

Anxiety and Sublime in Theatre

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Abstract: In this paper it is analyzed the idea that, in modernity, the theatre placed under the sign of anxiety tends to oscillate between the aesthetic categories of beauty and sublime. The analysis takes into consideration Peter Brook's concept of *deadly theatre* from the perspective of its tendency to lessen the creative anxiety. Then we follow this idea from the point of view of *sociological art* that gives the experience of anxiety, from a theatrical perspective, only to the spectator, the artistic operator avoiding it. What stands out is that, for theatre, anxiety, in various definitions of the term, seems to enhance the realization of the performance. We also note, throughout the argument, different ways of understanding the concept of the sublime. We notice that the sublime tends not to define itself in a unitary way, having multiple meanings, some even contradictory. In conclusion, we propose a definition of the aesthetic category of the sublime, taken from the universe of fine arts, which seems to us much more efficient and operative in the field of theatre arts.

Keywords: anxiety, sublime, individuation, present, presentation, irrepresentable

Is the personal imprint of a theatre creator a hard-to-reach goal or is it something implicit? Is it enough for him, for instance, *to walk across an empty stage* in order to manifest himself according to his personal style? Simplifying, ultimately, to assert that *the personal imprint is immanent to the theatre creator*, it assumes that its coming into existence is not conditioned by anything external. It is taken for granted that a theatre creator is innately gifted with talent, and that is enough to create theatre. We believe, however, that this situation has not yet been observed in reality, also because theatre needs both a hard and continuous work of the creator with himself and someone else willing to observe him. Therefore, we reject the idea that as regards theatre creators the personal imprint can be innate. If the personal imprint were innate, imitation as a theatrical instrument would be impossible. We know imitation

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to be a theatrical tool by definition. Thus, we find that for theatre creators, the personal imprint remains something difficult to achieve.

Sometimes the creations seem to resemble each other to such an extent that they are perceived as identical. The fashion, the trend of theatrical creation imposes itself with such vehemence that, sometimes, it seems that censorship itself has found it appropriate to find its purpose in an atypical, irre recognizable form, and has given a helping hand to create the trend, or, in other words, to remove any personal imprint from theatrical creation. Why is it hard to reach one's personal imprint? In order to have a personal imprint on the construction of the artistic product, the theatre creator must understand this process of expressing the personal imprint as a process of individualization, distancing himself from the safety of collective existence.

To have a personal imprint, for a theatre creator, implies a blessing and a curse at the same time. It can be the guarantee of the quality of the performance. But it can also be dangerous. One's personal imprint can prevent him from expressing himself in the creative dimension. How? Trying to achieve it in theatre can lead one to unintelligibility, to isolation in an obscure form of expression. If we consider that the personal imprint belongs to the process of psychological individuation, in the sense that it manifests at the end of this process, then we can affirm that the dynamic balance between consciousness and the unconscious, in Jungian terms, was established on imprecise coordinates, which will not be able to sustain it over a long period of time, of manifestation in the immediate.

On the other hand, considering that "the theatre is the arena where a living confrontation can take place"¹ and that "The individuation process is the unfolding of the conflict between the two dimensions of the psyche. The symbol, with its transcendent function, facilitates the meeting of the unconscious with consciousness and the elimination of disturbances in the process. The unconscious acts with archaic wisdom, teleologically oriented in the direction of restoring the balance of the psyche. The tendency to relativize opposites is a specific feature of it. Consciousness acts logically, the unconscious follows instinctive tendencies"², we could say, in a parallel, of course, extremely distant between psychology and theatre, but, nevertheless, possible, that if we treat as equivalent to *the psychic balance* the moments in which the performance *presents itself* to the spectator in a *present* that has common points; if we treat *the consciousness* and *the unconscious* as

1 Brook, Peter, *The Empty Space*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1996, p. 122

2 Sorea, Daniela, *De la Freud la Jung – O schimbare de paradigmă*, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2019, p. 79

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equivalent to the presence of *the actor* and *the character*; and if we treat *the symbol* as equivalent to *the scenic action*; beyond a few observations underlying the existence of *the state of equilibrium* or *the state of presence in the present*, namely: (a) the confrontation must not be mechanical or artificial, but *alive*, (b) the actor tends to emphasize the confrontation by reasoning, and the character to diminish it, (c) the actor tends to act logically, and the character instinctively, (d) there should be a moment negotiated by the meeting between actor and character that leads to the establishment of the presence in the present; we could notice that the personal imprint in the theatrical universe can be assimilated to the moment when the state of presence of the performance in its entirety was achieved, a state that can be assimilated to the state of psychological equilibrium resulting from the individuation process.

Therefore, *the personal imprint* can only be identified where, after reaching the balance given by the presence in the present, the scenic individuality can be ascertained. Even in the world of theatre, the personal imprint cannot be created by a collective, but only by individuality. After all, the collective can have access to its personal imprint only to the extent that the individualities that compose it manage to manifest themselves as *presences in the present* and fuse their characteristics into a group identity or collective identity that erases any trace of the parts that compose it.

But perhaps it is precisely the presence of this personal imprint of the theatre man, his identity, that accentuates the anxiety that arouses the creative energy that, treated with neglect, can demolish any trace of his talent. "For talent is not static, it ebbs and flows according to many circumstances."³ And this *anxiety* is very likely to circumstantiate what we call talent as the main condition of its manifestation. However, the creative anxiety we sometimes speak of can be noticed from the beginning: "In the group that gathers for a first rehearsal, whether a scratch cast or a permanent company, an infinite number of personal questions and worries hang unspoken in the air"⁴. However, anxiety can be of several kinds. It can be, on the one hand, worry, turmoil, restlessness, agitation, panic, fear, and, on the other hand, it can be understood as continuous action. Thus, thinking of the theatrical performance as an interval of the unfolding of the action, we could claim that it necessarily manifests itself as uninterrupted action and, therefore, as *anxiety*. The moment the anxiety calms down, disappears, is the moment the scenic action stops.

3 Brook, Peter, op. cit., p. 128

4 Ibidem

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Stage movement can be regarded as a state of anxiety. The theatre performance by its simple spacing, occupying a place, can be understood as anxiety.

But how should we understand anxiety itself? As mere agitation? As entropy? As anomie? Pulverization? In this case, theatre would itself be merely an endless unraveling of any possible connections. But we should take into account that anxiety, if we do not understand it as self-sufficient nervousness, has a component that takes it off the path of irreparable breakups and positions it in reality as unfolding. In the case of nervousness as anxiety we have the possibility of understanding by this an anxiety about something, usually an uncertain outcome, but it can also be something other than that. Namely the intense desire for something to happen or to produce something. In this case we could extend the meaning of anxiety, through its dimension of restlessness, to the fact that anxiety always involves a worry about something or someone.

Often, anxiety, in the theatre, is confused with discontent and protest, as if the source of the theatre were mere grief. Undoubtedly, this is a major error of interpretation. The source of theatre is not sadness, distress, but just the opposite. And yet the stubborn insistence on experiencing this conceptual delight leads, in practice, to the conceiving of a theatre that, day by day, proves to be a theatre without spectators.

It is a theatre of mortification, of confusion. A theatre that lacks the need to be performed in front of the spectator, to *address every spectator*. It seems to be a theatre of one's own failures to perceive and represent *the real*. A theatre deeply conventionalized on several levels of infrastructure that no longer addresses otherness, but contributes to subjugating the mentality of individuals to a tribal community. A theatre that no longer has any unrest. A theatre of pleasure. An undisturbed and undisturbing theatre. A theatre full of clichés. A theatre that no longer has any turmoil. It resides only in the present moment. It has no future or past. It always aligns with the trend. And yet, "The theatre, on the other hand, always asserts itself in the present"⁵. Should we believe, following the logical thread, that any presentation of a theatrical performance belongs to the category of *deadly theatre*? Undoubtedly, not every theatre performance, by definition, is *deadly*. Here a small distinction can be made between the *deadly theatre* and any other type of theatre. The *deadly theatre* does not need the spectator, but the audience. It is a theatre that exists *per se*. The actor in the *deadly theatre* does not allow himself any ambiguity. It no longer needs to be "... fully immersed in the depths of his being and, at the same time, perfectly controlling himself, his mind, and his

5 Ibidem, p. 121

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body”⁶. For the actor of the *deadly theatre*, exploring his inner life is useless and he does not need to control himself, because precisely that “acting-out” is the desideratum he proposes. He is uncontrollable. No one can be his master, not even himself can master himself. And that doesn't worry him. It calms him down.

The *deadly theatre*, in Brook's terms, thus manifests itself, in the present time, as a theatre of beauty by definition. From this perspective, the category of beauty is defined as relativity. The beauty that does not subsist in the absolute, but only positioned in comparative relationships. This theatre lacks the dimension of the sublime. It cannot be sublime. It will limit itself to remaining beautiful to the other. The one who cannot be otherwise, in this paradigm, but ugly. Hence the tyrannical aspect of *deadly theatre*. *Deadly theatre* cannot be anything other than beautiful or ugly.

As might be expected, it is quite possible that the *deadly theatre* is not transmitted only from the stage to the spectators, but also from the spectators to the stage. There is a possibility that the *deadly spectator* created the phenomenon itself. A spectator unwilling to pay attention to something going on outside of himself, or to someone who manifests himself somewhat parallel to his existence and therefore intangible to his dreams or cupidity. He seems to be a spectator who comes to the theatre only because of his snobbery. Nothing else motivates him. Thus, for this *deadly spectator*, stage mirroring is limited to simply transforming the subject outside his own subjectivity into an object. The *deadly spectator* feels surrounded by objects, and he does not notice happenings around him, only objects. He looks at the environment only to establish the lower or higher value of objects that make the momentary sequence of his attention. Nothing worries the *deadly spectator*. He is calm, for the source of his gaze, which turns everything into an object, is none other than his own snobbery.

But by this, is the deadly spectator a skeptic? If we consider that “Scepticism is an ability to set out oppositions among things which appear and are thought of in any way at all, an ability by which, because of the equivalence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come first to suspension of judgement and afterwards to tranquility”⁷, what he lacks to be totally skeptical is precisely this *suspension of judgment*. He evaluates, counts, values. Instead of suspending judgment, he intensifies it. This leads to emphasizing aesthetic

6 Cozma, Diana, “The Dimension of Corporality in the Theatre Laboratory” in *Hermeneia*, nr. 28, 2022, pp. 86-92, p. 91

7 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, Translated and Edited by Julia Annas and Johnatan Barnes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 4

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pleasure and judging a theatre performance exclusively by means of taste. Thus, silence does not arise as a result of the suspension of judgment, but is independent of it or, at best, we could say that it precedes this suspension. Therefore, the intensification, acceleration of judgment is no longer felt as bearing fruit in anxiety. The *deadly spectator*, paradoxically, is tolerant, he is not troubled, disturbed by anything. And because the *deadly spectator* lives exclusively in the present, he tends to relate to the past as a disease. But “The tendency to pathologize the past does not mean that it has ceased to play an important role in contemporary culture”⁸. The role of the past is drawn from under the patronage of origin, source of presence and is attributed only to those who managed to survive it. The past is a disease from which the *deadly spectator* has healed. He is healthy at present. Nothing threatens his supposed homeostasis anymore. But if the past as a threat has faded, where can the new threat come from? Only from the future. We know that:

“In previous times, uncertainty about the future coincided with the tendency to romanticize the past. Nostalgia for the ‘Good Old Days’ and the celebration of the achievements of the past indicated ambivalence towards change and an uncertain future”⁹.

For him, the past is not security, but threat, it is not health, it is disease, he does not idolize the past, he despises it. But to avoid any threat, the *deadly spectator* merged the present and the future. Thus, the future is no longer uncertain, the future is one with the present. He no longer has any insecurities. He knows that theatre performance is not reality. It is just fun. Therefore, he can remain indifferent to it. Stay safe. Nothing threatens him because nothing touches him anymore. He gets emotional, from time to time, protests more or less discreetly, with intellectual laziness, feels like an actor, rushes on stage without having memorized his text as actors usually do, improvises nonsense and thus he simply satisfies his need for theatre. Not unexpectedly, “... a magnificent performance doesn’t change the world, but a performance which leaves one indifferent and seems generated by indifference makes it uglier”¹⁰. Therefore, the *deadly spectator* has no fear. If the world is not beautiful, it is ugly. And what’s with that? The world is its way. The spectator does not pay attention to the world. He, the spectator, looks at the world.

8 Furedi, Frank, *Politics of Fear*, London & New York, Continuum, 2005, p. 88

9 Ibidem

10 Barba, Eugenio, *On Directing and Dramaturgy. Burning the House*, translated by Judy Barba, London, Routledge, 2010, p. 1

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In contrast, the spectator of other types of theatre is brought to the theatre by an anxiety, even a fear: “The overriding theme of contemporary public life is the fear of change. It is difficult to think of any film, novel or other production of art which depicts the future in positive terms. In recent decades science fiction has become indistinguishable from the horror film. The fear of change also has a deep popular resonance”¹¹.

The disappearance of fears, anxieties, however, is possible to align with the disappearance of the performance itself. The deadly theatre performance still remains within the scope of the definition of a theatre performance. But we can go one step further and imagine what could happen: “When the performance, the stage, the theatre, the illusion disappear, when everything becomes transparent and visible, when everything becomes information and communication, the generalized obscenity begins, which is precisely the situation we experience. We no longer live the drama of alienation, we *live in the ecstasy of communication*”¹². In what we call *sociological art* we notice that the decay of the object from the centre of attention does not restore the subjectivity as *omphalos*, but puts in place of the object the role, the task, the function. “The new type of work will replace the traditional artistic object, conceived in physical support (painting, sculpture, photography) or event type (performance, happening), paying more attention to the way of ‘organization’, to functions and less to objects”¹³. In sociological art, theatre performance tends to disappear.

Its ability to mirror reality is being undermined and replaced by the so-called simple transmission of information. Actually, we are dealing with a transmission of staged information. “Today there is no stage or mirror, only a screen and a network. There is no longer transcendence or depth, only the immanent surface of operations, the smooth and operational surface of communication. [...] We no longer project ourselves into objects with the same affects, with the same fantasies of possession, loss, renunciation, jealousy: the psychological dimension has faded, even though we can always see it in the detail.”¹⁴ Reality declines from its state of complex interaction of its parts to an indicative address devoid of complexity. The claimed efficiency of interpersonal communication turns out to be misunderstood. Communication efficiency should not exclude ambiguities, redundancies, the use of unknowns, variables and constants. However, sociological art seems to have lost interest

11 Furedi, Frank, 2005, op. cit., p. 87

12 Bejan, Petru, “*Artă și estetică în paradigma comunicării*” in *Hermeneia*, nr. 8, 2008, pp. 43-53, p. 46

13 Ibidem, p. 47

14 Baudrillard, Jean, *Celălalt prin sine însuși*, trad. Ciprian Mihali, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 1997, pp. 7-8

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in even structuring artistic models. It seems to have lost patience with artistic expression. For it, the inner life will be especially absent from the artistic product. The theatre maker will have to limit himself to the superficial dimension of appearance. For “The methodology of sociological art consists in activating deviance devices, through transport of information, subversive short circuits, spontaneous questioning, debate, disturbance of affirmative communication circuits, refusal, in order to test effective patterns of communication between people”¹⁵. But we reiterate: theatre performance cannot exist in this way. It needs its own inner life. It cannot remain forever to make a living parasitizing the permutation of information. The theatre performance cannot exist in the absence of the anxieties that generate it. For sociological art, theatre can be a danger, because the binomial actor-spectator works not on the principle of mechanical translation, but on the principle of benevolent subjectivity.

However, “Sociological art [...] proposed and promoted in 1971 by Hervé Fischer, Fred Forest, Jean-Paul Thénot, reunited in *a sociological art collective* (1974-1980)...”¹⁶ does not completely eliminate anxiety from the artistic process. It reserves anxiety only for the spectator. The scenic universe is no longer populated by any anxiety. Only the spectator is given, through various communication techniques, insecurity under the pretext of forcing him to interact in a supposedly authentic way with the artistic product, in reality a way deeply conditioned by the expectations of the so-called *scenic communicators*. And by this does it produce the sensation of beauty? It depends on what we mean by beautiful. But the producers of sociological art who nowadays practice it, often without realizing it, seem to be troubled by no other concern than that of parasitizing the spectator.

However, there is, nevertheless, a “... disruptive event, forcing critical thought to a crisis...”¹⁷ thus provoking, with precision, what sociological art intends to achieve after a rather cumbersome process and with rare chances of success. We are aware that this disturbing event, in fact assimilated to an aesthetic category of the sublime, can be invalidated by ridiculisation: “Anything which is incongruous in the sense that it strikes as ridiculous or grotesque will always puncture the balloon of sublimity and bring it crumpled to the ground”¹⁸. In itself, this event is instability, even anxiety.

Probably, because of this, there are few theatre performances that can be included in this aesthetic category. However, we could make the Kantian

15 Bejan, Petru, 2008, op. cit., p. 47

16 Ibidem

17 Shaw, Philip, *The Sublime*, London & New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 129

18 Osborne, Harold, “From Sublime to Ridiculous” in *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 4, Issue 3, 1964, pp. 284-285, p. 284

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distinction: "... tragedy is distinguished from comedy primarily in the fact that in the former it is the feeling for the sublime while in the latter it is the feeling for the beautiful that is touched"¹⁹. And yet, reasoning that pure tragedy nowadays seems to be extinct, under the assault of the viruses of ridiculisation or grotesqueness, we could understand why the sublime seems to no longer exist in relation to the theatre. But even in this case, the refuge of this aesthetic category could be found in surprising performances. We cannot say that the sublime can no longer manifest itself scenically in actuality. Or is this ultimately the intention of sociological art? Eradicating the sublime.

But it is not only the instruments of the ridiculous and grotesque that can remove the sensation of the sublime. The same result can be achieved in the following situation: "Choose a day on which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations; unite the greatest efforts of poetry, painting, and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when their minds are erect with expectation, let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy"²⁰. Thus we observe the precariousness of the sublime, due, perhaps, to a contemplative component necessary to attest to its existence. Social involvement, the intempestive event can annihilate the sublime.

But if we reduced everything to the category of beauty, perhaps theatre performances would degenerate into an *agreeable* that can easily become disliked because "Without the disturbing character of the sublime, the beautiful would be in constant danger of sliding into the merely "agreeable," corresponding with personal liking or taste"²¹. Personal imprint should not be confused with personal taste, even if the difference between them seems difficult to draw from the perspective of social perception. The separation of the two can be understood by opening outwards of the former and turning inwards of the latter. On the other hand, the style of artistic creation could derive from the personal imprint of the artistic creator, and the instinct to consume the artistic product could derive from the education of taste. The taste

19 Kant, Immanuel, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*, Edited by Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer, Introduction by Patrick Frierson, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 19

20 Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, with an *Introductory Discourse Concerning Taste, and Several Other Additions*, London, Thomas McLean, Haymarket, 1823, pp. 58-59

21 Vránková, Kamila, "Modern Theories of the Sublime: The Question of Presentation" in *Eger Journal of English Studies*, vol. 18, 2018, pp. 3-15, p. 12

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of the theatre creator is not his personal artistic imprint, to the same extent that the taste of the spectator does not become his personal imprint on the performance he witnesses, even if one can speak of an influence on the quality of the actors' play.

Once reduced to the level of taste, the theatre performance loses its validity and reason for existing, because it can no longer offer the spectator access to the horizon of a comprehensible reality that could be possible if it were not just a scenic projection. The theatre performance does not need a horizon of communicative understanding, but that of possible existence. On the other hand, if the definition of "... The ability to present our inability to comprehend [...] constitutes the sublime"²², then the sublime can be suspected of having dramaticity as its fundamental characteristic.

The sublime, when it connotes the dramatic, can also be assumed as that quality of processes that denote unease, even anxiety, in the sense that we expect something unfortunate to happen in the immediate future. But this anxiety can often also be perceived as the expectation that nothing will happen, nothing will change, everything will remain the same. "The possibility of nothing happening is often associated with a feeling of anxiety, a term with strong connotations in modern philosophies of existence and of the unconscious. It gives to waiting, if we really mean waiting, a predominantly negative value."²³ Waiting is somehow inadequately associated with boredom as we might continue the course of Lyotard's logic, if we admit that boredom, in turn, can be valued negatively, in Peter Brook's line that boredom is a demon.

This would exclude the intempestive which identifies with the unexpected, which, in turn, can identify with the inopportune associated with waiting. However, if we consider the aspect of the inopportune of being easily misplaced, even unpleasant and undesirable, we find that it identifies with the boring. Therefore, we may be dealing with a reversal of the meaning of terms. Waiting makes a castling with the unexpected becoming a positive value. Anxiety is no longer that of fear of the future, but that of fear of the permanence of the past. We are no longer frightened by what will come, but by what is. In theatrical terms, this reversal is obviously possible. And by this we could note another confirmation of the emphasis on the theatrical dimension of the existence of the individual in the societies of modernity.

Anxiety can be a characteristic of the sublime, and "The sublime is perhaps the only mode of artistic sensibility to characterize the modern"²⁴. In

22 Ibidem, p. 7

23 Lyotard, Jean-François, "The Sublime and the Avant Garde" in *Paragraph*, Vol. 6, No. October, 1985, pp. 1-18, p. 3

24 Ibidem, p. 5

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this case it can be appreciated that modernity, at least from an artistic point of view, is an age of anxiety. But not only artistic modernity can claim this exclusivity. We can say that “A language of anxiety is everywhere to be found in Shakespeare’s plays...”²⁵. This makes us approach, cautiously, the radical visions of the sublime.

We notice here, firstly, that the suspicion, the intempestive can remove the experience of the sublime, and, secondly, that the sublime can completely remove suspicion: “The sublimity and the effect on the emotions are a wonderfully helpful antidote against the suspicion that accompanies the use of figures. The effrontery of the artifice is somehow lost in its brilliant setting of beauty and grandeur: it is no longer obvious, and thus avoids all suspicions”²⁶. However, thirdly, the sublime, in itself, can be subversive: “... the feeling of the sublime – *the state of enthusiasm and impelling power of unlimited imagination* (Kant) – is subversive by definition, since it calls into question the justification of any limit and, implicitly, the legitimacy of every authority and social order”²⁷. It is possible to appreciate the paradoxical character of the sublime, but we might realize that there is no single kind of sublime. Perhaps the sublime is not a unitary category.

Kant observed that “... we must divide the sublime into the mathematically and the dynamically sublime”²⁸. We are thus dealing with at least two types of sublime. But what if to the sublime belong many feelings that resemble each other? However, distinguishing them accurately is in itself a difficult undertaking because: “The sublime object is an object which cannot be approached too closely: if we get too near it, it loses its sublime features and becomes an ordinary vulgar object – it can persist only in an interspace, in an intermediate state, viewed from a certain perspective, half-seen. If we want to see it in the light of day, it changes into an everyday object, it dissipates itself, precisely because in itself it is nothing at all”²⁹. Therefore, the sublime is attributed the horizon of its objective nonexistence, or in other

25 Johnson, Laurence, “Nobler in the Mind: the Emergence of Early Modern Anxiety” in *Journal of Literary, Language and Cultural Studies*, Special Issue Refereed Proceedings of the 2009 Aulla Conference: The Human and the Humanities in Literature, Language and Culture, 2009, pp. 141-156, p. 149

26 Longinus, *On the Sublime* in *Aristotle – The Poetics; “Longinus” - On the Sublime; Demetrius – On Style*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press & London, William Heinemann LTD, 1953, p. 185

27 Hanganu, Laurențiu, „Modernism și axiologie. Perspectiva kantiană” în *Philologica Jassyensia*, an XI, nr. 1, 2015, pp. 185-107, p. 190

28 Kant, Immanuel, *The Critique of Judgment*, Foreword by Mary J. Gregor, Translated & Introduction by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987, p. 101

29 Žižek, Slavoj, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London & New York, Verso, 2008, p. 192

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words, the sublime can exist only in the relationship between at least two entities as a state and not as an object. In this case, the theatrical experience can confirm, up to a certain point, the perspective from which the sublime is viewed. But we should rephrase the above statement as follows: the sublime can exist in the relationship between two entities as long as one of the two can testify to the presence of the other. That is, the spectator can testify to the presence of the character, which in itself does not exist as an object, but is a situation, state, posture in which the actor finds himself.

In conclusion, beyond the unsettling aspects of the sublime, we find in the cluster of experiences that can be called sublime a personal imprint that urges us to look at the sublime from a radically different perspective from what we expected the sublime to be. For the theatre world, this would be an import from the fine arts. But we think it is a much more appropriate definition of the theatrical sublime than those reviewed so far: “If those artists seem *haunted* by the sublime in the dramatic sense, proper to Lyotard, Brancusi remains at the permanent foreboding of *the appearance of something unknown*, but not necessarily destructive.

Moreover, I believe that Brancusi is one of the few exceptions, in the last century, to the quasi-general fear of world degradation or final catastrophe. He thus achieves a *gentle sublimity* without transforming it into a adulcorated aesthetics. But this too is, like any sublime, *irrepresentable as such*³⁰. We notice here a distancing of the sublime from the dramatic, but this does not bring with it a distancing from the theatrical, in the sense intended by Hans-Thies Lehmann. The irrepresentability of the act itself is also the basis of the scenic presence in the present of the performance. What cannot be seen and heard is the determinant of what is seen and heard on stage. And *the constant foreboding of the appearance of something unknown*, in terms of the stage mechanism, is a well-known necessity. We could think even further and adapt this concept for theatrical necessities: *the permanent foreboding of the appearance of someone unknown, but still suspected*, generates the feeling of sublimity in theatre art. Anxiety is no longer a disturbance, but the impatience of encounter.

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