

To: gsholette@artic.edu

Subject: I am NOT my office

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2 [no description] to: gsholette@artic.edu jpg image/jpeg 53.99 KB

Message Source

## Gregory Sholette Selected Projects 1980-2003

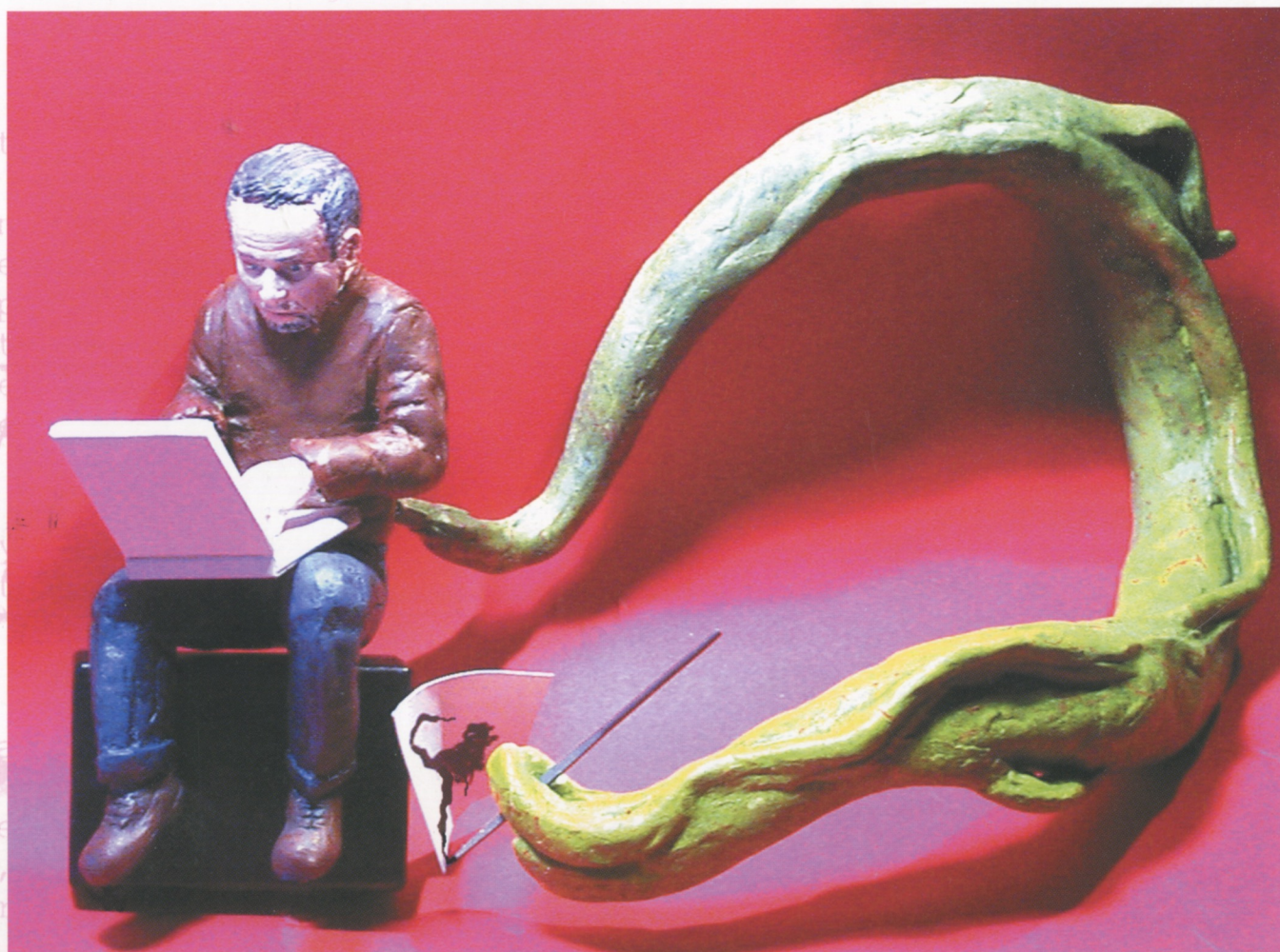
If you had a super-human power/prosthetic arm or device that allowed you to do things on the job you fantasize doing, what would it be like? \*

strong, invisible fields  
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4/2003 SAIC Device.

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erpower makes me more effective, my work more efficient. Helps me not wasting  
e and energy.





Gregory Sholette

Selected Projects 1980-2003

February 3 - March 2, 2004

Clifford Gallery, Little Hall

Colgate University / Hamilton, New York

Gregory Sholette is the Spring, 2004 Batza Family Chair in Art and Art History at Colgate University



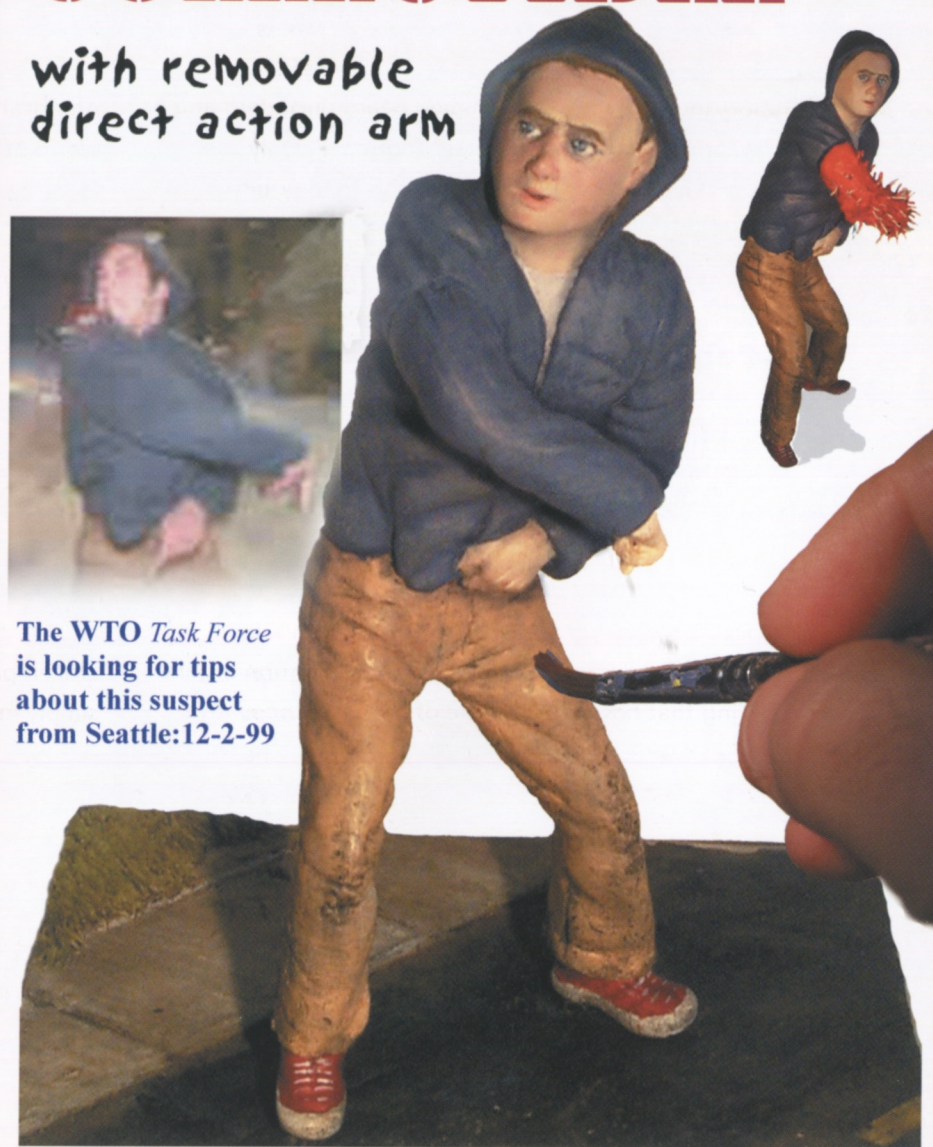
[http://www.pan.ci.seattle.wa.us/seattle/spd/WTO/wto\\_suspects.htm](http://www.pan.ci.seattle.wa.us/seattle/spd/WTO/wto_suspects.htm)

# WTO ACTION COLLECTIBLE

with removable  
direct action arm



*The WTO Task Force  
is looking for tips  
about this suspect  
from Seattle:12-2-99*

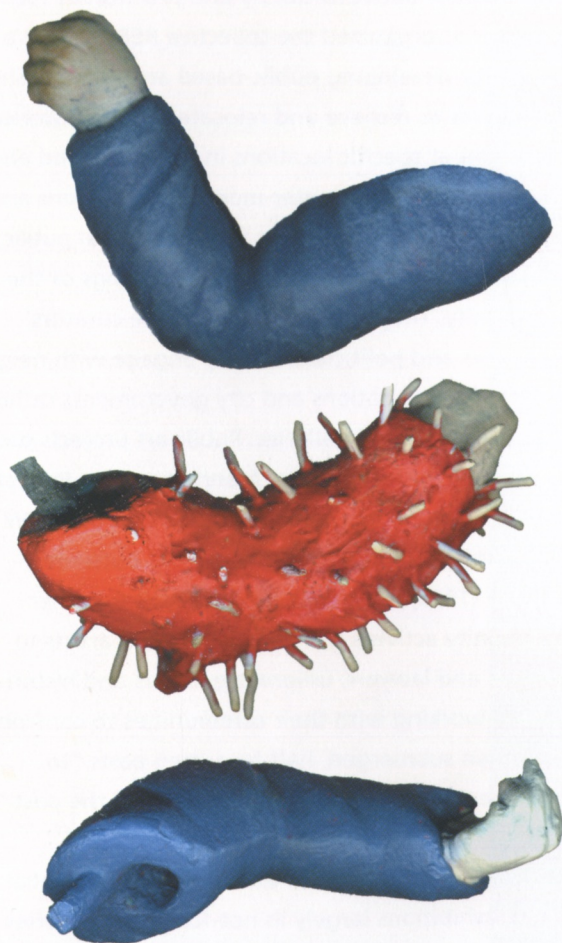


Counter-wto action collectible with  
direct action prosthetic arms, 2002



## Greg Sholette: Do It yourself Art Action Kit!

(includes interchangeable tools and body parts)



The Greg Sholette art action figure arrives as a seemingly genteel, artist type, slightly bohemian looking, with a nicely trimmed beard (included) and wearing a tweed sport jacket (optional). Only the wrestling shoes (included) belie his true nature. In an instant he has removed his coat, and unpacked his artist action toolbox (included) and things begin to happen. Sholette's toolbox comes with the requisite brushes and chisels as well as self annotated pocket-sized editions of Brecht, Benjamin and the Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film. The kit includes Sholette's own multi-media art works combining elements of sculpture, photography, drawings and text as well as copies of his writings on the history and theories of contemporary arts activism that inform all of his work. The Sholette Kit reflects twenty years of experience in cultural organizing that has created some of the most innovative artist's collectives of the last two decades. These, along with his activities as an exhibition curator, college educator, professional toy model builder and a public intellectual tirelessly speaking for alternative relationships between art practice and the public sphere has made the Greg Sholette art action figure paradigmatic of the post-studio artist/thinker/activist who emerged from the 1980s.

If the dominant history of the American art world of the last twenty years is identified with the "re-materialization" of the art object to be bought and sold in the high stakes art market, linking art practice with high finance and the spectacle of US celebrity culture, then there is also a counterhistory of that period that can be identified through the post-studio art practices as embodied by Sholette. Such counter practices have been less concerned with the commodification of culture and artistic auteurism than with working to create an arts culture committed to critical practice, redefining the role of the autonomous artist into a citizen participant, asking questions rather than simply making commentary. In what ways does art perpetuate dominant ideologies and work to discourage dissent? In what ways can art practice be used to disrupt and expose the naturalized social structures that operate—often invisibly—within daily life. How, in political terms as well as in the most personal ways, might artists work to integrate aesthetic practice into everyday life? Of course, these questions are not new and have been asked by





socially engaged artists and thinkers from Brecht and Heartfield to Haake and Rosler. As a child of this history, Sholette's practice continues a tradition that focuses on art making as a mode of production deeply tied to the material conditions of our society. Walter Benjamin wrote in 1934, "Rather than ask, 'what is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time?' I should like to ask, what is its position in them?"<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Sholette explores what it means to be an artist in his own time—rather than maintaining the idea of timeless autonomous individual expression (as if such a notion were possible).

Since 1980, Sholette has produced an extraordinary body of work that not only includes the individually produced works of art seen in this exhibition, but also numerous essays theorizing relationships between social and political issues and their aestheticization.<sup>2</sup> In all of his work he examines what it means to place art practice at the service of social transformation and to engage the issues of the day in aesthetic terms. In what ways do the meanings of social histories and issues change as they enter into the institutions of culture, from the museum to the university to the streets of a specific community? Combining theory with practice, Sholette is not simply interested in what it means to make politically thematic art, but also what it is to make art politically. Practice itself becomes a discourse that opens beyond the individual artist working alone in his studio. Looking toward earlier models that

focused on collective activity, such as the Berlin Dadaists, Russian constructivists, and the New York Photo League, and also in the contemporary context, of such collectives as the Critical Art Ensemble, The Art Workers Coalition, Paper Tiger TV, Group Material, Gran Fury, the Guerrilla Girls, among others, Sholette has extended his practice into collaborative, collective and community based projects. Often working collaboratively with the artist Janet Koenig, he has created installations and public art projects in which the labor of research and production as well as the creative problem solving is shared. One such collaborative piece, *disLOCATIONS* (inSITE94, 1994), a site specific installation at the Tijuana/San Diego border, looks at histories of resistance at the border at the turn of the twentieth century, creating links between past events and the current situation at the US/Mexico border. Sholette's work with artist's collectives subverts the idea of individual authorship entirely, exploring the creative dynamics within the group of artists while making community-based, public art that includes members of the community they are working in.

"How do we work together?" must always be the first question for cultural workers struggling to transform any society. Sholette was a founding member of PAD/D (Political Art Documentation and Distribution) in the early 1980s. PAD/D created a series of exhibitions taking up specific political issues facing their community in New York City, such as the "Not for Sale Project" which examined the

contradictory ways artists both facilitate and disrupt the gentrification of poor, urban neighborhoods. PAD/D's activities included an archive of international activist art projects to preserve the histories of such practices, and a reading group for artists to explore relationships between theory and practice. In 1989, Sholette co-organized the collective REPOhistory a forum for developing public-based art projects. Their object was to retrieve and relocate hidden historical narratives at specific locations in New York and elsewhere by creating counter-monuments, actions and events. In making public art for the general public, artists are thrust into the political workings of the community. They are forced to become curators, educators and politicians as they engage with neighborhood organizations and city governments rather than museums and galleries. Public art projects such as the *REPOhistory's Lower Manhattan Sign Project* (1992), *Civil Disturbances* (1998) and *CIRCULATION* (2000) in New York City, and *Entering Buttermilk Bottom* (1995) in Atlanta, GA, brought together community activists from academics and artists to doctors and lawyers, unions organizers and historians, all working with their communities to confront their own submerged, half forgotten pasts "to provoke critical and multiple readings of the past."<sup>3</sup>

Sholette has preferred to exhibit his work in collaborative exhibitions largely in not-for-profit galleries organized around specific issues rather than foregrounding himself as a solo artist. His work has been part of many of the defining political art exhibitions





REPOhistory

Lower Manhattan Sign Project, 1992

The Other J.P. Morgan









Massacre of Innocence, detail



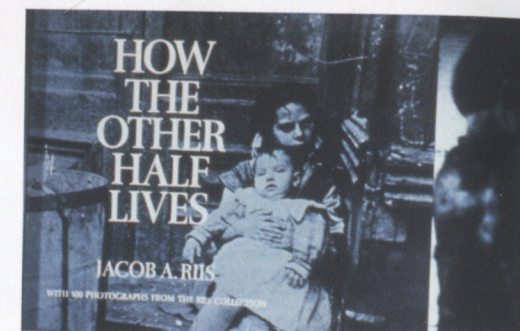
occurrence. In the words of Leo Bersani this can create the condition for "[t]he catastrophes of history to matter much less if they are somehow compensated for in art, and art itself gets reduced to a kind of superior patching function."<sup>6</sup>

A highly trained sculptor who also spent several years as a professional model builder for toy and advertising companies, Sholette uses the materials of model building to create a faux lexicon of actual forms that refer to the redemptive impulse to create and hold onto cultural knowledge. In *Culture and Barbarism*, Sholette uses the traditions of the diorama—a scale model of the Museum of Modern Art is juxtaposed with a miniature encampment of the striking miners who were murdered—to suggest the discourse of historical display familiar in natural history museums. Similarly, Sholette explores the use of archaic bas-relief sculpture that in other eras was used to depict heroic scenes of battle. In *The Massacre of Innocence* Sholette plays with the mise-en-scene of movie and stage design that seems real at a distance, but whose ersatz nature becomes clear upon close inspection. With all of these forms, he creates unsettling relationships between the timeless monuments to past events built of stone or brass and the cheesy plastic recreations—faux antiques that seem to be falling apart as soon as they are made. Sholette is not simply making objects; he is also playing with the ways objects function as signifiers of social memory. On a grand scale, institutions such as museums,

libraries and archives, housed in majestic edifices, are created to provide that function. On a more quotidian level, natural history dioramas, brass plaque markers, bas-relief narratives, souvenirs, and toy models are also imbued with the energies of memory and history. As Sholette writes:

"I have chosen to work with these familiar, 'middle-brow' forms because they navigate a narrow line between irony and innocence, the sentimental and the uncanny. Like portable icons I imagine these mementos invoking sentimental longings as well as everyday life and small-scale histories."<sup>7</sup>

The unifying interest in all of Sholette's practice is transformation. He is not only concerned with the most idealistic possibilities for social transformation, but also with how the meanings of events and images transform as they move through time. His art works take up the ways in which events in the world are appropriated as subject matter and become aestheticized, and finally turned into commodities. In his *Jacob Riis Series* (1995/96), Sholette considers ways artists appropriate images intended as documentary evidence and transform them into aesthetic spectacles, often erasing the original political intent behind the imagery. In this work Sholette uses photographs made by the 19th century liberal social reformer Jacob Riis, who photographed the squalor in which the underclasses lived in the hope of changing it. As time has gone on, such documen-



tary photography has become part of a fine art genre in which their meaning as documents of a social critique recedes, while the empathic rendering of human suffering takes precedence. Sholette has created five photographic panoramas of his own miniature dioramas based upon a Riis' photograph of a group of children playing around a water barrel on the New York City's Lower Eastside. Sholette uses Riis's photograph as a springboard to consider the way social groups and classes are objectified within the cultural imaginary, suggesting multiple narratives for both the images themselves and for what is going on in them. Sholette uses the three dimensional model as a kind of movie set through which he can examine the image from the position of the street kids, from that of the photographer who is seen as a character in this scene, and from the viewer who is







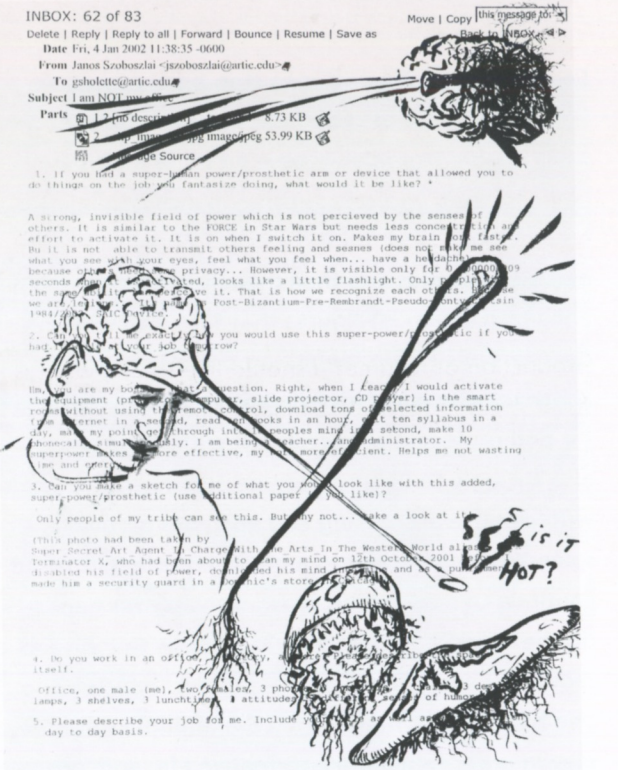


MY SPECIAL ENHANCEMENT/PROSTHETIC IS ACTIVATED WHEN I AM POURING OVER THE EIGHTY PLUS E-MAILS I MUST ANSWER IN ANY GIVEN DAY AT THE OFFICE. IT ALL BEGINS WITH A SHARP PAIN IN MY UPPER ABDOMEN AS MY SPLEEN SUDDENLY TAKES ON A LIFE OF ITS OWN. SOON IT BURSTS OUT OF THE BACK OF MY BODY, GRABS A SABLE PAINT BRUSH AND BEGINS TO DRAW PICTURES WHILE I CONTINUE TO SLAVE OVER THE COMPUTER. ONLY NOW I AM HAPPY TO BE DRAWING DESPITE THE INTENSE PAIN MY SPLEEN/ARM BRINGS WITH IT GREG



voyeuristically implicated in the spectacle of squalor. Different panels in the series reference early cinematic genres that appropriate the social inequities of urban life as the mise-en-scene of "real life", use of images of impoverished street children in mass entertainment like the "Bowery Boys" and "Spanky and Our Gang", and more nightmarish visions of urban life such as Lang's "M". This kind of appropriation of the image of poor children is an artistic tradition that spans the rise of popular art from the urban realist novels of the nineteenth century to current hip-hop movies set in the urban ghettos from Los Angeles to New York. Throughout the diorama there is the enigmatic image of the photographer (Riis) setting up the pictures, many of which were clearly posed for dramatic and/or aesthetic effect. Social reality, for both Riis and Sholette, is seen as a series of simulations, appropriated, aestheticized, and re-imagined. The *Jacob Riis Series* is particularly unsettling because it is so engaging to look at. The complete five panel series runs nearly 30 feet long and is beautifully crafted. The models are so playful, imaginative, and meticulously made that one becomes conscious of the ways materials and modes of representation heighten our sense of ourselves as spectators of art works. Simultaneously they force us to confront the contradictions of having an aesthetic experience at such a distance from the social realities that the pieces depict.

In the most recent work in the exhibit, *i am NOT my office* (2002), Sholette continues to explore the use of his hand-made "meta-objects," this time taken more directly from popular culture. For this piece Sholette has created models that emulate home-made "garage kit" action figurines based on sci-fi and action movies and comic book imagery in order to connect his work with the sub-cultures of amateur art making. Such creative sub-cultures also include home-made 'zines and websites, music and video scratch mixing, home movie making as well as various craft practices. Referring to this kind of work as the "dark matter" of the art world, Sholette contends that although it remains largely outside the discourses of the art world, it maintains a symbiotic relationship with that world that is both creative and economic. The majority of contemporary creative activity, he feels, takes place as this sort of "dark matter" art, indicating the widespread desire that people have to participate in creative labor whether or not they are acknowledged as legitimate artists.<sup>8</sup> *i am NOT my office* explores possible relationships between activist art forms created by trained intellectuals and artisans such as himself and the more informal creative work of the amateur artist/hobbyist who exists quite apart from the art world. Sholette is interested in the potential such non-professional artist cultures might have for creating unexpected forms of autonomous, politically engaged activist art that might occur outside of centralized art world contexts such as museums and galleries.



*i am NOT my office* brings Sholette's longstanding interests in collaboration together with his faux model building aesthetics and reflexive ruminations on the life of the artist in today's society—in this case as the consummate multi-tasker. To create the piece, Sholette sent questionnaires to a range of office workers asking them to describe their fantasies of the kinds of "super powers" or prosthetic devices they wished to possess in order to be able to do their personal creative work while completing the tasks they were being paid to accomplish on company time.



People desired the power to stop time, as well as wanting a range of cybernetic enhancements of their bodies, from detachable ears and multiple limbs to brain implants which enhance intelligence and memory. From these fantasies, Sholette began making drawings and then models, creating enhanced action kit figures that turn into working class versions of the fantasy artist/worker hero. Sholette, who earns his living as an arts administrator and professor, aligns himself with those who also struggle to balance routine administrative work with creative art making and imagines his own spleen transforming into a huge tentacle that could continue to work on his drawings while his hands do the voluminous administrative tasks that his job requires. *i am NOT my office* considers how, on the one hand, artists must juggle the multiple roles they play in order to maintain a creative life, and, on the other, how the suppressed or latent creative energies of people doing routine jobs not generally associated with art making, are expressed in the work place. In political terms, it asks how the surplus creative energy of workers at highly structured jobs can be harnessed for self and community empowerment. More overtly than in his other pieces, Sholette engages a lexicon of aesthetic forms that exist outside of high culture in an attempt to reflect more precisely the desires of those outside of his own cultural and class milieu. As a professionally trained artist he has no illusions about becoming part of the world of amateur art making—nor is it really his interest. Rather, as he writes, “I can bor-

row and re-tool examples of this informal culture for purposes of social critique and reflection.”<sup>9</sup>

With *i am NOT my office*, as in much of his work, Sholette can be seen as a postmodern pasticher playfully emulating and appropriating other forms of cultural imagery to create new hybrids between high and low cultural forms. At the same time, he is the consummate modernist attempting to place aesthetic activity at the service of an even more ambitious project, that of transforming society. In doing this Sholette is not simply trying to create an image of how others struggle to live a creative life. He is also reinvigorating high art discourses by connecting popular fantasy with utopian notions of a society that satisfies the material needs of a work force and cultivates the libratory potential of personal creative expression. If the realm of fantasy is a stage on which contemporary culture can be re-imagined as a humanizing force which places democratic creative expression at the service of the most idealistic aspiration for social transformation, then the *Greg Sholette Art Action Kit*, like all the other action kits fighting for social justice and new ways of living together, is not simply a fantasy—but a necessity. Now’s the time!

Jeffrey Skoller

Jeffrey Skoller is a filmmaker who writes frequently on experimental art. His book *Shadows, Specters and Shards: A Poetics of History in Avant-Garde Film* is forthcoming from the University of Minnesota Press. He is currently Associate Professor of Film/Video/New Media at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” *Reflections*. New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich. 1978. pp. 222.

<sup>2</sup> See Sholette’s website for a complete bibliography of his writings, many of which he has made available on line. <http://www.artic.edu/~gshol/>

<sup>3</sup> See *REPOhistory* website for detailed histories of their community based projects between 1991 and 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin. “Thesis on the Philosophy of History” *Illuminations* New York Schocken Books. 1969. pp. 256.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin. “Thesis on the Philosophy of History” *Illuminations* New York Schocken Books. 1969. pp.256.

<sup>5</sup> As part of the exhibition *Committed to Print*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Bersani, Leo. *The Culture of Redemption*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1990. p1.

<sup>7</sup> Artist’s Statement: See Sholette’s website <http://www.artic.edu/~gshole/>

<sup>8</sup> Sholette borrows the term from the science of cosmology, which refers to the theory that there has been an enormous amount of invisible material created by the Big Bang, which has never been directly perceived but can be inferred by the errant motion of astronomical objects in outer space. For a complete discussion of Sholette’s analogy see “Dark Matter, Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere” in *Marxism and Visual Art Now* London: Historical Materialism. Forthcoming, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Artist’s statement from the exhibition “Critical Mass” The Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2002.

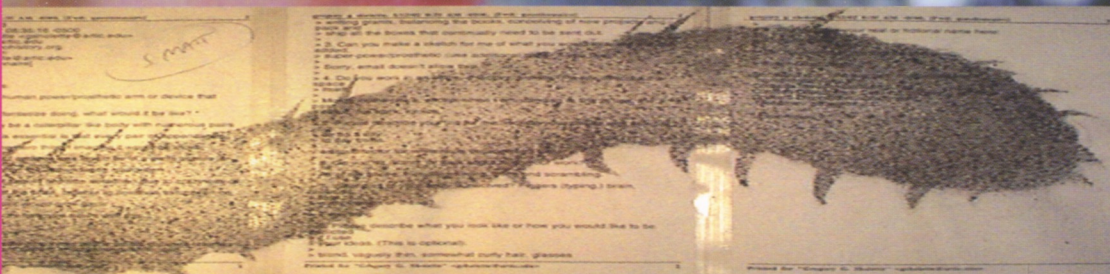
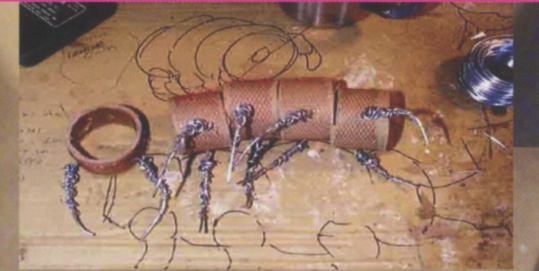
The artist extends his appreciation to Janet Koenig, Jeremy Kassen, Timothy Noe, and Wendy Tiefenbacher for their assistance framing and printing images.

Photo on page 8, *Men Making History*, by Ellen Page Wilson



WELL, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE A CATERPIL-  
LAR LIKE BODY WITH NUMEROUS PAIRS OF  
LEGS AND ARMS. WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IS  
THAT EVERY PAIR OF APPENDAGES HAS ITS  
OWN BRAIN. THIS BEING A SUPERHERO  
THING I IMAGINE IT WOULD BE MOST  
INTERESTING IF THE BRAIN FOR EACH PAIR  
OF ARMS OR LEGS WOULD BE IN A GLASS  
BUBBLE JAR PROTRUDING FROM THE BODY

ALSO, BECAUSE OF THE BRAIN THE  
APPENDAGES COULD WORK INDEPENDENTLY  
OF EACH OTHER AND IF A SEGMENT SHOULD  
BECOME DETACHED DUE TO CRAZINESS OR  
JUST CUT OFF, IT WOULD, BECAUSE OF THE  
BRAIN, BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO FUNCTION  
ON ITS OWN. OF COURSE A NEW PAIR  
WOULD GROW BACK ANTHONY





## Gregory Sholette

Born Philadelphia: 1956

Lives and Works in NYC

The Whitney Museum Independent Studies Program,  
Critical Studies, 1995-96.

University of California San Diego, CA. 1995, MFA.

The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science & Art,  
NYC. 1979, BFA.

Bucks County Community College, Newtown, PA. 1976,  
Associates Degree.

### Selected Exhibitions

- 2004 Clifford Art Gallery, Colgate University, NY.
- 2003 D.S.L.R.-West, San Francisco: various public locations.  
Puffin Room, NYC.
- 2002 The Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago.
- 2001 The Painted Bride Art Center, Philadelphia.  
Sarah Lawrence College, NY.  
Wolverhampton Art Gallery, UK.
- 2000 Circulation: REPOhistory, various public locations and  
galleries NYC. (Map Brochure.)  
Monk Parakeet, Chicago.  
International Center for Photography in "Martha Rosler:  
Positions in the Life World."  
Pacific NW College of Art, Portland Oregon.  
Rush Arts, NYC.
- 1998 Civil Disturbances: REPOhistory, various public locations  
NYC. (Map Brochure.)
- 1996 Lower East Side Tenement Museum, NYC.  
EXIT ART, NYC.
- 1995 New Langton Arts, San Francisco, CA.
- 1994 inSITE 94. w/ Janet Koenig, Tijuana, Mexico & San  
Diego, CA. (Catalog.)
- 1992 Lower Manhattan Sign Project: REPOhistory, various  
locations NYC. (Catalog.)  
Artists Space, w REPOhistory, NYC.  
Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago, IL.  
Washington University Gallery, St. Louis, MO.
- 1991 The Alternative Museum, NYC. (Catalog.)  
Momenta Art Gallery, Phila. PA. (Catalog.)
- 1990 Painted Bride Art Center, Phila., PA. (Catalog.)  
PS122 Gallery, NYC.
- 1989 DIA Art Foundation Gallery, NYC. The Alternative Museum,  
NYC.

- 1988 The Museum of Modern Art, with Janet Koenig. (catalog.)  
Traveling Exhibition: "Unknown Secrets: Art of the Rosenberg  
Era," Installation Gallery, San Diego; Otis/Parsons Gallery  
L.A.; Aspen Art Museum, CO. (Book.)  
P.P.O.W. Gallery, NYC.  
The Mattress Factory, Atlanta, GA.  
Randolph Street Gallery, Chicago IL. Catalog.
- 1987 EXIT Art, NYC.  
Franklin Furnace, NYC.
- 1986 The New Museum: Group Material, NYC.
- 1985 The Alternative Museum. (Catalog.)  
Paul Robeson Cultural Center, The Pennsylvania State  
University.  
PS122 Gallery, NYC.
- 1984 Barbara Gladstone Gallery, NYC.  
Franklin Furnace, NYC.  
Real Art Ways, Hartford, CT.  
Not For Sale Project: PAD/D, various public locations, NYC.
- 1983 Subculture: Group Material, with Janet Koenig, posters in  
subway cars, NYC.  
The Kitchen, NYC.
- 1982 Artists Space: Group Material, NYC.  
Civilian Warfare Gallery, NYC.  
Dance Theater Workshop, NYC.  
Mason Gross School of the Arts Gallery, New Brunswick NJ.
- 1981 Group Material Gallery, NYC.
- 1980 Just Above Midtown Gallery, NYC.  
Printed Matter windows, NYC

### Selected Writings

*Collectivism After Modernism*, ed. G. Sholette & Blake Stimson.  
Forthcoming, University of Minnesota Press.

"Dark Matter, Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere,"  
Historical Materialism UK, special issue forthcoming.

"i am NOT my office," Art Journal, Vol. 62, No. 2, Summer 2003.

"Some Call It Art: From Imaginary Autonomy to Autonomous  
Collectivity," *Dürfen Die Das? Kunst als sozialer Raum, Art/Education/*  
*Cultural Work/Communities*, Ed. Stella Rollig and Eva Sturm, (Verlag  
Turia & Kant, Wien, Austria, 2002). 161-184.

"Fidelity, Betrayal, Autonomy: In and Beyond the Post-Cold War Art  
Museum," *Beyond the BoX: Diverging Curatorial Practices* Edited by:  
Melanie Townsend

"Authenticity Squared: REPOhistory Circulation, Anatomy of an Urban  
Art Project," New Art Examiner 12/99.

"Counting On Your Collective Silence: Notes on Activist Art as  
Collaborative Practice," *Afterimage*, 11/99.

"News from Nowhere: Activist Art & After," *Third Text*, #45, 1999  
*Kunst, Kultur und Politik in den Großstädten der 90er Jahre*,  
Ed. Jutta Held.

"Urban Encounters" brochure essay for New Museum of  
Contemporary Art exhibition, July-Sept. 1998.

"Red River: Take Two," catalog essay for the exhibition "Red River  
Crossings: Contemporary Native Artists Respond to Peter Rindisbacher  
(1806-1834)," The Swiss Institute: New York, June 1997.

### Collective Practices

REPOhistory, co-founder, 1989.

Political Art Documentation & Distribution: PAD/D,  
co-founder, 1980.

### Recognition/Awards

- 2001/02 Outstanding Faculty Award, The School of the  
Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1999 The Smithsonian Institute Visiting Scholar Grant,  
Archives of American Art.
- 1996 The National Endowment for the Arts for REPOhistory  
CIRCULATION.
- 1990 Artists Space Award for developing REPOhistory.
- 1982/83 New York State Council on the Arts: Creative Artists  
Public Service Grant.

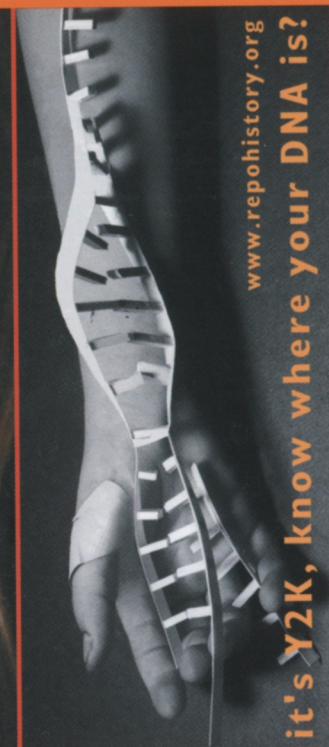
The Batza Family Chair in Art and Art History was  
established in 1997 through the generosity of  
Michael J. Batza Jr, a member of the class of  
1963 and a University Trustee Emeritus, his wife,  
Patricia, and daughter, Maureen, a member of  
the class of 1990. This endowment supports a Chair  
in Art and Art History. Selection is based on the  
individual's teaching excellence and scholarly  
achievements.



It's Y2K.  
Do you know  
where your DNA is?



[repohistory.org](http://repohistory.org)



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box above and  
apply it to the lower  
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