

BUNKER

A play written by Matthieu Bareyre and Marion Siéfert
directed by Marion Siéfert

New production for June 2026

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SYNOPSIS

We are in the near future, when the temperatures have soared 5 degrees in France. For the past few years, Paul, CEO of one of the country's leading petrochemical groups, has taken refuge with his daughter Ami, in the luxury bunker he's built. From this lair he continues to manage his business remotely, aided by the neural implants he's had added to his body. All would be well, except that Amina has recently decided not to speak anymore.

written by **Matthieu Bareyre & Marion Siéfert**

directed by **Marion Siéfert**

with **Janice Bieleu, Monica Budde, Lorenzo Lefebvre, Charles-Henri Wolff**

artistic collaboration **Matthieu Bareyre**

set design **Nadia Lauro**

sound design **Patrick Jammes**

lighting **Manon Lauriol**

costumes **Chloé Courcelle**

stage assistant **Noa Landon**

general management **Chloé Bouju**

stage and props manager **Charlotte Arnaud**

production editing **Anne Pollock**

production **Ziferte Productions**

Co-production: T2G - Théâtre de Gennevilliers - Centre dramatique national, Points Communs - scène nationale de Cergy-Pontoise, festival d'Avignon, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Comédie de Genève, Célestins - Théâtre de Lyon, TNS - Théâtre national de Strasbourg, Bonlieu, Scène nationale d'Annecy, Châteauvallon liberté - scène nationale de Toulon, Le Parvis - scène nationale de Tarbes, Théâtre de Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines - Scène nationale (in progress)



« In 5 to 10 years, the human language could become obsolete. »

Elon Musk, entrepreneur, in 2020

« What does the brain not kill? One can really ponder this question. »

Henri Michaux, poet, in 1935

0. Genesis

Ever since I've started doing theater productions, I've directed my own plays. From *Le Grand Sommeil (The Big Sleep)* to *jeanne_dark_*, I experimented with the monolog form, addressed directly to the audience. With *Daddy*, I attempted to mix more diverse theatrical languages (mundane scenes of everyday life, famous movie scenes, stand-up comedy, performance, musical comedy). I took on strong breaks in tone and started writing dialogues. Built around six actors, this baroque theatrical piece placed narration at its heart and focused on telling a story, even if the passage from one level of reality to another could upset the usual reading of a more classical narrative.

With *Bunker*, Matthieu Bareyre and I built the writing of this new play around a very strong opposition, one that lies at the heart of the poem: speech and silence. We imagined that the play would revolve around two characters: one who speaks, and the other completely mute. It's also a way of returning to the origins of my work, which articulates two main languages: that of text and that of the body, theater and dance, and how one is the condition for the (im)possibility of the other.

It wasn't long before two performers with whom I'd worked in the past came to my mind: firstly Charles-Henri Wolff, who plays Big Daddy in *Daddy*. For *Bunker*, he has the neurotic energy necessary for this character, whose logorrhea is both rational and delirious, technical and hateful, controlled and terrified. And secondly, I thought of Janice Bieleu, who danced in *DU SALE!* and has an expressive power, both in body and gaze, such as I have rarely encountered. I've been waiting for the chance to work again with her for years, and my instincts tell me that she'll be more than able to play this mute, rebellious, demanding and inflexible character, who won't compromise with her own convictions. With her, I want to build a stage language and acting style based on *popping*, a dance of brutal muscle contractions and relaxations. We will thus explore further what we began in her long introductory dance to *DU SALE!* which took place in silence. This choreography already evoked the impossibility of speaking, when one's words get stuck, jammed down one's throat, and come to inhabit this body, to possess it, to invade it.

How can we resist the onslaught of a language that has become nothing more than a vast communication operation? What remains is silence and its' violence. Its clarity.

1. Opening

The play opens with a brain operation, during which Paul, our main character, has a new silicon chip implanted to optimize his brain's capabilities. The operation is performed by his personal surgeon, Thomas, who will also be his sports coach and speech therapist in the play.

During this routine operation, Paul and Thomas chat about this and that, as Paul is awake during the procedure to ensure that the implanted chip does not interfere with brain functions. This surgical sequence sets the stage for the story, particularly the recent silence of Paul's daughter Ami, who stopped talking overnight, which deeply affects her father.

It's also an opportunity to plunge into the heart of the play's main subject: the overstimulated human brain, augmented by neural implants, subjected to multiple experiments, caught up in a mad race to compete with new AI. The operation is followed by a series of adjustments, during which Thomas adjusts the level at which Paul's brain is stimulated in order to optimize the chip's effectiveness and minimize unwanted side effects. We witness these highly empirical adjustments live, which have an immediate effect on Paul's body and language, like a puppet manipulated by its puppeteer. A willing and enthusiastic guinea pig for new biotechnologies, Paul is indeed a hybrid human, a man-machine, who fights relentlessly against the obsolescence that threatens him, at the risk of his own psychic equilibrium.

2. Bunker: palace, castle, burrow

Bunker is inspired by the recent phenomenon of "apocalyptic real estate", the ultimate fad of the ultra-rich to escape the world and a commoner's fate. These buildings are springing up in New Zealand, Patagonia, Alaska, Scandinavia and Kamchatka. The world's self-appointed elite are building underground spaces in which they plan to settle in the event of a major climate catastrophe. In these bunkers, you'll find everything you need when you're both a billionaire and a survivalist: a library as well as a shooting range, a gym of course, a place to walk your pets as well as a multi-ton gate that serves as an impregnable airlock. One of the levels is often filled with food supplies, and on the

walls of some rooms are vertical screens that virtually duplicate the view you'd get from a window overlooking an outdoor landscape. Everything from toilets that recycle excrement to paramilitary surveillance companies is thought through. We'll be drawing plenty of inspiration from the research being carried out by today's large scientific and engineering sphere, connected to the networks of the ultra-rich preparing themselves for an unrealistically comfortable retirement in the event of environmental catastrophe or social collapse.

In this fortress designed to protect its inhabitants from the world, this castle has all the makings of a burrow, an ecosystem of holes and tunnels in which animals often hide to protect their offspring, just as Paul imagines he is doing for Ami. Where the image of the bunker immediately conjures up images of blocks, concrete and immobility, I'd rather draw inspiration from these animals to imagine a space with multiple entrances, galleries and exits.

Another dimension of this production is to craft, as we did with Nadia Lauro in *Daddy*, the construction of a single yet ever evolving set design. I am imagining a space that transforms itself, a mental expanse with slowly shifting walls, rather than a stable and permanent "home". Objects too, could evolve and be caught in this movement of appearance / disappearance. We will explore how to slowly transform this « huis-clos », this set behind closed doors to exacerbate tension at the very heart of this paranoid space. Initially a refuge, the bunker turns out to be the trap that ensnares those who inhabit it.

3. Paul, defender of the enhanced life

In *Bunker*, Paul is an "enhanced man" with a hybrid brain. He belongs to a privileged caste of humans who benefit from enhanced cognitive abilities. Coupled with artificial intelligence, he transmits his thoughts via this new brain-machine interface - the neural implant. Saving him precious time, he can analyze data at lightning speed and communicate his orders without having to type out his e-mails or text messages. This implant actually enables him to beam directly from brain activity to issuing directives. All mediation between thought and action has disappeared: his desires are indeed orders, and without anyone's help nor purview.

Routine command tasks are automated. More complex issues are discussed at length with his various councils: his right-hand man Jean-Marc, his coach and personal neurosurgeon Thomas, a few corrupt politicians, the chief-militiamen he pays and... his mother, a consigliere as toxic as she is imperious, lurking in the shadows. Played by Monica Budde every night live, Paul's mother is not physically present in the bunker. She is, so to speak, connected, hears everything that goes on there, and intervenes whenever she sees fit to advise her son on family and heritage matters. Paul is obsessed by one question though: his inheritance. He has fallen out with Anderson, his son, and is determined to disinherit him in favor of Ami. He can't say harsh enough words about him, and goes to great lengths to demolish him to anyone he speaks to.

As the play progresses, Paul's logorrhea becomes more frenzied; he jumps from one subject to another, shows the emotional turmoil provoked by each new information he receives, and is caught up in his addiction to the constant flow of information bombarding him. In these scenes where speech accelerates to match the market's speed, the audience is projected into the antechamber of a new kind of power, at the heart of a paranoid digital system, in which everything is constantly anticipated: competitors' strategies of course, but also accidents, technical problems and political changes. Every potential obstacle to the profits made by Paul's petrochemical group is identified and neutralized. The slightest ecological revolt, the slightest sabotage, even of low intensity, becomes a threat that must be nipped in the bud, "eradicated", even if it means plotting and spreading rumors.

As far as Paul is concerned, our writing will focus on how AI in turn modifies human speech. It isn't just his choices, his time and his behavior that AI impacts; it modifies

even his use of language – his thought even, since what comes out of his mind must be "AI-compatible" as quickly as possible. Grammar breaks down, verbs and periods disappear, as do silences. At times, Paul will speak only in torrents of code and keywords, "tags" as they say in AI-speak, words that serve to group together on a common envelope objects, photos and texts that the AI alone is unable to identify.

4. Ami

Having refused to speak to her father for several days and knowing his devious use of language, Ami decided to live in a world of gestures, practices, and reading. Her life is governed by a strict and ascetic routine, taking the opposite approach to her father's guidance: she spends long hours training in *Bart Jarn Dao* (also known as "butterfly knives"), one of the two traditional weapons of *wing chun*; reads books on logic as if they were entertaining magazines; practices *kyudō*, Japanese archery, while her father trains in pistol shooting to be ready for the day an "enemy" infiltrates the bunker.

As the play progresses and we hear Paul speak, we quickly understand that, apart from social convention, it doesn't really matter whether Ami speaks or not. Paul asks the questions and gives the answers, telling others to be quiet and forbidding certain questions from being asked, so as not to threaten his emotional balance. Paul perceives any disagreement as an attack. Ami understands this well and has built a special relationship with his father, one made up of evasions, pirouettes, and tricks to avoid upsetting him. The gestures and habits that shape Paul and Ami's daily lives betray this relationship made up of unspoken words, lies, but also tenderness, and outline roles and functions that have developed over the years. Ami's silence is a response to her father's silence on many subjects. By preventing the relationship from following its usual routine, Ami creates a breakdown and forces a readjustment. From the intimacy of their life together, she secedes and throws her father into crisis.

Where Paul's presence manifests itself through language and the saturation of the sound space, Ami's presence crisscrosses the space and weaves its web around her father. For the stage direction, I will rely mainly on the choreography of Ami's movements in space, which obey an inexorable, mathematical logic, like music that follows extremely precise, almost algorithmic laws, made up of repetitions and variations. With dancer Janice Bieleu, we are working on how immobility contains movement, and how silence contains speech. The aim is to break down the usual dichotomies and hierarchies between body

and speech, immobility and movement. To give an example, in *kyudō*, everything that precedes the shot is much richer, fuller, and more alive than the shot itself, which ultimately matters little. It doesn't really matter whether the arrow hits the target or not.

I imagine ending the show with a grand finale dance, which will start with a seemingly simple and childish instrument: the harmonica. We chose this instrument because it is directly connected to breathing, a prerequisite for speech. If you don't breathe, you can't speak. The harmonica connects language to its vital, organic source and restores its full embodiment. At his father's bedside, Ami will play a tune. And it is this sound, this breath, that will initiate the dance. I will use popping, a dance style practiced by Janice, as a basis for creating a choreography with her in which the music initiates the dance, which in turn generates its own music. Abrupt, fragmented, both addressed and autotelic, this long final dance restores power to the body in a technophile world that considers it solely as a constraint.

5. Farewell to language

Already weakened by the many enhancing operations that have put a strain on his body, Paul won't be able to bear the human ordeal imposed on him by his daughter. His language implodes, becomes increasingly incoherent and, as the play progresses, relinquishes meaning for the non-articulate, the cry, the gibberish. In this way, we see this man regress to primary noises. Since the implant eliminates what the child has taken years to learn, namely mediation and the frustration that goes with it, it seemed logical to us that Paul should end where babies begin.

This play stems from a desire to refocus my work on the question of language. To explore its limits, to go to the point where speech breaks down, where communication fails, where words can no longer perform their function of orienting us in existence, of giving it meaning. What becomes of language in the age of ultra-communication, when there is no longer any filter between feelings and what is said, and when the insane logorrhea of an executive collides with the block of silence that his daughter has become? When language goes off the rails because psychic equilibrium has been disrupted, what's the result?

On this question of language, we will conduct research in different directions: Matthieu

Bareyre and I are fortunate to be welcomed as residents in the neurosurgery department of the Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, thanks to a partnership between the APHP and the Festival d'Automne in Paris. We are able to attend neurosurgery consultations, during which we have seen patients with implants, as well as deep brain surgery, where several electrodes are implanted in a patient's brain, and HiFu treatment (ultrasound that burns the part of the brain responsible for essential tremors in a patient). This artistic residency also allows us to meet patients with varying degrees of language disorders and aphasia.

The true question posed by a mute character is, of course, how to put an end to this muteness. Just as a “huis-clos” is not necessarily resolved by leaving the closed set, silence is not necessarily destined to turn into speech. Something other than language exists. As children who have been in conflict with their parents often do, faced with parents who are aging and becoming dependent, they decide against all odds to take care of them, to support them in their old age. Although she has every reason to do so, Ami doesn't break with her father and becomes, as it were, her father's father.

Saint-Denis, June 25, 2024 - updated November 17, 2025

Biographies

Marion Siéfert is an author, director and performer. Her work is at the crossroads of several artistic fields and is realized through different media: performances, films, writing. In 2015-2016, she was invited as part of her PhD at the Institute for Applied Theater Studies in Gießen (Germany). There she developed her first production, *2 ou 3 choses que je sais de vous* (*2 or 3 things I know about you*), a portrait of the audience through their Facebook profiles. From 2017 to 2023, she was an associate artist at La Commune - CDN d'Aubervilliers (France). In 2018, she created *Le Grand Sommeil* (*The Big Sleep*), with choreographer and performer Helena de Laurens, programmed at the 2018 edition of the Festival d'Automne à Paris and in March 2019, *Pièce d'actualité n°12: DU SALE!* a duet for rapper Original Laeti and dancer Janice Bieleu. For this piece, she received the Grand Prix du Jury at the European Festival Fast Forward. The following piece, *_jeanne_dark_*, premiered at the 2020 edition of the Festival d'Automne in Paris and is the first show conceived simultaneously for theater and Instagram. It won the Prix Numérique from the Syndicat Professionnel de la Critique de Théâtre, de Musique et de Danse, with a special mention. Her latest play, *Daddy*, co-written with filmmaker Matthieu Bareyre, premiered at the Cndc in Angers and at the Théâtre de l'Odéon (Paris, France). She also collaborated on *Nocturnes* and *L'Époque*, two films by Matthieu Bareyre, with whom she has been working for 10 years now. Together, they now co-write plays as well as movies. Marion has been since 2024 associated artist at the T2G, CDN de Gennevilliers and at Points-Communs, Scène nationale de Cergy-Pontoise (both in France).

Matthieu Bareyre is a writer, director, cameraman and editor. He has made three documentaries: *Nocturnes*, in 2015, a medium-length film presented and awarded at Cinéma du réel, and *L'Époque*, in 2019, his first feature, a nocturnal ballad alongside young people whose dreams, nightmares, drunkenness, boredom, tears, mobilizations and desire he films over three years, between the 2015 Paris attacks and the 2017 presidential election. Awarded the Best First Film prize by the Syndicat français de la critique, *L'Époque* received a special mention at the Locarno festival, where the film had its world premiere, and was noticed at several festivals, including the Festival Premiers Plans d'Angers. His latest film, *Le Journal d'une femme nwar*, co-written with Rose-Marie Ayoko Folly and Marion Siéfert, inaugurates an original production format: initially produced by the Théâtre de La Commune CDN d'Aubervilliers, it was previewed at the theater, before being broadcast on the French-German TV channel Arte in 2024. In the theater, Matthieu Bareyre is involved in casting, writing and co-directing Marion Siéfert's shows, including *DU SALE!*, *_jeanne_dark_* and, more recently, *Daddy*.

Janice Bieleu (2000) began dancing with her sister. At the age of 12, she took classes with her teacher, Pascal Luce aka Scalap, a popping boogstyle dancer. She developed her popping and hip-hop skills through choreography and freestyles. During a stay in the United States, she explored a new dance style, Lite Feet, a variant of hip-hop first developed in Harlem. This dance is based on a succession of fast steps and attitudes,

ending with locking to accentuate the whole and mark the beat. Since 2018, she has been a member of the collective representing France at Lite Feet. In 2019, she danced in Marion Siéfert's *DU SALE!* for which she was also the choreographer. Since then, she has appeared in the work of Yves-Noël Genod, given workshops at the Cndc in Angers (among others) and begun working with Anne Nguyen's company Par Terre for the show *Héraclès sur la tête* in 2022. She also collaborated with Sylvie Balestra, who wrote a solo for her, *Rites de Passage* in 2024. She also has a degree in STAPS, specializing in physical support for people with disabilities.

Charles-Henri Wolff is a graduate of the ENSAD in Montpellier, where he was successively directed by Richard Mitou, Ariel Garcia-Valdès and Gildas Milin. Upon graduating in 2016, he worked with Guillaume Vincent on *Songes et Métamorphoses*, followed by *Love me Tender* by Raymond Carver, and *Les Mille et Une Nuits*. Under the direction of Pascal Kirsch, he plays in *Princesse Maleine* by Maurice Maeterlinck, and *Solaris* based on the science fiction novel by Stanislas Lem. During the same time, he worked as an artistic collaborator with directors Katia Ferreira and Charly Breton, with whom he founded the Compagnie du 5ème Quart. He took part in the creation of *First Trip*, directed by Katia Ferreira, as well as *Dolldrums*, written and directed by Charly Breton. With Pierre Andrau, he co-wrote and starred in *Le Leurre inévitable*, inspired by René Char's *L'abominable des neiges*. He recently appeared in *Daddy*, directed by Marion Siéfert, and in *Anachronique paléolithique ! Portrait #3: l'abbé Breuil*, directed by Victor Timonier.

Nadia Lauro, scenographer, develops her work in various contexts (stage spaces, landscape architecture and museums). She designs scenographic devices, environments and visual installations. Her highly dramaturgic spaces generate new ways of seeing and being together. She has collaborated with choreographers and performers Vera Mantero, Benoît Lachambre, Frans Poeslstra, Martin Belanger, Ami Garmon, Barbara Kraus, Emmanuelle Huynh, Fanny de Chaillé, Alain Buffard, Antonija Livingstone, Latifa Laabissi, Jonathan Capdevielle, Laëtitia Dosh, Antonia Baehr, Yasmine Hugonnet and Jennifer Lacey, with whom she has co-signed numerous projects. Their collaboration is the subject of a publication entitled *Jennifer Lacey & Nadia Lauro, dispositifs chorégraphiques* by Alexandra Baudelot, published by Presses du Réel. She receives The Bessies, New York Dance and Performance Awards for the visual design of \$Shot (Lacey / Lauro / Parkins / Cornell). She conceived a series of installation/performances entitled *Tu montes, As Atletas* and *I hear voices*, scripted environments developed in various venues (museums, theater foyers, galleries, gardens) in Europe, Japan and Korea. She created the concert-performance *Stitchomythia* in collaboration with electro-acoustic composer Zeena Parkins. She has designed several scenographic and curatorial devices: *La Clairière* (Fanny de Chaillé/Nadia Lauro), an immersive visual environment for hearing at the Centre Pompidou, 4th edition of the Nouveau festival / Khhhhhhh Langues imaginaires et inventées *Garden of time*, a performative garden for the Festival de la Cité Lausanne, 2020. Since 2014, she has been an associate artist at the Extension Sauvage festival (Latifa Laâbissi / Figure Project).

Previous work / footage links

DADDY (2023)



©Matthieu Bareyre

<https://vimeo.com/869469207>

pw : daddydaddy

_jeanne_dark_ (2020)



©Matthieu Bareyre

<https://vimeo.com/622608684>

pw : jeannethedark

DU SALE ! (2019)



©Willy Vainqueur

<https://vimeo.com/330718605>

pw: SALEtance21

Le Grand Sommeil (2018)



©Matthieu Bareyre

<https://vimeo.com/871735559>

pw : TBS2018