



*Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism.*  
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***Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Crisis of Capitalism*** is an investigation into specific cultural changes that have taken place in a period of intense socio-economic change and instability beginning roughly in the late 1970s with the era of globalization and counter-globalization protests, through the Dot Com technology boom and bust, and on up to the 2008 global financial collapse with its aftermath of austerity and precariousness for numerous workers in the arts and beyond. These are the decades in which so-called neoliberal deregulation and privatization became the dominant policies for the majority of developed Western nations. Over the last decade the preeminence of this paradigm has begun to draw sustained political challenge from both the Left and the Right. It is with this historical framework in mind that my study asks several questions related to the visual arts. First: what effects has this economic liberalization had on the working conditions of artists themselves, and has artistic practice been wholly or partially subsumed by capitalist modes of production? Second: how have these extreme deregulatory policies impacted claims by the artistic avant-garde as a force of creative resistance against capitalist subsumption, especially given that key aspects of neoliberal policy actually parallel aspects of the artistic vanguard itself? These questions become more complicated in light of art's traditional claims to be an autonomous phenomenon that is essentially immune from the political conditions and economic turmoil of any given historical moment. What is also curious is that overtly activist art has become increasingly visible in recent years, even as museums and other mainstream cultural institutions appear equally eager to selectively incorporate some of this socially engaged art into their programming. Therefore, the broadest aim of this dissertation is to trace the path taken by socially engaged and activist art beginning in the late 1970s on up to the present day in 2016 primarily using case studies drawn from New York City where I have been active as an artist and critic for almost forty years. Analyzing my direct experience within a broader socio-political and historical analytic sets the stage for my attempt at understanding the contradictory forces which are at work in the changing conditions of artistic production first during the era of neoliberalism's implementation and more recently during its current phase of escalating crisis.