



AN IMAGE FROM INSIDE

INTERVIEW WITH EL CONDE DE TORREFIEL

Tanya Bayeler and Pablo Gisbert, your creations bear the name of your company. Can you introduce El Conde de Torrefiel?

We are indeed the originators of this project: the ideas start with us, and we then work on their dramaturgy. But we don't think of ourselves as authors who'd want to share their own point of view. Creation is something that always unfolds collectively. Our projects are strongly influenced by the personality of every single participant, be they performers, light designers, musicians... all come up with ideas and forms with which we experiment on stage through improvisation. That's why we like to use the collective identity "El Conde de Torrefiel." This project is that of a theatre of the limit. The means, processes, and forms we use are at the border between performance and plastic arts; but it's first and foremost for us a search for theatricality. We start with that convention, that of theatre, with the goal of always pushing its boundaries. To identify boundaries is to make them flexible. Paradoxically, this very ancient form of expression that is theatre allows us to work on the present.

What process led to the creation of *Una imagen interior*?

For the past few years, we've worked using the same method. We start with a scenic research and study forms we present to the audience in chapters. Those periods of experimentation, which can be relatively long, allow us to try out forms, texts, concepts... they are a sort of training period. Then we create a more complex artifact, dramaturgically and aesthetically speaking—here, *Una imagen interior*. For this project, we called the studies we did "ultrafictions." We liked that word a lot; but what does it mean? We came to this conclusion: ultrafiction is precisely what we call reality. All that human beings create to forget the gravitational weight of life and its natural laws, such as being born, falling, dying. That ultimate fiction, we give it the name of "reality." Those "ultrafictions" have nothing to do, formally or aesthetically speaking, with *Una imagen interior*; but the theoretical and conceptual foundation remains the same. In *Ultraficción I*, the cornerstone was the power of imagination: there was nothing on stage, just a screen onto which a text was projected. The idea was to stimulate the spectators' imagination, through reading as well as tiny natural stimuli, in order to bring them to build the story in their heads. Then, for *Ultraficción II*, we worked with hard-of-hearing people on the choreography of sign language, in order to investigate the fiction of languages—one of the first fictions we created to found our human community. If almost all of what we produce during rehearsal has to do with the performance or choreography, the text is also very important for us. In a way, it's the core characteristic of our work; but it's also what comes last. Because if we were to start with the text, it would condition our work on stage. So we do it the other way: first we create a number of movements and images with the bodies of the performers, without any constraints. Those choreographies are like landscapes in that they have no dramatic content. Then, towards the end of the process, we start to settle on the form. There's an encounter then between the first texts and the movements we've created. At first, they collide and fight... then little by little, texts and images link up. We begin to understand how to associate them, how to make them dance together—and that's when we find the rhythm of the play, its character. That confrontation, which doesn't happen until the very end of the creative process, is also precisely what creates conflict, and thus theatricality, in our plays. Without it, there would be no dramatic dimension.

The concepts of reality and imagination play an important part in your work. How do you explore them in this show?

The theme remains the same, but the point of view has changed a little: image is no longer at the centre, used as a language. Here we're interested in its materiality. We can touch and change the image. Imagination refers to our faculty to create images—a projection of ideas, thoughts, and sensations onto the world. Nowadays, that ability is smothered by mass media, publicity, Instagram... But without imagination, there can be no creativity, no action. Either we imagine, or we are imagined: if we can no longer imagine for ourselves, we let others imagine for us what we should be or do. And that prosaic and immutable reality is a dying reality. Hence our question: how can we make possible the creation of images not on the outside, but on the inside? How to fight against external immobility in order to create a malleable and changing reality? For this project, we looked into the question of the gaze and of materiality on stage, which seems particularly important to us. We want to highlight, through stagecraft and the use of certain materials, that things that may seem at first glance irremovable and most concrete can easily disappear, change, or drift away. That brought us to the idea of an "inner image," which gave its title to the show. We really like that idea, for its poetic aspect and because it can mean something very personal for each of us—that indeterminate sensation which beats within us but which doesn't yet have a name, a voice, an identity. But more than that, it implies that everything is possible. In fine, theatre is the possibility of a universal and infinite world which, in a defined time and space, unfolds not in front of us, but within us.

How would you define the relationship you're trying to build with the audience?

This aspect of our work hasn't changed much over our years of creation. We always want to keep a certain distance with the audience while at the same time engaging in a relationship of seduction. We generally respect the fourth wall: we never directly approach the audience in our performances, we don't talk to them... the situation we create is more that of a voyeur. We think it's important for the spectators to be witnesses to what they see—that's what eroticism is: to feel the desire of watching. Then little by little, we invite them to take part in this theatrical game that needs their presence to be complete. As we said, there's always a gap between the stage choreography and the text—and those are the gaps the spectators, with their imagination, are made to fill. We activate a whole network of mechanisms to stimulate them at an intellectual and emotional level, in order to seduce and win them over. Our work consists in creating emotional architectures. Hence our use not only of sight, but also of the four other senses, and particularly of sound which allows us to include the audience in the landscape of the stage by connecting to their emotions through music. To do that, one has to look into those sensations we experience both collectively and individually, and which we all share in this particular moment that is the present. What movement, what image can move us today—or even tomorrow? There are so many modes of expressions to spread ideas, emotions, and questions which haven't quite hatched yet, which we don't quite know how to answer. Some artifacts have the capacity to make us see beyond what's right in front of us. But we're so focused on the present that we tend to forget this truth: the purpose of art is to create the future. It requires a lot of work, of focus, of honesty, it asks you to forget about the world. We might never succeed in this endeavour... but it's important to have this utopia, and to throw something out there to try to maybe open the doors of the future!

Interview conducted by Marie Lobrichon