

En lumière, ou le rêve d'un langage commun (In the Light, or The Dream of a Common Language)

Muriel Andrin, Université Libre de Bruxelles – *l'art même* 97, September 2024

Like contemporary writers, from Kae Tempest to Lisette Lombé, the new film by LUCILE BERTRAND (lives and works in Brussels) forcefully asserts poetry as a lively, modern art form, an extraordinary chamber of resonance. Screened in June 2025 at Été 78 (Brussels), *Les inoubliables* follows in the footsteps of *amnesia* (2014), which already questioned the issue of collective amnesia linked to traumatic historical events. This time, the artist addresses the invisibility of female poets and their words, even though these embody, with a timeless power, the here and now of women's reality, their experiences, and their struggles.

Throughout eight black-and-white scenes, in a rigorously minimalist staging, thirteen non-professional reciters interpret the texts of 25 deceased female poets in their written language. Far from any artificial compilation, Lucile Bertrand weaves these fragments of stories of isolation, war, violence, and revolt, but also of awakening and sisterhood, into a poetic, polyphonic, and multicultural fresco. "In the distance, I hear words uttered centuries ago, their echoes having wandered through the universe before reaching me"; these words by Luxembourgish poet Anise Koltz crystallize the idea of resonance between shared experiences in the past and present. This new poetic form is far from ethereal; the film anchors the words in the bodies and voices of the reciters, linking past trajectories to a vivid, embodied, and ever-raw memory.

Thanks to the director of photography Marie Merlant and to the editor Léole Poubelle, Lucile Bertrand has opted for a minimalist, abstract style, creating a world that is both in and out of time. Everything is finely crafted, from the visual elements (composition of shots, the reciters' blank voices, and slow movements) to the narrative (confinement followed by the gradual opening up of space until immersion in nature) and themes (the creation or relegation of women to the margins of history). Some choices make perfect sense. Invoking the filmmaker Germaine Dulac, who described cinema as an art of movement and light, the artist does not offer a film in "black and white," but rather "in light," which enables "the transmission of vibrations that powerfully affect the gaze".¹ Just like words, a gradual, luminous revelation sculpts space and time in a relentless struggle against the unacceptable. From the very first scene, the women clear dust from the windows; traumatic photographs are laid out on a light table; the meadow under a clear sky, where the reciters eventually gather, provides the film with a final deep breath.

Each element is chosen not to erase tensions but to constantly rebalance them in a symbolic and cyclical struggle. The horizontal moments (to borrow Chloé Delaume's term) of sisterhood between women, as seen in the circle they form, exchanging benevolent glances, contrast with the individual traumas depicted in the poems. The static shots of women facing the camera interact with the movement of their walking through spaces, of miniature gestures that move stones. This balancing act extends to the sound. The cardinal role of the texts and of their embodiment makes this question central, highlighting the remarkable sound work of Liza Thiennot and Marc Doutrepoint. The editing of the film distributes speech but also the act of listening, even our own listening. The fragmentation, the decontextualization of the original texts, and the constant shifting between languages create a very particular process in which we seem to be offered a choice: to engage in the complex weaving of intertwined narratives and hear the incantation of a modulated choir, as Pascale Viscardy² so aptly describes it. Or to free ourselves from the words and their meaning, and experience this chant as a rhythmic pulse—the beating of a shared heart.

While the film ends with Adrienne Rich's sublime *Planetarium*, it could just as well lead to another of her poems, *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978). For throughout this film dedicated to the power of poetic language, there is a desire to use a common language to "meet in difference," to quote Audre Lorde. But it is not just about an encounter. Behind an apparent tranquility, rebellion looms in the face of the threat of erasure. *Les inoubliables* responds to those who still think of poetry as a nostalgic or obsolete relic, with the relentless performativity of a common language of resistance—one that orchestrates lived and poeticized experiences as triggers for action and cosmic resonances.

1. Germaine Dulac, "La musique du silence" in *Cinégraphie* n°5, January 1928 (reprinted in *Avez-vous peur du cinéma ? Chroniques (1919-1931)*, Feux, 2024, p. 42).

2. Pascale Viscardy, "Les Inoubliables de Lucile Bertrand", in *Flux News Magazine* #94, July 2024.

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Film screening (with French subtitles), Poetik Bazar, Halles de Schaerbeek, Brussels, www.poetikbazar.be – 20/09/2025

Screening of an excerpt from the film (with English subtitles) in the exhibition *A Place Apart*, duo with Ane Vester & Lucile Bertrand, Queens Brussels, www.queensbrussels.be – 28/09 to 18/10/2025