

WHAT IF [REDACTED]

*This was omitted on my new theory
that you could omit anything if you
knew that you omitted and the omitted
part would strengthen the story and
make people feel something more
than they understood.¹*

Feel something more than they understood: Looking for shared concerns and related ways of working, or not working, that surface in the pairing of these artists in side-by-side rooms, we find [REDACTED]. We note overlaps and hear echoes where both practices center conditions of production as their art's main subject matter. Both commit to fostering and mining the casual intimacy produced in the social space from which art comes because art is a scaffolding of relationships they inhabit like a studio. Both withhold, both omit. Both evince a certain reluctance or resistance to [REDACTED]. Both invoke the deferral and distance of proxies, stand-ins, and administrative formalities to get at something rather vague and elusive and moving. Both may appear hands-off and remote, perhaps even cold and dry but turn out, after spending some time to get into it, to be saturated with feeling and aspiration. They reach far with longing gestures that seem to wonder, what if art was just a starting point? What if art was, ultimately, beside the point? Everything flows from, or arrives at, the affirmative conviction that [REDACTED]. Both make us feel something more than we understand.

Magnus Frederik Clausen's room presents a group of vigorously painted depictions of bread—a slice, a roll, a loaf torn in half—that oscillate between still-life and abstraction, while looking ambiguously like a group and solo show at the same time, which is a wonderfully strange way to look. And his is truthfully both a kind of group show and a solo show because, not for the first time, the artist hired assistants ([REDACTED], non-professionals) to paint these paintings for him at his direction. That first time, he hired assistants to paint numerical and clock-face representations of [REDACTED]. For these bread paintings, he hired locals living in The Hague, individuals encountered on the street and by word of mouth, employing a total of six painters with up to three working in the studio at the same time. The hiring process was formalized with a one-page employment contract. The six employed for this occasion range in age from an 11-year-old girl to [REDACTED] and vary by nationality from Dutch and Iranian to Chinese and Ukrainian. The paintings are loose and winningly unfussy, blunt but evocative. Operating with assistants this way, he has reflected, redefined his aesthetic project as [REDACTED] instruction and observation, taking on pedagogical

¹ Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast.

overtones. The themedness of the paintings, their small size, and restricted palettes give them the look of a class assignment. They say the secret to producing effective children's art is knowing when to take it away from them; in Magnus' case it might also be knowing when to keep painting beyond a point of exhaustion or start over. Like structurally-minded, concept-driven practitioners before him, he sets up a context with parameters, developed in response to some query or musing, that sets in motion a process of making from which works of interest will necessarily result no matter what. An empirical and experimental approach; everything is a form of research. It takes a lot of preparation and planning. It must require a broad view and the ability to track multiple things in mind at the same time, like a conductor balancing the entire orchestra on his baton. In fact, the artist ends up performing the labors regularly delegated to studio assistants while the hired assistants fill in for the artist.

They painted from life, Magnus picking up fresh models from the bakery on his way to the studio to concretize that paradigmatic symbol of all things basic and necessary, as well as literalize that colloquialism for the money the assistants were paid to paint. Bread is the money you are paid for a job, for grunt work, for the thing you do to pay the bills—worried money. The bread paintings were built up over multiple sessions, with multiple assistants able to paint on the same canvas, as directed by the artist. Called "Werkgelegenheid" ("Working Possibilities"), the show also includes a brief statement by the artist. The statement adds [REDACTED]. It explains that the artist started keeping a diary when he began hiring assistants to paint for him in his studio two years ago. The journal writing he then did, documenting [REDACTED], was initially planned to be this exhibition's central component, but by the time the writing was done and reread, he reconsidered: "I must admit I felt disappointed when I realized my words failed me." Instead of presenting his diary, he presents [REDACTED]: "Next time, I will consider hiring a ghostwriter to write my diary..." By its proclaimed absence, the diary—or the idea of it (ambition and hope plus reality)—remains [REDACTED].

But, back to the provocation of [REDACTED] and the blurriness of [REDACTED]. What if authorship is not simply a matter of by-lines, attribution, or originality, but rather an extremely complex tangle of relations in excess of the artist—a continuum of events that have brought us to this point? Instead of closing things down with the comforting clarity of a name, the question of authorship in art could blow [REDACTED]. It may be claimed, but never truly known. The hunt for origins is never-ending; there's always a before, a backstory, a known unknown. Furthermore, what if authorship is not only inherently vexed on an ontological level but used as a plastic medium to be fucked with, purposefully confused and deflected? What if an artist seeks not only to work *on* people—transmitting an experience, a shudder, a psychic effect—but *through* people, an invisible hand rerouting intent and desire through other individuals? [REDACTED]. There are various occupational models available to approximately describe this strategy, like director, guide, facilitator, influencer, or teacher. Then there's the problem of recognition—if we cannot be sure where the work of one person ends and another begins, can we be sure to recognize the work when we see it or hear it or come into contact with it? Will we know *where* the work is? Does it matter? Can we still have an experience of fullness? And, what if, conversely, an artist sublimates ego in the other direction to make themselves the instrument of another artist's vision, for a time, employed as an assistant? The circumstances of such a service could be one of friendship or economic need, or perhaps both. Which leads to [REDACTED].

In the other room, Jason Hirata's show is called "Orologio," which translates as clock, watch, or "Timepiece," the latter fitting best as the English title since his pieces here directly concern time. A dozen digital metronomes, ticking from within the boxes they were packaged in, are mounted to the walls at a standard height, encircling the room and producing a densely layered, pre-programmed sonic array. The work is aural and immersive, changing shape like sculpture does as a body moves through the room's surround-sound, navigating closer to one box and farther from another. Some cacophonous drum machine symphony with syncopated polyrhythms. When one beat recedes and another steps forward in relation to the architecture, he thinks of "these instances of form as being somewhat related to the social constellations and associations that emerge out of working conditions for creative and economic activity alike." I have neither seen nor heard *Orologio* exhibited in person, but neither has the artist, who sent production instructions. This and any future installations are unique, the specific arrangement of metronomes in an architecture producing specific effects. Such is the nature of [REDACTED] today.

Jason's metronomes are programmed according to a set of conventional classical time signatures he has catalogued in the list form of an invoice, which is also presented within the exhibition as an aesthetic work, a drawn study. He's explained that the invoice provides "a framing of disciplined time according to the logics of the orchestra and business." Routinely using invoices to quantify and bill work done as an independent contractor in daily life, Jason came to see the invoice as a repository of biographical traces—a record that forms a kind of diary. He hears action and story coursing through the beats: "The metronomes act for me as a kind of soundtrack, or perhaps a description, of activity." The list format rationalizes time as a cumulative experience, one thing after another, building on itself and adding up. What if art was made out of time, like the shape of time, rather than space or matter? What does it mean to offer a tempo? How would [REDACTED]? It's impossible to put anything but an arbitrary value on artistic labor. In an invoice, time is material and labor is currency and, in this invoice, titled *Grave Fattura (Serious Invoice)*, the services rendered are an annotated series of symphonic tempos. Jason compiled a glossary of Italianate time signatures as relics of the historical necessity to describe time in narrative terms before the existence of mechanical time-measuring instruments. *Grave, largo, lento, adagio, adagietto, andante, moderato, allegretto, allegro, vivace, presto, prestissimo*: the tempos are organized from slowest to fastest, with a description and an associated range of beats per minute (BPM) to the right of each entry where fees would be listed. *Grave* at the top of the invoice is "deep and heavy. A slowness of considerable weight to the point of hostility," pegged at 25-45 BPM. While *prestissimo*, at the bottom, has the "persistence of urgency past due" at 200+ BPM. The arc, gradually moving from slowness to speed, heaviness to fleetness, projects a sense of mounting anticipation and a general enlivening, like waking up. Addressed to Billytown, the bill's total due is 988-1286+ BPM, however one wants to interpret, let alone pay, that. Such high BPMs are beyond our capacity to differentiate and not perceptible as beats, instead forming steady tone.

[REDACTED] comes from Jason's broader fascination with narrativization as an irrepressible human impulse or base instinct that produces meaning in all things. As he put it, narrative meaning will always surface, even in apparently objective or impartial systems, even in the most alienated spaces. The gravity of our social relations and intersubjectivity cannot be defied. And because of that, there is heart in his BPM pile-up. Heart and humanity. What if art were an excuse to meet people and better understand them—to psychologize? What if artists were just pushers of energy?

Being a catalyst or conduit is [REDACTED] a powerful, if invisible, kind of work, like being a parent. Oh to have a barely-there practice, one that risks disappearance. Both Jason and Magnus variously delegate, subcontract, and outsource aspects of the making of their work in ways that makes the work about that very delegating, subcontracting and outsourcing, one [REDACTED], one [REDACTED]. Both, in so doing, grasp that the self may not be the most interesting thing about an artist—about them. What if someone found others more interesting than themselves? With all the contemporary stress on artists' biographical bona fides and precise manners of self-identification that wield cultural power, we risk losing [REDACTED] an opportunity to escape the self, circumvent the limitations of each person's narrow set of contingencies, and throw consciousness ecstatically into or through another person, another body, time, and space. Isn't that why art lasts and thrills? Maybe we don't need more exploration and expression of self, biography, and identity. Maybe what we need is to get out from under all that, to break with the self for a spell and gain the perspective that break provides. Get out of our own head and into another's. Anyway, wrestling these seeming opposites—of self and other—need not [REDACTED] psychic space is always foggy at the horizon where one person (and their work) ends and another begins.

– Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, 2023