

Polytopography
A performative exploration of collective biographies through public space

- ☐ As far as possible, conduct the activity in silence. The moments when talking is encouraged will be explicitly indicated.
- ☐ The timing for each activity is written next to each point, try to respect it.
- ☐ Perform each point before reading the following one.
- ☐ The objective of the exploration is to discover and compose a performative collective biography of the group through engaging with public space.
- ☐ You are invited to approach public space as a book. You are topographers that act as readers and writers of this space. You write yourself in and through it.

1. Finding the space (max 10 minutes)

Walk silently in public space together with your group. The aim is to find a common place that *you would use to stage a piece of your biography*. It is important that you agree on a space together. If you notice a place that catches the attention of someone in the group, stop and ask the others if that might be the space you have chosen. If you feel the need to discuss it briefly (no more than 3 minutes), do so.

2. Identify elements of the space (5 minutes + 3 of sharing)

When you have decided on the space, everyone takes **5 minutes** to walk in the vicinities of the space, to identify all the elements of the space that they connect to a memory that they would put in their autobiography.

Write down the elements.

When you're done go back to the others and share the elements that you have identified.

3. Definition of the space (3 minutes)

- ☐ Now observe the elements that the groups just identified, and together identify which ones are the furthest away from the group.
- ☐ These elements will define the borders of your stage.

4. Centre of the space (3 minutes)

- ☐ Once you have defined the borders of the space, collectively decide on which is going to be the centre of the space, the place you're going to come back to when you share insights and memories with the rest of the group.

6. Opening ritual – the beginning of the biography (3 minutes)

Once you have found your centre, let's open the book of space together!

- ☐ Form a circle with the group
- ☐ Turn to your right
- ☐ Draw with your finger on the back of the person in front of you, the illustration you would like to have on the cover of your biography. (2 minutes)
- ☐ Give seven small taps on the backs of everyone in the group.
- ☐ Close your eyes and take seven deep breaths.

- ☐ Open your eyes and observe the space around you.

7. Measuring space (7 minutes + 5 sharing)

- ☐ Individually all at the same time, go in the space and measure elements of the space using as a unit measure one or more elements of the space connected to your biography that you chose before. For example, "This wall is ten times the half-eaten baguette coming out of the bin". Write down each of your measurement.
- ☐ After 7 minutes, join your group again at the centre of the space, and share your measurements. When everybody is finished, go on to the next point.

8. Similitudes (7 minutes + 5 sharing)

- ☐ All at the same time, go in the space and compare elements and qualities of the elements of the space to other elements and qualities of your biography.
- ☐ Write down the comparisons in the structure of similitudes, meaning "*this (element) is (...) as (...)*". For example "This sign is as dark as the biscuits my grandmother once burned, even though I ate them nonetheless and they were delicious." You can explain as detailed as you want.
- ☐ After 7 minutes, join your group again at the centre of the space, and share your similitudes.
- ☐ When everybody is finished, go on to the next point.

9. Cover (7 minutes + 5 sharing)

- ☐ All at the same time, go in the space and choose an element that would go on the cover of the book of your autobiography.
- ☐ Take a picture of it (it can also be a shot including more elements, or the sky, or a little piece of grass... everything goes).
- ☐ Write down thoughts replying to the following questions. Why did you choose it? What memory that would go in your autobiography does this element connects to?
- ☐ Join your group again at the centre of the space, and share your covers, and the memories connected to them.
- ☐ When everybody is finished, go on to the next point.

10. Graffiti (5 minutes + 5 sharing)

- ☐ Go back in the space. Until now, you were looking for existing elements in space that could relate to your biography. Now you are asked to add in space one element that doesn't exist until now but it is needed for your biography. Leave its mark as a graffiti. Let's imagine your body is the final sentence you would like to close your autobiography with. Find a surface on which you want to imprint your body/sentence. Adapt your body to the surface, make your body become a graffiti, an imprint on a surface of the space. Stay in that position focusing on that sentence and if something changes in it while you are in the position. Stay in place for 2 minutes.
- ☐ Come off the surface and write down the sentence that is in your mind in your notebook.
- ☐ Go back and share with the others your sentence and point out where you did your body-graffiti.

12. Movement as memory (5 minutes + 3 sharing)

- ☐ Go back in the space and find a spot in relation to one of the elements you identified connected to your biography.
- ☐ From there imagine your memory connected to this object reenacted in the space.
- ☐ Transform this memory into a movement.

- ☐ Perform this movement. It can be a repetition of the same movement, or a series of movements. It can come from your memory, or it can be a new movement. The movement doesn't have to be descriptive.
- ☐ Write down the description of the movement.
- ☐ Go back in the center and share the movement and the memory with the group.

13. The missing element. (7 minutes + 4 sharing)

- ☐ Go back to the space. Think of an important element of your autobiography that should be in this space but is not, an important element of your autobiography. This element is the starting point for another chapter of your autobiography, the chapter which until this point has been invisible.
- ☐ To which memory is this element connected? What is this missing chapter about?
- ☐ Place the imaginary object in the space.
- ☐ Write down a couple of sentences related to the memory.
- ☐ Go back to the group and share with each other the object that is missing, where did you place it, and to what memory it is connected to.

14. The common elements (5 minutes)

- ☐ Until now you have heard and shared about your individual biographies. Now try to speak with the group to identify common themes or common interests that are coming up through your biographies for 5 minutes. Each one of you should identify a commonality.

15. The collective cover (5 minutes)

- ☐ Now collectively decide on the element/object that would go on the cover of your collective biography. Briefly share how this element connects all of your biographies. Take a picture of the object.

12. Co-authored Poem writing (10 minutes)

- ☐ Now go back to the center of the space. By now you have memories, yours and of the other members of the group, written in this space-book. Observe this space, the emotions, and the memories that are connected to it.
- ☐ Each one of you start writing a closing poem to this space-book you have writing, in which every sentence start with the words "We come from...". Let your imagination flow. You can describe, invent, imagine, inform. It is your poem. (You can use your mother-tongue if you prefer and translating it later). You have 7 minutes.
- ☐ Now each one of you read one verse of their poem, and whoever calls to continue with one of their verses does it. For example, person 1 starts with "We come from... ashes" and then person 2 feels one of their verses fits after that one and say it out loud. Number each of the verses so that you can reconstruct the whole poem.

13. Closing ritual. (3 minutes)

- ☐ Form a circle with the group
- ☐ Turn to your left and draw with your finger on the back of the person in front of you, the illustration you would like to have *on the back cover* of your biography. (2 minutes)
- ☐ Give seven small taps on the backs of everyone in the group.
- ☐ Close your eyes and take seven deep breaths. Open your eyes.

14. Make your way back to the initial space in silence. (10 minutes)