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Architecture and Field/Work

**Edited by Suzanne Ewing,
Jérémie Michael McGowan, Chris Speed
and Victoria Clare Bernie**

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Contents

Contents

Illustration credits

determinations don't usually work and that often neither architects nor the public 'participate', or participate as planned. The projects embrace the essential instability, the sometimes bizarre and even threatening connectivity of the world. They are prepared to take a while for ideas to meld, for practices to form, for conflicts to emerge, for things not to work, or to work out in unexpected ways. They encourage thinking about how to produce work without predetermining its outcome and refuse to define space as programmable within the normative logic-dominated techniques of power.

The documentary game is not about the recording and therefore the production of an environment per se, but about understanding architecture as a provisional construction in a paradoxical space of shared interactions – an 'open field'. This kind of experimental practice suggests an alternative and provisional document of architecture's ongoing potential for social and political engagement.

P.S.

The proposal itself is not as important as the question of why it has been made in the first place.

Notes

1 With thanks to MArch Studio Six, School of Architecture, University of Sheffield. Studio Six 'Architecture and Interdependence' (2006–2009) was linked to the Interdependence Day project (www.interdependenceday.co.uk), and explored experimental practice and global environmental change issues. Studio Six fieldwork has involved visits to Berlin, Bergen, Grimsby, Kraków, Nowa Huta and Warsaw.

2 Oskar Hansen (1922–2005) was a Polish architect, urban planner, teacher and theorist of Finnish birth. He graduated from the Technical College in Wilno (Vilnius, Lithuania) in 1942, then studied in the Department of Architecture at the Technical University, Warsaw (1945–1950). In 1948–1950 he visited France, Italy and Britain and studied under Fernand Léger and Pierre Jeanneret; he also became acquainted with Le Corbusier and Henry Moore. From 1950 to 1983 he lectured at the Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw. He was also a member of the Groupe d'Etude d'Architecture Moderne (GEAM) and a contributor to Team 10. Hansen presented his concepts of Open Form at CIAM 1959, the Team 10 meeting in Bagnols-sur Cèze, 1960 and subsequently the journal Le carré bleu dedicated an issue to Open Form in 1961.

3 The Bergen School of Architecture (Bergen Arkitekt Skole, BAS), was founded by Hansen's former student and collaborator Svein Hatloy. BAS still follows the pedagogical methods developed by Hansen and includes instruction on 'Open Form' in its curriculum. The First International Open Form Symposium was organised at BAS in 2001 to celebrate Hansen's eightieth birthday. BAS has continued to host international symposia dedicated to Open Form. With thanks to students and staff at the Bergen School of Architecture, in particular Eva Kun, for her Open Form workshops, and Marianne Skjulhaug, Head of School BAS; and to Sarah Wigglesworth Architects who taught a studio at BAS in 2008–2009.

4 Among Hansen's best-known 'un-built' projects was the submission to the international competition for the monument at Auschwitz-Birkenau (1957; with Zofia Hansen, Jerzy Jarnuszkiewicz, Edmund Kupiecki, Julian Pałka and Lechosław Rosiski), also presented at the CIAM congress in Otterlo, 1959.

The critical *where* of the field

A reflection on fieldwork as a situated process of creative research

Ella Chmielewska and Sebastian Schmidt-Tomczak

This essay is part of a larger project that concerns urban memory in Warsaw and is planned to take the form of a book-object, discursively engaging material, visual and textual evidence. Emphasizing the authors' distinct voices, it expressly dwells on their different articulations of, and positions vis-à-vis, urban objects. In this collaborative research project, the field of fieldwork is seen as mobile, moved by the exchanges and negotiations between the authors. Thus, tracing the critical *where* of the field is here developed as both a strategy for understanding fieldwork and constitutive *of* fieldwork.

Here, a method of close contemplation of materiality developed for Peter Eisenman's field of stelae in Berlin by one of the authors is mobilized by the other author in its deployment in an artist studio in Warsaw. The essay examines the exchanges around this application and argues that the actual fieldwork in collaborative research, while framed by physical displacement, pertains to the movement of the field back and forth between the authors. The field's changing *where*, informed by the authors' critical engagement, theoretical approaches and attitudes, is thus posited as an instrumental device for collaboration. The field's position (procedural, methodological, conceptual, representational, discursive), reframed in each new context, generates productive collisions and translations. It is in transpositions (of thought, language, objects) that collaborative exchanges take place and that fieldwork as creative research practice is articulated.

Sebastian:
Where, within the work, is the field framed and articulated? What is its position in relation to the task or larger project to which it is expected to contribute? How is it inflected by the researcher's familiarity with the site, its texts and surrounding context; by her informed or innocent anticipations?
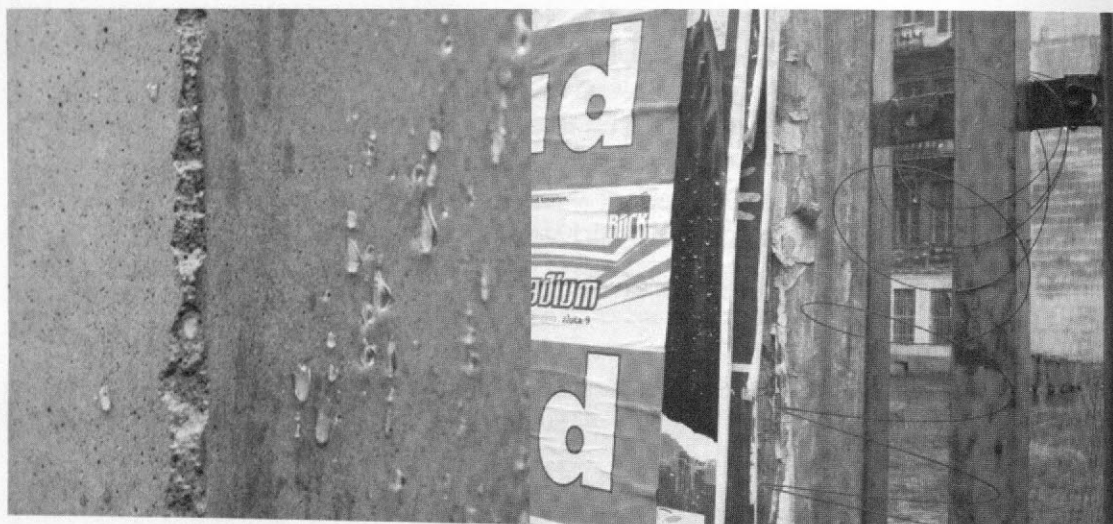
Figure 1

Figure 2

How and where do we make sense of the field once it is transformed into a set of representations and recordings, now dismembered and re-membered through the ordering of fragmentary images, notations and artefacts? Where do we fold it into the project and what happens with the original field? Is it now exhausted, consumed in the process of data collection, an emptied site left behind?

In this essay we reflect on the position of fieldwork in our collaborative research. In our larger project – a book on urban surfaces, materiality and place memory[1] – collaboration is taken as a process of creative translocation, of 'material thinking', to borrow Paul Carter's concept (2005: 3–5). For us, however, it is not a movement from art to writing as articulated in Carter's work, but from research to research, from looking to looking, *from writing to writing*. It is a process of translation that happens in the transposition of material between the researchers. The focus here is not on movement itself, but on the movement *of*, whereby the object and its *where* are crucial to the procedure.

The process is vectorial, but not unidirectional. It is not dialectic, where the contradictions are sought and negotiated. It is dialogic, though not aimed at resolving implicit disagreements. It is conversational: responsive to the nuance of location, open to changing viewpoints, attentive to the process and to the concrete encounter. The procedure demands alertness to the site and its objects, a close contemplation of the researcher's position. The field here does not enter the process, the fieldwork, as something merely instrumental, *some thing* to be used and discarded but as a produc-tive *place* of work, of gathering thought.

What is central to our project is the specificity of positions, the location of an outsider and an insider within the enquiry, and in relation to the field. The critical *where* from which an outsider is *looking in*, an insider *looking out*; an outsider in a close scrutiny, an insider in making broader connections. In the exchange of looking, in conversation, the specific place of experience is critical: this is *where* possibilities are mobilized.
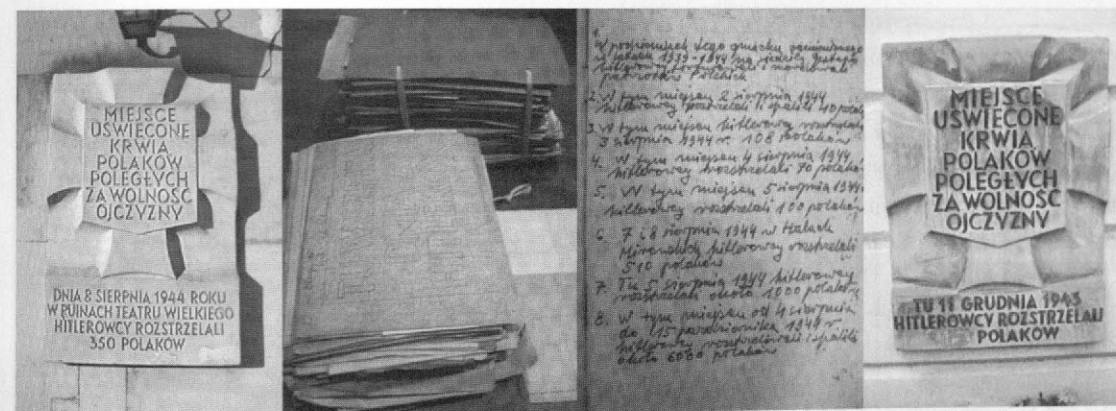
Now, *here*, we are reconstituting, briefly, in consideration of this context, the process of our field/work. We are reflecting on the process through its story, opening it up to *your* scrutiny. De-scribing it, testing our method, as it were, in this *Field/Work* volume.

Ella:
Birkbeck College London, January 2009.
I am speaking at the Symposium *Sites of Memory*. My talk, 'Remembering in Forgetting' – part of my project on surface memory – is a reflection on conflicted place memory in Warsaw. Here in London, it is preceded by two papers on London and followed by one on Paris.[2] I am acutely aware of how my name and accent further locate my paper *in* Warsaw, away from the frame of reference of this London audience. My topic, a 1950s commemorative project by the little-known Warsaw sculptor Karol Tchorek, is familiar to two people in the auditorium, both of whom came especially to hear the paper. Chris is a journalist, a specialist in East European political history; Katy is an artist who inherited Tch-orek's works and documents, which are gathered in his studio in Warsaw.[3]

The sculptor's archives contain detailed records of the project that marked the city with stone tablets indicating numerous execution sites from the period of Nazi occu-pation. With their officially commissioned standard form, they replaced earlier spontane-ous acts of local remembrance. Impossible to see in their entirety, unknown as a monument or as the work of a singular artist, indexical and located in discrete places of past trauma, they seem in a dialectical position to Peter Eisenman's Memorial to the Mur-dered Jews of Europe in Berlin. These stone markers constitute the base of Warsaw's memorial landscape pointing to local politics of memory, to localized voids and absences.

As expected, my talk elicits the kind of questions from the audience that necessitate detailed explanation, translation if you will, of that remote context. At some point, Chris turns to the audience. *I live in Warsaw*, he begins, and with a journalistic facility, proceeds to disentangle historical complexities. His opening makes a palpable impact: *I live in Warsaw* pronounced with his distinct Oxford accent. A few moments later, someone challenges my referring to Tchorek's tablets as artwork. Katy enters, *Let me speak to this. He was my father in law*, she says in her posh Surrey accent,

Figure 3

I live in Warsaw … she follows. The shift becomes apparent: Warsaw's stone tablets have been transposed, dis-located within the room, moved from the obscurity of distance to the proximity of attention. And so has my paper. Now, legitimated by a mere shift of accent … (the London and Paris papers retreat to the background).

Ella:

Edinburgh, School of Architecture, March 2009.

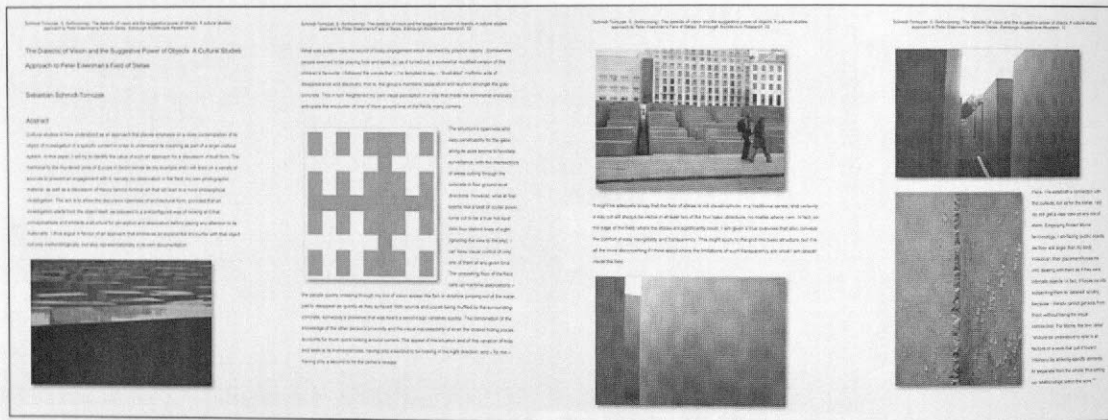In his paper for the conference, 'Transilient Boundaries in/of Architecture',[4] Sebastian contemplates Berlin's Stelenfeld memorial, demonstrating through his intense engagement with its form how the 'suggestive power of objects' of architecture (or art) can be revealed in that specific context. In his close attention to materiality, to surfaces, volumes and voids, his position in viewing and the 'experiential encounter' that brings to the site his alert theoretical reflection, he constructs an intricate *critical object*: simultaneously an account of thinking, a methodology for fieldwork, a documentation of an attentiveness to the built form, and a record of what he terms 'a discursive exchange with the object of investigation'. He claims, drawing on Georges Didi-Huberman, that in Peter Eisenman's memorial, 'the remembrance of the unspeakable … that we cannot look at is what looks back at us from what we see'. It is 'the friction between the evident outside [of the commemorative form] and the uncanny inside [that] reaches embodiment in the observer' (Schmidt-Tomczak 2010: 112). Sebastian insists with the words of German phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels.

Sebastian:

'Was unseren Blick beunruhigt, ist nicht etwas, das wir nach Belieben sehen können, sondern etwas das uns *zu sehen* gibt' (Waldenfels 1999: 131).

['What disturbs our gaze is nothing that we can see at will, but something that causes us *to see.*'][5]

Ella:

'What disturbs our gaze is nothing that we can see at will, but something that causes us *to see.*'

'Naszego spojrzenia nie zakłóca to co widzimy, ale to co sprawia, że możemy *zobaczyć.*'

The difficulty of translating the sentence from English to Polish reveals to me an interesting potential of the verb *to see* when mobilized in a different context, in the language that demands specificity of spatial and temporal relation to the object. Employing the verb *zobaczyć*, I am pointing to an acuity and attention as well as to completion: my seeing *having resulted* in completing the act of seeing. *Having seen* that is the realization of the action of the gaze: 'something that causes us to having seen', then. Again, the specificity of language inflects what we see in the event. The place of the event, the field, demands attention to its *Logos*.

What if Sebastian's essay were to be located in the context of Warsaw, in the book on Warsaw's surface memory that I have been working on? What if this essay-object were confronted with texts focused on a different context, on local particularities? Its content set within a different discourse, the object of its reflection placed within Warsaw's fragmented surfaces, ambiguous ruins, its palimpsests of conflicted inscriptions?

What kind of questions would this object pose in the city whose trauma is vaguely indexed by the Berlin memorial? While Eisenman's immense undulating field of concrete blocks references abstract memory of events that happened elsewhere, Tchorek's stone tablets, scattered around the city, speak to the specificity of memories. They address the distinct *here* of trauma, the memory of which also indexes the void there, though the void is differently *concrete* than that inside the Stelenfeld's cement blocks.
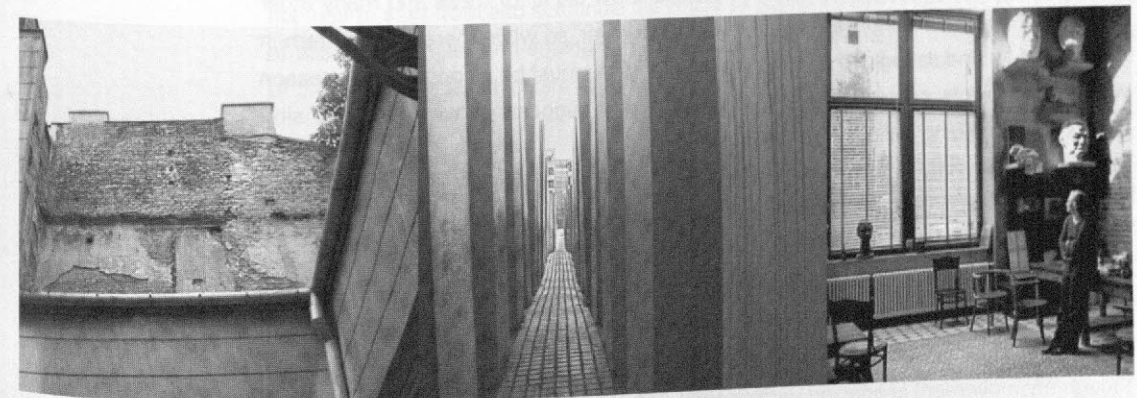
Figure 4

What if Sebastian – camera in hand and methodology employed for the Berlin site in mind – were transposed into the field of my work on surface memory, a particular site of my fieldwork in Warsaw? There, at a specific address, all commemorative tablets are held in drawings, blueprints, lists, photographs, notes in the sculptor's personal diary and official correspondence, documents, models and casts.

The place of this archive, the sculptor's studio located in a disfigured fragment of a building hidden in the centre of the city, is simultaneously a place of work for a contemporary artist, Katy Bentall.[6] Through remaking the space, through inhabiting it with her works, collections of art and objects, installations and events, Katy explores the relationship of this place to the city, its memory and personal stories held in its objects and fragments.

Figure 5

Sebastian:

Katy Bentall's studio, Smolna Street, Warsaw, April 2009.

I am leaving the field of smooth surfaces and countless repetitions of a single form, but I am not leaving it behind. I am entering this new space in Warsaw, which also is a field, yet of a different kind. It is easy to imagine the open space in Berlin as a field, the wind sweeping through its channels, rain hitting its surfaces. It is impersonal, indirect, non-specific, and its morphology is ruled by multiplication and multitude. In Warsaw, there, too, is a quantity of objects, but morphological references and similarities are scarce, if they exist at all. The contemporary sofa and period chairs, Christian iconography and abstract paintings, socialist realist sculptures and folk woodcarvings alongside the archive of Tchorek's models and monuments, among Katy's textual works and intricate installations, books and family memorabilia. How did all of these and many other objects get here? Nothing seems out of place, however, so while there is no pattern in the style of an undulating grid of concrete blocks, there must be a connection, a reason why these objects came together. Coming together suggests movement, and, similarly, I am continuing my own mobile enquiry.

Following the gazes of sculpted heads, the reflections of mirrors, the pointing corners of furniture, or the connections established between colours, my attention is directed around the space, falling on new things and surfaces as I move among them. I am part of an unfolding choreography, triggering a close and engaged contemplation. While I am still not sure whether or how I can apply my method from Berlin to this new environment, the exploration of the space feels strangely similar to that *in* Berlin, even though my movement is enacted under entirely different conditions. There is no specific form, but a collection of objects without a clear shape. I am not outside, navigating a concrete form, but inside a fragile space within a fragment of a ruin. I am not looking at an artwork designed in its entirety, delimited by a distinct urban site, but I am *within* an installation, moving around what seems like a deliberate yet contingent arrangement. In fact, I am part of that arrangement in that I am accommodated in Katy's studio.

In Warsaw, as in Berlin, there is an objective of gathering material for research. However, while the visit to Berlin was what shaped the project, its starting point, the visit to Warsaw, is part of an already existing project, my participation in it triggered by the work done in Berlin.

In Berlin, I am perpetually outside, trying to grasp the absence of the Murdered Jews of Europe that is referenced to be elsewhere, alluded to by the possible
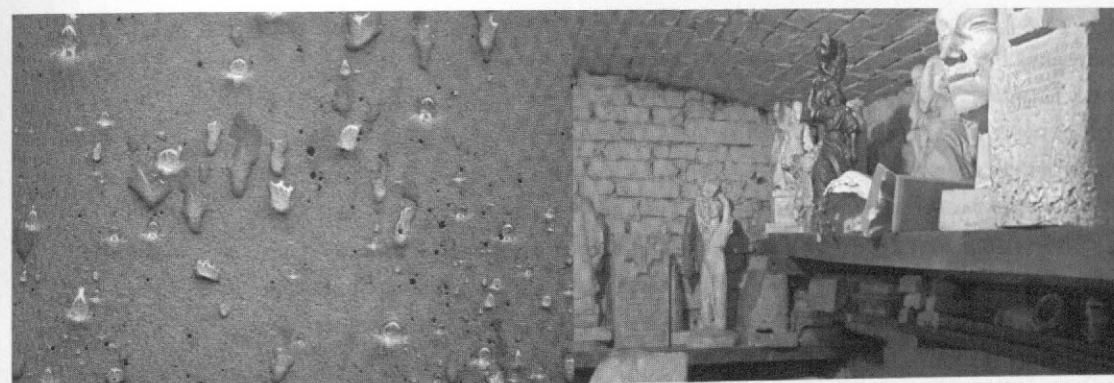

Figure 6

void inside the stelae. In this field of concrete, this absence could not be commemorated if it were placed on the personal and specific level on which the field in Warsaw is operating. There, references are direct, the entire space or site is a bundle of objects, held together by someone's past, memory and history.

While in Berlin the clarity of an artistic form could be subjected to an art theoretical reflection based on its materiality resembling minimal art, this is precluded here by an intricate tangle of relationships. They are played out between pluralities of art, history, morphology and language that are bound together in what, too, is an artistic investment, but none that lends itself to analysis through its form. Rather, any theoretical investigation has to start from and scrutinize the mode of apprehension employed to make sense of this very complex and entangled field; not to disentangle it, but to reveal the *intensity of the relationships*, which are enacted through movement.

Ella:

It is not the motion in itself, not filmic mobility of images that matters here, however, but the force of looking that mobilizes thought. For Bill Viola the kind of looking that (time-based) art calls for is not that of an isolated ocular act. It is a close scrutiny of things that, he claims, 'elevates the commonplace to a higher level of awareness' (Viola in Perloff 1998). Viola demands his images to be generative of experiences, to trigger acute events. This kind of looking is not realized by the sense of vision alone but rather by a corporeal presence. For Viola, the closeness of things is based on sensorial complexity that constitutes experience. And it is *experience* that the fieldwork is all about: not separating the senses into text production and ocular scrutiny, but the kind of immersive data *gathering* that necessarily involves the body.

It is not a singular body that Viola specifies for his method of making and demands of his images. 'I want to look so close at things', he writes, 'that their intensity burns through your retina and onto the surface of your mind' (Viola in Perloff 1998). This intensity of looking, then, surpasses the self and the body, and his *completed* looking, his materialized *having seen* – his articulation of the Polish verb *zobaczyć* – has a capacity to burn into my (your) retina, to inscribe itself permanently onto my (your) vision. This materialized insistence goes beyond the experience, exceeds one vision and crosses into another.

For Michel Serres the sense of vision, the act of looking also surpasses the body, goes beyond the self. It is an act of movement, of dislocation, of changing positions. Looking is visiting; it involves displacement and gathers into itself, as he writes, 'the compact capacity of the senses' (Serres 2008: 305). 'In order to see', he follows, 'movements take paths, crossroads, interchanges, so that examination goes into detail or moves on to a global synopsis: changes in dimension, sense and direction' (305). This *looking* both explores and details, it is an action of excursions, 'it always goes beyond its site, by shifting position' (306). Serres insists that while '[t]he subject sees, the body visits, goes beyond its place' (306), goes out from its role and 'plunges into and lives in a perpetual [exchange]' (307).

In order to see, movements must *take paths* in relation to objects of seeing; in approaching, getting closer, moving away, the repositioning of the body informs the relationship to the field and to the considered object. In the shifting position of the self (of the I), in movement, in *trans*action, the *where* of the inside of the place and that of the outside are negotiated.
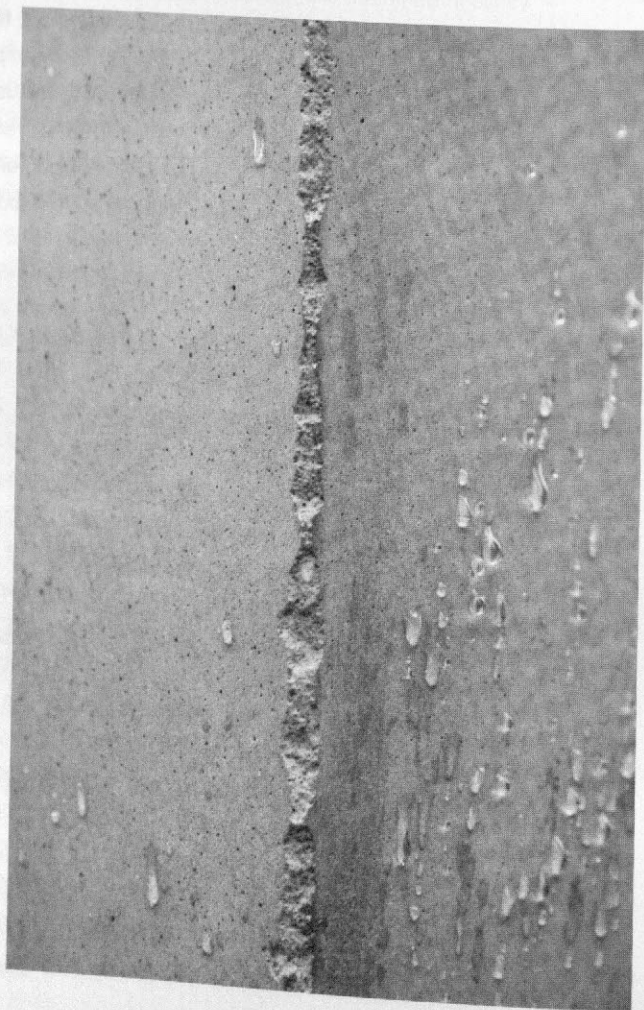

Figure 7

Sebastian:

Our collaborative fieldwork takes place in the moments of encounter, in productive collisions; when positions and arguments are necessarily vulnerable to change, when exchange, translation and co-thinking in conversation happens.

Like the two concrete surfaces in the last figure, our perspectives collide and create friction that has creative potential. Meeting in a right angle exposes the surfaces to outside forces that can be destructive, chipping the corner, but that thereby create a more varied material landscape. The collaboration forces one to constantly revisit assumptions, implications and aims of the work, luring one out of the comfort zone of the two-dimensional plane and into the dangers of three-dimensional thinking. In certain areas, the two perspectives meet in a perfect edge, making their creative conflicts barely noticeable. In other places, the tectonics of the meeting take off that edge, increasing the distance between the two surfaces. However, any increase simultaneously reduces the angle of their relationship, steadily working towards the spherical geometry of a well-rounded argument, not towards a shared two-dimensionality. The coherence and integrity of the sphere is the ultimate aim of collaboration. It is, however, an ideal concept more than a real possibility. In the discursive mobility that is paramount in the fieldwork project, new sites, texts or histories enter the work, triggering self-reflection that will, chisel in hand, result in the revision of the argument, inflection of voice, forming new edges that will have to be smoothed again in further creative thinking and exchanges.

Notes

1 In this essay, we are focusing on the method as related to the fieldwork, the sites and our specific exchanges. The larger project considers questions of historical context and politics of commemoration. The project is focused on the *iconosphere* of Warsaw, and is based on research of photographic and media archives in Warsaw (National Digital Archive, the Institute of Art, Muzeum Historyczne miasta Warszawy, Tchorek-Bentall Foundation), Marburg (Herder-Institut) and Maryland (The National Archives at College Park).

2 'Sites of Memory: Objects, Traces, Places', 27 February 2009, Department of History of Art and Screen Media, Birkbeck College. For the Polish version of the paper see Chmielewska (2008).

3 Chris (Krzysztof) Bobiński is a journalist, the former *Financial Times* correspondent in Warsaw, publisher of *European Voice* and president of the Unia Polska Foundation. Katy Bentall is an artist, the founder and president of the Tchorek-Bentall Foundation.

4 'Transilient Boundaries in/of Architecture', 30–31 March 2009, University of Edinburgh. See Schmidt-Tomczak (2010).

5 Translation S. Schmidt-Tomczak.

6 See Chmielewska *et al.* (2010).