

INTERVIEW ([HTTPS://BOMBMAGAZINE.ORG/FORMAT/INTERVIEW/](https://bombmagazine.org/format/interview/))

## Helgard Haug by Evan Hill

The founder of Rimini Protokoll reckons with world-changing disappearances in a new performance.

SEPTEMBER 19, 2025



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night1.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night1.jpg))

Performance still from Helgard Haug, *All Right. Good Night.*, 2025. Photo by Merlin Nadj-Torma.

*All Right. Good Night.* (2025) is one of the most humane meditations on processing a loved one's disappearance I've encountered. I've long admired Helgard Haug's work with Rimini Protokoll, whose paradigm-shifting theater has framed real people like you and me, experts of all kinds, as its protagonists and performers. But in *All Right. Good Night.*, Haug interrogates her own experience of losing her father to dementia. Those eight years of her life overlap with the unresolved disappearance of those aboard the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370. Though palpably absent from the stage, Haug's voice narrates both stories in oscillation, appearing as projected language read by us. We reanimate her probing memories to a requiem played by the Zafraan Ensemble. Eliding live and recorded sources of sound, their music hauntingly attunes us to the mysterious entanglement of the seen and the unseen. The musicians eventually fill the empty stage with sand, transforming it into an ocean shore where these two stories resonate with each other and within us in unpredictable, unspeakable ways. Helgard's work reminds us that though each loss is singular and uniquely perplexing, the universal need for resolution binds us together at the edge of unknown depths, where our questions ring out in collective fragility. In attending to each other's search for answers, life is somehow affirmed between us. Now, Helgard speaks.

### **Evan Hill**

In the piece, you contemplate the fifty-seven million people in the world who live with dementia.

### **Helgard Haug**

A monstrous number.

### **EH**

Your personal story is a very global one. Despite its enormity, though, dementia remains a rather invisible issue.

### **HH**

As soon as you start sharing experiences about dementia, people relate their own stories. It's not a private problem, but it often stays hidden. We hide people affected with dementia, along with our emotions and anxieties. It's frightening. Imagine losing yourself, the capacity to think, and your memories. You don't recognize your closest friends. What if we put dementia out in the open? Learned how to live with the confusion, the weakness, and our own helplessness?



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night2.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night2.jpg))

Performance still from Helgard Haug, *All Right. Good Night.*, 2025. Photo by Merlin Nadj-Torma.

**EH**

When did you realize that your experience with your father's dementia and the disappearance of Malaysian flight MH370 had this resonance?

**HH**

The composer Barbara Morgenstern and I had planned to collaborate on a new performance about disappearance and absence. Coming from a documentary theater practice, I begin with research, usually by interviewing professionals. I spoke with biologists about vanishing populations of insects, police officers about missing persons, and linguists about endangered languages. Then, in this process, the story of the vanished Boeing stuck with me. I tried to talk to family members who lost relatives on the plane, but as the story grew, it felt wrong to ask people still involved in this tragedy to open this wound onstage. It's so emotional. The case is still not solved. The psychologist Pauline Boss refers to "ambiguous loss." It happens when there's hope that a missing person is still alive, as in the case of MH370. The person who has vanished is physically absent but psychologically present, because you aren't certain that they're really gone. Or it happens when someone is physically there with you but psychologically absent, as with dementia. I realized that losing my father when he started to get dementia was a similar experience because in both cases there is no resolution. No definite point at which to start or end the grieving process. I started to explore these stories in parallel as they unfold over eight years between 2014 and 2021.

**“It is not only about losing but also about finding new ways.”**

— Helgard Haug

**EH**

In the performance, we experience these narratives through the act of reading. We're confronted with the stage as a place of absence. Your father and the passengers are absent. You, the narrator, are absent. You don't try to represent yourself or the families. No actors stand in as surrogates. The absence is presented, framed as present.

**HH**

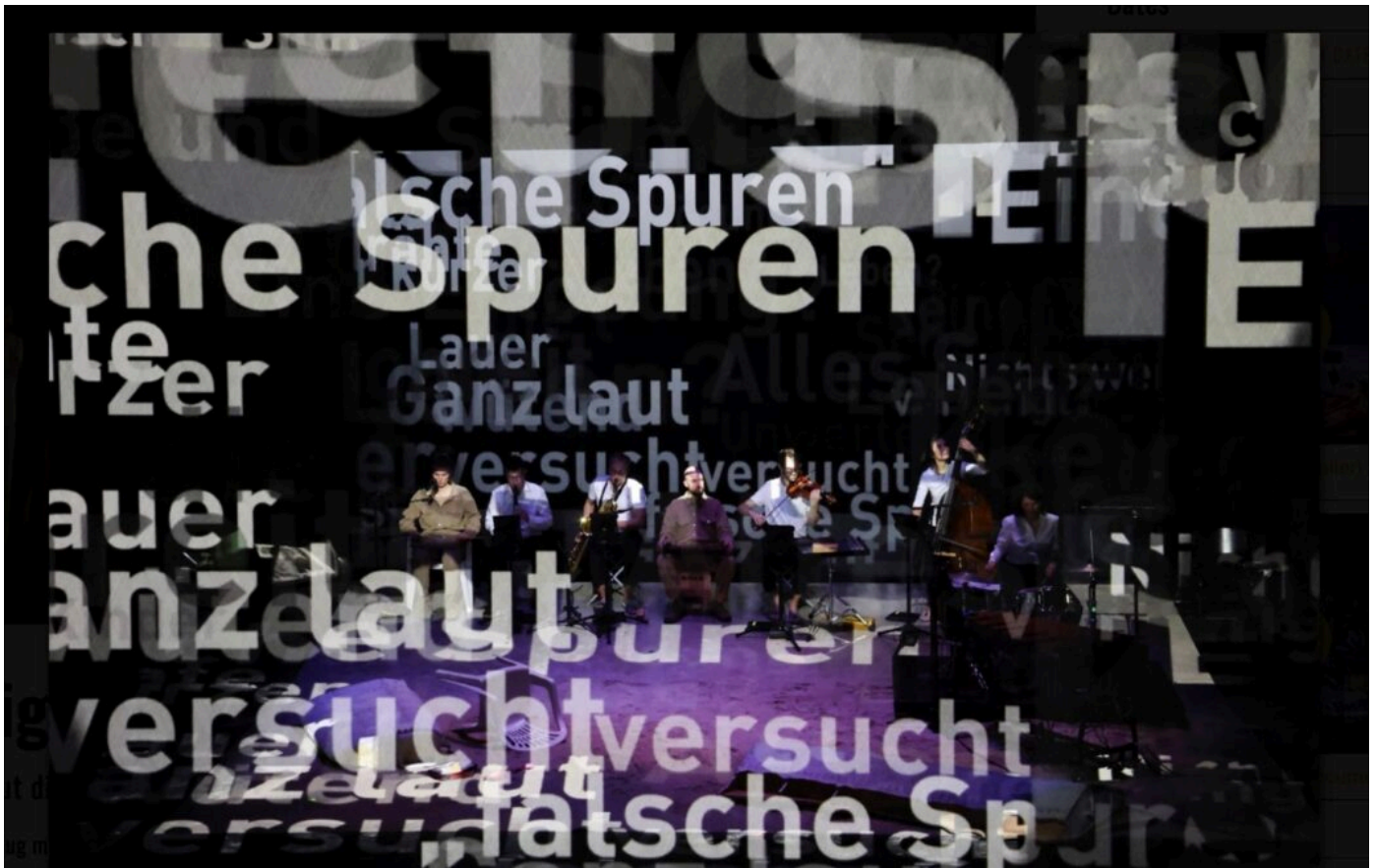
We project the text onto a semi-transparent gauze, giving the impression that the text is hovering overhead. I knew from my previous work that I wanted to keep experimenting with projected words, sound, and a stage marked by absence. Normally, it would be a real person on stage, an expert of some kind. My work with Rimini Protokoll stands for the idea: This is real. This is not an actor acting. This is a real person, a true story. But it was impossible for me to do it, even though it's my story. I couldn't ask the passengers' families, either. Having the audience read was a way for them to slip into this role. It solved the problem of who tells this story.

**EH**

For much of history, reading and music have been regarded as spiritual practices, ways of communing with the invisible: the divine, the dead, the past, and hidden realities. In these contemplative acts, we are somehow changed. Did you intend this as a ritual of this sort?

**HH**

Maybe a requiem. I'm very interested in rituals. I know you are, too. I'm fascinated by the question of how we can take the audience seriously and say, I'm inviting you to be part of this. You're not just a consumer. We are going on a journey together. We are creating this together.



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night3.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night3.jpg))

Performance still from Helgard Haug, *All Right. Good Night.*, 2025. Photo by Merlin Nadj-Torma.

**EH**

By reading, I did feel cast as Helgard going through her father's writings, or as a passenger's relative desperately surveying the news and government reports for information. Shifting between these two narratives, we never know what the next sentence will reveal or obscure, whose story we will suddenly be in. That indeterminacy keeps us in a state of anticipation, perhaps offering us a small insight into how a survivor might read.

**HH**

True. We wait for the next message. The next sign. This collective reading creates a fascinating atmosphere in the auditorium. You must really concentrate, stay active and involved. You can't be a passive audience member who dozes off until the actors start shouting.

**EH**

Under the music's influence, the effect of reading is counterintuitively dramatic. Sometimes the sentences quicken our thoughts; sometimes they arrive slowly, surrounded by silence. I've never experienced reading in this way. It felt like the rhythm of thinking.

**HH**



Time is very important for this play, especially this feeling of looping: looping in variations, stretching time, and accelerating again. Dementia is torturous, and so is the experience of survivors searching for answers, each looping in the same situation. We worked very precisely on the rhythms of the music and projection. The technical elements demanded that I produce very concise sentences, with short words, for the audience's reading experience. One sentence on one slide. The rhythms created by projecting the text influenced the music, and vice versa.

## EH

That makes sense because even though these are such heightened topics, you exercise great restraint in the telling. There's no melodrama, but your voice remains open and reflective. It creates this poignant space for the audience to feel.

## HH

I tried to balance my personal experience with a more distant perspective. I wanted to offer a view into a process of confronting uncertainty. I never use names. I write about "a father" and "a daughter." It could be your father. You could be the person experiencing this. It could be your relative who vanished without explanation. I wanted the audience to connect this to their own experience. And where the text is seeking distance, the music invites you to feel all these emotions. This is a very emotional piece, but there's no vampirism of other people's emotions. Either your emotions will surface, or they won't. Many families of the plane victims have been used by the media as a big story that sells because it is so melodramatic.



([https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/\\_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night4.jpg](https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Helgard-Haug-All-Right-Good-Night4.jpg))

Performance still from Helgard Haug, *All Right, Good Night*, 2025. Photo by Merlin Nadj-Torma.

**EH**

The way you structure these narrative tatters reflects the fragmentary nature of both evidence and memory. Like the detritus of the plane crash washing ashore or the scattered thoughts of someone with dementia.

**HH**

I'm really trying to get confused, to explore contradictions, the ebbs and flows in the search for answers, and the way you create hope. My intention is not to find "the truth." Right? Maybe I just tried to document the confusion.

**EH**

To stay with it.

**HH**

Yeah. It's really an anti-dramaturgy because we know the end of both stories. We know there is no hope for a person with dementia. You can slow the process, but you can't reverse it. And we know that there is no happy ending with MH370. The plane has never been found.

**EH**

Was there a moment with your father that you felt you should put hope away or transform it into something else?

**HH**

You realize it's not about intellectual exchange anymore, and you find new ways to communicate. We hold hands, press them, and there is some kind of exchange. There's a word. A signal. An answer. A conversation takes place on a completely different level. It is not only about losing but also about finding new ways.

All Right. Good Night. *makes its North American premiere at [NYU Skirball](https://nyuskirball.org/events/all-right-good-night/) (<https://nyuskirball.org/events/all-right-good-night/>) from September 25 through 27.*

**Support BOMB's mission to deliver the artist's voice.**

DONATE (/DONATE)

JOIN/SUBSCRIBE (/MEMBERSHIP)

Evan is a dramaturg, critic, editor, playwright, researcher, and educator. He holds an MFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from Yale School of Drama, where is completing his DFA.

---

**MORE**

Ensemble Theater (<https://bombmagazine.org/topics/ensemble-theater/>)

Music Scores (<https://bombmagazine.org/topics/music-scores/>)

Playwriting (<https://bombmagazine.org/topics/playwriting/>)