

G – K – Dean

1N

Links

Fragmentation/Melancholy

H

Forms of fragmented politics completely cedes the political to capitalism. Engagement in undercommon communication is too individualized and resists collective and concrete change. This constitutes enjoyment of melancholic pleasures of being distanced and accommodated to the real world, and as a result remains stuck in parasitic oppression without change – Dean 13:

“Communist Desire”, Jodi Dean, , 2013, LHP AM

An emphasis on the drive dimension of melancholia, on Freud's attention to the way sadism in melancholia is 'turned round upon the subject's own self', leads to an interpretation of the general contours shaping the left that differs from Brown's. **Instead of a left attached to an unacknowledged orthodoxy, we have one that has given way on the desire for communism, betrayed its historical commitment to the proletariat, and sublimated revolutionary energies into restorationist practices that strengthen the hold of capitalism. This left has replaced commitments to the emancipatory, egalitarian struggles of working people against capitalism - commitments that were never fully orthodox, but always ruptured, conflicted and contested - with incessant activity** (not unlike the manic Freud also associates with melancholia) and so **now satisfies itself with criticism and interpretation, small projects and local actions, particular issues and legislative victories, art, technology, procedures, and process** It sublimates revolutionary desire to democratic drive, to the repetitious practices offered up as democracy (whether representative, deliberative or radical). **Having already conceded to the inevitability of capitalism, it noticeably abandons 'any striking power against the big bourgeoisie',** to return to Benjamin's language. For such a left, **enjoyment comes from its withdrawal from responsibility, its sublimation of goals and responsibilities into the branching, fragmented practices of micro-politics, self-care, and issue awareness** Perpetually slighted, harmed and undone **this left remains stuck in repetition, unable to break out of the circuits of drive in which it is caught** - unable because it enjoys. **Might this not explain why such a left confuses discipline with domination, why it forfeits collectivity in the name of an illusory, individualist freedom that continuously seeks to fragment and disrupt any assertion of a collective or a common?** The watchwords of critique within this structure of left desire are moralism, dogmatism, authoritarianism and utopianism - watchwords enacting a perpetual self-surveillance: has an argument, position or view inadvertently ruled one of these errors? Even some of its militants reject party and state, division and decision, securing in advance an inefficacy sure to guarantee it the nuggets of satisfaction drive provides. **If this left is rightly described as melancholic, and I agree with Brown that it is, then its melancholia derives from the real existing compromises and betrayals inextricable from its history - its accommodations with reality, whether of nationalist war, capitalist encirclement, or so-called market demands.** Lacan teaches that, like Kant's categorical imperative, the super-ego refuses to accept reality as an explanation for failure. Impossible is no excuse - desire is always impossible to satisfy. A wide spectrum of the contemporary left has either accommodated itself, in one or another, to an inevitable capitalism or taken the practical failures of Marxism-Leninism to require the abandonment of antagonism, class, and revolutionary commitment to overturning capitalist arrangements of property and production. **Melancholic fantasy (the communist Master, authoritarian and obscene) as well as sublimated, melancholic practices (there was no alternative) shield this left, shield Ltd, from confrontation with guilt over such betrayal as they capture us in activities that feel productive, important, radical.**

Alt

Politics of Comrade

The alternative is the politics of the comrade – one that is oriented toward a shared communist horizon – only our methodology can fight capitalism, anything else allows it to take over co-opting any movement – Dean 19:

Dean, Jodi. *Comrade: An essay on political belonging*. Verso, 2019. // LHP BT + LHP PS

The term **comrade indexes a political relation, a set of expectations for action toward a common goal. It highlights the sameness of those on the same side—no matter their differences, comrades stand together.** As Obama's joke implies, when you share a politics, you don't generally distance yourself from your comrades. **Comradeship binds action, and in this binding, this solidarity, it collectivizes and directs action in light of a shared vision for the future. For communists, this is the egalitarian future of a society emancipated from the determinations of private property and capitalism and reorganized according to the free association, common benefit, and collective decisions of the producers.** But the term comrade predates its use by communists and socialists. In romance languages, comrade first appears in the sixteenth century to designate one who shares a room with another. Juan A. Herrero Brasas cites a Spanish historical-linguistic dictionary's definition of the term: "*Camarada* is someone who is so close to another man that he eats and sleeps in the same house with him."² In French, the term was originally feminine, *camarade*, and referred to a barracks or room shared by soldiers.³ Etymologically, comrade derives from *camera*, the Latin word for room, chamber, and vault. The technical connotation of *vault* indexes a generic function, the structure that produces a particular space and holds it open.⁴ A chamber or room is a repeatable structure that takes its form by producing an inside separate from an outside and providing a supported cover for those underneath it. Sharing a room, sharing a space, generates a closeness, an intensity of feeling and expectation of solidarity that differentiates those on one side from those on the other. Comradeship is a political relation of supported cover. Interested in comrade as a mode of address, carrier of expectations, and figure of belonging in the communist and socialist traditions, I emphasize **the comrade as a generic figure for the political relation between those on the same side of a political struggle. Comrades are those who tie themselves together instrumentally, for a common purpose: *If we want to win—and we have to win—we must act together.***

As Angela Davis describes her decision to join the Communist Party: "I wanted an anchor, a base, a mooring. I needed comrades with whom I could share a common ideology. I was tired of ephemeral ad-hoc groups that fell apart when faced with the slightest difficulty; tired of men who measured their sexual height by women's intellectual genuflection. It wasn't that I was fearless, but I knew that to win, we had to fight and the fight that would win was the one collectively waged by the masses of our people and working people in general. I knew that this fight had to be led by a group, a party with more permanence in its membership and structure and substance in its ideology."⁵ **Comrades are those you can count on. You share enough of a common ideology, enough of a commitment to common principles and goals, to do more than one-off actions. Together you can fight the long fight. As comrades, our actions are voluntary, but they are not always of our own choosing. Comrades have to be able to count on each other even when we don't like each other and even when we disagree. We do what needs to be done because we owe it to our comrades.**

In *The Romance of American Communism*, Vivian Gornick reports the words of a former member of the Communist Party USA, or CPUSA, who hated the daily grind of selling papers and canvassing expected of party cadre, but nevertheless, according to her, "I did it. I did it because if I didn't do it, I couldn't face my comrades the next day. And we all did it for the same reason: we were accountable to each other."⁶ Put in psychoanalytic terms, the comrade functions as an ego ideal: the point from which party members assess themselves as doing important, meaningful work.⁷ Being accountable to another entails seeing your actions through their eyes. Are you letting them down or are you doing work that they respect and admire? In *Crowds and Party*, I present the good comrade as an ideal ego, that is to say, as how party members imagine themselves.⁸ They may imagine themselves as thrilling orators, brilliant polemicists, skilled organizers, or courageous militants.

In contrast with my discussion there, in the current book, I draw out how **the comrade also functions as an ego ideal, the perspective that party members—and often fellow travelers—take toward themselves.** This perspective is the effect of belonging on the same side as it works back on those who have committed themselves to common struggle. The comrade is a symbolic as well as an imaginary figure and it is the symbolic dimension of ego ideal I focus on here. My thinking about the comrade as a generic figure for those on the same side flows out of my work on communism as the horizon of left politics and my work on the party as the political form necessary for this politics.⁹ **To see our political horizon as communist is to highlight the emancipatory egalitarian struggle of the proletarianized against capitalist exploitation—that is, against the determination of life by market forces; by value; by the division of labor (on the basis of sex and race); by imperialism (theorized by Lenin in terms of the dominance of monopoly and finance capital); and by neocolonialism**

(theorized by Nkrumah as the last stage of imperialism). Today we see this horizon in struggles such as those led by women of color against police violence, white supremacy, and the murder and incarceration of black, brown, and working-class people. We see it in the infrastructure battles around pipelines, climate justice, and barely habitable cities with undrinkable water and contaminated soil. **We see it in the array of social reproduction struggles against debt, foreclosure, and privatization, and for free, quality public housing, childcare, education, transportation, healthcare, and other basic services.** We see it in the ongoing fight of LGBTQ people against harassment, discrimination, and oppression. It is readily apparent today that **the communist horizon is the horizon of political struggle** not for the nation but **for the world**: it is an international horizon. This is evident in the antagonism between the rights of immigrants and refugees and intensified nationalisms; in the necessity of a global response to planetary warming; and in anti-imperialist, decolonization, and peace movements. In these examples, **communism is a force of negativity, the negation of the global capitalist present. Communism is also the name for the positive alternative to capitalism's permanent and expanding exploitation, crisis, and immiseration, the name of a system of production based on meeting social needs—from each according to ability to each according to need**, to paraphrase Marx's famous slogan—in a way that is collectively determined and carried out by the producers. This positive dimension of communism attends to social relations, to how people treat each other, animals, things, and the world around them. **Building communism entails more than resistance and riot. It requires the emancipated egalitarian organization of collective life.** With respect to the party, intellectuals on the contemporary left tend to extract the party from the aspirations and accomplishments it enabled. Communist philosophers who disagree on a slew of theoretical questions, such as Antonio Negri and Alain Badiou, converge on the organizational question—no party! **The party has been rejected as authoritarian**, as outmoded, as ill-fitting a society of networks. **Every other mode of political association may be revised, renewed, rethought, or reimagined except for the party of communists. This rejection of the party as a form for left politics is a mistake. It ignores the effects of association on those engaged in common struggle. It fails to learn from the everyday experiences of generations of activists**, organizers, and revolutionaries. **It relies on a narrow, fantasied notion of the party as a totalitarian machine.** It neglects the courage, enthusiasm, and achievements of millions of party members for over a century. **Rejection of the party form has been left dogmatism** for the last thirty years **and has gotten us nowhere**. Fortunately, the movements of the squares in Greece and Spain, as well as lessons from the successes and limits of the Occupy movement, have pushed against this left dogmatism. They have reenergized interest in the party as a political form that can scale; a form that is flexible, adaptive, and expansive enough to endure beyond the joyous and disruptive moments of crowds in the streets. A theory of the comrade contributes to this renewal by drawing out the ways that shared commitment to a common struggle generates new strengths and new capacities. Over and against the reduction of party relations to the relations between the leaders and the led, comrade attends to the effects of political belonging on those on the same side of a political struggle. **As we fight together for a world free of exploitation, oppression, and bigotry, we have to be able to trust and count on each other.** Comrade names this relation. The comrade relation remakes the place from which one sees, what it is possible to see, and what possibilities can appear. It enables the revaluation of work and time, what one does, and for whom one does it. Is one's work done for the people or for the bosses? Is it voluntary or done because one has to work? Does one work for personal provisions or for a collective good? We should recall Marx's lyrical description of communism in which work becomes "life's prime want." We get a glimpse of that in comradeship: **one wants to do political work. You don't want to let down your comrades**; you see the value of your work through their eyes, your new collective eyes. **Work, determined not by markets but by shared commitments, becomes fulfilling.** French communist philosopher and militant Bernard Aspe discusses the problem of contemporary capitalism as a loss of "common time"; that is, the loss of an experience of time generated and enjoyed through our collective being-together.¹⁰ From holidays, to meals, to breaks, whatever common time we have is synchronized and enclosed in forms for capitalist appropriation. Communicative capitalism's apps and trackers amplify this process such that the time of consumption can be measured in much the same way that Taylorism measured the time of production: How long did a viewer spend on a particular web page? Did a person watch a whole ad or click off of it after five seconds? In contrast, the common action that is the actuality of communist movement induces a collective change in capacities. Breaking from capitalism's 24-7 injunctions to produce and consume for the bosses and owners, the discipline of common struggle expands possibilities for action and intensifies the sense of its necessity. The comrade is a figure for the relation through which this transformation of work and time occurs. **How do we imagine political work? Under conditions where political change seems completely out of reach, we might imagine political work as self-transformation.** At the very least, we can work on ourselves. In the intensely mediated networks of communicative capitalism, we might see our social media engagements

as a kind of activism where Twitter and Facebook function as important sites of struggle. Perhaps we understand writing as important political work and hammer out opinion pieces, letters to the editors, and manifestoes. When we imagine political work, we often take electoral politics as our frame of reference, focusing on voting, lawn signs, bumper stickers, and campaign buttons. Or we think of activists as those who arrange phone banks, canvass door-to-door, and set up rallies. In yet another political imaginary, we might envision political work as study, whether done alone or with others. We might imagine political work as cultural production, the building of new communities, spaces, and ways of seeing. Our imaginary might have a militant, or even militarist, inflection: political work is carried out through marches, occupations, strikes, and blockades; through civil disobedience, direct action, and covert operations. Even with the recognition of the wide array of political activities, the ways people use them to respond to specific situations and capacities, and how they combine to enhance each other, we might still imagine radical political work as punching a Nazi in the face. Throughout these various actions and activities, how are the relations among those fighting on the same side imagined? How do the activists and organizers, militants and revolutionaries relate to one another? During the weeks and months when the Occupy movement was at its peak, relations with others were often infused with a joyous sense of being together, with an enthusiasm for the collective co-creation of new patterns of action and ways of living.¹¹ But the feeling didn't last. **The pressures of organizing diverse people and politics under conditions of police repression and real material need wore down even the most committed activists.** Since then, on social media and across the broader left, **relations among the politically engaged have again become tense and conflicted, often along lines of race and gender.** **Dispersed and disorganized, we're uncertain of whom to trust and what to expect. We encounter contradictory injunctions to self-care and call out. Suspicion undermines support. Exhaustion displaces enthusiasm. Attention to comradeship, to the ways that shared expectations make political work not just possible but also gratifying, may help redirect our energies back to our common struggle.** As former CPUSA member David Ross explained to Gornick: I knew that I could never feel passionately about the new movements as I had about the old, I realized that the CP has provided me with a sense of comradeship I would never have again, and that without that comradeship I could *never* be political.¹² For Ross, the Communist Party is what made Marxism. The party gave Marxism life, political purpose. This life-giving capacity came from comradeship. Ross continues: "The idea of politics as simply a diffused consciousness linked only to personal integrity was—*is*—anathema to me." His description of politics as "a diffused consciousness linked only to personal integrity" fits today's left milieu. Perhaps, then, his remedy—comradeship—will as well. Various people have told me their stories of feeling a rush of warmth when they were first welcomed into their party as a comrade. I've had this feeling myself. In his memoir *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid*, the theorist Frank Wilderson, a former member of uMkhonto weSizwe, or MK, the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC), describes his first meeting with Chris Hani, the leader of the South African Communist Party and the chief of staff of MK. Wilderson writes, "I beamed like a schoolboy when he called me 'comrade.'"¹³ Wilderson chides himself for what he calls a "childish need for recognition."¹⁴ Perhaps because he still puts Hani on a pedestal, he feels exposed in his enjoyment of the egalitarian disruption of comradeship. Wilderson hasn't yet internalized the idea that he and Hani are political equals. "Comrade" **holds out an equalizing promise, and when that promise is fulfilled, we confront our own continuing yet unwanted attachments to hierarchy, prestige, inadequacy. Accepting equality takes courage.** Wilderson's joy in hearing Hani call him "comrade" contrasts sharply with another instance Wilderson recounts where comrade was the term of address. **In 1994, shortly before Wilderson was forced to leave South Africa, he encountered Nelson Mandela** at an event hosted by *Tributemagazine*. **After Mandela's public remarks, Wilderson asked a question in which he addressed Mandela as "comrade."** "Not Mr. Mandela. Not sir, like the fawning advertising mogul who asked the first question. **Comrade Mandela. It stitched him back into the militant garb he'd shed since the day he left prison.**"¹⁵ Wilderson's recollection shows how comrade's equalizing insistence can be **aggressive, an imposition of discipline. This is part of its power. Addressing another as "comrade" reminds them that something is expected of them. Discipline and joy are two sides of the same coin,** two aspects of comradeship as a mode of political belonging. As a form of address, figure of political relation, and carrier of expectations, comrade **disrupts capitalist society's hierarchical identifications of sex, race, and class. It insists on the equalizing sameness of those on the same side of a political struggle** and **renders that** equalizing sameness **productive of new modes of work and belonging.** In this respect, **comrade is a carrier of utopian longings** in the sense theorized by Kathi Weeks. Weeks presents **the utopian form** as **carrying out two functions:** "One function is to alter our connection to the present, while the other is to shift our relationship to the future; one is productive of estrangement, the other of hope."¹⁶ **The first function mobilizes the negativity of disidentification and disinvestment. Present relations become** strange, **less binding on our sense of possibility.** The second function **redirects "our attention and energies toward an open future** ... providing a vision or glimmer of a better world."¹⁷ **The power of comrade is in how it negates old relations**

and promises new ones—the promise itself ushers them in, welcoming the new comrade into relations irreducible to their broader setting.

Institutionalized Party Politics

ROB

Fidelity to Truth

The role of the ballot is fidelity to the truth – dedication to a shared horizon is liberatory, Dean 19:

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The idea that comrades are those who belong to the same side of a political struggle leads to the fourth thesis: **The relation between comrades is mediated by fidelity to a truth; practices of comradeship materialize this fidelity.** The “same side” points to the truth comrades are faithful to—the political truth that unites them—and the fidelity with which they work to realize this truth in the world. “Belonging” invites attention to the expectations, practices, and affects that being on the same side generates. The notions of truth and fidelity at work here come from Alain Badiou. In brief, **Badiou rejects the idea of truth as a proposition or judgment, arguing instead that truth is a process. The process begins with the eruption of something new, an event.** Because an event changes the situation, breaks the confines of the given, **it is undecidable** in terms of the given; it is something entirely new. ⁶⁰ **This subject isn’t the cause of the event. It’s an effect of or response to the event,** “induces the appearance of a subject of the event.” **We should** avoid this temptation and **recognize the subject as** designating an inflection point, **a response that extends the event.** The decision that a truth has appeared, that an event has occurred, **incites a process of verification** the “infinite procedure of verification of the true,” in what Badiou calls **an “exercise of fidelity.”** ⁶¹ **Fidelity is a working out and working through of the truth, an engagement with truth that extends out into and changes the world.** We should recognize here the unavoidably collective dimension of fidelity: **in the political field, verification is a struggle of the many.** Peter Hallward draws out some implications of Badiou’s conception of truth. First, it is subjective. Those faithful to an eventual truth involve themselves in working it out, exploring its consequences. ⁶² Second, fidelity is not blind faith; it is rigorous engagement unconcerned with individual personality and incorporated into the body of truth that it generates. Hallward writes: “Fidelity is, by definition, ex-centric, directed outward, beyond the limits of a merely personal integrity. To be faithful to an eventual implication always means to abandon oneself, rigorously, to the unfolding of its consequences. **Fidelity implies that, if there is truth, it can be only cruelly indifferent to the private as such. Every truth involves a kind of anti-privatization, a subjective collectivization. In truth, “I” matter only insofar as I am subsumed by the impersonal vector of truth—say, the political organization, or the scientific research program.** ⁶³ **The truth process builds a new body.** This body of truth is a collective formed to “work for the consequences of the new” and this work, this collective, disciplines and subsumes the faithful. ⁶⁴ Third, collectivity does not imply uniformity. The infinite procedure of verification incorporates multiple experiments, enactments, and effects. ⁶⁵ Badiou writes, “An organization lies at the intersection between an Idea and an event. However, this intersection only exists as process, whose immediate subject is the political militant.” We should amend this statement by replacing *militant* with *comrade*. Comrade highlights the “discipline of the event,” the way that political fidelity cannot be exercised by a solitary individual—hence, the Marxist-Leninist emphasis on the unity of theory and practice, the barren incapacity of each alone. Comrade also affirms the self-abandonment accompanying fidelity to a truth: its vector, its unfolding, is indifferent to my personal experiences and inclinations. For communists, the process of truth has a body and that body is the party, in both its historical and formal sense. Already in *Theory of the Subject*, Badiou recognizes the necessity of a political body, the party as the “subject-support of all politics.” ⁶⁶ He writes: “The party is the body of politics, in the strict sense. The fact that there is a body by no means guarantees that there is a subject ... But for there to be a subject, for a subject to be found, there must be the support of a body.” ⁶⁷ **As a figure of political belonging, the comrade is a faithful response to the eventual rupture of crowds and movements, to the egalitarian discharge that erupts from the force of the many where they don’t belong, to the movement of the people as the subject of politics.** ⁶⁸ **Comrades demonstrate fidelity through political work; through concerted, disciplined engagement.** Their practical political work extends the truth of the emancipatory egalitarian struggle of the oppressed into the world. Amending Badiou (by drawing from his earlier work), we can say that the comrade is not a faithful subject but a political relation faithful to the divided people as the subject of emancipatory egalitarian politics. ⁶⁹ **For us to see the revolutionary people as the subject in the struggles of the oppressed, for their subject to be found, we must be comrades.** In *Ninotchka*, Nina Ivanova Yakushova can’t tell who her comrades are by looking at them. The party has told her who to look for, but she has to ask. After Iranoff identifies himself, Yakushova tells him her name and the name and position of the party comrade who authorized her visit. Iranoff introduces Buljanoff and Kopalski. Yakushova addresses each as comrade. But it’s not the address that makes them all comrades. They are comrades because they are members of the same party. **The party is the organized body of truth that mediates their relationship. This mediation makes clear what is expected of comrades—disciplined, faithful work.** Iranoff, Buljanoff, and Kopalski have not been doing the work expected of comrades, which is why Moscow sent Yakushova to oversee them in Paris. That Kopalski says they would have greeted her with flowers demonstrates their *embourgeoisment*, the degeneration of their sense of comradeship. But they are all there for work. Gendered identity and hierarchy don’t mediate relations between comrades. The practices of fidelity to a

political truth, the work done toward building that truth in the world, do. The solidarity of comrades in political struggle arises out of the intertwining of truth, practice, and party. It's not reducible to any of these alone. Comrades are not simply those who believe in the same truth—as in, for example, the idea of communism. Their fidelity to a certain truth is manifested in practical work. Work for the realization of a political truth brings people into comradely relation. But carrying out similar tasks in fidelity to the same truth isn't sufficient for comradeship. The work must be in common; no one is a comrade on their own. Practices of comradeship are coordinated, organized. The party is the organization out of which comradeship emerges and that comrade relations produce. It concentrates comradeship even as comradeship exceeds it.