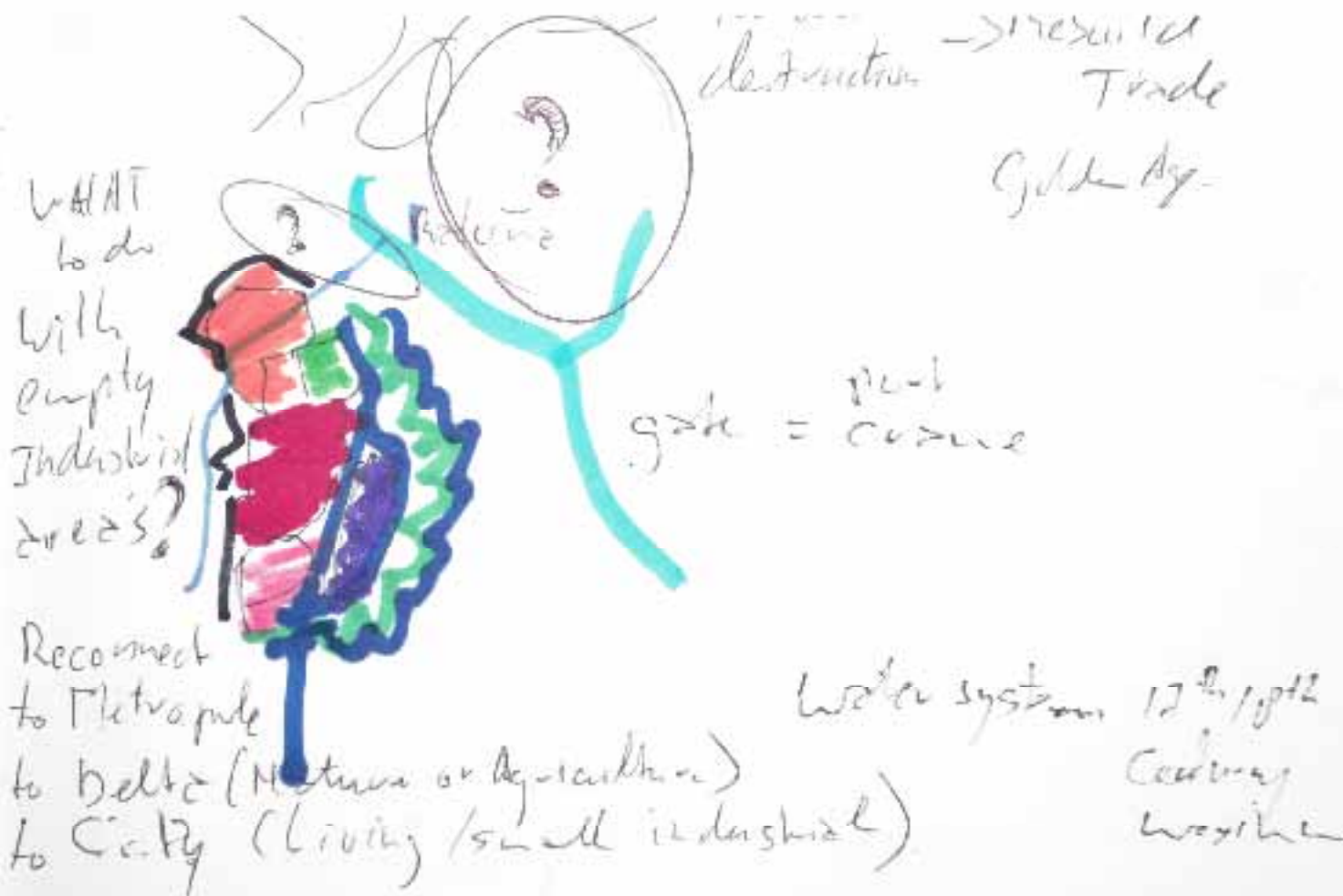


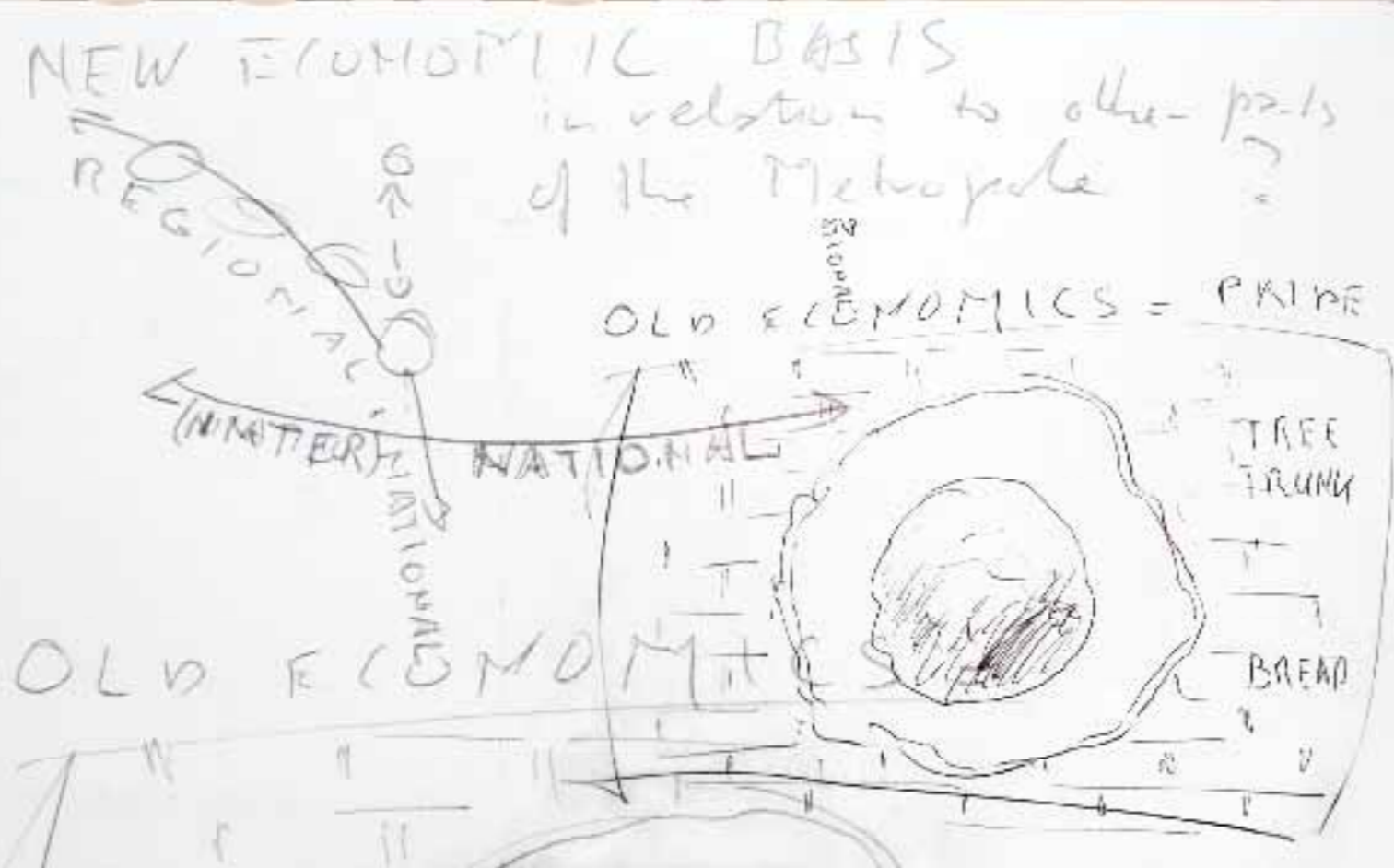
RECONNECT

Jeroen van Westen 2006





ECONOMY



In 2007 the province of Noord-Holland (The Netherlands) and the region Pommeren (Poland) collaborate in a cultural program titled Creative Coasts.

Creative coasts is a cooperation of the Baltic Sea Cultural Center and Art and Culture Noord-Holland.

A broad spectrum of artists, actors, historians and culture professionals work on this large scale program focusing on the development of their profession. Inhabitants of both regions get a peak into each others kitchen. This is expressed in art, theatrical forms, film and cultural planning. The performances, shows and many other activities are public in 2007 at different locations in Pommeren and Noord-Holland.

Two teams, both a mix of specialists and trainees, have taken up the challenge to find ways to re-connect a restored fortification to the dynamics of the city of Gdansk.

Carmela Bogman, Aglaee Degros, Ellen Holleman, Alicka Karska, Grzegorz Lechman, Dennis Moet, Lucyna Nyla, Anna Olszewska, Brechtje Schoofs, Jakub Szczepanski, Aleksandra Went, Jeroen van Westen, Bartosz Wysocki.

DANCING to a LIGHT

The ice age left a moraine, the river left a fertile sedimentation, people settled, were swept away, washed ashore, driven out, pushed in, moved out. The dynamics of a strategic position in a delta:

Gdansk, Dantzig, Gdansk, Danswijck, Gdansk, Danzig, Gdansk, Dancing to a Light.

connectivity

How can the Bastions, the fortification, become a place well used by all inhabitants of Gdansk. Everyone seems to agree they are beautifully restored, but they are not used for leisure time.

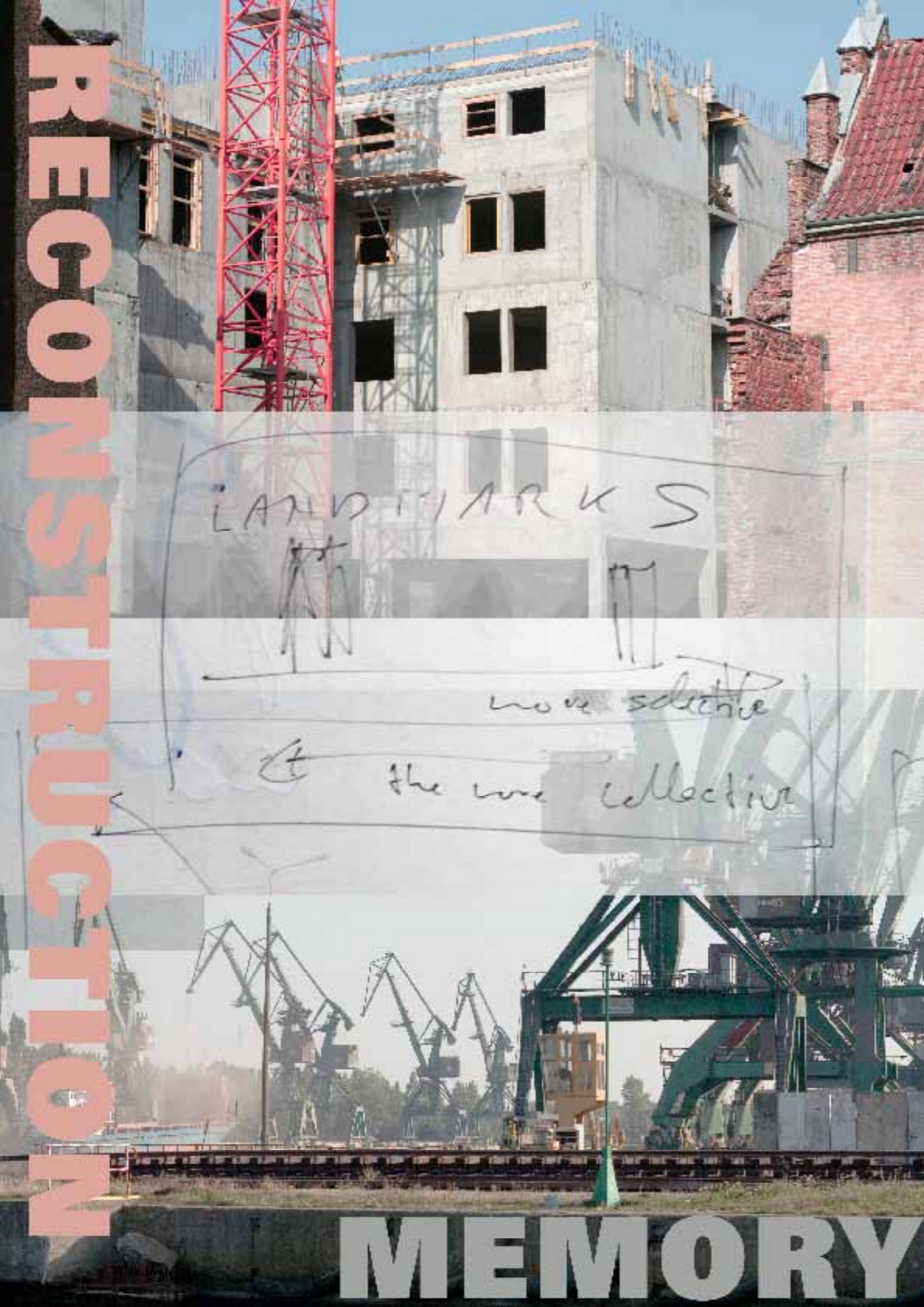
The hypothesis is that they are not used because there are depraved areas between fortification and more upscale parts of the city, and that the E77 is a major barrier in the city. A suggestion was we should look into the Motlawa branches if they are possible attractive routes to the fortification.

In a week we tried to understand the city and each other. The weather was great and people were friendly, but it was a complicated process anyway. We decided to study the different areas between the restored inner city and the fortification. Cultural planning is about connecting local and meta perspectives without hierarchy in a continuous alternation of scales: a localized issue is put in different relations to any larger structure/idea it can possibly be connected to. Every one of us has developed a professional way of looking. Normally a specialist would sit down after acquiring enough information and write up a report. The simple act of several people of different background researching a situation together in an open atmosphere leads to intense experiencing, literally to discovery. We tried to research in collaboration and discuss our findings in collaboration, this is one step further than the normal exchange of information.

continuity

First of all the history of the city was discussed, with one major conclusion. One, the city has moved position from a city in economic and military control of a delta and the 'hinterland' into being almost like a suburb of the new metropolis that sprouted from the mother city of Gdansk. Two, the succession of change of powers that ruled the city created a rich history, a melting pot of architectural styles, but the last change left scars that are still very much alive, visible in the ruins of Granary Island and invisible in the memories of the present inhabitants.

RECONSTRUCTION



It is a very special feeling to discover all the Dutch connections, the bricks, the design of the fortification, we even have Dutch names for the city, Danswijck, and for the Wisla, Wijssel. It was so good to drive through the polders even though it looks like they need to be re-organized socially to become fertile again. I read in a great book by Bart Rijs about the Hollanders in Poland and how they ended up in Siberia, but that there are still farms recognizably Dutch in the Gdansk polders.

locality

With this in mind we set off for a communal walk, a boat tour with the group on the Motława river and the Wisła, a delegation to circle the city visiting the polders and the industrial areas.

Questions and observation on these excursions.

How do Gdansk people like to spend their leisure time? What is the contribution of the fortification to the structural qualities of the city? What is the role of each area in the city's narrative? Sometimes borders are necessary (Ala and Ola). Who stayed, who left, who came? How can monuments of the city become landmarks for a new population? What is the importance/special quality/role of Gdansk in the metropolis? The polders are close by, and still very beautiful, but are they still maintained? Few cars, many traffic jams! Why?? A pedestrian city is making a jump to a driving city, what about the in between scales of public transport and bicycling? The inner city looks and feels artificial, do locals use it? The real centre seems to be (partly underground) near the new railway station. Amazing how aesthetic dilapidated buildings look when the weather is great. Creative unofficial use of empty space seems to be a substitute for lack of public space. Why is Granary Island still in ruins? How come bridges near the gates look so much like parking spaces? A landmark is not always appreciated

The endless variation in materials of the pavement are worth a book in itself. The old freight station is an inspiring area.

... There will be more

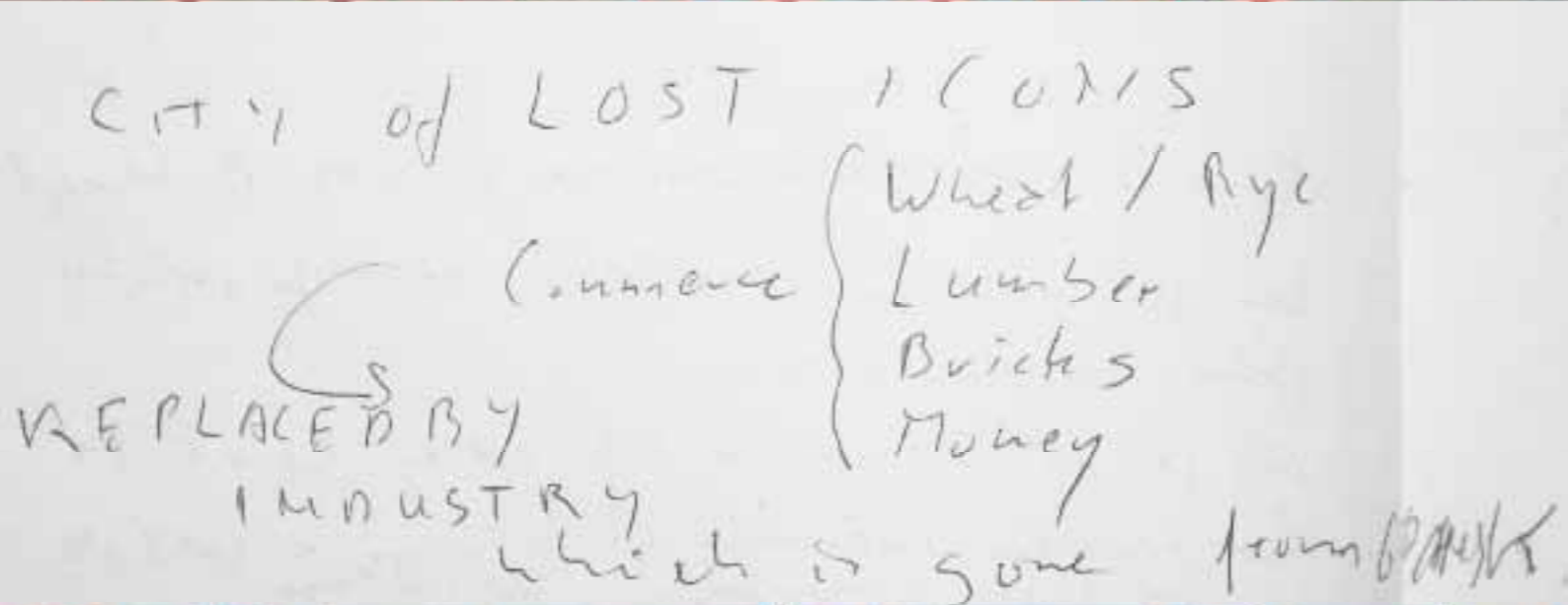
A lot was discovered, the tempered earthly colors of the city, the readability of the pavement, the hinge like function the fortification once must have had between city and rural area (and may be still can have). Over all this first getting acquaintance made us wonder if the problems of the fortification not being used are related to the problems of the city which we think are rooted in a social/cultural disconnection. Partly due to economic decline there are still a lot of areas in ruin, waiting for what? The city seems indecisive. Lack of money? Lack of energy? Lack of belief in oneself? Lack of shared vision? The present inhabitants seem to have a special/different relationship to the cultural past of the city where the younger generation grew up in, but the older generation was 'deported' to under the name of repatriation. Is this of importance for what we see?

It became obvious to me that one cannot put their hopes on the (in our eyes) harmless part of art: the magic of beauty and charm, of aesthetics in stead of ethics. It is a naïve hope that beauty can fight crime, that new art can fill the gaps in the city's narrative. But art can contribute to soul search for a inner creative force that can contribute to change. It can help to clarify mental blocks. It can act as a catalyst by sending out sparks.

MEMORY



LOST ICONS



Teams were formed, one studying the crossings with the E77, one following the branches of the Motlawa with special attention to the bridges, one looking deeper into the neighborhoods adjacent to the fortification. The intention was to notice the good, the bad and the promising qualities to try to determine how the present contributes to the city's narrative and how the (wishful) possible future could look like. This way we were hoping to find out what the position of the fortification is in relation to the adjacent neighborhoods individually as well as to the city of Gdansk. A second track of attention was for each group to find opportunities, potentials for qualitative good public connections from the inner city and neighborhoods to the fortification. This last part is in fact a research of public space and a prying look in to future planning.

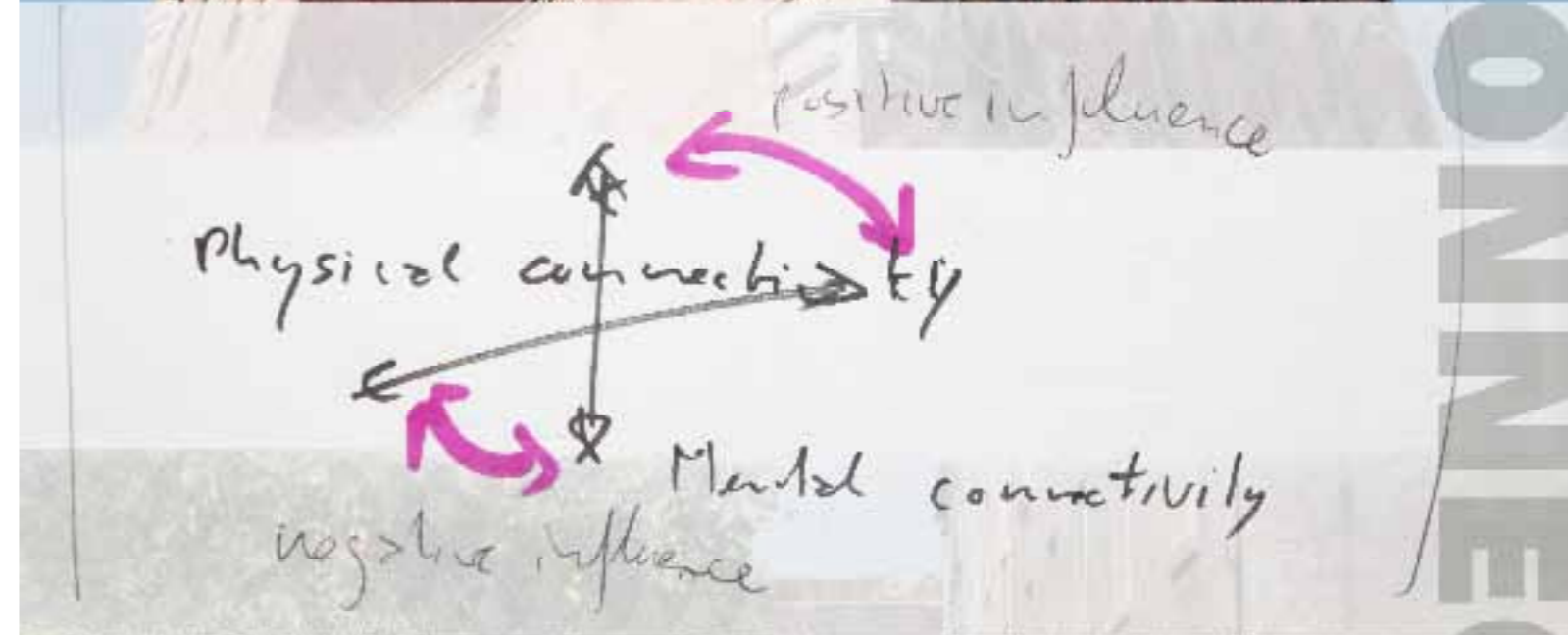
*Research subject/area for Aglaee and Jeroen:
Lower gate area - Lower city area - Granary Island - E77-connections – bridges across the Motlawa – Torunska street station.*

connectivity – continuity - locality

Looking deeper into these subjects we found out that may be not the supposedly unsafe neighborhoods adjacent to the fortification is the reason why the recreational potential of the bastions is not used. And probably the E77 is not such a new moat as supposed at the start. It rather seems that these neighborhoods are more or less isolated from the rest of the city,. They are cut of from the cultural, the tourist, and the shopping parts of the city, not so much by the E77 as well as by the emptiness and neglect of the Granary peninsula, a condition continuing in the freight station emplacement at Torunska-Brama Nizinna. This area could very well be the missing link in the city, it is symbolic for the state of mind of the city. The part that was the true centre of its power, the Granary peninsula, now is the last remaining ruin; rich in archeological evidence, slow in regaining life. Speculating on how and why, considering ifs and buts, the cultural disconnection keeps popping up, the gap between personal history and the history of the city: the repatriation, a subject that is not highlighted in any part of the city. In fact a point is reached to state, if you want the city to redevelop itself, to pick up the tasks of upgrading the depraved parts, it is time to really give this historic disaster a cultural place in the inhabitants hearts. There is beauty in a scar when you can look at it without pain, with being glad the future is yours. A recession for the repatriation should be the core of the design assignment.

A possible conclusion is to suggest to define the second phase of the collaborative research as a project to study on how the axis of the station area via Granary Island could become a symbolic AND a physical entrance to the city, how that could contribute to the healing process of the inhabitants and of the city. The discovered local social structures and economic potentials can be woven into this task to find ways to revive the Granary peninsula as a hinge between east and west parts of the city, by making Chielma a lively north south axis again. The results of the analysis of the opportunities the Motlawa branches offer are to be combined with the studies of the bridges and the roads that belong to these bridges.

Personally I am struck by the history of the repatriates. The lower gate freight station can be both a great connection to the horizons where people came from, and to commemorate their arrival in the city. Combined the railway yard can become a symbol for change, the place where new Gdansk arrived and started:





RECESSIONAL



Cultural
Municipal
Local

COMMON EFFORT & IDENTIFICATION recent

