

Nous qui n'entendons pas que l'on crie sans fin (We who do not hear the endless cries)

Muriel Andrin, Université Libre de Bruxelles – *l'art même 77*, 1st semester 2019, p. 35

LUCILE BERTRAND' installation, *amnesia* (2014), screened at Contretype – the Center for Contemporary Photography in Brussels –, focuses on the ability of human beings to bury the unbearable, the un-representable. But she also teaches us to remember and to keep alive the memory of human trauma against a cruel erasure.

amnesia – Conception, realization and photos: Lucile Bertrand

Image and editing: Céline Gulekjian; Sound mix: Marc Doutrepoint, EQUUS

The woman who falls: Johanne Saunier; Lighting: Jim Clayburgh, joji inc.

Produced with the help of la Maison des Arts de Schaerbeek, Belgium. HD, total length: 52mn

SHE. I didn't make anything up.

HIM. You made it all up.

SHE. Nothing.

Just as in love this illusion exists, this illusion of being able never to forget,
so I was under the illusion that I would never forget Hiroshima.

Alain Resnais/Marguerite Duras, *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1959.

Collective amnesia, selective amnesia, traumatic amnesia. Faced with the tragedies of history and their thousand and one stories, there is the haunting idea of the possible erasure, of the hypothetical and terrible disappearance of the facts. The history of images is thus rich with artworks and films that retrace the existence of these fragments of memory, highlighting the need to bring them together and make them audible. Lucile Bertrand's installation is part of this tireless task and demanding fight.

The artist stages the reading of twelve texts written in twelve different languages by authors who have in common their traumatic experiences. Twelve historical events are evoked in as many chapters linked by fade-outs. A barbaric, inhuman history that has left its mark on the bodies and minds of the authors. Successively, from ex-Yugoslavia to Russia, from South Africa to Hiroshima or Fukushima, the texts of Rithy Panh or Anna Akhmatova, the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda or the retribution of territories to the Native Indians of America. Once the text has been read (anonymously, by a reader only seen from behind), a question is asked straight away: "Do you remember?". The negative answer falls like a knife — "no", "it's too old", "it's all in the past", suddenly revealing the dizzying contours of History's dungeons.

But far from relying solely on textual processes and the power of the texts, Lucile Bertrand's work (°1960; lives and works in Brussels) also engages in a complex construction, deploying a unique device. The anonymous readers who alternate with shots gleaned from landscapes occupy only one part (left) of the screen; as a mirror, on the other side of a split screen that imposes itself to our attention, a woman's body, dressed in black and barefoot, inhabits a white space. There is nothing more artificial than the split screen device, which draws a constantly visible boundary, like a scar, between spaces that appear fundamentally different. The split screen creates an optical, visual link in systems of formal rhymes, of variations and of oppositions. But, as Jean-Baptiste Thoret points out, it creates above all a mental link between the two spaces of the film shot, which forces the spectator to make an imaginary synthesis forming an invisible third image, an additional meaning¹. The two images submitted to our gaze are thus inseparable. The two parts of the diptych respond to each other, build on each other, linking cause and effect: the texts and this body, the gaping, living wound of the stories. Each confession of oblivion crushes the woman on the ground; echo of the line that cuts the film shot in half, it is the visual, incarnate trace of the shock caused by amnesia.

This work raises the question of empathy "empathia – *em* (inside) and *pathos* (suffering, what is experienced) – a penetration, a kind of journey. This suggests that one enters the pain of others as one would enter a foreign country, crossing borders, immigration and other customs services (...)"². Because it is indeed a dive into pain ("an injury to our memories is an injury to all") – a pain embodied in this scar-body. As the final shot of the installation emphasizes, this story is "endless", prolonged by other dramas that are in turn erased from memory by a world drowned by a frenzy of overbidding. Contrary to the victims and their speeches, *amnesia* imposes the presence of this woman's body, who falls perpetually, but who also straightens up, without failing, pure resistance made explicit to our eyes. She finally confronts us with our own responsibilities, like this sentence that closes Resnais' film, *Night and Fog*, in 1956 – "We who do not think about looking around us and who do not hear the endless cries..."

1. Jean-Baptiste Thoret, "Le split screen", in *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, November 2000, pp.84-85

2. Leslie Jamison, "The Empathy Exams", Graywolf Press, 2014

Contretype – 4A Cité Fontainas, 1060 Brussels – www.contretype.org – to 13.01.2019

Participation to *Drawing Now Paris 2019*, Contemporary drawing Art Fair, with Irène Laub Gallery, Brussels – 28-31.03.2019