

Polish Stage Design



The Last Decade

LESZEK MAĐZIK (born 1945). The basic elements of production by the Visual Stage Theatre (of the KUL - Lublin Catholic University), directed by Mađzik for over twenty years, are darkness, depth of space and illuminated plastic forms, alongside music and sound effects. One cannot omit any of those components when discussing the work of this artist. Moreover, one should not examine them separately, since they remain closely intertwined. For Mađzik darkness is never the absence of light, nor is it a pause in the performance or a neutral moment. It always possesses a symbolic and dramatic function, by intensifying the mood of expectation or setting into motion the mechanism of the audience's memory. Space - usually extremely elongated - is not only a setting for the plot but, for example as Infinite Distance, it co-creates its meaning. Plastic forms appear often on the very edge of visibility, and resemble murky, intriguing and terrifying phantoms. Their plastic expression is decided not only by their shape and texture - Mađzik is particularly concerned with textural expression - but also by force, direction, light and location in space. A special significance is ascribed to moments of the emergence and departure, proximity and disappearance of successive images, in which the objects gradually gain or, on the contrary, lose their palpable concreteness and contour. All these factors are the reason why the viewer experiences very strongly and directly, almost physically, the pressure of an, after all, completely artificial reality created by Mađzik. This is an ambiguous reality, albeit familiar and understandable. At the same time, it remains hostile and alien. The indifference of things terrifies us since it constitutes a petrification of life, said Enzo Paci. These words could become the motto for many of Mađzik's productions. They come close to the core of his co-creativity, the essence of his thinking by means of images and the obsessive theme of almost all of his works. How does it happen that a landscape, people and things mean anything? How is it possible that so much follows from viewing them? Let us take the simplest and, seemingly, most

obvious scheme in accordance with which meaning is a supplement. First, consciousness absorbs what is provided by the senses and then, thanks to the effort made by the intellect and intuition, meaning comes into being. This scheme appears to be insufficient for the works of Mađzik, who proposes another solution by declaring "I think in images". Anyone who believes that thinking in images consists of a simple collection of impressions and their arrangement into certain arbitrary entities, is very wrong. "Thinking in images" signifies rather a gathering of scattered objects around the already present contents, a perception of the world in the light of existing meaning. What is, then, the source of those meanings? It can greatly differ and, moreover, is as a rule difficult to recognize. A source of meaning could be cultural tradition, a myth, a semi-conscious or conscious sphere - for example, fascination or fear which cannot be rationalized. It is impossible to present those sources with a legible sign - a plastic or theatrical one, too - since it is precisely they which are the reason why something means anything at all. On the other hand, one can try to reveal the force of their impact, and this is what Mađzik does in his visions-spectacles. This purpose is served by a symbol, a dual connection between what is concrete and palpable, and that which is abstract or cannot be named, between the visible and the invisible world. The term "hermetic" symbol corresponds perfectly to the heart of the matter: the symbol, like Hermes, is the "personification" of motion. The symbol is the motion of meaning, while the art which is cultivated by Mađzik, is symbolic in the strict sense of the word. What are the regions in which this motion of meaning takes place? What, apart from Mađzik's talent and skill, endows his visions with such force? It seems that usually the basic source is the conflict between the myths of Prometheus and Job, a tragedy which is concealed in the transformations of Nature: drought and blossoming, the sowing of seed and the sprouting of grain. It is on this terrain that Mađzik, the author of "Travellers" (1980) and "The Coast" (1983) moves.

In the light of those meanings, man's existence appears uncertain and crippled, and life is perceived as a special form of non-existence, not much more than an accident, and much less than necessity. "We are doomed to moisture which can lead to disintegration. Hence our wish to dry ourselves", says the author of "Moisture" (1978), which is full of images of hollow mannequins, empty clothes, artificial limbs, and human shapes dripping water like wet rags. It is also here that we encounter one of the most symptomatic moments in Mądzik's art: hands peel away pieces of a mask, and underneath the shell there emerges a twitching live face. Mądzik, the author of séances of autonomous plastic forms, never got rid of the actor, the live image of man, completely. As a rule, however, he hides and does not display him. In "The Coast", a field of grain suddenly appears under the feet of the audience, over their heads float a number of thick objects resembling wooden logs, while at the edge of the illuminated space silent hooded figures, similar to a row of monks, assist in the ceremony. In "Gateway" (1989) water, and the human figures who experience it, contrast with a mysterious gigantic cocoon, the source of life, and a grave which unexpectedly opens underneath the chairs of spectators. Symbolic images, symbolic figures, symbolic objects, and, at the same time, concrete objects - this duality is extremely important and cannot be reduced, just as one cannot halt the motion of meaning and must resist ascribing a certain *signifié* to a certain *signifiant*. In the case of Mądzik, substance does not supplant things even for a moment, just as the water which fills available space in "Gateway" or, recently, in "Cassandra", according to Christa Wolf (the Studio Theatre, Warsaw 1991) does not mean *water* but is water. It is always worthwhile when discussing the stagings by Mądzik to stress that the most important factor is the impact of the symbol. The ideal recipient of his performances should, in my opinion, incessantly repeat to himself the words of Paul Ricoeur that the symbol "speaks to me only when I allow myself to be carried away by its

meaning, and not when I examine it from the outside as an unusual, immobile structure whose sense I compare by placing it on some intellectual scale". It is only then that we are able to follow the attempt dramatically expressed by the visions proposed by Mądzik. This is an oft-repeated attempt at discovering such an order of the world in which the quietus of things would cease proclaiming its terrifying memento to that which is alive.

Paweł Konic

Plates No. 58-60

JERZY MOSKAL (born 1930) is a graduate of the Department of Graphic Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow. Moskal pursues the graphic arts, posters, collage and stage design for the theatre, television and cinema. He treats stage design, next to posters, as a form of reflection and manner of expressing his artistic attitude toward the surrounding reality. He often turns to the Polish Romantic drama as well as compositions from the realm of the theatre of the absurd and grotesque, the works of Mrozek and Witkiewicz. The period of cooperation with Lidia Zamkow, a celebrated Polish stage director, proved to be extremely important for Moskal. At that time, he worked on "Anna Karenina" and "The Resurrection" by Leo Tolstoy (1969), "Troilus and Cressida" by William Shakespeare (1970) and Kesey's and Wasserman's "One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest". The manner, in which he arranges the stage space is always determined by the director's production idea. Moskal rejects the decorative aspect of the visual art in the theatre, and concentrates on the metaphor. Empty space is the typical and most favourite form of Moskal's stage world. He creates astonishing settings on stages almost devoid of theatrical machinery by employing kinetic solutions, as in "King IV" by Grochowiak, "The Madman and the Nun" by Witkiewicz and "The Varsovienne" by Wyspiański. The sun-baked space in which the tents of the Trojan camp in "Troilus and





