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# Dark Matter: Art And Politics In The Age Of Enterprise Culture (Marxism And Culture)



## Synopsis

Art is big business, with some artists able to command huge sums of money for their works, while the vast majority are ignored or dismissed by critics. This book shows that these marginalised artists, the 'dark matter' of the art world, are essential to the survival of the mainstream and that they frequently organize in opposition to it. Gregory Sholette, a politically engaged artist, argues that imagination and creativity in the art world originate thrive in the non-commercial sector shut off from prestigious galleries and champagne receptions. This broader creative culture feeds the mainstream with new forms and styles that can be commodified and used to sustain the few artists admitted into the elite. This dependency, and the advent of inexpensive communication, audio and video technology, has allowed this 'dark matter' of the alternative art world to increasingly subvert the mainstream and intervene politically as both new and old forms of non-capitalist, public art. This book is essential for anyone interested in interventionist art, collectivism, and the political economy of the art world.

## Book Information

Series: Marxism and Culture

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: Pluto Press (January 5, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0745327524

ISBN-13: 978-0745327525

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.7 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 15.7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

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## Customer Reviews

“Provocatively, Sholette connects the improvisational and highly contingent quality of artistic careers more broadly with the new reality of employment, in which workers must be both more individually creative on the job and more acclimated to personal risk.”  
—Richard Lloyd, CAA Art Journal

“It’s impossible to do justice to the work in this space, but suffice it to

say that this was perhaps my favorite book of the year. *Left Eye on Books* "Those who first camped out in Zuccotti Park and renamed it Liberty Square are indeed a dark matter whose resistance various institutionalized forces have attempted to recuperate. Marc James Löffler, *Monthly Review* "Almost as soon as *Dark Matter* was published, the current revolutionary wave began spreading across North Africa and the Middle East • a refusal by youth making use of networked tools and defiant street performance. Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Afterimage* "As well as achieving a great many of its aims, the most infectious aspect of *Dark Matter* proves to be its author's passion and commitment to the issues at stake. • Theo Reeves-Everson *Review 31* "Sholette does a brilliant job of bringing a vast range of material together, documenting, contextualizing, and theorizing it in a sensible order that knits divergent practices together into a largely coherent landscape. • Dave Beech, *The Journal of Modern Craft*. "This book directly addresses the peer production of art, and how this dark matter could move from the current 'free labor and precarity position in the art world, to become its core." Michael Bauwens *P2P Book of the Week*, January, 3rd, 2011 "Dark Matter is a document and dent against our dark times. • Nikos Papastergiadis, University of Melbourne, Australia "Enough to make a Dadaist blush." • Alex Danchev, *Times Higher Education* "I'm *Dark Matter*! that's what I am!" • Michael Eddy/ *Artforum* "I'm *Dark Matter*! that's what I am!" • *Our Vitamin*

"Despite his fascination with the past, Sholette's main concern is with the present and the future, in the search for the acknowledgement of forgotten histories and talented labor surplus. We may just all be surplus, but if Sholette's uncovering of these invisible practices tell us anything, is that the *Dark Matter*, really does matter." • Sarah Smizz, *You Ain't Got No Picasso, Yo?!* "Dark Matter reveals in encyclopaedic detail a vast world-wide movement of marginalised yet essential artists who are politicised, active and organised." • Gwyn Griffiths, *The Morning Star*, March 2011

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This provocative and stimulating book reveals what visual artists will become in the 21st century. As Nicolas Bourriaud's "Relational Aesthetics" morphs into Pablo Helguera's "Socially Engaged Art" (SEA), Gregory Sholette demonstrates why a renewed commitment to art as a means for the

establishment, expansion and engagement of civics-minded communities both for establishing and enlarging "creative democracies" (as defined by John Dewey) and the importance of educating those whose insatiable curiosity appeals eventually to the value of both long-term, static social institutions and to the sudden, kinetic emergence of temporary communities whose identity stems from a shared experience (i.e.: concert festivals, Burning Man, county and state fairs, etc). Sholette examines why this binary (long-running, established traditions that emphasize the artist's intention which corresponds with theories of an art-for-art's-sake formalism. Sholette admirably demonstrates why such narrow conceptions of art's value to society results in a rapacious inquisitiveness and mindless materialism that denies the therapeutic capacity of art to re-humanize us in an epoch marked by social media processes which conflates community with alienation and isolation. Socially engaged art unites people and enables us to encounter our humanity through the conflation of aesthetic impulses with ethical action. Read this book if you want to understand what art will become in the next fifty years. The Situationist International and the collective is back to save contemporary society from its institutions and worst impulses.

"Gregory Sholette's great new book, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, makes a nice link about the Situationist's espousal of an alternative to capitalist economics based on the concept of a potlatch ceremony, which according to Marcel Mauss (via Sholette) 'redistributed ... property downwards, in the form of gifts that traveled from those better off to those less so, thus raising the status of the gift-givers within the entire community.' Obviously, as suggests Sholette, the Situationists expected at least some kind of pay-off for their efforts (like the potlatch 'gift-givers' expecting a rise in status), even if political in nature rather than material; 'their generosity therefore might be thought of as a gift of resistance.'" [...]. Sholette's book is great analysis of the complex inter-workings of art, capital, neoliberalism, gentrification, people's desire for autonomy (or conformity), questions of legitimisation and fund structures, precarious work, censorship and potential resistances through redundancy, unproductivity and surplus itself. The amalgam of effects and lives he terms 'dark matter' is that which keeps the art world machine functioning, despite (and because of) its blaring hypocrises and exploitations. *Dark Matter* explores what it could mean to be part of the art abyss, that ever-increasing mass who every day wake up on the 'wrong' side of Capital, but nevertheless keep getting up somehow. Sholette investigates how this is at once a position of exploitation and precarity but also of potential empowerment. The broad focus of the study is from a North American perspective, however the depth of research and clarity of phrase make the links to specific locales circumstantial rather than emblematic and thus enables the

reader to see the overarching issues in terms of a 'global' situation that goes (necessarily and systematically) beyond the confines of nation and culture. The remaining question is not only whether this dark matter could indeed 'refuse to be productive for the market' (p.188) and thus develop some kind of subversive freedom 'apart from the objectifying routines of "work"' (p.186), but whether such a refusal could be possible and, furthermore, politically effective in the age of mass depression and nonsolidarity. Highly recommended reading!

Those of us who teach contemporary art or art history, or have done so for a while, are in the process of updating our courses and reading lists to adapt to the new realities in the field. Art today is literally in the field--out in the open, on the streets, on the net, on the prowl--and no longer caged in safe museum and gallery zones. Sholette's *Dark Matter* makes us aware of some of deep historical trajectories for activist, counter-establishment practice. Sholette was co-author, with Nato Thompson, of the now famous book, *The Interventionists*, but this time Sholette provides all the depth and detail the former book lacked. I have used this in an upper level seminar and it really sparked discussion. To be sure, Sholette's book is not definitive, it does not exhaust the subject of activist art in the 20th-21st centuries. Rather, it opens it up. Thanks to Sholette, "Dark Matter Art" has become significant terminology.

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