

**RIMINI PROTOKOLL (Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi, Daniel  
Wetzel)**

**CONFERENCE OF THE ABSENT  
CO-READING SCRIPT FOR ENGLISH SPEAKING  
AUDIENCE**

## PROLOGUE

Welcome to the Conference of the Absent.

So nice to see you here!

Until recently, each year thousands of conference guests would gather here in this city. They would come together to present, to debate, to provoke, to make their mark, to discuss research-related questions, to exchange research results, and so on.

For these conferences and conventions, people would travel here from all kinds of different regions and countries, consuming energy and occupying hotel rooms. But: today, you are at the Conference of the Absent.

This conference follows different rules:

Our nine speakers are experts in absence.

They have all experienced absence in various forms in their lives. They're watching this world from very diverse places: Somalia, the US, Israel, the Republic of Sakha, a Greek island and other places in Europe....

But for them to attend this conference, no trips needed to be booked or hotel rooms occupied.

Instead of travelling here or having their digital selves projected onto the stage, they've found other ways of being present here.

It's an experiment.

That could be fun for a while.

But not for longer.

Or how about you fill in for those who are absent?

Fill their empty spots with your presence!

You can use this opportunity to slip into our protagonists' skin.

You won't need to rehearse for this.

You won't need any special skills or acting talent either.

You just need to be able to read, listen and speak.

The absentees have left texts, images and instructions for you to use.

And if you do need help, there'll be people ready to assist you at the tables to the left and right.

In this way, many of you will become representatives of others and make sure that, despite their absence, they will be heard. So we're ready to go.

Are you ready to go?

Our first speaker lives more than 6,000 kilometres from here.  
By reading out her words, you can enable her to speak to us without her having to spend 18 hours on a plane.  
You could help us save 1,500 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> by giving her speech in her place.

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By reading out her words, you can enable her to speak to us without her having to spend 18 hours on a plane.  
You could help us save 1,500 kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> by giving her speech in her place.

So who would like to read first?

We now need a representative for our first speaker.

We now need a representative.

Please give me a sign if you would like to be a representative. Stand up or wave, so I can see you.

We need a representative...

*(potentially, a couple of arguments are played out by the anchor voice until a member of the audience volunteers or, alternatively, the show has come to an end)*

## **SPEAKER 1 - TAMARA**

Before you open the envelope, please confirm that you are not familiar with the play and don't know what text awaits you.  
Is that true?

Good. Then please open the envelope now.  
Take all the time you need to read through the instructions.  
We're happy to watch you prepare the lectern while we, too, prepare ourselves: for a journey to a faraway country.

Dear conference guests.  
Strastvujtie!  
I don't know if I'm pronouncing this correctly.  
It's Russian.

Russian is not my language.

Russian is the language Tamara was raised in.

Tamara – that's not me.

But: now Tamara is speaking through me.

I'm filling the gap left by her absence.

From now on, I will say I when I speak about Tamara.

So: My name is Tamara and I learned Russian in school, because it's the official language spoken in my country.

But today, I will speak English.

Just like the Russian language took over my body when I was a child.

Does my body maybe even look a bit Russian today?

My real body is the body of a woman.

I am 37 years old.

I have a round face.

I wear thin-rimmed glasses.

My eyes are narrow.

My face reminds people in Europe of the indigenous population of North America or people from China.

But I am a Sakha

That's what we call ourselves.

The Russians call us Yakuts.

But I would appreciate it if you called me a Sakha.

Sakha is also the name of our language.

My body today can't play the mouth harp.

Even though the mouth harp is our national instrument.

When I play the mouth harp, it sounds like this:

This is the Republic of Sakha.

Sakha belongs to Russia.

Sakha is situated to the north of Mongolia.

And to the south of...

– nothing at all.

Sakha is pretty much the northernmost place there is.

Sakha is the coldest region in the world.

The average annual temperature in Sakha is around minus 9.5°C.

In January, it can get as cold as minus 60°C .

In Sakha we say: 'God was distributing all the natural resources fairly around the world, but when he reached Sakha, it was so cold, he dropped them all at once.'

This is Mirny. A town of 40,000 inhabitants.  
In 2001, I flew from the capital of Sakha to Mirny for the first time.

I thought the landscape looked like I was flying to Mars.  
Hills were everywhere, and they glowed red.  
The permafrost had thawed. It was September.  
September 11, 2001.

When I arrived, I saw skyscrapers explode on the TV.

They left a hole in the skyline of New York.

In Mirny, we have a different kind of hole  
I went to university in Mirny.

I studied mining engineering with a special focus on processing useful  
mineral resources.

My speciality is diamonds. Diamonds used as gemstones.

Many of them were extracted from that hole.

The hole is so deep, you could more or less fit the whole height of the Twin  
Towers in it – and more than twice as wide.

I can't remember if Mirny smells of sulphur.

When people land in Mirny, they say it does.

But if something has always been there, you stop smelling it.

What if something has always not been there though?

Do you stop missing it?

Every day, up to 10,000 tons of material were extracted from the hole in  
Mirny and transported to one of its factories.

I worked at factory number 3.

A lot of Sakha work at the machines.

But the leading positions are mostly held by Russians.

There are so many cameras it's like a reality show.

To keep you from lining your pockets with diamonds.

The mine is owned by Alrosa.

ALROSA used to be a Soviet company, and so it belonged to the people. A  
socialist mining collective.

I don't know who needed diamonds in socialism.

But the Soviet Union needed foreign currency.

And someone in the West needed diamonds.

Today, ALROSA is an international joint-stock company and owned by its  
shareholders.

The Republic of Sakha owns 33 percent of its shares.  
And 100 percent of the hole.  
To work inside the hole or the factory isn't good for your health.  
I worked a lot of night shifts, from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m.  
That's okay when you're young.

But over time, it damages your health.  
That's why, after six years, I stopped working in Mirny.

When I left on the plane, I saw the red hills glowing again.  
They're excavated material from the hole.

Now I work at the mouth harp museum in Yakutsk, the capital of Sakha.  
My mouth is a hole too. But mine only emits air.  
My mouth turns air into music.  
Then the hole shuts again.  
But the hole in Mirny is still there.

Only the diamonds are gone.

### Transition to speaker 2:

A big thank you to our wonderful representative – you've earned yourself  
a round of applause

That was Tamara from Yakutsk.  
She's left us with some questions to think about:  
What traces does absence leave behind?  
How can this hole be filled?

We'll now move from the hole in the remote Republic of Sakha to a gap in  
someone's consciousness.

A gap that can change a person's entire life.  
Since this speaker can only move with difficulty, we now need someone to  
act as representative.

If you would like to enable this person to speak on this stage through you,  
please give me a sign.

We need a representative for our second speaker.

*(potentially, a couple of arguments are played out by the anchor voice until a member of the audience volunteers or, alternatively, the show has come to an end)*

## a volunteer is found!

Come up to the tech table. Up front on the left. They will equip you.

All the elements you see up here on stage are borrowed. Instead of building a stage set and transporting it here, we made a list of things that could be taken from the prop room and set up on stage:

seating elements, cushions, chairs, a coffee table, a projection screen, a reading stand

plants – real ones if possible

rugs

water bottles and glasses

a pair of reading glasses

a skull from a Hamlet production

a book

some sweets

anything that would make the stage a pleasant place to be.

In the meantime, a second envelope has been placed on the reading stand. Please open this envelope.

Instead of by thousands of kilometres, this speaker is distanced from us by his own body. Thanks to you, he'll be able to bridge this distance.

So let's start.

## **SPEAKER 2 - KARL-HEINZ PANTKE**

Hello.

Do you know what a femtosecond is?

Exactly.

14 zeros behind the decimal point, followed by a one.

One millionth of a billionth of a second.

My name is Karl-Heinz Pantke.

As a physicist, I used to work with semiconductor technology.

A field where processes happen in femtoseconds.

Our fundamental research has sped up the world: inside chips, mobile phones and computers.

I have become very slow since then.

Since a specific point in time, that is: 1995.

If I were to speak to you in person today, this would've already taken 5 minutes.

So it's better for you that I'm not here.

And this way I can even move around with ease.

Not only am I absent, my walker is as well.

Today I can hop and jump like I could 25 years ago.

For a physicist like me, things usually look different from what they are anyway.

Most things we physicists look at aren't even visible to other people.

Like black holes for example. – Until recently, that is.

In April 2019, an image of a black hole was captured for the first time.

In this picture, the black hole has a reddish glow.

But the black hole isn't red of course.

It was just interpreted that way.

Everyone seems to have a different vision of reality.

If the Earth were to be turned into a blackhole, it would be as big as a cherry pit.

What this means is, we're mainly surrounded by: nothing.

How do black holes form?

More and more mass accumulates and then gets so heavy it collapses.



Collapses like a soufflé.  
Well, so goes the theory.

The first evidence of a black hole was indirect.  
When one star dances around another, its orbit offers conclusions as to the other star's mass.  
If it's big and black, we're probably dealing with a black hole.

We postulate its presence.

Just like I'm postulating mine today.

Without actually being here.

I went to a lot of conferences though: Beijing, Atlanta, Paris, Stockholm...

Until 1995.

What happened then was a kind of implosion. But no one heard it but me.  
On a completely average night.

I was sitting on my armchair at home.

And suddenly: a severe stroke.

From one second to the next, my entire body was paralysed.  
I couldn't move a thing. I couldn't even speak or swallow.

Please stand up for a second.

Now, on my signal, please dance for 15 seconds until the music stops. And then stop moving!

Ready?

Don't move.

Now imagine being frozen like this for the rest of your life.

From up here, it's quite a funny picture.

But I was at home all alone.

I was the only one who heard the loud pop.  
Like a black hole inside of me.

Today I know that this condition is called locked-in syndrome.  
I was awake and lucid but as if locked inside my own body.

You can now sit down again.  
Thank you.

I was sitting down too.  
But I was unable to move.

Everything around me very gradually got darker and darker.

A few hours later my girlfriend found me.

But I was unable to communicate with her.  
Inside the ambulance, a paramedic leaned over me and said: 'Dead.'  
I tried to make him know I was there – but not a chance. I felt panic.

It took a few days until I could open and close my eyes again.

If I blink once, it means "Yes", and twice, "No".  
Later the nurses would go through the letters of the alphabet. That way I  
could form words and sentences.

Eventually, I was released from the hospital.  
At home, everything was set up, so that I can now live quite independently.  
With a lot of remote controls.

At this very moment I'm remote-controlling an entire audience!

That's given me some of my life back.

In a moment, could you please – everyone together – stomp your feet  
once.

So that everyone hears the loud pop this time.

So that I can be with you.

If only for one femtosecond.

Ready?

3, 2, 1,....

Transition to speaker 3

Thank you, enjoy your applause!

Through you, Mr Pantke was able to experience a dancing body again.

At least secondhand.

Through his representative.

But anyway, who are we allowed to represent, and how?

For our next conference speaker, we don't need just anyone.

We need someone very specific.

Please stand up if this description fits you:

We need a human being.

Can I ask **all human beings** in the audience to **please stand up**?

Right – who isn't standing yet?

The person we're after needs to be between 25 and 55 years old.

Everyone else, please sit back down.

Okay. The person should own a car.

The person we're looking for should not have white skin. If you do, please sit down.

Interesting. They should not have a university degree. Those of you with a degree, please sit back down

The person we're looking for should own shares.

The person should at some point have run for a political post.

(potentially, some persons are still standing and thus entitled to volunteer. Otherwise the anchor continues:)

Shame, that means we won't be able to hear this speaker...

For the next one, I'd now like to ask all of you who speak for other people or act as representatives for them, either professionally or as volunteers, to stand up.

(They are asked to decide amongst themselves who should act as representative for the next speaker)

Please come up to the tech table. Front left.

The development of the next speaker's text mainly took place over the phone.

When the court was in recess.

And in between reviewing files and talking to defendants.

The envelope is waiting for you on the desk.

So let's start!

### **SPEAKER 3 - STEFAN KIRSCH**

Hello. I am glad to be represented here...

You could call me an expert in the *absence* of justice, but I'm even more of an expert in what we're doing here right now: acting as a representative for someone.

So my stage is the courtroom.

That's where I represent people, in the role of defence lawyer. When I get a new case, it's more or less like here. I receive a sealed envelope. I have no idea what and especially who will await me in there.

Who will I try to understand?

Who will I give my voice to?

Who will I stand up for?

Who will I stand by?

I'll now show you 4 envelopes and will let you choose between 4 cases I worked on or am currently still working on as a defence lawyer.

envelope number 1 is labelled: **DIESEL EMISSIONS SCANDAL**

envelope 2 is labelled: **SREBRENICA MASSACRE**

On envelope number 3 it says: **CUM EX**

On the fourth envelope it says: **GENOCIDE IN RWANDA**

A pretty random mix, you're thinking?

A bit incongruous?

White-collar crime and genocide all in one body – how's that meant to work?

But it does!

Let me tell you how: Actually, my area of expertise is white-collar crimes, like tax fraud, corruption and so on.

But I also put my name down on a list from which defendants in proceedings before the International Criminal Court can choose a defence lawyer to represent them.

And one day, someone actually chose me.

That's how I ended up in the Hague, at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, and later in Arusha, at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. What they handle there is genocide and crimes against humanity.

So, let's proceed to the vote.

I would like to ask you to please conduct the count.

Who would like me to open envelope **number 1: DIESEL EMISSIONS SCANDAL?**

A case of high scale manipulation of emission results.

Show of hands please.

Approximately how many hands?

Okay.

Who is in favour of envelope **number 2: SREBRENICA MASSACRE?**

Show of hands please.

Okay.

Have you counted them?

Thank you. Let's make a mental note of that as well.

Who's in favour of envelope **number 3: CUM EX?**

A case of severe tax evasion.

Interesting.

Are you keeping track?

And who's in favour of envelope **number 4: 'GENOCIDE IN RWANDA'**

All right then. So the result of the vote has been recorded.

Today, I will neither speak for nor about my client, as he will be able to speak for himself.

For this, I'll need your help again:

So can I ask everyone who voted for this case to raise their hand again please.

So who would like to act as representative for the defendant?

Please come and join me on stage.

I will now hand you the envelope with your instructions.

(please scroll to the selected option:)

### **OPTION 1 'DIESEL EMISSIONS SCANDAL'**

Most of us voted for envelope number 1, labelled **DIESEL EMISSIONS SCANDAL**.

An interesting choice!

Most of you will have already heard and read a lot about the case and probably formed an opinion or even passed some kind of judgement.

I have been charged with manipulating emissions test results.

By doing this, we were able to avoid the legally imposed emissions limits.

My colleagues and I programmed the car computers to enable them to detect when the vehicle was undergoing an emissions test.

When being tested, the vehicle operates in a pre-programmed test mode where it produces lower levels of emissions.

But in reality, when driving around the streets of this city, the car operates completely differently, producing more emissions. 'What a vile thing to do! That deserves to be punished!', you say?

You're outraged?

Well, my lawyer says it's not a crime.

He is going to enter the plea 'not guilty'. Because it might've been vile what I did, but since the German lawmakers weren't prepared for this kind of thing, there's no law against it. Nowhere does the law say: cheating on a test is illegal. But according to my lawyer, this is what the law does say: 'There shall be no penalty for acts that were not prohibited by law at the time they were committed.'

No law, no punishment!

*So I'm hoping to be acquitted.*

But my lawyer *here* tells me not to get my hopes up. He says:

Your outrage is so effective that there will be verdicts and punishment, even though, legally, no crime has been committed.

I've often asked myself why he took on my case.

## **OPTION 2: "SREBRENICA MASSACRE"**

Most of us voted for envelope number 2, labelled **SREBRENICA MASSACRE**.

An interesting choice!

I am Momir Nikolić. I am a Bosnian Serb. In 1995, I was Chief of Staff of a military unit in charge of separating the Bosnian Muslim men and women living inside an enclave. I was the one who organised and supervised their separation. All the women over here.

All the men and boys over 13 over there.

That's what I did.

There were about 8,000 over here.

What I didn't know was, what would happen after I'd separated them:

The females were taken away from the enclave on buses.

The 8,000 male were executed.

Let me repeat that: I didn't know anything about this planned massacre.  
And no witnesses could be found to testify that I did.

I assume you were following this on the news?

You say: How is that possible? They must convict him!

*My lawyer here says:*

If a crime cannot be proven, you are innocent and should be acquitted.  
But he also said that the "Srebrenica narrative" was just too big for an acquittal.

So he advised me to confess. To admit I'm guilty, even though he believes me when I say I'm innocent.

So I did.

I was sentenced to 27 years in prison.

In 2014, I was released.

Where do I live now?

I'd rather not say. I'll just say this:

No one there knows about my past.

I've often asked myself why he took on my case.

### **OPTION 3 'CUM EX'**

Most of us voted for envelope number 3, labelled **CUM EX**.

An interesting choice!



I am Nicholas D. - British banker.  
And as a banker, I used to do Cum Ex deals.

Cum Ex is Latin and means 'with – without'

And this is how it works:  
Securities can be sold short.  
This means they're securities you don't really own.  
These securities are not just absent, they belong to someone else.

Since timing and speed are crucial in these transactions, I joined forces with other investors.

Now we were buying and selling the securities amongst ourselves.  
As many as possible and as often as possible.

The joint-stock company then pays the state a tax of 25% of the dividend it has paid its shareholders.

This tax I then go and reclaim. That's common practice.

But my partners and I are accused of not only claiming tax refunds from the state for stocks I actually own, but also for the other ones, the absent ones.

Because you only need to prove that you bought them, not that they're actually there.

And the state paid up.  
447.5 million euros more than it had to.  
What a vile thing to do, you say?

He should be convicted?

My lawyer *here* says it's not a crime.  
He entered a plea of not guilty.

Because it might've been vile what I did, but since the German lawmakers weren't prepared for this kind of thing, there's no law against it.  
According to my lawyer, this is what the law does say: 'There shall be no penalty for acts that were not prohibited by law at the time they were committed.'

No law, no punishment!

So I was hoping to be acquitted.

But my lawyer, told me not to get my hopes up. He said:

Your outrage is so effective that there will be verdicts and punishment, even though, legally, no crime has been committed.

And that's exactly what happened. I was sentenced to one year and ten months on probation.

And to repayments of around 14 million euros...

I'd rather not say where I live now.

I've often asked myself why he took on my case.

#### **OPTION 4 "GENOCIDE IN RWANDA"**

Most of us voted for envelope number 3, labelled **GENOCIDE IN RWANDA**.

An interesting choice!

I am Ephrem Setako.

Lieutenant Colonel.

I belong to the Hutu ethnic group.

Like the majority of people in Rwanda.

In 1994, there were massacres of the Tutsi minority.

Approximately between 800,000 and 1,000,000 people died.

In 2004, I was arrested in the Netherlands and handed over to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha.

I was accused of being responsible for the genocide.

And to have planned, instigated, ordered and participated in the so-called killings in April and May.

I'm sure you followed it on the news back then.

You're outraged?

He deserves to be convicted, you say?

I didn't do any of this though.

I didn't kill a single person, nor did I give out the order to do so.

And there's no one who would testify any different, and say that I was responsible for the massacres.

My lawyer here says:

If a crime cannot be proven, you are innocent in the eyes of the law and should be acquitted.

He entered a plea of not guilty on all charges.

But he also said that society's outrage about the genocide was so big that I would be convicted regardless – no matter what I did or didn't do.

So I received a prison sentence of 25 years, for murder and crimes against humanity.

And I died in prison.

During my time in prison I've often asked myself why he took on my case.

### **Kirsch:**

To that I say: "Defence law, just like any other law practice, is a service."

I just do my best, no matter what acts I'm defending.

And when I feel that I can't do my best, then I don't touch the case.

Thank you for your attention.

### **Transition to speaker 4:**

Thank you for being our defendant's representative today. And thank you for representing a defence lawyer who, despite representing people on a different stage, was able to still be present here today.

And who left us with a question to think about: Who should represent whom?

You'll now have the opportunity to exchange ideas on this with a person near you.

Is there someone you haven't met yet?

Tell each other if and in what way you have ever been represented.

And on what occasion you've used your voice on someone else's behalf.

You're welcome to carry on your conversation after this conference but we now have our next presentation coming up.

We're going to hear about a situation in which the truth would've led to death.

By living a lie, our protagonist and speaker experienced a different kind of truth.

Who of you will represent this man who, at 95 years old, was eager to be present here but isn't currently able to.

Who will enable him to be here today?

Just raise your hand and stand up, so I can see you.

If you feel like telling someone an adventure today, now is your chance...

The following text was written over several decades. That's how long the author waited before he decided to write down his story.

#### **SPEAKER 4 - SALLY PEREL**

Good Day. I'm sending you greetings from a faraway place.

If someone else were to talk about me, my short biography might go something like this:

He was born in 1925 in Peine, Lower Saxony. He had a happy childhood. When he was 8 years old, Hitler rose to power.

His father's reaction to this was: 'That mad man won't last 80 days in power.'

In 1941, he worked as a translator for the Wehrmacht. For the 12th Tank Division.

Here on the photo you see him on the right, sitting on a transporter unit in 1941 near Minsk.

He then went on to work at military food service station 722 in Reval – Tallinn. After that, he was sent back home to the Reich. He was trained in Braunschweig.

Here you see him in the middle at the Academy for Youth Leadership of the Hitler Youth:

Towards the end of the war, he briefly fought as a soldier. He was taken prisoner by the Americans. **His name is Josef Perjell and he usually goes by, Jupp.**

I am going to speak about this Jupp in the third person. Even though I am Jupp too. I am Jupp, and I love him, as you can only love yourself.

But I rarely speak as Jupp. Mostly, I speak *to* Jupp, referring to myself as Sally. Sally is the diminutive form of Salomon. I was born in 1925, in Peine, Lower Saxony. My father was a rabbi, my mother was pragmatic. Eventually, my parents realised that Hitler wasn't going anywhere: Our shoe shop was destroyed and so we fled back to Poland. When Germany invaded Poland, they sent me on to the Soviet Union.

When we said goodbye to each other, my mother said to me: You must live. And my father said: Never forget that you are Jewish. Those sentences went together quite well.

I lived in an orphanage, learned Russian and became a Communist. Two years later, in 1941, I was standing in a village near Minsk. The Germans had broken the pact and attacked Russia. We orphans had fled from the Germans. Now they were going to execute all the Jewish. We were lined up in three queues. I was standing as far to the back as possible, to gain time to think.

To think about my parents:

Mother: You must live. Father: Never forget that you are Jewish. Those sentences didn't go together after all.

I saw the boy in front of me. How he was led behind the trees. Soon another shot would ring out. At that moment, *He* came out of me... My voice said: "I am not a Jew. I am an ethnic German." A Polish boy behind me pointed at me and said:

- "He - Jew!"

And that's when the unimaginable happened: The boy was slapped across the face and I was asked:

- "What is your name?"

And I replied:

- "Josef, Jupp".

- - "Last name?"

I only had one second to reply:

- "Perjell".

Everyone else was shot. I carried on as Jupp.

A young ethnic German, whom the soldiers believed to have saved.

That's why they wanted me to pose on the transporter unit with my proud saviours.

What you don't see in this photo: While it was taken we could hear the shots that were killing all the others.

During the day I was Jupp. At night I was Sally.

During the day I was tough and loyal. At night I was desperate and prayed that I wouldn't talk in my sleep.

During the day I lived: for Führer and Fatherland. I knew: It was my duty to stay healthy. My body belongs to the German people.

But what about the body my parents had given birth to?

Both of my selves knew: My parents were in the ghetto in Łódź.

In 1943, I used my Christmas leave from the Hitlerjugend Academy\_ to go to Łódź.

The one in the middle is speaking to you.

He was with me on the train to Łódź.

I managed to get in front of the ghetto:

“CAREFUL, RISK OF CONTAGIOUS DISEASE. ACCESS PROHIBITED.”

I told them:

- I need to go in there.

The guard said:

- Then take the tram.

Upon entering the ghetto, the tram doors were locked from the outside. The tram carried only Germans, travelling through the ghetto like through some kind of parallel universe. Like an avatar, I looked out the window at the people's misery outside. As secretly as possible, close to breaking.

And every day, I would ride past the house where my mother and my father were still alive. While my comrades sang *Silent Night*, sitting together with their families I hoped I could look my parents in the eye just *one last time*.

That they would recognise me. Without showing it publicly.

I was wearing the uniform of their sworn enemy. I had become our own enemy. And I still understand him today – me – and fight with myself – him. It's a dialogue I had until February 2023 in Israel.

I died at the age of 97. I'm not able to see you. But through the eyes of my representative, my avatar, you're being looked at – even when I'm no longer there.

Yoo-hoo! This postcard with a greeting from your city will be sent to the Yad Vashem memorial site, where my memorial is administered. My avatar is going to write the audience's answers to the following question. Raise your hands please: My avatar is going to write down the result on the card. Who of you knows a person who has been or is currently affected by antisemitism? – Raise your hands, please!

Thank you. Schalom.

### Transition to speaker 5:

The representative is now writing the result of today's survey on the postcard – and a personal greeting from avatar to avatar.

Thank you for this representation of Sally Perel!

Now we'll start a new chapter. With new rules.  
For our next round of speakers we're going to need 4 people.  
We need 4 people!

*(potentially, a couple of arguments are played out by the anchor voice until a member of the audience volunteers or, alternatively, the show has come to an end)*

Please come down to the stage to the tech table.

So while you're getting ready, let me tell you who I am. (clears throat) You might already have asked yourself who the person behind my voice is.

I am a composition. Individual letters combined to create single words, words to form sentences and sentences to build whole paragraphs!

They requested a human voice that should be friendly but confident. I am quite flexible when it comes to that. I travel on data streams, speak all existing languages.

Now, I am a playlist.

179 individual tracks that can be played consecutively or skipped.

In some situations I can call upon a number of different statement options - depending on the situation.

Here I am chatting away, while our next representative is all ready to go.

Our next speaker doesn't like to travel.

**SPEAKER 5 - Dr. SACHA TAFELSKI AND PATIENT**



**DOCTOR:** *Hello.* My name is Sascha Tafelski.

I work at the pain clinic at the Charité hospital in Berlin where I deal with phantom pain. Meaning pain in something that isn't there.

I'll be happy to try and help you.

Could you describe whatever it is you are missing?

Can you describe pain?

Pain is most complicated where its cause no longer exists.

I've brought one of my patients with me today.

Don't be afraid.

It won't hurt.

In Germany alone 25,000 patients each year receive an amputation.

Not just a finger or an eye, but a leg or forearm.

When losing a leg, the first thing you feel is a dull pain.

And maybe a burning sensation in your wound. You can feel pressure, a piercing pain.

You are the patient, 4 months after surgery. How are you feeling now?

**PATIENT:**

I can feel a shooting pain, like a shock, like when you stick your fingers into an electrical socket

The pain comes from my leg and shoots down to my foot. The sole of my foot.

**DOCTOR:**

Even though you know that your foot is gone.

Do you always feel the pain?

**PATIENT::**

It's strange. Often I don't feel it over long periods of time. Sometimes it's more like a constant tingling sensation. But then, suddenly, it shoots into my leg.

**DOCTOR:**

And when we examine this, we realise:

It's a kind of pain where your average painkillers don't really work.

So does the pain shoot down from your back?

**PATIENT:**

No, it's really strange: It shoots up from my foot.

**DOCTOR:**

Then I suspect that a nerve bundle has formed in the stump.  
And the information it transmits is incorrectly interpreted by the brain as pain.

So where do you locate your leg now?

**PATIENT:**

Strangely, my foot is angled upwards. Bent backwards and upwards here.

**DOCTOR:**

That would indicate a traumatic amputation.

**PATIENT:**

I had a traffic accident. And the leg I lost still feels like it's twisted backwards.

**DOCTOR:**

It's entirely possible that this was the position last registered by your brain.  
The twisted position was the last one it stored.  
Like a computer screen that freezes when the system crashes.

**PATIENT:**

It also feels like the toes are attached directly to the stump.

**DOCTOR:**

I see. So your brain has shifted the representation of your foot.

That's where scientists begin to argue:  
Is the pain caused by the foot? Or the head?  
Let's assume it's a case of wrong wiring in the brain.  
We could try mirror therapy for that.

How does it work?

When you're in the MRI and told to lift your arm,

in your brain we can see the area for planning light up, then we can see the area for execution light up, and so on.

Now, I want you to only imagine you're lifting your arm.

Your brain will basically perform all the same steps, but still block the actual movement.

Because there is a kind of brake in your brain.

Actually, your brain is constantly planning movements it never carries out.

Only when deactivating this brake will your arm actually move.

### **DOCTOR:**

That's where mirror therapy comes in:

Now please take the mirror.

The stump of the amputated leg will now disappear behind the mirror.

Now move your other leg to make it look in the mirror as if you're moving the missing leg.

Give it a try.

Go ahead.

Very good. Keep going.

Now keep doing this for several hours. And keep watching yourself in the mirror while you do it.

Again and again.

If you carry on like this over several weeks you'll be able to convince your brain that your leg isn't twisted.

Even though it's not even there.

By the way, sometimes it helps if you take the prosthesis into bed with you before you put it on.

To create a physical substitute.

Just like I did.

Or did you miss me at all?

I assume you didn't.

Because I was here, wasn't I.

## Transition to speaker 6:

Thank you

So basically, presence mainly registers in our neurons.

So how can we be sure that we are actually present?

And how do others know who we are when we are present?

That's what our next piece looks at – delivered by an expert in being someone else.

Our representative is all set.

How to represent someone who plays both sides – and officially doesn't even exist?

## SPEAKER 6 - ANONYMOUS

Hello, I'm not allowed to tell you my name. You'll learn the reason for this later.

I was born in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. I'm 36 years old and can hardly remember the peaceful times. There's been civil war in Somalia since I was a schoolboy.

This is what Mogadishu sounds like:

*(sounds in the dark)*

Grenades, car bombs, gunshots...

No foreigner would voluntarily want to live in Somalia.

I am happy to inhabit someone else's skin today.

For three years, someone else inhabited mine.

For three years, I was the eyes and ears of a Western intelligence service.

To you that might sound like something out of James Bond.

For me it sounds like being scared: for my kids, my wife, myself.

Up here on stage, my body only risks saying something the wrong way.

Back there I risked my life.

I was a military officer in the Somali Army. Like my father, who was a soldier before me. Almost exactly 10 years ago, he went off on a mission against the terror militia al-Shabaab.

He was shot dead. It was why I decided to become a soldier too.

Yes, I wanted revenge.

But I also wanted the shooting in my country to finally end.

In the army, I quickly rose through the ranks. And yes, I also killed people. If you're surrounded by islamist extremists and gangs of criminals, you have to kill if you don't want to be killed yourself.

That's the route to the Suez Canal.  
Ships on the way to Europe have to pass through it.

The West only began to show an interest in us when the pirates started to threaten its commercial ships.

But the West was also my hope.

After a few years in the army I knew: only someone from outside the country could cut the Gordian knot.

Our government was corrupt, my army was corrupt, and eventually I was as well.

I was the commander of a unit that was in charge of securing the airport.

We checked people's passports at desks like this one.

Whoever voluntarily came to Mogadishu had money. And they knew that we knew. There were dollar bills hidden in the passports we checked. Ten dollars, twenty dollars, or fifty...

About three years ago I found 500 dollars inside the passport of an Italian diplomat.

The Italian was at least 20 years older than me very polite, almost reserved.

He told me he was working for the UN. And then, in a quiet calm voice, he said I could as well.

They wanted information about the airport.

The UN wanted to expand it as a base for development projects.

But apparently, the Somali government wasn't very cooperative. Which is why he was interested in collaborating with an expert like me.

For a fee, of course.

After a few months it became clear that my new friend was working for the Italian intelligence agency – which meant I was too.

The Italian knew I'd been left with no choice. He wanted more and more information.

He wanted passenger lists, flight documents.... Planes from the Gulf states and China were of special interest to him.

How did our generals assess the security situation?

What about food supplies, ammunition, petrol? Were there any Islamist fighters inside our government forces? Who inside the military leadership was known to be corrupt?

Many of his questions were easy to answer. But for some I had to go to our headquarters. Asking a lot of questions in Mogadishu attracts attention though. I should've known.

We'd meet up once a month.

I received a lot of money. Mostly 100 dollars, sometimes even 200. He asked me about my sons and my wife. On their birthdays he'd give me 50 dollars extra.

Once he gave me an address in Kenya.

I'd been told that I should report to someone in the port city of Mombasa if I needed to get out.

Last October, the time had come. A friend tipped me off that they were planning my arrest. .

Only a few hours later my family and I were on our way to the port. The trip to Mombasa cost 2,000 dollars.

Once we'd arrived, everything went very quickly: to Nairobi by car and then on to Rome by plane.

Rome is where we live now. In a suburb. With new passports. But without new friends.

I'm not just struggling to learn the language, I'm struggling with everything. I feel so empty

As if the Italian had sucked all the information out of me and left behind an empty shell.

But the most important thing is that we're safe.

When I wake up each morning, I'm happy to hear the street noises outside.

No gunshots, no grenades.

I can't forget the sound of the explosions though. That's why I'm here today looking like a simultaneous interpreter. But these are my words, my memories. 'Talking about it helps', they say.

Well, thank you for helping me with that today.

**Thank you for helping us understand Somalia a bit better!**

Stop! Wait! Don't clap yet.

Did you believe me?

In the intelligence service I learned to lie.

So my story, unlike everyone else's here at this conference, is not entirely true.

It was invented for you though, by the ex-president of the BND, Germany's Federal Intelligence Service: Gerhard Schindler.

Yet another person standing in my skin today.

Someone who knows what they're talking about.

So when you step out into the street after the show, pay attention to the noise and remember me, your ears in Mogadishu .

**Transition to speaker 7:**

**Thank you!**

**So who can represent us in places where we don't want to be?**

**And is there anywhere you would like to be but for some reason can't go?**

**Gerhard Schindler likes to spend his holidays on a Greek island.**

**For our next round of speakers, we already have a representative waiting and ready to go. We still need 2 more representatives though. We're now going to need two more people.**

**I see we'll be able to carry on.**

**SPEAKER 7 - BAHÁTI**

When was the last time you were near the sea? What do you think about

when you look out at the ocean? When you're at the beach? The waves constantly washing up on the shores. On and on... And our lives – so short?

The next piece was developed out of dialogue and recordings left on a messenger service with someone who's been looking out at the sea for months.

She also also made this recording of the sea:

	“The voice you're about to hear”
Thank you for listening to me.	“it's only a cover”
It's better if you don't hear my real voice. What I have learned in <u>Europe</u> :	
	“I've become very insecure”
The less I show myself the better. It's not that I've committed a crime.	
I am at the mercy of people who will determine my fate.	
	“I am at your mercy”
And nothing must irritate them. I am at the mercy of the Europeans.	



You heard the sound of the sea.	
I recorded it for you. With my mobile phone. Here where I am.	<i>(map of island Samos, Greece)</i>
Now that I'm still here.	
Where I don't want to be! In a long time, I haven't been allowed to leave the island.	
Where I've been stranded.	
	"I won't speak to the authorities again"
Wet and helpless. So how can I be there ...	
...and still be sharing something with you?	
	"Telling them about what happened again is just too painful."
I'll also need a new name.	
	"Baháti"
Baháti	
Baháti means fortune in Swahili.	

I'm not taking any chances...	
...by telling you that I am a young woman.	
Just like the speaker before me, I am from East Africa.	
I'm sure you're able to picture me a little now. Yes: I have brown skin.	
Yes: I like strong colours.	
I can at least show you my hand. This snapshot was taken for this play. .	
This is me.	
And I am also a few things that I still have left.	"the shirt, the pants, the sneakers"
The things I had on me when I washed up on the shore.	
And a few photos of my people back home.	"I'll never be able to see them again"
Corroded by the sea water. I am also absent because I disappeared..	
...in a big crowd of people.	

<p>And our rights disappeared along with us.</p>	
	<p>“No one shall be subjected to degrading treatment” (Art. 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights)</p>
<p>On the island, they're violated every day.</p>	
<p>I am a number inside a camp</p>	<p>“No one shall be discriminated against by any public authority” (Protocol Nr. 12, Art. 1, Para. 2)</p>
<p>and on handwritten lists.</p>	
<p>I am absent, because I don't live,</p>	
<p>I merely survive.</p>	<p>“Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own. (Protocol Nr. 4, Art. 2, Para. 2)”</p>
<p>You can also be absent from where you are. By not being in the right place.</p>	

Where you do nothing but wait.	
One application in December. One reply in October. Papers?	“Should I lose my rights, just because I am not the only one?”
Maybe next year.	
I’ve been waiting for years.	“Every one of us is being abused, just because we are so many“
To have my existence recognised.	
And my rights.	
I spent months waiting in bushes.	“One place in a tent costs €140”
No money – no tent.	(“in the “Jungle” outside the camp”
For a few months, I was given shelter in a house for victims of violence.	
Then, the NGOs were pulled out.	“one doctor for 4,000 people”
I was moved to a container in the camp.	
No electricity no running water,	”4,000 people in a camp built for 400”
no peace	
	“rats everywhere”

<p>The only hope coming from the music out of my headphones</p>	
<p>What would you think about while looking out at the ocean,</p>	
<p>in Greece, on an island?</p>	
	<p>“The lost Odysseus?”</p>
<p>The abduction of Europa? When I look out at the ocean – from where I am –</p>	
<p>beyond it I see my life.</p>	<p>“I cannot see it”</p>
<p>I cannot live it. My life is far removed from where I am.</p>	
	<p>“Like on a stage”</p>
<p>I can imagine it. The last time I was at the theatre was in 2013: With my mother at the National Theatre of Uganda. To see my favourite play of all time.</p>	
<p>It’s about an ancestor of our king,</p>	

<p>in the kingdom of Buganda.</p>	<p>“Kabáka Mukáabya, King of Buganda in Uganda”</p>
<p>King Kabáka Mukáabya behaves like a tyrant. But we, his people, believe in him. Later, he recognises his mistakes.</p>	
<p>He repents, changing his ways and his name.</p>	
<p>Kabáka Mukáabya becomes.</p>	
	<p>“Mukáabya becomes Mutesa”</p>
<p>Kabáka Mutesa. I love the fact that his people stand by him...</p>	
<p>... despite his cruelty.</p>	
<p>And that this enables him to change.</p>	<p>“Presentation:”</p>
<p>That’s why I believe in our kings.</p>	
<p>And in the power of the theatre. I can’t see your theatre</p>	
<p>But I wanted you to see what I believe in for 2 minutes:</p>	

I believe in change.	
I don't know what it's going to look like.	
But that's not what matters.	
Soon I hope to experience this scene in real life.	

### Transition to speaker 8:

Our next piece is an artistic feat: The speaker has been practicing her absence many hours each day.

Has practiced to not be present but to still exist.

### SPEAKER 8 - SUTZANNA RANDALL

I am not going to be here.

For 10 days, I am not going to be here.

For 10 days, I am going to be absent from this planet.

For 10 days, I am going to look down on the earth – from 400 km away.

I am going to be in space. Up there.

I've always wanted to be there – for as long as I can remember.

Even though I had no idea what to expect up there.

And what it would be like not to be here – but there.

And what it would feel like to be back here – after being there – meaning away.

I'm being trained for this right now: for not being here.

My name is Suzanna Randall.

I was born in Cologne, 10 years after the first human being set foot on the moon.

I became an astrophysicist because I was excited by the idea that something existed outside the earth, that we could actually leave our planet.

That idea fascinated me. That there is a finiteness to every state.

I'm still watching space from the earth but soon I'll turn my gaze around.

And ask:

Where do we come from?

And

Where are we going?

The ticket for my trip to absence costs: 50 million euros.

And I think: It's worth it.

Because my time in space will be used to research the effects being absent from Earth has on the body.

Meaning: the effects it has on the female body.

Because research on that is still very scarce.

So far, almost all space travellers have been men.

Their bodies have been researched.

Now I'll be lending my body to this research in space.

Without gravity.

Without load on the cells.

Certain forces that normally affect the human body are missing in space, and because of this weightlessness the ageing process quickens.

That is what they're going to study on me:

Bone loss, loss of muscles

– at the space station they'll be able to watch this in fast-motion.

In a few weeks there, the body will live through the same processes that, on Earth, would take years to live through.

In space, I'm going to learn to look beyond the horizon. Not just to our own planet but beyond the earth's orbit into the heart of our solar system, and into the vastness of space and back at my own finiteness...

Into nothingness...

Transition to speaker 9:

Thank you!



Humans have spread to the most remote corners of this planet and even beyond.

They're present: everywhere. Dominating. Intervening. Modifying. Our next speaker has a mission.

He also owns a forest.

This forest was bought by his grandfather in the 1960s. Then he inherited it and did: nothing!

More and more animals began to populate his forest: black bears and racoons, an opossum, moose and red deer, and even a family of mountain lions live in his forest.

Today, when he, as a human being, goes into his forest, to guarantee his own safety, he announces his arrival by blowing into a whistle.

## **SPEAKER 9 - LES U KNIGHT**

Thank you for inviting me to this conference.

I'm excited to be able to speak to you today without having to get on a plane. Because for years, I've turned down invitations like this one.

Instead, every Saturday you'll find me at the local farmer's market in Portland where the farmers sell their products: tomatoes, cabbage, eggs, cheese, meat.

And me, I stand there with a table full of flyers and stickers.

With a banner above my heads that reads:

**'Thank you for not breeding'**

I might as well have written: **'Stop reproducing, now!!!'**

But inconvenient truths are best sold with a pinch of humour.

My name is Les Knight.  
How should you picture me?  
I am male.  
I have white skin.  
And grey hair.

And I believe that in today's world procreation is morally equivalent to selling a cabin on a sinking ship.

And now I'd like to know how I should picture you.

And how many of you have already procreated.  
A show of hands please:

Who has one biological child?

And who has even more than one biological child?

There we have it. That's quite a lot of children. Who, in turn, will also procreate and spread out. Which is why I've formed a movement to convince as many people as possible to voluntarily stop reproducing. Because the planet is suffering just because we exist.

We should disappear – a gentle departure.

I like to compare it to a company that doesn't fire its people – but doesn't hire anyone new either.

We humans are causing the extinction of hundreds of thousands of other species.

We are deadly to this planet.

Let's picture this kind of fading-out for a minute:

Isn't that a beautiful image?

Once we're gone, the ecosystem will quickly recover, and after a few years, nature – even in a space like this – would gradually take over again.

Some of the walls would soon have cracks in them, and here and there, plants and animals would be taking up residence.

To tell you how my revelation came about, I need to go way back:

I was born in a small desert town in the US as part of the postwar baby boom generation.

At some point, I came across the book *Population Bomb*.

In very vivid terms, it describes how overpopulation will lead to food shortages, famines, and natural disasters.

So I joined the 'Zero Population Growth' movement.

Our slogan: 'Stop at Two'.

But it doesn't take a whole lot of math to realise that this process would take far too long.

That's how I came to the conclusion that what we needed to do was to radically and instantly stop our constant production of new human beings.

'You go first!', people would often sneer.

So when I was 25, I wanted to show everyone how serious I was. A teaching hospital needed volunteers to train their students. So I let a medical student perform a vasectomy on me.

It was a success!

'OK, so I did it!'

'Your turn now!' – I've been telling them ever since.

I also founded the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement!

'Every US citizen not conceived preserves 15 football fields worth of potential living space for about 80 years', I've been explaining to my listeners.

I used to accept every conference invitation I would get. Often they'd book me to play the crazy part.

That didn't bother me much though.

The way I saw it: Any public stage is good – to promote my ideas!

What I most enjoyed was the Q&A sessions after my speeches.

That's why I'd now like to start a Q&A round.

Some of you were given envelopes on your way in. Please open them now.

Who has envelope number one?

Great, you do – so please ask your question:

**QUESTION 1 FROM THE AUDIENCE: What you're saying is all very negative. I get the feeling you just don't like children. Might that be true?**

Yes –

– people often suspect that I'm just plain negative and don't like kids.

But I can assure you: I love kids, as much as anyone. 'Having kids' isn't actually the problem. But those who imagine having a child tend to forget that they're actually producing a new human being, who, in a few years' time, will be an adult!

So, the decision to prevent a new human being from being made isn't born out of a negative attitude towards children, but out of a completely positive, life-affirming one!

Next question please. Who has envelope number 2?

You. Go ahead.

**QUESTION 2: I wonder if procreation isn't a kind of human instinct?**

Is it a human instinct to procreate?

I would describe it like this: Humans, like all other creatures, follow instincts that lead to reproduction.

Let's be honest though: What we mainly want isn't to have children but to have sex.

So you could compare our "reproductive instinct" to the instinct of a squirrel to plant trees:

What drives the squirrel is the urge to store food. The fact that the nuts he

hides sometimes grow into trees is just a natural result of his actions but not *why* he does it.

And why else do we stop making babies once we've made as many as fit our plans?

If you think about how often our species feels the urge to have sex, it's quite likely that the main goal behind human sexuality isn't reproduction but pair-bonding.

We have more questions. Who has envelope number 3?

Go ahead.

**QUESTION 3: Have you ever thought about who's going to take care of the elderly and sick if there are no younger people left?**

Many people voice that fear. Who's going to take care of the elderly and sick if procreation stops?

That's true, there'll be no one to look after us. That's indeed part of the fade-out process.

Our lives won't be prolonged.

But our extinction will give other species the chance to recover.

That's the price we pay.

After the Q&A or during a coffee break, a lot of people come up to me with additional questions. For example:

**We already have children, can we still join your movement?**

To which I reply:

You have no reason to feel guilty.

Being part of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement has little to do with the past.

It's about the future of this planet and everyone willing to preserve it.

So you're welcome to join.

Occasionally, someone will come up to me and i'm say:

'About 15 years ago, I heard you speak at an event and afterwards

decided I wanted to be sterilised.'

It really fills me with joy that, thanks to my efforts, there are some people who never came to exist – who will never be here.

Dear conference guests. You have already gotten used to my voice. The voice I use to represent Les Knight as best as I can.

But now you'll get to hear the original.

Les Knight sent you some words of greeting so that, for a moment, we'll be able to hear his voice.

Roll tape please!

(Les U Knight speaks from the video:)

"Hello to all the participants present in the conference of the absent, this is Les Knight saying: I don't see how the intentional creation of one more of us by anyone, anywhere can be justified, today. Thank you for not breeding - more than you already have...and the last one to go, would turn off the lights"

A Fade-Out.

Thank you very much. An applause for the representative of Les Knight!

What if you hadn't been here tonight?

Would you have missed each other?

Who would have represented you?

We heard nine speakers.

And have now reached the end of this conference.

It started out as a conference of the absent and soon became a conference of the present!

You helped make a play out of a playlist

May I ask all of today's representatives to join me up on stage again?

Our representative for Tamara from the Republic of Sakha.

Our representative for Karl-Heinz Pantke from Berlin.

Our representative for the defence lawyer Stefan Kirsch from Frankfurt and his client's representative.

The representative for Sally Perel from Tel Aviv.

Our representative for Sascha Tafelski from the Charité hospital in Berlin as well as his PATIENT:'s representative.

Our representative for the anonymous intelligence asset from Somalia.

Both representatives for Baháti from East Africa, currently still on Samos.

And our representative for Suzanna Randall, who's almost on her way to space now.

Also, our representative for Les U. Knight from Portland, in the US, and the persons who asked him questions..

A round of applause for our entire audience and for everyone here at the theatre who helped host this conference.

**(music plays, end of show)**

And that was now track 114. That's all there is to it.