

THE MAGIC OF THEATRICAL SPACE

P O L A N D



PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL

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LESZEK
MĄDZIK

LESZEK MĄDZIK
director and stage designer

Born in 1945 at Bartoszowiny.

Active in designing since 1967.

1969 — founded the *Scena Plastyczna KUL* at the Catholic University in Lublin, work as the artistic director, the production of the following:

1970 — *Ecce Homo*,

1971 — *Births*,

1972 — *Dinner*,

1973 — *Fibres*,

1974 — *Icarus*,

1975 — *The Brand*,

1976 — *Herbarium*,

1978 — *Moisture*,

1980 — *Nomadic*,

1983 — *The Coast*,

1986 — *Hobbling*,

1989 — *Gate*,

1992 — *The Breath*,

1994 — *The Crevice*.

Moreover: co-operation with theatres in Lublin, Lyon, Łódź, Warsaw, and Bonn.

The manager and conductor of international theatre workshops.

The Space of Leszek Mądzik's Visual Art Stage

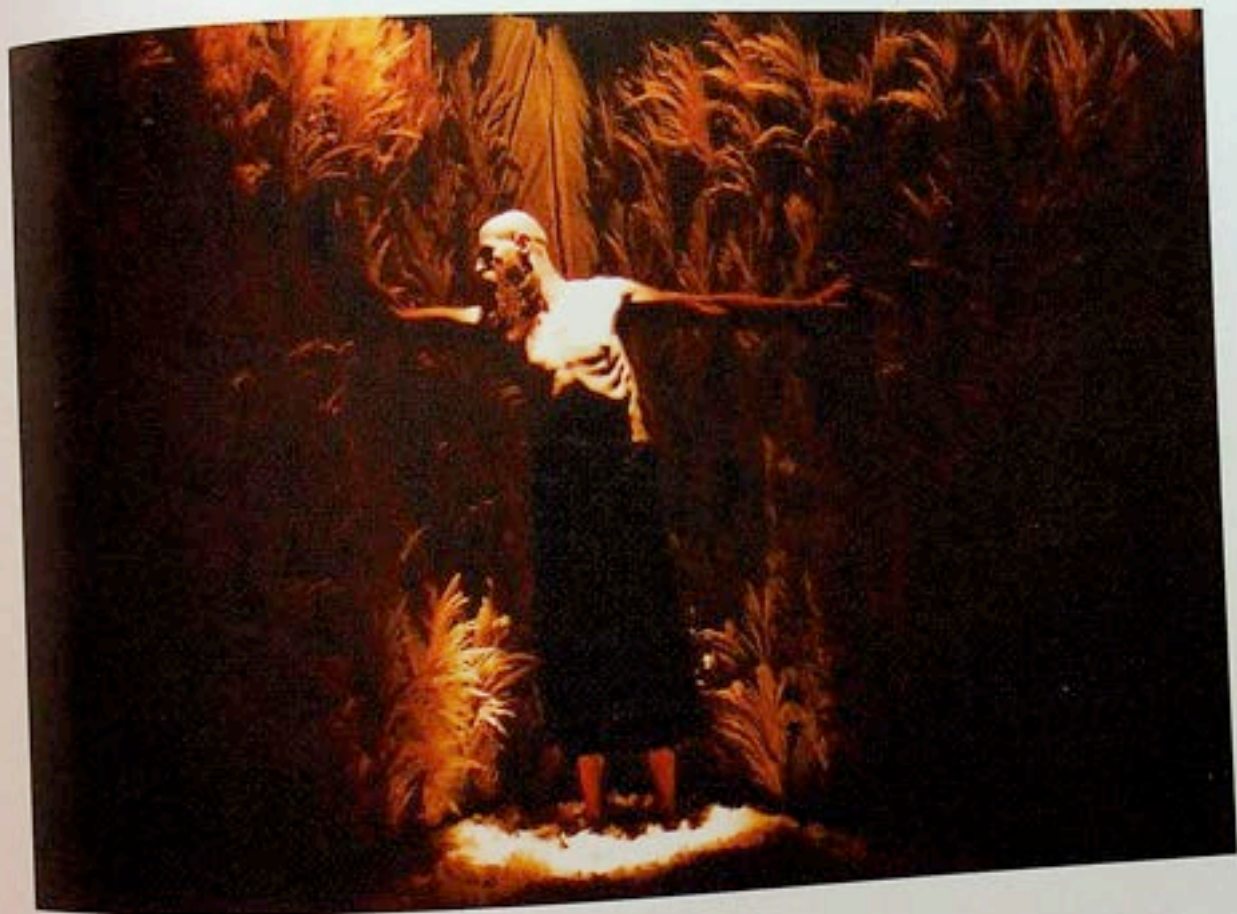
When one asks about the functions of space in Leszek Mądzik's theatre, the question always pertains to its basic philosophical and aesthetic premises. On the one hand, in this theatre there takes place the scrutiny of the truth of matter, the analysis of the substance that constructs the world which we are a part of. On the other, this theatre indicates that the world we are familiar with is not the only one. There are regions outside it which are inaccessible to our direct and imperfect cognition. They are available only by imagination or intuition.

Consequently, for him, the process of shaping space is, first of all, entangled in the process of revealing the values of matter: the area of the stage is treated in such a way that it demonstrates the analysed substance in the fullest range. Simultaneously, the character of presented objects and their symbolic message add defined features to space; they fill it with content.

Secondly, the created space becomes subject to various transformations. The planes are multiplied and start overlapping. This questions our capability of seeing and the possibility of finding any homogeneous sense in the images which appear. Consequently, if our possibility of seeing and comprehending is so limited, we start to doubt whether the world we can see is the only world.

Mądzik scrutinises the matter of reality in a way typical of visual artists. Firstly, he is interested in the physical aspects of objects and substances. He analyses their shapes, colours and textures. He uncovers the features that easily evade our eye. In his theatre, as in the works of painters, sculptors, or performers, reality appears in a new light. We start to realise that our perception of the world is strongly conventionalised, that we only see what we are used to seeing. At the same time, we have a strong feeling that this does not suffice, that culture, which introduces order into our life, brings also its limitation. Culture imposes certain patterns, hinders our contact with reality and makes the cognition of reality difficult. Then, the thirst for the return to what is basic — the need for the simplest and the elementary, for what lies at the bottom of our vision of the world and, hence, shapes our stance towards it.

In many productions the issue of penetrating the physical values of matter is not of primary importance. However, there are some in which this becomes the central question. Among such are *Wilgoć* (*Moisture*) and *Wrota* (*Gate*). The play of changing lighting fills the space on stage, which enhances the presentation of the texture of objects, their weight and three-dimensional character, and — above all — their dynamics. In *Tchnienie* (*The Breath*) it is not only man who is the subject of the action, there are also delicate clouds of white dawn whose soft spinning in the air and a peaceful fall onto the ground constitute a study of subtlety, finesse and gentleness.



Leszek Mądzik, *The Breath*, dir. L. Mądzik, the Scena Plastyczna KUL, Lublin 1992; photo: A. John



Leszek Mądrak, *The Breath*, dir. L. Mądrak, the *Scena Plastyczna KUL*, Lublin 1992; photo: A. John

The process of showing the various values of substances is closely connected with the process of revealing space. Light applied in this is a crucial factor in constructing a scenic perspective. Mądzik has worked out a wide range of means in using light in his performances. He uses both white and coloured lighting; he lights up the whole stage, but often he uses a spotlight that draws the shapes of people and objects from the darkness, light which glitters on the contours of figures, glides on the surfaces exposing their texture, and reaches far perspectives. Sometimes, the designer directs light through translucent curtains of delicate fabrics and thus creates something like distant planes luring with their apparent depth. A sophisticated game of lights and matter puts the viewer's perception to the test. We yield to these images while being slowly and thoughtfully introduced into the created world; we go deep into their interior, gradually losing the sense of distance and the ability to recognise the character of objects disclosed to us. The space of the stage, which received value thanks to lighting, not only allows the value of the scrutinised substance to be shown, it is also created by this lighting itself.

There is also another factor entangled in the process in which the space and objects mutually reveal themselves, namely: movement. On the one hand, the space determines limitations for the movement of objects on stage, on the other — it is the very dynamics of these objects that defines this space. Movement is also another dimension of the analysis of the presented world. The way in which people and objects move characterises them and tells their story.

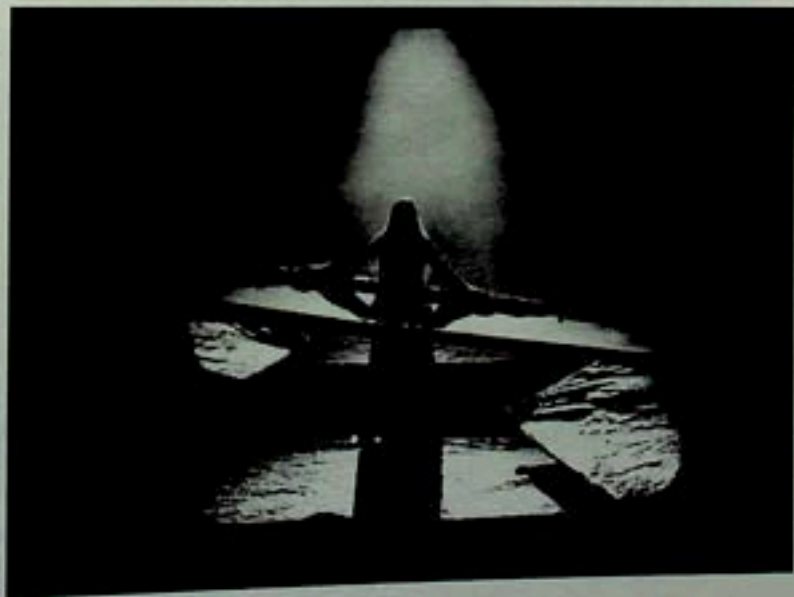
In the world in which matter is subject to a meticulous scrutiny, man also exists in a specific way. On the one hand, his physicalness and corporeal nature are highlighted, on the other — some almost incorporeal figures appear hanging in the void; figures — symbols.

Many productions strongly emphasise the carnality of human beings, the materiality of their physical cover. This is manifested in several ways. The first is the lack of any words in the constructed message. The acting characters remain silent. Silence deprives them of rationality and individuality. Moreover, people in Mądzik's theatre do not gesticulate. Their faces lack any expression; they express neither any feelings nor attitudes. They exist without all those things that mark the paths of communication, that are signals of life within a culture uniting people and being decisive for a community.

These characters lacking in any individuality often make a monumental impression. They move slowly to the sounds of solemn music swollen with dramatic qualities. The space filled with an extraordinary light complements the unearthly image.

Mądzik endows this monumentality with a specific

Leszek Mądzik, *The Crevise*, dir. L. Mądzik,
the *Scena Plastyczna* KUL, Lublin 1994;
photo: S. Ciechan



Leszek Mądzik, *The Crevise*, dir. L. Mądzik,
the Scena Plastyczna KUL, Lublin 1994;
photo: S. Ciechan

content. It is so thanks to the simultaneous accentuation of the corporeal quality of human beings. Acute light draws from the darkness the outline of the feet of men walking on a wet surface. A gust of wind moves their hair. The physicalness of humans is strongly emphasised when it appears as material signals or traces of his presence. We can see dummies whose lack of life make us realise the transitoriness of our own existence. We watch some worn-out, ragged coats frozen in the shape that a human body gave to them; we can see masks split open that have been taken off a face; finally — we see shreds of clothing stretched on crosses that evoke the corporeal nature of the one Man — the Crucified. The Man of Scena Plastyczna is a particular being that lacks the attributes of society and rationality, who is lonely and mute. On the one hand, he exists only in his own physical dimension; on the other, he is raised to the monumental scale.

The applied means of stage expression, especially the way of presenting man, add different value to the space in the theatre, bestowing it with a poetic and metaphysical character.



In the majority of his performances, Mądzik creates several spatial planes simultaneously, above all, thanks to the lighting. He shows several dimensions of the created reality; he implies that the reality in which we live is not the only one.

The degrees to which Mądzik's spaces are real vary. Sometimes the space is reminiscent of real places: secret corridors, crypts, murky vaults dominated by the atmosphere of concentration and mystery. However, sometimes it happens that the space is difficult to identify, it is disquieting, it inspires the imagination. The most suitable language to describe it is that of poetry.

The creation of areas of diversified character and different message is not the only means of multiplying space in the productions by Scena Plastyczna. The productions where Mądzik multiplies the special planes of a given area have a particularly strong impact. In a per-

formance of *Wrota* (Gate) the seats for the audience are not simply a place of watching the action on stage in front of it; it is also a place that is subjected to the action above it: a beam of light indicates an opening over the area, the opening is covered by falling lumps of soil — the

last rays of light disappear, the spectators are closed in a grave. The dramatic multiplication of space makes us feel that there are other worlds besides ours.

The impression of many worlds existing and their various mutual inclusions is also created by images in which a fragment of stage reality is conspicuously separated, framed. Then, the activities take place as if in a glass box or aquarium. In *Szczelina* (*The Crevice*) we can observe the fictional world only through a narrow, lit opening which makes us realise the invalidity of our perception, the relative character of what we see and our limited access to — perhaps — other worlds.



Leszek Mądzik, *The Breath*, dir. L. Mądzik,
the Scena Plastyczna KUL, Lublin 1992; photo: A. John