



# Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics

By Jodi Dean

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*Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* is an impassioned call for the realization of a progressive left politics in the United States. Through an assessment of the ideologies underlying contemporary political culture, Jodi Dean takes the left to task for its capitulations to conservatives and its failure to take responsibility for the extensive neoliberalization implemented during the Clinton presidency. She argues that the left's ability to develop and defend a collective vision of equality and solidarity has been undermined by the ascendance of "communicative capitalism," a constellation of consumerism, the privileging of the self over group interests, and the embrace of the language of victimization. As Dean explains, communicative capitalism is enabled and exacerbated by the Web and other networked communications media, which reduce political energies to the registration of opinion and the transmission of feelings. The result is a psychotic politics where certainty displaces credibility and the circulation of intense feeling trumps the exchange of reason.

Dean's critique ranges from her argument that the term *democracy* has become a meaningless cipher invoked by the left and right alike to an analysis of the fantasy of free trade underlying neoliberalism, and from an examination of new theories of sovereignty advanced by politicians and left academics to a look at the changing meanings of "evil" in the speeches of U.S. presidents since the mid-twentieth century. She emphasizes the futility of a politics enacted by individuals determined not to offend anyone, and she examines questions of truth, knowledge, and power in relation to 9/11 conspiracy theories. Dean insists that any reestablishment of a vital and purposeful left politics will require shedding the mantle of victimization, confronting the marriage of neoliberalism and democracy, and mobilizing different terms to represent political strategies and goals.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“Jodi Dean provides an incredibly lucid explanation of what neoliberalism has been both in policy terms and collective fantasies of the relation of markets to freedom. But the really threatening Big Other in this book is not neoliberal ideology, but the failed and flawed leftist will that concedes too much power and unity to neoliberalism. This is a frank polemic that will stimulate many arguments about the past and future of critical theory and democratic politics in the United States.”—**Lauren Berlant**, author of *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*

“Jodi Dean’s new book provides what we have all been waiting for: the authentic theoretical analysis of how ideology functions in today’s global capitalism. Her diagnosis of ‘communicative capitalism’ discloses how our ‘really-existing democracies’ curtail prospects of radical emancipatory politics. Dean demonstrates this status of democracy as a political fantasy not through cheap pseudo-Marxist denunciations, but through a detailed examination of social, symbolic, and libidinal mechanisms and practices. To anyone who continues to dwell in illusions about liberal democracy, one should simply say: ‘Hey, didn’t you read *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*?’”—**Slavoj Zizek**, Institute of Sociology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

“In *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* Jodi Dean pulls few punches in her critique of the American Left, for both its complacency and its limited capacity to (or even lack of awareness of the need to) offer a stand of political resistance to power. . . . *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies* is not, however, merely a critique of the US Left; it is also a powerful demolition of its claims for a collective existence.”  
(David Chandler *Radical Philosophy*)

‘[A] provocative examination of contemporary Left politics. . . . The complex ideas of poststructuralist thinkers such as Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Zizek figure prominently in her analysis. As in her earlier work, however, Dean is able to relate the value of such thinkers in understanding contemporary events with unique lucidity and clarity. . . . [A]n important, worthwhile, and entertaining contribution to discussions of radical alternatives to current political realities. Summing Up: Highly recommended. General readers, upper-division undergraduate students, and above.’

(R. W. Glover *Choice*)

“Dean’s [text] is stimulating in its ability to offer an alternative view of how neoliberalism achieved apparent invincibility. The work offers a challenge to leftists to produce not only some new, radical ideas but to unite and be heard once more.”

(Lucy Welsh *Feminist Legal Studies*)

#### From the Publisher

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#### From the Back Cover

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