

Nadine Plateau – *Habiter en possibilité (Living in Possibility)*¹ (excerpts)

Under the title *I dwell in Possibility*, Lucile Bertrand and Natalia Blanch take over the house of artist Evelyne de Behr and Thierry Lucas². The reference to Emily Dickinson's poem in which the writer praises poetry – a home that is far more beautiful than prose, because it is the place of all possibilities – sheds light on the relationship that these two artists have with both *domus* and *poesis*.

Images without images

“That's what poetry is all about: you are often on the edge of something, with the impression that you are approaching a wider mental space, more intelligent and profound, yet one that can never be definitively grasped.” This is how Lucile Bertrand puts it, echoing Natalia Blanch's Dickinsonian conception of poetry: “Poetry opens up imaginary worlds that first give the impression of forming images... but they remain elusive or vague. And with each rereading of the same poem, other floating images can be formed, never quite defined, and therefore infinite.” Here she freely interprets a line by Dickinson – I could not see to see³ – which she translates in her own way as ‘images without images’ because, as she tells me, “Meaning is lost in the desire to find the image behind the words.”

Words have long been an integral part of her work, appearing as images on a textile, in the space of a photograph or projected onto a screen. The series *Des routes et des mots* (Routes and Words) uses graphite and colored pencils to retrace the journeys of writers, whether they were domestic as in the case of Emily Dickinson and Marcel Proust, or long, tortuous journeys as in the case of Evliya Çelebi and Jan Potocki. There are no words on the drawings, but the tracings, so eloquent in relation to space, fail to speak of writing, which remains mysterious.

When Lucile Bertrand uses words in her work, they are sometimes her own words, or those of silent people whose voices she passes on, or those of poets she cherishes. Already, the video *amnesia*, completed in 2014, was the result of a montage of fragments of poetic texts. We observe the same approach in the film presented at Losange, *Les inoubliables*, with the difference that only texts by women have been selected. The artist's aim was to pay tribute to women poets who are ignored, forgotten or poorly read, and to highlight the power of their texts, their timelessness and their topicality. “These women stand the test of time with incredible strength; I also wanted to show their power in gravity and joy.” Whereas in *amnesia* she portrayed a series of lone individuals with no connection to each other, here she invents a conversation between women writers who lived at different periods in history, hail from different countries and speak different languages.

When Lucile Bertrand tells me: “I perceive in poetry a sense of the essential, of saying the most with the least”, it's as if she were talking about her film, made with an extreme economy of means. Black, rather grey, and white, lots of white. An uncluttered space, a vast empty room bordered by a row of French windows blacked out with Spanish white; five ordinary women, just like everyone else. Few camera movements.

Watching the first part of *Les Inoubliables*, (...) the image is the medium of an incarnation, that of words carried by voices. The image has been stripped of any visual or sound nuisance so that the text can be revealed in its original written and spoken language. ‘The text’, not ‘the texts’, because Lucile Bertrand has dismembered and then reassembled texts by more than twenty women poets so that a conversation can take place between the authors, so that themes or images born at a distance from each other in time

¹ Title of a France Culture programme devoted to Emily Dickinson, and more specifically to the poem «I dwell in Possibility». Listen to <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/poesie-et-ainsi-de-suite/emily-dickinson-habiter-en-possibilite-6275709> (in French. Consulted on 26 August 2024).

² Evelyne de Behr and Thierry Lucas open their home to the artistic projects of the *Losange* non-profit association, hence the name *Maison Losange*.

³ Last line of the poem *I heard a fly buzz — when I died* —

and space echo each other. In the first scene, the word 'blue' becomes a kind of leitmotif, like the image of the window evoking both prison and freedom. A new text is born, by Lucile Bertrand, a polyphonic glossolalia that speaks of the difficulties of being a woman, of being free, of loving, of the suffering of war, of the beauty of nature, of the power of words. What allows this fictional conversation to really take place, what makes it plausible and readable, is the editing. A subtle, refined montage of interlacing. As opposed to the classic shot/reverse shot, the sequence shots slide from one to the next, either when a narrator disappears from the frame while we hear her reading, which continues in the next shot, or when a voice is heard before we even understand, in a subsequent shot, to whom it belongs. Editing attenuates the sound and visual gaps between shots: bodies and words become so intertwined that, despite the fragmentation of materials effected by the artist, it is the continuity that strikes us.

The community of women

(...) In her film *Les inoubliables*, Lucile Bertrand celebrates the horizontal link between women inaugurated by feminism. In the final shot of the second scene, the five narrators stand erect, very close to each other, almost touching, silent; they look at each other, look at each other, look at each other until a smile appears on one face and widens on another. With varying degrees of restraint, each one expresses the pleasure of being a community, of working together. Lucile Bertrand has deliberately chosen non-professionals. "Even though we have read and reread the texts together and worked out how to express them, the interpretation of the texts is not 'in force'. We are often 'on the edge', which leaves room for the unexpected, for gifts that had to be seized", she explains. The fact that the team was made up of sincere, sensitive women, she says, "created a climate of benevolence, because everyone felt equal, all alike despite their differences, all just as fragile, and a beautiful solidarity was built up."

But with Lucile Bertrand, the community of women is no longer limited to solidarity between women, to 'sorority', that happy complicity between women who have finally discovered each other after having been isolated, separated from themselves and from others. Indeed, by constructing this conversation of women poets across space and time, Lucile Bertrand masterfully achieves the aspiration of Françoise Collin, who called for "the vertical and diachronic constitution of symbolic feminine genealogies through an act of affiliation of which a retrospective 'history of women' cannot suffice⁴." It is not enough to add the names of forgotten women to the existing canon; above all, today's women and men need to take account of the heritage they are passing on to us and make it their own, because it is the recognition of women's lineage, a symbolic lineage rather than a biological one, that will bring real innovation to the world of art and culture.

Nadine Plateau, September 2024, in catalogue *I dwell in Possibility*

Exhibition Lucile Bertrand – Natalia Blanch, Losange, Brussels, 14/11- 08/12/2024

⁴ Françoise Collin, « Entre poésis et praxis : les femmes et l'art », in *Diogène*, n° 225, 2009/1. See <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-diogene-2009-1-page-101?lang=fr> (in French. Consulted on 25 August 2024).