

The Stage as Examination or the Stage as Revelation? Dilemmas of Student Theatre

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Abstract: This article analyses the specific status of student theatre at the intersection of pedagogical training and artistic creation. It argues that the stage, in this context, functions simultaneously as a space of evaluation and as a potential site of artistic revelation. Although student performance is shaped by discipline, correction, exposure and institutional forms of assessment, it can also generate moments in which technique becomes expressive presence and training transforms into artistic self-discovery. The article also examines the relationship between discipline and freedom, suggesting that scenic authenticity in student theatre does not emerge outside rigour but through its internalisation. Student theatre is thus understood as a distinct artistic field, in which training, vulnerability and becoming acquire both pedagogical and aesthetic significance.

Keywords: student theatre; pedagogy; artistic revelation; scenic authenticity; discipline; freedom

Introduction

Student theatre occupies a particular place in the landscape of the performing arts, precisely because of its ambiguous status, which is difficult to fix within a single, definitive category. It can be reduced neither to the condition of a mere pedagogical exercise, nor can it be viewed, without nuance, as an autonomous artistic product entirely detached from the context in which it is born. Between these two dimensions — the pedagogical and the spectacular — one of its fundamental tensions is constructed, a tension that confers upon it both fragility and force. In student theatre, the stage is never solely the space of representation; it is also the site of permanent verification, of confrontation with oneself, with the demands of training, and with the gaze of "the other". At the same time, this very space — subject to the discipline, evaluation and constraints specific to the educational process — can become the site

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of potentially decisive revelations, in which the student discovers not only the mechanisms of scenic play, but also the first authentic forms of their own scenic presence.

This dual belonging of student theatre makes it, perhaps more than other forms of scenic practice, a territory of becoming. Here, the process does not disappear behind the final result but remains visible, sometimes even constitutive of the expressiveness the spectator experiences. The uncertainties, hesitations and tensions between technique and spontaneity, between the desire to succeed and the inner freedom of the creative act, are not simply signs of an unfinished journey but elements that give specificity to this form of theatre. In the student space, the stage does not function exclusively as a site of aesthetic fulfilment but also as a site of searching, of attempting, of exposure. It presupposes not only the presentation of a result but also the assumption of a process of transformation.

From this perspective, one of the most fertile questions raised by student theatre concerns the deep nature of the stage within the context of artistic training. For the student actor, the stage is, without doubt, an examination — a site of explicit or implicit evaluation, of measuring oneself against requirements, criteria, hierarchies, comparisons and validations. It illuminates capacities and limits, confirms possibilities and can also generate blockages, anxieties or forms of self-censorship. To step onto the stage, in the context of school, does not mean only to perform, but also to expose oneself to a multiple judgement: that of the teacher, of peers, of the audience and, not least, of one's own critical conscience. In this sense, the stage acquires the dimension of a trial, of a threshold of passage, of a verification that often exceeds the simple logic of the grade or institutional assessment.

Nevertheless, reducing the student stage to its examinatory function would mean radically diminishing its artistic and human potential. Beyond the pressure of verification, the stage can also become the site of a revelation: the moment when the student no longer merely executes technical tasks, no longer responds exclusively to an external requirement, but begins to understand the living meaning of scenic presence. Here, revelation should not be understood in the sense of the spectacular exceptional or of a grand illumination, but rather as a subtle yet decisive moment in which the exercise begins to transform into personal language and technique finds a living, interior and coherent expression. In such moments, the student discovers their artistic possibilities and their authentic relationship with the stage partner, the space,

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the text, their own body and the audience. The stage ceases to be merely the place where something is demonstrated and becomes the place where something is revealed.

The question of whether the stage is, in student theatre, an examination or a revelation does not aim, therefore, to establish a rigid opposition between two incompatible functions. On the contrary, the hypothesis from which this study proceeds is that the specificity of student theatre derives precisely from the tension between these two dimensions, from the impossibility of separating them radically and from the way in which they mutually condition one another. Rigour, discipline, repetition, correction and evaluation are not necessarily obstacles on the path to scenic truth: sometimes they constitute the necessary framework within which that truth can emerge. Equally, artistic revelation does not suspend the rigour of training but internalises and transfigures it. The question is therefore not whether one of these dimensions should annul the other, but to what extent the relationship between them remains fertile, alive and creative.

This study proposes to analyse this dual function of the stage in student theatre, understood both as a space of pedagogical evaluation and as the site of a possible artistic revelation. The approach aims to highlight the way in which the student stage constitutes itself as a territory of tension between discipline and freedom, between technique and authenticity, between fragility and scenic affirmation. In this sense, student theatre will not be approached as a minor or incomplete form of professional theatre, but as a distinct space of artistic experience, in which becoming, vulnerability and risk are not signs of insufficiency but real sources of expressiveness and meaning.

Student Theatre between Pedagogy and Creation

Student theatre is defined by a particular condition that differentiates it both from institutionalised professional theatre and from other forms of scenic practice developed outside the academic framework: it is born in a space of training, exercise and accumulation, yet does not remain confined to the exclusively pedagogical logic of learning techniques. Although it is an integral part of an educational process, student theatre often exceeds the status of a mere didactic instrument and tends towards the configuration of an artistic act with its own identity. It is precisely this positioning between two registers — one of training and one of creation — that confers upon it specificity and complexity.

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To receive student theatre merely as a preparatory stage, as an intermediate ground before the "real" stage, means diminishing one of its essential traits — the capacity to produce authentic artistic experience within the process of becoming. In this type of theatre, the process does not disappear behind the final form, as often happens in mature, well-calibrated productions, but remains visible and active in the texture of the performance. The student production frequently bears traces of searching, of construction in progress, of a relationship between technique and expression that has not yet been definitively fixed. These traces should not be interpreted exclusively as signs of insufficiency, but also as signs of a special vitality, of a scenic energy that derives precisely from the proximity of the training process. At the same time, this condition should not be idealised. Student theatre is not valuable merely because it is "young", "fresh" or "spontaneous", but because it places pedagogical rigour and creative impulse in a fertile relationship. The student actor is not on stage simply to express themselves but also to learn how expression itself is constructed: how the body is disciplined, how presence is organised, how emotion is transformed into scenic form, and how the transition from affective availability to artistic consciousness is achieved. In this sense, student theatre is the space in which freedom does not precede training but is born gradually from within it.

From this context derives also its paradoxical status: student theatre is simultaneously a protected space and a space of exposure; a framework of learning and a site of real confrontation with the audience; a laboratory and a stage. It presupposes error, attempt, return and adjustment. Equally, student theatre requires assumption, rigour and the capacity to transform exercise into an artistically recognisable form. Between pedagogy and artistic creation there is, in this case, no stable frontier, but a zone of permanent interference. It is precisely in this zone that the specificity of student theatre is born, and it is here that the central dilemma of this study is prepared — that of the stage understood as more than a site of validation: a possible space of artistic self-discovery: "It has long been understood that theatre offers young people a transitional space in which to shape, disrupt and interpret narratives, both fictional and real, and the methodologies and pedagogies of theatre education depend on interactivity. Participating in theatre can offer young people a

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chance to produce equitable spaces in which to work, in which they can be ‘me and not me’, thereby meeting the alterity in.”¹

The Stage as an Examin

Within student theatre, the stage almost inevitably acquires the value of a trial. It is not merely the place in which the scenic exercise is concretised, but also the space in which it is verified, measured and judged. Even when no explicit form of examination exists, the stage remains associated with a constant evaluative pressure, because, in the context of training, any public appearance implies, directly or indirectly, a confrontation with criteria, expectations and hierarchies. The student does not step onto the stage exclusively to play, but also to demonstrate that they have understood, that they have assimilated, that they are capable of transforming workshop work into a coherent and expressive form.

This examinatory dimension should not be reduced to simple institutional grading. The scenic examination is more complex and more subtle, for it presupposes simultaneously multiple evaluating gazes. There is, of course, the gaze of the teacher, the master, who follows rigour, precision, availability, progress, or the capacity to integrate working notes. There is then the gaze of peers, equally important and sometimes even more pressing, because it functions within a space of permanent comparison. Finally, there is the gaze of the audience, which introduces another form of verification — less technical but more direct — since it validates or invalidates the communicative force of scenic presence. To all of this is added self-evaluation, perhaps the most severe of all, through which the student measures themselves against their own ideals, insecurities and demands.

In this sense, the stage as examination is a site of heightened exposure. The student actor finds themselves in a vulnerable position, because what is subjected to evaluation is not merely an external result, but the very instrument of expression: body, voice, sensitivity, capacity for concentration, relationship to the partner, inner mobility. To err on stage, in the student context, means not only failing to reach a technical objective but can be experienced as a personal failure, as a fissure in one's own artistic image still in formation. This is why the pedagogical stage is often

¹Helen Nicholson, *Theatre, Education and Performance. The Map and the Story*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 223

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traversed by specific anxieties — the fear of not measuring up, of not being sufficient, of not confirming the promise perceived or projected by others: "The true actor should not ape the outward manifestations of passion, or copy outward form, or indulge in mechanical playacting according to some ham ritual or other, but perform actions in a genuine human fashion. You must not play passions and characters but react under the influence of passion, in character."²

Such pressure has ambivalent effects. On the one hand, it can discipline, can focus energies, can create that sense of stakes without which theatre risks remaining a mere inert exercise. The stage understood as examination obliges assumption, rigour and the transformation of intention into a recognisable scenic act. It demands active, real presence, clarity and responsibility. In this sense, the examination can have a deeply formative function and teaches the student that the stage is not a space of indefinite approximation but one of concentration and truth confronted with the gaze of the other: "The first question must always be 'What is good acting?' And the answer will remain the same: 'When it is alive'. Strangely we need to keep returning to this point of departure, otherwise we are forever lost."³

On the other hand, the same logic of verification can produce forms of rigidification that affect precisely the freedom necessary to the artistic act. The student may begin to play not in order to search but in order to succeed. There is a possibility that one no longer pursues the living experience of a scenic situation but rather the demonstration of a competence. In such moments, technique risks becoming ostentatious and scenic expression risks subordinating itself to the desire for confirmation. What should be a living process can transform into an excessively controlled demonstration, in which spontaneity retreats and creative risk is replaced by caution. The stage ceases to be the site of an encounter and becomes the site of a defensive verification.

This is, in fact, one of the great tensions of student theatre: that between the legitimate need for evaluation and the danger that evaluation comes to occupy the entire horizon of scenic presence. To the extent that the student comes to relate to the stage merely as an instance of judgement, the possibility of artistic revelation is considerably reduced. Instead of a living relationship with the role, with the partner

²Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work. A Student's Diary*, Translated and edited by Jean Benedetti, Routledge, 2008, p. 43

³*Ibidem*, p. X

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and with the audience, excessive self-control, calculation and fear of error take hold. And when fear becomes dominant, the stage no longer forms — it blocks. Nevertheless, the examinatory dimension of the stage cannot be eliminated from student theatre, nor should it be demonised. It is part of the very structure of the training process and its role is to confront the student with the rigour of the chosen profession. The problem is not the existence of the examination but the way in which it is internalised and experienced. When the stage remains merely the site of an external validation, it risks becoming sterile; but when evaluation functions as a form of lucidity and assumption of one's own becoming, the examination can become a necessary step in scenic maturation. It is precisely from here that the possibility of the other dimension opens — that in which the stage is no longer merely a trial but begins to acquire the meaning of a revelation.

The Stage as Revelation

If the stage, in student theatre, often functions as a space of evaluation, it can equally become the site of a formative and artistic revelation. This is not a matter of revelation in the spectacular sense — as an exceptional, grandiose and by no means definitive moment — but of that discrete yet essential transformation through which the student begins to understand, from within, what it truly means to be scenically present. In such moments, the stage ceases to be merely the framework in which learned techniques are applied and becomes the space of a discovery: of one's own inner rhythm, of the living relationship with the partner, of the expressive force of the body and of the profound meaning of the encounter with the audience.

Scenic revelation does not emerge outside of exercise but, paradoxically, from its very core. After repetitions, corrections, attempts and returns, there may come the moment when the student no longer simply executes a task but begins to inhabit the scenic situation organically. Technique does not disappear, but it ceases to be visible as an external mechanism and transforms into inner availability. The gesture acquires meaning, the voice becomes more than a vehicle for text, and presence organises itself through a form of coherence between interiority and expression. What until then had been merely work, discipline or correction can suddenly become living language, used by the body of the student actor — which is an instrument: "Our instrument is the same body that carries on a life; it eats, and sleeps, and makes love, it laughs and cries, it dies. Experience is coming to us through our bodies as sensations. Our bodies record

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this as knowledge. We speak a language of experience we are comfortable with, using word pictures that are absolutely connected to movement. Perhaps we are too comfortable in that we have lost a connection to the original statements. What do we mean when we say, ‘she fell into despair’, or ‘fell into confusion’, or ‘fell in love’ or ‘fell asleep’? How can these things be connected? Do we really fall into them?”⁴

In student theatre, this revelation carries a particular force precisely because it occurs in a space of becoming, where nothing is fully fixed. The student does not always possess the technical security of the mature actor, but it is precisely this instability that can make room for an artistic presence of rare authenticity. Vulnerability, hesitation, searching — all these signs of an artistic identity still in formation — can become sources of expressiveness. There are moments in which imperfection does not diminish scenic truth but renders it more visible, because the student's presence is not yet covered by automatism or by the already-sedimented formula of a professional solution. In such moments, the stage is no longer the place where insecurity is concealed but where it transforms into living, communicable tension.

Revelation also concerns the modification of the relationship between the student and their artistic self. In the early stages of transformation, scenic play may be dominated by the desire to conform, to imitate a model, to respond correctly to a requirement. Revelation begins where the student detaches from mere execution and understands that scenic presence is not reducible to correctness but requires assumption. This is the moment in which they no longer seek merely to demonstrate that they can, but begin to discover how they can be. This transition from conformity to assumption is one of the decisive experiences of student theatre and represents, perhaps, the first real step towards artistic consciousness.

Moreover, the stage as revelation implies a new understanding of the relationship with the audience. For the student, the encounter with the spectator can initially be experienced as a threat, as a source of paralysing emotion or as an instance of judgement. But as scenic experience deepens, the audience may be felt differently: not as an adversary but as a tacit partner in the theatrical act. At that moment, the stage is no longer merely the place where competences are demonstrated, but the space of real communication, in which energy circulates, meanings are activated and presence

⁴Lenard Petit, *The Michael Chekhov Handbook. For the Actor*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2010, p. 6

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becomes relational. The student is no longer alone before the gaze of the other, but together with it, in a form of co-presence that gives the scenic act its living dimension. The stage as revelation should not be idealised nor confused with immediate success. It can appear in very fragile moments, often impossible to repeat identically, and does not coincide with impeccable performance. Sometimes, revelation consists precisely in understanding that the stage does not demand perfection, but truth of presence; not absolute control, but the availability to transform technique into expression and vulnerability into relation. This is why revelatory experiences in student theatre are so important: they do not offer merely the satisfaction of a punctual success, but open a perspective onto the deeper meaning of theatrical practice.

In this sense, the student stage is more than a framework of learning or a step towards professionalisation. It can be the place in which the future actor understands why theatre is not reducible to representation, but implies a form of self-knowledge and of relating to the world. Scenic revelation does not merely produce a successful production; it contributes to the formation of an artistic sensibility, to the emergence of a consciousness of presence and to the understanding that the stage is, in essence, a space of truth lived and shared. It is precisely for this reason that, in student theatre, revelation is not a fortunate accident, but one of the most profound stakes of training.

Between Discipline and Freedom: the Founding Tension of Student Theatre

If the student stage can be understood, on the one hand, as examination and, on the other, as revelation, it becomes clear that its specificity does not reside in the choice of one of these aspects, but in the permanent tension between them. Student theatre does not develop in a space of absolute freedom, nor within a system of purely technical constraints. It constitutes itself precisely in the zone of interference between rigour and availability, between the demands of training and the need for authentic expression. In this sense, one of its essential dilemmas is that of the relationship between discipline and freedom: how much rule is necessary for scenic expression to acquire consistency, and at what moment does the rule risk becoming an obstacle to artistic truth?

In the process of acting training, discipline is inevitable and legitimate. It presupposes repeated exercise, control of the corporal and vocal instrument, the capacity to work with precision, to return, to correct, to deepen. Without this

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dimension of work, scenic freedom would remain a mere intention, an affective availability without norm and without consistency. The student cannot arrive at a genuine scenic presence without learning to organise their energies, to master their means and to understand the mechanisms by which emotion is transformed into communicable expression. From this point of view, discipline is not the opposite of creation but one of the conditions of its possibility.

And yet, theatre cannot be reduced to discipline without losing its very living dimension. If rigour becomes excessive, if the accent falls exclusively on correctness, on conformity and on the reproduction of an efficient solution, then the stage risks closing itself within a logic of control that stifles initiative, intuition and creative risk. In student theatre, this danger is all the more present since training implies reference to models, to pedagogical authority and to solid criteria of evaluation. There is always the temptation to equate scenic success with exactness of execution and to confuse artistic maturation with the diminishment of uncertainty. But it is precisely this uncertainty — when assumed and worked — that can become one of the most fertile resources of scenic presence. Freedom, in the context of student theatre, does not mean the absence of rules or the refusal of discipline. It is not a spontaneous given, existing prior to training, but a fragile and progressive result of it. The student does not become free on stage because they escape from demands, but because they begin to internalise them in a living, personal, creative way. Scenic freedom emerges when technique no longer functions as external pressure but as support for expression, when rigour no longer inhibits but sustains. From this perspective, the true stake of theatrical pedagogy is not the reproduction of an obedient discipline, but the formation of an articulate freedom, capable of transforming exercise into presence and rule into language.

Here lies one of the fundamental differences between mere instruction and genuine artistic training. Instruction can produce habits, reflexes and functional mechanisms. Artistic training, however, presupposes something more: the student's capacity to move from the application of a set of techniques to the assumption of a living relationship with the scenic material. In theatre, discipline becomes fertile only when it opens, not when it closes; when it creates the conditions for discovery, not when it imposes a uniformisation of expression. This is why the tension between discipline and freedom is not accidental but constitutive of student theatre. It defines precisely the space in which the student learns not only to do, but to understand and to artistically assume what they do — as in other art forms as well: "It still proves

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difficult to accept that only a too limited notion of theatre creates the expectation that it should always present us with a heightened representation of human affairs, that theatre is just as much an art of the body, of space, of time as sculpture or architecture."⁵

This tension is also reflected in the relationship between teacher and student, one of the most sensitive axes of student theatre. The teacher's role is to transmit method, rigour, clarity and criteria, but also to bear responsibility for not transforming the pedagogical process into a simple reproduction of formulae. To the extent that pedagogical authority encourages only correctness and conformity, the student may become cautious, imitative, incapable of assuming personal risk. On the contrary, when rigour is doubled by openness and by the understanding that each student constructs their relationship with the stage differently, discipline can function as support rather than as limit. Artistic freedom does not oppose guidance here, but develops through a pedagogy that knows how to demand without stifling and how to guide without substituting the student's own voice.

At the same time, the tension between discipline and freedom also manifests at the level of the relationship between the individual and the collective. Student theatre is a space of shared formation, in which the student learns to integrate into an ensemble, to respect the rhythm of others, to participate in the construction of a collective organism. But this group dimension should not annul the process of artistic individualisation. On the contrary, one of the great difficulties of student theatre consists precisely in finding a balance between ensemble discipline and the affirmation of a personal sensibility. The student must simultaneously learn to be part of a whole and to discover their own scenic tonality, without confusing autonomy with arbitrariness or integration with self-erasure.

Student theatre can therefore be understood as a space of formation through tension, not through simple resolution. Neither discipline nor freedom is sufficient in itself. Without discipline, the stage dissolves into uncontrolled improvisation or into spontaneity without density; without freedom, it reduces to demonstration, to mechanism, to inert correctness. The force of student theatre comes precisely from the fertile maintenance of this contradiction. It is the place in which the student learns that scenic truth emerges neither from total abandonment nor from absolute control,

⁵Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Translated and with an Introduction by Karen Jürs-Munby, Routledge, 2006

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but from an always unstable, always renegotiated equilibrium between rigour and openness. In this light, the student stage becomes more than the space of a professional exercise — it becomes the space of a deeper education of sensibility. It obliges the student to accept that artistic freedom is not a comfortable state but a form of responsibility. To be free on stage means to be able to transform constraint into resource, rule into support, fragility into expression. This is why the tension between discipline and freedom should not be overcome but inhabited creatively. Within it is formed not only the actor as executor of techniques, but the artist as a subject capable of giving meaning to their own scenic presence.

Fragility, Risk and Authenticity in the Student Production

One of the most salient features of student theatre is that it keeps visible a certain state of fragility that professional theatre, in its established forms, tends to mask or to integrate into an already-stabilised technique. This fragility should not be understood exclusively as a lack of experience or as a deficit of scenic mastery, although such aspects may naturally exist. More importantly, in student theatre, fragility belongs to the very condition of training: the student is still in a process of artistic constitution, and the stage reflects precisely this state of becoming, with all the insecurities, hesitations and intensities it entails. Rather than being entirely concealed, the process remains present even in the performance, which frequently confers upon the production a particular vibration, difficult to reproduce in other contexts.

From this derives also the dimension of risk, inseparable from student scenic practice. To step onto the stage means for the student, beyond the mere assumption of a public exposure, the assumption of the possibility of not succeeding, of not fully controlling the scenic instrument, of not always being able to transform intention into clear and coherent expression. But it is precisely this instability that makes student theatre a space of potential authenticity. Risk here is not only a limitation, but also a factor of intensifying presence. The student plays without yet possessing all the mechanisms that, in professional theatre, can protect, regulate or "rescue" the stage; they find themselves closer to the edge of vulnerability, and this proximity can generate a real scenic tension, perceptible and emotionally fertile: "The emotional life of the characters on the stage is, with rare exceptions, only a substitute for atmosphere. This is especially true of our dry and intellectual era, when we are afraid of our own

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and others' feelings. Let us not forget that in the realm of art, in the theater, there is no excuse for banishing atmospheres. An individual, if he wishes, can dispense with his feelings for a while in his private life; but the arts, and the theater in particular, will slowly approach death if the atmospheres cease to radiate through their creations. The great mission of the actor, as well as the director and the playwright, is to save the soul of the theater and, with it, the future of our profession."⁶

There is, of course, a danger in idealising this state. Fragility should not be transformed into a value in itself, just as risk is not automatically synonymous with scenic truth. A student production does not become authentic merely because it is imperfect or because it makes its fissures visible. Authenticity is not confused with a lack of control nor with the raw exposure of emotion. It emerges only when this vulnerability is inhabited scenically, assumed and transformed into a living relationship with the play material, with the partner and with the audience. In other words, authenticity does not mean the mere presence of fragility, but the capacity to integrate it into a scenic act that communicates and generates meaning.

Nevertheless, student theatre has the special capacity to make visible precisely the moment in which expression is born from such a zone of risk. The student does not always have recourse to the protection of the formula, of the already-verified solution or of a completely internalised technique. In return, they can offer a type of scenic presence in which effort, searching and emotion are not yet covered by automatism. Sometimes it is precisely this direct exposure that produces in the spectator the sensation of a more immediate contact with the truth of the stage. All of this can happen not because student theatre is "more sincere" than professional theatre, but because its state of instability keeps open the possibility of an encounter less mediated by convention and technical security. In this sense, the authenticity of the student production should not be understood as the opposite of technique, but as the still-living relationship between technique and experience. The student is not authentic because they do not sufficiently master the means of the stage, but because they find themselves at a moment in which these means are still in the process of being internalised and, for that very reason, have not yet fully separated from the person using them. On stage, they will bring not only a role or a composition, but also their own training process, their own limits, their own attempts to transform vulnerability

⁶Michael Chekhov, *To the Actor. On the Technique of Acting*, New York, Barnes & Noble Books, 1985, p. 54

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into expression. From this derives that specific mixture of insecurity and intensity that can give student theatre a particular affective power and aesthetic.

There is yet another important aspect: fragility and risk do not function only at the individual level, but also at the level of the entire scenic construction. In student theatre, the ensemble itself can preserve a form of fertile precarity: the relationships between actors are in the process of sedimentation, scenic rhythms are still alive and permeable, and the group's energy is not always fully fixed within a stable convention. This slightly unstable character of the ensemble can sometimes produce a form of collective intensity that compensates for the lack of technical perfection. The production lives then not through impeccability but through the quality of a shared presence, in permanent negotiation with itself: "The body is not exhibited for the sake of its closeness to a classical ideal, but for the sake of a painful confrontation with imperfection. The attraction and aesthetic dialectic of the classical sculptures of bodies consist not least in the sense that the living human being cannot compete with them. In the here and now of the exchange of looks between audience and stage, by contrast, the ageing and degenerating body is subjected to an unsparing exposition. The performer balances on a knife edge between a metamorphosis into a dead exhibition piece and her self-assertion as a person. In a certain way, the performer also presents herself as a victim: without the protection of the role, without the fortification of the idealizing serenity of the ideal, the body in its fragility and misery is surrendered to the tribunal of judging gazes."⁷

Student theatre must therefore be regarded also as a space in which authenticity is won through exposure. It does not result from the refusal of rigour but from traversing it with all the risks that implies. To be authentic on stage, in the student context, means accepting that fragility cannot be entirely annulled and that precisely from its assumption a form of scenic truth can be born. At this point, student theatre reveals one of its most valuable resources: the capacity to transform insecurity into presence and risk into significant artistic experience. It is precisely here, in this zone of fertile instability, that the deep connection between formation and expression, between becoming and scenic meaning, can be glimpsed.

⁷Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, Translated and with an Introduction by Karen Jürs-Munby, Routledge, 2006, p. 165

Conclusions and Possibilities for Continuation of the Study

Student theatre is configured as a particular scenic space precisely because it cannot be reduced either to the strict logic of pedagogical formation or to that of the closed and self-sufficient artistic product. It exists in a zone of fertile tension, in which exercise and expression, discipline and freedom, vulnerability and affirmation coexist without mutually annulling one another. From this perspective, the question formulated in the title of the article — whether the stage is, in student theatre, examination or revelation — does not demand an exclusive answer, but invites recognition of a dual function that defines the very nature of this type of scenic practice.

The stage is, without doubt, an examination. It verifies, exposes, obliges assumption and confronts the student with the demands of a profession that does not admit indefinite approximation. In the space of student theatre, this dimension of the trial is not limited to institutional evaluation, but implies a broader confrontation with the gaze of the teacher, of peers, of the audience and, perhaps most intensely, with one's own artistic conscience still in formation. It is precisely for this reason that the stage becomes a site of lucid thinking, of concrete understanding that theatre does not mean only intention, emotion or availability, but also rigour, responsibility and the capacity to transform all of these into a living scenic form. But the stage is, equally, revelation. Within the formative process, those decisive moments can emerge in which the student no longer plays merely to respond to a requirement, but begins to understand the living meaning of scenic presence. Revelation marks the emergence of an artistic consciousness, of an authentic relationship with the role, with the partner, with the space and with the audience. It marks the transition from execution to assumption, from conformity to expression, from the mere application of techniques to the discovery of a personal language. In this sense, student theatre is more than the space in which craft is learned: it is also the space in which the first forms of an artistic identity are delineated.

What confers specific value upon student theatre is precisely the fact that these two dimensions — examination and revelation — do not exclude each other but mutually condition one another. The pedagogical experience can create the necessary framework for the emergence of an authentic scenic freedom, just as artistic revelation does not suspend discipline but internalises and transfigures it. The question is therefore not the choice of one of these functions at the expense of the other, but the preservation of a living rapport between them. When the stage becomes merely an

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instance of control, it blocks; when it becomes merely a space of uncontrolled spontaneity, it loses its consistency. The force of student theatre comes from maintaining this contradiction in a fertile, creative form.

At the same time, the fragility and risk specific to the student production should not be viewed only as signs of insufficiency, but also as resources of a particular authenticity. The fact that the process remains visible, that presence is not yet fully covered by automatism, that the student finds themselves in a state of artistic becoming — all of these can confer upon the stage a special intensity. Student theatre does not impress through perfection, but through the way in which it renders visible the living matter of formation: the attempt, the hesitation, the courage, the exposure, the searching. In this sense, it obliges us to reconsider the criteria by which we evaluate scenic success and to accept that artistic truth can also appear in forms that are not yet fully sedimented. In conclusion, the student stage is valuable precisely because it does not offer only a result, but renders visible a process of becoming. It is simultaneously trial and promise, verification and discovery, rigour and openness. Within this dual function is formed not only the actor as practitioner of techniques, but the artist as a subject capable of assuming the meaning of their own scenic presence.

In the continuation of this analysis, the study can be extended through applied research into the concrete situation of theatre schools in Romania, analysing the specific pedagogy, the relationship between scenic examination and revelation, and the dynamic between discipline and freedom in each institution. Such a comparative approach, centred on the particularities of each school, could highlight the differences in method, aesthetics and institutional culture that shape the training of young actors, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of student theatre as a diverse space in continuous transformation.

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