

Dark Matter: Art, Politics, and Resistance in an age of Age of Enterprise Culture

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Art is big business: a few artists command huge sums of money, the vast majority are ignored; yet these marginalized artists remain essential to the mainstream cultural economy serving as its missing creative mass. This seminar selectively surveys structures of visibility and invisibility, collision and resistance revealing 30 years of alternative hybrid cooperative networks, gift exchange, tactical media activism, and community based public art spurning or infiltrating global contemporary culture and beyond. Participants will be exposed to artists' groups such as The Yes Men, Bruce High Quality Foundation, Group Material, Temporary Services, as well as historical and theoretical texts by Adorno, Brecht, Bourdieu, Debord, Mouff, Enwezor, Kester, and others, while researching the political and aesthetic impact of enterprise culture and the deregulated economy on contemporary art, theory, and collective, social critique.

Preparation and Attendance

The readings and viewings listed below are to be done prior to class. Unless otherwise indicated they will be available online at I-site. You are asked to prepare a list of 2-3 discussion questions based on the reading/viewing to bring to class each week (for example: *what is the author's central argument and is it well defended in the text? What are the operative terms and definitions employed? How would the same facts or arguments sustain a different thesis or answer? What would Theodor Adorno or Walter Benjamin or another thinker we will study think of this argument? Does the essay appear have a direct relationship to your own art or research practice and how?*). These 3 questions must be turned in at the beginning of class.

Research

This is a research seminar, and a list of potential research topics is included below, however, you can also propose a topic of your own that is not on this list. A statement indicating your choice of research topic and a preliminary bibliography is due by April 1st. Please consult with me before about your choice. Be prepared to engage in original research including interviews and archival investigation because little published material exists on these topics.

Presentations

The last three weeks of class will be devoted to student presentations. These are to be based on your research, but not a straightforward reading of your papers due at the end of the course. The aim of the presentation is to *teach your classmates (and professor) about the artist, group, or phenomenon you have been researching*. You will be responsible for assigning a reading (one article each, to be distributed the week before your presentation), and giving a 12-minute lecture on your topic (with images) leaving 10 minutes for discussion.

Presentation Format: Five Components

1. Start with a premise or thesis about your topic or artist.
2. Provide background details, dates, and relevant information. (Remember: who-what-why-where-when.)
3. Elaborate on your thesis, but don't give your opinion.
4. Whenever possible quote directly from relevant texts, documents, and/or the artist or group.
5. Conclude by raising a series of questions your research has raised.

Books recommended but not required

Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era, Julia Bryan-Wilson, U. California, 2009.

Alternative Art New York: 1965–1985, Julie Ault, ed., U. Minnesota, 2002.

Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material, Ault, Ashford, Locks, eds., Four Corners Books, 2010.

Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945, Stimson & Sholette, eds, U. Minn., 2007.

Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture, Sholette, Gregory, Pluto Press, 2011.

Research Paper

In your final, fully footnoted paper (15-20 pages), please *answer* one or more of the questions you raised in your presentation by developing an original argument about your topic. (In other words, in order to give the presentation you will have to have decided what the most important aspects of the topic are, and for the paper you will have to decide what you think about them.)

Possible topics for your research:

- Michel de Certeau, post-1968 politics, and the Situationist International
- Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics and his critics (Grant Kester, Claire Bishop)
- Grant Kester's dialogical aesthetics in an age of Para-Fiction and Mock-Institutionalism
- Culture Jamming and Hacktivism after 9-11, Wikileaks, and the 2010 Stuxnet computer worm
- Environmental "green" art and the rise of the sustainable design movement
- Craftivism, Yarn-bombing, radical knitting circles and the return of "the hand" in contemporary art

Research projects for two to three students to work on collaboratively: *

Art Fairs V. Art Biennials: To what degree has the growing international "art fair" phenomenon overtaken the global art biennial movement by exhibiting same artists represented by the same dealers who are of interest to the same group of critics and curators, and if so, what does this usurpation of cultural authority represent in terms of artistic autonomy and integrity (if anything)? Research both phenomena in order to establish points of contrast, overlap, and complicity.

Tactical Media (TM) and Agency: TM as practiced by The Yes Men and Critical Art Ensemble has, according to theorist Geert Lovink, an aversion to ideology. While these artist-activists clearly oppose authority and neoliberal markets exactly what their vision of a "liberated" society would look like and what kind of agency would bring radical change about is difficult to assess. But what if the underlying dynamic of TM is in fact the re-birth of a much older form of romantic anti-capitalism associated with figures such as John Dewey, William Morris, and the early Marx, and later with Michel de Certeau and Situationist artists like Raoul Vaneigem and Guy Debord? Compare and contrast the ideas of TM practitioners today with past theorists to locate possible ideological precedents.

P2P Artworld?: Peer-to-Peer (P2P) networking has been lauded as an entirely new, democratic model for sharing knowledge, skills, and creative activity including books, videos, and music. Whatever its actual possibilities are, this new platform for sharing information has been made possible thanks to the spread of inexpensive digital technologies (the same technologies that TM also takes advantage of). But is it possible to imagine something similar taking place between visual artists: a sustainable Peer-to-Peer art community in which value and judgment and exchange do not depend upon the filtration system of a few gate-keeper galleries and museums? What would the advantages of such a P2P Artworld be? What obstacles would its creation face? How might it already be in formation today?

Rightwing collectivism, cultural activism, and resentment: Conservative and fundamentalist constitutional activists have received much attention in the mainstream media in recent years. Groups such as the Tea Party and the Minutemen border patrols appear to operate through informal social and online networks in ways not unlike those of the cultural Left. Meanwhile, claims by net-theorists such as Yochai Benkler and Lawrence Lessig that digital technology will inaugurate an era of enhanced liberal democracy have seemingly not taken into account the possibility of using these same open-ended networks to limit the speech of others (immigrants, the poor, anarchists and socialists). Is this "dark and light" democracy an inevitable byproduct of the rise of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negre dub the multitude, or is it particular to the era of social networking? And what kind of response should state legislators, "the Left," or simply "the people" seek to make in response to the increasingly well-organized and militant collectivism of the far Right?

** Collaborators will need to break their topic down into separate research components and show equal levels of work. The final paper should be a combination of these elements. In addition, the class presentation will also be longer.*

SYLLABUS

Jan. 27: Week one: Introduction

Feb. 3: Week two: Preliminaries

Readings:

- “The Author as Producer,” Walter Benjamin, 1934.
- “Commitment,” Theodor Adorno, 1962.
- “Black as an Ideal,” Adorno 1970.
- “Book X” of *The Republic*, Plato, 380 BC.

Feb. 10: No Class (College Art Association Conference, NYC.)

Alternative assignment: look for and bring to next class at least one news story from mainstream media or art magazines about state of art market (auction prices, art fairs, commissions, gallery sales, etc...).

Feb. 17: Week three: Art Inc.

Readings (totals about 35 pages):

- “Art Advisors,” Mia Fineman, *The New York Times*, 2006.
- “The Function of the Dealer,” Edith G. Halpert, *College Art Journal*, 1949.
- “When is a Day Job a Work of Art?,” Juri Lynn Keyser, 2006.
- “Looks Brilliant on Paper. But Who, Exactly, Is Going to Make It?,” M. Fineman, *NYTimes*, 2006.
- “Making 'Exclusive' Exclusive Again Marc E. Babej and Tim Pollak, *Forbes*, 2006.
- “Summary: A portrait of the arts...” Kevin F. McCarthy et al, Rand Corp., 2005.
- “A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Market for Contemporary Art,” Stuart Plattner, 1998.

Feb. 24: Week four: APT Vs. AWC, the age of deregulated security

Readings:

- “Art Workers Coalition: Not a History,” Lucy R. Lippard, 1970.
- Artists Pension Trust Annual Report: APT Insights, 2007.
- “Artists’ Collectives Mostly in New York, 1975-2000,” Alan Moore, 2007.
- “State of the Union,” G. Sholette Artforum, 2008.
- (Please also review assorted AWC documents)

NOTE: I will give lecture -presentation at 6:00 in Room B-04 (but attendance is not required)

March 3: Week five: Cat Mazza special guest lecturer <http://www.microrevolt.org/>

Readings:

- “Abstract Hactivism,” Otto von Busch & Karl Palmås <http://www.isk-gbg.org/99our68/AbstractHactivism.pdf>
- “The Politics of Craft,” Bryan-Wilson, *Modern Painters*. 2008.
- “Becoming Fashion-able,” Otto von Busch
http://www.hdk.gu.se/files/document/fashion-able_webanspassahd%20avhandling_OttovonBusch.pdf
- “Dark matter, activist art and the counter-public sphere,” G. Sholette, 2004.

March 10: Week six: "Getting lost: Dislocation and Place" special participatory performance project with guests Jane Marsching, Catherine d'Ignazio, & Andi Sutton of www.platform2.info

Readings: “Getting Lost and the Localized Mind,” Franco La Cecla

Special Assignment: With seriousness and utter sincerity, Platform2 invites you to Get Lost. You may choose the site and the method. We will choose your strategy of documentation (TBA). A note of caution - We mean "get lost" very literally - to dislocate and disorient your body in physical space, to not know where you are, to be confused about where to go next. Please do not interpret it metaphorically as it is much harder these days to lose oneself literally. And please don't lose yourself on the Internet or in a video game, screen, movie, book or device.

March 17: *No Class* (Harvard Spring Break.)

March 24: Week seven: Tactical Media, Critical Art Ensemble, and the FBI

Readings:

"Fuzzy Biological Sabotage" Critical Art Ensemble, *ONLINE AT:

<http://www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp;jsessionid=4AFDEB8B2B4C16077974A98413839DC8?objectnumber=38074>

"A Hacker Manifesto [4.0]," McKenzie Wark, 2006.

"Postscript on the Societies of Control," Giles Deleuze, 1990.

"The theory of the Dérive," Guy DeBord, 1956.

"A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway, 1991.

* *Presentation Group 1: due date to post reading for your presentations.*

March 31: Week eight: The institutions and its other: Marisa Jahn guest artist

* *Plus first presentation student research project.*

Readings:

"Byproducts and Parasites: On the Excess of Embedded Art Practices," introduction to the book *BYPRODUCT*, Marisa Jahn and L.M. Bogad, 2010.

Manifesto: Artist Placement Group (now known as Organization and Imagination: O+I), 1980.

"*And the Winner Is...*: an essay on Miss Canadiana," Michelle Jacques

* *Presentation Group 2: due date to post reading for your presentations.*

April 7: Week nine: Research presentations

* *Presentation Group 3: due date to post reading for your presentations.*

April 21: Week ten: Final research presentations & class wrap-up.