

### **Stretching the imagination**

An intervention into our social imaginary in form of a short and open-ended workshop. We look into relationships between lived experience and capacities to imagine. Imagine what? Examples may include bonds between volunteer/artist, artist/work, work/exhibition, exhibition/research, research/institution, institution/policy, policy/language, language/form, form/employment, etc. We apply a so called "low skill, high sensibility" approach, which means that we constantly alternate between doing and reflection. Doing what? For example: Imagine that you meet as a group. Perhaps you count 16 people including yourself. The task is given to formulate a sentence. Or several sentences on a given topic. You are part of this, and you are now forming smaller groups of 3-4 people, standing in circles. The only rule is that you can only contribute one - word - at - the - time. Someone starts the sentence with a word. Based on - when - it - is - your - turn - to - say - your - one - word - only, relating to what others said before. So far, you have no control of the full meaning or direction of the sentence collectively delivered. You contribute your fragment. Circulation. You may try to go with the flow. Perhaps add a punctuation, or try hard to influence the content with the whatever agenda you might have, but only with the means available to you; your one - word - at - the - time. This "democratically produced" sentence may resonate collectively within the group, or not at all, but it is there. In plenum, as a larger group, the same type of exercise is repeated and you observe that the dynamic is different. Like children games, adults imagining things together. This is just one example to bring to the foreground the central principle of mixing individual and collective focuses, which is guiding the workshop at large.

These kind of practical activities, or specific hands-on exercises, we can call modalities. They are composed within a given framework, often in sequences. Here is an illustration of another modality in terms of operational principles: Everybody gets a white A4 sheet of paper. Each of us explore that piece of paper individually for 5 minutes alone. Folding it, smelling it, talking to it, going for a walk with it, whatever. Then we get new information. We will individually represent that A4 paper in an imaginary "mini-assembly" of A4 papers. The assembly will be starting in 10 minutes and behind a tape on the floor is our speakers corner, imaginary council seats etc. Everyone is given a 1 minute slot to formally represent their paper in the assembly. The stage is set: Each A4 paper gets their voice heard through their representatives. This example is just a fictive one to give a sense of "activity grammar." First modality is to explore the paper. Second modality is preparing the paper. Third modality is representing that paper in the mini-assembly. Fourth module (not mentioned) could be to translate the "concern" of that A4 paper into a movement in the space, moving from speech to choreography (=performance). A limited distribution of information is central for facilitating transitions, since participants need to "not to know what comes next" to be operational in moving effectively from one modality to another. Not unlike Ad Reinhardt who would ask his students to make self-portraits in pencil and charcoal on fine paper and then, when the drawing was finished, he would direct them to erase it and start over, a process continued on the same piece of paper throughout the term. Thus we may talk about intermodalities. Part 1 forms a larger modality at large, then part 2, 3 and 4. Overall, an exploration enabled through imaginary capacities to articulate aspects of a given situation beyond the logic of a rehearsed speech, reflection and language.

### **January 30 / Introduction**

We meet as a group of 12-16 persons (strangers, volunteers, tempers; basically anyone can take part). We do this in a simple and practical way, no skills or preparations needed. Sociometry or simple practical diagrams is a good way to begin to gain a better sense of what constitute us as a group. Sociometry is a tool to make visible through various formations on the floor, positions and constallations. Where do we stand? What moves us? Where do you position yourself? What is it that contextually brings us together? The conversation is semi-structured and informally facilitated so we get a smooth in-direct sense of where we are coming from in terms of motives, expectations, obligations and particular interests. Individual and collective approaches. Some words about this particular practice and the point of instituting a case study could possibly be suitable to round off before we dedicate the last hour to a specific hands-on exercise which will provide us with a point of departure, a stand by transition to the next meeting February 27th and 28th.

### **February 27-28 / Part 1+2**

We continue from last part of the introduction to further challenge our imagination through voluntary engagement. Moving further with the work started in January. Perhaps, we will spend some time to internalise a small selected part of the exhibition Making Use. We continue through a set of practical exercises, focusing on decentering. In this context, decentering is a technique to work through applied imagination, addressing a theme though literally detouring it followed by an aesthetic analyses, aesthetic response and designated observations. We will address some of the material we have accumulated individually and/or collectively within the group. We end the second day with a specific hands-on exercise, aimed to prepare for March 26 and 27th.

### **March 26-27 / Part 3+4**

We continue from last time and transition into a new theme, related to narration. With a few narrative exercises, we address how lived experience is placed and located in language. We add interpretation though a series of blind panels. What is being experienced? In what way do we talk about things we lived though and what are our propositions to imagine otherwise? At this point we recognise our established a regular work rhythm in terms of

intermodalities and step by step approach. We advance and continue to work out particular directions in both individual and collective ways through a series of supervisions, emphatically stretching our imagination. We spend some time to reduce and enrich chosen segments selected from the exhibition Making Use. We discuss and consider possible real or non-real interventions into the exhibition context for the last meeting April 23-24th.

**April 23-24 / Part 5+6**

Days of interventions and performances for each other and perhaps for the public? We look briefly at some of the theoretical underpinnings for the various activities we have been going through. Still in a playful investigatory manner, we evaluate and identify useful aspects in general terms of our imaginative inquiries and what was particular to this specific context. Final presentations of narrative interpretations and end evaluation. What might be the tools and techniques developed and lessons learned? What worked?

In addition to this plan I returned in early June 2016 to Warsaw for 4 days and conducted interviews with all participants.