

Coming Together, Coming Apart

A Soundtrack for the Journey to an Assembly

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There is no assembly without the journeys that all participants have to undertake to get there. These journeys are the precondition of any assembly, yet they are usually not considered part of the assembly itself. The journey to the assembly, then, is an ideal occasion to ask how the assembly is framed, or, put differently: when it begins and ends, how it relates to the rest of the world and who will actually be able to participate.

To this end, we have made a soundtrack for the journey to an assembly, on the occasion of *The Art of Being Many*, and thus with a specific context in mind, but with the intention of keeping it open for journeys to and from other assemblies¹. Since the journeys of different people will necessarily be different, we have decided to make different tracks available to be listened to in different moments on the journey rather than one continuous soundtrack. There are three tracks for the way to the assembly and one for the journey back. The music on the tracks was provided by Umherschweifende Produzenten, the soundtrack was recorded and mixed at Alien Studios in Hamburg by Ronnie Henseler, and all tracks are available for download at the-art-of-being-many.net.

1 Because all these assemblies and journeys will be different, some things will make more or less sense in different contexts, and some assumptions will be wrong. For instance, the whole format assumes a listener travelling with relative ease, having some sort of mobile device ready to use, and with nothing more pressing to do than listen to these tracks on her way.

As performance makers, we have become increasingly concerned about performance's obsession with the present, with notions such as experience, immediacy, liveness or eventhood – because they impose a logic of exclusivity on performance, a diktat of having to be there, which in turn excludes anyone who, for whatever reason (because, for instance, they had other commitments or had not been born yet), could not make it to a performance, or at least deems their access to a performance secondary or inferior. We know that the live moment is unlike any other possible encounter with the work – we love being there – but to privilege it over other kinds of encounters perpetuates this logic of exclusivity. Hence, the different ways in which performance transgresses or exceeds its own eventhood have been an important focus of our work in recent years. *The Art of Being Many* seemed an interesting context to continue this investigation into an *art of not being there* and thus into the different ways in which performance circulates beyond the frame of the singular event – via documentation, hearsay, the journeys to and back from the event, or in a book – here, we have decided to include excerpts from the texts we have written for all four tracks.

Being there, of course, is a constitutive element of any assembly, not just the assemblies of theatre and performance. And this is especially true for the assemblies that informed and motivated *The Art of Being Many*, the practices of assembling, of occupying, of deliberating that real democracy movements across the world introduced and adopted as ways of enacting alternatives to representative democracy. The idea behind this soundtrack for the journey to an assembly is not a questioning of such practices; it is merely an attempt to highlight the importance of forms of participation and circulation that extend the spatio-temporal frame of the singular event.

Maybe it helps to think of this as a rehearsal: the repetition of something that has not yet happened.

TRACK 1 > A BLIND DATE WITH THE MANY

a track to be listened to just as you are about to step out onto the street to start your journey to the assembly

One. Two. One. Two. Check Check.

Hi. Hello. Hello, wherever you are. This is a track to be listened to just as you are about to start your journey to the assembly. Just before you step out onto the street. Soon, you will be many. Soon, you will come together. Soon, you will meet. Democracy is like a blind date: You just don't know who will turn up. Are you ready? Are you ready for your blind date with the many?

One. Two. One. Two. T minus 1. Two. One. Zero. One Zero.

It begins now with a first step. It begins now with the word now. It begins with an exclamation mark marking the end of the phrase: Let it begin! Let it begin exclamation mark. It begins now with a beat. It begins before it begins with you walking. Off you go. Have a safe journey!

On a journey, the future is always elsewhere. On a journey to the assembly, the future is other people. Whenever an assembly begins, people have already assembled. Every assembly is the destination of many journeys. This is not a journey of self-discovery. You will not be by yourself for much longer. Soon, you will be many. Off you go. And take care!

You are already many, but soon, you will meet. Democracy is like a blind date: You know where you are going, but you don't know where you're gonna end up. Off you go to your blind date. And good luck!

Did you bring the right shoes? Will they take you where you need to be? What are these boots made for? Come together, right now. But right now, you are somewhere else. Coming together, walking towards right now. Right now. Soon, it will be right now. Soon, you will have come together. Soon, you will have assembled. It has begun before it has begun with you going on a journey. Off you went.

These are one of many steps. This is one of many journeys. This is one of many streets. What are these streets made for? Will they take you where you need to be?

Look back at what you are leaving behind. But keep going. Listen and keep going.

One two. One two steps. One two. One, two, three. One, two, three steps. Come together, right now. Right now.

TRACK 2 > THE ASSEMBLY of ABSENTEES

a track to be listened to somewhere along the way to the assembly

One. Two. One Two. One Two Two. Check Check. Mic Check. Welcome back. Welcome back on track. This is a track to be listened to somewhere along the way to the assembly. Welcome on track to the assembly. This is a track to be listened to somewhere on the road. Somewhere on the move. Somewhere in transit. Somewhere out there.

Check Check Mic Check. Check Check Reality Check. Check Check Border Check. Test Test Protest.

This is for everyone out there. This is for everyone on the move. This is for everyone on the road. This is for everyone in transit. This is for you. And this is for all of you. The assembly will be one stopping point on many journeys. This is for you and this is for all of you.

This is one of many journeys. This is one of many journeys connecting the assembly to the world out there. The assembly is one of many destinations. The roads that lead you to the assembly also transport tourists migrants commodities commuters.

Check Check Border Check. Test Test Protest. Take one, take two. Take it to the streets. This is the assembly of absentees. Welcome to the assembly of absentees.

Tell somebody where you are going. Invite somebody to come with you to the assembly. Hello, stranger. What's your destination? Hello, fellow traveler. The journey is not the reward. Hello, fellow traveler. This is a blind date. Hello, stranger. Where are we going?

Or: You can still turn around. You can still get off. You can still go somewhere completely different. You can still go off track.

Take one, take two. Take it to the streets. This is the assembly of absentees.

TRACK 3 > RIGHT NOW IS ALMOST HERE

a track to be listened to when you have almost arrived at the assembly

One. Two. One. Two. Three. One. Two. One. Two. Three is a crowd. One. Two. One. Two. Three. Four. This is a track to be listened to when you've almost made it. When you're almost there. Maybe you can count the steps? One. Two. One. Two. Three. Four. Five hundred. How many will there be? Does it matter how many? There is always many more. One, two, three is a crowd.

Think of the people who cannot make it: Their number always exceeds that of any concrete gathering of people, because everybody is invited. Remember that there are different manifestations of the many, that this future gathering is only one of them: There are those who turn up, and those who turn on, those who tune in, those who participate without being there, virtually, in spirit, but for real. Those who can't afford the train fare. Those who have others to care for. Those beyond the border. Those who didn't get the invitation. Those who send their message of solidarity. It's everybody who's here and it's everybody else. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.

You are almost there. You are about to be many. You might have noticed already that there is some ambiguity here in how you are being addressed: it is not always clear if that 'you' means you individually or 'you' in a larger group of people, 'you' in a collective, a public, the *many*. It can mean 'you' who is arriving at this moment, alone perhaps, or it can mean 'you', all the people who are on their way. Let's enjoy this uncertainty for a moment. It will never completely go away. And that's ok. This means you. And this means all of you: participation, not belonging.

It's everybody who's here and it's everybody else. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.

A network of dispersed assemblies, following a rhythm of delays and feedback, deferral and urgency, resonating with each other across the dimensions of time, space, and ideas – it might not all be happening at the same time but it's all happening now.

It's everybody who's here and it's everybody else. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.

You've almost made it. You are almost there. Right now is almost here. You're about to step into the frame of the assembly. There might not be a physical frame, no threshold, no door, no border. You might just be stepping onto a square, or onto another street. But when you do, you are leaving others behind.

It might not all be happening at the same time but it's all happening now. Are you there?

It's everybody who's here and it's all of us together. It's all of us together and it's everybody else.

Are you there? Are you there yet?

TRACK 4 > BETWEEN IS WHERE IT'S AT

a track to be listened to once you're back on your own after the assembly

One. Two. One. Two. One Two. One is the loneliest number. This is a track to be listened to when you're back on your own.

This is you leaving. This is you being private again, wearing headphones, walking away. And nobody else knows what the voice in your head is saying. Off you go. Farewell. Take care.

The many are many without you. But without is where it's at.

When have you stopped being many? Have you really stopped? How much space can there be between us before we stop being many? How much distance, how much time, is required for this to be over? When are you out of range? Are we coming apart right now? What is it that will bring us back together?

Do we need to be together for something to happen between us, in the space between us, which is only getting bigger now, the space between us growing, the scope of our togetherness extending, until there's night and day between us, oceans and continents, until we are becoming a constellation of planetary proportions. A world between us.

Between is where it's at.

Are you still there? Are you still out there? Are you still listening?

