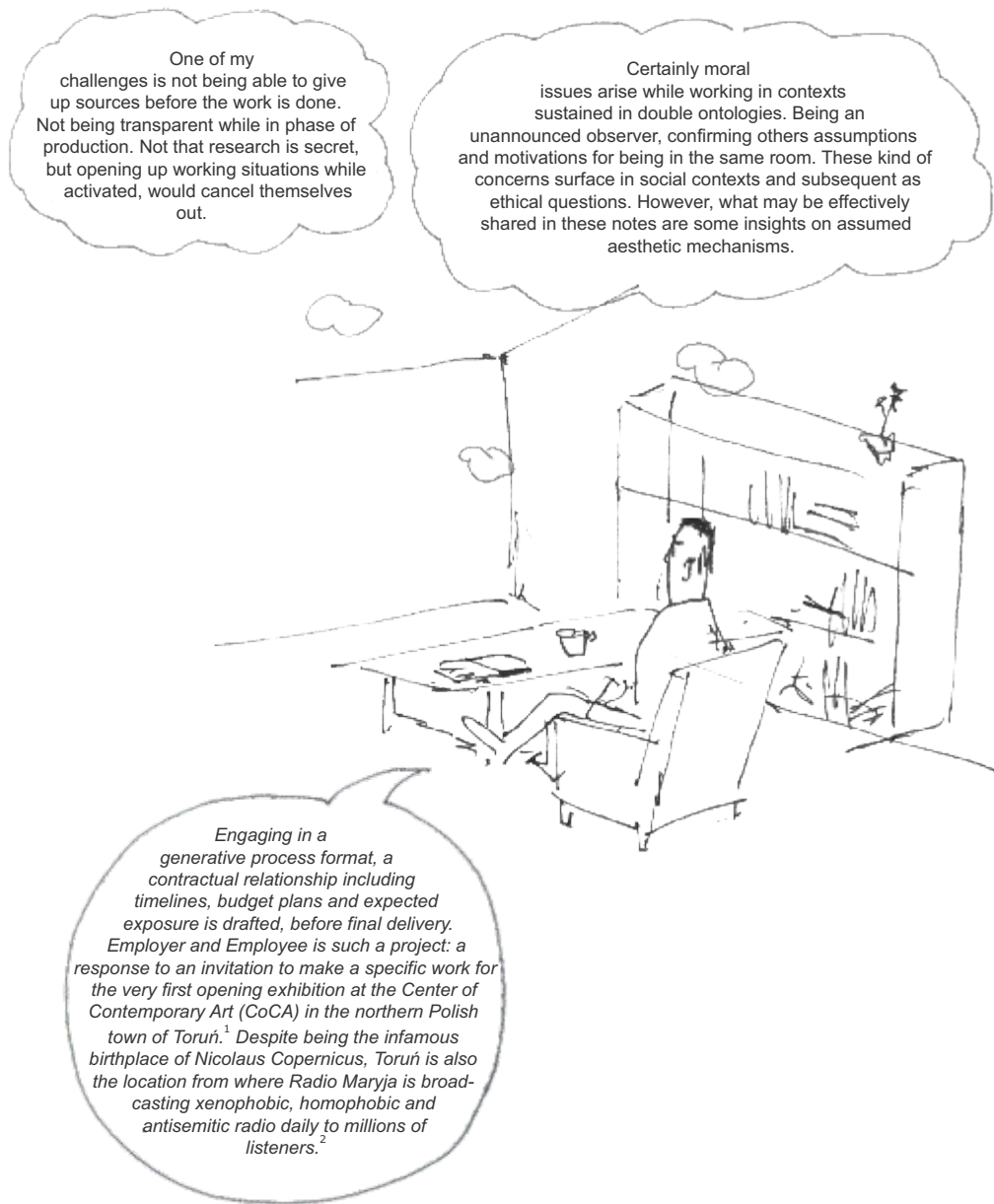


# STAGING DISLOCATION: NOTES ON FINISHED AND UNFINISHED WORK

---

## JESPER ALVAER

**Jesper Alvær** (born 1973) received his artistic training mainly in Prague, New York, and Kitakyushu. During 2013–16 he is a PhD candidate at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts with the project *Work, work: Staging dislocation in artistic and non artistic labour*, (<http://artistic-research.no/jesper-alvaer-work-work>). In addition to showing his art at a number of international exhibitions, Alvær has also participated in numerous study, residence, and research programmes both in Norway and abroad. His most recent exhibitions include *Mother, Dear Mother*, (Kunstnernes Hus Oslo, 2014), *Arbeidstid/Work Time* (Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 2013) as well as several exhibitions held in collaboration with Isabela Grosseova: *Competencies* (Fotograf Gallery, Prague 2014), *Activum* (Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo, 2013), *Eventos Paralelos* (Manifesta 8, Murcia, 2010/11), and an exhibition at Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery, Krakow, 2007.



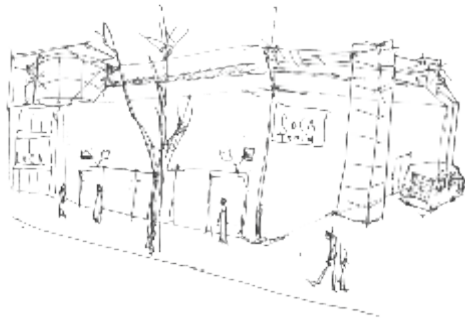
It seemed necessary to describe a few personal works and approaches towards a given logic of production, embedded in common formats. The projects *Employer* and *Employee* and *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday*, will serve as examples. Often, artistic production is initiated based on a response to a call, typically from an authority entitled to ask for a work for a specific context.

Several times, when visiting Toruń for research purposes, the responsible secretary at the CoCA Toruń showed him around and at some point after taking a taxi, explained him a feeling that the whole town know that she is divorced and a single mother. In the conservative catholic context of Toruń, she described this as a stigmatised position. To make a long story short, below is a description on how his conceptual response was communicated for the small staff in the office. We try imagine the following:

[1]  
[http://www.csw.torun.pl/?set\\_language=en&cl=en](http://www.csw.torun.pl/?set_language=en&cl=en)

[2]  
<http://www.radiomaryja.pl>

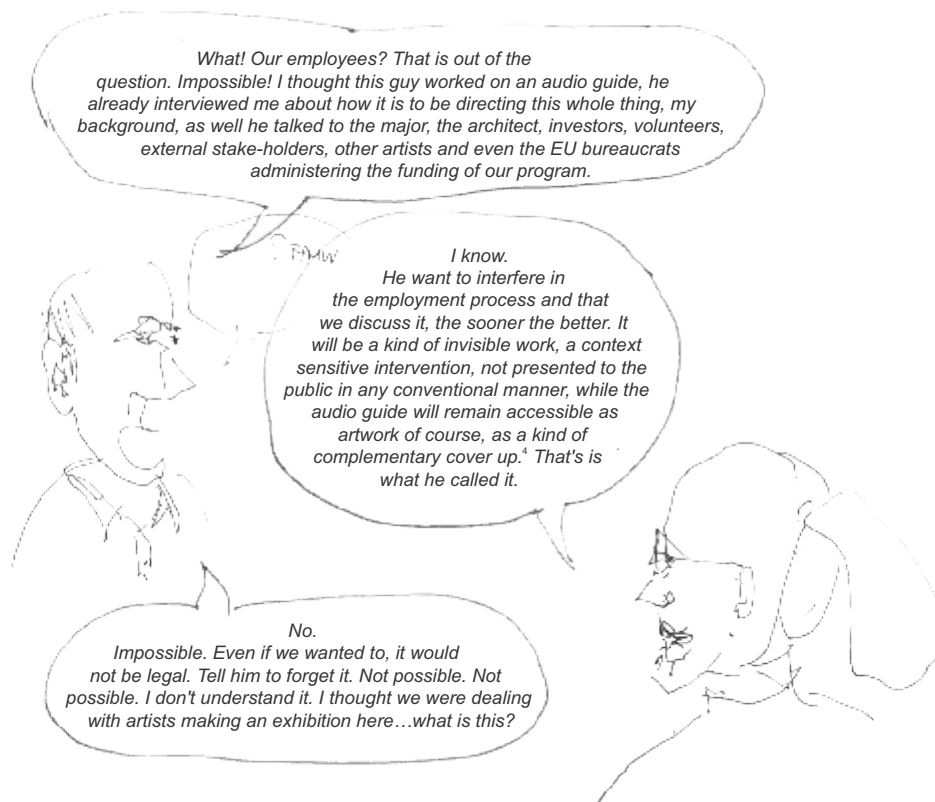
*Employer* and *Employee* was still a work in progress while for the first time presented for the institution by the curator of the show.



The secretary (mentioned above) is in the office of CoCA Toruń and the director is there with her, both standing and busy discussing some details. The curator is there as well, having her temporary office desk in the same location. The whole new building complex including the CoCA is to be opened in less than 6 months and they recently moved into these offices. A technician is finalising some network installation in the corner of the room.

It is a small work group; nobody apart from this core administration, the curator and a board on the paper. Everyone is working under pressure in getting various infrastructures of the building ready and even a more intense focus is on preparing for the very first opening exhibition, titled *Flowers of Our Lives*, the main responsibility of our guest curator.<sup>3</sup> The guest curator walks over to the secretary and director. The director looks up in a welcoming manner, naturally taking the lead and ask:





Meeting a temporary dead end in the office, extensive lobbying succeeded in pushing *Employer and Employee* through another channel. The intervention into the employment process of the CoCA Toruń was facilitated though members of the board, made possible under strict regulations. Engaging initially in screening processes and durational negotiations after interview sessions, they found ways to interpret and bend the juridical issues to enable the project.

The private consultant company working for the city of Toruń<sup>5</sup> managing employment to the public sector, accepted legal responsibility for an overall employment procedure that resulted in 11 single household divorced mothers getting a job at the CoCA Toruń. A rather high number considering all the applicants being screened initially and then interviewed for the all in all 47 full and mostly part time positions.

The artist agreement with the board of CoCA Toruń, the managing director and the curator in order to implement the project, was to maintain a very low profile in terms of dissemination. *Employer and Employee* was further on not to be formally presented for the first 4 following years, as a kind of quarantine of sorts. This to avoid legal misunderstandings, repercussions or other trouble for any of the persons involved on both sides.

New staff members employed under the particular criteria of being a single-mother by the time of employment (in addition to fulfil the general qualifications for the job), should not be informed about the special circumstances in which they actually got their job. However, they realised early on themselves the large quantity of single-mothers within their small work force and shared interests in discussions during lunch and coffee breaks.

*Employer and Employee* is in practical terms still rendered by the employees themselves, in simply showing up at work, not knowing that their job constitute artistic labor, embedded within the structure of general public employment at the CoCA Toruń. The result is a dislocation of artistic production, within a non artistic labor workforce. Using

[3] <http://www.csw.torun.pl/exhibitions/exhibitions-db/flowers-of-our-lives>

[4] Elastic Medium As a Wave <http://www.google.no/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCIQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcs.w.torun.pl%2Fwystawy%2Fbaza-wystaw%2Fkwiaty-naszego-zycia%2Ffiles%2Faudioguide-mapa.pdf&ei=TJsYVNmcHO07ygOitYH4CQ&usg=AFQjCNEVDJLi7PCrDB7snJY07r28vh2m2g&bvm=bv.75097201,d.bGQ>

[5] <http://www.klgates.com/pl/>

*Employer and Employee* as an example illustrate the importance of how information is distributed and question visibilities and transparence in allowing this work to come into existence.

*Employer and Employee* would not be possible to carry out if the essence of the project would be announced before, during or immediate after realisation. Another point is the relation between a critical distance to an observed conservative social reality, but caring to intervene in order to have an impact on this particular situation, rather than diagnosing the obvious through a an critical, but formal installation. Care, beyond criticality.

Further, what kind of validity would *Employer and Employee* translate if we choose to interpret this as a model of locating artistic labour within a non artistic work environment? An invisible employer being exposed while invisible employees (for the viewer) are performing the (invisible) work without knowing. In the writing moment, 5 of the 11 initially employed are still working at the CoCA Toruń.<sup>6</sup> What keeps them going? When does the work end?

### ***Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday***

As the title insinuate, this negotiated set of five successive working days was first associated with his own participation in the Oslo based international residence program, W17.

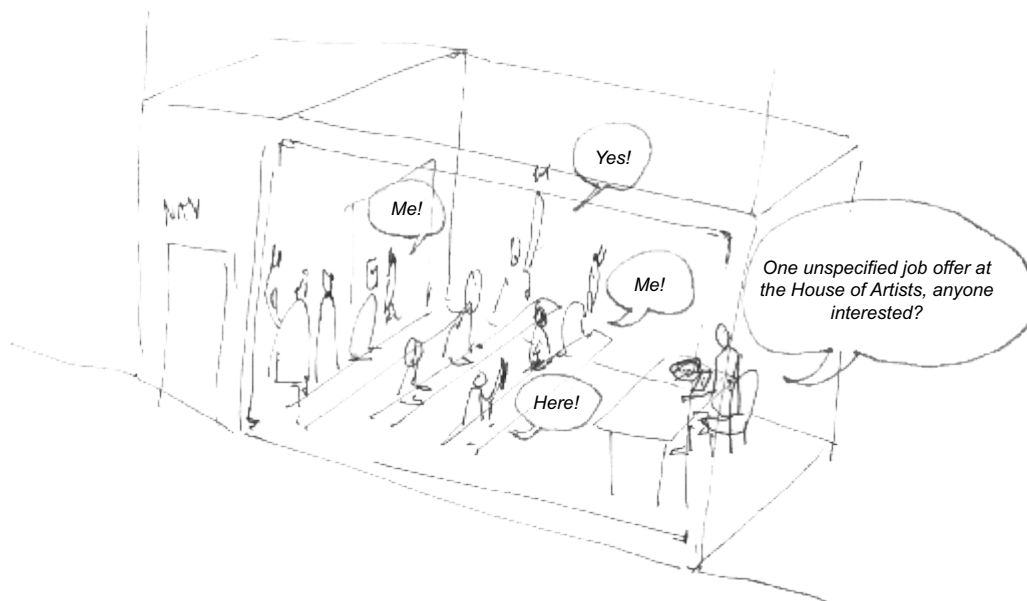
The project Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday set out to examine current perceptions about the type of work and logic of production associated with artistic practices. The idea was to locate specific working experiences in relation to artistic production per se. The project was elaborated in collaboration with the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), formally serving as supplier of temporary staff.<sup>7</sup>

[6]  
September 2014

[7] <https://www.nav.no/en/Home>

[8]  
<http://tv.nrk.no/serie/nasjonalgalleriet/MKTF03002511/28-11-2011#t=16m17s>

[9] The video work Konkret (links) was as well elaborated from these 42 sessions, commissioned by Henie Onstad Kunstsenter (HOK) Oslo for the exhibition *Arbeidstid* (2013) curated by Milena Hoegsberg, including the related publication *Living Labor*.  
part 1:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4VNFwy-1c1eNkIndmluY2R6WDQ/edit?usp=sharing>  
part 2:  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B4VNFwy-1c1eNkIndmluY2R6WDQ/edit?usp=sharing>



The Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) day job distribution centre was recently closed down due to few available jobs. The distribution centre was not widely known since state run institutions of this kind were not allowed to compete on the market with recruitment agencies like Jobzone, Addecco, Manpower etc.<sup>8</sup>



A systematic framework was put in place: a person would show up individually from the NAV day job distribution centre to the studio in W17, more or less every day. Not informed in detail on what the job actually would consist of, the meeting normally started by having a coffee or tea. During the first hour he would normally describe the open ended idea and a particular interest in contractual relationships. Then more concretely about the project and the job itself; to discuss different aspects of work and to possibilities use this series of conversations if something (extra-)ordinary would come out of all these meetings.

So, they talked, associated and articulated experience. Just sitting in that room. Apart from written notes, no documentation was done and they followed no schematic approach. Each meeting depended on that unique person and his own mood as well. If people did not like to talk after a few hours, then they wrote some poems, drawings or just coloured some white sheets of paper. Basically, a group of random people hired to discuss understandings of work articulated in their own words. Overall, this resulted in 42 in-depth conversations with a variety of people during a period of 4 months. After 4 hours, they received their payment in cash.<sup>9</sup>

[10] Exhibition NORSK; <http://www.galerie-poggi-bertoux.com/en/expositions/presentationarchive/88/norsk-une-scene-artistique-norvegienne-contemporaine>

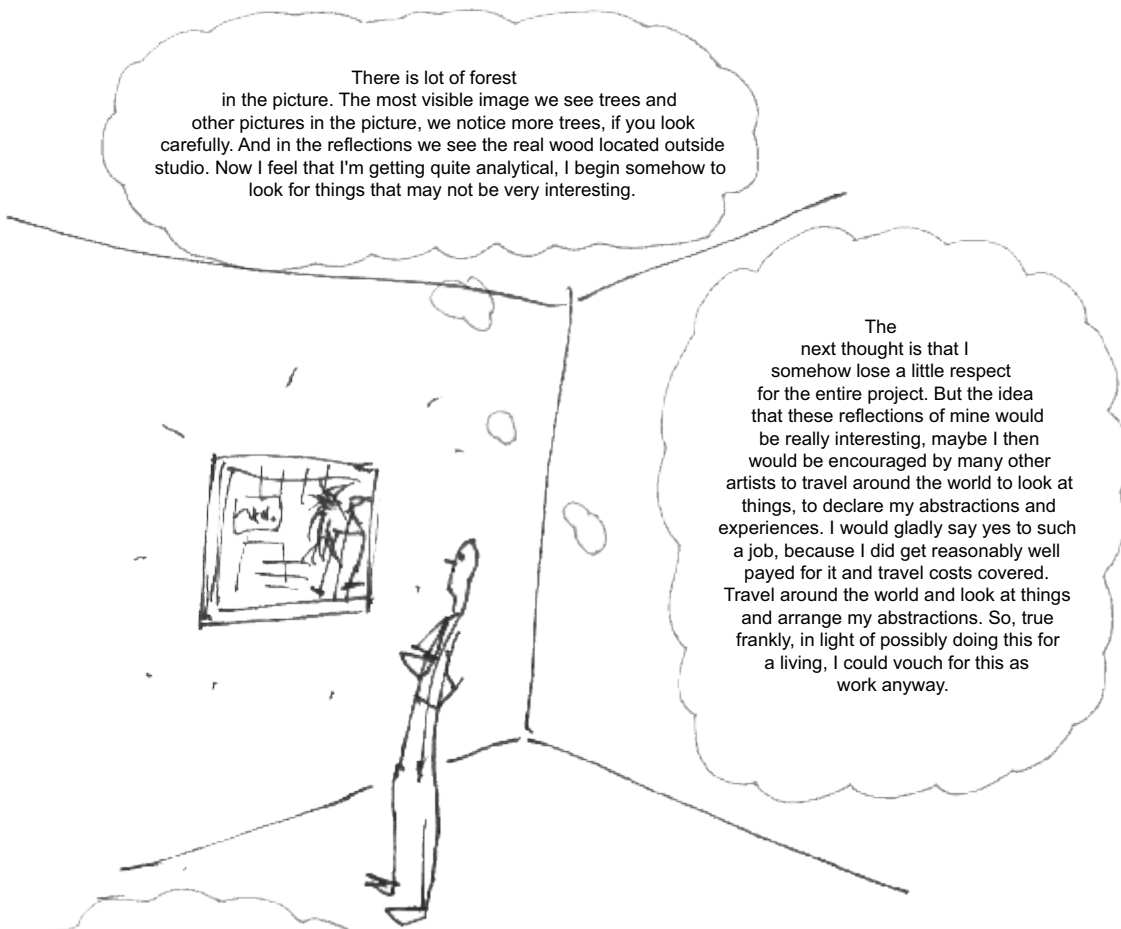
[11] In collaboration with Eline Mugaas, a series of 6 photographs.

So, six people were individually hired in again, but this time to visit an exhibition. To see their own image, now hanging in a gallery. The exhibition was in Paris, so in order to see the particular image from the conversation, the task was to fly to Paris and "certify the image", to use the terminology applied in the gallery context.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the display of the photographs in the exhibition was adapted to accommodate these individual visits, one at the time, changing images accordingly within a period of time of six weeks. Nobody had seen the images beforehand and the task was simply to travel alone, stay in a hotel, go to the gallery and see their specific photograph. Then reflect on their travel experience and finally hand in a report of their thinking experience on return to Oslo.



Later, six conversations stood out for him as special after absorbing the 42 meetings. One photographic image was then conceived with a photographer for each of these, as a kind of extension of that particular conversation. The images depicted specific geographic locations functioning as a reference points, as a continuation of the conversations, translated into another modality.<sup>11</sup> The same people were contacted again and asked if they would be interested to continue the work from last time.


To see "their" image, based on the previous conversation. This was almost a year later but the people hired at first remembered well the previous conversations and accepted to continue "the job".



There is lot of forest in the picture. The most visible image we see trees and other pictures in the picture, we notice more trees, if you look carefully. And in the reflections we see the real wood located outside studio. Now I feel that I'm getting quite analytical, I begin somehow to look for things that may not be very interesting.

The next thought is that I somehow lose a little respect for the entire project. But the idea that these reflections of mine would be really interesting, maybe I then would be encouraged by many other artists to travel around the world to look at things, to declare my abstractions and experiences. I would gladly say yes to such a job, because I did get reasonably well paid for it and travel costs covered. Travel around the world and look at things and arrange my abstractions. So, true frankly, in light of possibly doing this for a living, I could vouch for this as work anyway.

My spontaneous thought immediately afterwards, when I'm on my way out again is that this is certainly not work.



Now I go very slowly out and away from the gallery. Relaxed, very relaxed. Now I have somehow done the job.



*Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday* may cast confusion in terms of locating the artwork. Is it in the image? Or is it rather in the subjective experience of the person traveling, in the report? Or is it perhaps taking place in the reader as the story unfolds?

Notions of delegation, imagination and care may be foregrounded in the descriptions above. Delegation of performance in *Employer and Employee* takes place without consent and without obvious impact. Delegated authority and responsibility presented in *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday* was given form by reflecting aesthetically without being trained to do so and having to report on it. It is not a question of doing it well, succeeding, failing or performing. Whatever the outcome, to what degree is it rich or limited in articulation? What are their capacities to imagine? Why is that so? How is the travel experience communicated at home, over dinner, in the pub with friends?

Exploring modes of engagement within employment may be described as intermodal decentering.<sup>12</sup> Traveling to Paris to observe one single image, as in *Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday*, involved a radical departure from the most workers ordinary life situation. Doing extraordinary work tasks abroad and articulating these. First from conversation to image. Then from image to journey and finally from traveling experience to report on reflection.

Working methodically with material from one modality to another, these transitions constitute a common framework, or pattern illustrated in the centre of this page. As well in the following described case studies, we find a setup for open ended engagement, presented as possible sites for production. Common for these work related case studies or proposals below, are their particular dislocation and limited information, making them difficult to describe.

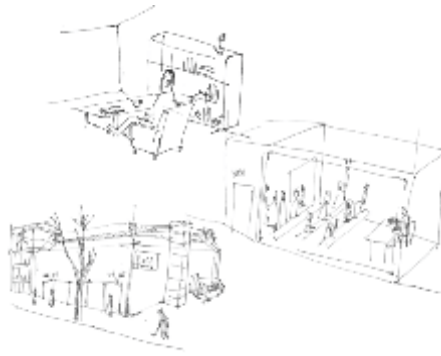
Partly because they are in the making and not really «cases» to be studied from distance or outside. Partly because full transparency would make these situations vulnerable. Partly because the nature of the research remains uncertain, indicating a displacement from artistic practice to artistic research practice. Under these circumstances, to what degree is it possible to avoid being project formatted, predictable and ultimately delusive?

Often descriptions of methodological approach seems to be misleading in terms of being mis-recognised as topical frameworks.

The main focus is therefor rather to emphasise on common grammar and aesthetic mechanisms, paying attention to inner perspectives and lived experiences. Central are how these situations are intended and influenced by the context and forums in which they eventually will be exposed and experienced.

[12] Intermodal decentering was developed by Paolo Knill and Herbert Eberhart. It was invented within the frame of education to create a structure where art making could unfold its capacities in a restricted amount of time. <http://www.egs.edu/arts-health-society/about/>





- Ordinary world experience before employment
- Giving necessary information
- Connecting employment to daily reality
- Instructing employment toward art-making.



- Extraordinary world experience
- Work-oriented decentering techniques
- Recognizing the imaginary reality



- Extraordinary world experience
- Work-oriented decentering techniques
- Recognizing the imaginary reality

### Notes on unfinished work case study A: Anonymous work group

Developing a capacity to imagine things together as adults, or to take part in forming ideas or concepts is directly employed in this anonymous work group. Members of the group responded incognito to an anonymous ad in the main newspapers in Oslo.

For the last 8 months, this work-group has been meeting on a 4 to 6 weeks frequency, providing a continuous concrete feedback and developing a reflection on an artwork not yet made.

The individual members of the group are offered payment for their effort to engage. The intention is to keep this discussion group ongoing until the last phase of the formal quest in the research project *Work, work*.<sup>13</sup> This group main target is to challenge the typical artistic practice accompanied by a complimentary critical reflection, being constitutive components in the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme. Will it prove productive to reverse reflection in which employment constitutes a significant role? If so, what kind authority does this question of co-authored research formally imply if when presented anonymously for assessment?

[13] [http://artistic-research.no/?page\\_id=2490](http://artistic-research.no/?page_id=2490)

[14] <http://www.kunstnerneshus.no/kunst/jesper-alvaer-2/>



### Notes on unfinished work case study B: Political membership

*Mother, Dear Mother* is a title of a research exhibition held at House of Artists in Oslo.<sup>14</sup> The work presented was based on systematically becoming a member of every major political party in Norway. This involved being engaged in social and political activities in the respective parties, both prior to and after the national election in 2013.

*Mother, Dear Mother* encapsulated as an attempt to describe emotional experiences of a nation undergoing a political shift with a special focus on transformation of work. Through taking part in activities based on assumptions of a shared political commitment, spread out on the political spectre, a sense of personal dishonesty developed, in not sharing project driven motivations in the nomination of political representation and collective work undertaken in various political organisations. The entire exhibition is currently being modulated into a film.

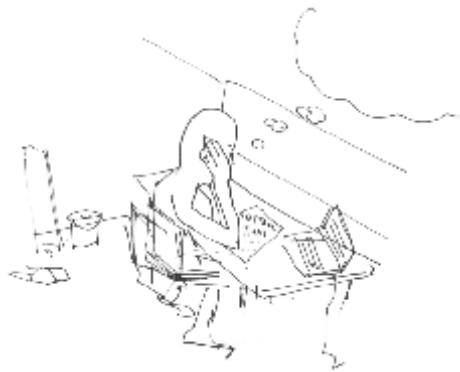


### Notes on unfinished work case study C: Delegated autonomy

Employing two students with non-artistic bachelors to obtain a Master in Fine Art. Who is trained to produce and entitled artistic authorship? Is it possible to pay someone to undertake such an artistic process? If so, at what point do the employed (current MFA students) gain authentic ownership of the work, since interpretational efforts are central in all delegated work tasks?

From a sense of alienation in making someone else art as a job, to developing a personal ownership and possible autonomy including forms of negotiated resistance along the way. Currently operational and not published in detail to protect the students as workers and the case study in itself for not being interrupted. The engaged students are reporting on a regular basis both their experience as process and how they actually imagine their work to develop. Expected graduation will be in 2016 and after the complete archive will be made accessible to the public.

[15] Research exhibition is being prepared in collaboration with Isabela Grosseova and Jiří Ptáček for Prague Fotograf Gallery, January 2015.  
<http://www.fotografgallery.cz/vystavy/2014/00/?lang=en>



### Notes on unfinished work case study D: Dismissed competence

Dismissed competence is a series of narrative inquiries in form of interviews. The study includes a group of elders which all did study to become professional artists in a national art academy, but abandoned their profession and never pursued a career as artists. One focus is on how this particular competence may have leaked into other activities.

Another focus is to locate epistemological layers, not chronologically but through practicing an improvised emotional archeology. This happens through language in addressing the experience of hosting personal and specialised competence never applied. How can competence be identified, articulated and described alternatively to the obvious narration the subjects already settled with? Outcome of these mutually constructed and repeated interviews will be made presentable and in some cases in collaboration with the elders in question.<sup>15</sup>

