

How to write about an event I wasn't at? Or was I? My words were audible, it seems, recorded earlier and transmitted by another. She was taking my place, filling my seat at K. Her task was to represent me and make my contributions at the conference. So my voice was there, but does that mean I was present?

I spent the day of K like any other day. An email arrived, it was the other asking me to approve our collective words she would scribble on the paper table cloth of K.

We had created a collective identity: I had given away my name for the other to perform, my words for her to carry around the room. She had given me the opportunity to emancipate myself from my body, to take part in an event in which I wasn't able to be bodily present.

The ability to speak would be a shared one. It would be one that would give both of us the ability to take part in the conference. Equipped with insights on the proceedings of K, I had attempted to foresee the audience and the surroundings of my social performance. I tried to live through the experience beforehand, in order to equip the other with recordings of words I believed were necessary for her to exist in this social situation in which she would play my part. For both of us those words would be the only way of making ourselves heard in the social interaction.

By substituting her body for mine and my voice for hers, we created an artificial identity, which would allow me to overcome the geographical distance lying between me and the location of K. Our intention was to create a double presence, a "joined intelligence", one that would combine the choice of sentences prepared by one individual pre-conference and triggered by the other during the course of the event.

Through bursting open the connection between the speaker and the spoken by interposing another person, the other became more than a mere placeholder. My words were hers to use. Even though it was my voice, I had to rely on the other's choice to trigger it. Although I was the author of the words, I gave away the control over their use and their meaning in a conversational context. Upon completion of the recording, it was no longer possible to adapt my language to the social context of K. The recorded words were to be used freely by the other, they could no longer be retracted. What would she do? Would she take me, her other, into account? I was dependant on her to make my words empathic.

On the day of K both of us faced restrictions: I was not able to react to the social situation being experienced by my other, while she was only able to react within the limits set by my pre-selected and recorded means of expression. In order for our shared identity to function, we both had to disregard our singular identities and face the possibility of not being perceived as a self-identical person.

So, was I actually present through the other or did our performance result in neither of us being truly present?

From my perspective there is no definitive answer to this question. For some of the participants the identity performed was a mere irritation, not possible to interact with, while others tested the possibility of social engagement. Yet another participant remarked: 'What a shame...now neither of you was there.'