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Review

Delirium and resistance: Activist art and the crisis of capitalism

by Gregory Sholette

Edited and with an Introduction by Kim Charnley

Foreword by Lucy R. Lippard

London: Pluto Press, 2017, 224 pages

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The pertinence of the study on the examination 'the delirium and resistance of the contemporary political world seems all the more consequential' as *Delirium and Resistance* engages in critical discourses and practices of artistic activism, with a focus on the crisis of capitalism related to the overlapping matters within a given system in terms of creative processes with political struggles. In a sense, *Delirium and Resistance* is a manifesto documenting these developments in their broadest forms, from 1980s anti-gentrification efforts and 1990s tactical media practitioners, to the post-occupy-practices of our current circumstances.¹ Yet, *Delirium and Resistance* is also so much the more as the essays in the book reinforces to reveal the problematics of this manifestation within the art world, art activism and social movements.

Many of the essays invite questions about the creative forms of variety of resistance. Besides, there is a need to draw its restrictions and failures as Sholette explains this as 'or is art's occasional venture into radicalism something else altogether [...]'.² However, the relationship between art and politics is of course a very old issue. This urges us to revisit the encounters with the 'discussions on the issue of fascism' that becomes rather crucial as it needs to be ever re-evaluated 'more than ever on the grounds of today's factual conditions and new wherewithal statements have to be found'.³

What does this offer, particularly when art is taken into questioning beyond its representational boundaries? Especially, in rethinking of modes of production that is taken into account where the problematics becomes a challenging one? The case in the hand, how one could

position oneself between 'politically produced art' and 'art produced politically' within their vagueness of the notion in terms of the role and future of politically motivated arts in its production and how to form a critical awareness of the construction of political identities? Thus, the underpinning question is more to do with not what art is and defines art as an entity but 'when' does art becomes art? Especially, at a time the creative and strategic practices of thinking differently forms the artistic production that are transformed within the transformative aspiration of socially engaged art through social transformations marked by the global changes.

This also brings us to another issue with the use of certain lexicons at the cost of today's failure of praxis. Where is the critical space that could be identified in our current representative political surroundings? How do we employ and reclaim our positions at the reflections of activist art and socially engaged art practices in the relevancy of words that we reluctantly use in every single and each day of our daily life; like 'delirium', 'resistance', 'crisis', 'conflict' and 'activism' within its frame of social justice? Furthermore, what it is at stake in this context is how social change would be possible with conflicting forces, repressive crisis and possible futures? And, what could the process be?

Sholette's book addresses those specific moment of crisis into context and 'today's factual conditions' with neoliberal capitalism while looking into how artists and activists have resisted against these unpredictable emerging forces. And, activism for him 'is a process of recovering what the past has betrayed'.⁴

The first of part of *Delirium and Resistance*, 'Art World', addresses the issues of alternative worlds of contradictory explorations of the past of the future of political possibilities by focusing on the relationship between network culture, activism and art education in which colliding different worlds of creative works. This comes to surface with Sholette's 'bare art': 'sometimes as resistance, sometimes as complicity'.⁵ With this token, he also argues that 'there are exactly as many artists as the system requires for reproducing itself, just as there always are in a market-driven artistic economy'.⁶

The second part of the book is titled 'Cities without Souls', searching for the links between studies of social practice for its potential crisis of socially engaged art and its transformative attribution through focusing on gentrification by bringing politics of art's elite and class into the discussion. This is where Sholette reproaches 'what forms of oppositional praxis are opened up or closed down by the changing conditions of artistic production over time.'⁷

The final, conclusive part of the book, 'Resistance', in an attentive manner acknowledges Sholette's previous books, *Collectivism after Modernism – The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (edited together with Blake Stimson, 2006) in which the book carries the focus on the collective art practices and *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture – Marxism and Culture* (2011) in which he deals with his concept on artistic 'dark matter.' This is called upon where the 'dark matter' countered with the political economy of the art world in aiming to disclose socially engaged art's future and its difficulty.

Sholette undertakes this challenging matter by raising the question: 'How might our narrative about social practice art collectivism be imagined differently?'.⁸ I believe that gives an edge to the moments of crisis to the clarity while *Delirium and Resistance* forces us to think more in between activist art and what it conveys in terms of its radical potentiality by its merging existing positionality for a deeper exploration.

In such a claim, crisis can become a way of life ensuring that ideology, as Karl Marx notes, 'is pure

nothingness and all this reality is external to it.' This leads to a question that is pertinence with precarious political situation within its problematic in between 'what is' and 'what it might be' while exploring the possible determining potentials that shapes the current artistic culture. With this in the mind, we have another take on a new formation of overlapping past research on the dominant idea of political spaces and their occupying restricted places that enables radical social change?

NOTES

- [1] Gerald Raunig, *Review quotes*, see: <https://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/D/bo26304430.html>.
- [2] Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Ed. Kim Charnley, London: Pluto Press, 2017, p. 123.
- [3] Elif Çağlı, *Darbe Tehdidinin İşaret Ettiği Gerçekler*, Issue 27, June 2007, see <http://www.marksist.com>.
- [4] Gregory Sholette, *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism*, Ed. Kim Charnley, London: Pluto Press, 2017, p. 38.
- [5] *Ibid*, p. 12.
- [6] *Ibid*, p. 54.
- [7] *Ibid*, p. 152.
- [8] *Ibid*, p. 230.

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