

# The Subject in the Crowd: A Critical Discussion of Jodi Dean's "Crowds and Party"

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**Abstract:** This article presents a critical discussion of Jodi Dean's (2016) book "Crowds and Party". I pay particular attention to her discussion of crowds and the Communist Party that is influenced by psychoanalysis. Dean has put forward an important argument for the affectivity within crowds that may be transformed into a Communist Party that is characterised by a similar affective infrastructure. I suggest that Dean's discussion of affect is slightly vague at times and may be supplemented with Sigmund Freud's work on affect. In contrast to Dean, who stresses the collectivity and deindividuation of the crowd, I argue that the crowd needs to be thought of as a place where individuality and collectivity come together and remain in tension. The Party may then manage such a tension, as Dean illustrates.

**Keywords:** Crowds, Communist Party, Affect, Freud, Psychoanalysis.

## 1. Introduction

Jodi Dean's recently published book *Crowds and Party* (2016) was possibly triggered by current uprisings and past demonstrations that have all occurred over the last 5–10 years or so: the Arab Spring, the Indignados movement in Spain, the Occupation of Gezi Park in Turkey, the Occupy movement across the world, mass demonstrations against austerity in Greece, the UK and the rest of Europe, the recent Nuit Debout protests in France to name only a few. They may be seen as grassroots uprisings against forms of domination that are deeply rooted within capitalism and specifically what Dean has called 'communicative capitalism' (Dean 2009) elsewhere. But most importantly for her work that results from these developments: they all take the form of the crowd, or crowd gatherings. As a result, Dean wishes to analytically define and value the crowd as a form of emancipatory uprising characteristic of the Left in general. The second major point of her work that is held together by the word "and" in the book's title concerns a passionate argument for a revival of the Communist Party. Dean's book is a gripping read. She weaves a tapestry of different writers and argues with a verve for a unified Left that one finds it difficult not to agree to. It is particularly Dean's drawing on psychoanalysis and specifically Freud (1949) and Lacan (2002) that is important and impressive, for she manages to develop theories of the crowd and the Communist Party that may account for affective, unconscious and conscious subjective and intersubjective dynamics in both phenomena. I explore both crowd and party components of the book in more detail in this article and argue that there are some problems with the book that concern (a) Dean's discussion of affectivity within crowds and (b) her slightly romantic discussion of the Communist Party. She writes what characteristics a new Party should have without providing ideas or visions of how we can transform crowds into the Party or parties. In the following, I suggest that Dean's discussion of Freud's work on crowds can be supplemented with his work on affect that has remained largely ignored within academia. Secondly, I suggest that we must envision and embrace a model of the Party that is characterised by affect (as Dean herself does) but also by divisions, antagonisms and differences as they occur in groups and individuals alike. This article is not meant as a critique of Dean's work. My suggestions and theoretical discussion may possibly make her arguments stronger.

## 2. Crowds

Dean argues that one of the reasons why the Occupy movement failed was because it could not sustain itself as a crowd that may be characterised by “collective desubjectivation” (Dean 2016, 4). The Occupy movement became atomised and different subjects, ideas and Leftist orientations could not be united—arguably a problem the Western Left has always experienced. Dean diagnoses a strong focus on individuality within contemporary neoliberalism and the Left alike as identity politics, individual struggles, personal experiences and perspectives are emphasised rather than an appeal to a commonality that surpasses individuality. Left writers such as Leadbeater (1988) and Brunt (1988) are also criticised by Dean for having advocated a similar individualism as conservative commentators and right-wing politicians. She likewise critiques Sherry Turkle’s (2011) work on lonely teenagers and children who are glued to their computer or smartphone screens and have failed to be communal and social without technology. Dean argues that this is a pathologizing account and suggests instead that social media and networked forms of communication may actually point to new forms of connectivity and organisation (Fisher 2012; Fuchs 2014; Krüger and Johanssen 2014). However, for the most part of her book, she theorises and argues for the crowd as an answer to the isolated yet technologically connected subjectivity of contemporary capitalism. To Dean, the crowd is the answer to an enforced individuality in neoliberalism. She draws on a number of seminal scholarship on crowd psychology including Canetti (1984), LeBon (2001) and Freud (1949). In this section, I reproduce some of her key arguments that primarily relate to the crowd that is made up of individuals and yet becomes a collective that surpasses individuality. This notion is the strength of Dean’s book but also lays bare some conceptual weaknesses that I hope to address and suggest supplements to in this section.

Central to any crowd or even group is the fact that there is always more to it than just its people. People “are never fully identical” (ibid, 90) with the crowd they are in. The people in the crowd have expectations of themselves, of each other and possibly of the crowd that are never fully conscious to any of them. Any psychoanalytic school, as Dean rightly notes, also upholds that people in themselves are not without fantasies, contradictions, drives, desires and ideas that work in harmony but also against each other and are situated at the border of consciousness and the unconscious. Based on LeBon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (2001) and Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1949), Dean develops her notion of the crowd. Both, Freud and LeBon, were initially interested in exploring, albeit with rather different viewpoints, what happens when crowds and masses of people gather. How does people’s behaviour change? What are the dynamics of crowds? For both, the crowd is a process “or force in which individuals get caught” (ibid, 95). Crowds involve a specific directionality that is oriented towards a goal, cause or triggered by something that set the crowd in motion. LeBon, who Freud extensively drew on, emphasised that the crowd subsumes individual qualities of subjects and renders them into a collective, “a collective mind” (ibid, 96) that also has an unconscious dimension. Crowds are held together through desire and are products of desire themselves. They may form spontaneously and are, as Dean stresses throughout, not necessarily characterised by processes of organisation, coherence and structure. “Freud wants to know what unites people in a crowd, what the character of the ties that bind them together is” (ibid, 101). I will outline the basic points raised by Freud, before supplementing them with his discussion of affect as it appears throughout many of his other works. To begin with, he argues that crowds are held together by libido:

Libido is an expression taken from the theory of the emotions. We call by that name the energy (regarded as a quantitative magnitude, though not at present actually measurable) of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word “love” (Freud 1949, 37).

Such a love is the “essence” (ibid, 40) of the crowd (Freud refers to it as “group” throughout his book) and the relations of its people. Equally, the crowd may be united in hatred (that may be seen as more akin to the death drive) of another group, class, or a particular development within society for example. Later on, he writes that a crowd may be held together by

“a wish in which a number of people can have a share” (ibid, 53). Such a wish makes the people in the crowd identify with each other “in their love for the same object” (Dean 2016, 108-109). In case of the specific crowds Dean is interested in, this love would be a love for Communism. Dean rightly criticizes Freud for spending too much time focussing on the idea that the group bears some resemblance to his notion of the primal horde (which is of course an arbitrary theorem constructed by Freud that has been highly criticised) and that the essentials of crowd psychology can be explained by shifting the angle on to the leader of the group who acts as a kind of hypnotist. “Where there were many, there appears one.” (ibid, 112) in Freud’s writing. Freud has therefore missed an opportunity in shedding more light on crowds and has instead individualized them rather than explaining its collective subjectivity, Dean notes. Additionally, crowds without leaders were not really considered by Freud. Dean goes as far as to say that if psychoanalysis only focuses on the individual unconscious it is recruited by neoliberal ideologies as a form of “covert support” (ibid, 113) of individuality. This conclusion may be drawn a little too hastily because even Freudian psychoanalysis bears some relational characteristics that I outline further in the next section with regards to affect. It is also safe to say that any post-Freudian psychoanalyst, thinks of the subject in more relational terms than Freud did. Dean stresses the collective force and affectivity of the crowd, its instability, fragility and lack that may give rise to something bigger, something new, a changed state, an altered being and I agree with her. However, the crowd always consists of individuals that make it a crowd. Rather than faulting Freud and psychoanalysis for transferring individual qualities onto collective qualities of the crowd, as Dean does, I feel that his work may be useful for thinking about the type of crowd that Dean describes and wishes to define. For the rest of this article, I will develop and engage with Dean’s arguments by drawing on Freud and Freudian theory. Indeed, Freud makes clear in *Group Psychology* that

it is a pleasurable experience for those who are concerned to surrender themselves so unreservedly to their passions and thus to become merged in the group and to lose the sense of the limits of their individuality (Freud 1949, 27).

This passage allows us to hold onto a sense of individuality and collectivity at the same time rather than thinking of the crowd as a mere collective. It also alludes to affect and I return to it in the next section. Rather than regarding the crowd as a collective subject, a revolutionary subject, or amorphous mass, I suggest we may think of it as a cathected body or entity that consists of individuals who have come together and thereby transcend but not sublimate their individuality. It is tempting to describe crowds in terms of asubjective or depersonalised words such as collective, movement, force, “[c]harge, atmosphere, pressure, expectation, excitement” (ibid, 119) but a crowd will always consist of individuals.

By describing the crowd as a deindividuated form, I argue that Dean elevates it to a higher being and thereby grants it more power than it has in reality. “The crowd wants to endure:” (ibid, 217)—or is it its people who have the desire that they as a crowd may endure? This question matters. Together the people in a crowd may achieve more than a singular individual but they are still driven by individual fantasies, desires and wishes rather than only a collective spirit or a contagious buzz. Rather than thinking of crowds as the “negation of individuality” (ibid, 120), we could think of them as phenomena that are at once constructed and perceived from outside the crowd, as well as from inside the crowd by its people who themselves may have differing ideas and fantasies of who they are and what they do.

Dean goes on to draw on Canetti (1984) and Lacan (2002) in order to think further about the characteristics of crowds. Canetti described the crowd’s coming into being as a moment of “discharge” (Canetti 1984, 17) in which everyone who is part of the crowd feels equal. This “concentration of bodies and affects” (Dean 2016, 120) results in a collective feeling of belonging and being together in that moment. Everyone recognizes each other as the same being. Such a state won’t last and crowds only last for certain periods of time but for its duration a recognition of everyone’s equality as a human being is achieved. A moment is shared by a collective. Alternatively, such a state may be described with the Lacanian concept of *jouissance* (e.g. Lacan 2002). Crowds may “dynamically generate collective *jouissance*”

(Dean 2016, 134). Rather than relying on this concept that even most Lacanians cannot adequately explain, I wish to take up Canetti's notion of the *discharge* as it has some similarity with Freud's use of the same term and may help to support Dean's impressive and important discussion of emancipatory crowds.

## 2.1. The Discharge in Crowds

"Attention to affect can open up a register beyond texts and practices, providing access to a domain of attachments and expectations productive of a mode of life." (ibid, 220), Dean writes. I wish to re-introduce Freud into her account at this point because he came up with a complex theory of affect that may be useful. To equate *jouissance* with affect, as Dean ("Affect, or *jouissance* in Lacanian terms [...] (Dean 2010, 95)) and others (Soler 2015) have done recently is incorrect and lays bare a theoretical lapse that Freud may help to overcome. As Lacan himself made clear "affect is unsuited to play the role of the protopathic subject" (Lacan 1977, 297) in psychoanalysis. Such remarks led André Green to conclude that "affect has no place in it [Lacan's work]" and that it was in fact "explicitly excluded from it." (Green 1999, 98) by Lacan. If we want to think about the crowd from a psychoanalytic perspective that includes affect, we need to turn to Freud rather than Lacan, as Dean implicitly does. This may be of use because Dean relies so heavily on affect, particularly when she describes the affectivity and the need for affect within the Communist Party in the second half of her book. I therefore offer a brief and sketchy introduction to Freud's affect model in this section in order to finally relate it to some of his ideas expressed in the Group Psychology book that can be used for thinking about crowds and the Communist Party.

Freud changed and revised his conceptualisation of affect throughout his life (Freud, 1981a, b, c, d, e). He did not provide an exhaustive definition but essentially referred to affect in order to conceptualise a bodily experience of an individual (Freud 1981a) that cannot be named as a fixed emotion. In an affective experience, something is viscerally felt by the individual. An affect as such can be pleasurable or unpleasurable. It is not autonomous or without context but can either be triggered by an internal or external stimulus. Freud made an important distinction between what he called an "idea" and "affect" (Freud, 1981a, c). He defined "idea" as the content of a thought, or a fantasy. An idea essentially refers to a mental act. Something is perceived externally or thought about by the subject. Affects have their own qualities but they are always in reference to an idea. An affect may also be associated with a wish or fantasy. Green has concluded that an affect may be "aroused either by external perception [...], or by representation (evocation of a phantasy constructed in the psyche)" (Green 1999, 56). An affective experience has a certain temporality and culminates in what Freud referred to as discharge, in the fading of the affective experience. Only that moment of discharge is conscious to the subject. Preceding moments are unconscious to them. For Freud, affect means a sudden and temporal loss of control or bodily agency. An affective experience is suddenly felt and fades away after a while. The subject's body is experienced as an other and beyond themselves in such a moment. Freud defined the term in 1917 as the following:

And what is affect in the dynamic sense? It is in any case something highly composite. An affect includes in the first place particular motor innervations or discharges and secondly certain feelings; the latter are of two kinds—perceptions of the motor actions that have occurred and the direct feelings of pleasure and unpleasure which, as we say, give the affect its keynote (Freud 1981d, 395).

This discussion of discharges and feelings has been often neglected by scholars who draw on Freud (Green 1999). An affective experience is marked by two things: discharges (in the physiological sense) and feelings. These feelings (that are of two kinds themselves) consist of a perception that the affective experience has occurred (e.g. the feeling of bodily excitation when I chant with 5000 others at a demonstration) and, secondly, feelings of pleasure or unpleasure, or a wishful or fantasmatic nature that are tied to the affect, not the idea (e.g. a feeling that could be characterised as pleasure because of the affective experience). To put it

differently: “Affect is regarded as both a bodily and a psychological experience, the former being the condition for the latter” (Stein 1999, 126). The affect itself has a sensation and a quality. It is a component of psychic life that is difficult to classify and discursively fix.

There is little discussion of affect in Freud’s *Group Psychology* book but some mentioning can be explored further at this point. He wrote that there is a “heightening of affectivity in groups” (Freud 1949, 23). Being part of the crowd is a “pleasurable experience” (ibid, 27) for subjects. Importantly for the theme of Dean’s book, Freud noted: “Indeed, just as in dreams and in hypnosis, in the mental operations of a group the function for testing the reality of things falls into the background in comparison with the strength of wishes with their affective cathexis.” (Freud 1949, 20). Here Freud granted utopian and visionary moments that go beyond reality an important place within the crowd. Subjects in the crowd may desire or wish for a change and such wishes are cathected (or charged) with affect. They are affectively felt in the moments of discharge rather than completely known and consciously articulated. For Freud and Dean, as noted earlier, such affective charges may be expressed and felt in a common love for the same object that unites the crowd. “Thus, when we speak of the existence in someone of a libidinal cathexis of an object, or, more shortly, of an object-cathexis, we mean that his libidinal energy is directed towards, or rather infused into, the idea [Vorstellung] of some object in the outer world.” (Freud 1949, 48, emphasis in original). A common love for an object (e.g. fundamental changes in capitalism or its sublation) is shared by individuals as an idea or fantasy that is charged with affect. It goes beyond mere discursive utterances or rational thoughts. How does such a process work in a crowd? To give an example: Dean refers to a moment of the Occupy Wall Street movement in Washington Square Park that broke its collectivity, as she argues.

After the fifteen minute or so breakout session where we talked with those around us about taking the park, we pulled back together as one assembly. Speaker after speaker, amplified by the People’s Mic (where the crowd repeats the words of a speaker so that those who are farther away know what is being said), urged us to take the park. We are many. We outnumber them. We can do it. We must do it. Upraised hands twinkled approval in waves of support round and round the circle. Then, a tall, thin, young man with curly dark hair and a revolutionary look began to speak.

We can take this park!  
 We can take this park!  
 We can take this park tonight!  
 We can take this park tonight!  
 We can also take this park another night.  
 We can also take this park another night.  
 Not everyone may be ready tonight.  
 Not everyone may be ready tonight.  
 Each person has to make their own autonomous decision.  
 Each person has to make their own autonomous decision.  
 No one can decide for you. You have to decide for yourself.  
 No one can decide for you. You have to decide for yourself.  
 Everyone is an autonomous individual.  
 Everyone is an autonomous individual. (Dean 2016, 3)

Apart from the notion that no one is an autonomous individual according to psychoanalysis, something else may be at stake here. Rather than only read the above passage as a moment that led to Occupy Wall Street’s failure, I would like to read it as a moment where affectivity is infused with an idea. In particular the lines “We are many” and “We can take this park!” may exemplify what Freud meant by libidinal energy, or affect, which is directed towards an idea: that collectively the protesters would have been able to take the park. The affectively charged love bound the protesters together. Through those sentences, a future was envisaged and a desire for it articulated. They could take the park and ultimately change the world. Of course, it was then shattered by different dynamics, as Dean notes. Rather than treating the crowd as an abstract phenomenon with autonomous collectivity, a focus on affect may point to the tension between individual and social dynamics at stake in any crowd.

I argue that such a tension is expressed in the sentences “Each person has to make their own autonomous decision” and that each individual would have to decide rather than rely on someone else’s decision. Such sentences were uttered first by the young man with curly hair, who Dean describes, but they were repeated by others and became shared and part of the collective. Dean interpreted the situation as follows: “the mood was broken” (ibid, 3) because the crowd had collapsed into individuals who asserted their own individuality as a result. This may be true. However, I would also argue that the shifting from a “We” to the “individual” that is evident in the above utterances by the speaker may have been felt by others within the crowd too. It was not one leader-like individual who lured the crowd into thinking about abandoning the park. The speaker’s narrative is one of ambivalence and fears that may be shared by others within the crowd. Rather than urging the others to take the park, he expressed that the decision had to be made at an individual level in order to lead to a collective result. A deindividuated crowd that Dean writes of cannot make such a decision for individuals but it has to occur vice versa. While the crowd was undoubtedly united by an affective, loving bond, its collectivity was also threatened by individual fears and desires that were not shared by all. Such fears and desires were quite concrete, Dean notes, as some protesters were concerned they might get arrested if they occupied the park but they may have also been of more diffuse and affective origins that were difficult to articulate and reflect on in a climate that was dominated by the need to make a decision whether to occupy the park or not. Rather than individuality that broke a collective spirit, it was perhaps a lacking opportunity for reflection on individual affects and affective atmospheres within the crowd that led to Dean’s feeling of a broken mood. While the individuals within the crowd may have felt both pleasurable and unpleasurable affective experiences on that day, such experiences can remain unconscious or difficult to articulate in the moment of their occurrence. Before returning to the example, I outline Freud’s affect theory in more detail.

For Freud, affect, even though being subjective, is also relational and social in so far as something is being communicated to the social world in an affective experience. “Through the affect, the unconscious is manifested as that which seizes the ego, questions it, subjugates it.” (Green 1999, 162). This may actually be seen as a positive thing, as Dean does in her general use of affect. Ruth Stein clarified the Freudian notion of affect in the following way:

“my body speaks itself to me”; when I am feeling, I possess my body, but at that same moment, the body is also its own speaker, and the three terms join together and link my possession (“my”), the object of this possession (“body”), and that which denies my possession (“it speaks”—and in that it is its own master, or speaker, thereby denying my possession of itself) (Stein 1999, 127).

This dispossession may help to theorise the Left crowd further. In listening and acknowledging the affect and the pleasurable and also unpleasurable experiences of not having ownership and control over ourselves in the first instance, we may then reflect on our affective experiences and how they shaped the crowd and our experience of it. Acknowledging such a dispossession may also help critique the pathology of communicative capitalism and the extent to which we and our data are always already possessed by others: the state, capital, corporations that exploit us, companies that sell our data. This relational and collective aspect of affect was also discussed by Freud in his 1895 Project for a Scientific Psychology. Freud (1981a) discusses how the first experiences in a baby’s life are essentially affective and pre-discursive. A baby is hungry and begins to cry as a result. Satisfaction and the feeling of not being hungry can only be achieved through the mother, father or another providing milk. Freud argues that the baby’s cries are of an affective nature that aims to discharge the unpleasurable experience of being hungry. The discharge is only completed when the other provides the milk. Affect is here essentially used to communicate an experience to the outside world. Affect designates an act of social communication (Diamond 2013).

The baby’s cries, the crowd’s screams, the subject’s bodily movements they are all forms of affective discharges towards the social. Others witness them. In reflecting on the

affective crowd and our experience of it, we may also reflect on our own pleasures and unpleasures and how we can turn feelings of dispossession into forms of political organisation. If we follow the Freudian take on affect, such reflections are not of a rational nature. Dean argues that affect may “open up a register beyond texts and practices” (ibid, 220). However, the Freudian notion of affect is, contrary to contemporary affect theories, related to texts, discourses and language. For Freud, affect is not beyond or excluded from language. There is a tension between the two. In an attempt to verbalise or write about an affective experience, the subject may say nothing about the affect as such but about its unpleasurable or pleasurable nature and what might have triggered it.

In this sense, affect is reflexive and even reflective. It reflects on what has been experienced in a delayed manner [...]. Hence, the moment of experience and the moment of meaning or signification never coincide, the latter always being retroactive (Stein 1999, 132).

Green also stresses this when he says that “affect appears only when the other parts of speech have exhausted their possibility of speech, hence my difficulty in speaking about it,” (Green 1999, 251). There may be a “difficulty” but no impossibility in speaking about affective experiences. To conclude, the Freudian notion of affect is rooted in the individual but it is also a form of social communication towards the other. In going back to the example I discussed above, we may ask why (some of) the protesters did not feel that they could occupy the park. How did Dean herself feel as someone who witnessed the incident? Why did she feel that the speaker had broken the mood? How could the apparent tensions between individuals and the crowd be managed, buffered and resolved? While affect works well as a concept to think about crowds, Dean also suggests to carry it over into her discussion of the Communist Party. To her, the Party may be able to give a more coherent organisational form to the crowd. It may possibly absorb differences and antagonisms.

### 3. A Different Party?

Dean treats the Party as a “psychic space” (ibid, 181) and argues that the psychoanalytic concept of transference may help to further theorise the Party. “Through the transference different unconscious agencies in the subject become manifest.” (ibid, 184). Similarly to affect, transference is a relational concept. Freud understood it as a subject’s unconscious patterns and dynamics of relating to another. If transference occurs, past relationships are actualised and transferred onto another subject. They can be conflictual and hateful but also loving relationships. The person before the subject who has conducted the transference in such moments replaces an earlier person. For the psychoanalyst, sensing transferences is important in order to learn more about the patient and their history. It is useful for getting an idea of how dynamic patterns relate to the patient’s past and present problems (Johanssen, 2016). Dean now argues that the Party may access modes of transference as they have occurred in the crowd. “The Party is a form that accesses the discharge that has ended, the crowd that has gone home, the people who are not there but exert a force nonetheless.” (ibid, 184). Transferences are at work between different subjects in the crowd and in the Party. Dean also argues that the crowd may regard the Party through a loving transference as an organ that steps up, does the work and takes responsibility. The Party may also act as a space that holds the idea and belief in fundamental social change (in Dean’s example Communism) that the crowd may aspire to. In discussing transference (and other concepts such as ego-ideal and superego), Dean manages to theorise a Party that is open to subject’s idealisations and beliefs and responds to them by valuing, acknowledging them and organising so that members may know that real change is indeed possible. I believe this is a very valuable move because it allows us to think of the Party as an organisational form characterised by complexities and dynamics that recognize individuality but also incorporate it into a collective.

To exemplify such psychodynamics, Dean provides case studies from individual members of the US and UK Communist Parties in the 1930s and shows in great detail how the party

acted as an “affective infrastructure” (ibid, 210) for its members. Contrary to her discussion of the crowd, she starts from individuals in order to explore how the Communist Party (in the US and UK respectively) demanded loyalty, effort and organisation from its members and offered hope, protection and help in return. In contrast to her discussions of the crowd, Dean theorises the Party as one that is strongly affected by individual experiences and subjects that are taken up by and find a home in the Party.

Dean writes that the future Party has to conduce “the affective intensity of the crowd discharge in the wake of its dissipation.” (ibid, 217)—but how? What happens after everybody goes home once a demonstration has ended? Who picks up the crowd and welcomes it to the Party? Dean advises against diverse social movements, specific alliances and multiple trajectories that are characteristic of today’s Left. Instead, all should be united in difference in a Communist Party. Dean does not write how we may achieve such a Party and perhaps it is beyond the book’s scope. Holding onto singular identities and identity politics “enchains us to collective failure” (ibid, 256) and turns subjects inward. It is the crowd that exemplifies “a collective desire for collectivity” (ibid, 258).

However, I disagree with Dean for the same reasons that are apparent in her theorising of the deindividuated crowd. It is not a question of either or, of individuality vs. collectivity as Dean alludes to throughout her book. The theoretical and practical challenge is to bring the two together. I maintain that this desire for a real collectivity that may transform itself into a Party that Dean writes of may be present more than ever but it is still rooted in individuals and then, in a second step, may be shared by many. Rather than naming it a collective desire of the crowd or Party that glosses over individuals’ desires, as Dean does, I would argue that desire is always individual before it may be abstracted to or felt as a collective desire. One should not outrightly dismiss identity politics but rather think about how the Party can channel and draw on them without fractioning into isolated groups. The many examples Dean draws on in her discussion of the Communist Party are actually examples of *individual* subjects and how they related to the Party and felt contained and held by its affective structures. They always begin at the individual level - we could argue that they are tied to identity politics (e.g. the young woman who was forbidden by her father to marry a non-Jewish man, as discussed by Dean, cf. 211–212)—and then move outwards to the collective level. Individual and social aspects thus become entangled. These discussions are important and show how the individual may be embedded in collectivity without losing their status of the individual. At the same time, it is always individuals within the Left (and the Party) who may quarrel over what the Party should be, what actions should be taken, how pamphlets should be written etc. Such divisions contribute to a divided Left and a divided Party. A Party that focuses more on libidinal ties, transference, affect and love may perhaps be better able to buffer such divisions. In order to do so, we must first acknowledge our own divisions within us. Dean’s book is an important step in such directions. I therefore agree wholeheartedly with her when she conceptualises a Party that is not about providing answers or hands-on solutions but about offering a space of (and for) uncertainty, desire and possibilities all of which are held together by the Party and allowed to exist. Rather than going straight into day-to-day politics and organisation, such a psychosocial space may be utilised in order to explore the transference dynamics between members of the Party and how they relate to social factors as well as the Party’s structures. In providing such a structure, members may be able to realise what unconscious dynamics are at play in themselves and in the Party, as Dean rightly highlights. “In a capitalist setting, the party provides communism with a body—one that is heterogeneous, porous, and polymorphous.” (ibid, 209), as she beautifully writes. In its focus on providing an affective space that is not only characterised by uncertainty and possibility but also by love and solidarity, Dean opens up a Party that does not seem abstract, cold and instrumental—as it may have been commonly perceived in the past. Her focus on affect is particularly valuable in this case because it constructs a Party that is about feeling, energies and libido and, secondary, about planning, organising and (discursive) strategies.



## 5. Conclusion

Jodi Dean's book *Crowds and Party* is a timely and important analysis of the contemporary Left and key moments that have shaped its recent history. Her book is an important work, particularly given rising nationalism, racism and nationalistic populism in the West to which the Left and particularly Left parties have failed to deliver adequate responses so far. Dean successfully brings together the crowd and forms of political organisation as the Party in her book. In this article, I have sought to reproduce some of her key arguments and supplement them with additional discussion. Dean's book works particularly well when it conceptualises forms of social organisation that may be seen as essentially psychosocial phenomena that surpass individuality and merge the individual and the collective. As I have suggested, this task works in some chapters better than in others. Dean has a tendency to deindividualise the crowd, possibly because she does not want to sound neoliberal or be accused of reproducing neoliberal arguments that only focus on individuality. However, I have argued for a crowd that can be seen as a site where individuality and collectivity come together and remain in tension. While Dean's use of affect adds important dimensions to thinking about contemporary crowds, her use of the term is slightly vague. Equating the Lacanian notion of jouissance with affect is problematic because the two terms are not identical. I have introduced Freudian affect theory, to her discussion of the crowd that is influenced by Freud's works and re-interpreted Dean's discussion of the scene from Occupy Wall Street as one of affective tensions within the crowd. We should not fault Dean for not delivering an analysis of how the crowd can be transformed into the Communist Party. Her discussion of the Party as an affective infrastructure that may respond to and absorb the crowd's desires, uncertainties and hopes is particularly important and gives us hope in darkening times. While Dean rejects identity politics, I argue that her historic examples about the US and UK Communist Party are actually about how individual identity politics were taken up by an affective infrastructure of the Party. This notion of the affective infrastructure that is held together by affective energies further adds a level of complexity to thinking about what the Party may mean today.

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