

SILENCE



DIRECTED BY

Lorraine de Sagazan

TEXT

Guillaume Poix

Le Silence

**First performance on 31 January 2024 at the
Comédie Française - Vieux-Colombiers
Re-creation with the cast and crew of La Brèche in
2026 / 2027**

by **Guillaume Poix** and **Lorraine de Sagazan**
based on the work of **Antonioni**

directed by
Lorraine de Sagazan

with
Jeanne Favre - *The sister*
Victoria Quesnel - *Lidia*
Mathieu Perotto - *David*
Benjamin Tholozan - *The friend*
and a dog
and a child
with the voice of **Nicole Garcia**

Set design
Anouk Maugein

Costume design
Suzanne Devaux

Light design
Claire Gondrexon

Vidéo
Jérémie Bernaert

Original music and sound
Lucas Lelièvre

Artistic collaboration
Romain Cottard

Assistant director
Mathilde Waeber from 'L'académie de la Comédie-
Française'

Sound assistant
Ania Zante from 'L'académie de la Comédie-
Française'

Production
La Brèche,

Coproduction
In process

La Brèche is subsidized by the ministère de la Culture –
Île-de-France

Staged in a bifrontal setting
No need for surtitles (the actors do not talk)

Show Protocol

« I would like spectators not to be attentive but available », said Antonioni about his films.

A manifesto on the expressive power of silence, this show offers a sensitive experience of proximity and intimacy. Inspired by several of Antonioni's films, as well as his writings, the piece brings together themes dear to the filmmaker, such as disappearance, the dereliction of feelings and the instability of perception.

But this is not an adaptation, rather a journey towards his approach and an attempt to grasp the radical nature of his legacy. The performers have drawn on a body of writings made up of inner monologues, poetic fragments and memories. At the same time, a great deal of improvisation has been used to deepen each performers personal journey. The stage story is the fruit of this back and forth.

Silence is an original creation. Conceived as a sequence-shot, the staging questions the traditional rules of narrative and seeks to challenge what is commonly known as theatre.

Due to the bifrontal set-up, the audience is as close as possible to the faces and bodies, as well as to a multitude of details usually taken as props.

Images shot in black and white are projected simultaneously. They evoke the interiority of the characters and encourage a multi-dimensional and polysemous perception.

In the economy of words, a different relationship to truth is revealed. It's a matter of conversion. Meaning can then emerge not through the interpretation of words, but through that of gestures, sensations and the minute details of embodiment.

Guillaume Poix and Lorraine de Sagazan

Writing as we remain silent - Guillaume Voix

«It seems to them that their contours are unravelling, stretching out in all directions, their shells and armour are cracking on all sides, they are naked, unprotected, they are slipping, entwined with each other, they descend as if to the bottom of a well... here, where they are descending now, as in an underwater landscape, all things seem to waver, they oscillate, unreal and precise like objects from a nightmare, they swell, take on strange proportions...»

Nathalie Sarraute

It took me a long time to find the way to write Le Silence.

When Lorraine de Sagazan suggested that I work on a text whose sensitive trace on stage would not be the spoken word, as is almost always the case in theatre, but silence, I recognised the dream, I believe, of every playwright: to write as we remain silent. To conceive a play that doesn't need to be said to be understood, and above all felt - fully experienced. To make the performers' inner selves speak, to make them tangible. To make them guess at their thoughts and feelings without the help of words. Not to involve them in the game of conversation. To look elsewhere so that the presence of beings is expressed outside language. To silence those who, for us, are the guarantors of the spoken word. In a way, to kill off what is traditionally theatrical.

After the enthusiasm, after also the apprehensions - invisibilising writing was not the most reassuring act for the writer in me (I was very afraid of sarcasm about the fictional nature of my work: if I can't hear the text, it simply doesn't exist) - and after the impasses of the first purely scripted attempts to transpose the Antonioni mystery, I gradually found the voice of the characters.

With Romain Cottard, my essential artistic collaborator, and Lorraine de Sagazan, we talked a lot about inner monologues, but strangely enough, I refrained from writing in the 'T'; voice, because I couldn't figure out how to flesh out this inner 'T'. I thought I should write not what the characters would say, since they would be silent, but what they would think during the performance. And I felt it wasn't right. I felt like I was profaning the performers, dictating to them a totalitarian score: imposing on them not what to say but what to think.

The writing became freer when I realised that I first had to write about the protagonists' pasts. Get them to talk about their personal histories in turn, like a choral novel. To unfold the material of their memories, their phobias, their ordeals. Set out their desires, their secrets, their disgusts. Detail their preferences, their habits, their shames - all the events that trace the contours of a being caught up in the passage of time. In the tone of a confession, the aim was to reveal their inner voice, the way in which the characters spoke not to each other, but to themselves.

This is only when the material accumulated has 'sifted' through each character and formed an entire novel that we were able to begin to develop the narrative of the performance and determine its exact scenario.

At this point in the work, delving into Antonioni's writings, and in particular *That Bowling Alley on the Tiber*, we came across a synopsis that had never been shot, entitled *The silence*, in which Antonioni sets out, in just a few lines, the idea of a film that would tell the story of 'two spouses who have nothing left to say to each other' - the silence between these two people constituting the very material of the fiction. Antonioni suggested 'recording, for once, not their dialogues, but their silences, their silent words'. It would be an understatement to say that this discovery confirmed the show's intuition, and that this notion of 'silent speech' has revitalised the writing.

From then on, the text gradually became hybrid, pairing inner monologues with didascalical notations, mixing document and poem, narrative and inventory, photo and aphorism. It has emerged as an invitation, a set of materials handed to the performers from which they can draw to compose their characters and build their secret world - arming and filling themselves, ready to enter the stage charged with the silent life I have imagined for them.

Everything in the show bears the trace of this, everything rustles with these 'silent words', bodies and things, glances, contacts, every vibration of an object, every twitch of the flesh - 'everything sings' as Monica Vitti, alias Giuliana, says in *Il deserto rosso*. So we have access to the intimacy of the performers in an unprecedented way. Perhaps something of the truth and mystery of being is returned to us in this face-to-face encounter that recaptures what only theatre can offer: pure presence.

Making Silence - Lorraine de Sagazan

Making silence is not the same thing as being silent. It is not an absence of noise. Silence can be more violent than any statement. Neither sacred nor profane, it is anything but a void. So it makes theatre. And it's not a question here of total silence, but of an absence of speech. An experimental filmmaker adulated by his peers, Antonioni was a revolutionary artist who renewed cinematographic dramaturgy by replacing the spectacle cinema with a cinema of behaviour and interiority. He created his own language, which Jean-Luc Godard described as « landscape drama ». In contrast to the usual hegemony of dialogue and plot, his work is infinitely plastic, merging the bodies of the actors with the space/landscape in which they act: a game that creates proximity, carrying symbolic charges and signs. This pleasure in creating and innovating, never taken for granted, is something that few authors can claim. Antonioni's approach to directing is as physical as it is mental, making dialogue almost pointless. The attention demanded of the audience becomes alert. You have to become part of the characters, let yourself be taken in by them and experience their adventures, no longer as a stranger, as a spectator, but as if by a kind of identification, a symbiosis. The work is waiting for them.

« What happens after everything has been said? » Antonioni

In Antonioni, the moments of rest are the moments when the performers speak. It is the silences that work. And it is this effort that I have chosen to explore by putting on a show in which speech is everywhere, but kills. So, over the weeks, the team and I composed a silent adagio, a mysterious ritual of love and death in which silence permeates every act.

This demands immense concentration from the performers, total shamelessness, a gigantic capacity to listen where secrets radiate. Without words, there is total exposure. To remain silent is to remove a mask. In Bergman's *Persona*, there's this sentence: « I like to live like that forever. In the silence I have the impression that my mistreated soul is slowly beginning to recover » The body becomes the only tangible link to the world.

« To respect the rules of narrative is to submit to the political order » Godard

It was by taking a risk that I wanted to come to the Comédie-Française. For me, theatre has to go beyond its own concept, and in that beyond, it is necessary to track down new

experiences and have fun with irreverence. By abandoning the traditional narrative concept based on action, we are trying to develop a new dramaturgy. The formal gesture is therefore perhaps more radical than in some of our previous shows.

What we're looking for is Antonioni's writing style: to put ourselves in his shoes and try to understand him. In his work, the Copernican revolution is at work. The human being is off-centre, competing with his environment. He gives as much importance to an object, a landscape or a silence as he does to a dialogue, a face or a human body.

This post-anthropocentric vision has been the breeding ground for our work.

Silence leads to an economy of speech, of course, but also of gesture, and generates a new ecology of attention. With this show, I wanted to assert the possibility of deceleration, to arouse the interest of the negligible, to get rid of productivism and effect. Elements that are usually used as props are transformed from objects into subjects. « Reality may be a relationship » wrote Antonioni.

Based on silence as a subversive force, as a heterotopia, this show, which examines vulnerability, invites us to consider the possibility of a radical anthropological break.

« We speak only when we are not living; true life, and the only life that leaves any traces, is made up of silence » Maeterlinck

In our Western societies, the only silence that the utopia of communication knows (at least that which we are willingly sold) is that of breakdown and failure rather than the emergence of interiority. Silence is seen as a sign of dysfunction. Hyper- mediatisation and the incessant flow of words lead us to fear them. Muteness often gives rise to the temptation to break them in order to dispel the anxiety generated by an absence of participation in language. But this is a cultural concept.

As far as I'm concerned, the more we communicate, the more we are tempted to remain silent. Silence sends us back inside ourselves. It can be a counter-time and a saving counter-space, an alternative. The performers weren't worried, because far from being an abstract, cold concept, this muteness turned out to be an experience of staggering closeness and intimacy, where the strength of the performance is at the centre.

« Unexpressed feelings are unforgettable »

Tarkovski

On stage, one of the performers simply offers his presence - he contemplates us. His gaze, serene and attentive, questions our place as spectators. He is a pure surface of projection, outside the fiction and outside any characterisation. In a way, it represents a page on which to plot our enigmas, our sensations, or our desire for meaning. Like a step beyond silence, he invites us to consider presence without effect or logic of production. He is. Some will see him as a silent narrator or an allegory of mourning, but he also seems to be saying « this is the human race », vulnerable despite its tales of omnipotence. What do we consider worthy of attention?

There are no innocent spectator. And so much the better. I firmly believe that intelligence is about making connections. So, against the hegemony of the rational and the didactic, against the widespread idea that a good show is given immediately in its entirety, it is a sensitive and organic experience that is offered here to the audience, where landmarks are disturbed and distorted. If to look is to form the thing, here the audience can probe. Find a way of listening that is subterranean, active, far removed from all the chatter. Taking an active part in the existence of the work by abandoning the single regime of presentation and interpretation. If speech is a time, silence is a place that reveals the infinite.



Inner voices - text by Guillaume Poix

For this wordless show, Guillaume Poix has written a number of poetic, narrative and pictorial texts, including inner monologues that inspire the writing of the stage narrative that is invented throughout the rehearsals. Here are a few extracts from the scores.

David enters in his coat, holding several bags, and stands against the door for a while.

He went shopping, returning to the hustle and bustle of the outside world, the bustle of a supermarket, the radio blaring, the aggressive lights, the crowd, the stalls, the accumulation of products. He felt dizzy in front of the large transparent refrigerated cupboards displaying the food. A deluge of packaging. Hundreds of tons of goods destined to be eaten, used up, reduced to waste. He spent more than an hour in the shop, pacing up and down the corridors, rediscovering the multitude of things, their gaudy advertising. The opulence stunned him. He returned dazed, exhausted by the effort.

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Lidia opened the bottle, felt the neck and poured herself a glass.

She does it discreetly, but Mathieu hears her effort, which he takes to be an addiction, a weakness that lingers. She could curse the immodest murmur of the liquid pouring into her small glass, the one she's used to using, but she's not ashamed of anything. She's not excessive, she's not addicted to alcohol, she only drinks to change her state. To become someone else. To induce nausea. She would so much like to empty herself, to expel the bile, the drool, her entrails – ablation of the sorrow.

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Irma turns on the tape recorder playing an Italian lesson.

On hearing it, Victoria is immediately taken aback. Tuscany, Montaione - the pappardelle al ragù that she and Mathieu had three nights in a row in the same little restaurant, discovered by chance on very dry summer evenings, the pistachio tiramisu that had stained her cleavage. Monteriggioni - the oppressive heat, the endless discussion about faith, his irreversible atheism. San Gimignano - the infernal world and the aniseed scent of kisses. Volterra - the yoghurt ice cream, the high orange walls, the blue sky and the ugly bedroom with linen sheets..

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Carrying the huge bouquet of mimosas against her chest, intoxicated by the scent, Jeanne wanders.

Their relationship is shattered. But how could they not stay together? I can't imagine what it must be like to live together when you're going through all this. All you can do is be engulfed in absence and pain. It's as if they're copying the couple they used to be. That they're trying to revive what held them together. That they are weighed down with peat. The gestures are slow, the tenderness worn. From the outside, people must think they're an old couple, that the desire is no longer there, that the conjugal structure has taken precedence over freedom, risk and exile. Perhaps they recognise themselves, or perhaps they envy this fidelity. Two people who are a little weary but stubbornly

concerned for each other. Care that was a little feigned, a little bland. Cold caresses, absent glances. And then, sometimes, an attempt to rekindle things. To travel back in time, to rediscover the person they once were, the eager man, the exclusive woman. I find it heartbreaking to see them flitting back and forth between the couple they used to be and the couple they are now. It's like watching a body bounce back from heart massage when the brain activity has already stopped.

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David puts his hand on the big marble table and feels its cold density. When you begin to be silent, you are quickly won over by the conviction that this is how the experience of life takes on its meaning. The eyes become sharper, the ears open up, the touch is symphonic, every contact with the material, the air and the skin shrieks and surges. Everything is more intense, purer, as if stripped bare. You wake up to violence, real violence. It's very hard to come back from silence. Once you've entered your own country, all you want to do is stay there. Speech loses its meaning, words become absurd, virulent - crude escapes, vain diversions. Time finally passes in silence. Thought itself gradually falls silent and withers. It repudiates language, it evacuates associations, analyses and interpretations. It embraces the moment. In this way, we are fully available. And the truth, at last, appears.

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Lorraine de Sagazan

Lorraine de Sagazan is a director and visual artist.

After studying philosophy and training as an actress, Lorraine de Sagazan turned to directing in 2015. She trained in Berlin with Thomas Ostermeier, Marius von Mayenburg and Romeo Castellucci.

Her first show is an adaptation of Lars Norén's *Demons*. This marks the beginning of what is now a cycle of work devoted to adapting texts from the classical and contemporary repertoires, and to the way in which "the fiction of a work confronts reality". The second part of this cycle is the adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, accentuating the search for what, today, reactivates the shock of past masterpieces. She closes her first cycle in 2019 with *L'Absence de père* based on Anton Chekhov's *Platonov* for Les Nuits de Fourvière and the MC93, co-signing the adaptation with author and playwright Guillaume Poix.

This piece, which frankly incorporates the actors' own experiences, marks the start of a second creative cycle focused on collecting testimonies and exploring how, this time, fiction responds to reality. Guillaume Poix co-wrote the following pieces. Her company, La Brèche, is deployed throughout France, with an international outlook. She, who questions the spectator's gaze, decides to meet those who cannot see, and invites a blind amateur actor on stage in *La Vie invisible*, a show presented at the Théâtre de La Ville in January 2022. Caught up in the upheavals caused by the pandemic since March 2020, she abandons the project of staging Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Le Décalogue* to "radicalize" the previous gesture by going to meet and question about reparation as many people as days spoiled by the health and political crisis. The writing work deepened the experience of a metatheatricity that had been apparent since the initial research, and *Sacred* was created in 2021. In Rome, Lorraine de Sagazan, resident at the Villa Médicis for a year from September 2022, is continuing her immersive research. Her aim is to observe the hollowness of reality and respond by creating counter-spaces. *LEVIATHAN*, a critical investigation of the contemporary justice system, will premiere in July 2024 at the Festival d'Avignon and be presented at the Odéon - Théâtre de l'Europe in May 2025.

In January 2024, she will create *Silence* based on the work of Antonioni at the Comédie Française - Vieux-Colombier.

At the Académie de France in Rome, she moves towards a more plastic dimension and begins to develop installations and performances, including *Monte di Pietà*, presented at the

Collection Lambert and the Lyon Biennial in 2024, *Nature Morte* for the Ferme du Buisson art center, *La Défense* for the Mac Val and BABEL as part of Anish Kapoor's Parliament of the Invisible, presented in Venice in May 2025.

Guillaume Poix

Former student of the École normale supérieure, Guillaume Poix is a writer.

Born in 1986, he is the author of around ten plays published by éditions Théâtrales, including *Straight* (Prix des Journées de Lyon des Auteurs de Théâtre 2014, Prix Godot des lycéens and Prix Sony Labou Tansi des lycéens 2016), *Et le ciel est par terre* (Prix Scenic Youth 2017), *Tout entière* (adapted for the opera by Benjamin Dupé in 2020), *Fondre* (Prix Godot des Nuits de l'enclave) and *Et soudain Romy Schneider* (finalist for the Grand Prix de littérature dramatique 2020, broadcast on France Culture in September 2021 in a production by Cédric Aussir, Grand Prix de la Fiction radiophonique francophone de la Société des Gens de Lettres 2022).

His plays have been translated and performed in around ten countries.

He has translated into French, with Christophe Pellet, *Quand nous nous serons suffisamment torturés* by Martin Crimp (L'Arche, 2020) and *Tokyo Bar* by Tennessee Williams, directed by Manon Krüttli with whom he regularly collaborates in Switzerland (Théâtre de Poche, Théâtre du Grütli, Théâtre Populaire Romand).

Since 2019, he has worked with Lorraine de Sagazan. Together, they created *L'Absence de père* based on Chekhov's *Platonov* (Nuits de Fourvière, 2019), *La vie invisible* (broadcast on France Culture in March 2021 in a production by Laure Egorrof), *Un sacre* and *Le Silence* (Comédie-Française, 2024).

Between 2020 and 2022, he was an associate author at the Grand R national stage in La Roche-sur-Yon.

In 2022, he was selected by Arte to join their talent incubator.

In cinema, he collaborates with Claire Simon, Nicole Garcia and Masha Kondakova.

His first novel, *Les Fils conducteurs* (Verticales, 2017; Folio, 2019), received the Wepler Prize - Fondation La Poste.

His second novel, *Là d'où je viens a disparu* (Verticales, 2020), received the Alain-Spiess Prize and the Frontières Prize - Léonora Miano. It was adapted into a radio series for France Culture and broadcast in a production by Cédric Aussir in December 2023.

His third novel, *Star* (Verticales), was published in March 2023.



ARTISTIC DIRECTION

Lorraine de Sagazan

ADMINISTRATION, PRODUCTION, DIFFUSION, RELATIONS PRESSE

AlterMachine

ADMINISTRATION, PRODUCTION, DIFFUSION

Marine Mussillon & Carole Willemot
marine@altermachine.fr | carole@altermachine.fr
+ 33 6 06 29 90 13 86 | + 33 6 79 17 36 65

PRESS RELATIONS

Camille Hakim Hashemi
Camille@altermachine.fr
+ 33 6 15 56 33 17