





THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN

director: **Michał Borczuch**
 adaptation and dramaturgy: **Tomasz Śpiewak**
 scenography and costumes: **Doris Nawrot**
 music: **Bartosz Dziadosz**
 video: **Krzysztof Bagiński**
 light design: **Robert Mleczo**
 choreography of the "emphysema patients' ballet": **Monika Frajczyk**
 assistant director: **Piotr Piotrowicz**
 assistant scenography and costumes: **Julia Zawadzka**
 stage manager: **Katarzyna Gawryś**
 production manager: **Magda Igielska**

cast:
Jan Dravnel
Izabella Dudziak
Monika Frajczyk
Mateusz Górski
Magdalena Kuta
Lech Łotocki
Maria Maj
Monika Niemczyk
Sebastian Pawlak
Agnieszka Żulewska

voice from offstage:
Piotr Piotrowicz

premiere: April 26, 2024

technical manager: **Michał Golasa**
 deputy technical manager: **Andrii Pogorielov**
 sound: **Piotr Domański, Andrii Pogorielov, Jakub Sapka, Jerzy Szelewicz**
 video: **Łukasz Karzewski, Maciej Kaszyński, Marcin Metelski**
 lights: **Daniel Sanjuan-Ciepielewski, Jędrzej Jęcikowski, Konrad Kajak, Kacper Stykowski**
 make-up artists: **Milena Jura, Dominka Zatońska**
 wardrobe masters: **Elżbieta Kołtonowicz, Teresa Rutkowska**
 stage manager: **Łukasz Winkowski**
 prop masters: **Mariusz Basiak, Marcin Puanecki, Tomasz Trojanowski**
 assemblers: **Mariusz Basiak, Piotr Iwaniuk, Mariusz Puanecki, Tomasz Trojanowski, Łukasz Winkowski**
 workshop/construction of the set:
Tomasz Ciężarek, Tadeusz Tomaszewski

Based on *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann, translated by Józef Kramsztyk and Jan Łukowski (alias of Władysław Tatarkiewicz)

photo: **Tomek Tyndyk, Adrian Lach**
 sculpture: **Coffe break Thinker (2021)**
 by **Joanna Sitarz**
 graphic design: **Grzegorz Laszuk**
 text: **Anka Herbut, Justyna Lipko-Konieczna**

We would like to thank Jan Jakub Tatarkiewicz for granting us a free licence of the Polish translation of the second volume of Thomas Mann's novel *The Magic Mountain*.

We would also like to thank Axel Brown for making available recordings of his bobsleigh runs, which were used in the video materials.



Projekt współfinansowany przez Fundację Współpracy Polsko-Niemieckiej



Moist Spots

The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann is one of those novels of civilisational importance that captures a breakthrough which suddenly situates humanity in a new, different reality where nothing is as before.

As we read, we enter an area of high risk. It is impossible to distance oneself from the content because Mann's work stands the test of time surprisingly well and many of his insights into the human condition entangled in the web of sociopolitical correlations sound alarmingly current. This is largely because health and illness – the poles between which a human being is stretched in their fragility and individual embodiment – are social constructs that deeply penetrate our corporeal and mental tissue, determining how we live, how we shape our horizons and how we think about our own capabilities and limitations.

Much has been written about *The Magic Mountain*, but it seems that especially important are those interpretations that allow us to read the novel as a study of the relationships between society and health (also at a political level). Such interpretations also show the correlation between social ties, both in terms of quantity, quality and durability, and the psychophysical condition, the risk of falling ill and mortality. The point of reference is not a healthy individual but one who is sick. Over the century that has passed since the creation of *The Magic Mountain*, our approach to health has changed considerably and the development of medicine has unimaginably accelerated. Nonetheless, the figure of a sick person still evokes a similar mixture of affects and anxieties. It appears as a playing field between cultural clichés and the interests of the pharmaceutical industry, the market of new technologies, religious organisations and political groups, whose agenda is to identify a disease, to confirm

and treat it (though not necessarily cure it).

Thus, the axis of tension runs between a disease as a social phenomenon – with its entire network of contributing relationships and factors – and the medical order with its descriptions, interests and devices that make the sick body an object of new discoveries, scientific fascinations, and progress, as well as an unsafe matter that may carry a deadly threat. When Hans Castorp sees an X-ray of his hand for the first time, he begins to understand and feel his own mortality. Access to what lies beneath the skin, to the flesh of the human body, makes him realise the fragility of the corporeal construction, the ruthlessness of the biological processes which affect it and the deadliness of its horizon. In *The Magic Mountain* directed by Michał Borczuch, the exclusive Swiss sanatorium and the tubercular "moist spots" in the lungs are replaced by a pandemical reality intersected by covid coughing and the sound of ambulances. Still, in both cases the focus of the narrative is the body. The one which is subjected to different protocols: medicalising the daily experience of life and distancing the characters from experiencing it in bodily relations with others on the one hand, and constantly keeping corporeality on the plane of "unhealthy" interest on the other.

It is obvious that where the body is at the very centre of events (even if these are of a sterile-medical nature), Eros will appear. Mann writes: "The body, love, death, are simply one and the same. Because the body is sickness and depravity, it is what produces death, yes, both of them, love and death, are carnal, and that is the source of their terror and great magic!"¹ It is obvious that where the body is subjected to constant treatments (and in Mann's novel these are also sensitive and attentive treatments of the language), where it is dressed, undressed

and looked at mainly through the prism of anatomy and physiological processes, the adventures of the body will be set in motion. And just as in Mann's work, where the erotic arousal and the desire that follows right behind cannot, at times, escape from the finely draped layers of language, so in the pandemic isolation they will often find no outlet. And in both cases, the disconnection from the erotic only intensifies the dream of the element of life, of the adrenaline and exposure to the "excesses" of experience. A dream of standing on the shore of a rough sea and getting close to the approaching storm...

*The lifeguard started whistling for me to go back, and then the spout of the wave hit me in the neck, like the paw of a wild animal. Since then, I have known the kind of happiness that comes from the touching of an element. A full embrace would mean death.*²

Thus, can illness paradoxically be a strategy for reclaiming one's own corporeality? When one of Mann's characters recalls a memory of lung surgery, he recounts the doctor's touching of his pleura as the most intimate experience. Hans longs to caress the bends of Clavdia's elbows and inhale the scent of her joint capsule. The extraordinary spell to which everyone in the novel succumbs is, indeed, interconnected with the specific time of *The Magic Mountain*. A time that is removed from the solid time of capitalism. Both in the sanatorium and in the pandemic, it slows down, quickens and thickens, enveloping the individuals that are isolated from the rest of the world. In theatre, time works in a comparable way. We fall under its spell in the here and now.

1 Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, transl. John E. Woods (New York: Everyman's Library, 2005), chap. *Walpurgis Night*, Kindle.
 2 Excerpt from the script of *The Magic Mountain* adapted by Tomasz Śpiewak.