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Chapter 3

What Do Artists Want? Re-reading Carol Duncan's 1983 Essay "Who Rules the Art World?" In 2017

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Figure 3.1 Malcolm Morley, *Beach Scene* (1968), acrylic on canvas, 279.4cm × 228.6cm. Courtesy the artist and Sperone Westwater, New York, US.

I. Art After Death

WING FLAPS FLAIL, DUST-CHOKED engines sputter, petrol-laden steel barrels loosen from restraints, bombarding passengers, and all the while credits flash over the mayhem as we watch the disabled twin-engine cargo plane crash-land into the Libyan Desert. Even before the movie titles have finished several listed actors are injured or killed off, their performances already completed. And still, the film goes on. Robert Aldrich's otherwise textbook Hollywood adventure movie *The Flight of the Phoenix* has always struck me as owing something to the unorthodox experiments of avant-garde cinema.[1] For one thing, Aldrich's 1965 movie was completed the same year as the late experimental filmmaker Tony Conrad previewed his first version of *The Flicker*, an infamous thirty-minute movie consisting of only black and white still frames that pulse hypnotically, generating psychedelic-like phosphene afterimages in front of viewer's eyes.

Granted, the two film projects appear entirely different at first. One movie boasts a traditional narrative script, box office star James Stewart, and five million dollars in studio resources that helped it garner two Academy Award nominations. By contrast, Conrad's experiment was made on a shoestring budget using several rolls of 16mm film gifted to him by fellow underground filmmaker Jonas Mekas. What then might link the two productions? It's surely not the way Aldrich graphically depicts the effects of air turbulence on human bodies or the fact that Conrad's experiment is rumoured to have produced bouts of nausea in audiences.[2] Rather, it is the curious way one movie appears to finish even before it starts, while the other compulsively repeats a series of visual patterns with no beginning middle or end in sight. In other words, the narrative of these works – if we can use that term here – appears to insist on the unthinkable: that once set in motion art is capable of continuing on without us, just as if it were an apparatus running without an operator at its helm. A bit like a phoenix in fact, and it is as if we are getting a glimpse of art after death.

II. Who ~~Runs~~ Rules the Artworld?

When contemplating who runs, or who rules, the artworld, let me suggest a pair of contrasting interpretive models or narratives. The first assumes high art to be an institutional structure that is indirectly ruled over by powerful elites whose objectives are ultimately driven less by a love of art or culture, than by the need to maintain their own class interests. This is a project that is accomplished through a combination of covert, as well as sometimes overt, ideological signals involving the direct economic control of museum boards, the ownership of gatekeeper galleries, but also a more roundabout mode of academic policing directed at the disciplines of art practice, history, criticism, theory, curating, and management. The second, and seemingly opposite interpretation of who controls the artworld also approaches high culture as an institutional structure. But rather than being ruled-over by the agenda of a specific

class, state, or business interests embodied in specific individuals, governments or corporations, it is instead a self-replicating program, or set of instructions, that operates across a broad bandwidth of formal and informal, networks, and increasingly within both high and low, or mass culture. And while this repetitive structure may have been built upon centuries of ruling class power, the latter's authority is now incorporated into the artworld narrative as a symbolic economy operating with the twin currencies of prestige and cultural capital, two forms of artworld booty that one hopes to harvest for the purposes of career advancement.[3]

While both of these interpretive models in the previous paragraph are schematic and admittedly overstated, it is important to note that neither forecloses on the possibility that confrontations might break out over who gets to control, or who benefits from, the broader artworld narrative. However, the first explanation has the advantage of clarity when it comes to the cause and effect and motivation that determines artworld operations, and thus also makes visible who is to blame for the direction art takes. In contrast the second reflects more accurately the way we actually experience the artworld in all its apparent miscellany, especially today, under an increasingly financialised and intangible form of global capitalism. But then there is another significant difference at play here. The first model hinges on the belief that high culture's narrative is also manifest within its specific content. By closely scrutinising particular works of art one can read traces of ideology at work, if not actual depictions of, or references to, class domination. This, after all, is the type of critical work certain art historians have performed for the past several decades, as we shall see. Conversely, the second, competing model of high culture typically bypasses the reading of specific art works in order to focus on the artworld as a discursive structure, which is the level where, according to this approach, real ideological power resides. In other words, a meta narrative.

Thus, we arrive at an apparent standoff between what might be termed a modernist, and a post-modernist interpretive paradigm regarding who rules, or who runs, the artworld. Before this essay concludes my aim is to present not so much a distinct, third interpretation, but an expanded version of artworld control and reproducibility that draws upon both of these models while re-focusing on the negative potency of what these narratives must logically exclude. With this aim in mind, I also need to point out that there are three distinct time frames at work in this essay. One is of course the present day, a point more than mid-way through the second decade of the 21st century in which, so I will argue, the demystification of high culture has been achieved, though the ecstatic liberation this disclosure was supposed to usher in appears distorted, even unrecognisable. The second time frame invoked in this essay is some thirty-five years prior to today when the noted art historian Carol Duncan pens "Who Rules the Art World?" It is upon her essay that my essay pivots.[4] In addition, Duncan's text is itself predicated on a still earlier event in the 1960s that involved an incident she was unable to forget (although it took her a decade to finally unpack and write about). Therefore, the late 1960s constitutes the third-time frame of my text.

What follows therefore, is my re-reading of Carol Duncan's "Who Rules the Art World?", a treatise that has inspired my research into high culture, as well as directly influenced a concept I label the "dark matter" of the artworld about which I will provide more details below.

III. 1968

"A little over a decade ago", Duncan writes in 1983 with reference to the late 1960s, "the art press announced a new trend in modern painting, photorealism".[5] This new style was sometimes branded hyper realism, or super realism, but the term Duncan adopts and that I will also subscribe to hereafter is photorealism. It is a school of contemporary art in which artists meticulously rendered photographic imagery with an affectless, machine-like precision typically using the vivid colour made possible with acrylic paints.[6] For Duncan, photorealism came as a surprise. "At the time, most high-art galleries were showing totally abstract or conceptual works", she writes. One canvas in particular draws her attention. In it a white family of four are depicted as they self-consciously pose for a snapshot posing on a sunny shoreline. The father, Duncan comments, is "a Dick Nixon look-alike" who "grins too much as he plays with his son's toy car, while his wife over indicates her amusement".[7] Rendered in a restrained and dispassionate manner the painting appeared to her as an acerbic commentary on the all-American nuclear family's false normalcy. "The work's cool, detached surface, clean-edged forms, and bright colours magnified the emptiness of the family cliché that the figures act out". But it was the art historian's encounter with the author of the painting that ultimately initiates a detailed investigation into the ideological underpinnings of high culture.

Duncan never names either the painting, or the painter in "Who Rules the Art World?", though the work in question is appropriately entitled *Beach Scene*.[8] It is a large canvas painted in 1968 by the British abstract expressionist turned pioneering photorealist Malcolm Morley. The piece now hangs in the permanent collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC. [9] But, exactly what was so startling about this painting's icy critique of family life, or with photorealism in general? After all, derisive, even sneering criticism of mainstream, white America was copious in the 1960s, including within academia, but also in best-selling novels, mainstream movies, rock and folk music songs, and sit-com television programmes. For many, the US middle class had come to symbolise sexual repression (Charles Webb's novel *The Graduate* or Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*), political hypocrisy (Bob Dylan's *Like a Rolling Stone*), and the malevolence of American patriarchy (Robert Duvall's 1979 tyrant *The Great Santini*, or Peter Boyle's unhinged father in the 1970 film *Joe*). Add to this the ludic parodies of the American dream staged by Chicago's Second City improvisational troupe, a forerunner to *Saturday Night Live*. Within this broader context, Morley's apparently sardonic painting hardly seemed shocking.[10]

What initially startled the art historian was not the presumed content of *Beach Scene*, it was instead the way the painting, and other photorealist pieces "thrust upon us highly resolved images of the modern world".[11] Recall that throughout the 1960s, and most of the 1970s, figurative and representational art was an anomaly in the high artworld, a cultural landscape saturated with ultra-flat geometric canvases, cube-shaped sculptures, and other formalist works favoured by museums, galleries and art critics.[12] Meanwhile, Duncan's art historical training focused on 18th and 19th-century European painting, a background that quite likely fuelled her initial enthusiasm for the realistic approach of photorealism regardless of its self-conscious and ironic perspective. After all, it appeared to represent a renegade group of heretical, living artists who had unexpectedly asserted their right to depict everyday reality. And at a time of intense political, social and cultural crisis such as the 1960s, virtually any figurative imagery, as opposed to abstraction or design, whether it be presented as art or entertainment or advertising, was inevitably decoded as an implicit critique, or confirmation, of the status quo. Nevertheless, the art historian was due for another surprise. And it was this second shock that ultimately led her to write "Who Rules the Art World?"

Duncan finally meets the painter Morley a year or two later. She compliments him on his craft and critical acumen. She shares her interpretive reading of his painting *Beach Scene*. At which point the art historian is rewarded with chagrin as the painter condescendingly informs her that his work has nothing to do with this or that clichéd imagery or social critique, in fact the painting has nothing to do with imagery or society at all. Instead, *Beach Scene*, he insists, is solely about "the painted surface as an arrangement of color and form".[13] Doubting his frankness, she nonetheless "did not argue with him". And yet clearly the banality of the image was brimming with uncomfortable innuendo. Was it possible that the vociferousness of the artist's response signalled another, deeper level of discomfort, if not outright suppression? Reflecting on that plausible concealment came a decade and a half later, and when it arrives Duncan takes no prisoners.

IV. 1983

"Who Rules the Art World?" starts off mercifully enough. Duncan even offers allowances for the unspoken obligation artists believe they have to frame their work within institutionally recognised critical language (despite the fact that the manifest appearance of their work typically reveals little or no obvious connection to these same conceptual intricacies to which the artist lays claim). This does not prevent her from becoming increasingly exasperated with the intentional blindness artist, and the artworld display towards their own mythologies as the essay progresses. She muses over Morley's scorching response to her reading of his work. This leads Duncan to consider that by accident she had exposed the artist's anxious fixation about issues of control and subjugation within the artworld. "Whether or not they like it or want to

admit it, most professional artists are forced to keep an eye on the market".[14] Which is to say, the value of one's work is always dependent on a combination of visibility within the artworld's key institutional venues, as well as favourable evaluations by critics who guard "the door to all available high-art spaces, sets the terms for entry, scouts the fringe spaces of new talent, and tirelessly readjusts current criteria to emergent art modes". [15] And the critic's power is vested in the artist's hope that he or she will guarantee that his or her work holds "some transcendent meaning". It is this collateral that in turn makes the art work marketable.[16]

By suggesting that Morley actually took interest in the everyday social content that he depicted, even if this subject matter was initially captured in the photograph the painter reproduced, Duncan unintentionally bounced *Beach Scene* right out of its high artworld status and sent it packing to the provinces where pictures and their meanings remain available to any viewer without the need for critical mediation. [17] The artist's vexed response to this demotion ultimately becomes the starting point for Duncan's systematic demystification of high culture. In general, "Who Rules the Art World?" makes two things absolutely clear. No matter how intensely artists may wish things to be otherwise, they do not determine how the artworld functions. Their ideas, artistic products, and even their careers are seldom determining forces within the artworld. More than that, the artist must also learn to surrender their autonomy to the demands of the artworld, even as the artworld's self-narrative promises that making art is the freest form of human labour. But above all else, the essay is a meditation not so much about Morley, or his painting, but about what any contemporary artist imagines that they get in return for invoking the immaterial discourse of art criticism. "Most people get along with art or something they consider art on their own terms without the slightest help from high art criticism", Duncan points out.[18] In stark contrast, the artworld has a costly tripartite system of admission that is premised on the systematic abandonment of such commonplace cultural innocence.

First, the professional artist must find the means to be present – either physically or through gallery representation – in what Duncan terms the "summit art community in the Western world", New York.[19] Second, the artist is required to signal to other high art professionals that he is aware of, as well as fluent in, the type of serious, critical conversation generated within this network of producers and buyers, critics, historians and administrators. "In order to become visible in this world [of privileged culture], an artist must make work that in some way addresses the high-art community or some segment of it". [20] These are two of three essential steps needed if one hopes to achieve some level of artworld success, and both require a combination of sacrifice and surrender. For example, New York between the late 1960s and early 1980s was hardly the swanky 1 per cent city it is today. Though far more affordable, most low-cost neighbourhoods where artists tended to gather including especially SoHo, the Lower East Side or Hell's Kitchen were plagued by substandard living conditions, poor or non-existent city services, as well as crime, drugs, and arson.[21]

But "Who Rules the Art World?" goes on to argue that there is a third important element necessary for art access and it has to do with the nostalgic, naïve, and non-ironic romantic sentiments most people experience when they encounter a work of art. All of these commonplace joys must be systematically and diligently detached from the professional artist's worldview. Duncan describes this self-inflicted process of dispossession as not only a sacrifice demanded by the artworld, but a forfeiture that promises to smuggle back to the acolyte a far purer form of insight.

> His unconventional art bears witness to both his heroic renunciation of the world, and his manly opposition to it…[his] work negates the world and its emotional, moral, and political possibilities with inspired convictions.[22]

Furthermore, this "triumph of the spirit" is clearly gendered male.[23] More than that, this masculine striving for individual freedom underpins the entire ideology of bourgeois culture, reaching all the way back to such representational artists as David, Géricault, and Delacroix in the 18th and 19th centuries, then moving forward through modernist experimentation with Cézanne, Picasso, Kandinsky, on up through Pollock and de Kooning, and later lays the ideological foundations for the art of the 1960s, 1970s, and the 1980s whereby its apogee is Minimalist asceticism in which all remaining vestiges of representational art are expunged. "Little by little," Duncan writes, this ever-accelerating alienation from the world rids art

> of narrative illusionism, representation, and, finally, of the picture frame itself. Modern art celebrates alienation from the world and idealizes this [detachment] as Freedom. [24]

At which point Duncan reminds us that this high art project of withdrawing from common life experience was first launched in the later eighteenth century, precisely when "the bourgeoisie was ready to make a decisive bid for state power". [25] It was also the historical moment when the art critic first appears, who would evolve into a profession later in the next century with the rise of independent art dealers and the demise of the French art academy.

> In all of these struggles criticism has fought not against high art but for control over it [but] for now as in the past, high art exists largely at the will and for the use of wealth and power–and I would add that it exists for he most part as a means of keeping that power in its place.[26]

Granted, up until the late 1980s the contemporary artworld was, like so many professions, marked by a sharp division of labour separating the activities of the artist from the critic, the critic from the art historian, and perhaps most decisively the critic from the curator. But the familiar compartmentalised artworld was about to implode. Sometime in the late 1980s the dominant role of the art critic Duncan scrupulously details began to be usurped by that of the curator, who takes over the indispensable task of sorting, labelling, and ranking art and artists in "relation to

each other within one of the ever-shifting trends that waft through the market". [27] In 1989 *New York Times* art critic Michael Brenson asserted that "the era of the curator has begun". [28]

One year after Duncan's essay appeared in print, Morley becomes the first recipient of the coveted Turner Prize, beating out British artists Gilbert & George and Richard Long among others. But the award is granted after the painter's photorealist canvases are abandoned. In 1984 he is producing large, lush images of tropical forests and beach scenes rendered in a neo-expressionist style with imagery alluding to the figurative work of Picasso and Gauguin. In retrospect, this is perhaps not all that surprising. Looking back on the 1980s we recognise that it is the decade in which the modernist paradigm that Duncan ardently denounces finally breaks down in toto.

Modernism's post-war supremacy over the artworld may have started its decline years earlier. Possibly it began with the mocking antics of Fluxus, Happenings, and other Neo-Dadaist practitioners who hoped to subvert high culture and its link to capitalist markets. But in 1968, the same year Morley paints *Beach Scene*, the artistic avant-garde moves from theory to direct action when the Situationist International joined the student and worker occupation of Paris. And yet, the power of Greenbergian criticism, with its professed Kantian philosophical foundation, was only completely toppled when a wave of young artists primarily from middle-class, rather than upper-class backgrounds, shamelessly embraced the American culture that they had grown up with: animated cartoons, advertising art, comic books and graffiti. In the 1980s the high-minded, detached and formalist artworld was suddenly confronted by a barrage of flippant and flamboyant, day-glo coloured canvases and campy performances created by artists who celebrated, even as they parodied, the all-American, white suburban life-experience. Centred in New York's East Village this bevy of fluorescent Valkyries rejected conceptual art, critical theory and institutional critique. They came riding into the citadel of high culture like puerile barbarians only to discover that the artworld was a fake fortress all along. Before the decade was over a similar "insurrection" had taken place across the pond in London as the so-called Young British Artists memorialised the profane, ephemeral, and frequently smutty facets of non-elite mass culture. The privileged worldview of serious art was forever ruptured.

Unlike previous anti-art, anti-high cultural uprisings including Dada or the Situationists, these middle-class rebels actually wanted in, not out of the artworld. Accordingly, they continued, rather than interrupted, the imaginary cultural dissent of the post-war, neo-avant-garde, which for Duncan was epitomised by Minimalism. "While Dada set out to beat the system by not producing commodities, Minimal and other trends like it admitted impotence from the start and mutely handed over the goods". [29] But something peculiar takes place with the pseudo-insurgency of the East Village Art Scene. Their lowbrow blitzkrieg of high art aesthetics was so successful that subordination to restrained upper-class taste has never been reinstated. At the same time, the disorderly and pluralistic culture that was ushered in by the 1980s also befit the

emerging economic paradigm of individualistic entrepreneurship associated with hyper-deregulated capitalism, or what we today call neoliberalism. Welcome to the new artworld, same as, or almost the same as, the old one.

Duncan was probably unaware of such events as the Times Square Show – the raucous overture that rang in the insouciant insurrection of the 1980s artworld – as well as other subterranean stirrings of high cultural dissent.[30] Focused primarily on critiquing the ideology and rituals of high museum culture she nevertheless acknowledges that there is space for rebellion when she affirms that "the high artworld monopolizes high-art prestige, but it does not organize all creative labor". [31] Unfortunately, the creative mutiny then underway was, by-and-large, neither a Left-wing Trojan Horse of the type activist critic Lucy R. Lippard anticipated, any more than it was a feminist subversion of masculinist art's "renunciation of the world" critiqued by Duncan. [32] And in an uncanny foreshadowing of the 2016 US presidential elections, the progeny of Nixon's so-called silent majority came back to roost in the derelict, post-white flight inner-cities of the 1980s. As they gained purchase within the expanding real estate and finance economies and helped pave the way for a new type of 20th-century urban gentry. Unwittingly, or complicity, artists who participated in this transformation helped set the stage for the blighted working-class enclaves of New York City and London to be reborn as neo-Bohemian havens for the 21st-century ultra-rich. For at the end of the day, these fun-loving, Warhol-inspired, art pranksters became the true scions of President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's ideological reformation of capital. For despite, what they may have professed politically, and no matter how much they may have despised their own parentage, this was a crop of artists who by and large drew upon the trickle down doctrinal discharge of neo-Conservative ideologues in both the US and UK.

Still, within the world of high culture there was suddenly room to manoeuvre in ways not previously available to professional artists in the past. Previously, if one held strong, politically dissident views there were three options: suppression (be active politically, but do not reveal your politics in your art); career marginalisation (make political art, but do not expect to prosper in the artworld); or simply "drop-out" (leave the artworld altogether and go to work within actual social movements).[33] Therefore significantly, along with this explosion of frivolous, politically apathetic, anti-modernist, or post-modernist art buffoonery, arose a new wave of socially engaged art activism primarily centred within an array of 1980s collectives. Some of these groups explicitly honoured the legacy of such 1960s organisations as Art Workers' Coalition (AWC), who called upon the Museum of Modern Art and other artworld institutions to treat artistic labour fairly, diversify their collections by including women and people of colour, and made the demand that museum trustees take a public stance against the US war in Southeast Asia. Duncan participated in the AWC's protests, (and even recalls that it was at one of these actions where she had the fated encounter with Malcolm Morley).[34]

Which is to say Duncan's text did not take place in a vacuum. Instead it joined a gathering body of art objects, installation works, performances, research and writings that would come to be associated with the practice of institutional critique in which the field of art is approached as a sphere of industrial production, rather than as a vocation transcending capitalist markets and business interests. The same year "Who Rules the Art World?" appeared in print artist Hans Haacke pens a frequently cited essay entitled "Museums, Managers of Consciousness". Borrowing the term "consciousness industry" from the frequently sardonic writing of German intellectual Hans Magnus Enzenseberger, Haacke, much like Duncan, uses this phrase to cut "through the romantic clouds that envelop the often misleading and mythical notions widely held about the production, distribution, and consumption of art". [35] Haacke – whose own art had been censored on more than one occasion due to its unflinching effort to link high culture with unsavoury corporate practices – goes on to describe this process of artworld industrialisation as a procedure that those who participate in the artworld including "galleries, museums, and journalists (not excluding art historians)" are "hesitate to discuss". That is because in order to acknowledge these raw, economic connections, the artworld would have to supplant "the traditional bohemian image of the artworld with that of a business operation". This revelation would in turn negatively impact the "marketability of artworld producers and interfere with fundraising efforts". Three years prior in 1980 Lippard had co-founded Political Art Documentation/Distribution (PAD/D), a collective that actively sought to align artists with third-world liberation struggles including the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua that President Reagan was actively seeking to overthrow.

What is crucial to note here is that figures such as Duncan, Lippard, Haacke, and other non-conformist artists and critics, played a critical role in humbling the privileged discourse of high culture, setting the stage for the successive efforts at overturning the paradigm of artworld control. The transmission of their critique was made possible through the very same artworld circuits that they challenged, including art journals, academic institutions, museums and galleries. In a sense, we could say the power of criticism met with, and also reshaped, the aesthetics of power. Which makes the enfeebling of this very same institutional critique today so unfortunate. "Now, when we need it most, institutional critique is dead", laments Andrea Fraser, one of the movement's exemplary practitioners. It has become "a victim of its success or failure, swallowed up by the Institution it stood against". [36]

V. 2017

> We can measure the waste not only in the thousands of "failed" artists – artists whose market failure is necessary for the success of the few– but also in the millions whose creative potential is never touched. Let us also count the labor of the mediators who conscientiously police high-art space and maintain its order.[37]

Almost twenty years ago I read these words by Carol Duncan and realised that they resonated deeply with my own experience as an artist, but also as someone coming to the artworld from a particular class background that offered no practical knowledge about how the high artworld worked, including who gets to participate in it, and how one must behave to advance within its ranks. Furthermore, Duncan's assertion (which borrows from the writings of Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci)[38] that most people have the capacity to make art, but are nonetheless prevented from doing so. In fact, her words made me confront the uncomfortable reality that my own movement away from the fairly immobile social position of my upbringing was based less on talent than it was on the generosity of teachers and mentors who acted on my behalf precisely because, far better than me at the time, they understood what the invisible costs and obstacles entry into the high artworld demanded, especially from certain social enclaves.[39] Nonetheless, what has never completely receded is first the feeling of being an imposter who is trespassing into alien terrain, and second a lingering undercurrent of *ressentiment* towards those who believe art and culture are their privileged birthright.

"Vast amounts of imaginative labor" are organised by the art market Duncan writes, only so it can "spill most of it down the drain in order to get a little of it to show in a few places for the benefit of a few people". [40] But, as an artist lodged within this process, Duncan's boldly stated metaphor did not ring entirely quite right. I knew many professionally trained artists who were still actively engaged in art, despite receiving only a small amount, or zero recognition from gatekeeper galleries, museums, journals, curators or critics. Their continued involvement with the artworld was typically financed by part-time employment as a studio assistant, art fabricator, adjunct art teacher, museum or art gallery installer, or art handler among other industry-supportive functions. There was, in other words, a strange, Limbo-like zone suspended between the artworld's successful 1 per cent, and the darkness of Duncan's deep drain. And this is where most artists find themselves, neither here nor there. Which is to say, most of the artworld's imaginative labour is never simply disposed of, it is instead organised and deployed on a continuous basis to become the essential reproductive substrate for the world of high culture. The metaphor I apply to this condition is that of artistic dark matter.

Cosmologists describe dark matter, and more recently dark energy, as a necessary gravitational force that while invisible, nevertheless serves to prevent the universe from dissipating into a cold, state of homogeneity. In order to achieve this slow-down of post-big-bang cosmic expansion some 96 per cent of the universe must be made up of dark matter. This estimate, together with is inscrutable invisibility is why the theory of dark matter is also described as the "missing mass problem". [41] Like its astronomical cousin, creative dark matter also makes up the bulk of contemporary artistic activity. However, artistic dark matter is invisible primarily to those who lay claim to the management and interpretation of culture; the critics, art historians, collectors, dealers, curators and arts administrators. In this way, artistic dark matter became my

shorthand label for Duncan's vast, invisible surplus of productivity, which I further broke down into three broad species of missing creative mass:

- The many professionally trained, yet failed artists, and also pre-failed art students
- The excluded armies of amateur and non-professional artists
- And a small number of art hackers, tactical media pirates, and peripheral artists' collectives who by and large excluded themselves from this world for political reasons

By flipping Duncan's insight, the other way around the question now becomes not why is there all of this waste of talent, but what does this vast pool of seemingly excess creativity actually and materially provide to the artworld? The short answer is that the high artworld needs this shadow activity as much as some developing countries furtively depend on their dark or informal economies.[42] Not only does artistic dark matter form the opaque backdrop of mass "failure" necessary for disclosing the luminosity of a relatively few art stars, but within its sphere of excess activity are the managers, builders, installers, journal subscribers, museum paying members and art supply purchasers who literally anchor the world of high art. Except, even as I developed this elaboration of Duncan's analysis, something was happening to this zone of obligatory invisibility. Dark matter creativity was getting brighter.

A clear example of this illumination was emerging within the then, newly emergent Internet where digital networks so essential for linking together the "just in time" production of deregulated, global capitalism, also made it possible for Duncan's "millions whose creative potential is never touched" to represent themselves to each other, to share images, swap music, images, information and artistic projects, and therefore to gradually develop into online communities. This was happening at the same time neoliberal enterprise culture sought to squeeze surplus value out of every nook and cranny of life, taking advantage of non-stop precarious working conditions, and the over-indebted consumerism of the "click here economy".[43] Combine this online self-discovery process with the extreme disparity in wealth distribution and the increasing reoccurrence of capitalist economic crisis – the 1980s savings and loan scandal, the 1990s Dot.Com bubble, and the 2008 real-estate and banking collapse – and not only has artistic dark matter gotten much brighter, it now glows with resentment as the UK Brexit vote and 2016 US election outcomes indicate. In Duncan's terms then, the drain is now quite clogged, and both the artworld and democratic society are facing a spillover, some of which is progressive, though much of it is the opposite. And for the moment the latter species of dark matter is in ascendancy.

The positive effect of this brightening is that the business-as-usual artworld is now facing a mutiny. Post-Occupy artists have generated a bevy of new organisations including Working Artists and the Greater Economy (WAGE), BFAMFAPHD, ArtLeaks, Gulf Labor Coalition, Occupy Museums, Debtfair, Liberate Tate, Art & Labor. Collectively they assert a moral, as well as often direct activist and/or legal demand that the

artworld become an all-around better citizen. The group Debtfair points to the 52,035 average dollars of debt owed by art school graduates (in the US) and insists this is untenable, while Gulf Labor and its offshoot Global Ultra Luxury Faction (GULF) and Decolonize This Place stage museum interventions protesting artworld hierarchies, complicity with the new US President, and unfair labour practices including the exploitation of migrant labourers in the United Arab Emirates where the Guggenheim is developing a new museum, despite condemnation from human rights groups. And there are some concrete outcomes. The Guggenheim gave up plans to build a museum in Helsinki, Finland thanks to organising by local groups, plus some strategic assistance from members of Gulf Labor Coalition. And after years of steady protests by the environmental justice art collective Liberate Tate, the Tate Modern has vowed to no longer accept funding from British Petroleum.

All in all, the situation today is very different from what it was in the late 1960s or early the 1980s, and Duncan already hinted at its possibility when she acknowledges as a caveat to her mostly bleak analysis that it does "not organize all creative labor".[44] Yet, at the same time that we witness this surprisingly robust pushback against hierarchical artworld hegemony, the art market has undergone almost a decade of unprecedented market expansion, even outperforming the stock market, if some investment reports are to be believed.[45] Rebellion and riches seem to make up the 2017 artworld, which has become so obviously integrated into global capital that it deserves a new moniker: the bare artworld, riffing off of Georgio Agamben's term "bare life". [46] Claustrophobic, tautological, our bare artworld is our bare artworld is our bare artworld. It emerges in successive and accelerating states of shadowless economic exposure following capital's ever-quickening swerves from crisis to crisis.

VI. Conclusion: Who ~~Rules~~ Runs the Art World?

> Everyone feels caught up in a "system" whose controlling power is everywhere but in no one in particular.
>
> Carol Duncan [47]

> The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do.
>
> Andy Warhol [48]

The "secret" or "mystery" of artistic production, including its purported autonomy from the capitalist market, but also its heroic "male" struggle to achieve a transcendent state of true freedom which is made concrete by the work of art itself, this seemingly enigmatic phenomenon is revealed today to be merely another type of social production, no more, no less. The struggle of artistic will power over the world now transmuted into a Warholian artist-automaton. And what Duncan, Lippard,

Haacke and a handful of other artworld practitioners laboured to expose, is now an all-too obvious elephant in the museum where corporate sponsorship is no longer camouflaged, but nakedly celebrated. Virtually everyone engaged in the artworld – from artists, critics and curators, to installers, fabricators and administrators – are fluent in the vernacular of institutional critique, thanks in large part to the critical work of the 1960s and 1970s, but also as a consequence of capitalism's ongoing economic crisis, especially following the 2008 financial collapse.

What then of photorealist art and Malcolm Morley's *Beach Scene*? Obviously neither this essay, nor Carol Duncan's "Who Rules the Art World?", turn explicitly on the subject of photorealist painting, a trend that in fact had already crested in artworld terms when she penned her essay in 1983. And yet, photorealism seems to loiter nearby both texts. Though no longer fashionable, it loiters like a petulant outcast, murmuring something about art having become, like so many other things today, an unambiguously mechanical operation. Who then rules (or runs) the artworld? Certainly, the art establishment is still a sphere of class privilege, in fact, we see today a return to virtually pre-market monarchical control of high culture whereby oligarchical Russian art collectors flush with copious petro-dollars and equally wealthy sheiks in the United Arab Emirates, now gobble-up Western art works and cultural brands including the Louvre, Guggenheim and British Museum. But we also see just as clearly that the credits have already finished, and that the artworld's raw relationship with money and power are fully divulged, once and for all. And what is also visibly present onstage is another cultural force, just as naked, and ceaselessly persistent, a vibrant, no longer dark, Golem-like agency that, despite market failure, refuses to mutely serve the success of the few.

VII. Coda

While researching this essay I came across a remarkable contention made by someone who claims to be the young boy riding on the back of the "Dick Nixon look-alike" father in Malcolm Morley's *Beach Scene*.[49] Today he identifies himself as Chairman and CEO of a global technology and counter-terrorism holding corporation. This information is available on the man's website. The now fully-grown lad asserts that Morley was hired to paint the photorealist canvas by Joseph Hirshhorn, future founder of the Hirshhorn Smithsonian Museum and Sculpture Garden, where in fact the painting now hangs. In addition, this same individual insists that Hirshhorn commissioned Morley to utilise his precise, photo-realist technique in order to reproduce a promotional poster, first printed by The Daytona Beach Chamber of Commerce a decade earlier in the late 1950s. The image on the poster is a photo of this man, his mother, father and sister that he still possesses today. While this contention is certainly fantastic, I have only substantiated to my own satisfaction that the individual and his family are indeed the people in the photograph that Morley reproduced, but I have seen no evidence that the Hirshhorn, or anyone else, commissioned the painting.

However, even if all of these claims proved false, it is genuinely ironic, as well as perhaps telling, that many years after the fact, an art work which was not supposed to have nothing to do with imagery or content, has been re-appropriated by a private individual as their own personal nugget of cultural capital. More than that, contrary to the irate Morley, but also to the analytical Duncan, it is the representational subject matter of the painting that generates the man's sentimental attachment to this work.

Notes

1 The plot of 1965 20th Century Fox movie *The Flight of the Phoenix* involves an oil-company owned twin-engine cargo plane in flight over Libya, which encounters a desert storm causing fatalities amongst the crew before crashing in a remote part of the Sahara and stranding a small group of ill-tempered survivors whose cantankerous pilot, played by James Stewart, attempts to keep them alive by forcing them to collaborate on the resurrection of a new aircraft from the wreckage of the old. The film was remade in 2004 with far less critical or box-office success.

2 Conrad even included an on-screen warning at the start of his film cautioning people that The Flicker might induce epileptic seizures.

3 According to Timothy Van Laar and Leonard Diepeveen the distinction between Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and art world prestige is that the latter cannot be purchased, but can only be conferred upon one from others because it comes to you from "a multitude of sources, in thousands of mysterious, obvious, or banal acts of deferral. Indeed, prestige can surface only in terms of the social, from a larger group to a smaller." Leonard Diepeveen and Timothy Van Laar, *Artworld Prestige: Arguing Cultural Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-21.

4 Initially published in the journal Socialist Review (1988-2001), which was itself heir to Marxist Perspectives (1978-1980), the pagination and version of "Who Rules the Art World?" I am referencing in my essay is taken from: Carol Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?" in *The Aesthetics of Power: Essays in Critical Art History*, ed. Carol Duncan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 169-88.

5 Ibid., 169.

6 Developed in the early 20th century, although only widely commercially available starting in the 1950s, pigmented acrylic polymer paint was made popular in part by pop art and photo-realist artists. Wendy Clouse, *Acrylics* (London: Hamlyn Press, 2002), 14.

7 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?" 169.

8 Carol Duncan expressed this in an email. 19 February 19, 2017. Subject line: RE: a few questions for you re: Who Rules the Art World?

9 *Beach Scene*, 1968, by Malcolm Morley is a 110 X 89 7/8 in (279.4 X 228.2 cm) acrylic painting in the permanent collection of the Hirshhorn Museum since 1972. Morley's image also appears as a smaller, limited edition screen print poster edition.

10 For a time, Duncan was married to the actor and *Second City* troupe member Andrew Duncan.

11 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?" 169.

12 What distinguishes photorealist painting from Pop Art painting is precisely the former's capitulation to the visual attributes of photography, even as the final work remains a singular, hand-made object and therefore not a photograph.

13 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?" 169.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 174.
16 Ibid., 173.
17 One could even go so far as to describe the intensity of the artist's indignation towards the critic as an example of reaction formation, a defence mechanism postulated by Freudian psychoanalytic theory in which a troubling emotion or traumatic memory generates an exaggerated and opposite behavioural response. In this instance, the artist truly desired critical approval and interest, but Duncan's interpretation of his work exposed an underlying conflict he could not confront directly, which then produced an angry retort, rather than a deferential or solicitous response towards someone in a position of art world power.
18 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 170.
19 Ibid. Duncan describes New York City as being at the centre of the art world with a series of satellite cities radiating outwards from it including "Paris, London, Milan, Tokyo, and other great centers of capitalism." And indeed, she is correct because New York City in 1983 was still *the* address most coveted by major gatekeeper art galleries and museums. However, this primacy was already beginning to be challenged by both the ongoing global museum boom and such phenomena as the Young British Artists who came to prominence in London in 1988.
20 Duncan, 172.
21 "When I first moved to SoHo, I could convince my mother, living a few blocks north of Houston Street, that my new neighbourhood with its trucks and trash-filled streets was too dangerous for her. Believing me, she never knocked on my door, thankfully," recalls artist Richard Kostelanetz in his memoir: Richard Kostelanetz, *Soho: The Rise and Fall of an Artist's Colony* (London: Routledge, 2003), 33.
22 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 179.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 186.
26 Ibid., 187.
27 Ibid., 173.
28 Michael Brenson, "The Curator's Moment," *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (1998): 16-27.
29 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 185.
30 Unquestionably the signature event of the decade's anti-modernist rebellion was the jam-packed, 1980 summer exhibition known as the *Times Square Show* in which a massage parlour on 41st Street was temporarily turned into a sprawling installation by Collaborative Projects that included works by Jean Michel Basquiat, Kiki Smith, and John Ahearn. Critic Kim Levin described it as a modern version of Dadaist Kurt Schwitter's Merzbau, and Robert Pincus-Witten called it a modern day *Salon des Refusés*. Levin is cited in: Margo Thompson, "The Times Square Show," *Streetnotes*, no. 20 (2010), http://people.lib.ucdavis.edu/~davidm/xcpUrbanFeel/thompson.html.; Robert Pincus-Witten, "The Times Square Show Revisited," *Artforum International* 51, no. 4 (2012).
31 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 187.
32 Ibid., 179. See also Lucy Lippard's comments about the *Times Square Show* in which she describes much of its artistic content as consisting of "pictures of guns, pictures of sex (actually pictures of women, since women and sex are interchangeable, right?) [which] constitute a statement in themselves." Thompson, "The Times Square Show". note 26.
33 This was one path artists in the 1960s chose when confronted with making art during what many on the Left perceived to be a state of war with US imperialism. Art was a seemingly frivolous pursuit under such circumstances, leading some to become union leaders or community activists. I discuss this in: Gregory Sholette, "A Collectography of Pad/D, Political Art

Documentation and Distribution: A 1980's Activist Art and Networking," (2003), http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2.2.Collectography.pdf.

34 Carol Duncan, email, 19 February 2017.

35 Hans Haacke, "Museums, Managers of Consciousness," *Art in America*, no. 72 (1984). Cited here from: Kristine Stiles and Peter Howard Selz, *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artist's Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 874.

36 Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum International* 44, no. 1 (2005): 279.

37 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 180.

38 "All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals," Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks (1891-1937),* cited from: Roger S. Gottleib, ed. *An Anthology of Western Marxism: From Lukács and Gramsci to Socialist-Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 115.

39 Although I moved to New York City to attend higher education, my parents and other three siblings did not attend college and remained within a few miles of where I was raised in suburban Philadelphia.

40 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 180.

41 See: "The Mystery of the Missing Mass," National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), https://history.nasa.gov/SP-466/ch22.htm.

42 According to the *International Labor Organization*, 80 per cent of new jobs created between 1990-94 in Latin America were in the informal sector. Furthermore, as many as half of all jobs in Italy are also part of an informal economy that is defined as economic activity taking place outside of government accounting and also goes by the name shadow, informal, hidden, black, underground, grey, clandestine, illegal and parallel economy. Matthew H. Fleming, John Roman, and Graham Farrell, "The Shadow Economy," *The Journal of International Affairs* 53, no. 2 (2000): 387-409.

43 Robert D. Hof, Gary McWilliams, and Gabrielle Saveri, "The Click Here Economy," *Business Week*, 22 June 1998, 122.

44 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 187.

45 See art market reporting by the Mei Moses art asset index that was acquired in 2016 by Sotheby's auction house. "Sotheby's Acquires the Mei Moses Art Indices," http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video/blogs/all-blogs/sotheby-s-at-large/2016/10/sothebys-acquires-mei-moses-indices.html.

46 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998).

47 Duncan, "Who Rules the Art World?," 175.

48 G. R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters: Part 1," *Art News*, no. 62 (1963). Cited from: Kenneth Goldsmith, ed. *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2009), 18.

49 The site in question is MRX.com. It is managed by Neil Gerardo who is listed as the Holding Corporation's Chairman and CEO, but also as "the boy in Malcolm Morley's painting of Daytona Beach entitled "Beach Scene." See: "Neil Gerardo Is the Boy in Malcolm Morley's Painting of Daytona Beach Entitled "Beach Scene"," The MRX Group, http://www.mrx.com/neilgerardobeachscene.html.