

# The Deep Order Called Turbulence

## The Three Faces of Dramaturgy

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*Eugenio Barba*

There exists an invisible revolt, apparently painless yet infusing every hour of work, and this is what nourishes “technique.”

Artistic discipline is a way of refusal. Technique in theatre and the attitude that it presupposes is a continual exercise in revolt, above all against oneself, against one’s own ideas, one’s own resolutions and plans, against the comforting assurance of one’s own intelligence, knowledge, and sensibility.

It is the practice of a voluntary and lucid disorientation in the search for new points of orientation.

Apart from nourishing the work, revolt is also nourished by it. I do theatre because I want to preserve my freedom to refuse certain rules and values of the world around me. But the opposite is also true: I am forced or encouraged to refuse them *because* I do theatre.

### *Storm and Meticulousness*

The choice to do theatre is often a difficult answer to a difficult situation. It is a way to live a freedom that is only free if the results of our own work succeed in influencing other people and winning them over to our side. It is a way of inventing our own identity, which is revealed to us through work that is both meticulous and stormy.

Some people believe that storm and meticulousness belong in two separate worlds; that technical problems, professionalism, and the craftsman’s precision have nothing to do with turbulence and with the impulse towards freedom, destruction, revolt, and refusal.

This is not true.

### *Extracting the Difficult from the Difficult*

Extracting the difficult from the difficult is the attitude that defines artistic practice. On this depend the incisiveness, the complexity, the dense quality of



1. *Technique in theatre and the attitude it presupposes is a continual exercise in revolt, above all against oneself, against one's own ideas, one's own resolutions and plans, against the comforting assurance of one's own intelligence, knowledge, and sensibility. Above, Roberta Carreri performs in Mythos (1998), directed by Eugenio Barba. (Photo by Jan Rűsz)*

the result, as well as the moments of difficulty, suffering and illumination, disorientation and reorientation that make up the process.

This attitude illustrates the difference between the organic character of art and the organization of daily tasks which are all the better for having the *easy* extracted from the difficult.

### *Scylla and Charybdis*

Order and disorder are not two opposing options, but two poles that coexist and reinforce one another reciprocally. The quality of the tension created between them is an indication of the fertility of the creative process.

When we attempt to describe this tension, however, the discussion becomes hesitant. The more our explanations stick to what we have experienced in the work, the more they appear fantastic and exotic to the listener. And in trying to transmit experience, there is a risk of misunderstanding.

The easiest way of escaping these problems is through silence. Otherwise we have to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis.

On the one hand there is Scylla, representing the risk of straightening out the route, thus transforming the intricacy of the many paths into one direct line running in the right direction. Everything then becomes clear, even though it does not correspond to our experience. Within the reality of work, creativity is like a stormy sky. It is perceived as disorientation, doubt, frustration, discomfort.

To be master of one's craft signifies above all knowing how to prepare for the storm that will threaten us, and how to resist without resorting to easy or familiar solutions.

"Storm" also means that problems do not present themselves one after another—as when we talk about them—but all or many simultaneously. When the sea and the waves are merely images of the route, every step becomes comprehensible. Everything turns out to be true, yet so abstract that it makes a mockery of experience.

On the other hand, there is Charybdis, with the risk of speaking only of storms and forgetting about the geometry of the compass and the sextant, which make the route possible. It is the risk of becoming anecdote or confession: the process is shown as a random path, confused and shadowy, like magma flowing almost involuntarily into a result without knowing how or why. This too is an aspect of truth, one of its profiles.

To discover the true face behind the reality of the artistic process, you must focus first on one and then the other profile.

### *The Secret Complexity of Bios*

In spite of the disturbing fluctuation between Scylla and Charybdis, with all the misunderstandings that it entails, it is worthwhile to attempt to talk about the way in which a performance grows, takes form, and is transformed. It means questioning oneself about something that has to do with life itself. One has the sensation that they are the same questions as the ones posed by those who investigate the secret complexity of *bios*.

It is this that justifies the interest and the curiosity surrounding the artistic process, with its paradoxes and obstructions. It explains the persistence of certain people to speak of it although well aware that their words will be opaque and the questions will almost always lack answers.

### *Art and Living Matter*

In artistic terms, the contraposition "organic" and "inorganic" distinguishes work that seems alive, credible, and coherent from that which appears forced,

mechanical, arousing in us a reaction of rejection and annoyance. In the natural sciences, however, the contraposition organic-inorganic serves to distinguish the realm of the bios from the mineral realm.

There is an important difference between discussions on nature and on art: in the first case the difference between “organic” and “inorganic” is objective, while in the second it has a purely subjective basis and only acquires an appearance of objectivity when it concerns an opinion shared by many. Or, to express it in terms that might appeal both to skeptics and relativists: discussions on nature have the presumption to be objective, whereas those on art presume that objectivity does not exist.

Another difference is that while the complexity of the natural processes determining *life* often appear as an admirable order, the paths which lead to the *life* of a work of art seem to be dominated by disorder and fortuitousness.

### *Forging Fortuitousness*

Many of the solutions that make an impression on the spectator and help to determine the significance of a performance seem to be suggested by fortuitousness. But what we call “fortuitousness” is a complex order in which several forces act simultaneously, a system of relationships that cannot be explored at a single glance.

We could say that in the creative process we must forge our own fortuitousness, just as the Romans used to say that we are the forgers of our own good or bad fortune. But we must not forget the words of Pasteur: “Chance only favors minds which are prepared.”

### *Catastrophe and Density*

From a technical point of view, how can we disrupt the direction of the work? One way is to concentrate not just on one objective, but to aim in two, three, four different directions simultaneously. Like a sailing boat that wants to go west, while the wind is blowing from the south and the currents are carrying it towards the east. The equilibrium between these tensions is the creative route. The tensions between forces that are divergent, opposed to one another or simply contiguous, can lead to catastrophe. But if we succeed



2. Order and disorder are not two opposing options, but two poles that coexist and reinforce one another reciprocally. The quality of the tension created between them is an indication of the fertility of the creative process. Torgeir Wethal (left) and Tage Larsen in *Mythos* (1998). (Photo by Jan Rűsz)

in keeping these forces at bay and discovering the kind of relationship that exists between them—in other words, if we can get them to coexist, interweaving and rearranging them—then we will attain density instead of catastrophe.

Density disorients the spectators, forcing them to extract the difficult from the difficult and shaking them out of the familiar trains of thought, which constitute a safe home for their ideas.

### *The Technique of Disorientation*

During rehearsals, the technique of disorientation consists in giving space to a multiplicity of trends, narratives and directions without bending them, right from the start, beneath the yoke of our choices and intentions. We must follow different tracks, diverging themes, and unconnected associations contemporaneously, and make sure that the stories pursued by the individual actors do not correspond to those of the director and the other actors.

It is an attitude that stimulates and generates a contiguity of material, prospects, and proposals. It is a means of trying out a labyrinthine path between *chaos* and *cosmos*, with sudden swerves, paralyzing stops, and unexpected solutions. It is the growth of a profusion that for a long time appears to obscure the explanatory and narrative clarity in the course of the process.

In this way an apparent confusion is created, a magnetic field with differing forces for each individual actor and for the director, but where each of them can find pretexts, bonds, justifications, interests, obstacles, challenges, and resonances related to the main theme or the nucleus of questions constituting the point of departure.

It implies the creation of a chaotic panorama with many underground rivers along which everyone is free to follow a different route. This freedom already constitutes the seed of a dramaturgy because, if they all navigate according to their own choice, the obligation to follow a common path necessitates the discovery of *relationships* between the various personal motivations. This *search* for coherent relationships is already a *search* for a narrative plot, a coherent dramaturgy.

### *Three Dramaturgies*

Working on the dramaturgy does not only involve the text or the story that we want to tell and make visible to the spectators.

There are three different dramaturgies, which should happen simultaneously but can each be worked on separately:

1. An *organic or dynamic dramaturgy*, which is the composition of the rhythms and dynamisms affecting the spectators on a nervous, sensorial and sensual level;
2. A *narrative dramaturgy*, which interweaves events and characters, informing the spectators on the meaning of what they are watching;
3. And lastly, the one that I call *dramaturgy of changing states*, when the entirety of what we show manages to evoke something totally different, similar to when a song develops another sound line through the harmonics.

In a performance, this *dramaturgy of changing states* distills or captures hidden significances, which are often involuntary on the part of the actors as well as the director, and are different for every spectator. It gives the performance not only a coherence of its own but also a sense of mystery.

The dramaturgy of changing states is the most elusive. There are no technical rules. Furthermore, it is difficult to explain what it involves beyond the perceptible effects: leaps from one dimension to another. For the spectator, actor, and director it is a spring from one state of consciousness to another

with unforeseeable and extremely personal consequences, both sensorial and mental. This leap from one context to another is a perturbation, a change in the quality of energy, which produces a double effect: enlightenment or a sudden vortex that shatters the security of comprehension and is experienced as turbulence.

### *Turbulence*

Turbulence appears to be a violation of order; in fact it is order in motion. It engenders vortexes that upset the current of narrative action. In the absence of these vortexes the continuity, rhythm, and narrative risk lapsing into the obvious, into mere illustration. It is like a succession of notes making a melody, but one which is sung without the wealth of harmonics that bring the voice to life, allowing it to enchant and move.



3. *There is no creative work without waste. The proportion between that which is produced and that which is finally used could be said to correspond to the disproportion of the seeds that are dispersed in nature in order that a single fertilized cell may succeed in engendering a new individual in the animal or plant world.* Torgeir Wethal and Iben Nagel Rasmussen in *Mythos* (1998). (Photo by Tony D'urso)

The dramaturgy of changing states concerns the performance as a physical and sensorial event, as an organism-in-life. It has nothing to do with the written text, with the dramaturgy of the words, in the same way that the vibratory quality of the singing voice has nothing to do with the score.

All this is not possible without the availability of many elements and different seeds, without the will to encourage contiguity and to spread out in several directions simultaneously. This abundance of elements and materials creates confusion, yet its aim is simplicity and coherence.

### *Coherence*

“A writer may well build castles in the air, but they must rest on foundations of granite.” This declaration by Ibsen refers to the dramaturgy of words, but emphasizes the dialectic of independence and dependence, anarchy and discipline, on the one hand revolt and on the other the authority of a unifying principle which characterizes every aspect of the three dramaturgies.

The actions of the actors should possess a coherence independent of their context and their “meaning.” They should appear credible on a sensorial level and be *present* on a pre-expressive one. The granite foundations are their quality of credibility, their ability to stimulate the attention of the spectator and to be rooted in the body-mind of the actor. They should be based on their own particular independent logic.

There are and have always been actors of prodigious effectiveness who have never fixed the pattern of their actions onstage, who have never thought in terms of a score, who have never consciously worked on a level that they called pre-expressive, avoiding every sign of visible precision that might be controlled from outside.

Why then do I insist so strongly on the work of the actor at a pre-expressive level; on the importance of precision in fixing and knowing how to repeat the precise pattern of the actions; on the value of one’s independence from the intentions of the director and the writer; on the coherence of one’s score and subscore?

I insist not only because I have observed what it is that makes the actor effective, but because the autonomous coherence of the actions (independently of the significance that they assume in the context of the performance) bestows a particular and precious gift on the material which the actor has assembled: it becomes *amphibious*, capable of passing from one context to another without withering away, and able to mutate without losing the roots that keep it alive.

### *Confusion and Con-fusion*

During the rehearsal stage, when the actors only follow a personal and coherent thread in their scores, the dramaturgy as a whole may remain confused, even chaotic, for a long time.

Confusion, when it is sought after and practiced as an *end in itself*, is the art of deception. This does not necessarily mean that it is a negative state, one to be avoided. When used as a *means*, confusion constitutes one of the components of an organic creative process. It is the moment in which material, prospects, contiguous stories, and diverse intentions become con-fused, i.e., fuse together, mixing with one another, each becoming the other face of the other.

The intricate lines of the route do not mean that the route aims at intricacy. The profusion and confusion of material and trends is the only way to arrive at the bare and essential action.

### *Craft and Genius*

When the work is almost finished, he stops and says that now it can really begin. Those around him express stupor and incomprehension. Meanwhile he disarranges and destroys everything he has done up to that moment. He draws other scenes and figures, which he interweaves or superimposes on the preceding ones, canceling them out. He takes another canvas and on it paints the picture that he has mentally extracted from the difficulties with which he was confronted while working on the previous canvas.

He started out from a dynamic and asymmetric division of a white rectangle, with lines pointing in six directions. Then he peopled it, filled it, applied colors, blotted out forms, reapplied new colors, invented new figures, and transformed others. He painted in haste, then stopped to reflect, began again, glimpsed a solution, and changed his mind. On the canvas, the sun shone on an azure sea. He had made night fall and the entire canvas gradually had become dark. At that precise moment he saw the right path: "Now I can begin. All the mistakes I have made up to now are teaching me the picture I must paint."

In the summer of 1955 Pablo Picasso agreed, contrary to all expectations, to make a film. It was Georges Clouzot, the French director, who had convinced him. The film was to show the painter at work. Contrary to his normal daily schedule, for a whole month Picasso got up early in the morning to go to the film studio in Nice. He agreed to submit to all the technical demands of the filmmaker. He worked in the presence of crowds of "spectators," lighting and sound technicians, electricians, photographers, production staff, director—all the numerous members of a film team.

The film, *Le mystère Picasso*, is a classic of its genre today. It is presented as a document that allows us to observe what goes on in the head of a genius. He was undoubtedly a genius. But the film reveals above all the craftsman Picasso.

What is the difference?

### *Humble Procedures*

In the 1970s, a series of film sequences rejected by Charlie Chaplin was discovered. They were supposed to have been destroyed but had been kept by mistake. With them Kevin Brownlow and David Gill put together a television program that became famous: *Unknown Chaplin*. It showed us Chaplin improvising, searching for a theme for one of his films, starting from nothing, constructing complicated scenes and then discarding them until the right road opened up before him. Meanwhile the camera continued to record hundreds of meters of film which now reveal to us what was going on in the head of that genius. The craftsman yet again.

If we watch *Le mystère Picasso* or *Unknown Chaplin* in order to deduce something that might be of interest from a professional point of view, we must not allow ourselves to be dazzled by their extraordinary creativity. Their exceptional qualities disclose the humble procedures on which the artist's work is based, whatever the level of the results.

### *Waste*

There is no creative work without waste. The proportion between that which is produced and that which is finally used could be said to correspond to the disproportion of the seeds that are dispersed in nature in order that a single fertilized cell may succeed in engendering a new individual in the animal or plant world.



There is no creative work without waste and there is no waste without the high quality of that which is wasted.

Kipling used to say that you cannot learn to write if you do not learn to discard, and in order to cut a text in a way that is beneficial, the rejected parts must be of an equally high quality as those which remain. In other words, it is no use writing something with the idea that what you write may be thrown away.

Extracting the difficult from the difficult involves creating complexity. This is not an objective in itself but aims at guiding us towards further choices and revealing paths we did not know existed.

This is a paradoxical way of reasoning according to the criteria of economy and accumulation. But it is simple good sense if the criteria are those of the artistic crafts.

In theatre this paradox is mainly present on two different levels of organization: that of the actor and that of the narrative dramaturgy.

### *Extracting Error from Confusion*

At a certain point in Clouzot's film *Picasso* appears confused. He is not sure that he will be able to dominate the difficulties that he has created for himself. Slowly, in his eyes, the confusion is transformed into an obvious spider's web of errors. At this point he gets his breath back: at last he can begin.

"Truth emerges more often from error than from confusion," said Francis Bacon (not the contemporary painter but the 17th-century philosopher). To extract error from confusion, and then *our* own truth from the error, could be a somewhat philosophical way of saying: extract the difficult from the difficult.

4. *Turbulence appears to be a violation of order; in fact it is order in motion. Kai Bredholt, Roberta Carreri, Torgeir Wethal, and Jan Ferselev in motion in Mythos (1998). (Photo by Jan Rűsz)*



### *Constructing Confusion*

The capacity to construct confusion is crucial in the theatre's creative process.

From a dramaturgical point of view it implies not being satisfied with what we already know about the performance on which we are working, its story or non-story, the meaning that the writer has given to the text or that we want to express and make visible. It means doing everything to escape the temptation to carry out a previously defined plan, which we usually call "interpretation." When we work on a text, it is important to know how to distance ourselves from it. But the purpose of this detachment, this straying from the path, or pilgrimage, is not to use the text as a pretext. It must be a road which carries us in unimagined directions in order that everything we have discovered while exploring the territories and the themes that have been carrying us away or contradicting our points of departure, may build a network of difficulties when we return to face the writer's dramaturgy, confronting us with new questions and unexpected perspectives.

This rule of behavior towards the text or the original theme, towards the meaning that these assumed for us initially, corresponds to a rule guiding the movements of the body: the impulse to move in one direction is preceded by an impulse in the opposite direction, a *sats*. This law of movement of the living organism is amplified by the actor at the pre-expressive level and transformed into one of those stimuli, leaps of energy or micro-vortexes which hold and steer the attention of the spectator sensually and kinesthetically.

### *Errors As Walls and Errors As Doors*

If it is true that it is essential to extract the error from confusion, then we have to ask ourselves what, from a technical point of view, is error.

There are sterile errors that every theatre craftsman has to learn to recognize and correct. These are errors that block the process, like blind walls. On the other hand, there are other types of errors which, as doors, are a threshold, temporary yet fertile.

If we have been able to work at different levels of organization of the performance, then each of these has a life and function of its own. When put together, however, they do not make for harmony but confusion. Every level of organization limits itself to following its own course, and has a certain centrifugal tendency, jealous of its own autonomy. That which possesses its own effective coherency on a particular level of organization—e.g., that of the dynamo-rhythm—loses it on another level, that of the narrative dramaturgy. And vice versa: some actions, a passage or an entire scene, which are essential to the story we are presenting, become an obstacle and counterproductive to the pace of the performance. A performance is built up according to different logics. Something that is right from the point of view of one of these logics becomes "error" when considered from another standpoint.

These "errors" guide us, obliging us to extract a new complexity from those that constituted the previous stages of the work. It is by attempting to respond to these new difficulties, to break down these "doors," that we may experience leaps in perception in ourselves or in the spectator: the dramaturgy of changing states.

At this point a phenomenon occurs which seems strange when we speak of it, but is a sign that the work is on the right course. It is as though the work no longer belongs to us but starts to speak with its own autonomous voice and language, which we have to decipher.

Something similar happens with the work of the individual actors when their physical scores are interwoven with the scores of their fellow actors, with the words of the text, and with the demands of the dramaturgy.

### *Work Tires and Sometimes Hurts*

It is easy to read storm and meticulousness, disorientation and confusion, turbulence and chance which is not fortuitous as formulas for extracting the difficult from the difficult. At the same time it is easy to imagine how, in the reality of the work situation, this process is experienced as doubt, discomfort, and sometimes pain.

During rehearsals, when what seemed already to be a difficult result is treated as a point of departure, some of the actors lose heart. It is always a critical moment for the ensemble. Sometimes the irritation of each against the others prevails and destroys. Yet even this is craftsmanship. Work does not only tire, but sometimes it hurts.

Sadism and masochism are of no use in the artistic process. If they emerge in the web of relationships that make up a group, the result is immediate and bitter destruction.

### *The Drop of Water*

Why, then, do I work in a way which may bring me distress, cause me unease or wound me or my companions?

In order to create a work that lives and stands alone, that belongs to me, in which I recognize myself, yet which does not need my presence to go on existing in the senses, the memory, and the actions of others.

In order to give the spectators something to remember even after they have forgotten it.

Because I long for the bare and essential action: the drop of water that makes the jar run over.

—translated by Judy Barba

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