world—each with unique cosmovisions, cultures, religions, and understandings of existence—facing a broad array of circumstances, conflicts, and life stories. I have discovered that beyond what is inherited, taught, or proselytized, when you strip away the social layers, the substances that sustain well-being are profoundly ordinary. At its core, well-being comes down to avoiding suffering: no one longs for pain or the loss of a loved one. To thrive, a person needs to feel cared-for, loved, respected, useful—and to attain inner calm, a home, belonging, the capacity to release the past, and the ability to face uncertainty and the future.

You, me, anyone carries a past—sometimes tinged with nostalgia, at other times with pain; that burden weighs on the present, distorting what we experience, warping what's ahead, instilling fear of the future, coloring personalities with hues of hatred, fear, fragility. From this understanding, the methodology of autobiographical theatre was born.

I didn't wake up one morning and say, "I'm going to create a new theatrical methodology." No—methodologies arise from necessity. I had already worked with Jo Salas and Jonathan Fox's Playback Theatre, where the audience tells its story and actors—and a musician—honor it through improvisation. I also drew on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, the "spectator-witness" model, wherein the audience stops being passive and becomes an spectator: someone who can intervene, speak out, even perform. In our version, the protagonist does not address the audience directly—they tell a fiction inspired by someone's personal story. After the performance concludes, we open a discussion with the audience so that what moved them isn't carried away, but shared and processed.

It was through these experiences and observations that I realized the need to bring to the stage voices that are usually unheard or invisible—their urgent needs in communities where disappearances, murders, health and mental-health issues, incarcerated individuals with dual diagnoses, gender-based violence, LGBTI violence, and countless other unseen daily struggles affect vast populations: from multiculturalism to climate change and exploitation.

I was invited to direct *Pedro y el capitán*, Mario Benedetti's only play, at the Festival Diez Sentidos in Valencia. That edition was titled "Beasts", referring to the perverse creatures that dwell within us. The festival organizers also asked me to create a live-arts piece with the ÁMBIT NGO, which supports formerly incarcerated individuals facing mental-health challenges, dual pathology, homelessness, and other hardships. Together, we created *Un mundo aparte adentro del mundo*, a dystopian place lived within the city—hidden from the rest of society, yet painfully real. But no one wants to acknowledge it.

This project could not end there. With Erasmus funding, we replicated the experience in six countries with different groups—and the outcomes, both for participants and audiences, were revelatory. Together with Ana María Solís, we decided to keep expanding it. Now, the goal is to train professionals to create their own productions. The idea is to empower beyond me—to allow this methodology to become a rhizome spreading in all directions and occasions, so people can use this powerful theatrical resource.

I call it a *bidirectional method of dramatherapy and autobiographical theatre*, because dramatherapy—through expressive arts—links the early stages of autobiographical theatre (trust, personal history, narrative) and begins working with individuals or groups, before carrying it to the stage and society.

Why *Janus*? Its two-faced head symbolizes looking toward both past and future simultaneously. It represents thresholds, transitions, beginnings forged amid remembrance. That's why June bears its name. Janus also embodies the duality within you: the capacity to love and to hate, to caress and to destroy, to create life and to snatch it away—and, most terrifyingly, the capacity to hold both possibilities inside. And the most distressing truth is that you can inhabit those contradictions at the same time.

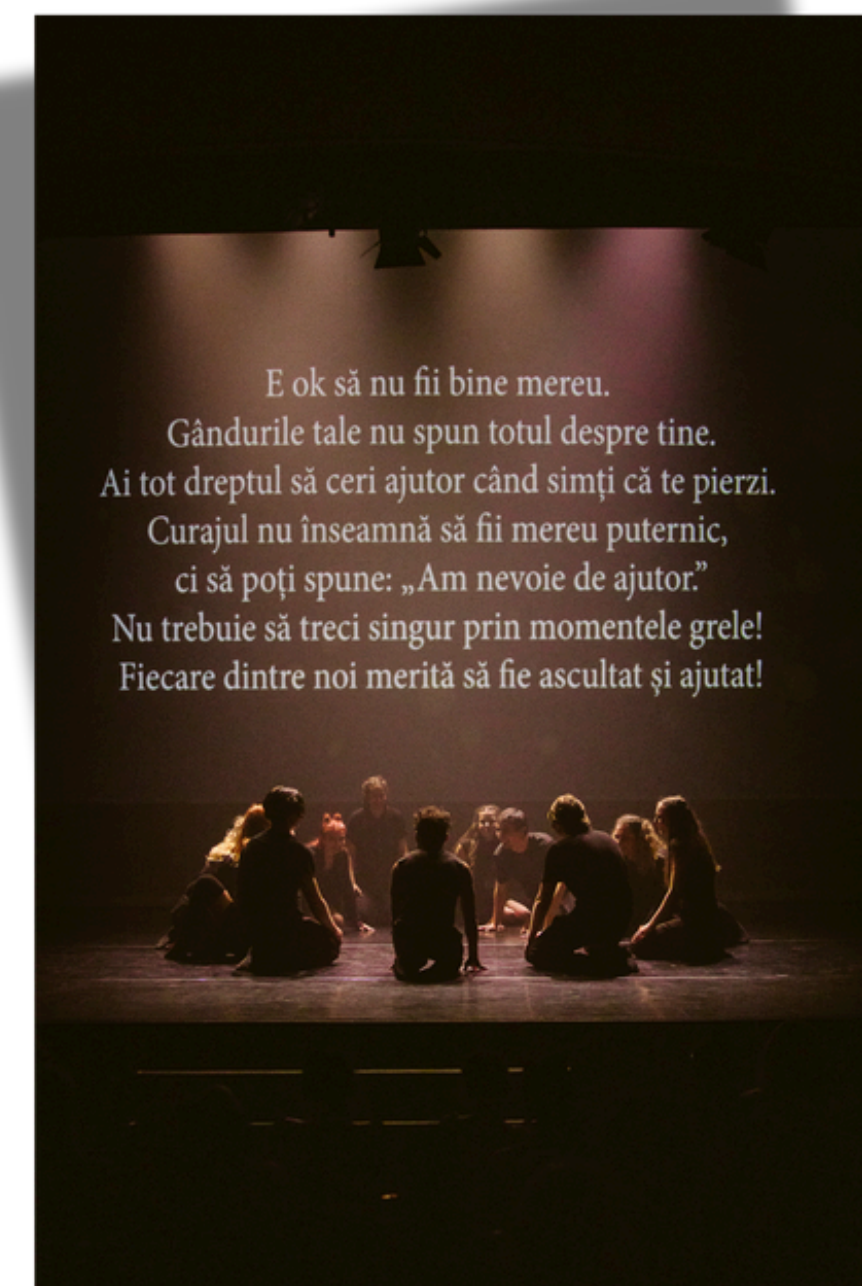
We live in turbulent times—climate change, wars, inequality spring from a common source: vanity, arrogance, folly. It's easier to notice it in others than in oneself. We see it in politicians who promote hatred, selfishness, privilege in a world where “the emperor’s nakedness remains unseen.”

The Greeks understood this. In Greece, birthplace of politics, medicine, philosophy, where myth became flesh in theatre to reveal Athenian psychology, two masks were used—comedy and tragedy—embodied in Democritus, who laughs at human folly and absurdity, mocking our perturbations, flaws, perversions; and Heraclitus, who weeps at the same idiocy, representing injustice, cruelty, and barbarism. Janus reflects that foolishness, that ineptitude that unleashes so many evils. Someone once said: “I prefer one intelligent villain over thousands of fools, because without fools he could never rule.” This is why theatre has always served as the people’s voice—unmasking ridiculous, distorted archetypes—and disarming them with grotesque sarcasm; shocking the collective unconscious, delivering limbic synchrony by unsettling circuits of misunderstanding, prejudice, stigma. To shake your beliefs—or even your identity. That is the value of this theatre: it’s why this conversation is indispensable.

In a world where live presence is being eclipsed by digital realms, theatre remains a sensitive space to address young people’s issues. Liquid modernity is pushing youth into a realm of leisure and consumption—producing insecure, anxious, violent, arrogant populations. This manifests as psychological imbalances, dysfunctions, and distress that, at extremes, can lead to abandonment, loneliness, suicidal thoughts, substance abuse, poor eating habits, and behavioral addictions. Their brains are boiling—neurochemical, neurohormonal volcanoes—under relentless bombardment: on the streets, amid uncertainty, inequality, lack of agency—and online, from algorithms and toxic practices. All this affects a brain addicted to novelty, that craves comfort and ease; a morbid, voyeuristic, gossipy, exhibitionist brain.

“In 2023, 46 percent of European youth reported feeling hopeless at least once a week (Eurofound, 2023, p. 12).”

This has a very dark side. It affects youth, society at large, and will impact globally in the future. We need young people to take the reins—to reveal all this on stage—and to tell present and future generations that it is vital to find ways to avoid becoming trapped in this web that makes us unwell.



Autobiographical Theatre: Neuroscience of the Scenic Self

Autobiographical theatre becomes a neurological laboratory where identity is dismantled and rebuilt. Buckner, Andrews-Hanna, and Schacter (2008) describe the Default Mode Network (DMN) as the brain structure that activates when we daydream, drift off, observe ourselves, or engage in inner dialogue. In this context, autobiographical theatre turns the DMN into the neural territory the actor uses to access and reconfigure memories in order to create the character.

"Reality is a social construction." — Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (1966)

Seeley et al. (2007) identified the salience network as the system that filters relevance and coordinates behavior. It acts as a switch between internal immersion (DMN) and external attention (executive network). When dysregulated, people get stuck in inner narratives or become obsessively hypervigilant. Based on this, an actor needs control over when to exit introspection or stop being captivated by what's happening around them. They must access the neural patterns linked to the character's biography. But above all, they must do so during the play.

What actors often say: *"I lost the character but managed to pull it back,"* or *"My mind wandered... we didn't connect..."* Common from the audience: *"I didn't believe the character, I was watching the actor,"* or *"There was a moment when the energy dropped, good thing they recovered it..."* Or the actor in silence has drifted, disconnected from the scene. All of that is your DMN kicking in—imagining what comes next, replaying a mistake from a minute ago, going blank... or a thousand other things.

That's where all the machinery we mentioned comes in: autobiographical memory, autonoetic consciousness, self-awareness, the DMN, the executive network, and the salience network as cognitive biases. This happens in seconds, which is why recovery is possible: elastic thinking, act fast, pivot, come back. And the best thing is always to return—to the character, the text, the subtext, the arc, the presence.

It's often said, metaphorically, that a good actor stays in the dressing room and gives the stage over to the character. In fiction, the actor should disappear. But that's not real. The actor is always there, and their psychological control is essential to mastering the character. When real stories are transformed into new fictional plots built from the cast's lived narratives, aesthetic distance becomes profoundly liberating: authentic characters with their own lives and situations—not an actor "playing themselves," but a character embodying parts of them, inhabiting experiences without the audience sensing they belong to the actor.

Menon (2011) shows that mental disorders arise when brain networks fail to coordinate. In theatre, this translates to characters embodying these disconnections: people trapped in obsessive internal films, or individuals with alarm systems destabilized by trauma, stuck in a permanent state of alert. Van der Kolk (2014) argues that the body stores traumatic memory and that unprocessed experiences remain lodged as fragmented bodily sensations. In this light, autobiographical performance offers a space where that somatic memory can be expressed and restructured through action, turning the stage into a transitional space to re-rehearse the past from a different place—and shift the role of victim or affected person into that of author.

In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson showed that metaphors are not decorative language. They're conceptual mappings: the brain connects domains of experience to make sense of the world. When you say time "passes," you're mapping time onto spatial movement. You use embodied physical knowledge to understand abstract things—work, emotions, ideas. This dismantles the old division between body and thought. For Lakoff, even the most abstract reasoning is rooted in the sensorimotor system and emotion. Thought doesn't float in a vacuum: we think with the whole body.

Later, Damasio added that the body archives experiences as somatic markers. Feelings produced by emotions and bodily states "mark" behaviors as favorable or unfavorable. These markers act unconsciously, steering decisions toward certain options. Emotion doesn't interfere with reason—it directs it.



If metaphors are conceptual mappings between domains of experience, then in theatre anything can be used. Abstract dance, dreamlike scenes, impossible objects—everything works, because the audience automatically maps what they see onto their own embodied experience. An actor moving slowly can evoke sadness. An empty space can evoke isolation. Floating characters can evoke detachment.

You don't need to be literal, because metaphor is the natural language of embodied thought. That's why the fantastic and the absurd communicate so directly: they activate the same mappings we use to understand daily life.

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Chapter: Conceptual Foundations of JANUS

The Proposal of the Philosophy of Performance

The Philosophy of Performance redefines the relationship between philosophy and art. Previously, philosophy imposed itself on art; a philosopher with a theory about human suffering would use an artwork to support their idea: "*See? My thesis is true—this piece proves it.*" Likewise, some artists turned to philosophy to add intellectual or critical gravitas to their work.

Now, the Philosophy of Performance argues that art—including performance—can generate its own philosophy and original thought. Performance itself becomes a mode of thinking and a form of knowledge (Cull Ó Maoilearca & Lagaay, 2020). In this way, *kintsugi*—the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold—operates within JANUS as a philosophy emerging from the performance itself, revealing the beauty of resilience. The construction of the self through autobiographical narrative—via *neuro-stories* and *mental health constellations* imagined through fiction—constitutes the central cognitive process of the project. Theatre thus produces an understanding of psychological imbalance without relying on pre-established psychological concepts.

At its core, performance art generates its own philosophy of existence.

The Body as a Dynamic and Experiential Archive

The body is a repository of stories, an archive written through every gesture and lived experience. Erin Manning, in *The Minor Gesture* (2016), introduces the concept of the "body archive," challenging static representation by emphasizing constant becoming. André Lepecki, in *Singularities* (2016), presents the idea of "de-archiving"—a practice exemplified by choreography, where the body is mobilized to prevent the past from becoming museum-like. William Forsythe's ongoing project *Choreographic Objects* (2015–) embodies this concept, offering interaction with movement as an active form of de-archiving.

The body is a living cartography, always in motion.

In our theatrical exploration, the fictional characters' bodies become analogues of this dynamic and continuously de-archived archive, allowing the narrative to visualize the forces that destabilize young people's emotional equilibrium.

The body, as a moving archive, defies any fixation of the past.

Toxicographies: The Physiological Trace of Lived Experience

Toxicographies explore the writing of the body through fluids and biochemical substances, treating them as bearers of emotion, information, and vital testimony. This approach directly informs JANUS. L. Cull Ó Maoilearca's research on sweat in Romeo Castellucci's performances demonstrates how bodily fluids inscribe experience. A study from the Max Planck Institute (2021) correlating salivary cortisol levels with stage-induced stress confirms the physiological trace of performance.

In JANUS, the bodies and movements of fictional characters become the canvas upon which these *toxicographies* of psychological vulnerability are written and read, allowing fantasy to transmit visceral truth to the audience. The physical intensity of performance—whether through tension, sweat, abrupt or fluid movement, slow or frantic pacing—materializes narrative. Every imagined droplet of sweat, every fictive muscle contraction, tells a story. The audience, in witnessing these bodies, perceives how plot, emotion, and peril are imprinted on them, activating a living archive that never settles.

Bodily fluids expose an intrinsic script of experience and emotion.

Identity and Vulnerability in the Socioeconomic Context

The city, with its labyrinth of boulevards and buildings, appears as a palimpsest of lives. Mariano Pensotti's *The Circular Ruins* (2018), reviewed in *Performance Research* (2019), weaves four narratives through urban space. The self mutates into a narrative device drifting across the metropolis, absorbing its imprint, merging the personal with the urban collective. This concept—space as a network of narratives shaping identity through interaction—translates directly into JANUS.

The fictional characters in our project inhabit a scenographic space analogous to the urban landscapes of existence. Their individual experiences—the *neuro-stories* that shape their *mental health constellations*—resonate with the shared sensibilities of youth across a borderless Europe. Theatre becomes the territory where fiction threads these lives together, raising awareness of how personal experience inscribes itself within a collective map.

Capitalism, a factory of subjectivity, sculpts our identities. Maurizio Lazzarato, in *Signs and Machines* (2014), theorizes *desubjectivation*, the process by which modes of being and feeling are engineered. This critical framework illuminates how economic and social structures shape the psyche. Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014), dissects *economies of disgust*, showing how the “repugnant” acts as a social regulator—marking boundaries, reinforcing exclusion. Travis Alabanza, in *Jubilee* (2022), reviewed in *The Guardian* (March 25, 2022), uses bodily fluids to challenge these norms, confronting gender conventions and pushing back against ingrained notions of what is acceptable or prohibited.

This critical perspective reveals how external structures mold the emotional equilibrium of youth. In JANUS, the fictional characters’ bodies, through their *neuro-stories* and performances, offer a response to these *economies of disgust* and processes of *desubjectivation*. The performance becomes an act of resistance, confronting how external pressures dismantle identity. JANUS’s fiction rises as a barrier against the revulsion young people experience in digital life—a place to shake off the debris flung by consumerist capitalism that traps them in desire, distraction, and consumption. Through fantasy, it forges renewed integrity.

The urban grid and the economic system shape a vulnerable self, whose repulsion is challenged by fiction.

Narratives and the “Tuning Work” of the Self

Sometimes, other people’s stories merge with our own and help heal past wounds. Lauren Berlant, in *Cruel Optimism* (2011), speaks of *mnemonic hijacking*—the appropriation of others’ narratives to renegotiate trauma. This is an act of resilience: rebuilding oneself through shared fragments. Antoine Hennion, in *The Passion for Music* (2015), theorizes the *infrastructure of the self* as a process of subtle, continuous *tuning work* needed to sustain identity. Passions and practices carve personality through steady, deliberate effort.

These ideas illuminate JANUS’s referential nature in reconstructing the self. Berlant’s framework shows how the fictional characters’ narratives in JANUS can serve as pathways to process the invisible afflictions of youth. Likewise, Hennion’s *tuning work* echoes through JANUS’s performance—an ongoing act where autobiographical material and *neuro-stories* are shaped and reshaped, foregrounding the struggle for psychic balance in a world that fragments it.

Foreign narratives and sustained effort reshape identity in the face of trauma.



Autobiography and Authenticity in the Digital Age

Memory, the body, and identity form fertile ground for experimental inquiry. One remarkable example is the *Pseudo-Spaldings* project from the ETH Zürich Digital Humanities Lab (2020–2024). Spalding Gray, an acclaimed American actor and monologist, was known for brutally honest autobiographical performances, especially about his mother’s mental illness and suicide. The project aimed to generate “ghost monologues” that imitated his confessional style and mental exploration, probing the boundaries of authorship and narrative authenticity. These artistic and technological experiments invite reflection on identity and creation in the digital era.

This connects directly with the heart of JANUS. Our *autobiographical theatre*, like Gray’s monologues, uses personal experience (fictionalized) as a portal to explore youth mental health vulnerability. By building *neuro-stories* through fictional characters, JANUS engages precisely with those same limits of authorship and narrative authenticity investigated in *Pseudo-Spaldings*. The performance becomes a space where the youth’s *ghost autobiographies* surface—offering insight into how the psyche is constructed and strained in today’s context.

Fiction inspired by the autobiographical explores the authenticity of the self in the digital age.

Spiral Brain Waves: The Invisible Synchrony Between Fiction and the Audience

Up to this point, we have explored how acting shapes social cognition and individual brain responses. However, the true magic of theatre lies in live connection—where emotional and cognitive states are transmitted and resonate in real time. This is precisely where recent research on spiral brain waves, such as the study by Keen, Breakspear, and Shine (2023) published in *Nature Human Behaviour*, opens an exciting new window into understanding the theatrical experience.

What are these spiral waves, and why are they crucial for theatre?

Imagine a stone dropped into water—but instead of linear ripples radiating outward, envision waves spiraling across the cerebral cortex, organizing thought and communication across vast neural territories. This study reveals that these waves are not random phenomena but structured patterns that emerge naturally, both at rest and during cognitive tasks.

They act as organizing scaffolds for the flow of information, enabling billions of neurons in distant brain regions to “speak” to one another efficiently—like temporary bridges connecting neural islands. Their persistence and alignment with areas of high information exchange underscore their essential role. Their formation depends on the interplay of neurotransmitters such as glutamate—responsible for synaptic excitation—and GABA—responsible for neuronal inhibition—alongside neuromodulators like dopamine—motivational reward—and acetylcholine—cognitive attention—which together orchestrate the brain’s *oscillatory dynamics*—the neural synchronization that generates these spiraling waves.

Relevance to the Live Theatrical Experience

This discovery has profound implications for understanding theatre’s impact. Picture the stage: characters who suffer, love, rage, sweat... These are real-time psychoaffective catalysts.

Spiral waves, by structuring brain communication, may play a key role in *limbic and neuronal synchrony* among audience members. When an actor embodies intense and authentic emotions, the audience cognitively understands the emotion—*cognitive empathy*—and often feels it viscerally—*emotional empathy*. Spiral waves may serve as the underlying mechanism that enables emotional brain regions in different people to align, forging a shared experience. This *brain-to-brain synchrony* could explain the contagiousness of laughter or sobbing in live theatre—and the vast difference from watching a film alone at home.

This *interbrain dynamic* and the collective experience of live fiction are most evident in interaction. The actor’s mind—immersed in the character but grounded in reality—communicates with the minds of the audience, with embodied fiction as the medium. Spiral waves may act as conduits through which the actor’s neural organization, while simulating the character’s emotional and cognitive states, generates oscillatory patterns that resonate in the audience. The fictional character, through the actor’s physical presence and voice, becomes a transmitter—translating the actor’s simulated neural processes into a mental experience that is both perceived and felt by the spectators.

The rhythmic oscillation of neurotransmitters in the actor’s brain, which generates these spirals, may trigger a *spiral resonance*—a harmonization of waves in the audience—despite their conscious awareness that it is all fiction. Herein lies the power of “*as if it were real*”, operating at the most elemental architecture of brain activity.



JANUS

Autobiographical Theatre



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