

Hey, youz there!

Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party*, Verso, London and New York, 2016. 288 pp., £16.99 hb., 978 1 78168 694 2.

Jodi Dean's book *Crowds and Party* is poised to ruffle some feathers among theoreticians and activists on the left who seek a mode of doing politics in ways that downplay or denounce the apparatus of the party and the vocabulary of collective emancipation. Dean sets out to 'intervene' politically – in a way akin to the party that calls for a degree of discipline and clear delineation of short- and mid-term goals – into the current state of affairs marked by haphazard challenges to the existing order. However, Dean's prose is free of the counterproductive, worn-out jargon of consciousness-raising and party-building that often features among groups with missionary pretensions. Instead, Dean's analysis departs from the challenges and exigencies that she has observed within social movements, providing a distinct angle into the debate and revealing how political strategy can draw imaginatively from a variety of unexplored fields.

The underlying problematic of Dean's discussions is what she perceives as an excessive and misplaced commitment to individuality, a corollary of the dominant ideology that should be staved off from left politics. Dean demonstrates that the individual form does not have an inherently emancipatory potential with the example of the historical individualization of the commodity form in the slave trade. Furthermore, individuality is invoked as a selling point: viral marketing campaigns, such as the 'custom' Coke cans with individual names, preserve the ubiquity of the brand while vesting it in a 'unique' veneer.

The more troubling aspect of individualism is the resonance it finds in left political practice. The social upheavals of the last decades rejected clearly delineated leadership procedures and concerted action, not to mention the notion of a common and actionable programme, but by agreeing to play within the individualistic terrain underlying the current form of capitalism, leftists lose sight of individualism as a social pathology that idolizes those who do 'whatever it takes' to achieve what is really a precarious livelihood to begin with.

Dean goes further in arguing that the individual form is an ideological construct conceptualized as the basic unit of subjectivity, drawing from Althusser's formulation that ideology interpellates the individual

as the subject. For Althusser, ideology summons the individual to 'subjectify' her in the name of the Subject, as citizen, national, believer, and so on. Dean proposes an inversion: the subject is interpellated as an individual. Thus subjectivity is untethered from the confines of the individual, the ontology of which is problematized. This move allows for a formulation of subjectivity that does not reduce itself to the individual level, while reinstating collective subjectivity and consciousness against conservative portraits of 'the crowd' as an irrational mob.

This inversion also has the consequence of assuming that a sort of subjectivity pre-exists the individual, in an essentialist vein that goes against the premisses set out earlier. This does not inherently compromise Dean's argument, yet it would be more theoretically coherent to connect the internal fragmentation of the individual at a psychological level with the antagonism between capital and labour, invoking the problem of individuality in Marx. It might be objected that a theory of individuality as such is absent in Marx, yet it is pertinent that in *The German Ideology* Marx differentiates between personal and class individuality, between the individual *as a person* and what is 'determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it'. This observation anticipates the fragmented nature of the individual within capitalist society, as alienated and opaque to herself. It is at this point, to return to and supplement one of the central points of Dean's book, that the party (or association, commune, society) is useful as a wedge within the flow of capitalist relations, and a space of autonomy that binds individual vantage points to enable a transcendent collective vision.

Regarding the ideological obstacles in the way of emancipation, Dean is categorical that the Left needs an avowedly communist organization, as this is the only concept uncompromisingly intransigent to capitalism. On this point, while Dean is correct to make a call to unfurl the banners of a positive revolutionary project, she does not appreciate that in many parts of the Majority World individual liberties have a progressive connotation, and while communists take pains to underline their differences with bourgeois elements, they find themselves compelled to engage with the institutions of the status quo along these lines, precisely in order to hold open and expand a gap for the collective, emancipatory discharge. It would have been more than prudent, therefore, to be more mindful of the regionally differential manifestations of class struggle.

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