

**the field is  
to the sky,  
only  
backwards**



Anders Bojen and Kristoffer Ørum, *The Pattern in Us All*, 2009, Video documentation of a performance, 37:38 min.

International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP)

# the field is to the sky, only backwards

September 4 - October 18, 2013

Curated by Aneta Szytak

Artists: Anders Bojen and Kristoffer Ørum,  
Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Hiwa K, Katarzyna Krakowiak, MML  
Studio (Michał Mądracki, Maciej Mądracki and Gilles Lepore)  
and Hito Steyerl

## Foreword

This publication accompanies the exhibition *The Field is to the Sky, Only Backwards*, curated by Aneta Szytak who was a resident at ISCP in 2001 and 2003. Each year, ISCP's thematic series considers a particular subject of critical value in contemporary art and the exhibitions share, in a way, a continuing narrative that facilitates ongoing discussion across the installments. The current cycle addresses research-based artistic practice and the complicated relationship between research and art.

The artists Anders Bojen and Kristoffer Ørum, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Hiwa K, Katarzyna Krakowiak, MML Studio (Michał Mądracki, Maciej Mądracki and Gilles Lepore) and Hito Steyerl all work within expanded boundaries of research not only as means to generate concrete facts, but also to apply experience and intuition towards producing new types of knowledge.

I would like to thank Aneta for collaborating again with ISCP after a decade, and for her insightful catalog essay; Shinnie Kim and William Sieruta from ISCP who organized many of the exhibition's logistics; and all the artists for their extraordinary contributions.

Kari Conte, Director of Programs and Exhibitions

Aneta Szytak

*The Field is to the Sky, Only Backwards*<sup>1</sup>

Already in the 1980s, Michel de Certeau wrote of the expert as one who had exchanged competence for authority and that knowledge is exhausted as it is exercised.<sup>2</sup> We sometimes are impatient with those who represent and disseminate knowledge from a position of power, yet knowledge is a major concern for many. In fact, it is not only about what we want to know but how we want to get to know. As knowledge accumulates, and fields of specialization narrow and deepen to an ungraspable degree, there is a growing need for thinking outside of rigid methodologies; and to open up space between legitimate and solid grounds of research for that which often goes unnoticed.

This exhibition includes works by Anders Bojen and Kristoffer Ørum, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Hiwa K, Katarzyna Krakowiak, MML Studio (Michał Mądracki, Maciej Mądracki and Gilles Lepore) and Hito Steyerl and questions art as a practice of knowledge. Studying the intersections of subjects such as economic and social relations, space and architecture, image, material, sound, movement, migration and mobility, the included artists transgress disciplines. They realize forms of research and modes of practice that provide limitless study. Here, diverse methodologies merge and cross, and seek what is possible in fault lines and unauthorized methodologies.

In her text *Field Work in Visual Culture* (2004) Irit Rogoff writes of the possibilities that constitute her understanding of the essay's title term:

Contemporaneity – not the objects of study but the temporal location of the studying.

<sup>1</sup> The title of the show is taken from the poem by Laurel Snyder *The Field has a Girl* from *The Myth of the Simple Machines*, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. By Steven Rendall, University of California Press, 1997, p.9.

Field – not discipline or expertise but a confluence of possible connections.

Boundary – not border but against thinking the limits of the possible.

Mobility – when it is not determined by where you are coming from and where you are going to. Rather in a state of productive tension with 'location' it becomes a dynamic mode of thought.

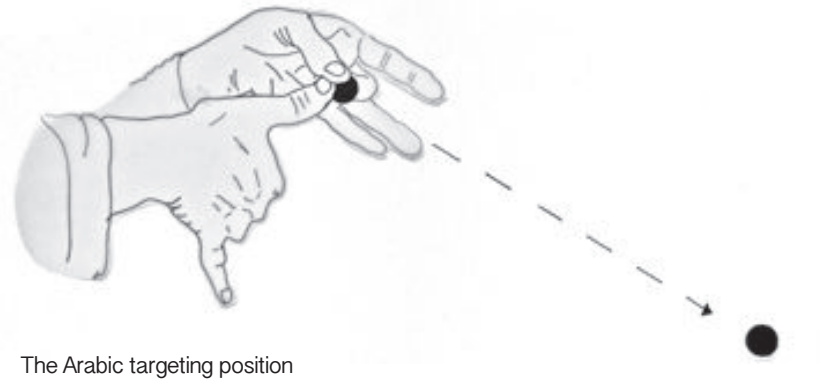
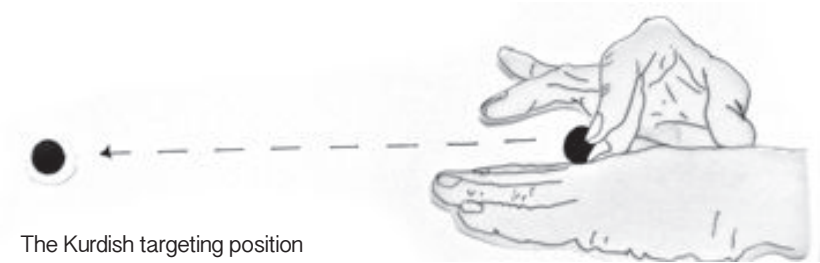
'Field work' expresses a preoccupation with contemporary permutations of location and mobility, with the production of a witnessing voice that is nevertheless not one of didactic analysis. Equally it poses questions concerning the constitution of a 'field': of inquiry, of activity, of interpretation, of relationality etc.<sup>3</sup>

There is a double bind position in such practice, which is (in Rogoff's own words) about being spatially located inside and pragmatically on the outside, or vice versa. As we are constantly on the move, the mode of practice is in transformation. If the field is, as Rogoff suggests, a "confluence of possible connections" we could perhaps also say that it is about the possibility of practice that is responsive and answerable – if we could borrow the term from Mikhail Bakhtin - towards the condition we are trying to inhabit.

Hiwa K told me some time ago that he is interested in things connected not by the subject but the eventual concurrence. In the case of his work *For the Few Socks of Marbles*<sup>4</sup> (2012), he addresses his own childhood. When his family moved in Iraq to the Kurdish and Arab neighborhoods, he was rejected by his peers because his accent in Arabic was Kurdish and vice versa. Yet, his story is not another identity story. His work concerns gambling and gaining strength by bringing new rules to the old game. For Hiwa, it is also about the economy and

<sup>3</sup> Irit Rogoff, *Field Work in Visual Culture*, Berlin, 2004, [ck.kein.org/node/2010](http://ck.kein.org/node/2010)

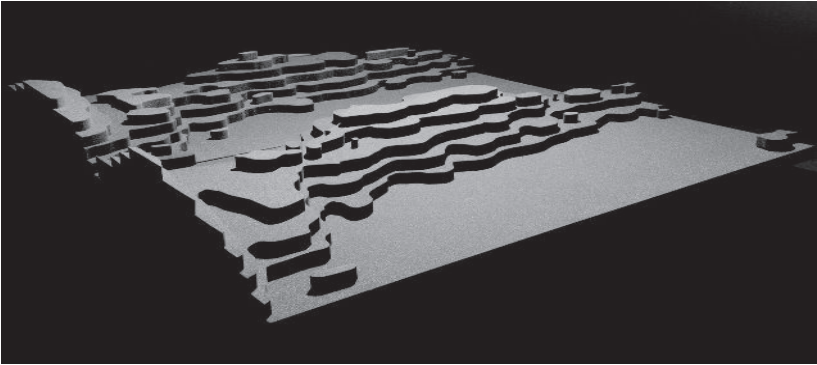
<sup>4</sup> The original version was made for Hiwa K's solo exhibition at MUSAC Leon (Spain) and commissioned by the curator Leire Vergara. The version presented at ISCP replaces woven carpets with a wall drawing.



the wars in the region, such as the Iraq-Iran War and the Gulf Wars. Along with the story we are given, the schematic drawings explain the games, and a video depicts the making of the key big marble and the vitrine with the objects related to the subject. His practice is as much a cross-disciplinary study to understand the origins of neoliberal order, migration, and the reasons for wars, as learning from the everyday, where personal memory manifests forms but the subjects are broadly connected to timely topics linking individual stories to the global flow of capital.

Hiwa K, *For the Few Socks of Marbles*, 2012, Video, drawings on wall, objects in vitrine, Dimensions variable  
Original version commissioned by MUSAC, Leon, Spain

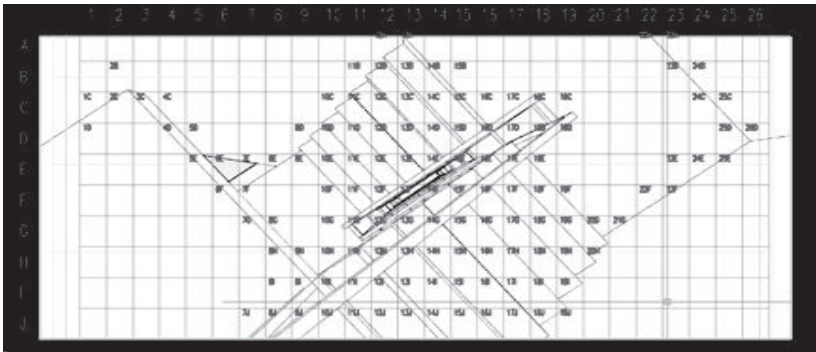
Lawrence Abu Hamdan continues the subject of migration the work *The Freedom of Speech Itself*. The artist researches aural contact, the role of the voice as a political agent, and practices of listening in relation to the law. He studies the architecture of courtrooms in the context of witness testimonies on historic war crimes such as the WWII Nuremberg trials, but most importantly, he follows today's voice recognition and analysis and its role in migration policies. Abu Hamdan works closely with all kinds of specialists; forensic speech analysts advise his search for the direct experiences of migrants and asylum seekers. In some countries, especially in the United Kingdom, the voice works as evidence and plays a key role in the authentication of a person regarding their place of origin. Abu Hamdan speaks of "collision between bureaucracy and voice". Yet, the accent is not a stable and recognizable feature, and the wrongful interpretation of accents by the agencies supplying voice analysis for immigration has caused a number of dramatic deportations.



In the work presented at ISCP, Abu Hamdan brings together audio documentary that resembles the style of a radio broadcast with a spatial form based on the conversion of the voiceprints in layers of foam. It brings the vocal to the material form, to a three-dimensional

Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *The Freedom of Speech Itself*, 2012, Audio installation, soundproof foam, 79 x 79 in. Original sculptural version commissioned by Wyspa Institute of Art for Alternativa 2012 International Visual Arts Festival.

representation of sound so that it becomes sculpture, made out of soundproof foam that absorbs the sound produced in the room. In this sense, it is an installation passively absorbing its own acoustics. Two ways of saying the word “you” becomes a sculptural link between the concept of citizenship and the legal status of the voice. In the words of the artist “not only what you say but also how you say it may be used against you”.



Katarzyna Krakowiak intrinsically studies the relation between space and the sound that penetrates it, as her field of inquiry is the acoustic potentiality of architecture. Her projects involve unspectacular places in art institutions, such as attics, stairs or storage rooms. She asks, what kind of sounds can these places produce or transfer? The artist contributes the work *when the stem breaks the water perpendicularly, its angle is measured to be 0, and the degree gets closer to 90 as it is slanted more, and the level surface is 90 degrees* (2013) in which she creates a hypothetical model of sound penetration in the Japanese art center Sogetsu’s stairwell, a transit space with proportions and form that strangely resemble that of ISCP’s building. Sogetsu brought international artists to work in Japan including John Cage, who was an artist in residence there in the 1960s. During this time, the floor

Kasia Krakowiak, *when the stem breaks the water perpendicularly, its angle is measured to be 0 degree, and the degree gets closer to 90 as it is slanted more, and the level surface is 90 degrees*, 2013, Drawing, architectural model and animation, Dimensions variable, acoustic model: Andrzej Klosak  
Commissioned by post.at.moma.org.

above him hosted dedicated disciples who pursued the rules of ikebana. Krakowiak is driven by curiosity in this produced gendered space, what did the women upstairs actually hear? Which sounds travelled where? The drawn and animated acoustic models of Sogetsu along with three-dimensional forms bring us closer to Krakowiak's mode of practice, in which she is more interested in the air held in the walls of the building than the walls themselves.

Maciej Mądracki, Michał Mądracki and Gilles Lepore work as the filmmaking collective MML Studio. The particular project presented at ISCP was developed in collaboration with the choreographer and dancer Rafał Dziemidok and based on the Gdansk Shipyard where they encountered factory workers and the material shrinkage of the legendary shipbuilding plant. At times, when the worker's jobs seemed to be no longer needed due to the industry declining, they took as the subject of their study the bodily movements of the worker. Inspired by Frank Gilbreth's time and motion studies and Aleksei Gastev's ideas about training the worker, they documented the reverse process. As the worker is no longer for hire, they catalogued the movements coded in the memory of their bodies. In order to document the movements they constructed a gridded space according to Corbusier's scale of proportions – Modulor – belonging similarly to organized industrial labor as to the modernist organization of time and space. The workers were filmed making repetitive movements characterizing their work without actual tools in their hands in response to their inquiry of how the body of the worker remembers particular repetitive movements. Those documented movements were then studied by a choreographer and dancer in order to design and perform the dance.

Hito Steyerl contributes to the show an installation consisting of a set of photographs from the installation *Der Bau/The Building* (2009) and a video titled *Strike* (2012). Steyerl, whose subject of practice and research

is the status of the image, moves radically in this work towards the re-materialization of the image. In the video, the artist herself approaches a blank monitor screen with a chisel and hammer with her hair undone, showing us a wilder, more radical and unbounded theory practitioner. One strike makes the screen matrix break to release the abstract form coming from underneath. The screen that carries the images becomes the image itself and manifests its own fragility and materiality. The video is accompanied by a set of tall and narrow photographs - the dissected image of the façade of a building connected to the Nazi past of the Austrian city Linz. Here for Steyerl's project, workers partly removed the top layer of the building's façade plaster as if in search for past events that had not yet been critically investigated. In both cases, there is a chisel intervention on the surface, one within the actual material structure symbolizing the

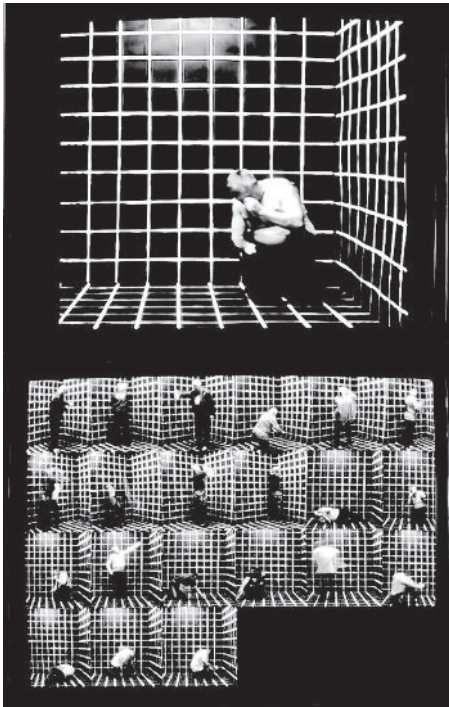


Hito Steyerl, *Der Bau/The Building* (documentation), 2009, Facade deconstruction, 5 channel video installation, panels, and rubble, Dimensions variable  
Architecture by Gabu Heindl, historical research Sebastian Markt, installation design Leon Kahane.  
Commissioned by Niko Wahl, Martin Heller and Ulrich Fuchs for Linz 2009.

heavy and unexplored past of the nation and the other, the unbearable lightness of carrying the monstrosity of contemporary representations. Steyerl creates a strong tension between reverting the denied atrocities of the past into the concrete matter of the building that symbolizes the idea of rematerializing the image by causing damage to the screen that carries it. In this sense, the screen and the façade become equal as the artist explores the surface tension of their planes.

*The Pattern in us All* (2009) by Anders Bojen and Kristoffer Ørum documents a performance given at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen. Made into the form of a mock lecture, it explores easy assumptions in a humorous style, non-methodological approaches, and associative thinking. The professor played by the actor searches for patterns that organize the world. The text uses fragments of actual scientific knowledge and a bluff, and also brings to mind issues in some academic circles regarding accuracy in research. It looks into reservoirs of visibility and at the same time challenges the expectation of spectacle embedded in the space and the environment of the lecture room. Yet, this work is also a call for joyful knowledge, one that falls out of disciplined thinking.

Artistic practices connected to the production of knowledge interrogate the mechanisms of identification, naming, categorizing and systematic thinking. Their matter of concern is often with how knowledge is applied and how it can be applied differently, and how methods from different fields can overlap to reveal what we really want to know. They study circulations, relations, and fluctuations and challenge our systems of representation of knowledge.



MML Studio, *The Shipyard Dance*, 2013, 3 channel video, 6:10 min. 8:25 min. 11:02 min.  
Realisation: Maciej Mądracki, Michał Mądracki, Gilles Lepore (MML Studio)  
Choreographer/Dancer: Rafat Dziemidok  
Music: Igor Kłaczyński  
The work commissioned by Wyspa Institute of Art for Alternativa 2013

**Aneta Szylak** is a curator, writer, and the co-founder and current Director of Wyspa Institute of Art. Since 2010, Szylak has been Artistic Director of Alternativa, a series of exhibitions accompanied by numerous additional events, which seeks new directions for art and its social role. After co-founding and running the Laznia (Bathhouse) Centre for Contemporary Art (1998-2001), she continued her career as an independent curator and researcher. Since 2004, Szylak has been responsible for programming Wyspa—the intellectual environment for contemporary visual culture—in the Gdansk Shipyard.

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