

Rehearsing the Art of Being Many

GEHEIMAGENTUR

In May 2014, geheimagentur invited the people who took part in the preparation of *The Art of Being Many* as well as the general public to participate in a rehearsal of the assembly planned for autumn 2014. The rehearsal took the form of a guided tour through the future assembly, taking place in the same hall and using the same technical setup. Two interrelated questions were at stake: 1) Can an assembly be rehearsed at all? and 2) Was the real assembly in autumn 2014 not bound to be something like a rehearsal, too – an assembly taking place in a theatre space and experimenting with its own practices and formats?

This is the script of the performance *Rehearsing the Art of Being Many*:

Everybody is waiting outside the theatre, outside the empty hall. Headphones are being distributed, so everyone is listening to the following text through the headphones.

Speaker 1:

Welcome! In 144 days we will be many. Many – that means first of all: more than now. To be precise – 10 times more than now. But even now we are already more than we were fifteen minutes ago.

We have assembled here for a rehearsal of a rehearsal. A rehearsal assembly. Perhaps a bit like a rehearsal dinner for weddings – maybe you know those from TV. During a rehearsal dinner, the procedure for the future event is practiced. It also serves the purpose of thanking everybody who contributed to the realization of the future event.

Speaker 2 (from inside the hall):

Imagine the hall that one enters through this door. The so-called entrance hall. A huge space, the ceiling as high as the sky. Concrete, steel, rust. Emptiness.

Empty spaces are stages. Stages are empty spaces, in which one imagines putting things. In our imagination, they are still empty spaces, just with many things in them. Only when one really enters them and really puts things into them, one realizes that the space is no longer empty. No matter how huge a space is: To enter a stage that one has imagined filling again and again means seeing how much smaller it is than the universe that one placed in it. It is a bit like looking at the stars and realizing how long the light took to reach us. Following the same principle, spaces become bigger in our memory. The longer we weren't there, the bigger they become. Memory is a space time warp.

Imagine how the door opens. And imagine you could hold an assembly in the hall for two days. An assembly of 400 people, 400 people who will have set off, who will have met others on their way, who will have participated in other assemblies, who right now are assembled somewhere else, in other halls, in other squares and streets, in factories, conference rooms, school classes, in basements, in bars, on roofs and in parks. An assembly of the many.

What should the many find when the door opens?

Imagine you could set up the hall for the arrival of the many. What should be in there?

What should you see when the door opens? What will be assembled there before the assembly begins? Who will assemble in order to prepare the assembly?

Imagine a recording from a fish-eye camera from the ceiling. Imagine the many people, walking around, sitting, standing, swinging, lying, dancing, talking, writing, eating. What structures can you recognize?

And now rewind. Look how the hall empties, how the podiums and platforms and lights and scaffolding and tents and projection screens and saunas and kitchens and dance floors disappear – in the reversal of their accumulation. Further and further back, until the hall is empty again, to the beginning, and further, and further – back to this moment. Just before the door opens and you enter.

Speaker 2 opens the door from inside:

To fill an empty space in your imagination is a forecast. The stage is a concept that makes it possible to align desires with expectations and to generate a prognosis for something that one causes but does not control. The empty space is a double boundary – once in your imagination, when you imagine the stage and putting everything there, exactly at that place and at that time, there and not anywhere else – and then a real boundary when one is standing on the empty stage again.

Like a wave the first prognosis breaks over reality and with more or less force and froth washes over the beach. After that the second wave appears, the second prognosis – starting from the real stage through time to the moment when everybody starts assembling.

Speaker 1:

To begin our assembly today, we would ask you to come close to each other, as close as possible, still closer, so close that there is no space left between us, and closer yet, perhaps so close that we touch each other, even if we do not know each other well yet. And then we can drift apart again and look around us in this huge space that once was even bigger.

Recorded voice, describing elements that will fill the hall:

In the middle there will be an arena. And around it: two containers, and a third one on top of these. Scaffolding forming a kind of tower house. Bracing like steel trees, with terraces inside. An old water canon with seat cushions. And somewhere in-between a grandstand. A caravan with a sauna. A four-storied kitchen installation. A bar. Four projection screens.

Speaker 1:

We have brought these things, these different places with us. As markers on these signs. Perhaps we can take these signs and put them where we imagine all these things that will be here in September. Where will be the kitchen? Where the containers? What will be next to each other? And what is still missing? What is still needed? Perhaps we can write these things that we desire to be here in September on the floor. Let's imagine the future entrance hall together.

The signs and pieces of chalk are distributed.

Speaker 2:

There, above the containers, will be two screens. On Saturday, September 27, videos of the occupation of Syntagma Square in Athens will be shown.

144 days before the occupation of Syntagma Square nobody knew about it.
144 days before the occupation of Porta del Sol in Madrid nobody knew about it.

144 days before the occupation of Gezi Park nobody knew about it.

Nobody submitted a building application.

Nobody calculated the capacity of the soup kitchen.

Nobody wrote a technical rider.

When so many assemble spontaneously, it is because other forms of assembling, of gathering, of making decisions, of adjourning, of speaking for each other, of agreeing, do not function anymore.

When so many assemble, the assembly at first is a blockade, an interruption, a special zone, in which the non-functioning becomes manifest. A state of emergency in which assembling has to be reinvented – not 144 days beforehand, but now, here, in this very moment in which we are together, while the cops are already standing outside the hall, while we are slowly getting tired, and hungry, and have seen somebody twice already back there in crowd with whom we would rather be alone.

And this is the moment when it is essential where the others have come from, where they have been before, who they have met on their way, how many tweets they have read and written on the way, if they have charged their computers and if, many years ago, they participated in this assembly at school, where this thing with the list of speakers worked for once and everybody joined in this one dance.

Because when the many invent an assembly, they do so by putting together what they know, by mixing together how to move, how to address the others, how to get up to something, how to touch each other and how to not touch each other, how to agree and how to disagree, how to vote, how to be visible and how to be invisible.

In 144 days an assembly on assembling will take place here, in which we want to share this kind of knowledge and art with each other.

Many will be together in this space – from 12 pm to 12 am and then again from 12 pm to 12 am.

How can we plan this assembly? Perhaps best by simply already beginning, by realizing that it has already begun, that we are already on our way to the assembly, that we are already there.

Speaker 1:

When we assemble, our paths cross. When we assemble, our bodies, our thoughts, our desires, our fears, our stories, come together. When we assemble, technologies, techniques, sounds, smells, things, ghosts, come together. When we assemble, our voices assemble.

Our technology tonight allows us to hear each other without having to look at each other. We can turn around; we can turn away. We can look at each other, but we do not have to. We can be very close to each other, like we were before, but that does not mean that we can hear each other better. We can grow apart; we can disperse within the assembly.

As this is a rehearsal of a rehearsal we would like to try how far we can disperse within our assembly, how much distance is possible – perhaps we can go as far away from each other as possible, still further and further, and a bit further yet, so far that we would leave the space if we were to take another step, as far apart as possible, so far that perhaps we cannot see each other anymore ... And nevertheless, we can still hear each other very well. Even if we whisper.

In this entrance hall, two spaces merge: the space where we actually are together and the acoustic space. These spaces belong to each other, but they are not identical. Here, things happen that do not necessarily happen there. While I am talking here, other conversations can take place there.

We are standing together, listening to the same thing. And yet we are separate with our headphones. Are dispersed in the hall. At the same time assembled and dispersed. It is exactly this technology that will be used at *The Art of Being Many. The Art of Being Many*, an assembly of assemblies. Otherwise dispersed assemblies will assemble here in dispersal, and perhaps in dispersal is exactly how the many can assemble.

Assembly spaces are acoustic spaces. Public address systems. The architecture of the acoustic space formats political speech. Do new acoustic spaces thus form new kinds of political speeches, new addresses? Do we hear old addresses differently in new acoustic spaces?

Sound check: Please compare the live sound in the hall to the sound over the head phones.

You will listen to Pericles' funeral speech from the year 431 BC, addressing the citizens of Athens:

It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. [...] Neither is poverty an obstacle, but a man may benefit his country whatever the obscurity of his condition. There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private business we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes; [...] While we are thus unconstrained in

our private business, a spirit of reverence pervades our public acts; [...] having a particular regard to those laws which are ordained for the protection of the injured as well as those unwritten laws which bring upon the transgressor of them the reprobation of the general sentiment.

And we have not forgotten to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil; we have regular games and sacrifices throughout the year; our homes are beautiful and elegant; and the delight which we daily feel in all these things helps to banish sorrow. Because of the greatness of our city the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us; so that we enjoy the goods of other countries as freely as our own.

[...] Our city is thrown open to the world, though and we never expel a foreigner and prevent him from seeing or learning anything of which the secret if revealed to an enemy might profit him. We rely not upon management or trickery, but upon our own hearts and hands. And in the matter of education, whereas they from early youth are always undergoing laborious exercises which are to make them brave, we live at ease, and yet are equally ready to face the perils which they face. [...] If then we prefer to meet danger with a light heart but without laborious training, and with a courage which is gained by habit and not enforced by law, are we not greatly the better for it? [...]

We are lovers of the beautiful in our tastes and our strength lies in our opinion, not in deliberation and discussion, but that knowledge which is gained by discussion preparatory to action.¹

Speaker 1:

Pericles' speech is about *>us<*. Talks about *>us<*. Is addressed at *>us<*. Imagines an *>us<*. Perhaps as we imagine speeches about the many to the many. It is the speech that we listened to here together. We who are assembled tonight. Yet, if we are dispersed at the same time, if we are separate with our headphones, are we *>us<*? Are we the many? When we talk about *>us<*, do we feel addressed? Are we *>us<*, then?

1 <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/education/thucydides.html>, accessed 26 January 2016.

Perhaps you can give us feedback regarding this question if ›we‹ can work with the headphones. Perhaps you can turn around, away from the middle, looking at the wall, if the ›we‹ does not work and ›we‹ are actually not ›we‹. But if ›we‹ is possible, even if we are dispersed, then please look towards the middle of the room, look at the others.

Does this work? Are we on a first name basis via the headphones? When I say you, do I mean only you? Do you feel addressed? If yes, please look towards the center. Do you think you are addressed or the person next to you as well? Are we on a first name basis because, in a way, it is only the two of us? Or are you not addressed? Does this not work at all? Then turn outwards. Because then this does not concern you. Has nothing to do with you. Because the others are there as well.

And, does that mean that the plural works? As when you were asked to respond to the ›we‹? Did you notice that you were addressed in the plural rather than the singular? And actually that is what we have done all along – addressed you as a group. Does that work better than the other you? If yes, well, you know already ... face the center, but if that ›you‹ is not for you – because you are standing there alone or together with us – if you are you, who are we who are talking right now – then turn away and look at the walls.

When we are contemplating how to address you, as you, the many, then this has to do with the technology. With the two spaces. With the simultaneity of assembly and dispersion. And quite pragmatically: What sounds better when the voice arrives via the headphones?

But it also has to do with how we imagine ourselves as a group. How we imagine the many to be, who the many are, and who exactly the many will be at *The Art of Being Many*.

People from Athens.
People from Madrid.
People from Rome.
People from Bucharest.
People from Rio.
People from Mexico City.
People from Milan.
People from Vienna.

People from Istanbul.
People from Cairo.
People from St. Pauli.
People from Barmbek.
People from Kotti.
People from Copenhagen.
People from Gängeviertel.
People from squatted theatres.
People from Somalia.
People from Lampedusa.
People from university.
People from the sea.
People from Schanzenviertel.
People from the harbor.
People from abroad.
People from the neighborhood.
People from drowning islands.
People from far away.
People from beyond.

Welcome to *The Art of Being Many!*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Thucydides: Pericles' Funeral Oration (<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/education/thucydides.html>, accessed 26 January 2016)

