



[Democracy and other neoliberal fantasies](#)

by Professor Jodi Dean

To be reviewed by [Simon Belt](#) April 2011

From the back cover:

Product Description

"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 neo-liberalization 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 individual 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 transmission of feelings.

The result is a psychotic politics where certainty displaces credibility and the circulation of intense feeling trumps the exchange of reasons. 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 neo-liberalism, 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 neo-liberalism and democracy, and mobilizing different terms to represent political strategies and goals.

Review

"Jodi Dean provides an incredibly lucid explanation of what neoliberalism has been in terms of both policy and collective fantasies regarding 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, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia