



# ¿QUÉ HARÉ YO CON ESTA ESPADA?

## INTERVIEW WITH ANGÉLICA LIDDELL

**After a first trilogy, your *Resurrection Cycle*, you are now working on a second one, *The Trilogy of the Infinite II*, whose second episode, ¿ *Qué haré yo con esta espada* ?, will play at the Festival. Is this the way you'll work from now on?**

**Angélica Liddell:** It's not a systematic and definitive decision. Right now, the form of the trilogy seems to me to be the most adequate to express the state of my thoughts, of my reflections, and it suits my artistic project. I look at it as at a medieval form, like an ancient altarpiece, it allows me to express three different states of one unique concept. Unfortunately, for financial reasons, I can never perform all three together. Even though money isn't an obstacle per se, I produce my works with what most great European directors spend on condoms after cocktail parties...

**In 2013, *All the Sky Above the Earth (Wendy's Syndrome)* was based on the Utoya massacre committed by the Norwegian Anders Breivik. Today, you're working on the Paris attacks of November 2015 and on the story of the Japanese Issei Sagawa, who ate his classmate. Is your theatre inspired by those events?**

Those events awakened in me preoccupations I've had for a long time, and of course triggered an immediate reaction, the same as everyone else. If the things they stirred are sometimes buried deeply, I don't want to react to everything systematically, and as an artist I want to go beyond that immediate reaction. As regards the November attacks, there's the question of the struggle between myth and reason. It also made me wonder about the relationship between the law of the state and the law of poetry. To tell you the truth, I think I find in some events an answer to a very old question: can culture be mythical only through violence? I'm talking about the necessity to turn real violence into political violence. It would be the only way to get in touch with our instincts and our senses as human beings, that is, with what is most primitive in us. It seems to me that something mythical and tragic about the human condition has been lost. People reject the ridicule of sentimentality and, like Hyperion, I struggle to find all that again, it's a war fought for the right to feel nostalgia for beauty. To make things clearer, I'd say I work with everything the outside world sends me. I identify with disturbing people: murderers, cannibals, psychopaths... They are my brothers. I know them well. Of course, I repress my criminal instincts thanks to poetry. I was in Paris on 13 November, working at the Théâtre de l'Odéon. It was a terrible moment of darkness in my mind. The poetic violence I was trying to dramatise on the stage became real violence right before my eyes. I was in a state of shock because I could imagine being the source of such horror.

**Your work and what inspires it remind me of two artists: the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch, who theorised the notion of "cannibalistic love," this kind of absolute love that consists in devouring the other psychologically out of love, and the playwright Bernard-Marie Koltès, who loved the theatre because it wasn't life.**

I completely agree with the first idea, that of a love that devours. Mr. Sagawa turned into action what is usually sublimated by words. He really "devoured" his partner. I only turned it into a poetic song. By working on this event, I have to face the contradiction between words and actions. It's a frightening contradiction I share with the Japanese writer Mishima, who resolved it by committing suicide. I feel the need, the necessity, to become a cannibal on the stage. The dichotomy theatre/life is a little complicated for me. What drives me crazy is that perpetual movement that makes me enter then exit the theatre, that drives me from life to the theatre and back... Since I work without there being any distance between life and the theatre, I'm always wondering what I'm doing on the stage. Through the theatre, I can survive. On the stage, I can exorcise my demons. But often, even though I can't live without it, I hate the theatre, because I need life, real life.

**For ¿ *Qué haré yo con esta espada* ?, you're not travelling alone. Hölderlin, Cioran, Nietzsche, Carlo Gesualdo are your companions. How do you work with them?**

They're not temporary companions. They're the companions of my life. It's a love story between me and those writers, those painters, who wrote or painted what I would have liked to write or paint. Sometimes, I like to think

that I'm the one who wrote *Hyperion*, and I get jealous of its actual author. They can be present through their texts, which I'll read on the stage, or their paintings, which play a part in my scenography. But they're mostly present inside me when I'm on the stage. They inhabit me, I've read them so many times that they've become a part of me. In Hölderlin, you'll find that nostalgia for beauty, that idea that you need violence, war, an act of violence and brutality to try to impose beauty on the state. The terrorist act that the poet commits is writing. And he has to write a love song for murderers, so that we can love them. Culture needs that love song for murderers. The Bible is also always with me, even though I regret not believing anymore. I like the wrath of God in the Ancient Testament, and the feeling of piety of the New Testament. What matters isn't to know whether God exists or not, but the idea of His necessity. I could mention Georges Bataille for France, for instance, and a lot of North American writers. I love American literature: Faulkner, Melville, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Flannery O'Connor... They have an apocalyptic vision that I find fascinating because they never killed God. They express better than most the conflict of man with himself. They don't deal in rationalism, which always weakens poetry. That's why I like Cioran, because he fights rationalism.

**Painting plays a large part in the scenography of your shows, like a space of beauty in which violence can happen.**

Painting has always been a part of my world. I can't do without it in my shows. I'm always my own scenographer. Sometimes, I associate one particular painter, or a group of painters, to a show. For instance, the paintings of the Italian Trecento for *You are my destiny*. But I don't try to make aesthetically-pleasing living paintings on the stage, I don't try to reproduce paintings. I let painting lead to an aesthetic shock; not only formally, but spiritually.



**How do you build your shows? Do you give actors a certain freedom, let them improvise?**

When I'm alone on the stage, I give myself every freedom, so that exorcism can happen. I leave a part of me open. But when I'm working with other actors, everything is written before we start rehearsing. I hate actors who improvise... My partners aren't allowed to improvise. Absolutely not. I warn them when we begin rehearsing, I tell them that I'm a demon on the stage, and that that demon is going to play with them according to rules that will turn them almost into puppets... [Laughs] As for me, sometimes I improvise, I'm allowed to. In my shows, I try to reach my mental and physical limits, but within a demanding, calculated, and extremely structured composition. The first few rehearsals can be chaotic, but quickly the structure takes shape, and once it has been meticulously built, there's no changing it.

**You've said that words can never do justice to human suffering... Is that still true today?**

There's always this feeling of frustration when I write my texts. I live with that hatred for the word that can't say all the violence of suffering, yet I'm also unable to make a play without those words.

Interview conducted by Jean-François Perrier  
Translated by Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

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