

THE ACTOR BETWEEN ART AND RESILIENCE: PRACTICES OF SELF-MANAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

GEORGE LEPĂDATU



“Acting up” Cultural Association, Romania
I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film, Bucharest, Romania
george.lepadatu25@yahoo.com

Abstract: This article examines theatre as a means of personal development and artistic resilience, focusing on the transformation of the acting profession in post-1989 Romania. Drawing on cultural sociology, performance studies and psychology, it analyses the actor's evolution from institutional dependency to professional autonomy within a fragile cultural ecosystem.

Two case studies – *BRAINSTORM* (2020) and *WOUNDED – The contrast between generations* (2023) – serve as applied models of artistic research and participatory pedagogy, combining creative practice with social reflection. Through self-management, emotional intelligence and applied theatre methods, actors emerge as cultural mediators, transforming vulnerability into creative resource and fostering intergenerational dialogue.

Methodologically, the study employs art-based and practice-led research, positioning artistic creation as both a cognitive and educational process. The findings show that self-management in theatre extends beyond career planning to encompass emotional regulation, ethical agency and community engagement. Ultimately, the article argues that contemporary Romanian theatre functions as a space of reflexive formation, where artistic and civic roles converge, shaping a sustainable model of creative autonomy and social responsibility.

Keywords: theatre, actor, self-management, artistic resilience, Applied theatre, cultural management, interdisciplinary pedagogy, post-1989 Romanian theatre, autonomy, performance studies.

How to cite: Lepădatu, G. (2025) "The Actor Between Art and Resilience: Practices of Self-Management in Contemporary Theatre", *Concept* 2(31), pp. 314-329. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37130/z0epv898>

I. Introduction

Theatre represents one of the most complex forms of human expression, integrating aesthetic, cognitive and emotional dimensions into a process of collective communication and reflection. In the contemporary era, marked by uncertainty and accelerated change, this art form extends its functions beyond the limits of performance, becoming an instrument for **personal development and artistic resilience**. The actor, situated at the intersection of art and society, is no longer merely the interpreter of a stage role but also the **manager of their own career**, a professional who takes responsibility for their creative and existential trajectory.

Traditionally grounded in the idea of vocation, the actor's profession is now undergoing a profound process of **identity redefinition**. As Pierre-Michel Menger notes, "the modern artist lives within an economy of uncertainty, where talent must be accompanied by the ability to adapt and reinvent oneself continually" (Menger, 2014, p. 18). This observation is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary Romanian theatre, where actors face a fragmented

labour market, a lack of coherent cultural legislation and economic precarity. In this environment, developing **self-management competencies** has become a professional strategy—and ultimately, a condition of artistic survival.

The social and economic transformations following 1989 have generated a new **theatrical ecosystem** in Romania, characterised by the emergence of independent structures and the diversification of performative languages. As Iulia Popovici observes, independent theatre emerged “from the need for aesthetic freedom, but also as a reaction to institutional rigidity and the absence of coherent cultural policies” (Popovici, 2016, p. 27). This context required new professional competencies for actors: career planning, resource management, the creation of collaborative networks and the ability to adapt to diverse production environments.

From a historical perspective, the evolution of the acting profession in Romania reflects a constant tension between artistic freedom and institutional control. Alina Rece points out that as early as the nineteenth century, Romanian theatre developed “within a political and educational context in which the performing arts were perceived as instruments of national modernisation” (Rece, 2014, p. 52). This dual mission—both aesthetic and social—has shaped the actor’s identity as an intellectual and a cultural mediator.

Analysing the communist period, Miruna Runcan emphasises that “the Romanian actor was simultaneously a creator and an executor, oscillating between freedom of expression and ideological constraint” (Runcan, 2006, p. 103). After 1989, this tension evolved into another form of precarity: economic insecurity. The transition from a subsidised system to a competitive one introduced a new professional paradigm—the **autonomous actor**, capable of independently managing relationships with institutions, audiences and funding bodies.

In this context, the concept of **artistic self-management** provides a relevant interpretive framework. Derived from motivational psychology (Deci and Ryan, 2017), self-management implies the individual’s capacity to set goals, evaluate performance and adapt behaviour to environmental demands. For actors, these competencies translate into **career planning, emotional self-regulation and continuous professional development**. Daniel Goleman asserts that “emotional intelligence, more than raw talent, determines success in creative professions” (Goleman, 2009, p. 76). An actor who manages emotions and cultivates empathy is better equipped to respond to the challenges of contemporary performance.

Beyond its psychological dimension, self-management also contains a pedagogical component: the actor becomes their own instructor. In the spirit of Stanislavski, “the true art of the actor begins when they learn to know themselves”

(Stanislavski, 2018, p. 45). This process of self-knowledge and inner discipline forms the foundation of **artistic resilience**—the capacity to transform vulnerability into a creative resource.

The concept of **artistic resilience** thus becomes central to the contemporary analysis of the acting profession. George Banu remarks that “fragility is not a weakness, but a condition of living presence,” and that theatre is “the place where vulnerability becomes expression” (Banu, 2011, p. 63). The resilient actor is therefore not immune to difficulty but one who integrates it into their creative process, transforming adversity into meaning and communication.

In the same vein, Miruna Runcan interprets post-1989 Romanian theatre as “a space for redefining the relationship between artist and society,” where the stage becomes a platform for interrogating identity and collective values (Runcan, 2019, p. 72). This shift marks a new aesthetic paradigm in which theatre ceases to be merely representational and becomes a form of knowledge.

In practice, these ideas materialise in contemporary cultural projects that explore theatre as a means of learning and healing. The projects “*BRAINSTORM*” (2020) and “*WOUNDED*—The contrast between generations” (2023), both funded by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN), exemplify the application of self-management and artistic resilience principles. *BRAINSTORM* employed theatre as a medium for reflecting on stress and performative pressure through a participatory educational process, while *WOUNDED* explored transgenerational trauma using interdisciplinary methodologies, highlighting theatre’s function as a space for **emotional and community reconstruction**. These examples demonstrate that contemporary theatre functions simultaneously as an **artistic laboratory, pedagogical framework and therapeutic environment**. In a society defined by acceleration and instability, the stage becomes a site of symbolic resistance, where artists and audiences engage in a shared process of reflection and transformation.

Consequently, the central theme of this study—theatre as an instrument for personal development and artistic resilience—surpasses purely aesthetic concerns, proposing an **interdisciplinary reading** of the theatrical phenomenon. Within this framework, the contemporary actor is not merely the subject of artistic pedagogy but also the object of systemic analysis that integrates concepts from **cultural management, performance psychology and the sociology of art**.

As Dragan Klaić observes, “theatre remains one of the few institutions that simultaneously reflects a community’s memory, present and future” (Klaić, 1997, p. 9). Understanding the actor’s role in contemporary society therefore requires a holistic perspective on the functions of theatre—**aesthetic, educational, therapeutic and civic**.

Accordingly, this article aims to investigate how **self-management** and **participatory cultural management** can support the actor's personal and professional development, offering a sustainable model of artistic practice within a precarious socio-economic context. Two major directions will be followed:

1. the conceptual and historical delineation of the acting profession in relation to post-1989 transformations of Romanian theatre; and
2. the applied analysis of artistic resilience and self-management models through the lens of the *BRAINSTORM* and *WOUNDED* cultural projects.

This approach—correlating theory with artistic practice—seeks to demonstrate that the contemporary actor is not merely the product of formal education but the result of a **complex process of professional formation** in which art, reflection and management converge toward a common ideal: **creative autonomy and the social relevance of theatre**.

II. Theoretical foundations of self-management and artistic resilience

II.1 Theatre as a socio-cultural and professional system

As a social practice and collective form of expression, theatre constantly reflects the cultural and political structures of the time in which it develops. The evolution of Romanian theatre over the past decades illustrates the shift from a centralised model—dominated by state ideology—to a pluricentric configuration defined by aesthetic diversity and professional autonomy. As Miruna Runcan observes, “the transition from institutional to independent theatre produced not only a systemic transformation but also a shift in the artistic mindset—a reorientation of theatre’s purpose from representation to reflection” (Runcan, 2019, p. 74).

During the communist period, theatre was tightly regulated by the ideological and administrative mechanisms of the state, and its artistic function was often subordinated to propagandistic purposes. Florentin Olteanu notes that “the private and professional lives of artists were inseparable, and political control extended into the intimate sphere of creation” (Olteanu, 2009, p. 57). The actor was thus perceived less as an autonomous creative agent and more as an instrument of official discourse.

After 1989, institutional liberalisation and the emergence of a market economy radically altered the structure of theatrical production. Vladimir Pasti describes this transition as the passage “from a paternalist system to a precarious capitalism, in which the individual becomes responsible for their own professional survival” (Pasti, 2006, p. 89). Within this context, artists were compelled to develop adaptive and self-management skills, giving rise to a new professional paradigm—the actor-manager. Theodor-Cristian Popescu argues

that the pioneers of Romania's independent theatre movement in the 1990s and early 2000s were "artists who turned the lack of resources into opportunity, using managerial improvisation as a form of cultural survival" (Popescu, 2016, p. 44). This observation underlines the direct link between socio-economic context and the emergence of self-management competencies. At the same time, the legislative framework of Romanian theatre—although rich in historical precedent—remains fragmented and poorly adapted to contemporary realities. Carmen Croitoru demonstrates that "the laws governing theatre have always been reactive, responding to immediate circumstances without offering a coherent vision of the artist's professional status" (Croitoru, 2017, p. 31). This institutional incoherence has reinforced the need for professional autonomy, transforming self-organisation skills into a key factor in career development. Consequently, post-1989 Romanian theatre can be interpreted as an adaptive ecosystem, in which artists, confronted with structural instability, have generated new forms of production and collaboration. These practices have led to a form of reflexive professionalisation, where artistic creation becomes inseparable from management and cultural education.

II.2 The self-management of contemporary actors

In the current context of the performing arts, the notion of self-management refers to the set of processes through which the actor plans, organises and controls their professional trajectory within an environment defined by instability and competition. This competence combines cognitive, emotional and pragmatic dimensions.

According to the Self-Determination Theory developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, sustainable performance is supported by three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2017). In the absence of these, the actor's motivation erodes, and artistic performance becomes mechanical. Applied to theatre, this theory reveals the importance of cultivating intrinsic motivation—one directed towards meaning and personal growth rather than external success. Daniel Goleman complements this perspective by arguing that emotional intelligence forms the foundation of all forms of self-management: "knowing one's emotions and being able to manage them is the first step in controlling professional behaviour" (Goleman, 2009, p. 81). The contemporary actor, faced with constant pressure from performance demands and professional precarity, requires emotional discipline to balance artistic and pragmatic dimensions.

Pierre-Michel Menger interprets modern artistic professions through the lens of the economy of uncertainty, in which success is uneven and unpredictable,

and symbolic capital becomes as important as material income (Menger, 2014, p. 25). In this context, actors cannot depend solely on institutional structures; they must develop their ability for self-projection and negotiate their own visibility.

From an anthropological perspective, George Banu emphasises the reflexive dimension of the acting profession: “the actor is not merely an executor but an observer of their own being within the creative process” (Banu, 2011, p. 54). This continuous exercise of self-reflection is essential for career regulation and the consolidation of professional identity.

In contemporary Romanian theatre, self-management manifests in diverse forms—from the creation of independent companies and interdisciplinary projects to pedagogical and mentorship activities. Iulia Popovici notes that “independence is no longer an aesthetic option but a mode of organising professional life” (Popovici, 2016, p. 92). Thus, the actor-manager emerges as a cultural operator, capable of combining artistic vision with managerial efficiency. Historically, Miruna Runcan highlights that Romanian actors have always been forced to adapt to successive systems of constraint, becoming professionals of “silent resistance” (Runcan, 2006, p. 111). This capacity for adaptation has evolved into a strategic competence, formalised today through the concept of self-management.

II.3 Artistic resilience and professional adaptability

Originating in psychology, the concept of resilience refers to an individual’s ability to cope with adversity and rebuild after traumatic experiences. In the artistic context, the term acquires aesthetic and professional significance, describing the process through which the artist transforms vulnerability into creative resource.

George Banu considers that “the actor’s resilience is born from exposure—by embracing fragility, they transform it into performative communication” (Banu, 2011, p. 69). Similarly, Bessel van der Kolk argues that artistic activities based on bodily expression can restore a sense of coherence and heal trauma through symbolic action (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 302).

In Romanian theatre, artistic resilience has often emerged as a response to ideological or economic constraints. In *Teatrul în Diorame*, Miruna Runcan analyses how “theatrical criticism and stage practice during communism became subtle forms of negotiating freedom” (Runcan, 2019, p. 88). After 1989, this adaptive logic transformed into a structural resilience through which artists managed to preserve the vitality of the stage despite material precarity.

Independent projects such as *BRAINSTORM* and *WOUNDED* can be interpreted as contemporary expressions of this resilience. They demonstrate theatre’s ability to integrate therapeutic and educational dimensions without

losing aesthetic rigour. In *BRAINSTORM*, the collective working process enabled young actors to develop self-awareness and cooperation skills, while *WOUNDED* provided a framework for exploring social trauma through performative means.

The outcome of these practices is the emergence of a new generation of artist-managers, capable of taking responsibility for their own formation and functioning within a hybrid system—artistic, educational and social. Dragan Klaic synthesises this evolution by affirming that “the future of European theatre depends on artists’ ability to combine aesthetic freedom with community responsibility” (Klaic, 1997, p. 12).

Therefore, artistic resilience should not be understood merely as a reaction to crisis but as an active strategy of reinvention. It requires the development of reflexive thinking, emotional autonomy and integrated managerial competence. Within this framework, self-management and resilience become two facets of the same reality: the actor’s creative adaptation to the complexity of the contemporary world.

III. Historical framework and transformations of the acting profession in post-1989 Romania

III.1 Post-1989 cultural transition: from control to autonomy

The post-communist period represented for Romanian theatre a moment of structural rupture but also of profound re-evaluation of its cultural mission. The collapse of the centralised system of artistic production opened the way to a diversification of institutional and aesthetic forms, generating a space of experimentation, freedom, and uncertainty. As Dan Lungu observes, “the Romanian cultural system of transition functioned at the intersection between the legacy of cultural centralism and the incipient logic of the market, without managing to harmonise the two” (Lungu, 2019, p. 46).

This tension between freedom and instability brought major changes to the actor’s profession, which had to adapt to new mechanisms of funding, management and public visibility. In the absence of a coherent normative framework, artistic autonomy came at the price of professional precarity. Carmen Croitoru notes that “the freedom gained after 1989 was not accompanied by sustainable cultural policies; instead of state protection, a form of institutional chaos emerged” (Croitoru, 2017, p. 38).

In this ambiguous climate, the emergence of the independent sector became a necessary reaction to the systemic blockages of public theatre. Theodor-Cristian Popescu highlights that the first independent creators “embraced the risk of experimentation not only aesthetically but also economically, constructing

models of work based on solidarity and improvisation” (Popescu, 2016, p. 53). Thus, post-1989 Romanian theatre redefined itself as a hybrid system, where repertory institutions coexist with independent companies and community or educational theatre forms.

Within this new cultural architecture, the actor’s role expanded significantly. They became simultaneously performer, creator, pedagogue and manager, assuming multiple functions within an unstable professional ecosystem. Vladimir Pasti observes that “the new Romanian capitalism transferred responsibility for success from institutions to individuals” (Pasti, 2006, p. 102). Accustomed to the protection of the state, the actor was compelled to reinvent themselves as a cultural entrepreneur, and Liviu Malița emphasises that, in the early years of transition, “theatre reflected the turmoil of a society in search of its moral and cultural identity” (Malița, 2022, p. 67). At the same time, dramaturgical discourse became increasingly introspective, oriented towards analysing collective trauma and recent memory, which also transformed the actor’s relationship with the audience—from being a mere stage voice to becoming a partner in the interpretation of social reality.

This transformation marks the beginning of a new theatrical paradigm in which professional autonomy becomes a central feature. The actor detaches from institutional dependence and begins to construct an individual artistic path, grounded in values such as collaboration, adaptability and critical reflection.

III.2 The actor between institution and freedom

Since 1989, the acting profession in Romania has oscillated between two antagonistic models: the institutional and the independent. The first, inherited from the communist period, is based on stability, hierarchy and public protection; the second, emerging after 1990, is characterised by flexibility, precariousness and creative freedom.

In public institutions, although resources are more stable, actors often face repertorial rigidity and an artistic hierarchy that discourages individual initiative. George Banu warns against “the risk of artistic ossification when theatre becomes merely a professional routine” (Banu, 2011, p. 82). By contrast, in the independent sector, aesthetic freedom is maximal, yet the lack of social protection and of a legal status for artists heightens vulnerability.

This duality has produced a restructuring of professional identity. The actor can no longer define themselves exclusively through institutional affiliation but through a set of transversal competencies: the ability to collaborate, generate projects, engage with audiences and manage resources. As Mihai Măniuțiu

observes, “an artistic career today means not only talent and work, but also a way of being present in the public sphere—of constructing meaning and sharing it” (Măniuțiu, 2017, p. 59). Similarly, Miruna Runcan remarks that “post-transition Romanian theatre has been rebuilt through a succession of micro-artistic communities that have replaced the absent institutions” (Runcan, 2005, p. 91). These communities have created an informal network of collaborations, generating a new professional culture based on reciprocity and mobility.

In light of these developments, contemporary cultural management must integrate an individual-centred perspective. Dan Lungu states that “the actor can no longer be merely the beneficiary of cultural policies but must become their active partner” (Lungu, 2019, p. 62). This change of role implies the formation of a self-management mindset, in which the artist assumes their professional path as an ongoing project of development.

III.3 Reconfiguring artistic recognition and career development

The cultural transition also transformed the mechanisms of artistic recognition. Before 1989, visibility was institutionally regulated; today, recognition is achieved through multiple channels: festivals, funding programmes, international mobility, and digital presence. Mihai Măniuțiu notes that “public recognition is a process of negotiation between value and visibility, between art and the discourse about art” (Măniuțiu, 2017, p. 86).

In this context, self-representation and communication skills have become as important as stage performance itself. The contemporary actor must simultaneously manage professional relationships, public image, and the social impact of their artistic practice. This complexity of roles redefines the actor’s status as a reflexive cultural agent.

From the perspective of cultural sociology, Pierre-Michel Menger explains that artistic professions exist “at the intersection between uncertainty and vocation,” where success depends on “the capacity to navigate between inspiration and organisation” (Menger, 2014, p. 42). In contemporary Romanian theatre, this dynamic is intensified by the lack of coherent infrastructure, transforming every career into a process of self-management.

In conclusion, post-1989 transformations have led to a reflexive professionalisation of the Romanian actor. From being an executant within a hierarchical system, the actor has evolved into an autonomous creator, engaged in production, pedagogy, and cultural management. The artistic career is no longer a linear trajectory but a continuous process of learning and negotiation, a dialogue between vocation and responsibility.

IV. Applied analysis: the case studies BRAINSTORM and WOUNDED – the contrast between generations

IV.1 Methodological considerations

This analytical approach is based on the comparative investigation of two theatre projects developed in different contexts yet united by a shared vision of theatre as a site for social reflection and personal development: BRAINSTORM (2020) and WOUNDED – the contrast between generations (2023). Both were conceived as interdisciplinary processes at the intersection of artistic research, performative education and cultural intervention, targeting distinct yet complementary audiences.

Methodologically, the analysis draws on art-based research and practice-led research, according to which artistic action functions as a tool of inquiry and theoretical validation. In both cases, the creative process constituted a framework for self-observation for actors and facilitators, as well as a learning platform for participants. Through their participatory design, these projects align with the paradigm of Applied theatre, defined by Schechner as “a form of theatre that intervenes in reality rather than merely reproducing it” (Schechner, 2013, p. 96). In this sense, BRAINSTORM and WOUNDED move beyond the strictly aesthetic logic of representation and propose a reflexive theatricality in which process takes precedence over finished product (Boal, 1979; Freire, 2005).

IV.2 Case study: BRAINSTORM

Launched in 2020, BRAINSTORM was designed as an educational and performative platform for adolescents, centred on the relationship between neurological development and the emotional dynamics of this life stage. Informed by recent research in neuroscience and educational psychology, the project translated scientific notions into an accessible stage form intended to stimulate empathy and intergenerational dialogue.

The methodology was participatory and collaborative: actor-trainers assumed the role of learning facilitators. Work unfolded through improvisation workshops, guided documentation, and focus-group discussions. This framework supported the development of self-awareness and self-regulation competences, consistent with the principles of self-management (Deci and Ryan, 2017; Goleman, 2009).

The performance outcome, The BRAINSTORM – Part I, was conceived as a laboratory-performance within a non-hierarchical setup where audiences were invited to participate in reflection. Its modular structure—alternating dramatic scenes, documentary fragments and direct audience dialogue—

conferred a distinctly pedagogical and introspective character. Thematically, BRAINSTORM addressed social pressures, anxiety and identity conflict, offering audiences a framework for articulating their own self-narratives. In doing so, the project contributed to socio-emotional learning and personal resilience, in line with educational theatre principles advanced by Boal and Freire (Boal, 1979; Freire, 2005).

From a cultural management perspective, BRAINSTORM proposed a sustainable model of collaboration among artists, educators and educational institutions. Benefiting from public co-financing and local partnerships (schools, cultural NGOs, public cultural/education bodies), the project demonstrated that independent initiatives can generate social impact without compromising aesthetic rigour—an evolution consistent with the trajectory of participatory theatre in Romania (Popovici, 2016).

By combining scientific inquiry with theatrical expression, BRAINSTORM redefined the stage as a space for cognitive and emotional formation. The actors involved became mentors and cultural mediators, assuming a pedagogical role in the broader sense. This strategy supports Măniuțiu’s observation that “an artistic career is built not only through performance, but through the capacity to generate communal meaning” (Măniuțiu, 2017, p. 46).

IV.3 Case study: WOUNDED – the contrast between generations / BRAINSTORM – Part II

The cultural project WOUNDED (2023) continues the trajectory initiated by BRAINSTORM, shifting the emphasis from adolescent emotional education to the social and intergenerational dimensions of resilience. Its subtitle—*The contrast between generations*—signals the direction of inquiry: exploring collective and familial traumas transmitted through silence, absence or misunderstanding.

Methodologically, WOUNDED combined art therapy techniques, collaborative dramaturgy and documentary theatre. The process relied on interviews and workshops of artistic confession, in which participants transformed personal experiences into performance material—an approach aligned with British traditions of Applied Theatre, privileging reflexivity, sincerity and acknowledged vulnerability (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009; Thompson, 2003).

The performative outcome, *The BRAINSTORM – Part II*, was presented in theatre and educational venues, combining stage language with visual and musical elements. Unlike the first part, which emphasised self-discovery, this continuation pursued intergenerational reconciliation, proposing a symbolic dialogue between young people and parents.

By integrating a documentary component with a cohort of approximately 40 adults and adolescents/young adults from the immediate post-1989 context, WOUNDED broadened the meaning of artistic resilience, defining it not only as an individual adaptive mechanism but as a collective process of understanding. In this framework, the stage becomes a site of reconnection, and the actor a facilitator of emotional transformation (van der Kolk, 2014).

In terms of cultural management, WOUNDED evidences the maturation of a working paradigm that combines artistic rigour with social responsibility. The project integrated professional training for young actors with cultural education and inclusion activities, leveraging local partnerships and interdisciplinary networks. This orientation reflects the current European emphasis on supporting socially engaged artists, as articulated in recent cultural policy reports (UNESCO, 2022).

Through its methodology, WOUNDED contributes substantively to the discourse on self-management and resilience, demonstrating that professional autonomy extends beyond career administration to the ethical dimension of community care. The actor emerges not only as interpreter but as a cultural agent involved in social reconstruction (Menger, 2014).

IV.4 Comparative synthesis and interim conclusions

A comparative reading of the two projects reveals a coherent evolution of the vision of theatre as an instrument for personal development and artistic resilience. BRAINSTORM emphasised the educational dimension, exploring cognitive and emotional mechanisms of adolescence, whereas WOUNDED extended this perspective into the social sphere, transforming theatre into a space of transgenerational dialogue and the identification of shared values.

Methodologically, both projects employed collaborative working techniques and applied the principles of participatory cultural management, offering sustainable production models outside the institutional system. In this sense, they confirm Popescu's observation that "independence does not mean the absence of structure, but the construction of one's own through solidarity and critical reflection" (Popescu, 2016, p. 47).

From the standpoint of actor training, these projects demonstrate the applicability of self-management as an educational strategy. Actors were involved in all stages—from conception to implementation—practising competences of planning, collaboration and self-evaluation.

Consequently, BRAINSTORM and WOUNDED may be regarded as two complementary stages within the same artistic research pathway of the Cultural Association *Acting Up*, in which theatre becomes a platform for dialogue between

arts, sciences and community. Both demonstrate that the actor's resilience is not reducible to professional survival; rather, it entails an ethical redefinition of art: the ability to transform fragility into resource and uncertainty into creation (Klaic, 1997; Popovici, 2016).

V. Conclusions: towards a sustainable model of theatrical practice and reflexive formation

Over the past three decades, the transformations of Romanian theatre have reshaped not only the institutional system but also the actor's professional identity. In an artistic landscape marked by uncertainty, fragmentation and the pressure of visibility, the contemporary actor emerges as a complex cultural agent, responsible both for their career trajectory and for the communal meaning of art.

The projects BRAINSTORM and WOUNDED confirm that theatre can function simultaneously as a space of learning, reflection and dialogue, transcending aesthetic boundaries. Through the integration of artistic research, experiential pedagogy and collaborative workshops, these initiatives propose a model of formation grounded in active participation and interdisciplinarity. They demonstrate that self-management extends beyond career planning to include emotional self-regulation and adaptation to the social complexity of the profession. Consequently, resilience arises not from institutional protection but from critical reflection on artistic practice and the ability to transform vulnerability into creative resource.

At a systemic level, actor training in Romania remains largely disconnected from the realities of the cultural market and contemporary management logic. Thus, theatre education must incorporate strategic planning, communication, cultural leadership and funding literacy, preparing future actors not only for the stage but for the wider cultural ecosystem.

As Miruna Runcan notes, "post-transition Romanian theatre has been rebuilt through a pedagogy of survival, where artists learned to manage their own resources and define their mission" (Runcan, 2019, p. 104). This informal pedagogy of self-management reflects a paradigm shift: the actor is no longer merely an interpreter but the curator of their own artistic becoming. Menger provides an explanatory framework for this reality, arguing that "in the economy of uncertainty, creativity becomes a form of adaptation, and the artist survives through the capacity to convert instability into project" (Menger, 2014, p. 47). From this perspective, self-management represents a form of reflexive intelligence that replaces institutional dependency with responsible autonomy. In the sphere of cultural policy, Croitoru observes that "the absence of a clear professional status for artists perpetuates the fragility of the Romanian theatrical system" (Croitoru,

2017, p. 42). In this context, the practices exemplified by BRAINSTORM and WOUNDED offer viable models of intervention, where theatre operates not merely as an artistic product but as an educational and social mechanism. Finally, Liviu Malița asserts that “theatre is the space where the collective meanings of the present are negotiated” (Malița, 2022, p. 91). Within this vision, theatre becomes a laboratory of contemporary consciousness, and the actor – a mediator between individual experience and social memory.

Therefore, through personal experience and comparative analysis of relevant sources, we conclude that Romanian theatre, faced with the challenges of precarity, finds its strength in adaptability, cooperation and critical reflection. The contemporary actor, capable of self-management and of contributing to the collective construction of meaning, stands as the central figure of a sustainable, reflexive and ethically oriented artistic practice.

References:

1. Banu, G. (2011) *Fragilitatea și prezența. Despre actor și vulnerabilitate*. București: Nemira.
2. Boal, A. (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*. London: Pluto Press.
3. Croitoru, C. (2017) *150 de ani de legi pentru teatru*. Craiova: Pro Universitaria.
4. Deci, E. and Ryan, R. (2017) *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*. New York: Guilford Press.
5. Freire, P. (2005) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
6. Goleman, D. (2009) *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
7. Klaic, D. (1997) *Theatre in Transition: The Cultural Politics of Independent Theatre in Europe*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
8. Lungu, D. (2019) *Sistemul cultural românesc în tranziție*. București: Polirom.
9. Măniuțiu, M. (2017) *Cariera artistică și recunoașterea publică*. București: Eikon.
10. Malița, L. (2022) *Să nu privești înapoi. Comunism, dramaturgie, societate*. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.
11. Menger, P.-M. (2014) *The Economics of Creativity: Art and Achievement under Uncertainty*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
12. Olteanu, F. (2009) *Stat și viață privată în regimurile comuniste*. Iași: Polirom.
13. Pasti, V. (2006) *Noul capitalism românesc*. Iași: Polirom.
14. Popescu, T.-C. (2016) *Surplus de oameni sau surplus de idei. Pionierii mișcării independente în teatrul românesc post-1989*. București: Eikon.
15. Popovici, I. (2016) *Independent Theatre in Post-Communist Romania: Between Freedom and Fragility*. București: Eikon.
16. Prendergast, M. and Saxton, J. (2009) *Applied Theatre: International Case Studies and Challenges for Practice*. Bristol: Intellect Books.
17. Rece, A. (2014) *Istoria teatrului românesc și a artei spectacolului de la origini până la înființarea primelor teatre*. Craiova: Universitaria.
18. Runcan, M. (2005) *Teatrul românesc actual. 1989–2004*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia.
19. Runcan, M. (2006) *Teatrul românesc în comunism. 1945–1965. Documente și mărturii*. Cluj-Napoca: EFES.
20. Runcan, M. (2019) *Teatrul în Diorame. Discursul criticii teatrale în comunism*. București: Tracus Arte.

21. Schechner, R. (2013) *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge.
22. Thompson, J. (2003) *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond*. Bern: Peter Lang.
23. UNESCO (2022) *ReShaping Policies for Creativity: Addressing Culture as a Global Public Good*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
24. van der Kolk, B. (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Viking.

Unpublished Project Documents

1. Asociația culturală Acting Up (2020) *BRAINSTORM – Partea I*. Unpublished project report. Administrația Fondului Cultural Național (AFCN), Bucharest.
2. Asociația culturală Acting Up (2023) *WOUNDED – Contrastul dintre generații*. (The Brainstorm – partea a II-a) Unpublished project report. Administrația Fondului Cultural Național (AFCN), Bucharest.

George Lepădatu is a stage director, actor, and PhD candidate in Theatre and Performing Arts at the I.L. Caragiale National University of Theatre and Film in Bucharest. He holds a Certified Entrepreneur diploma, which complements his artistic training with advanced competences in cultural management and organizational development. His research focuses on artistic self-management, the professional resilience of actors, and sustainable models of theatrical practice within the broader transformations of the Romanian cultural system after 1989. He is the founder and president of the “Acting up” Cultural Association, where he coordinates interdisciplinary projects integrating artistic creation, performative education, and social reflection. Among these, *BRAINSTORM* (2020) and *WOUNDED* (2023), co-funded by the Administration of the National Cultural Fund (AFCN), stand out as innovative models of artistic training and social intervention. His theatre productions are included in the repertoire of the Luceafărul Independent Theatre in Bucharest, as part of collaborative co-productions. Through his work, George Lepădatu contributes to redefining theatre as a space of dialogue between art, education, and community, promoting a vision of the actor as an autonomous and reflexive cultural agent.