

The Anxieties of Generation Z. *Story of a Hooded Sufferer.* Devised theatre - An instrument of connection

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Abstract: People often struggle to openly express their emotions. When asked, “How are you doing?” the typical response is a simple “Fine!” even when things may not be going well. How can we teach teenagers to articulate their feelings and navigate through new concepts such as *FOMO*, *JOMO*, *cyberbullying*, and the *Gyges Effect*, especially during the ample space and time “between school and home”? Microsoft has introduced a Chinese chatbot with the voice of a seventeen-year-old girl, serving as a confidant for millions of Chinese individuals daily. This program records users’ emotional histories and is set to be launched in Europe. The question arises: Why do young people prefer to communicate in this manner? *Generația Zet. Story al unui Suferman cu Glugă* a performance rooted in *devised theatre* principles, represents the culmination of a research process focused on depression among Generation Z pre-teens in the municipality of Iasi. Its objective is to employ theatre as an intervention in the community, fostering connections among people. This article details the construction of the mentioned performance, using *practice-as-research* and *devised theatre* methodology.

Keywords: devised theatre, performance, preadolescent depression, generation z, Iasi

“I do not propose to write an ode to dejection,
but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning,
Standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.”¹

I. Introduction. Adolescence as a painting by René Magritte

“From the vantage point of the lighthouse, a storm is heralded, signifying a time of change, of ‘crisis’: ‘Adolescence on the horizon,’ cries the captain, i.e. the father, steering the family boat on the rough sea, clinging to

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1 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the Woods (orig. Walden sau viața în pădure)*, Translated by Ștefan Avadanei and Alexandra Pasca, Publishing House Art, Bucharest, 2020, p. 14

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the rudder...Suddenly, the rudder breaks.”² The teenager believes he is ready to steer ahead. He views everything from an elevated perspective, as he has grown taller. Parents may notice the physical growth but may overlook the corresponding emotional development, which is also “elevated.” The teenager vocalises emotions and moods, sometimes punctuating the expression by slamming doors. On different occasions or with other teenagers, they shut themselves away, displaying indifference. In the confines of their room, they may slump into a chair and engage in conversation as if André Breton and Boris Vian and Franz Kafka were their audiences.

Standing at the bedroom threshold, it feels like observing René Magritte's *The Improvement* while the family living room resembles Gertrude Stein's salon at 27 rue de Fleurus, inviting you to sit, have a drink, and share your thoughts. The captain transforms into the adversary. As a parent, you become the most annoying person, deemed old-fashioned and incapable of understanding, because the teenager believes they know better than the rest of the world. Despite this knowledge, they struggle to manage emotions like fear, anger, sadness, and anxiety. The *fight-flight-freeze-fawn* response, a natural reaction to perceived danger, occurs in teenagers even when confronted with simple questions like “Why haven't you cleaned your room?” Thus, the war begins. “Today is the ‘tomorrow’ you were afraid of yesterday.”³ What felt safe and comfortable in childhood now seems restricting and dull. In a country where the language is scarcely known, “with all manner of beautiful and profound things to say, [people] are condemned to the banalities of the conversation manual. Their brain is seething with ideas, and they can only tell you that the umbrella of the gardener's aunt is in the house.”⁴ This is what parents go through when dealing with teenagers, expressing sentiments like “What did you score in physics?” “Why can't you study like him?” “I'm taking your phone away!” “If I say something, you obey!” “I know better!” “You're embarrassing me!” “You're lying!” “You don't sleep, you're acting insincerely!” “Do you think you're living in a hotel?” It is a delicate, intricate,

2 Yvonne Poncet-Bonissol, *Survival guide with the rebellious teenager* (orig. *Ghid de supraviețuire cu adolescentul rebel*), Translated by Eugen Damian, Publishing House METEOR PRESS, 2017, p. 7

3 Radu Paraschivescu, *Today is the tomorrow you were afraid of yesterday* (*Astăzi este mâinele de care te-ai temut ieri*), Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012

4 Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *The Woman Who Runs with Wolves* (orig. *Femeia care aleargă cu lupii*), Translated by Simona Voicu, Niculescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 2020, p. 166

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beautiful, and daunting phase, as no parent receives an instruction manual, even after poring through countless parenting books. Sending children to school is not enough. For a genuine comprehension of the intricate tapestry of existence, and a secure foundation, children should inherit the wisdom passed down through generations, stories from wise elders, knowledge of ancestral spirits, and develop awareness of their own potential, and a deep understanding of the history of both their ancestral lands and family. They need depth. Simply handing them Montaigne's *Essays* or Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* and Epictetus' *Manual* is not sufficient. Instead, they should be asked: "What do you choose?" "How do you feel?" "What is your opinion?" "What are your thoughts on this?" "What do you want?" Building a solid foundation makes the aforementioned "teenage crisis" less apparent in terms of rebellious behaviour and deviations. The "rudder" will not break so easily. J.J.Rousseau calls adolescence "the age of reason" but also "stormy revolution", "second birth."⁵ The American psychologist Stanley Hall refers to it as "storm and stress,"⁶ a tumultuous period marked by maladaptive shifts in emotion regulation.

This article focuses on the *Generația Zet. Story al unui Suferman cu Glugă*⁷ project, a collaboration with the National Athenaeum of Iasi, targeting pre-teens aged 10 to 15 from Iasi within Generation Z who are grappling with depressive disorders. Employing an interdisciplinary approach at the crossroads of arts and mental health, and leveraging art as a medium of expression, I took on the role of cultural coordinator, facilitating a range of integrated initiatives in both Romania (specifically in the municipality of Iași) and Norway (within the Oslo area). The project entailed the presentation of four contemporary art productions and a series of art therapy workshops. In line with a methodical selection of pilot schools, crafted with the assistance of two specialists — a psychologist and a sociologist — we conducted interviews and administered questionnaires to pre-teens. These interactions provided

5 Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emil, or On Education, (orig. Emil sau despre educație)*, Translated by Dimitrie Todoran, Publishing House Didactică și Pedagogică, Bucharest, 1973, p. 194.

6 Arnett JJ. Adolescent storm and stress, reconsidered. *Am Psychol.* 1999 May;54(5):317-26. doi: 10.1037//0003-066x.54.5.317. PMID: 10354802

7 *ZETgeneration - Smile, Empathy, Therapy*, Project funded by EEA Grants 2014-2021 under the RO-CULTURE Programme, CALL 6 - Strengthening Cultural Entrepreneurship and Audience and Audience Development - Session 3

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valuable insights, forming the core of a medium-length film titled “My Couch/ My Coach”⁸ (filmed by Andrei Ivaşc), a performance titled *Generația Zet. Story al unui Suferman cu Glugă*, an installation art piece made in Romania called *Recul* (created by plastic artist Alexandru Grigoraş), and another one to be produced in Norway as part of a mirrored experiment. The Norwegian partner of the project, DAC Music Performance Company, represented by pianist Dragoş Andrei Cantea, contributes the soundtrack for all four productions. This article predominantly focuses on detailing the performance aspect of the project - *Generația Zet. Story al unui Suferman cu Glugă*. Developed using the concept of *Devised Theatre*, the production involved four actors: Andrei Sava, Bianca Ioan, Sorin Cimbru, Cezara Fantu. I will describe the research carried out in order to create this production, starting with the scriptwriting process, which incorporated two approaches: one with an informative-educational orientation and the other emphasising interpretation and drama. A comprehensive account of our observations as actors throughout the entire creative process, along with the feedback received, aims to shed light on the significance of non-formal and informal education and the use of theatre as an educational tool.

II. Devised theatre. Collective creation. A tool for connection

We initiated our project through a collective creation process, employing applied theatre techniques with the aim to educate and engage the community through theatre, following the ideas of Paolo Freire and Augusto Boal. We wanted to craft *Generația Zet. Story al unui Suferman cu Glugă* as a documentary theatre piece, which would serve as an unconventional means of educating people. In this production, the actors aimed to express their perspective on a pressing community issue, namely depression. We intended to foster audience involvement. Our broader mission was to raise awareness among pre-teens about their role within their generation and community, instilling a sense of belonging and understanding of the larger societal structure. We aspired to foster connection, and provoke thought. We sought to stimulate a reaction, a kind of attitude from the “specta-formers,” which encompassed pupils, parents and teachers alike. Throughout this endeavour,

⁸ My Couch/ My Coach: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWswQ_B8B70. Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

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we found links between the concept of “collective creation” and *devised theatre*. Embracing the framework of postdramatic and post-postdramatic performance, we positioned ourselves at the intersection of theatre and the performing arts, manifesting as performative theatre. Our project, particularly the performance aspect, served as a gateway leading to interdisciplinary and intermedial exploration, connecting various fields like psychology, philosophy, sociology, educational sciences. We learned that this form of collective creation is a valuable educational and therapeutic tool, benefiting not only the intended audience but also our creative team. In this context, creators find motivation that is more intrinsic than extrinsic, driven by the project’s purpose, while enjoying the freedom of expression stemming from the absence of a rigidly defined hierarchy on stage, such as the traditional director – actor – playwright structure. Simultaneously, this project challenged another type of “hierarchy” within the audience, breaking down the teacher – pupil dynamic, even though the performance was structured in the form of a “lesson”.

Numerous books discuss the concept of *devised theatre* and the new type of theatre maker. For example, the book *The End of Directing, the Beginning of Theatre-Making and Devising in European Theatre*,⁹ is a compilation of essays exploring the theatre directors who craft texts with or without actors, subsequently bringing them to life on stage either through solo directing or collective efforts. Names such as Joel Pommerat, Armin Petras/Fritz Kater, Gianina Cărbunariu, Bela Pinter, and Rodrigo Garcia, share the spotlight with Pippo Delbono, Rene Pollesch, Oliver Frljic, Wojtek Ziemilski, all without being confined to an experimental aesthetic context. Olivia Grecea contributes to the discourse with her work *Devised Theatre. Collective theatre creation*,¹⁰ recalling *The Living Theatre*, *The Connection*, *The Brig and Paradise Now*, *Eugenio Barba and Odin Teatret*, *Barter*, *Ariane Mnouchkine and Théâtre du Soleil*. The subject is extensively covered in articles, lectures and podcasts. *The Guardian* featured an article providing ten tips for genuinely creative collaboration¹¹ in devised theatre. Concurrently,

9 Iulia Popovici, *The End of Directing, The Beginning of Theatre-Making and Devising in European Theatre*, Tact Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015

10 Olivia Grecea, *Devised Theatre: Collective Theatre Creation (orig. Teatrul Devised. Creația teatrală colectivă)*, Eikon Publishing House, Bucharest, 2017

11 John Walten, *Devised theatre: ten tips for a truly creative collaboration*, *The Guardian*, London, 2014, Article available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals->

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numerous educators have pioneered pedagogical systems that significantly shape contemporary theatre practices, exerting a substantial influence on education through theatre. Figures such as Henry Caldwell Cook, Peter Slade, Dorothy Heathcote, and Winifred Ward have played important roles in this regard.

In the case of the project under discussion, specifically regarding the performance, the four actors involved (Andrei Sava, Bianca Ioan, Sorin Cimbru, Cezara Fantu), took on multiple roles, including scriptwriting, directing, proposing set and costume designs, and collaborating on sound, light and video elements. Their work was inspired by their own research on the causes and preventive measures related to depressive disorders in Generation Z. Drawing from the case study, the team crafted the main text and developed four distinct scenarios set in places where pre-teens commonly spend their time: “At Home”, “At School”, “Between School and Home”, and the inclusion of “A Solution”, representing a therapist's office. The performance aims to establish a connection between the “specta-performer” and the protagonist, thus introducing a therapeutic effect. The actors offer a fresh and direct perspective on how to navigate various situations. Before entering the “play space,” each spectator is handed two cards, one red and one green. These cards empower them to influence the unfolding narrative. Three times during the performance, they choose between two possible continuations, guided by their desired emotional response: fear/disgust, or anger/sadness. The voting process revolves around the message “You choose!” and serves as a reminder of the power to choose emotions in real-life situations. Spectators who have not had the opportunity to see their chosen version played, will be able to access an online link¹² to watch it later. The performance fosters a sense of unity within the audience, as each individual's experience contributes to the overall impact. Children are actively encouraged to participate by determining the “Where, When, Who, What” aspects, addressing any reluctance from some pupils to engage fully.

The text is centered around the concept of emotion, the term described as encompassing “feelings, moods, pleasures, pains, passions, sensations, and desires.”¹³ Can we feel all these emotions simultaneously or do we experience

network/2014/dec/16/devised-theatre-ten-tips-collaboration, Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

12 Official website: www.zetgeneration.ro. Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

13 Dean Burnett *The small brain about the big brain (Creierul mic despre creierul mare)*,

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them one at a time? Similar to the palette we use for combining colours, there is Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions that explains how emotions are compounded from basic ones. Psychologist Paul Ekman, known for his work on the series *Lie to Me* and the animation *Inside Out*, has identified seven basic emotions experienced by all people: happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, anger, and contempt. In terms of processing facial expressions, iPhone has its facial recognition feature, but it does not have a feature allowing for face reading, in the way humans can tell how faces reflect emotions. We know when someone is faking a smile, when they are angry or disgusted. Faces reflect our emotions. For pre-teens, who are "emoticon-aware," a new universal written language built from emojis facilitates expressing and understanding/"reading" feelings easily.

There are, however, cultural differences in emoticon usage. The scenes presented in the text focus on the perspectives of parents, teachers, and peers, touching on themes like bullying, communication issues, technology overuse, fashion and other characteristics specific to Generation Z pre-teens, which we have identified by talking to students. It acknowledges the challenges of this tumultuous time and the significant socio-emotional impact at home, at school, shaping pre-teens' development. Rebellion is a common theme during this phase, often manifesting as a response to stress or as a rejection of "authority." The text notes the risky behaviours pre-teens may adopt, including rule-breaking, non-conforming dress style, anti-social behaviour, and substance use. Having identified that a majority of the conflicts revolve around their interactions with parents, we crafted a scene called "Home," which explores disagreements with parents. Parents serve as the initial role models for individuals, significantly influencing the formation of their ideal selves.¹⁴ The relationship between adolescents and parent plays a crucial role in shaping self-image. If parents project a positive image, the child is likely to describe themselves in positive terms, fostering confidence and a sense of appreciation. Simultaneously, during this stage, the process of social comparison becomes more prominent. Preadolescents tend to relate predominantly to members of their peer group, initially seeking to be liked and accepted, and later aiming to

Translation by Loredana Bucuroaia, BAROQUE BOOKS & ARTS Publishing House, Bucharest, year 2020

14 Dumitru Cristea, *Treatise on Social Psychology*. Vol. I., Renaissance Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012

differentiate themselves and be original. They adapt, accommodate, and learn to demonstrate relational, cognitive and emotional autonomy. The adolescent identity crisis, a term coined by Erik Erikson, also includes psychosexual development. With the physical development of the body and the onset of sexual maturation, a process of self-discovery about one's own sexuality begins, including the acceptance of gender identity and the conflicts that may arise, some of which involve gender dysphoria. Gender and sexual identity are fundamental aspects of personality. Body image is also shaped, not solely by a pre-teen's physical appearance but by their perception of themselves. Young people often have lower opinions of their bodies, as societal acceptance and popularity are often tied to a specific appearance. This has led to a growing number of individuals, especially girls, suffering from anorexia or bulimia. Concurrently, there is an increasing number of people experiencing depressive disorders due to these body image issues. As per our findings, the concept of body self-esteem, defined as "a multidimensional construct comprising perceptual, cognitive, affective, evaluative and behavioural components, thus bringing them all together and constituting a complex and subjective way in which the individual perceives his or her own body,"¹⁵ is not frequently discussed either at home or at school.

III. Adolescence and depression. The aesthetics of suffering

Between the ages of 12 and 18, individuals undergo a significant period of self-reflection, marked by the emergence of self-awareness. Fundamental questions like "Who am I?" and "What am I?" take center stage during this phase. This period is akin to a hormonal hurricane, a "domestic and intimate" revolution¹⁶ that unfolds both internally and in the immediate surroundings of the adolescent. As psychoanalyst Winnicott aptly put it, "You have sown a baby and you are harvesting a bomb."¹⁷ Facing this tumultuous time, some parents turn to "bomb defusing" books offering guidance on navigating these challenges, while others seek assistance from specialists. Adolescents, in turn, begin to rigorously assess the validity of family ideas,

15 Zinovyeva, Kazantseva & Nikonova, Self-esteem and Loneliness in Russian Adolescents with Body Dissatisfaction, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2016 Oct, 233:367-371, DOI:10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.10.160

16 Yvonne Poncet-Bonissol, *Op. Cit.* p. 24

17 *Idem*, p. 12

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often more intensely than suggested by Karl Popper. It is completely normal for individuals to experience anger or sadness in certain situations. There is no need for them to feel guilty about expressing these emotions. It is natural not to be happy all the time. However, when these emotional states persist without apparent cause and become difficult to overcome, it may lead to depression — “a vital sadness, characterised by nostalgia and remorse for the past, disgust for the present, anxiety for the future, self-loathing and emotional anaesthesia.”¹⁸ But what exactly is depression? “It is a mood disorder that results in continuous and significant psychological and biological deterioration of the patient, and is manifested through psychological symptoms (lack of interest, sadness, demoralization, and low self-esteem may occur) and somatic symptoms (loss of appetite, weight loss, fatigue, disruptions in sleep patterns, including both insomnia and periods of drowsiness).”¹⁹

“Extensive statistical analyses reveal that depression is the most prevalent mental health issue globally, followed by anxiety, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.”²⁰ Approximately 280 million people worldwide suffer from depression. Shockingly, 700,000 young individuals aged 15-29 commit suicide each year due to this medical condition.²¹ To put this staggering number into perspective, it could populate an entire country. Its national day would be the third Monday in January, often referred to as “Blue Monday.” This hypothetical country characterised by its cold climate, metaphorically aligns depression with the “common cold of psychiatric disorders.”²² However, an optimistic perspective does exist, as some psychologists and psychiatrists perceive it as a potential catalyst for change — an opportunity, a privilege.²³ Depression, seen as both a symptom and a syndrome,²⁴ can serve as a springboard for transformation. This transformative journey hinges on awareness and choice, as healing is

18 Sylvie Tenenbaum, *Depression. Do we inherit it or not?* (orig. *Depresia. O moștenim sau nu?*), Niculescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018, p. 15

19 Juan Moises de la Serna, *Depression. When sadness becomes pathological*, Translation by Nicoleta Nagy, TEKTIME Publishing House, Bucharest, 2019, p. 28

20 Dean Burnett, *Op. Cit.* p.126

21 Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation, Global Health Data Exchange. Available at: <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/>. Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

22 Sylvie Tenenbaum, *Op. Cit.* p. 24

23 *Idem*

24 *Idem*, p. 15

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ultimately a conscious decision. Researchers have identified a specific gene associated with depression, a discovery observed in multiple family members diagnosed with the condition. Chromosome 3p25-26 has been found in more than 800 families characterised by recurrent depression.²⁵ It is noteworthy that 40% of individuals grappling with depression may inherit it genetically, while the remaining 60% are subject to environmental influences — a malleable aspect of one’s surroundings. Reflecting on ancient philosophical insights, the Greek philosopher Epictetus, nearly two thousand years ago, wisely observed that “People are disturbed not by the things that happen, but by their opinion of the things that happen.”²⁶ Echoing this perspective, Shakespeare, in *Hamlet* articulated the idea that “there is no such thing as good or bad, it is only thought that makes a man good or bad” (Act 2, Scene 2).²⁷ Moreover, mental lapses typically originate from the way we think, but it is important to note that any form of misguided thinking can be rectified at any stage of life.

During adolescence, the risk of depression increases. In Romania, few parents differentiate between a genuinely depressed child and one merely posing as rebellious, feigning a lack of understanding and propelled by the desire to oppose authority figures, be it within their family or the educational environment. Notably, Romanian parents often lack the inclination to seek guidance from mental health specialists, and minimal efforts are made at the school level in terms of prevention and intervention, primarily due to a scarcity of school counsellors and psychologists. For instance, in the municipality of Iasi in 2019, there were 45,256 children enrolled in pre-university education, of which 11,774 were enrolled in secondary education.²⁸ These students currently have access to only 55 school counsellors,²⁹ equating to one counsellor for more than 800 children. The challenges of depression and

25 Gerome Breen G & co, A genome-wide significant linkage for severe depression on chromosome 3: the depression network study. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2011 Aug;168(8):840-7. doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2011.10091342

26 Epictet, *Antidepressant bearer. Manualul (orig. Antidepresiv la purtător. Manualul)*, Translation from the Greek by Ioana Costa, Seneca Lucius Annaeus Publishing House, Bucharest, 2015, p. 18

27 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Translated by Violeta Popa and George Volceanov, Paralele 45 Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, p. 38

28 Information available at: <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>. Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

29 Information available at: <http://www.cjrae-iasi.ro/info/cjap/echipa>. Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

anxiety have been further compounded by the pandemic. A UNICEF study indicates that at least one in seven children and young people worldwide have been adversely affected by travel restrictions, posing risks to their mental health and socio-emotional well-being.³⁰ Given this context, the relevant authorities are urging a thorough assessment of adolescents, as it is known that they adeptly conceal their symptoms. Depression manifests through three main categories of symptoms. The first is mood collapse, characterised by a pervasive pessimistic outlook where everything is perceived in a negative light. The second is blockage, marked by isolation, a lack of motivation to engage in activities, persistent fatigue and diminished willpower. Appetite for various aspects of life is notably reduced. The third category is moral distress, where one's conscience remains intact, leading to feelings of guilt and a negative self-perception. Unfortunately, individuals in this category may be at risk of choosing to commit suicide.³¹ Recognising depression in children involves observing signs such as hyperactivity, school difficulties, and engagement in risk-taking behaviours or delinquency. On average, a depressive episode in this age group lasts 8-13 months, with symptoms completely disappearing in up to 2 years for 90% of patients. However, these individuals remain susceptible to other psychiatric disorders, including anxiety disorders, phobias, behavioral issues, and hyperkinetic disorder.³² Children may express their distress through irritability rather than the overt sadness seen in adults. They may appear easily upset, disinterested in activities, and annoyed by any remarks or interactions. This heightened irritability can also lead to increased aggression, with the child responding more vehemently, both verbally and psychically, to non-threatening situations. Additional common indicators include a diminished appetite and a constant sense of fatigue.

IV. Practice-as-research methodology. Approach in the study of collective creation

30 Information available at: <https://www.unicef.org/romania/ro>. Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

31 Moussa Nabati, *Depression: illness or chance (orig. Depresia: boală sau şansă)*, translated by Nicolae Balta, Philobia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2023, p. 8

32 Doina Cosman, Horia Coman, *Melancholia. From sadness to suicide (orig. Melancolia. De la tristețe la sinucidere)*, Risoprint Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2018, pp. 65-66

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The research process leading to an artistic project can often be viewed as an artistic practice in itself. This dual exploration serves as a valuable opportunity to delve deeper into the research subject. The initial stages of the research process involved the formulation of a methodology for selecting pilot schools, where interviews and questionnaires were to be conducted with approximately three hundred students. Professor Ovidiu Gavrilovici, the psychologist, and Virgil Leîtoiu, the sociologist, collaborated with the inspectorate to identify ten pilot groups from schools in Iasi. These groups included nine from state schools in Iasi (normal schools) and one special school catering to children with disabilities. Among the participating schools involved in the project, there are “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Theoretical High School Iasi, “Dimitrie Cantemir” Theoretical High School Iasi, “Mihai Eminescu” National High School Iasi, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” Theoretical High School Iasi, “Octav Băncilă” National College of Art Iasi, Agricultural and Food Industry College “Vasile Adamachi” Iasi, Technological High School of Electronics and Telecommunications “Gheorghe Mârzescu” Iasi, National Pedagogical College “Vasile Lupu” Iasi and Special Technological High School “Vasile Pavelcu” Iasi. These schools were chosen for their representative nature, reflecting an average level in terms of school results and performance. According to the findings of the psychologist and sociologist engaged in the project, the selected schools cater to the “majority, not to the peaks,” where the problems faced by children are specific, different. Notably, the schools mentioned above also exhibit the highest incidence of stressors, according to County School Inspectorate (ISJ Iasi).

We were aware that there is a lack of universally implemented prevention programs in schools to address the onset of anxiety disorders and depression, which are among the most prevalent issues during adolescence. My initial inquiry centered around preteens’ perceptions of depression: How do they define it? How do they articulate its symptoms? How do they navigate negative emotions? To what extent do they trust adults enough to seek help? Conducting interviews in schools was a collaborative effort with the consent of principals, teachers, and parents. The set of questions aimed to elicit the preteens’ perspectives on various aspects related to depression. The questions included prompts such as “For me depression means ___; When I am sad ___; I feel guilty when ___; I calm down fast when ___; For me depression has the colour ___; I get angry the most ___; I am pleased with myself when ___; When

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I am worried I go to ___; When I feel like having fun ___; When I think about depression, I think about (an object, a phenomenon)___;" The children responded both verbally and in writing, offering insights into their understanding and experiences while exploring the suggested topics.

Here are some of their responses to different prompts: When I think of depression I think of ___: "a snow-filled glass globe that has been shaken, like the Christmas one, with a person inside"; "a withered flower"; "a cube, but not material, physical. Like a hologram in space"; "rain"; "stacks of white papers with folded corners"; "an abandoned cat"; "an eclipse"; "autumn"; "a broken hourglass from which sand has poured out"; "a mental illness"; When I am sad ___: "I go into my room and isolate myself from everyone"; "I put on my headphones and listen to music"; "I want to be alone"; "I withdraw from others and try to forget"; "I need a hug to feel safe"; "I cry"; "I have thoughts that are impossible to imagine"; "I smoke and listen to music", "I think about running away from home. About suicide"; "I think about what I've done to make myself feel sad"; "I escape into my thoughts"; For me depression means ___: "a long-lasting sadness that is hard to explain", "a grief greater than death", "times of the day that are sadder and lonelier", "sleepless nights"; "a state of mind in which you feel sad and have no desire to do anything", "a state that finally strengthens you", "a state that weighs on your soul", "a stupidity."

A thirteen-year-old boy suffering from nanism, transferred to a special school due to bullying in his previous school (a state school), shared with me his deep love for fishing — his rod being three times his size. He described the therapeutic effect it has, how it brings calmness, and expressed his passion for reading. He also shared his dream of one day seeing a coral reef. Despite being aware of his differences, he showed a remarkable understanding of why some children treated him differently, emphasising it was not their fault. No signs of depression were evident; rather, he exhibited a level of acceptance akin to the Dalai Lama atop a Tibetan mountain. He conveyed a positive outlook, stating, "There's so much to do; the world is big," acknowledging his physical stature but embracing the vastness of possibilities. These insights prompted questions about how these children perceive life and the world, whether it feels friendly to them, what freedom means, and the meaning they ascribe to life at their age. Imagining what they would do if given the chance to change the world added another layer of curiosity. As for the title of the performance, *Generația Zet. Story al unui Suferman cu Glugă*, it stemmed

from another account, namely the monologue-like story of a fourteen-year-old girl transitioning from the countryside to a city high school. She recounted an incident where her mother, wearing a hat, became the subject of school wide mockery: “Things have gone too far. My mother was waiting for me one day at school. [The pupils] were on the sports field and saw her. Very funny! She was wearing a hat! Haha! One week, the entire school made fun of me because my mother wore a hat. We’re the hoodie generation, in case you didn’t know.” This shed light on the Generation Z culture, especially the affinity for hood and oversized hoodies, and prompted further reflection on Generation Z characteristics based on interviews conducted with children.

V. Generation Z. iGeneration. Teenagers in hoodies

Claudine Attias-Donfut and Philippe Daveau conceptualise generation as “one of the essential dimensions of life: time, which, for an individual, is the duration separating birth from death, but whose consciousness also projects one’s own temporality towards a past never known and a future never to be known.”³³ It has also been asserted that generation is an identifiable group but also “a place of memory.”³⁴ Generation Z, known by over twenty-five names, such as *Internet Generation*, *Social-Media Generation*, *Facebook Generation*, *Celebrity-Obsessed Generation*,³⁵ *The Zeds*, *Zers*, *Bubble-Wrap Kids*, *The new Millennials*, *Tweens Digital Integrators*, *The up-ageing generation*, *Generation Recession*, *Screenagers*, *Igen*, falls within the 1995-2010 timeframe. Also called *iGeneration*, *Centennials* or “digital natives,” they constitute approximately 2.47 billion of the world’s population and 25% of the US population.³⁶

The case study carried out on a sample of three hundred pupils from Iasi allowed us to observe a number of common traits specific to Generation

33Attias-Donfut Claudine, Daveau Philippe, Baillauquès Simone, *Generation, Research & Training*, issue 45, 2004

34Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* 2, Paris, Gallimard, 1997

35 Elena Bonchis, in "Generation Z. Education and vulnerabilities", in *Parenting from A to Z. 83 challenging themes for today's parents*, Georgeta Pânișoară (coord.), Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2022, p. 116

36 Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects 2022. Summary of Results*, UN DESA/POP/2021/TR/NO. 3, United Nations New York, 2022. Information available at:

https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/wpp2022_summary_of_results.pdf. Link accessed on 4 Oct. 2023

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Z. In essence, its representatives are characterised as fragile, individualistic, creative, flexible decision-makers with personal convictions who prioritise making their own choices over following rules. They tend to be less detail-oriented, employ limited critical thinking, are easily influenced, and hold influence themselves (as evidenced by the popularity of Kylie Jenner with 333 million Instagram followers). Generation Z exhibit a strained relationship with books but share a special fondness for brands, which can lead to competition within their social circles. For instance, they reveal that not having a pair of designer trainers might invite ridicule from others. Additionally, around half of them expressed feeling judged, believing they have to “wear a mask” to gain acceptance within a group. They heavily invest in gadgets and exhibit a strong connection to fashion, gastronomy, makeup, movies, hairstyles, and music on a global scale. Having grown up in the online era, technology is integral to their lives, and devices are omnipresent. The fear of missing out on something important, the reason why Generation Z is “glued to their phone,” contributes to a negative daily mood, giving rise to two concepts: *FOMO* (fear of missing out) and *JOMO* (joy of missing out). *Digital FOMO* negatively impacts their ability to concentrate and engage in immediate reality interactions. *JOMO*, on the other hand, focuses on empowerment, and opting for personal preferences even when others choose differently. Pre-teens in Generation Z are learning to navigate from *FOMO* to *JOMO*, while staying connected to their phones because being absent from the virtual world induces anxiety. They have developed visual-spatial intelligence and visual thinking,³⁷ combining lateral and vertical thinking. This inclination leads them to seek faces and stories through storytelling, making them particularly drawn to content creators, Instagram stories, and *Tik-Toks*. However, aligning themselves with such content can also make them susceptible to bullying, especially cyberbullying. The *Gyges effect*, a concept encompassing online manipulation and bullying, links “invisibility” and amoral behaviour in the digital world. Continuing the list of Generation Z traits, *Wikipedia* and *Google* serve as their encyclopaedias, and they admit to occasionally using *GPT Chat* or *Snapchat AI* for homework. Generation Z requires a “toolbox” that fosters creativity and flexibility. It has been predicted that, when they become grownups, people’s jobs may not be stable for extended periods. In the early

37 Georgeta Pânișoară, *Op. Cit.* p. 118

stages of a knowledge revolution, Generation Z members are seen as self-taught, willing to experiment, and ready to face failures as they grow up.

VI. Conclusions

The importance of the creative dimension often gets overshadowed by normative learning. Schools should adopt three main directions: pedagogical, social and artistic. The cultural/artistic activities, which also have educational objectives, strengthen the pedagogical dimension and extend its impact to the community. What can schools learn from culture and the arts? What can culture and the arts teach schools? The performance *Generația Zet. Story al unui Suferman cu Glugă* received positive feedback because it offers a unique way of conveying information to the target group, which is exposed daily to a variety of stimuli. Students retained a significant amount of knowledge on emotion management, and, moreover, it posed a challenge for reflection. Some pupils admitted to having felt depressed, while others expressed being in a depressed state. Some even shared that they sought help from a specialist because they did not know how to manage their anger. A person who reflects is someone on the brink of making a change. The power to reflect on experiences, behaviours, moods, and feelings lies within each of us. “People would lead a much better life together if human knowledge were deep, because certain disruptive forms of living together would be suppressed — forms that are possible today because we do not know each other.”³⁸ Perhaps it is advisable to take early steps in this direction, so that the future adult already hold this conviction. The sense of communion, as emphasised by Adler, makes humans incapable of living alone. He states, “No matter how far we search in the history of society, we find nowhere any trace of an individual who lived alone. Faith in society has always existed.”³⁹ Education through theatre serves as an extension of informal education.

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38 Alfred Adler, *The Psychology of the Hard to Educate Schoolboy*, IRI Publishing, Bucharest, 1995, p. 34

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