

By *Gregory Sholette*



SWAMPWALLS DARK MATTER & *the* LUMPEN ARMY *of* ART

For more than thirty years,

a close relation of mine has worked in the shipping and receiving department of a non-unionized factory in Pennsylvania. Early on in his employment, this relative and several of his co-workers spent their work breaks attaching newspaper clippings, snapshots, spent soda cans, industrial debris, trashed food containers and similar bits and pieces to one wall of the plant. After a few years, the accumulated clutter expanded to include the entire wall. They christened this impromptu collage "Swampwall." The owner of the factory, an aging sole-proprietor in a world of mergers and multinationals, tolerated this workplace diversion until a global corporation bought up the company. Swampwall was swiftly expunged.

This family relation and his fellow workers are high school graduates.

They did not attend college; they had never visited an art museum. Notwithstanding the recent popularity of de-skilled slack art and “cluttfuck”—randomly distributed cartoons, sketches, and doodles pinned to white walls; idly piled clumps of ephemera; or manufactured goods spread over gallery floors—their messy, collaborative frieze was not meant to be “art.” It was instead a silent expression of non-productivity that was visible only to those with business in that particular wing of the factory: an uninviting, sweat-soaked warehouse ruled by packing crates, forklifts, and tiers of loading pallets, set far from the tidy cubicles or product showrooms of plant managers.

Swampwall was a fantasy of autonomy. It made manifest a desire to direct some small portion of one’s energy as one pleases, without workplace discipline. As Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge insist, “living labour has, along with the surplus value extracted from it, carried on its own production—within fantasy.” Swampwall might be thought of as a concrete representation of such fantasy, but also it demonstrated the possibility that one could punch in and be “on company time,” while being elsewhere at the same time.

How differently we take stock of this rubbish wall, knowing it was not the offspring of arte povera, nor intended for display in a museum or art gallery. This contrast sharpens further if we compare my description of Swampwall to the accolades that celebrated artist Tony Feher receives when he transforms “humble, forgettable materials that he finds – bottles, jars, plastic soda crates ... into work that is rich with human emotion and fragile beauty.” Similar descriptions could be cited regarding the work of other artists who reject technical craft to highlight the unpretentious aesthetic of everyday objects, low-brow styling and pop culture; or who celebrate the ingenuity of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) non-artists and amateurs. Art historian Brandon Taylor uses the term “Slack Art” to describe the way such artists use ephemeral materials and a marked disinterest in skilled craftsmanship to produce extemporaneous installations. For historian John Roberts and artist David Beech, this tendency reveals a “philistine aesthetic” of poorly crafted and often vulgar art, reflecting the distractedness of the audience at a football game or television show. Many professional artists wish to appear ill-trained, and so de-skill themselves in order to emulate what they think of as informal production. But simultaneously, the great mass of non-professionals is finding it easy to “raise” its standards of craft, thanks to inexpensive digital technology that makes the production of near-professional quality graphics, movies, and music available to anyone with access to a computer. Which leads to an unexpected convergence. As Roberts asserts, “the amateur on the ‘way up’ and the professional artist on the ‘way down’ meet under the auspices of deskilling.”

This juncture of formal and informal artistic skills is not surprising to anyone familiar with the way hobbyists and amateurs often approach technique as a time-consuming activity, requiring a great deal of practice and patience to “get right.” But this is exactly opposite to the way art school graduates are taught to downplay, discard, or outsource manual technique, and focus on developing intellectual, organizational,

This tank cozy was produced by artist Marianne Joergensen from Copenhagen, Denmark in cooperation with some one thousand volunteer knitters from around the world.



< Above: *Pink m.24 chaffe image* Courtesy of [MARIANNE JØRGENSEN](#)

Swampwall was a fantasy of autonomy.

or even curatorial skills instead. Charlie Leadbeater and Paul Miller label this meeting point “the pro-am revolution.” On their website [proamrevolution.com](#), they insist that “we’re witnessing the flowering of bottom-up self-organization, and the crude, all or nothing, categories of professional or amateur

will need to be rethought.” However, a different way to think about this emerging sphere of social productivity is not as something entirely new, but as a missing mass or dark matter that has always operated within the shadows of the formal economy. Dark matter invisibly anchors productivity, but also occasionally disrupts it, a point I will return to shortly.

Consider the work done by housewives who, in most nations, still feed, clean, and literally reproduce the work force. This seemingly natural type of work appears to fall outside the formal economy. Nevertheless, a recent poll (October 2007) by the Office of National

Statistics in England indicates that women's "unwaged" housework indirectly contributes as much as seven hundred and thirty nine billion pounds to the British economy annually. Nevertheless, efforts by feminists to obtain wages for housework are seen as a threat to economic stability, which in a way they are. First, to pay for this work would require some sort of redistribution of corporate profits, an unwelcome socialist proposition in a world dominated by neoliberal economic policies, (not to mention neoconservative and patriarchal politics, especially in the United States and most Muslim countries). More significantly, to recognize unwaged women's work as a contribution to the mainstream economy opens up a Pandora's box. Why only pay for housework? Why not also remunerate sexual reproduction? What about the contribution children and students make as future laborers? How about supporting the non-work of the unemployed, who serve as a reserve army of labor for the employed? Isn't each necessary for the other? In fact, the entire range of superfluous people generated by the market would need to be accounted for if informal social production and non-production were understood as structurally necessary for a system that benefits only a small portion of the global population.

Unlike the formal economy, this missing mass or dark matter consists of informal systems of exchange; cooperative networks; communal leisure practices; conduits for sharing gossip, fantasy, anger, and resentments; and even the occasional self-organized collective that may or may not be politically motivated. Within this dark universe, services, goods, information, and in some cases outright contraband are duplicated and distributed, sometimes in the form of bartered exchange and occasionally as gifts that circulate freely, thus always moving and benefiting a particular network or informally defined community. All of this is disconnected, or only partially connected, from the mainstream market. For capitalism to acknowledge this missing mass would require a radical re-definition of the concept of productivity. And that is exactly what some enterprising capitalists are seeking to do.

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For neoliberal theorists such as Leadbeater, the materialization of a broadly distributed, creative force is the creative engine driving the new, networked, creative economy. Leadbeater has even urged British universities to become "open-cast mines of the knowledge economy." Meanwhile, business pundit John Howkins insists "managing creative people will be fundamental to business success in the next century," and legal scholar Yochai Benkler actually refers to the rising visibility of intangible social production as "the dark matter of our economic production universe." Despite these upbeat assessments about what I am calling dark matter, this missing mass is not just a world of cooperation and friendly networking, it is also filled with populist contempt for authority, resistance to selling one's labor as a commodity, and even instances of nationalism, racism, and class resentment.

As philosopher C. George Caffentzis put it, there has been recently a “growing realization that non-market exchanges can challenge and disrupt the formal economy, and yet are essential to its existence.” That challenge will not be settled cheaply.

Controlling the intrinsic unruliness posed by informal systems of social production was far easier when economists, politicians, business people, arts administrators all agreed that dark matter either did not exist or was inherently valueless. As this missing mass becomes increasingly illuminated, the danger it poses to entrenched interests within mainstream business, political, and art worlds has generated a brewing crisis of legitimacy. The arbitrary lines normally demarcating productive from non-productive work, or people who participate professionally in making culture from people who do not, are getting wavier, and in some cases erased altogether. Curiously, it is those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of culture—the critics, art historians, collectors, dealers, museums, curators and arts administrators—who have been the most reluctant to address this phenomenon. Such denial is not baseless. Recognizing the rising wave of social production as bona fide culture requires that the art establishment either adopt an entirely new aesthetic platform, or admit that the normal processes of artistic valorization are arbitrary. Perhaps this explains the popularity of a certain European curator who claims to have discovered that artists are becoming social producers, and has branded his “find” as a radical new art movement?

Needless to say, artists have always engaged in social production, just like other workers do. These new understandings come from people perceiving the process of making or remaking art as a collective process, rather than the isolated work of an individual genius or auteur. As art historian Alan Moore explains, when it comes to making art,

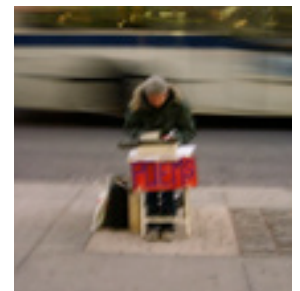
Mutual aid is as important as competition. The process of production is continuously or intermittently collective as

artists come together in teaching situations and workshops, sharing ideas, techniques and processes.

Therefore, within the folds of dark matter social production, one finds not only informal producers and amateurs, but also a legion of professionally-trained artists occupying a limbo-like space that is simultaneously necessary and superfluous to both the fiscal and symbolic economy of high culture.

In economic terms, most professionally trained artists make up what Marx described as a reserve army of unemployed. The majority of artists enter the ranks of this cultural infantry the moment they graduate from art schools or universities. Most will never leave its service. These lost souls are what Carol Duncan has called the “glut of art and artists that make up the ‘normal condition of the art market.’” These hungry lumpen not only compete for the minute rewards doled out by the art world, but they inadvertently prop-up the symbolic and fiscal economy of art too. Superfluous artists form an indistinct backdrop against which the small percentages of artists who succeed appear sharply focused. A recent study of visual artists in the United States by the Rand Corporation underscores Duncan’s observation. The report’s key finding states that although the number of artists has greatly increased in recent years, “the hierarchy among artists, always evident, appears to have become increasingly stratified, as have their earnings prospects.” While a few “superstars” at the top of this hierarchy “sell their work for hundreds of thousands and occasionally millions of dollars, the vast majority of visual artists often struggle to make a living from the sale of their work, and typically earn a substantial portion of their income from non-arts employment.”

Some of these surplus laborers find work in the megastudios of ultra-successful artists, where they might sand and polish resin-cast sculpture, often for little more than minimum wage. Because of the loss of affordable studio space, many artists are also moving



< This Page: Street-demonstration props created by the Brooklyn-based group *The Change You Want To See*, together with Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, for a public demonstration opposing a proposed city ordinance criminalizing the photographic documentation of New York City, Union Square, New York City, 2007.

further from the urban centers that remain home to gatekeeper museums, galleries, critics, and curators. Dark matter is like an unrepresentable shantytown surrounding the municipality of art, or even more disturbingly, an artificial Bantustan system like that constructed by South Africa under Apartheid. Because what the Rand Corporation report does not say is that, unlike other professional disciplines where individuals spend years (and in the United States, large sums of money) training to be a professional, the high art industry as it is now organized must segregate the majority of its qualified participants by isolating them from any share in the overall industry revenue. This is what Duncan means when she ironically describes the surfeit of artists as “a natural condition.” Its only natural if one believes that talent, like gender, or noble birth, determined one’s destiny. Nevertheless, such thinking is how the culture factory represents itself as a top-down process when it is operationally functional only from the bottom-up.

Needless to say, artists are far from passive victims in this process of delimitation and segregation. By actively replicating and circulating the critical “buzz” directed towards successful artists and their work, and by subscribing to trade magazines, attending exhibitions and lectures, purchasing art supplies, and informally sharing personal stories and gossip about art stars, dealers, curators and the like, they provide the symbolic and material revenue for maintaining the art market and its hierarchies. Add to this the thousands of trained artists who literally reproduce the dark matter work force by teaching future generations of artists in universities, colleges, and other educational programs.

Nevertheless, in the recent past, the yield from art world production has been shared more equitably. The period leading out of the last great depression in the United States was one of the few moments when government-funded programs put artists to work producing murals and other public art projects. Something similar took place starting in the mid-1960s through the early 1980s.

By no longer operating from a superior position of ideological critique, contemporary art becomes the conduit of a reified banality. It enters the gallery Zombie-like, stiff with rigor mortis, yet clamouring to speak for itself. The art world is only too happy to listen.

As artist Martha Rosler has written, ample government funding helped spread cultural equality to many smaller American cities, which then had “highly active art scenes that were not oriented toward making (a lot of) money from art.” This more inclusive “alternative” cultural sphere was made up of artist-run cooperative galleries, small not-for-profit spaces, and even some informally organized artists’ collectives, many with radical social or political agendas. Indeed, this was a moment when experimentation and interdisciplinary collaborations were common between artists and scientists. In the 1960s and 1970s numerous artists in the United States found at least some level of employment in public projects, some of which were aimed at developing ties to local communities in urban and rural settings.

Increased independence from the established cultural world also coincided with an unprecedented pluralism of artistic styles. As Rosler points out, this was a moment when a less-hierarchical, more intellectually

porous idea of art emerged, thanks to a combination of significant public funding (compared with today), and the influence of liberation struggles by feminists, people of color, and gays, as well as militant factory workers, dissident soldiers, striking students, and the profusion of splintery political parties generated by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the American New Left. Some artists formed their own radically oriented collectives, such as Art Workers Coalition (AWC), Artists Meeting for Cultural Change (AMCC), or Angry Arts. Militant editorial collectives emerged that took advantage of inexpensive offset printing to focus on issues of culture and politics. Publications included *Red Herring*, *The Fox*, *Heresies*, *AntiCatalog*, *Left Curve*, and *Black Phoenix*. Even during the first few years of massive wealth re-concentration under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, it was still common to find artists working in groups with strong political or social programs. Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D), Group Material, Carnival Knowledge, Artists for Nuclear Disarmament (AND), and, later, *Gran Fury* and the *Guerrilla Girls* all emerged in the first half of the 1980s, a time when neoliberal privatization was aggressively dismantling the social welfare state.

This process has transformed the art world, including its academic divisions, into a super-competitive, entrepreneurial matrix that produces a few winners and many more losers, and where much contemporary art is indistinguishable from other luxury commodities. (The interest hedge-fund operators and other financiers now take in buying and selling contemporary art is proof enough of this fact.) Such harsh circumstances have convinced younger artists, and quite a few mature ones, that talent and hard work are not enough to carry one up the sloping sides of the art world pyramid. As a result, painters, sculptors, installation artists and media makers show a growing interest in self-marketing and other entrepreneurial techniques. The new enterprise-artist has apparently abandoned any lingering, wistful romanticism to embrace the icy relations of capital. But what became of the power art allegedly held to critically

reveal the distance between actual social conditions and an ideal autonomy? Is it possible that aesthetic detachment has itself been appropriated as an instrument of unfreedom?

In 2000, a well-known contemporary artist paid four Brazilian prostitutes in narcotics in order to permanently tattoo a 160-centimeter-thick line across their backs. The process of producing the tattoo was photographed, and the photograph later displayed in an art gallery in Spain. The artist has defended the critical significance of this act as an illustration of brutal social conditions, adding that art is incapable of effectively intervening in the real world to alter such conditions, no matter what the political intentions of the artist may be. Others see the unequal relations of power, the physiognomic alteration of superfluous bodies, and the institutional support that such work receives as a disturbing reduction of art to a mirror or extension of the broader socioeconomic system. But this work, and similar projects that embrace commodity status as intentional critique, merely restage the historical avant-garde as farce. Art meets, and once more collides with life, only this time life irredeemably sucks (although not for the artist or for his admirers). There appears to be no “outside,” no other system or way of being that, if not already marked, is imminently brandable.

In fact, the shock produced by this enterprising art is nothing other than the real world, which, almost without assistance, makes the spectator squirm. It touches on some vestige of disgust for a system that treats large portions of the world’s population as little more than excess, especially ones in the global South. It feels good to feel something, even something unpleasant. However, by no longer operating from a superior position of ideological critique like so many artists of my generation, as well as the 1960s and 1970s, contemporary art becomes the conduit of a reified banality. It enters the gallery *Zombie-like*, stiff with rigor mortis, yet clamouring to speak for itself. The art world is only too happy to listen.

This is not a moral denunciation of those who trade in the desolation of the present moment. Much of what I am calling dark matter or informal social production is also disturbing, reified, and soulless, even though it lacks the ironic affectlessness of contemporary art. Like Swampwall, takes no pleasure in delayed gratification or aesthetic detachment. This is not a moral criticism because reification also has its positive side, a point that some critics who defend politically and socially engaged art tend to forget. Nevertheless, by seeking to merge art and commerce, cruelty and objectification, and then merely to engage in acts of humiliation that are identical with, or even more compassionate than, those generated by the real global market, what the enterprise artist reveals is a profound lack of the imagination. Artists, critics and curators who glibly cite Duchamp as an authority when they defend high priced slack art, commodified art, or objects not meant to be art, have in their hearts and minds a strict prohibition against democratizing aesthetic valorisation to include the ranks of informal producers, no matter how interchangeable and indistinguishable with contemporary art this missing mass may be. Behind this aesthetic policing is a simple fact: that which is excluded from valorisation is too diverse, too large, and too redundant to be ever be fully absorbed by a art market whose prime mandate is to be the ultimate arbitrator of “real and lasting,” as well as cultural values (the type worth investing in).

Today, one can hardly escape an encounter with dark matter productivity. It radiates from homes and offices; schools and streets; community centers, prisons, and cyber-space; most especially cyberspace. It reveals itself in knitting circles, amateur garage-kit sculptors, tattoo artists, crop circle designers, fantasy role-play gamers (LARP), zinesters, and the hardcore disciples of hip-hop, goth, punk, and Do-It-Yourself (DIY) subcultures, all of which actively spurn commercialization. It is produced by swarms of cyber-geeks generating open-source computer programs, fan videos, music mashups, and other forms of collectively networked freeware. In a word, these makeshift, amateur, and informal social practices are superabundant.



< Above: Currency showing *St. Precarious*, Patron Saint of Chain Store Workers and the artists who inhabit dark matter.

In addition, this dark matter production is by turns whimsical, banal, nostalgic, sentimental, angry, obscene, and grotesque, all modes of expression traditionally anathema to the fine arts and orthodox notions of aesthetic detachment. In so far as a great portion of it refuses to be productive for the market, it testifies to other moments of resistance, to what Negt and Kluge have described as “imaginative strategies grounded in the experience of production”—protest energies, psychic balancing acts, a penchant for personalization, individual and collective fantasy, and creative re-appropriations.” This includes not producing, or not producing for the market, but for oneself, friends, community, much in the way Swampwall was a small act of collaborative refusal as self-directed production. For if being usefully productive confers membership in normal society and its market, then

purposefully refusing to produce signifies a rejection of those norms. This is so regardless of how fleeting the circumstances of this refusal is, and no matter how constrained its circumstances are. As philosopher Bruno Gulli states, “the potential not to, the ability to say no, to withdraw, is freedom itself.” It is also true regardless of whether or not one is or is informed by the classic philosophical arguments linking freedom with aesthetics.

When it comes to acts of resistance, the artist holds no special monopoly. From ingenious contraband inventions made by prisoners out of paper clips, ball point pens, and toilet paper; to quilts cooperatively stitched in support of voting rights or in defense of a woman accused of murdering her husband; to the precarious margins of labor where teaching assistants, janitors, chainworkers, and Starbucks

economic conditions, would be impossible to openly and productively integrate under global capitalism.

The same holds true of the mini-market economy of the art world. It cannot absorb what is essentially a mass greater than itself (this would be analogous to reaching full employment and unrestricted democracy under capitalism, a goal impossible under Keynesian liberalism and completely shunned by neoliberals).

The need to accumulate capital requires the majority of the population to be superfluous, as well as cowed by the authority of market productivity. The same holds true for high culture. If dark matter is like an unrepresentable shantytown surrounding the municipality of art, then when compared to high culture,

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baristas furtively organize themselves, sometimes under the black-cat logo of the International Workers of the World (IWW); and most of all during the supposedly restful hours when working bodies are meant to reproduce their labor power through idle pastimes, yet remain awake to fantasize, organize, play and invent – in all these instances a hidden social production has always found its own time and space apart from hegemonies of power and the objectifying routines of work. These borderlands of resistance extend well beyond conventional conflicts between labor and capital, to form a murky excrescence of affects, ideas, histories, sentiments, technologies that shift in and out of visibility like some half-submerged reef. However, what is most alarming about the materialization of this informal, social production is found in neither appearance nor content per se. Dark matter presents a problem to mainstream market valorization because it embodies the overlooked, the discarded, and the superfluous as an actual excess of labor that, even under ideal

its shadow productivity appears not only useless, but abject, and even a drain on resources. However, unlike the fictional scarcity demanded by the art market, nothing impedes most dark matter productivity from producing freely. It seems to partake in a gift economy, what Georges Bataille described as a “principle of loss,” or a pathological economy of expenditure without precise utility. Which is to say that the desire for social participation outweighs accumulation. Moving information, ideas, music, tactics, food, services, and goods around rather than piling them up also serves to adjust differences of power amongst individuals within in the same social group. Some of this is what attracts theorists of the new, networked economy, as well as those who want to believe the art world can have its social-relational cake and eat it too.

At the same time, nothing assures us that this increasingly visible social productivity will be the force of liberty and democracy as many neoliberal evangelists of the “new

economy” proclaim it to will be. This missing cultural mass is not intrinsically progressive in the traditional liberal or radical sense of that term. It possesses only a potential for progressive resistance, as well as a potential for reactionary resistance. Such political and ethical ambiguities are an inevitable part of past struggles against repression, and it is time, as cultural historian Michael Denning insists, to begin to “make connections between the occasional eruptions—machine breakings, store lootings, window smashings” and that *longue durée* of resistance that may not even be aware of itself as a history from below. But Denning cautions that when interpreting the fragmented narrative of past resistance, one must read “not only between the lines of the letters sent in, but also the letters which were never sent.” The revolutions that don’t take place are as disturbing as those that do. Recognizing the radically militant potential of dark matter productivity is but one step towards that recognition.

Extending an essentially false gift of aesthetic recognition to informal production—as the so-called pro-am revolution proposes, or the way some professionally trained artists coopt the work of community-based

amateurs—is merely a false radicalism at best. Instead, organizing around one’s market redundancy is how politically savvy artists deal their dark matter status. Collectives and groups give this structural superfluosity a name, visibly embodying the abjectness of dark matter while demanding to be seen and heard. Strangely, this recognition of redundancy provides a release. The “collectivized” artist not only can ignore modernist or “high art world” demands to prove her artistic genius, but she can focus pleasure, anger, and resentment towards the possibility of imagining a radically different social and cultural terrain. This materialization of dark matter may only exist for a day, a year, or a few years at best, and there is no guarantee of success: no teleology at work, no way back. But what the militant collective grasps is something Walter Benjamin described as that “secret agreement between past generations and the present one.” It is a deliberate, even willful linkage that opens up a potential redemption for redeeming the super-numeraries of the past by fixing what has gone terribly wrong in the present. It also represents a claim by these past generations over the present. As Benjamin reminds us, that claim “cannot be settled cheaply.” ♦

Brandon Taylor. *Avant-garde and After: Rethinking Art Now*, H.N. Abrams, New York: 1995, P. 153. <http://www.worcesterart.org/Exhibitions/Past/feher.html>
David Beech and John Roberts, editors, *The Philistine Controversy*, London; New York: Verso, 2002. Beech and Roberts derive their notion of the distracted viewer from Walter Benjamin’s discussion description about the way the masses view cinema almost tactilely. Walter Benjamin, “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, Schocken Books, 1969.
John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill And Deskilling In Art After The Readymade*, Verso Books, London: 2007. p. 159.
This does not mean artists are become computer literate using Photoshop instead of canvas and paint, but that many fine art programs barely teach computer skills, and students must pursue these as an elective.
“Women’s unpaid work: some statistics” *The Guardian Unlimited*, March 7, 2000. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/womensday/article/0,,191190,00.html>.
Quoted by Glenn Rikowski in a review of the book *Universities in a Neoliberal World* by Alex Callinicos, 2006. <http://journals.aol.co.uk/rikowskigr/Volumizer/entries/2007/03/05/universities-in-a-neoliberal-world/1399>.

“Political Economy as Subject and Form in Contemporary Art,” by Alan W. Moore in the Review of Radical Political Economics, Vol. 36, No. 4, p. 471-486, 2004.
Carol Duncan, “Who Rules the Art World?” *Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, Cambridge University Press: 1983, p. 172 & 180.
Rand Report: A portrait of the visual arts: meeting the challenges of a new era. Kevin F. McCarthy et al. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp. 2005. http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG290.sum.pdf.
“A Bantustan or homeland was territory set aside for black inhabitants of South Africa, and South-West Africa (now Namibia), as part of the policy of apartheid.” From Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bantustan> These black workers often traveled to white populated cities and towns for employment only to return to their segregated “homelands” afterwards.
I am not suggesting that artists’ working conditions, especially in developed countries, are comparable to precarious workers in a fast-food chain store or factory. What I mean is that each relatively autonomous economic sphere within capital develops its own hierarchies of elite workers and

plentiful underlings, and therefore of visibility and invisibility. The art world industry is even more unusual because it locks out most participants from upward mobility or profit sharing, the illusion of which is even found at Walmart or Starbucks. And yet the thought of unionizing or resisting this structural “canvas ceiling” seldom arises amongst the artistic minions.
Ibid.

Many of these artists and collectives have fallen into the equivalent of a dark matter archive. See Gregory Sholette, “Snip...Snip...Bang, Bang: Activist Art Reloaded.” <http://artwunl.org>, 2005.
For a more detailed discussion of art world hierarchies, see Gregory Sholette, “Dark Matter, Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere.” As Radical As Reality Itself, eds. Hemingway, Leslie, & Beaumont. Peter Lang, Oxford: 2007. Also available at http://gregorysholette.com/writings/writing_index.html.

Santiago Sierra. *Línea De 160 Cm Tatuada Sobre 4 Personas (160 Cm Line Tattooed On 4 People)*, exhibited at El Gallo Arte Contemporáneo, Salamanca, Spain. December 2000. http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200014_1024.htm

“Having a tattoo is normally a personal choice. But when you do it under ‘remunerated’ conditions, this gesture becomes something that seems awful, degrading—it perfectly illustrates the tragedy of our social hierarchies.” From an interview by Mark Spiegler, with the artist Santiago Sierra. “When Human Beings Are the Canvas.” *ARTnews*, June 2003. http://www.artnews.com/issues/article.asp?part_id=1335

Sierra’s work is only more evidence that the global art world is incapable of re-establishing its historic alliance with emancipatory politics, defaulting instead to an altogether different and far less ambitious precedent, *c’est la bourgeoisie*.

Miriam Hansen in the Foreword to Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge’s book *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. p. xxxii.

“Even so-called unproductive labor is then understood as unproductive only of and for capital, from the point of view of capital. In reality this “unproductive” labor often relates to essential social needs.” Bruno Gulli. *Labor of Fire: The Ontology of Labor between Economy and Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005. p. 66.

Michael Denning in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*. London, New York: Verso, 2004. p. 40.
Walter Benjamin, from “Thesis on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations*, op cit.