

A Candle of Darkness: Multiplied Deixis in Roberto Ciulli's *King Lear*

Jerzy Limon

When in Act V, scene 2, of William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the Earl of Gloucester, blinded, resigned, and no longer desiring to flee any further, declares, "No further, sir; a man may rot even here," his son Edgar encourages him to save himself:

What, in ill thoughts again? Men must endure
Their going hence even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all. Come on.

Gloucester's reaction to this is somewhat surprising, for he says (in the Folio version):

"And that's true too."

As Bernard McElroy long ago observed,¹ if he had said simply, "That's true," or "That's not true," there would be nothing unusual in this utterance; but he says "and that's true too." In other words, he equates two mutually exclusive options. It is impossible both to "rot even here," and also, in the awareness that the time has not yet come, to face "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." It is, I suppose, not without significance that the words "and that's true too" are the last that Gloucester utters in the play. (The Fool, in turn, will say, equally paradoxically, as he departs from the text, that he will "go to bed at noon.")²

In Roberto Ciulli's recent production of *King Lear* (seen at the XI International Shakespeare Festival in Gdańsk, Teatr Wybrzeże, August 2007), the ambiguities of language are deepened by the fact that each of the actors performing on stage impersonates at least two distinct fictional figures.³ One of these figures is not Shakespearean at all, and for that reason, and also because only Shakespeare's text is used throughout, what is true for one of the figures in its specific context is

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not necessarily true for the other. Moreover, whatever the situation might be, the relevance of Shakespeare's language to one of the figures may always be related to the implied relevance of the same utterance to the other figure, by which the network of possible relationships is deepened and becomes multi-layered. This means that all the verbal utterances, constituting what I prefer to call stage speech rather than language, appear simultaneously in distinct contexts, by which they generate different meanings, depending on their relationship to one of the two fictional speakers (played, as I said, by one actor) and their deictic axis.⁴ In theatre, meaning derives from the relationship of the denoted attributes⁵ of the fictional realm to the material substance (and its modeling) of scenic signs. Since in this particular production we have two distinct layers of fiction (for the sake of clarity, I shall mark them simply 1 and 2), the relationship becomes more complex and depends also on the cognitive choices made by the spectator. Thus the meaning of stage speech may be drawn from the relationship of the referential world, as created verbally by live actors, to one or the other of the two fictional figures to whom a given speech is attributed. The described situation, rather rare in theatre, relies on the actor's ability to create more than one assumed deixis of fictional figures.⁶ Naturally, this needs further explanation.

In Ciulli's *King Lear* all the actors are blind, from the very start of the performance. More precisely: through the acting technique adopted, they indicate that they cannot see (see fig. 1). But they do this unobtrusively and very subtly, so subtly indeed as for it to pass unnoticed by many in the audience and even the critics. They move only reluctantly, and if at all, then only uncertainly. Their eyes are wide open and they try not to blink, by this means conveying the impression that their eyes are motionless and thus do not react to the external world. Additionally, the actor "playing" Gloucester hides his eyes behind extremely dark glasses. Naturally, since the figures in Shakespeare's play are not blind, the spectator requires an explanation for their blindness in this production. In the beginning, however, only one thing is certain, namely, that the fictional "actors" are blind, that they are cut off from the external space and the geometry of the world around them, which has a decisive impact not only on their behavior, but also on the proxemic (and metaphorical!) relationships between the denoted fictional figures. Cut off from spatial relationships, external to the perceiving mind (as Kant and others have shown us), all they are left with is time, which is an internal quality of the mind. In this way, the production concentrates on temporal issues, which may be related both to epistemology, the cognition of reality by humans, and to rules that govern the theatre as art, of which those concerning the time structures involved are of uttermost importance.

All the actors taking part in the performance are on stage (which also means a stage in the fictional realm) all the time; there are no entrances or exits. They stand still, waiting for their cues, and when they speak, they address the space, the



Fig. 1. General scene with “blind actors” rehearsing, *King Lear* (2007), dir. Roberto Ciulli (photo: Wiesław Czerniawski).

darkness, that surrounds them. Some take a few steps, feeling the furniture, the large, old-fashioned tape recorder that stands on the table in the center of the stage and plays an important role in the production, or the bodies of others, looking for support from them. Only Edgar (Steffen Reuber), half naked and filthy from the start of the performance, seems to act independently of the evolution of the “action”; he crawls over the ground, as if practicing animal movements long before the scene when, in the framework of the plot of Shakespeare’s *Lear*, he turns from a nobleman into mad “Tom of Bedlam.” In Ciulli’s *King Lear* he appears as an actor practicing the role of a naked beggar from the beginning. Sometimes the actors collide with a wall that is invisible to us and demarcates the scenic space, but this too is indicated very subtly, only as if it were signaling the rules of the theatre, which enable whole worlds to be created out of practically nothing in the material sense. Paradoxically, we, the spectators, see the actors bouncing off the wall that is invisible to both the fictional figures and the audience. However, the fact that we do not see the wall does not mean it does not exist in the fictional realm: what the figures sense with their touch (an act of ostention), we perceive through convention. We understand that the bouncing off signals an indexical relationship, based on spatial contiguity, between the fictional figure and the wall. This means that the fictional space is an enclosed one, similar in dimensions to the theatre stage, enclosed by solid walls; this also means that all the actors are set within that space (which of course contradicts the multitude of changing spaces employed by Shakespeare in his play). But this does not mean that they are on the stage of Teatr Wybrzeże, where there are no solid

walls enclosing the platform on all sides. In this way a fictional space is denoted through the actors' gestures and movements.

At all events, we understand that the actors, playing blind actors, are creating a fiction. The space created is also a fiction, because the rehearsal is taking place not on the stage of Teatr Wyrzeże, but in some room, in some space built metonymically, and so conventionally, theatrically, without the participation of the audience (whose presence is not signaled by the actors). Thus its time, too, is different from that of the real performance. We are therefore dealing with a typically theatrical gap between the time and place of the audience and the time and place of the created world. But, as I have said, in the production under discussion there is a duplication of fictional realities, which is achieved basically through the multiplication of deixis of denoted fictional figures. At the same time we see that the departure from psychology does not involve a simultaneous erasing of the borders of theatre or an undermining of its rules. These are maintained throughout the whole duration of the performance, which is modeled in such a way that metatheatrical impulses take on significance: the spectator is constantly reminded that what he or she is dealing with here is theatre, though not the kind of theatre that strives to create an illusion of anything. This theatre does not pretend, and the fiction that it creates is self-referential in a high degree. We watch a theatrical performance that is stylized as a rehearsal. But this is achieved by the use of every available theatrical resource. Purified of the illusion of the world outside the theatre, of the psychology of traditional productions of Shakespeare, it delves deeper in its aesthetics, revealing and explaining the rules that make it possible for the theatrical message to take shape in the form conferred on it. This creates a theatrical metaphor of human life and of the stage, of life and acting, playing roles. It is not a new metaphor—indeed it is perhaps one that is over-exploited today—but in theatre (as in all art) what counts is not only “what,” but above all “how.”

In spatial terms, the blind actors perform, as it were, each alone and for him/herself. They utter their lines into space, which for them is a scalar, without direction or orientation of any kind. They also do not create by ostensive means the fictional times and spaces that belong to the world of Lear; the latter is constructed verbally, with a marked distance between what is being said and the world in which the actors are set. They do not pretend that they are in pre-Christian Britain; they do not pretend to be Lear, Goneril, or the Fool. In this way a more complex relationship is established. For example, the actress (Simone Thoma) becomes related not only to Cordelia and the Fool she is playing (or rather, whose speeches she utters), but also to another fictional figure who is not an inhabitant of the world created by Shakespeare and “lives” at a different time and in another space. Also, to make matters even more complicated, the three fictional figures enter into all sorts of mutual relationships. This needs further explanation.

The words uttered by the blind actor indicate that the denoted fictional figures

in *Lear* are not blind. Consequently, their actions cannot be the same. You cannot blind a blind person, if we take Gloucester as an example; you cannot write and read letters. This creates a certain confusion in the spectators for it becomes noticeable that what we observe happening on the stage is not in the time and space indicated by Shakespeare's text, and the actors on the stage do not fully comply with what traditionally has been labeled as Shakespearean. And yet the action still takes place in a fictional space and a fictional time, not in the here and now of the audience, even though the effect of the fourth wall is somewhat weakened by the fact that the actors do not have to pretend not to see the audience; since they are blind (or present themselves as such), they *really* cannot see the spectators. But, as I have indicated, they only pretend to be blind (and the last scene, discussed below, may stand as a proof); they seem to enact blind actors rather than the fictional figures from Shakespeare's *Lear*. This preserves the rudimentary level of fictionality necessary for theatre to create meanings according to its specific rules.

As is well-known, in theatre the basic rule that makes it possible and distinguishes it from non-theatre is the temporal hiatus between the created fictional realm and the reality of the audience, and that is signaled predominantly by the actors who pretend, through verbal utterances and ostensive signals, not to notice the spectators' presence. What follows is another phenomenon, typical for theatre, namely, the appearance of at least two time streams and, paradoxically, two present times, the fictional one of the figures and the real one of the actors (and the audience). This, in turn, enables a historical past to be presented as an evolving present—a feature that distinguishes theatre from, say, film or performance art.⁷

As a consequence of their loss in space, it is rare for the actors in Ciulli's production to succeed in saying anything in "face to face" dialogue. They are cut off from the geometry of the world, which gives us orientation in space. Their words cut across the space in a variety of directions, often independent of the location of the interlocutor. This may of course be interpreted metaphorically as an attempt to emphasize their isolation, their imprisonment within themselves, lack of mutual understanding and inability to communicate with one another, a feature that may also be applied to Shakespeare's figures (fictional layer 1 enters into all sorts of relationships with layer 2).⁸ When they sit opposite one another at the table, they usually seem to conduct their dialogues not with another person in their shared present time, but with the voice rendered by the tape recorder: with past time. For the conversation with the recorded voice is a clash between two times and two ontologies. By this means, the past marks its permanent presence in the implied consciousness of the stage figures. They are not in a position to notice the material signs of the flow of time: this seems to blur their perception of the present, and they all seem to be oriented towards past time. Moreover, from the point of view of a blind person who has lost a sense of space, the human voice is the only attribute of a human being (as in a radio play): it does not really matter whether it is "live" or

recorded. Thus playing the voice from the past brings it into the non-spatial present. This also invites further metaphorical interpretations, for the tape recorder may be seen as a metaphor for memory. A human mind incapable of perceiving objective space, cut off from the geometry of the world, relies on time only.

The proxemic relations, the blocking, and also the failure of eye-contact and of meeting in time contradict the principles of inter-personal communication as we experience them in daily life. Hence the distancing and far-reaching “de-psychologization” of this production, which Hans-Thies Lehmann considers one of the features of the postdramatic theatre.⁹ Naturally, “de-psychologization” involves one of the fictional layers created here through the relationship of the Shakespearean figures to the actors. The actors do not “represent” anyone apart from themselves: they do not play figures from Shakespeare’s drama, but figures from Ciulli’s production. Thus real actors impersonate fictional actors. They only speak the Shakespearean text, while remaining themselves (I shall shortly explain this paradoxical-sounding situation). This is achieved through the lack of congruity between the verbal component and the acting. For instance, the voices of the actors are not modulated theatrically to “suit” the figure from Shakespeare’s play; their harshness sometimes grates on the ear (e.g., Cordelia). For a considerable part of the performance, Edgar emits only animal-like, unarticulated sounds, howls and mumbles; he is really mad, or—as we understand after his “transformation into a human being”—he does not believe that in his situation words or articulate language¹⁰ could change anything. He does not believe in the possibility of communication, in dialogue (but he too turns on a piece of text from the tape recorder: so he understands human speech, although he seems to be interested only in past time). However, even though the actors do not impersonate Shakespeare’s figures in any psychologically convincing way (to use a dated criterion), they do signal their attitude to Shakespeare’s text, even in those cases when it is based on indifference or total lack of congruity. But that is also meaningful.

All of this creates a dialogic situation between Shakespeare’s text and Ciulli’s production. The director not so much “interprets” the play, but inserts it into a production of his own creation, which in many ways is not predicted or implied by the play. At best, he translates the verbal into the visual, creating a transmutation rather than an adaptation.¹¹ This creates yet another level of meaning: Ciulli consciously plays on the relationship between the fictional world as indicated by Shakespeare’s text (along with its traditional readings) and the fictional world created by what we see and hear on the stage. The former is basically verbal and supported by congruous acting, while the latter is non-verbal in the sense that, as I have indicated, the language uttered is not part of the world inhabited by the actors. It is external, if not alien. This creates a paradoxical situation, by which the realm denoted by language is not the world in which the actors pretend to live. And yet they signal to us that their world is not the reality of the spectators. The effect of

this situation is that we observe a split of deixis, or, rather, its multiplication. The “I” of the actor we see is not the “I” of the real person whose profession is acting and who appears on the cast list; naturally, this would have been a normal theatrical situation if the actors had implied, through acting, that they had assumed another “I” to whom the verbal utterances “belong.” But they simply do not act in that way. We come to understand that the language “belongs” to someone else (a third “I” and deixis) who is predominantly implied by Shakespeare’s text, and not by the actor’s attempt to assume the role. This leads to the rise of two fictional levels, which are in constant play in Ciulli’s production.

This brings us to the main topic, indicated by the title of this essay, i.e., the deixis. As noticed by others,¹² the play and interchange of deixis is of particular importance in theatre. In the temporal sense, linguistic communication or events on the stage always acquire meanings of the historical reconstruction of utterances or events, which in some assumed reality beyond the stage were made or happened in a more or less defined past. It could also be the future—then the dialogues and events are not an assumed reconstruction but a projection (in rhetorical terms, their proleptic function will be revealed). Accordingly, all linguistic utterances on the stage are characterized by an apparent internal contradiction: that which in a grammatical sense creates the impression of the present, the *hic et nunc* of the spectators, is in reality a re-creation of something which somewhere at some time has already happened or will happen. In this way, present time becomes a sign of past time, or perhaps the present tense of the verbal utterances is a sign of the past. However, in order to accept this, we have to agree to theatrical convention, which is a sort of agreement between the director and his audience. All of this is a “normal” theatrical situation, which may be explained by the temporal structures involved in the artistic act of communication we call theatre. But Ciulli’s production is more complicated than the “normal.”

Therefore, fully aware of the complexities involved, I propose a simple definition of theatre, which focuses on the temporal aspects of theatre as art.¹³ I have defined theatre as a communicative situation, in which, by mutual agreement, someone (the “actor”) pretends before someone else (the “spectator”) that what in general terms belongs to the latter’s past time is taking place in the actor’s present time; in doing this, the actor assumes the role of someone else living at a different time in a different space. The key role is played here by the actor’s gaze (s/he ceases to notice the presence of the spectators and the space of the theatre) and the assumed deixis of the fictional figure, signalled primarily through verbal utterances, but also by other attributes of acting. Of course, when an actor “abandons” or conceals his/her individual deictic characteristics and adopts the one belonging to some other fictional person, “living” at a different time, this is signalled on two levels: linguistic and physical, i.e., concerning the body. Usually, within the mimetic tradition, there is a conspicuous attempt to combine the two, the language and the body, as if the

adopted language used were the actor's own, and his/her body were the body of someone else. This means that the assumed deixis, signalled predominantly by verbal utterances, finds full support in the modelling of the actor's body, its movements, the actor's gestures, gaze, his/her costume, makeup, and the like. The material substances constituting the vehicle of the sign of a fictional figure on the stage are also engaged in building the assumed deixis. The greater the congruity of language and acting, the more conspicuous is the indexical function revealed by the actor in relation to the created fictional realm. A further implication is that the language becomes an inseparable component of the material vehicle of the stage sign of a figure, thus becoming stage speech. All the words uttered enter into various relationships not only with other words (also those spoken by other actors), but with the material and non-material components of what is seen and heard on the stage. Through this network of relationships meaning is created and is unique for any given production. This demonstrates clearly the reasons why language on the stage becomes an iconic sign, why its functions (as listed by Roman Jakobson) change, and why stage speech is also a visual phenomenon. This is exactly what differentiates theatre as an art from, say, a rehearsal or play reading. On the stage, language becomes a component of stage speech, along with the actor's face, body, wig, costume, makeup, and other elements of a given production, such as lights, noises off, the stage set, and so on. Thus, the language used in theatre loses some of its systemic features and becomes, basically, an inseparable component of an iconic sign.¹⁴ In other words, and paradoxically, stage speech is not only heard, but also seen: at least two senses are required for its proper perception. A simple experiment will prove my point: close your eyes during a theatre performance, listen to the ensuing dialogues, and the difference will become obvious. This explains why it is claimed, especially by theatre practitioners, that the actor speaks with his whole body. We may therefore venture the conclusion that acting in itself is stage speech.

In theatre, therefore, stage speech becomes a sign of the natural language used by fictional figures. This explains why the "language" spoken by the actors is not the language spoken by the figures; it explains why, for instance, the actor speaks in verse (and, say, in English), whereas the figure speaks prose (and in Latin). The deictic "I" of the actor uses blank verse, and the deictic "I" of the figure does not. The former is a theatrical and iconic phenomenon (and an artistic one), whereas the latter is a linguistic and acoustic phenomenon (occurring in the realm of fiction where it is usually not artistic unless recognized as such by the fictional figures). Moreover, in most circumstances, the aesthetic function appears in stage speech, and not in the denoted language that the figures use. Actually the aesthetics arise from the relationship between the two distinct phenomena under discussion here.

However, in spite of all the efforts and histrionic talents of the actors, a total coalescence of fiction and material reality is an impossibility, and they always retain

some of their individual physical qualities and characteristics, not to mention the fact that acting in itself is a peculiar form of behavior, often considered unnatural.¹⁵ Generally speaking, we may observe that acting, like all other elements of theatrical production, is dual in its orientation: on the one hand, it aims at creating a fictional figure; on the other, it points to the process of creation, i.e., towards itself. As is always the case, theatre signs are at least partly auto-referential, and they draw our attention to the material substance and its modelling of the sign's vehicle. The actor, often known to us from other live performances, television, or films, signals his/her own individual properties of voice, gestures, and movement, which s/he is usually not prepared to give up in favor of wholly new ones. Not to mention the obvious fact that some physical attributes of an individual actor cannot be concealed or replaced by others.

We must also consider that usually, in theatre practice, it is the body (and some aspects of the actor's voice, such as pitch, timbre, and the like) that reveals at least some remnants of the deictic function of the actor (the human being), whereas the language conspicuously signals the assumed deictic axis of the fictional figure and in most cases cannot be assumed to belong to the actor. Owing to this factor, we do not lose the sense of the duality of acting, understood here as an ability to create a fictional figure inhabiting a fictional world,¹⁶ within a fictional space and time. However, the meaning of acting is not only the creation of some fictional beings, it is also the juxtaposition of fictionality to the actor's physical presence on the stage. Through this juxtaposition we are able to define the degree of the integration between what the actor says and what s/he does. A total merger of the two is rare and may be the result of a spectator's illusion. (As indicated, in the production under discussion, the merger becomes impossible because, owing to the multiplication of deixes, we have more than one fictional figure created by one actor (or, rather, by the director), which moreover, do not "live" at the same time and in the same space.) Also, the duality enables us to perceive the realities on both sides of what I call the fifth wall,¹⁷ the actor at work and the fictional figure which, being immaterial, comes "alive" only as a mental structure; this enables us also to evaluate the quality of the acting. Again, the aesthetic function of acting reveals itself on the phenomenal side of the fifth wall, through the relationship between the denoted fictional figure and the phenomenology of the actor, his/her utterances, gestures, mimicry, movements, and the like.

In mimetic theatre the relationship between the actor's real deixis and the assumed one relies usually on their compatibility, if not on a total merger: one should not contradict the other to an extent beyond the spectators' tolerance and the assumed criteria, which are, of course, culturally determined. Usually, the words uttered are not expected to appear in sharp contrast with the gestures, behavior and actions of the actors. They should be in line with the modality of the voice and mimicry. We may talk here of deictic congruity. As a result, the actor's aim

is to signal that the language s/he uses belongs to the speaking body. However, in theatre that does not follow mimetic rules; the one does not have to be compatible with the other at all. It may be to a large degree conventional, accepted without any need for verisimilitude or psychological likeness or sameness. In these cases, instead of compatibility or deictic congruity, we have a separateness, which results in the sharp separation of the two realms, the phenomenological one on the stage, and the fictional one denoted by the former. What follows is that, instead of some degree of likeness and merging, we witness two times flowing in separate streams, two denoted spaces, and two sets of “humans beings” (real actors and fictional figures denoted by the stage speech and separate deictic axis) entangled in conflicts in two distinct fictional worlds. This is often a feature of amateur productions or, simply put, of bad acting and/or bad directorship (bad casting may have a similar effect). However, in the non-mimetic streams of theatre (Brechtian, postmodern, postdramatic and such like), the incongruity of deixis results in the “estrangement” effect, which in extreme cases breaks the intimate relationship between the actor and the enacted figure. This implies that the meaning is not generated through the typical theatrical mode, by which the features of the fictional are related to the phenomenal. Instead, the actors appear as reciting a text that belongs to fictional figures, without, however, impersonating the latter. The separation of the language from the body creates a vivid hiatus between the two deixes. In extreme cases, this could result in a situation in which the actors do not signal any assumed deixis of a fictional figure. This could further imply, as is often the case in the postmodern theatre, that the actors are playing themselves in the here and now of the audience, a situation risky in itself for it may cross the boundaries of theatre as art. In this case the actors would have to signal that they notice the presence of the audience throughout their show. If they do not do that, it implies that a certain dose of fictionality is preserved. That in fact is absolutely sufficient to retain the basic features of theatre as art.

This is exactly what happens in Roberto Ciulli’s production. Although in his speeches the actor uses “I” to denote Lear, and “here” to denote the heath, we also notice that his body and voice retain a high degree of his “real” I, by which we know that it is the actor at work on the stage in the particular performance we are watching. Since s/he is not one of the figures in Shakespeare’s play, and yet through bodily movements and gestures signals his/her own “I” set in a fictional time and space, the spectator is baffled and seeks an explanation of this unusual situation. Consequently, the spectators—at least those who want to understand the rules of the selection and modelling of whatever is presented on the stage—reach the plausible conclusion that the actors are impersonating actors reading, reciting, or rehearsing a play. In this way, the verbal text ceases to be the actors’ assumed one, as, let me repeat, they do not seem to impersonate Lear, Edgar, or Goneril. They are themselves actors taking part in a rehearsal or reading of a play, living in

a world that is not pre-Christian Britain. However, as indicated, these are fictional actors, set in an undefined location at a time when tape recorders and refrigerators were already known. Thus, we are dealing here with three deixes, one belonging to the real actor, one to the fictional one, and yet another to the figure from Shakespeare's play.

Moreover, in Ciulli's *King Lear*, the situation is even more complicated, because when actors impersonate actors at work throughout the play, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the deixis of the real actor from that of his/her counterpart (acting has to be contrasted with non-acting: Ciulli provides that contrast towards the end of his production). Also, it must be noted that the separation of the language from the bodies of the actors, referred to above, is a valid statement only in relation to the fictional actors. Their behavior signals the appearance of a conspicuous estrangement effect. In this sense, and from their perspective, what the fictional actors produce verbally is not stage speech, but language isolated from its material scenic context. However, the separation of language and body occurs only in the relationship between Shakespeare's text and the fictional actors, whereas the congruity of language and body is fully preserved (hence artistic) in relation,



Fig. 2. Lear (Volker Roos) listening to the tape recorder, *King Lear* (2007), dir. Roberto Ciulli (photo: Wiesław Czerniawski).

complex as it appears, to the real actors who are totally engaged in what they are doing. This means that verbal utterances may be seen as both language and stage speech, depending on their fictional levels.

As I have mentioned, fragments of the Shakespearean text are played from a large, old-fashioned, reel-to-reel tape recorder (see fig. 2). Thus they are a recording

an evocation of a record of time past, which has been repeated no one knows how many times and is now played over again. In any case, at the end we see that Lear also as an actor has grown old and seems to have little time left to live. It is only for the time of the performance, the dialogue with the past, that he summons sufficient strength to act. Could this be his last performance, his last listening to the tape (with a directorial bow to Samuel Beckett and Jan Kott)? The recorded voices from the past can be variously interpreted. Shakespeare, and after him Ciulli, inclines away from the unequivocal—they clearly prefer the sphere of connotation.¹⁸ The words once uttered are evoked in accusation or explanation, or as evidence as if in a court hearing (the first to turn on the tape recorder is Regan, as if she wanted to clarify and explain her further actions); or perhaps there is another interpretation: they are a record of memory, reminding us that one cannot go outside the role one is ascribed in life however much one tries to do so. Here there can be no ending. Instead, time is circular: the curtain becomes a sign of yet another beginning. Towards the end of the play, Lear removes more reels of tape from the fridge; it too “prolongs time,” as if the reels were a fast-perishing product subject to decay, erasure, and hence oblivion. Champagne and oysters are also kept in the fridge, but here they are not so much a sign of upper-class luxury as of human eyes.

There are numerous references and allusions to sight and blindness in Shakespeare’s play, but Gloucester is the only figure to lose his eyesight: in a scene of ferocious cruelty, his eyes are plucked out. This has been staged in a great variety of ways; but Ciulli’s direction of the scene is outstandingly original. Gloucester sits with his back to the audience, in front of the fridge. Regan opens the fridge and takes out the champagne and oysters. She spikes one of them on a fork and then swallows it, drinking the juice. One eye is gone. A gulp of champagne. The action is repeated, and the other eye is swallowed. Champagne. Shocking, but at the same time how theatrical! As I have indicated, meaning is generated through the relationship of the fictional and the phenomenal. The stage power of this device should not pass us by: oysters, which we eat raw, become a sign of human eyes, and consuming them a sign of human cruelty and suffering. The champagne may be treated as a sign of the torturer’s insensitivity. But we should note that the oysters are a sign not of the eyes of the actor playing Gloucester in a fictional rehearsal, but of the figure in the Shakespearean drama. The actor playing Gloucester (e.g., reciting his lines) does not even pretend that he has been blinded; he does not play the Shakespearean figure, but himself, the fictional actor. Hence the scenic Gloucester—in any case blind already—does not react at all to the plucking out of his eyes. It does not concern him, because he represents no one apart from himself; he only mechanically repeats the role assigned to him. For this is a blind actor who is taking part in a rehearsal of a drama in which a person loses his sight. These two figures, the fictional actor and the earl of Gloucester, inhabit different times and places. The first does not want us to “read” him as a fictional earl. Similarly, the

oyster is both a real stage property (as seen from our, spectator's, point of view), eaten by an actress during a rehearsal break (for whom it is not a stage prop), and a sign of the eyes of the fictional Gloucester. We can see how the multiplication of deixis in two fictional planes changes the meaning of everything, depending on what is related to what: for us, the spectators, the oysters become a sign of Gloucester's eyes. Also, the same oysters remain signs of oysters in relation to the rehearsing actor. However, the blinding does not concern the fictional actors engaged in what seems to be a rehearsal (in both literal and metaphorical meanings of the word), and it is only we, the real spectators, who are invited to "read" the oysters as signs of Gloucester's eyes.¹⁹ For the fictional actors they are just a snack during their work. Of course, they utter the appropriate lines of Shakespeare's text, but they are not emotionally engaged with it. In other words, from their perspective, they recite the lines (as language), which have not been absorbed into stage speech; from the point of view of the spectators, however, the acting and verbal utterances form stage speech, unusual if not unique in the tradition of "staging Shakespeare" and the scene involving "vile jelly."

There are other symbolic and metaphorical scenes in Ciulli's production (just as there are many in Shakespeare's text),²⁰ such as Lear's conversation with one of his daughters, which takes place at the table on which the tape recorder stands. Lear embraces it as if he were embracing the past, before his daughter proved unnatural. At the performance's end, the tape, taken out of its spool, winds round Lear, now overtaken by madness. Although he repeats his role many times, he has learned nothing: he has not changed and perhaps cannot change the course of events. He has grown old before he has grown wise, as the Fool says. He wraps his head in the recording tape, as if in the past; the tape is a sign of memory, of time that cannot be brought back and from which he cannot free himself. The Cordelia-Fool figure even crowns him, placing a saucepan on his tape-bound head (see fig. 3). He, who thought he could be master of time and preserve memory with the help of a refrigerator, becomes a farce king. At some moment he places the tape to his ear. He listens attentively to something that neither we nor the other actor-figures can hear. After all, he advised the now blind Gloucester to read with his ears. Ciulli takes advantage of this to create a stage image of a Lear who literally "reads with his ears." Of course, one may also generalize that the past cannot be changed, and human beings cannot change fate or the course of events. This introduces determinism, which, we may suppose, neither Shakespeare nor Ciulli would entirely accept. Yet not a few references to blind and fickle Fortune can be found in the former. In *Lear* it is said that to the gods we are "as flies to wanton boys": "they kill us for their sport." We may say that Ciulli reads Shakespeare well, countering the dichotomy of human freedom and determinism once more with the assertion "and that's true too."

Owing to the fact that all the actors remain on stage all the time, while

ostensive signals do not create a different space than the real space of a group of



Fig. 3. Lear crowned with a saucepan, holding the recording tape, *King Lear* (2007), dir. Roberto Ciulli (photo: Ryszard Pajda).

blind people, we understand that the actors do not build fictional spaces in relation to themselves, but remain in one time and one space. Hence changes of space and shifts of time in the fictional world of *King Lear*, as implied by Shakespeare's text, are not signaled scenically by parallel changes of time and place. So on the fictional level (1), the actors are not playing at all. Generally speaking, the fictional time and space of Shakespeare's *Lear* find no reflection in either the actors' playing, the stage movement or the blocking, or the configurations of persons. Obviously, there are some departures from this rule: in the scene played on a ladder, Edgar impersonates a nobleman hounded by pursuers. But on the whole the fictional actors do not act out (again, from their point of view) the situations in which the figures

created by them find themselves; they do not act the lines uttered, just as they do not signal particular emotional engagement. Edmund reveals his arm in order to show Gloucester the wound he has inflicted on himself, of which he accuses Edgar. However, both Edmund and Gloucester—as fictional actors—are blind, so they cannot see the wound; we, on the other hand, can see that there is none (at the same time we see that they do not see). It is a fiction in which only a blind man can believe; but Gloucester cannot yet look with his ears. For the fictional figures in Shakespeare's text, the wound exists; thus, at least two different models of perceiving reality, the figures' and the actors'. In this particular production there are three models, the fictional figures' from the ancient world of Shakespeare's play, the fictional actors' from the world of rehearsing the past that Ciulli stages for us, and us, being the real spectators. They are all the consequence of the appearance of the multiple deixes that are in constant play here. What stands between us, the spectators, and the world of Shakespeare's play, is yet another fictional plane, which contributes to the "estrangement" effect. The juxtaposition between what the fictional figures on the fictional levels see and hear, and what we see and hear, generates highly original meanings, and, by drawing our attention to the rules that

govern the created world, it becomes an important element generating the aesthetic function. These rudimentary rules of theatre Ciulli reveals to perfection.

I have already mentioned the conspicuous distancing of the acting. The same applies to objects. There are very few displayed on the stage and almost no object changes its semantics in the fictional world of the rehearsal, for it may only seldom be related to the realm denoted by the Shakespearean text. There are a few exceptions, like the ladder, a mundane object to be found in any theatre, which is used as a sign of a tree, in which Edgar hides from his persecutors. Again, the meaning of a given object depends upon its relation to one of the two fictional levels. This implies that the meanings of everything are multiplied. In most cases, the meaning is metaphorical and inconclusive, as in the scene where the Fool lights a candle and puts it in front of Lear, but from his/her gestures we can see that s/he cannot see it either; the candle of course cannot reveal any truth about the world to the blind actors. The case is similar with the symbolism of the spinning top: its meanings remain undefined. Perhaps it is a sign of the globe of the earth, or of time, running on as it revolves (like train wheels in old movies). It is usually the Fool who sets it in motion, but at the end Edgar and Edmund fight for it: Ciulli stages this duel as a fight over a toy between two small boys (see fig. 4). It thus becomes a sign of something precious, something that one can sacrifice one's life for—perhaps a sign of power or control over time, or the world itself.

In any case, since there is considerable distancing of the actors in rehearsal from the world denoted by Shakespeare's text, the objects usually mean functional objects within the fictional realm of rehearsal. Thus, the table remains a table, the



Fig. 4. Edgar fighting over the spinning top with Edmund (Fabio Menendez), *King Lear* (2007), dir. Roberto Ciulli (photo:Ryszard Pajda).

chair a chair, and the fridge a fridge. As stage signs, they refer to the table or fridge in the created world, but this does not mean that we are dealing here with a form of theatre that undermines its own rules (as in the presently fashionable postdramatic theatre). Ciulli only plays with two fictional worlds, two fictional layers, two spaces, and two times: one is the world of the Shakespearean plot, the other, the world in which a “rehearsal of Shakespeare” is taking place. The duplication of the fictional worlds is the cause of the distancing and de-psychologization mentioned earlier. Why? Perhaps because in theatre two fictions cannot be played at the same time (the actor cannot play two roles simultaneously). They can, however, be represented alternately, or one can be made dominant and the other moved into the background. This is what happens here: the world of the blind actors, rehearsing the Shakespearean text, forms the dominant; while the other world is rather evoked than “played.” The major juxtaposition is between the real world of the audience and the world of the fictional actors who are conducting a rehearsal (or something resembling a rehearsal), not the world of the Shakespearean figures. Thanks to this device, theatre remains theatre and constantly reminds us of this. It speaks of itself, even though it turns away from the tradition that sees it as an enactment of literature.

The fact that the actors are only playing the blind is confirmed at the end of the play: the group of actors, having spoken their last lines, return to their “real” nature as human beings, healthy people who are only playing the part of the blind. Suddenly their proxemic relations change: they behave “normally,” they even hug one another, speak to one another, smile, each one seeing the others. Their behavior and utterances are conspicuously different from those that precede this scene; they are back to the space and geometry of the world, back to their present time (which now they perceive through the space). Thus, a contrast is provided of acting and non-acting, by which, retrospectively, we read the whole as a rehearsal. And at this moment the rehearsal ends, everything returns to “life” (though the rules of theatre are maintained: the actors still do not notice the audience, for they are set in another, fictional, time and place). Only the actor playing Lear draws attention to his difference from the others. One may form the impression that, in contrast to them, he has remained blind: he still sits on the “throne,” he has grown weaker and is suddenly old and incapacitated (see fig. 5). The actor playing Gloucester feeds him some kind of mush. He has trouble getting the spoon into “Lear’s” mouth; soon he looks like a infant with a dirty face. He really is a resident in a home for the blind or old (one of the elements of his costume is a red dressing gown). It seems that yet again the director has not defined precisely the meaning of Lear, leaving it in the sphere of connotation.

This also throws light on the function of Ciulli’s highly inventive staging device of presenting the actors as blind actors. It seems that we are dealing here not only with a metaphorical treatment of the figures of the drama. Of course, in

Shakespeare, eyesight, eyes, seeing, and blindness are structural motifs that appear throughout the text. A madman leading a blind man, seeing oneself and the truth about the world in a fit of madness, “seeing with the ears,” the blindness of naivety or cruelty, a blind man who sees more than he did when he had his eyes—these all appear, in a great variety of shapes, in Shakespeare’s text. Ciulli’s presentation of the fictional actors as blind extends this metaphor of sight and blindness, to issues of time and memory, our cognition of the world, and our own identity as humans. But Ciulli goes beyond the Shakespearean text. By making use of the resources and rules of the theatre, he shows that it is not literature, but theatre that “speaks” from the stage. The director knows that among the audience there are those who read with their ears as well as those who read with their eyes. Still others can read with both ears and eyes, and yet others who cannot read at all and see nothing. The meanings derived from reading may and must be various, more or less in line with the director’s intentions. This is why Ciulli avoids the unequivocal. His emphasis is on the ways of making meanings in theatre; the meanings themselves he leaves to the sphere of connotation. He is the creator of a work of art, not of a moralizing treatise.

It may hence be said that the theatrical rehearsal of blind actors, with a careful play of assumed deixes, expands into a metaphor of the impossibility of interpersonal understanding: their utterances pass one another by, without reaching the other person, with perhaps only one or two important exceptions, such as the Fool’s dialogue with Lear, or Edgar’s with the blinded Gloucester. That’s true. In real life we cannot assume the deixis of another person to reach a better understanding. But, on the other hand, Ciulli wants to communicate some message about the world and humankind. So he believes in the possibility and need of communication. That creates another contradiction, but we now know that “that’s true too.” Dialectically both thesis and antithesis appear, but Ciulli leaves synthesis to the audience. This enables us to create all sorts of interpretations, even commonplace ones. For instance, experience, misfortune, and suffering bring people together, leading to



Fig. 5. Earl of Gloucester (Klaus Herzog) feeding Lear, *King Lear* (2007), dir. Roberto Ciulli (photo: Ryszard Pajda).

communication and understanding: despite their blindness, they begin to notice and speak to one another, instead of casting their words into empty space. The community of experience and suffering causes the scales to fall from their eyes. But in theatre (and art in general) what really counts is *how* meanings are created, and not necessarily *what* they communicate, even within the dramatic tradition. (Of course in notable productions a balance of the two is achieved.) In fact, theatre does not have to be semantic and referential; it may be oriented (as in music) almost totally towards itself, towards the rules that enable its appearance in the process of what Roman Jakobson called introversive semiosis.

At one point in the play, Lear, looking at the naked and shivering Edgar, asks, "Is man no more than this?" He finally knows that man is both only this and as much as this. Logically, both statements should exclude one another, but in Shakespeare and in Ciulli, they coexist. And in this sense the director is faithful to the playwright, much more so than are many psychologically oriented productions. Nevertheless, as an actor, Lear alone remains blind even after the "rehearsal" is over. The scales fall from his eyes only as a figure. Perhaps, on the principle of paradox, those who have eyes (the rest of the actors) remain blind, while the one who does not have them (the actor playing Lear) can see. It may be, however, that he has learned nothing, just as we, the audience, may not notice the candle that Roberto Ciulli lights for us. But he does this in order for us to perceive that "that's true too."

Notes

1. In his *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 8-9.

2. I have drawn attention to this fragment in order to underline a characteristic of all Shakespeare's mature tragedies, in which a frequently declared truth about the world or about human life proves to be not the only one: its logical contradiction also proves to be true. Hence there is not, and cannot be, any unambiguous interpretation here: even the most deeply considered ideas may meet with the counter-argument that "that's true too, but ..." This is why Hamlet both is and is not a coward, loves and does not love Ophelia, hesitates and does not hesitate in taking revenge. The dichotomies with which Shakespearean figures struggle are, to a large degree, resistant to the intellect; there is no way, by going beyond the paradox "and that's true too," of definitively resolving them.

3. The initial distinction between an actor and a stage figure has to be made: the former is a human being for whom theatre is a profession or hobby, whereas the latter is a creation of the former. In other words, the actor is both the co-creator and the material substance of the sign of a figure which is immaterial and basically a mental construct.

4. It may be said that language as used on the stage loses its intrinsic qualities, as defined by grammar, and becomes inseparably linked to other material and non-material components of a given production. In point of fact, the verbal utterances of actors, which should be treated as elements of stage-speech, may be treated as signs of the linguistic utterances of fictional figures, which are not elements of stage-speech, and are governed by the rules of grammar of natural languages. Thus, the language used by the actors is something altogether different from the denoted language of the fictional figures.

5. Of course, by definition the fictional world does not exist in the material and spatial sense, which is why I talk of its "material attributes." Fiction may appear only as a mental construct in the mind of the recipient. Let me add that creating fictional realms is not the ultimate goal and meaning of theatre as art. This may be achieved in games that people play. What counts here is the relationship between the attributes of the fictional realm, denoted by stage utterances, verbal and non-verbal, and the phenomenal world of the stage, as perceived by the senses and cognitive schemata of the audience. This is why, unlike literature, the substance of whatever is presented on the stage, along with its modelling, becomes

pivotal to our understanding of the stage communiqué and also plays a vital role in its aesthetics.

6. We have to keep in mind, however, that the figure is much more than an actor is capable of creating on his / her own: the fictional figure is a synthesis of the various relationships between fictional and material and verbal substances of the performance, and it does not exist in the material sense, for it is created in the mind of the spectator. What this means is that the figure is constructed not only by what the particular actor who creates it does and says, but also by other factors, such as other figures' utterances, behavior, costume, make-up, light, music, and the like. Not taking this factor into account makes any discussion of acting and theatre rather superficial.

7. The seeming physical and empirical impossibility of duality of the present time in theatre is in fact one of the basic conventions and rules of the art, and distinguishes theatre from other signifying systems. Thus, of the many systems and practices of human communication, theatre is unusual in its ability to create a fictional (and usually past) reality as if occurring in the here and now of the performers and spectators. Without it, theatre ceases to be itself, and becomes another phenomenon, which may be artistic (such as happenings or performance art).

8. The motif of the difficulty and even impossibility of communication is not the invention of the director. It is a development of what he read in Shakespeare's play. In *King Lear* the "positive" characters speak a highly individualized language, full of rhetorical figures, marked by poetic means of expression (with frequent apostrophes to the gods), while the opposite side speaks a language of the concrete (with frequent apostrophes to nature), like cliché examples of politicians in negotiations or business people.

9. Cf. Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, tr. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006).

10. I am somewhat hesitant to use the word "language" in connection with theatre. This is too complex a matter to be even touched upon in a brief article, but let me stress once again that I use the phrase "stage speech" rather than language. It seems to me that what constitutes stage speech is less dependent on grammar than its linguistic source, and on the stage becomes entangled in very complex relationships with all material substances used in a given production, whether material or non-material, whether live (like human bodies) or inanimate. It seems to me (and I am in a position to prove this) that in theatre one does not only listen to language as spoken by the actors, but, paradoxically, one also watches it.

11. I shall give just one example: as is well known, the verse meter in Elizabethan drama best adapted to scenic dialogue is unrhymed iambic pentameter (so called *blank verse*). In *King Lear*, however, we find a departure from the norm: throughout the whole play, the Fool, played by the same actress who plays Cordelia, does not once use *blank verse*. This is by no means because he does not speak in verse: he sings rhyming songs, and yet he does not speak in *blank verse*, not even a single line. This may be interpreted in various ways, but this happens probably because the Fool speaks a language that does not invite dialogue: in his embittered wisdom, he has no desire to talk to anyone any more. The fact that he speaks results from his professional obligations, but also from deep disappointment with the world (and with his master), and not from his belief that his words can change anything, teach anyone, or convince anyone of anything. Ciulli translates this into scenic images: The Fool's words fall into a vacuum, while the candle (a simple symbol of wisdom?) that he lights is not going to be seen by anyone (Lear does not notice it, despite his wide open eyes). Obviously, we may assume that Ciulli believes in the point of dialogue, the ability of people to understand one another, or at least to communicate. Otherwise he would not be a director of plays. For what would be the point? This is true, unless he does it for the same reason as the Fool. And that will be true too.

12. See, for instance, Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1994), Chapter 4: *The Performing "I": Language and the Histrionics of Place*, 120-58.

13. I have discussed these issues in greater detail in my theoretical works.

14. See Eli Rozik, "Acting: The Quintessence of Theatricality," *SubStance*, 31.2-3 (2002): 110-24.

15. Acting is an extremely complicated issue. For a theoretical scrutiny that does not concentrate on the actor's psychology, or his/her work on preparing a role, see, for instance, articles by Jiří Veltruský, "Contribution to the Semiotics of Acting," *Sound, Sign and Meaning: Quinquagenary of the Prague Linguistic Circle*, ed. Ladislav Matejka (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1978) 553-606, "Acting and Behaviour: A Study in the *Signans*," *Semiotics of Drama and Theatre: New Perspectives in the Theory of Drama and Theatre*, ed. Herta Schmid and Aloysius Van Kesteren (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1984), 393-441; see also Rozik, "Acting."

16. Of course, the actors do not have to impersonate fictional human beings; they may enact objects, animals, or allegories. This is why it is safer to say that, simply put, acting is the art of creating

fictional present time.

17. I have discussed the concept of the fifth wall in my book, published in Polish, *Piaty wymiar teatru* (Gdańsk: stowo obraz/teytoria, 2005). For the cognitive blending theory see Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, "Blending as a Central Problem of Grammar" (1998), an article available on the home page of the authors, and also their book *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

18. This invites yet another possible metaphor: it is predominantly memory that constitutes a conscious human being: we are because we remember, and this is why time and memory are vital to what constitutes our identity. Ciulli's production may be seen as a variation on this theme.

19. After his symbolic blinding, Gloucester tries to move away, but he falls to the ground and for a long moment executes useless movements on all fours, recalling Edgar's animal-like way of moving. Through this similarity, a new equivalence is created between the father and the son; they are both thrown to the ground, literally and metaphorically. This becomes a sign that something has taken place that may draw them closer: the community of experience, of suffering. Gloucester removes his glasses, revealing huge, ghoul-like eyes that really remind us of oysters. Immediately afterwards, "the scales fall from his eyes," while Edgar recovers human speech and faith in the value of dialogue. Perhaps for the first time in their lives, the father and son talk like two human beings.

20. It may be said that, thanks to his skillful translation of words into images, Ciulli's production attains a high degree of metaphorical saturation. As a result, the performance plays "pure theatre," and the effect is extraordinarily powerful. And this in spite of the break with psychology, the departure from acting as "pretending" or "experiencing." The director reads Shakespeare theatrically and, through the introduction of additional deixes, creates yet another level of meaning, absent in Shakespeare's text.