

CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT

by Rimini Protokoll (Haug, Kaegi, Wetzel)

Duration of the performance approx. 2 hours.

No intermission.

Performance rights are held by Rimini Apparat.

A production of Rimini Apparat in co-production with Staatsschauspiel Dresden,
Ruhrfestspiele Recklinghausen, HAU Hebbel am Ufer (Berlin) and the Goethe-Institut.
The conception was supported by the Federal Agency for Civic Education.



**STAATSSCHAUSPIEL
DRESDEN**

CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT

MODERATING VOICE
IN EAR VOICES

Lisa Lippi Pagliai
Evelina Rosselli and Daniele Natali

WITH

Audience members from the respective performances

AND CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Tujara Anatoljevna Schirkova Mining engineer, specialized in processing of useful mineral resources, employee of the Jaw's Harp museum Yakutsk

Karl-Heinz Pantke Physicist, co-founder and director of LIS e.V. for research of the Locked-in-Syndrome

Stefan Kirsch Lawyer for commercial law, criminal defense attorney at international criminal courts

Sally Perel Former mechanic, book author, Holocaust survivor

Sascha Tafelski Senior physician, pain policlinic of Charité Berlin

Gerhard Schindler President of the Federal Intelligence Service (ret.)

Baháti Refugee from East Africa, still detained on Samos

Suzanna Randall Astronaut in training, astrophysicist

Les U. Knight Founder and chairman of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement

CONCEPT, TEXT, DIRECTION
RESEARCH, DRAMATURGY
VIDEO AND LIGHTING DESIGN
MUSIC
LIGHTING

Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi, Daniel Wetzel
Immanuel Schipper, Lüder Wilcke
Marc Jungreithmeier
Daniel Dorsch
Olivia Walter

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT
COLLABORATION POLITICAL-
CULTURAL EDUCATION
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
STAGE DESIGN ASSISTANT
DRAMATURGY ASSISTANT
PRODUCTION ASSISTANT
STAGE MANAGEMENT

Epona Hamdan
Werner Friedrichs
Lisa Homburger, Maximilian Pellert
Maksim Chernykh
Sebastian Klauke
Federico Schwindt
Andreas Löttsch

Photography, film, video and sound recordings as well as the use of wireless means of communication are not permitted during the performance. Please turn off your cell phones for the duration of the performance.

REPRESENTATIONS WANTED

An internationally staffed conference which no one travels to, and which – please, not again – is not supposed to simply take place digitally. How should that work? Here is a proposal: The speakers simply hand over their presentations to those who are there and who do not have to travel from afar: to citizens from the very city in which this CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT takes place. Is there a more suitable space for such an experimental arrangement than the theater? The directing and writing team Rimini Protokoll, together with the audience, dare exactly this experiment.

Everything it needs: a kind of play manual, the prepared conference presentations and the technical support on site. And, of course, audience members. The advantage, by the way: This conference can be attended several times, is a bit different each time, is relatively environmentally friendly, and can take place in a wide variety of locations around the world – even at the same time. In this way, the diverse biographies, stories, thoughts and positions of those who themselves are not there and cannot be, find new bodies every evening. And at the same time absence itself is the theme: What are different forms of absence? Where and when are we absent? What does absence do to us? When is absence a curse and when perhaps a blessing? The experts at this conference have all had their own experiences.

With the beginning of the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT, a double game emerges that draws circles: Those present take on the role of those absent, and those absent thereby become present. This conference generates interference, as Werner Friedrichs observes in his contribution to this program booklet, it blurs boundaries between stories, identities and bodies and in doing so – this much seems certain – will repeatedly come up to their limits as well as its own. But after months of reduced presence of bodies worldwide and the total absence of spectators from the theater, it also radically breaks through this sad state of affairs: it hands over the theater space – along with the stage – to its audience.

Unlike usual plays, no one determines the cast for this one. The question of who (re-)presents whom and what, remains not least a game of chance each time. Who will represent whom this evening, in this performance and in this place? The creation of contingent difference, the suddenly possible perceptibility of differences and the abstraction of commonalities begins anew with each performance.

And even more happens: We look to the stage, to a person from our midst, to hear from them a story which is not theirs, but which they adopt playfully for just a moment. But how is our perception of what is being said influenced by the person who is speaking – their appearance, their voice, their performance? And how does our perception of a person change by what is being said? And what does representation itself, lending one's own voice and presence, that 'letting-someone-else-speak-through-you', actually do to the representatives? – You will have to try it for yourself. Any volunteers?





LOGFILE

September 10, 2019, St. Petersburg Theater can be As-If. But also: What-If ... – Doing everything differently for a change. Develop a play which is generated only from what can be found on site and which can be sent on a guest performance tour like an e-mail. And which unfolds there on location – by the power of those who are present. This is the idea around a kitchen table in our dusty guest apartment in St. Petersburg.

November 3, 2019, Old Building in Brandenburg A big Rimini get-together for a weekend: the production office and most of the dramaturgs with whom we work continuously. One of the topics: sustainability in producing. This also includes the question of travel. A play with zero shipping and zero travel, is that possible? And then who would perform?

November 25, 2019, Rimini Office Berlin First round of talks with the Deputy Artistic Director of the Staatsschauspiel Dresden, Jörg Bochow, on production issues: we discuss the necessities that the audience should step in as representation of the absentees, that the stage elements should not be built, but found in every theater, and the texts are not to be staged, but conveyed on slips of paper or via headphones. A couple of names are thrown around, lists tentatively filled. Which person should be represented? Is it about people who otherwise would not have time for an appearance and whom's perspective it would at least be ambivalent to slip into? A play with Elon Musk? Working on a text with Melinda Gates? What could it be about?

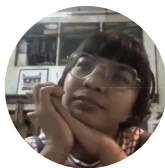
November 35, 2019 The date does not exist, but sometime around that time the decision was made not to work on a conference which would last all day – the way conferences are held, with coffee breaks, roundtable discussions, cookie platters. Instead, we want to commit to a certain selection that would apply to all venues. So an evening of theater called CONFERENCE.

February 29, 2020, Rome Workshop in a former slaughterhouse (Mattatoio Testaccio) in Rome. The master's students work on forms of representation. Among others, a man is being represented who was unable to travel due to the first covid cases in Liguria. Seemed like an exotic idea still.



Beginning of April 2020 First talks with the Federal Agency for Civic Education and with the Goethe Institute: the question of representation and performative telepresence is relevant beyond the theater. In which areas of civil society could they also be used: universities, global cultural institutions or NGOs, postcolonial studies, political organizations?

April 12, 2020, Athens Until recently, the seminar in Athens with art students was planned as research on site. Now we are relegated to the internet. How can we work on the perspective of people who are unknown to us? Advantage: these people could be anywhere in the world. For example, the young artist Zon Pyu in Yangon, Myanmar.



End of April 2020 Another topic area: AI and machine learning. Are we working on our own absence with this? We are trying to get in touch with Sebastian Thrun. He's a computer scientist, robotics specialist, was a professor of artificial intelligence at Stanford University and Vice President at Google.

May 2020 The list is getting longer: A representative of the Uyghur Congress? A posthumanist? Someone who speaks for animals? A collapse-ologist? Absence on various levels begins to concretize itself as the theme. Another kind of telepresence in the theater: not the appearance of famous dead people like Hamlet, Walenstein or Aida, instead less famous but still living persons who have various reasons for not appearing here and now.



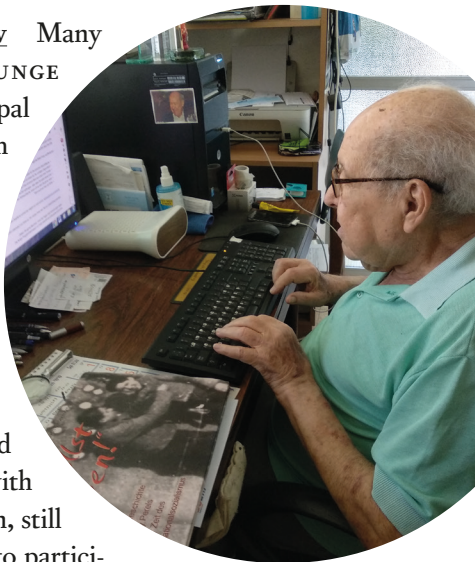
August 2020 First talks with Elena and Gernot Grimm in Yakutsk. Elena participated in a Rimini workshop in Berlin years ago and showed a picture from her home country, showing the largest hole on earth. They set out to find someone who knows this hole from up close.



September 15, 2020 Research for the project **TEMPLE DU PRÉSENT**: visit to a doctor for phantom pain. Are there kinds of physical sensations in humans that do not run via a central brain? Like in an octopus? **Sascha Tafelski** proves himself a good expert for the **CONFERENCE OF THE BBSSENT**.

September 20, 2020, Lisbon Workshop on performative telepresence in the context of the Boca Biennial in Lisbon. What of the frailty of a person at the end of a long life is transmitted to a young successor?

September 22, 2020 Hamburg/Tel Aviv Many attempts to reach **Sally Perel** (HITLERJUNGE SALOMON) lead nowhere. Finally, the principal of the Alexander-von-Humboldt-Gymnasium in Harburg helps out. He replies via email on the same day in a friendly and interested manner from a suburb of Tel Aviv. In the first Zoom interview, he tells us how he invited Ehrenfried Weidemann to an event at the auditorium of the Thomas Mann School in Lübeck: the soldier who believed his lie at the time and thus involuntarily saved his life. Sally has been on friendly terms with him for years. At the end of the conversation, still somewhat critical of our project, he agrees to participate on the condition that our text and the cooperation with us will convince him.



September 30, 2020, Internet Fourth day of a workshop with participants located in Brazil, England, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Greece and Myanmar – show us where you are. Digital presence across 15 time zones. Ariadni Kallabaliki is one of the participants. An NGO funds her work with families on Samos who are waiting for their asylum applications to be accepted or processed. Ariadni refers us to someone from among those she works with. We are scheduled to chat next week.

October 4, 2020 Visit to „Captain Ben“. In a clearing in the woods is a five-hectare site with 3500 square meters of Soviet housing for the army. The buildings have been empty since 1989, at times they were a lifeline for asylum seekers. Benjamin Green bought the land with his savings. The man, who used to work as a computer scientist for large insurance companies, believes that the end of the world as we know it is near. Because in less than five years we will be well past three of the nine Climate Tipping Points. He came here and became a self-supporter. Why here? This is the coldest part of Western Europe. While the south of Europe is burning a climate similar to that of the Moselle will prevail here. He planted more than thirty different fruit trees and shrubs, grows peaches, apricots, wine and over a hundred varieties of vegetables, medicinal and culinary herbs, and owns three pigs.



October 7, 2020, tak Theater Aufbau Kreuzberg First try out on a stage – under Corona conditions, before the second wave. With the historian Valentin Groebner we developed a text on the term homeland, at the end of which the representative circles the stage on a bicycle and operates a small mobile fog machine mounted on the handlebars. Additional appearances: drafts on dropout and „pirate“ Ben Green, astronaut Alexander Gerst.

October 16, 2020, Berlin/Portland We become aware of the organization VHEMT (Voluntary Human Extinction Movement), which wants to stop humans from reproducing. The founder **Les U. Knight** is based in Portland, Oregon. He responds quickly to our inquiry: „I would be honored to participate. Our extinction would certainly exemplify absence, though it would precipitate more presence of other species.“



October 19, 2020 First contact with **Suzanna**

Randall. A woman in space is more exciting than Alexander Gerst, who was still omnipresent during his absence from Earth. During her space expedition aging processes in the female body will be investigated among other things. The male body has already been extensively researched in space, the female body is absent with a few exceptions.



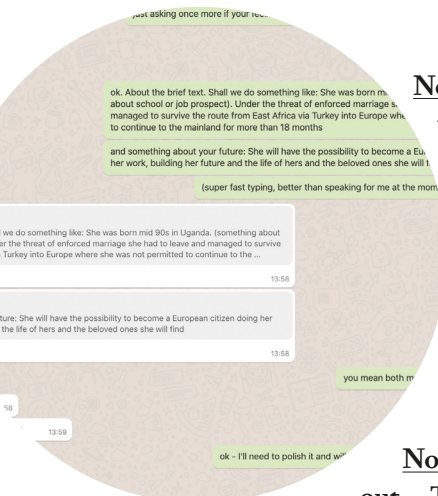
October 29, 2020 Conversation with Nikolaus Hirsch, who is preparing the German pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale together with a number of architects. They anticipate the pandemic absence of the public by leaving the German Pavilion empty. And in this absence of architecture, they see a simulation of the future that seems to fit the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT.



November 5, 2020, UferHallen Berlin Second rehearsal. A

representative does her own thing and disregards all instructions. This can also happen. Another representative speaks with a very strong accent. Experiments at the threshold: Can nature be represented? But how to write for an animal that would not itself write? Does so-called artificial intelligence enable dialogues with people who have already died? We try the

so-called Obama Prompter – tinted windows to the left and right of the lectern to allow the gaze to wander while speaking. Additionally we test a video projection of the texts behind the audience. Both are discarded.



November 17, 2020 Second chat with **Baháti**, the contact Ariadni gave us on Samos. She likes our text proposal. The following day we meet for a video chat. We talk about her situation in the shelter for victims of violence, about her plans. But does this position perhaps strain the piece too much? Are there limits in casting, when you ask so openly into a situation that we otherwise only get mediated?

November 20, 2020, Dresden, KH 3, third try out The artificial voice we have thus far been working with for the moderation is replaced by that of the Dresden actress **Nadja Stübiger**. Many recordings will follow in order to have suitable audio files ready for all eventualities.

December 2020 With students of the Otto-Falckenberg-Schule we try to work out a CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT on Zoom. After a nearly four-hour piece, the students need travel permits to get home. We understood that it is about presence and not absence.

December 8, 2020 Topic of refugees: What about the people on this side of the fence, who are specifically working to deter from and make Europe's borders impermeable. We call journalists to ask for their contacts and experiences with this – informants and correspondents from government side are rare and nervous special cases – and write mails all the way up to the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex, whose budget between 2006 and 2021 rose from 6.2 to 544 million Euros. Making progress here is a project in itself – mined territory, networks of silence:

„Thank you for reaching out. We have very much liked the idea of your project, but unfortunately we won't be able to accommodate the interview with the officers deployed. Kind regards, Frontex press office“.



December 15, 2020, Berlin/Frankfurt a.M. By email we contact the lawyer **Stefan Kirsch**. We are looking for a position that is ambivalent. Mr. Kirsch has represented war criminals at international criminal courts. Two minutes later, the phone rings. On the other end Mr. Kirsch.

December 26, 2020 Absence has become a global priority. The song of imminent easing of restrictions is sung further. If and when the premiere can take place is unclear.

December 2020 to January 2021 We are looking for a person who can speak from personal experience about amputation. About life before and after. About ways to cope with missing a limb. But the response from associations, organizations and advocacy groups is retained. After only a few responses, the e-mail correspondence fizzles out.



Early January 2021 We read in the book **WER HAT ANGST VORM BND?** by the former president of the BND (German Intelligence Service), **Gerhard Schindler**, and ask him what it means for undercover agents to represent other countries invisibly. He is happy to tell but can't give us any names, let alone provide contacts. We suggest that he invent a fictitious agent – as close to reality as possible.

January 14, 2021, Uferstudios Berlin, Try Out No. 4 We decide to expand the use of contributions transmitted via headphones. Would the audience believe that an audience member on stage can communicate via WhatsApp with an AI-controlled system that answers in the interest of a deceased person? Answer: yes. The theatrical Deep Fake is modeled on a narrative that is common among younger companies developing such services. The artificial intelligence hype is being linked to overcoming the threshold of death.

January 20, 2021 Attempt to write a panel discussion for this piece: absent people talk to each other through present people. Strangely, the aura of the remotely controlled performers is lost when they talk among each other. Suddenly they both seem as if they have nothing to say to the audience, as if they are acting behind a fourth wall which definitely makes the absentees absent from us.

January 21, 2021 The composer **Daniel Dorsch** creates first sound sketches. We are not yet sure how much sound there should be. Nothing should be varnished. Possible gaps should remain clearly recognizable.

January 25, 2021, Kleines Haus Dresden, rehearsal Various objects are ordered from the fundus: tables, chairs, carpets, a skull. How do you create a stage without producing anything – wasting resources? A discussion at sub-zero temperatures in front of the theater: What happens if a representative does not agree at all with the contents of the person to be represented? When is it questionable or uncomfortable to represent a person?

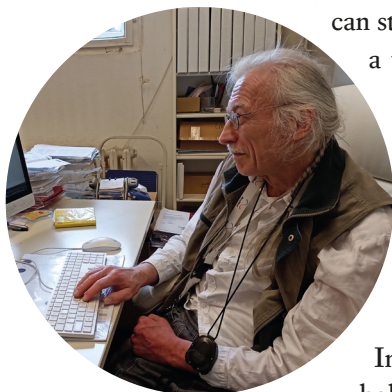


February 9, 2021, Hamburg /Tel Aviv Second video chat with **Sally Perel**: We read the elaborated text to him. We get his address for the postcard which is to be sent to him after each performance.



February 10, 2021, Berlin Visit to **Karl-Heinz Pantke** in Berlin-Schöneberg. The appointment has to take place in such a way that his household help

can still open the door for us before she leaves. He sits in a universe of his late wife's artwork. He has learned to manage what is left behind by an absent person. But here it is to be about him once more, about the second that removed him from his own body.



February 12, 2021, Centre Français de Berlin Matthias Lilienthal attends the rehearsal and immediately takes on the first contribution.

In the follow-up discussion he is as open as ever: The whole thing is „the nightmare of any city theater.“ Ouch.

Yeah. We remember the first joint

work with Lilienthal almost 20 years ago with the title **DEUTSCHLAND 2** – for the duration of one day, citizens of Bonn copied the Bundestag speeches from Berlin's plenary hall. In both cases the participants risk stuttering in front of the wider audience, not appearing in the most sovereign manner in the spotlight.



February 18, 2021 „My name is Zon, I would like to join the previous speaker: If you take the prosthesis to bed with you, your brain doesn't even get the idea that your leg is gone. I was walking through an intersection in Yangon today. A car was waiting for the green light. There were young people in it on their way to the demonstration. I winked at them. Then Buddhist monks came with batons and demolished the car. The people jumped out and were beaten up. Police came. And do you know who the policemen protected: the attackers. The beaten people and I were told to leave. The leg that I am missing is a leg

that many millions are missing. Now that it's gone, we know how weak it still was. Our prosthesis is this sound. Right now there is internet from 9am to 9pm. But this app also works offline. With it, you can play the sound wherever you are: when it's 8 o'clock at night and we're all been banging plates against pots for 18 days. Since the night the military arrested the government. I never want to update this text again. I'm speaking it once now. It is to capture a moment: NOW on February 19, 2021. I blow it up like a balloon. Into this balloon I blow: the pride and the desire for all that we can achieve, if only we don't compromise anymore.

We walk around with costumes. We splash paint on each other. We meet in boats on the rivers. They can

kill any one of us. But not this moment. That I share with you forever. We have courage, hope, confidence, humor. We stick together. We recognize each other. We trust each other. I stay in this moment. The demonstration's prosthetic can still be visited: <https://thanbonetee.github.io>



February 19, 2021, Centre Français de Berlin The technology is on strike, the stage is too high, the test subjects are too insecure, the timing is off, and the coffee machine in the foyer breaks down as well. Outside there is snow.

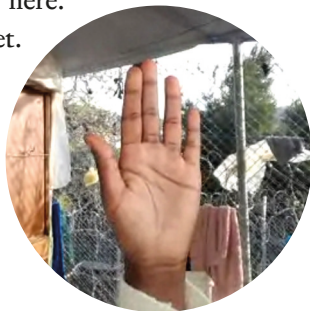


February 22 – 24, 2021, Dresden try out on the big stage in the Kleines Haus Ensemble members eager to play take on the representations. It works really well. Great presence, great voices – have we written an ensemble piece? We need stage photos. No easy task for theater photographer **Sebastian Hoppe**: How do you photograph absentees when they're represented by different people at every performance?



February 23, 2021 Audio recordings with the actors **Henriette Hölzel**, **David Kosel**, **Hans-Werner Leupelt**, and **Karina Plachetka** from the ensemble of the Staatsschauspiel. They record the texts which will be prompted via the headphones. We have also arranged to meet Nadja again for further recordings.

March 4, 2021 Four weeks ago **Baháti** wrote that she was very happy. She has been approved. Now she just has to wait for the papers. That could take a long time. Although she has only provisional documents, she wants to leave Samos today at her own expense. Since her approval she doesn't receive the monthly 70 € support for singles by the UNHCR anymore, but she can't improve her situation on the island either. Just get out of here. Refugees are not accepted on ferry boats. Buy a plane ticket. Say goodbye to everyone. Take a cab with the last of the money. At the gate: You are not allowed to fly. Back to the camp. Continue waiting.



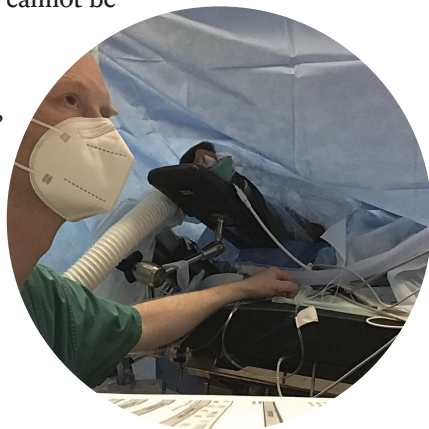


April 19 and 20, 2021, Theaterdiscounter Berlin, try outs in Berlin

In the process the question arises whether we need more proof that the originals are not fictional characters. **Les U. Knight** sends a voice message so that we can incorporate his real voice in the play for a moment. The trial over the diesel scandal resumes. **Stefan Kirsch** represents one of the defendants. He says, „If an act of criminal offense was not defined at the time it was committed, it cannot be

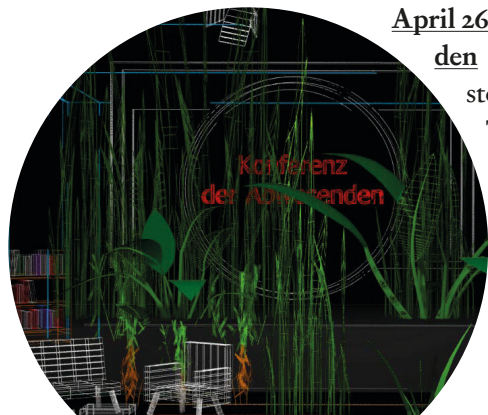
punished.“ No law – no punishment!

April 23, 2021 Between two consultations, we catch **Priv.-Doz. Sascha Tafelski, MD**, a specialist for pain at Berlin's hospital Charité, for a Zoom interview. He does not want to apply for a professorship at another university hospital. He is a Brandenburger, they like to stay where they are. Talking about pain is difficult, but important.

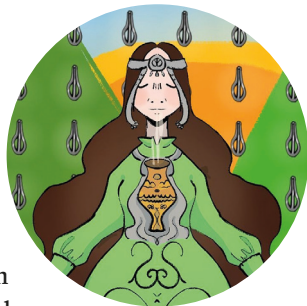


April 26, 2021 Try Out Dresden

More carpet remnants are retrieved from storage and old stage sets are plundered. The stage looked too cold and gray. **Marc Jungreithmeier's** video projection is also more colorful now.



May 13, 2021, Dresden **Tamara** doesn't want to appear on stage with a picture, says Gernot Grimm. It is not quite clear to him why not. Maybe it has something to do with superstition. We get a drawing made by the daughter Kyara Grimm. Tamara doesn't want to appear on stage with her real name either. But here we can mention her name: **Туяра Анатољевна Жиркова (Tujara Anatoljevna Schirkova).**



May 15, 2021, Dresden The final week of rehearsals is underway. Dynamo advances to the second league again, barricades are erected at Großer Garten. Rockets from Gaza fly towards Tel Aviv, Israel responds with air strikes.

May 18, 2021 Inspiring online conversation about the project and current pressing questions of presence and absence with five heads of major European cultural institutions in Brussels, Dresden, Lisbon, Paris and Rome. „It's also a political message.“



May 21, 2021 Planned premiere It can't take place yet. We are converting it into a final dress rehearsal try out. But in the meantime, hope has appeared on the horizon: With the reopening on June 1, **CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT** will be the first performance after the lockdown to finally be premiered to the public. Almost simultaneously to the first guest performance date. After many months of actors having to rehearse here without an audience, the theater is reopening with an evening in which the audience, which has been absent for so long, is allowed to enter the stage.





REMOTE | PRESENCE

On the absence or presence of the common

by Werner Friedrichs

Dr. Werner Friedrichs is Academic Director at the Otto-Friedrich-University of Bamberg. He leads and accompanies (in cooperation with the Federal Agency for Civic Education i.a.) numerous projects at the intersection between aesthetic and civic education. The following text gives an insight into the results of a participatory observation of the rehearsal process for the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT.

From Con-ferring to Inter-ferring

At conferences, points of view, opinions and thoughts are gathered. [*Con-fer - con = together, shared*]. Conferences are held to bring a common (as a concern, question or problem) *to presence*. However, they are thwarted by the logic of the *re-presentation* of the absent(ees). The experts' presentations are about insights they have acquired elsewhere: in the laboratory, in the space of logical laws or in the empirical field of investigation. Business representatives stand up for the interests of their industry, their companies or their contractual partners. Members of parliament and envoys represent the interests of voters, minorities or those affected. The contributions (the compiled) thereby oriented by an order of presentation:

I stand here for something else. I have gathered something for this. What is at stake in each case is not present, but in a different place: in the transcendent sphere of scientific truths, a production site outsourced to the point of invisibility, or an affected distant region. How could it be organized that the conference participants do not only show each other professional presentations, styled graphics and position papers? How could the absent contexts, working conditions or glocal entanglements be gathered in such a way that they become present at the site of the conference? How could what is represented be made present in such a way that the scattered diversities, places and needs interweave, interpenetrate and create a common thread? How can the *con-ference* become an *inter-ference*? In other words: Do experts really have to travel thousands of air miles to sit across from each other in conference centers, to point out connections in seminar rooms, to complain about watery coffee at high tables, or to affirm intentions in large circles? If a *co-existential* moment of different perspectives, needs and concerns is to be realized in a *con-ference*, don't the representatives, speakers, agents and even sometimes the witnesses get in the way? *Step aside – we want to realize something shared here!*

In the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT these questions are given space.

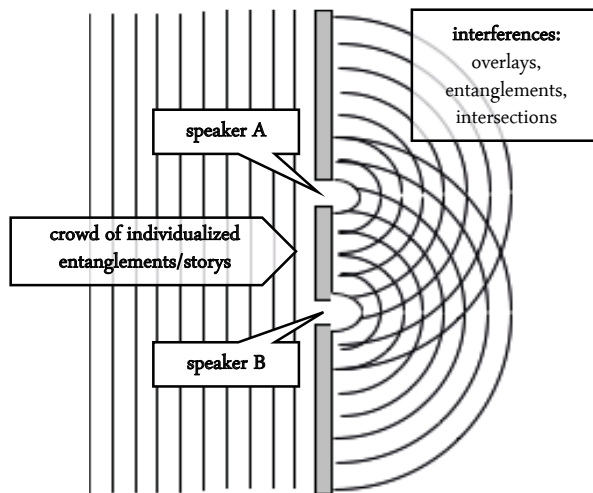
One Million stories of democratic existence. How to get together?

Thus, the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT touches the central, democratic problem: the problem of procuration, of representation. How can it be possible, in mass societies with scattered differences, oppositions, dependencies and needs, to envision and maintain the democratic cohesiveness of a social bond? How can the hybrid entanglements be made palpable in such a way that they enable and promote thinking and acting in solidarity? A question on whose answer depends nothing less than the planetary well-being of humanity. The mass extinction of species, the increasing social inequalities or the steadily rising numbers of refugees requires acting together in solidarity.

It is crucial for democracies to make the indeterminable many, the *multitude*, the co-existence „present-able“ (Lorey 2020) in conferring, in assembling. Because democracy is a „mode of living together“ (ibid., 14). The precise meaning of democracy – in its composition of *demos* and *krátos* – is the empowerment to do things together. „The ability to do things is not one that everyone makes use of to the same degree, but it refers to the many, diverse individuals who, in their social heterogeneity, shape common life together“ (ibid., 36). This understanding of democracy was already obscured in ancient polemics. The original claim to always envision the indeterminable many (make it present-able) and thus keep it alive as the driving force of action was perverted by the technique of representation: Now the many were to be represented in the unity of the whole. In this way, democracy was inscribed with a burdensome legacy that it has never been able to fulfill: to represent the many – the absent – in a unity. This distorted, imagined juxtaposition of the *many* and *the one* often leads to paradoxes and blockades. The hybrid *multitude*, however, eludes the distinction between unity and multiplicity. The many absences simply cannot be gathered in conferences, parliaments and consultations of representatives, experts and witnesses.

The incomprehensible horizon (the uncountable) of common action, the way of living together, only comes to light in entanglements, enmeshments and intersecting narratives. It becomes palpable only in the overlaps and *interferences* of the narratives. The presence of particular persons does not help. Sometimes it even proves to be a hindrance. For the *presence* of the experts distracts from absent entanglements and stories. And they are exactly what it is about: those singular stories in which we have to involve ourselves, envision together. In this way, the idea of an „audience democracy“ (Manin 2007), in which the *many spectators* follow the *one* (representative) deliberation, recedes into the background. In the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT, the spectators embody the entanglements and narratives from the *multitude*, without the

latter being absorbed by the presence of designated experts, representatives, or witnesses. Thus, in the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT, a present-able moment of *multitude*, of *the uncountable*, is made audible.



¹⁾ The term interference is used in physics to describe a superposition of waves. One of the best-known manifestations of interference patterns is provided by the double-slit experiment: waves strike permeable apertures, creating superpositions with changing amplitudes (see Barad 2015, i.a.). Just as the stories in the Conference of the Absent visualize new interactions with fluctuating intensities and entanglements in their embodiments by the speakers. The mass of individual destinies becomes common stories. They entangle us, connect us.

RE | PRESENCE

New presences in the European cultural scene.

A conversation with Joachim Bernauer (Director Goethe-Institut Rom/Country Director Italy), Francisco Frazão (Artistic Director Teatro do Bairro Alto Lisbon), Joachim Klement (Artistic Director Staatsschauspiel Dresden), Chloé Siganos (Director Performing Arts Centre Pompidou Paris) and Barbara Van Lindt (Artistic and Administrative Coordination Kaaitheater Brussels). Moderated by Imanuel Schipper and Lüder Wilcke.

What have cultural institutions learned from the pandemic, which new perspectives have emerged?

Chloé Siganos (CS) I think the relationship with artists is different now, it has become more democratic. We are more connected as people than before. It's nice to see that creativity and the way we think about distance is very different now. We have learned to create with less mobility but with more dialogue.

Joachim Klement (JK) A good experience is that creativity cannot be stopped by a pandemic. In Dresden, we produced an entire festival as a hybrid format, and in the last few months I have seen many productions that were created in the course of the pandemic situation, that would not have existed in that way before.

What does this situation mean for cultural mobility?

Joachim Bernauer (JB) At the Goethe Institut, we have successfully experimented with interactive formats. And we had more students than the year before. The digital allows us to reach people who we would otherwise not be able to reach geographically. We also talked more with our colleagues in Munich, Paris, or around the world. There is more exchange with artists and among cultural workers and less travel.

Barbara Van Lindt (BVL) It is the pandemic that determines our program. The cultural sector, and especially the arts sector, has gone through an identity crisis due to the pandemic: we are witnessing how a virus destroys all curatorial concepts and narratives. It is hard but also liberating. What is emerging instead is a different commitment to the local art scene. In addition, the cultural sector has had to subordinate itself to the government. They decide what you can and cannot do. We were obedient for more than a year. In the second lockdown the government offered no prospects. So we decided on our own to close until the end of March since we didn't want to stay in this dependency, but to create a period that would be a fertile ground for our team to reflect, experiment and work on topics.

Francisco Frazão (FF) I was thinking about this quote from JURASSIC PARK, that life always finds a way. I think art also always finds a way, theater finds a way, artists find a way. That's what we experienced last year. We had a curfew on the weekends until 1pm. So we did theater in the morning, and the audience came. If they only let us do theater at noon, then we do theater at noon. So there's this persistence to explore presence as something precious, not just digitally.

In the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT, there's a line at the end of the play where it turns into the Conference of the Present - in German that is just one letter difference. The person on stage begins to represent a position without knowing who's. So they say „I“ before knowing what this „I“ is.

JK This work poses a central question to the theater: who represents whom? For example, can an old white man from Dresden speak for a young woman from East Africa? This is one of the burning debates of our time.

BVL „Speaking on behalf of.“ I think that's where there is potentially moral friction: that there is perhaps as much of a gap between the person speaking on behalf of someone and what is being said.

FF The conference deals with this debate in a playful way, showing us that we can think both presences at the same time, have them in our minds: the original and its „translation“. This is a playful challenge for the audience, a non-dogmatic idea that will materialize on stage. In addition, some of the absent speakers are not absent by choice, but simply cannot be there because it is impossible for them. So it's not only a nice concept, but thematically it's also a real necessity.

JB We are now used to thinking digitally. But this is about physical representation. Right now we can watch hours of streamed theater – which is nice and interesting. But we're missing the physical approach. This is put on stage in the CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT in a very radical way: The „real“ person portrayed is not there, instead there is a physical person on stage.

CS And it also holds another question: What is real? And what makes me believe it's real. Are these facts – or fakes?

BVL I think in a polarized world full of Fake News, etc., it's important to make the audience aware of these gaps.

JK This production does something else: getting people involved in a situation without knowing beforehand what will happen to them. And it seems that they trust the game and the theater. And that's something I find very positive. It's not normal in daily life to trust the unknown.

The concept of CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT is that the play travels, but if possible no one else travels, just the play: the idea and the technical instructions. That brings us to the topic of sustainability. How much has your work already been influenced by this?

JB Rimini Protokoll asked: How can we tour without leaving such a large carbon footprint? This is just as true for the Goethe-Institut. During the pandemic we are discovering that we really feel good when we travel less. This idea of telepresence is more than just a playful concept. We will have a lot of fun with it on performance evenings, but to answer the question of how physical presence can be realized without a lot of travel, we would have to think much more creatively. That's why Rimini Protokoll and the Goethe-Institut will continue to work on this with other agents from theater and civil society, and will also hold an ACADEMY OF THE ABSENT in four European cities.

JK Cultural institutions have a responsibility to make relevant themes of the future visible. We are therefore working on many topics related to sustainability. But not only on the stages – we also have to live what we talk about in our institutions. And you can see that for many people in the company it is a real need to be involved in this.

FF There are many ways to make sustainability a part of our daily lives. This production takes this issue very seriously. But we in Portugal are on the periphery of Europe, so we don't have the luxury of being able to be in five different countries within two hours on a train. Sustainability is in a way a

luxury for some, and it is very dangerous to give up this exchange that travel provides. The danger is that we revert to a kind of digital Middle Ages, where we have digital exchanges but we don't leave our walled cities. The fact is that not traveling is not an option for all artists. Jérôme Bel or Rimini Protokoll might be able to present their work without traveling. Because they are known worldwide. But newcomers are not invited by anyone if their work has not been seen yet. Maybe we are in a transitional phase and in twenty years there will be much less travel. We still need to protect the cultural importance of actual travel - and thus co-presence.

BVL Yes, you are right. I think the mentioned artists can benefit from their decades of traveling the world. But Mexican theater-maker Lázaro Gabino Rodríguez points out that his livelihood depends on European festivals co-producing his work. So to call now for a global travel ban is not that simple.

CS It's helpful and good to have a choice. It may take decades to make the connection between what we used to live and what we want to live in the future. We are children of Europe – it would be hard for me to say we will not travel anymore. Also and especially for political reasons. Because Europe is increasingly confronted with extremism, protectionism and similar issues. Cultural institutions – and our generation – therefore also have an obligation to show young people how to deal with foreignness. We have a choice now. It's a political statement, I think.



ARTISTIC TEAM

HELGARD HAUG, STEFAN KRECI AND DANIEL WETZEL founded Rimini Protokoll in 2000 and have since been working in various constellations under this name to expand the means of theater and create new perspectives on our reality. They often develop their stage works, interventions, scenic installations and radio plays with experts who have gained their knowledge and skills beyond the theater and transpose spaces or social structures into theatrical formats which are often characterized by the interactive involvement of the audience and a playful use of technology.

Rimini Protokoll declared the **ANNUAL SHAREHOLDER MEETING** of Daimler shareholders to be a theater play, or staged a transatlantic conversation between an employee of an Indian call center and a theater visitor from far away with **CALL CUTTA**. With **100% CITY**, they created a production that is constantly re-contextualized worldwide, where one hundred representatively selected citizens of the respective city gather on a theater stage.

DEUTSCHLAND 2 (2002) – one of their earliest pieces invited people to choose which of the more than 650 MoPs they'd to represent and then staged them performing an instantaneous interpretation of a daylong parliamentary session, the speeches of the „protagonists“ being transmitted live from Berlin, prompted through earphones, and simultaneously translated by the voters - including the heckling, voting, and applause of the absent pirate copied representatives. The plays **CHINCILLA ARSEHOLE**, **eyey** (2020), **SITUATION ROOMS** (2014), **WALLENSTEIN** (2006) and **DEADLINE** (2004) were invited to the Berliner Theatertreffen. Rimini Protokoll has received, among others, the Mülheimer Dramatikerpreis, the German theater award Faust, the Grand Prix Theater of the Swiss Federal Office of Culture, the European Theater Award, the Silver Lion of the Venice Theater Biennale, as well as the German Audio Play Award and the Audio Play Award of the War Blind.

DANIEL DORSCH (music) is a sound designer as well as a theater and stage musician. He works with directors such as Hans-Werner Kroesinger, David Marton, Chris Kondek and composed music for Helena Waldmann. He creates sound installations at the Münchner Kammerspiele, the Thalia Theater Hamburg, Théâtre Vidy-Lausanne, Schauspiel Stuttgart, Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin, the HAU Berlin and the Opera Lyon, e.g. He made electronic sound experiments for the Expo in Seville and Hannover, the German Hygiene-Museum Dresden, the Bauhaus Dessau, Humboldt Lab Dahlem and produces sounds for the DB Museum Nuremberg, e.g.

MARC JUNGREITHMEIER (stage, video and lighting design) studied applied theater studies in Giessen and works as a freelance stage, lighting and video designer. He has been involved several times in productions of Rimini Protokoll and developed, among others, the stage design for *QUALITY CONTROL* (2013) and *ADOLF HITLER – MEIN KAMPF VOL. I & II* (2015), as well as the video design for *CHINCHILLA ARSEHOLE, EY EY* (2019). Under the label *STUDIO6* he is also involved in theater and museum work.

IMANUEL SCHIPPER (dramaturgy, research) is a long-time dramaturge for Rimini Protokoll. As a cultural and theater studies scholar, he is concerned with concepts of dramaturgy in digital cultures. He is a researcher at CityScienceLab at HafenCityUniversity Hamburg, working on the integration of VR/AR/XR into co-creative urban planning, and he directs the program *CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE & DRAMATURGY* at the Uniarts Helsinki Art Academy. A comprehensive publication on Rimini Protokoll's work will be released in summer 2021.

LÜDER WILCKE (dramaturgy, research) studied culture and technology with a focus on philosophy and dramaturgy. He assisted in productions at the Deutsches Theater Berlin and the Münchner Kammerspiele, e.g. As a dramaturge, he accompanied work developments by Dimitrij Schaad and productions by Jacqueline Reddington, which were shown at the Münchner Kammerspiele. His stage text "DIESER WELT GEBE ICH ERST GAR NICHT DIE HAND" was premiered in 2017 at the Civica Scuola di Teatro Paolo Grassi in Milan. Since the 2019/2020 season Lüder Wilcke is working at the Staatsschauspiel Dresden, where he has worked with Tobias Rausch and Lilja Rupprecht, among others.

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PHOTO CREDITS

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Translation by Lisa Homburger

