

November 2017

Final report – Jesper Alvær's - *Work,work: Staging dislocation in an artistic and non-artistic labour*

Assessment committee:

Dora Garcia (Chair)
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Jesper Alvær's artistic work for the fellowship programme was presented to the committee 14th-15th November 2016 in Oslo. This was assessed by the committee in an interim report of 30th Dec 2016. The critical reflection following the artistic work was made available for the committee in May 2017. This had form of a text, this text pointing to reference material on a web site for the project: Work,work: Staging dislocation in an artistic and non-artistic labour – <http://stagingdislocation.net/>
The viva voce took place at KHiO 26.10.2017.

1. Assessment of the artistic work

Originality:

We do not really like to think in terms of originality, but rather of intelligent inscription in a certain tradition. Regarding the tradition where the work of Jesper could inscribe, we think of institutional critique from 70's and 90's but there are no indicators of his awareness of this, whether he wishes to inscribe there, or he refuses to inscribe there. In this regard, our recommendation was that the critical reflexion would be used for a thorough contextualization of the work. The same applies for the working with witnesses: this has been a practice in the assessment of performance art for a while and for good reasons. We therefore asked the candidate to make reference to this tradition and elaborate in detail the choices he made for the assessment session on this backdrop.

Further, in the kind of field where Jesper is working, it is surprising that he makes no reference to social media, as a way of reaching out to people and as well as a way of obtaining feedback; to create a dynamic. We therefore asked directly why the use of social media was avoided in projects based so much on processes of communication.

We feel Jesper tries to carve a place for his work where care and group dynamics are the main point, but without much questioning matters of hegemony or politics or institution. We strongly recommended that he takes the opportunity in the critical reflection to take a standpoint regarding the institution, in an explicit and clear form. This applies also to key decisions within the work, i.e. the conscious preference for Wengraft's methodological approach to the interpretation of narrative biographical interviews in contrast to the many other possible approaches more informed by intersectionality and critical theory.

We appreciate the meta-fictional dimension of the setting of the assessment, where witnesses seem to be actors performing the last act of a long and carefully staged play, which includes us as assessment jury. The feeling of being caught inside a fictional play is strong, and it creates a kafkaesque paranoia feeling in witnesses and jury alike.

We very much missed a testimony of people who refused to enter the play of "Competence" or any of the other experiences. We found the selection of witnesses arbitrary and unfortunately composed, with two curators, one former runner of a commercial gallery and one journalist as they all seem very close to the author's own habitus.

Accordingly, their accounts have proved to be partly redundant if not almost identical to the descriptions in Jesper's own texts. The selection of witnesses thus undermines the implicit yet strong emphasis of the documented work on dealing with lots of different realities and value systems. This inhibited the assessment procedure to unfold its obviously intended originality.

For more remarks on the choice of witnesses, regarding their impact on consistency, see below.

Expression:

It is a very courageous format, taking the risk of failure, playing everything to one card and one card only.

The artist expresses himself through the actions he inspires in others and through the social interactions among those others. His instructions are the main expression. But we notice that, given the metafictional character of the work (where a form discusses itself) everything is part of the work: the actual exhibition, the participants then, the witnesses now, the school, the audience, the jury...

We wonder if Jesper is aware of all the dramaturgical possibilities that this offers, because we find that many elements were not taken care of, and there were some unacceptable and unethical loops such as having the artist's life partner and collaborator of one exhibition filming the assessment. This strongly contradicts the notion of care which is mobilized strongly in the work as an overall informing concept.

Then the witnesses had of course their qualities but as well some dramaturgical failures: The first witness was reading from a phone and didn't really know what his role was and had serious difficulties to answer questions that were not programmed. He neither did ask whether it was ok to record. Then on the next day the role of the "small audience" in the witness presentation was very unclear. In general, one had the feeling that things happened without a plan and many occurrences were left unplayed. The whole experience thus stayed superficial.

We think there are many positive possibilities to use this kind of delegation and leave things to create their own dynamics; but it did not become clear for us whether Jesper was aware of these possibilities.

It is very difficult to assess the exhibitions discussed in terms of expression because of lack and poorness of material. Also, within the theme of work, some more back-stage information should have been provided - like: contracts with the volunteers, with the institutions, agreements between artist and volunteers, instructions given to volunteers and institutions etc. (for the impact on this lack of information on consistency, see below).

The cartoon inserts in the text support the content and thematic approach, and were one of the most efficient tools to understand.

Consistency:

The approach of the assessment setting and the conceptual framing of the project are very coherent approaches to the questions raised in the work.

We think nevertheless, that even if we value very positively to have consistently kept just one way of entry to the work, the witness, the choice of witnesses was poor. One first witness had communication trouble and was a former gallerist, two witnesses were curators, out of four; and the third witness and volunteer although being a journalist, did not seem to ask herself many questions about the work.

We would have liked to have as a witness someone "from the other side" - some of the people who escorted and accompany the audience in the exhibition in Prague, and in Poland, it would have been nice to have some museum staff, some of those single mothers that were employed thanks to the grace of the artist...

Because we think the information that the witnesses delivered was very much one-sided and rather similar among them. There was no critical witness regarding the situation, no witness who refused to follow the rules. Everyone seemed to be mainly occupied with explaining the intentions of Jesper rather than manifesting their position in relation to them and reflecting on their role within them.

We think as well that a rather bad dossier and documentation of the exhibition inhibits assessment – it is a missed opportunity.

We also did not learn enough about the conditions of the collaborators: contracts, agreements which doesn't seem to be consistent with the theme "work, work", as we do not know enough about the conditions of production.

We would like to manifest some doubts we have regarding ethics:

- The co-author of the exhibition "Competence" is in the room of the assessment and is in charge of filming, recording and postproduction.
- This co-author is not explicitly enough acknowledged, it is not clear what her contributions are and what are the contributions of the candidate.
- Is it really necessary to leave collaborators in the dark about purposes and plans, without explanations, without clear directions? The desire of the artists to be fiend and friend at the same time? To be *God* (quote from witness, though uncritical)? To be the mastermind or spinductor of the purpose of the overall plan?
- What about payment of the people, and working conditions, i.e. the "focus group"? Work with volunteers? if you deal with "work, work" shouldn't you address the precariousness?
- There was as well no mention of the curators of institutions or people who invited to develop these projects, as co-responsible of the events.
- The get information or not is part of a "regime of control" >> this is a quote from a witness when she described the protocols of spectatorship.

Relevance: How the project contributes to new insight, knowledge and/or experience in the subject area

Jesper Alvær obviously wants to be part of a tradition of post – institutional critique. He focusses on a mode of "reparative reading" (vs. paranoid reading), instigating micro – situations of repair and care. Care as opposed to mere critique. This is an interesting angle, and a very contemporary one. The

subjects he deals with are really interesting: the idea of competence, the position of the artist in society, how the artist is judged, and on what basis the competences are valued.

However, with the last stage of the presentation, the group discussion with Tom Wengraft, facilitator, we were puzzled, because it all seemed to revert to a discussion of the artist himself, the artist named Jeremy / Jesper, as if in the end the subject was not competence and the role of the artist in society, but rather the position of a particular artist within the institution of art - creative class entrepreneurship.

And in this sense, we were wondering why all works made abstraction of their context, no reference to the transforming situation in post-communist countries (Czech Republic, Poland) – nor to the welfare state Norway.

Presentation and communication

Transmission is *THE* main problem of the work to be assessed, as it has already become clear in the other points. It is too unclear, and that does not support the appreciation and understanding of the work. We get very little information about the visuals of the installations, - not necessarily photographs, but ground floor plans, exhibition plans, sketches, drawings; we only got a poorly drafted pdf.

While we appreciate the radicality of choosing just the experience of witnesses to communicate the work, the truth is, we do not have now a clear idea of the work, and this could have been solved at not cost of radicality, with a proper documentation in the form of a book or objects or photographs, or plans, or all of it together, given to the assessment committee, not necessarily exhibited.

This inhibits a much more detailed discussion and thus in-depths reflection and appreciation of the individual projects presented, which generally (but not in each case equally) seem to be much more carefully crafted and thought through as well as conceptually thorough than the assessment session itself.

2. Assessment of the document REPORT CRITICAL REFLECTION - Jesper Alvær – Work – Work

What follows is an assessment of the text document "XXX REPORT CRITICAL REFLECTION" by Jesper Alvær – Work – Work, delivered as a .pdf under the title "Work, work May 1, Critical reflection Jesper Alvaer". This assessment is made by Carmen Mörsch, Andreas Siekmann and Dora García.

This critical reflection has been assessed as sufficient and approved.

However, we had important reservations about the written critical reflection titled "Work, work May 1, Critical reflection Jesper Alvær" and we felt therefore the need to communicate them to the candidate. These reservations are mentioned below.

Regarding the presentation and communication, the text is not structured, it is difficult to read (because it does not have a clear structure) and it is hard to assess where it is going. It does not really aim at a conclusion and could better be considered a form of personal diary. It seems not to intend to clarify to the reader the aims and method of the research process, but rather to clarify the thoughts of the author to himself.

Regarding how the project contributes to new insight, knowledge and/ or experience in the subject area, the committee would appreciate more effort to describe the position of the work in art history, artistic practice or the art community. There are no references to artists working in a similar field; the work seems to be completely isolated in terms of artistic landscape, no references are mentioned (although the committee can think of very clear and obvious references). Similarly, if we speak of the position of the research within the sociological and social sciences or cultural studies field, there is as well a lack of references and positioning, although the text uses terminology that could be understood as scientific. Two personalities who are named, Henri Corbin and a Raivo Puusemp, are just named and briefly quoted, and no context is given about who they are and what is their relation to the project.

Regarding originality, expression, and relevance: the committee has doubts about the concept of "exhibition as alibi" (couldn't this be rather an incapacity to renew the exhibition format to fit new forms of "relational" practice?); the committee perceives as false the oppositions presented, such as artist / non artist, participative audience / "transient voyeuristic passive spectators"; there is a rather reductive view of artistic practice, considered only as labour and object-producing, which leads us to doubt that the "public" in this research was ever really enabled to assume authorship and real agency in the different processes described. We as readers are often denied insight about certain processes, such as the inscription of the candidate in "all political parties" - we are left without knowing the why or the result of this action, and this puzzles us.

Regarding consistency: there is no index, no index of names nor of themes, there is no bibliography.

In the archive <http://stagingdislocation.net/>, there is a great amount of material and information, but there is no guide to go through it, there is no way to know what we should look for. It is just classified by format and within the formats it seems to follow a chronological order. It would be necessary to offer an easier navigation to the visitor. This visitor should understand at first sight what this is about and where to find what.

Very often there is a justificatory tone in the way the text relates to the work. We wish there was a more engaged and at the same time more analytical and self-reflexive approach both to the work and to the text. The text often sounds as an administrative justification for the grant received.

We as a jury did value the amount of work developed by the candidate during these grant years and the professional network he succeeded at establishing internationally.

Final conclusion after the Viva Voce

The viva took place 26th October when Jesper Alvær presented the project followed by a discussion with the committee and the audience.

As jury, we have observed a number of positive and negative things, that hereby we detail:

As positive,

- We salute the sensitivity and aesthetic rigor of the exhibition output presented by Jesper, very well thought through, functional and efficient.
- We salute the capacity to engage people in a common project.
- We think this project is especially relevant for the things it points towards, as "to be done"; even if a proper reflection upon those things is not yet done, it certainly points in the right direction, such as:

- a. the evolution of capitalism, the role contemporary art has played in it and will continue to play in it.
- b. the hegemonization of institutional critique, and its blindest spot: the institutional critique of institutional critique.
- c. the role of the artist and the role of the audience, the limits of participation, the ethics of collaboration and authorship.
- d. the changes today in feedback systems, which were not there at the time of APG (Artists' Placement Group, an experiment in the 70s we consider to be the direct antecedent to Jesper Alvær's research)

As negative,

- We did not find that the VIVA VOCE contributed very much to the clarification of our open questions, which were raised by the critical reflection and the presentation.
- We observe a lack of connection between the naming of authors, concepts, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the experiential accounts. There was no synthesis between the two.
- We observe an important tendency to Hermetism, a refusal to reveal information, which creates an uncomfortable distance to the subject and to the audience.
- We consider that the ethical issues we raised in our feedbacks previously delivered to Jesper Alvær, have not been dealt with and are yet to be answered.

However, valuing the negative and the positive, we unanimously decide to let pass the candidate and validate the research.

1st November 2017

Dora Garcia



(s)

Carmen Mörsch



(s)

Andreas Siekmann



(s)