



Silence Complice

A personal reflection on the dialogue around the play

Between 21 and 24 October 2015 the Compagnie Tisserin put on four performances of Silence Complice (Silent Partner). Between 12.00 and 15.00 the day after each show, we opened the doors of the theatre for a "dialogue cafe" - constructive discussions on the themes in the play conducted by members of the audience, the artists and other guests. What follows is a personal account of the events by Stien Michiels, accompanied by poems by Dorothy Oger that have been translated from French to English by Dorothy and Stien.



I could give you the statistics – the numbers, the figures, the sums. And sadly I would fail. When it comes to return on investment and quantitative impact, the results have not been impressive. But I'm not writing this for the number-crunchers.

I'm writing this for the story-tellers, for the poets, for those who understand the art of birds in flight.

This is for those who are still able to be astonished, to lose themselves, to stray from the path and delve into the depths.

This is for those who, despite everything, still find the courage to be human.

It all started with the destinies of John and Bill, two friends in their mid-forties whose nightly escapades of alcohol, drugs and betting on the greyhound races are suddenly gone forever after an impulsive decision to accept a shady but enticing proposal from an invisible underworld figure.

With ruthless precision, Australian playwright Daniel Keene has depicted the 22 tragicomic scenes in which, over just a few weeks, the pair tumble over the precipice.

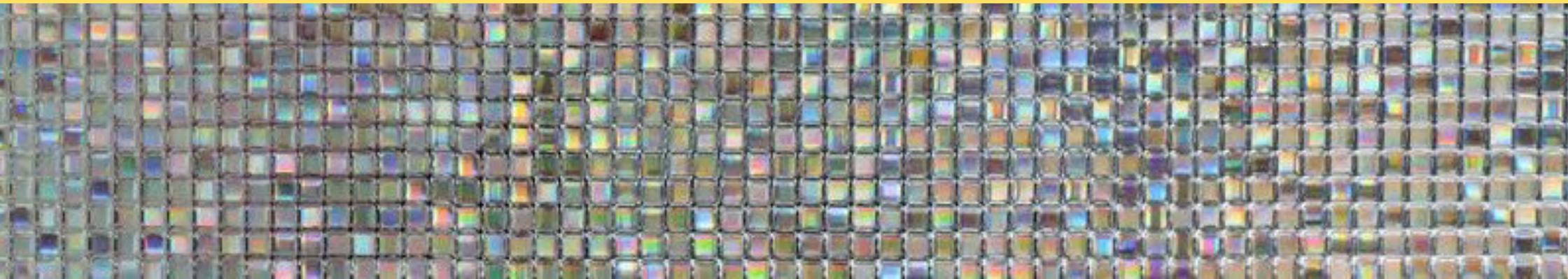




Autumn, 2014. After reading *Silent Partner* for the first time, I sat down and wrote the following :

While I would describe myself as generally open-minded and tolerant, I could feel myself getting angry with John and Bill. The inevitability of their fate made me uneasy, and I blamed them for losing control of the situation. To me they were weak and short-sighted. Stéphane, who initiated the project and is one of the two actors, highlighted their friendship, their ability to believe in something, but I couldn't see it. It was only after some time that it dawned on me - my unconscious fear of losing control was blinkering my power of observation.

For me that was the breakthrough: I was going to direct this play in order to better understand my own inner dialogue; to mirror myself in Keene. Our rehearsal location, the Sint-Gillis Public Social Welfare Centre, took us to the next logical step in respect of the play's themes - arranging discussions between the artistic team, users of the Welfare Centre and other spectators. The aim was to mirror ourselves in each other.





Gradually John and Bill made their way into my heart. Their continuous dialogue, which was simultaneously cruel and funny, initially seemed very simple and on the nose, but in reality it turned out to be ingeniously layered. Together with the actors, we read and reread the play - five times, ten times, a hundred times - and each time we discovered something new, unearthed a nuance and made a link to what we did not see before.

As is so often the case, it turned out that the most important things were happening between the lines - it was in the many pauses and silences that we found and recognised their longing for warmth and friendship, recognition and esteem. At the same time their tragedy confronted us with the unfathomable system that we are all a part of and that compels us to chase plastic aspirations like greyhounds in a race.



We held two public rehearsals in the Welfare Centre for its habitués and staff. This outside perspective, which came each time at a fragile moment in the rehearsal process, proved to be of inestimable value to us. It was not about the numbers – there were only some ten people in the audience – but about what they brought with them. It was exactly what we need at just the right time. It was in our vulnerability and our openness that we found each other. None of those precious theories and quasi-intellectual exchanges on theatre and culture, but encounters from person to person.

As the facilitator, I loved that bonding and I saw how the public rehearsals created a great stepping stone to the dialogue cafes.

In my guise as director I allowed all questions, comments and ideas – in fact, the entire atmosphere – to impact upon me so that I could give even better shape to John, Bill and their friendship. They became evermore real.

Meanwhile I grew as a person.

DANIEL
KEENE

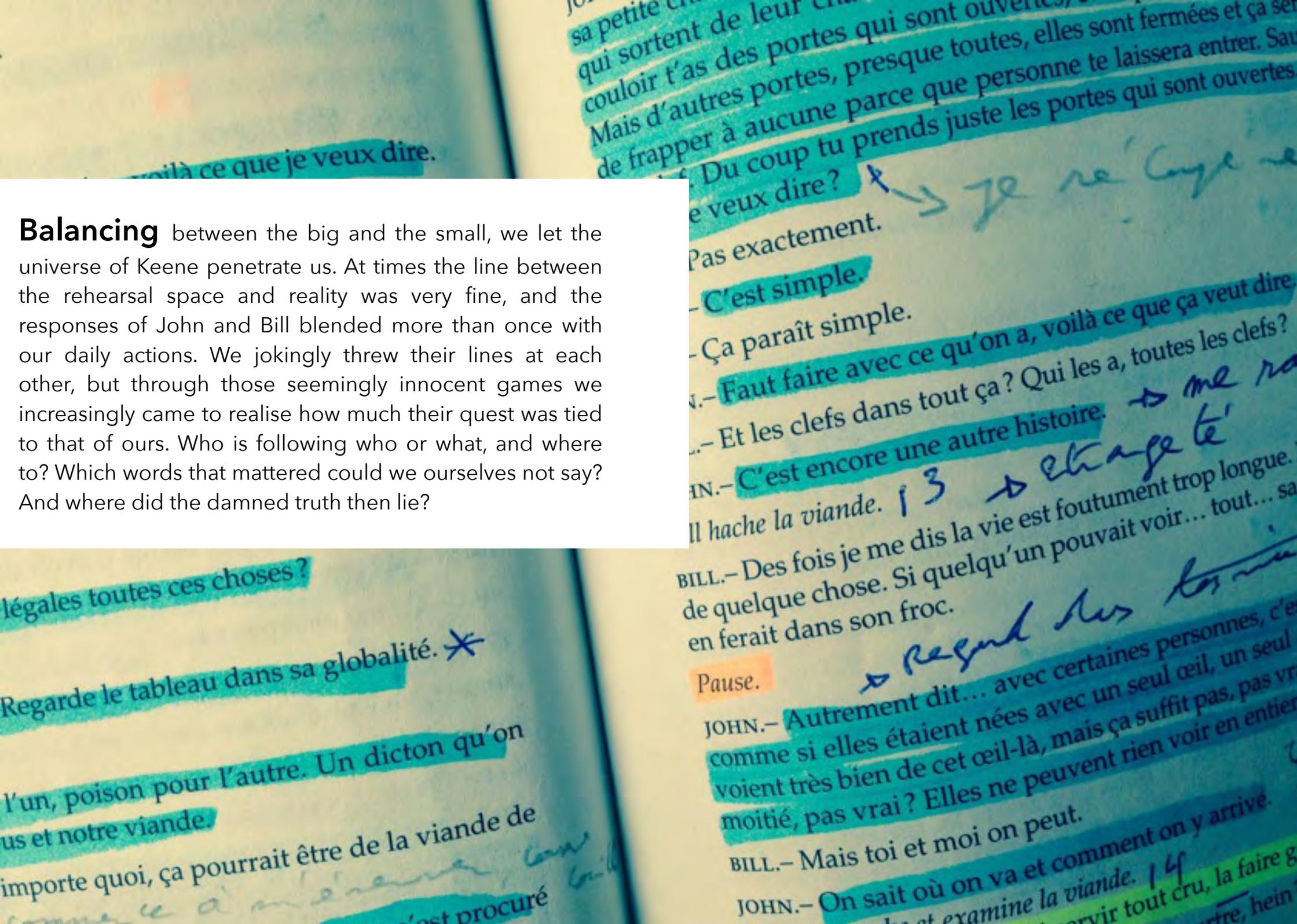
SILENCE COMPLICE

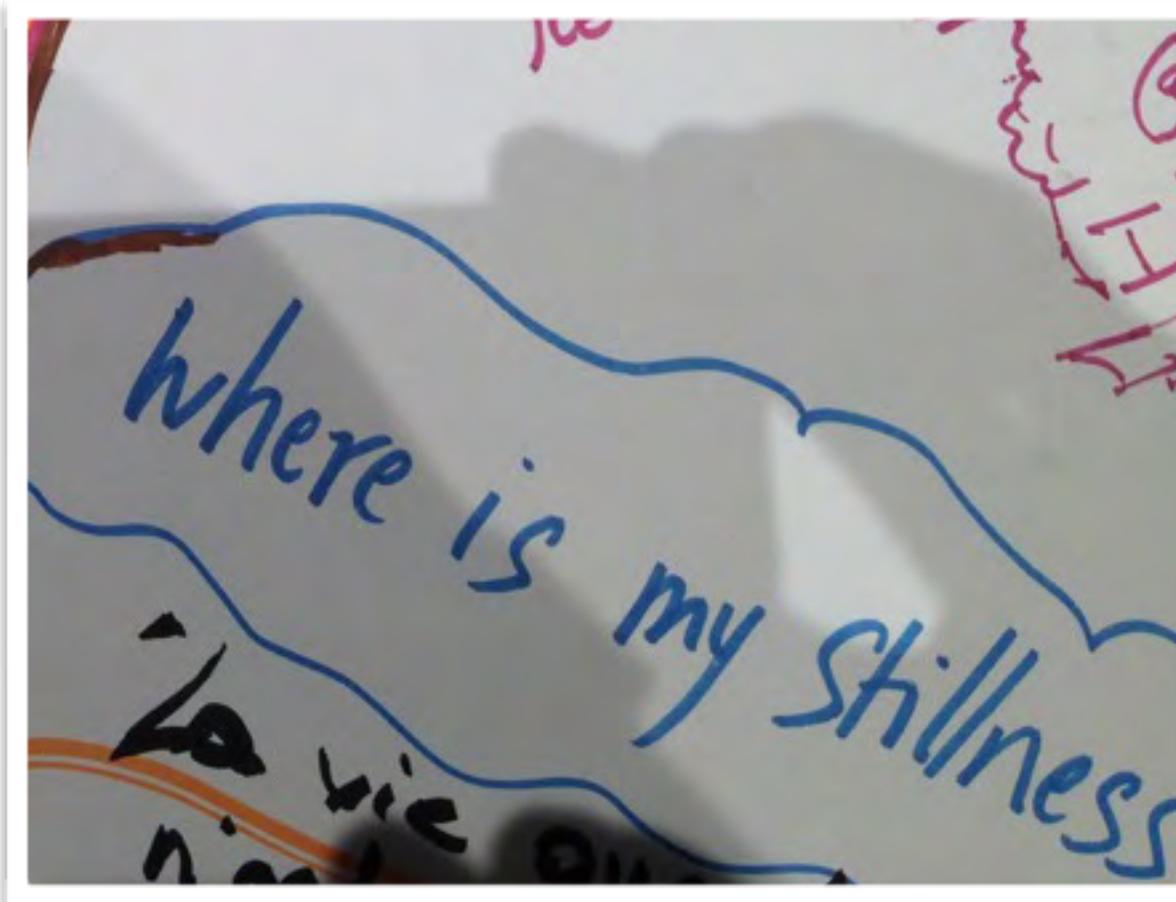
And then there was Emmanuelle. She was there at the first public rehearsal, quiet but involved. We told the assembly that I would be away for a few days and needed somebody to help the actors rehearse their lines. A few days later Emmanuelle volunteered for the job. Both the project and the play appealed to her, and she had time on her hands. She wanted to help us, and that was an unexpected gift that we welcomed with open arms.

What comes to mind when I think back to her presence are words such as sincere, contemplative and happy to be of service. She coloured the days we spent there and thus the play too.

Traduit de l'anglais (Australie) par Séverine Magois

Balancing between the big and the small, we let the universe of Keene penetrate us. At times the line between the rehearsal space and reality was very fine, and the responses of John and Bill blended more than once with our daily actions. We jokingly threw their lines at each other, but through those seemingly innocent games we increasingly came to realise how much their quest was tied to that of ours. Who is following who or what, and where to? Which words that mattered could we ourselves not say? And where did the damned truth then lie?





The fact that the act of creating sometimes became a rat race itself is something that I grasped during an enjoyable chat with the poet Dorothy Oger at Europe Refresh, the crowdfunding event in Les Halles de Schaerbeek for which our project was selected.

Her gentle reflection showed me how I was racing against time, how the glittering prize - to create a show, find funding, communicate - had caused me to take to the racetrack together with Silent Partner. Just a few weeks before our opening night I was dog-tired, worn out.

Dorothy was inspired by our discussion to write a poem...

The time that I will stop

The time that I will stop,
I will take a break,
Make it still
And let the world fall off my shoulders.

Magic is on hold,
Silence misses me.

Am I really in charge
Of other people's races?

I have let the lure become my dream,
While I was running and shouting and pulling,
Forgetting perhaps to be kind
And to let the magic take place.

Under the yoke
Of more, more, more, more
I shall be my silent partner
I shall still and I shall settle.

The rest will work itself out.

Dorothy Oger for Silence Complice
October 10, 2015 - Europe Refresh

Translated by Dorothy Oger, December 2, 2015 - With inspiration from Stien

Large sheets of paper were placed on the table of our stand at Europe Refresh, and sometimes visitors would pop by for a discussion. Here is a sampling of the things they penned or left behind:

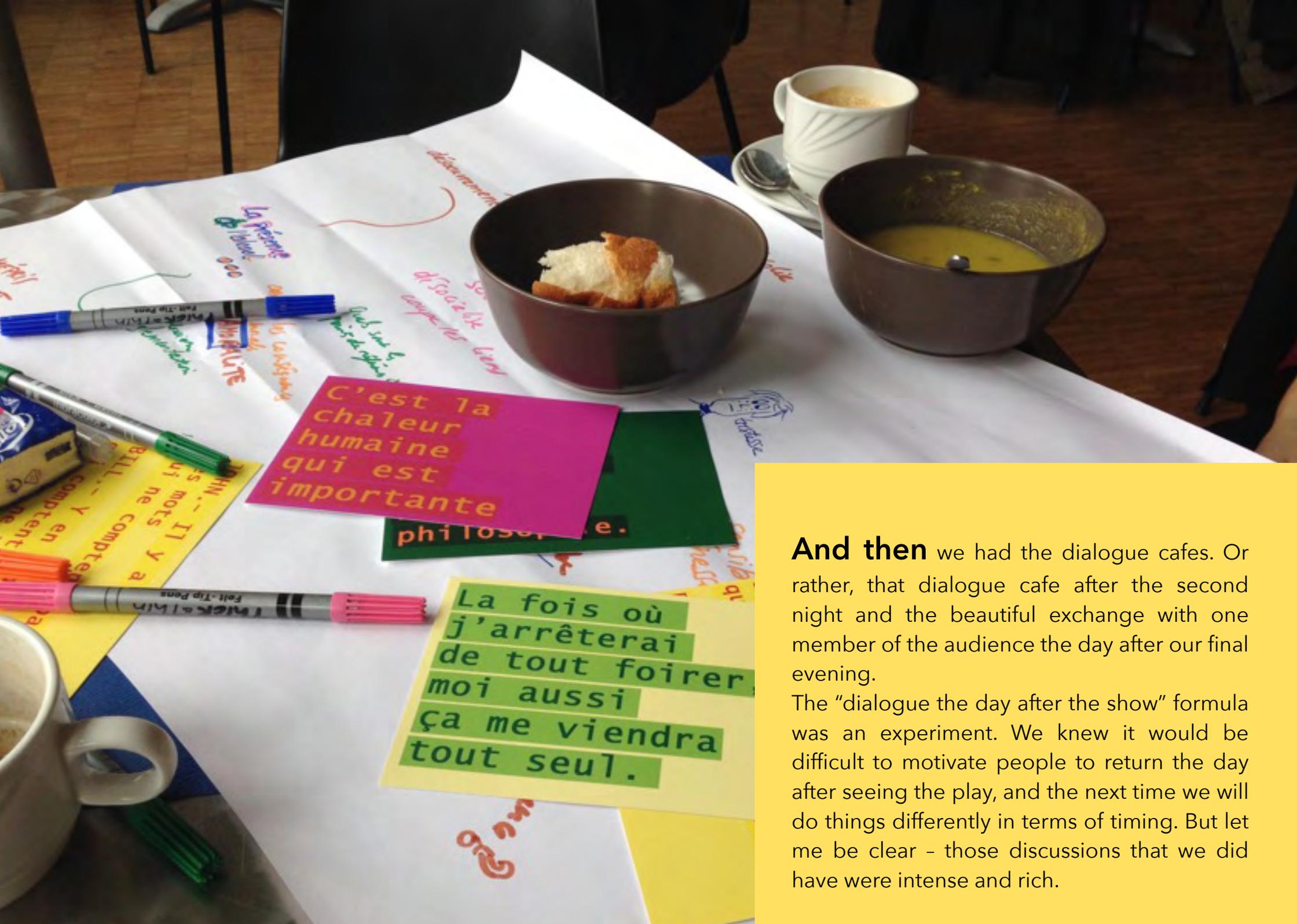


"To reveal oneself is to accept that the other can do you as much harm as good"

"The art of not knowing"

"Cosy together"

"I saw a greyhound this morning, that was a good sign!"



C'est la
chaleur
humaine
qui est
importante

La fois où
j'arrêterai
de tout foirer
moi aussi
ça me viendra
tout seul.

And then we had the dialogue cafes. Or rather, that dialogue cafe after the second night and the beautiful exchange with one member of the audience the day after our final evening.

The "dialogue the day after the show" formula was an experiment. We knew it would be difficult to motivate people to return the day after seeing the play, and the next time we will do things differently in terms of timing. But let me be clear - those discussions that we did have were intense and rich.



On Friday, 23 October five users and one member of staff of the Public Welfare Centre, the actors Stéphane and François, my assistant Valentin, Dorothy Oger and myself took our seats around two tables. During the first session we asked ourselves what we had achieved through the play, and in the second session we formed two new groups and used the cards containing responses from the play as triggers for new conversations. Using the large white sheets of paper before us, we jotted down all the words, sentences and fragments that appealed to us. The third time we made a large circle and each person told the group what they would take home from the experience.



A synopsis of discussions of such a profound nature cannot be straightjacketed into black on white because, just like with John and Bill, the most important things are often said between the lines - during a break, a breather, through a look. No possible linear report that can do justice to what was almost tangibly present for the participants, but was also just out of reach. Under those circumstances it is fantastic to have a person like Dorothy with you, because she can explore through poetry those things that cannot actually be said. To go where silence sets us in motion, often better than words are able to, as one participant said. And that is also what our visitor on Sunday meant when she quoted a colleague to whom she had given one of our cards: 'all words count, including those that are left unsaid'.



Machinations

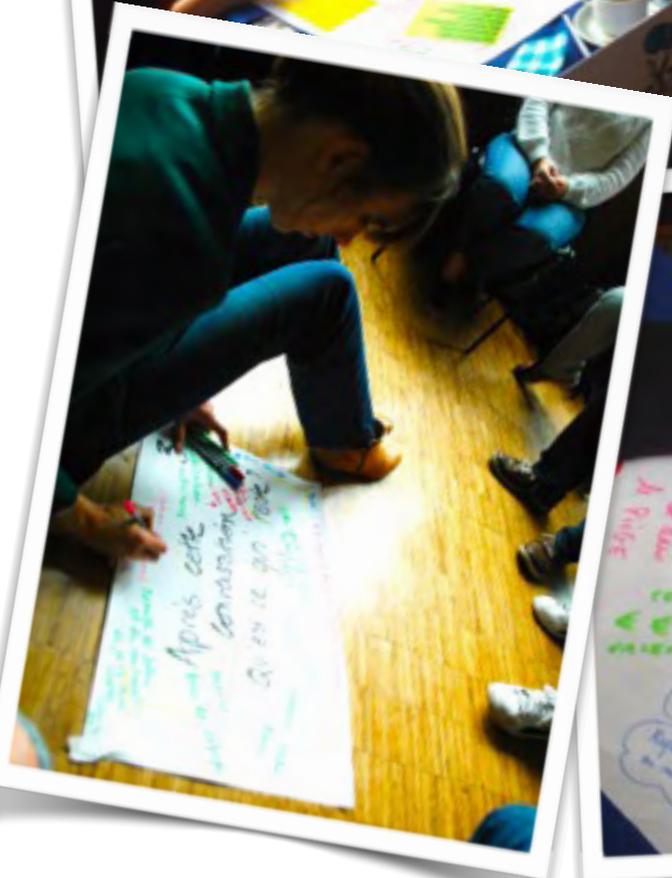
I am feeling trapped
By the diktat of institutions.
Show up. Shut down.
It pisses me off
Until despair kicks on.

They turn me crazy,
Around and around and around
Like a useless object.
The heavy hand of destiny
Pulls and pushes at will.

Doubt starts to rise.
Feeling manipulated,
I hide and protect myself.
I can feel my hands,
Still I hold nothing.

I chose life after all,
And even if it treats me like a dog,
I still believe I can reclaim
The power that is eluding me.

Dorothy Oger for Silence Complice
October 23, 2015 - Dialogue Café
translated by Dorothy Oger & Stien Michiels, December 2, 2015





Regardless

Regardless, life redeems itself
With those lulls between the tides
When there is peace in my mind
And my spirit comes to rest.

Regardless, life redeems itself
When you step out and wander,
offering the world a heartfelt smile,
a random act of kindness.

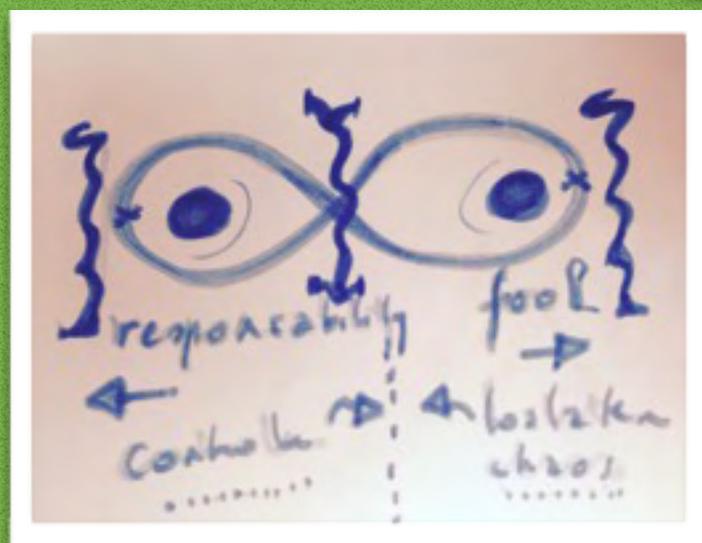
Regardless, life redeems itself
With its whispers of culture,
When I expose myself to otherness,
stepping into roles unknown.

Regardless, life redeems itself
In the meeting of each other
Human-to-human
Remembering what connects us all.

Dorothy Oger for Silence Complice,
October 23, 2015 - Dialogue Café
translated by Stien Michiels & Dorothy
Oger, December 2, 2015

Le rapport de force
Reprendre son destin
en main

Le piège
le système vous
fait tomber
ball de ping pong
DES CHOIX...
C'EST VOUS QUI
FAITES VOTRE VIE



La pièce
s'infiltré dans
la réalité

Je ne regrette Rien - cela m'a fait du Bien.
D'être là à voir le Bonheur de deux heures
La vie c'est toi qui la choisie, Personne ne t'a

COURIR ET ROND
POURQUOI / POUR QUI ?

ON
PEUT PAS TOUT
AVOIR
DANS LA
VIE

ce théâtre est
comme un
échauffeur

Arrête de
faire ce
nouveau
bouger

CHALF

le présence de la
♀ FEMME
équilibrée

What remains after this conversation ?

words from the closing circle:

thank you, safe place, refuge, generosity, love, friendship between us, moment of respiration and connection, touched, this play inspires words and ideas, sadness, enjoying the little moments, open mind, interesting, social means the link that connects us, diverse people and still unity between us, even if the play is sad - you still take something out of it, hearing each other, listening to each other, learning from each other, a nice moment, sympathy, forming a unity, osmosis, re-united, the meeting of diversity, a long life to the play - each time something new, the desire to go for it and to keep on doing things like this.



So what did they give us, John and Bill?

What did we learn? Can we draw conclusions?
Maybe just this :

That, for all their diversity, people are yearning for a connection. And that includes me.

That people feel lonely and separated from the world and because of their vulnerability they do not always know how to make a connection. And so they flee, freeze or fight. And that includes me.

That people who dare to see themselves and others as humans and to mirror each other are so very vulnerable and powerful. And that includes me.

That there is an extraordinary need to create safe spaces within which this can happen. For me too... myself included.

And that in a world where powerlessness, uncertainty and fear seem to reign, this might just be the most important skill that we all, including me, have to learn.



Many thanks to everyone who helped to make this enthralling journey come true.

Silence Complice is a production of compagnie tisserin

With Stéphane Brodzki / François Pinte **Directed by** Stien Michiels **Video** Almudena Crespo **Scenography** Saoud Mama
Music and sound Frédéric Vercheval **Costumes** Delphine Coërs **Creation Light** Claude Lauvaux, Saoud Mama, Valentin Dayan **Technique video & sound** Benjamin Durfort **Assistant scenography** Esteban Lee Monin **Communication, Public Relations & Production** Stien Michiels **Poet & Support** Dorothy Oger **Assistant Communication, Production & Public Relations** Valentin Dayan

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<http://www.kisskissbankbank.com/en/projects/silence-complice>





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