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## Contemporary Art, the Contemporary and Late Capitalism

Jodi Dean's *The Communist Horizon* is both a jeremiad and an exhortation: fundamentally, an anti-capitalist jeremiad in favour of 'the unrealized potentials of ... collective struggle' (2012: 17); and an exhortation to leave behind what she describes as a 'postmodern pluralist approach' (3) to politics, an approach including 'general inclusion, momentary calls for broad awareness, and lifestyle changes [as political strategies]' (12). For politics, she prefers, instead, a move 'toward militant opposition, tight organizational forms (party, council, working group, cell), and the sovereignty of the people over the economy' (12).

Dean champions the reclamation of communism as *the* form of 'revolutionary universal egalitarianism' (19) for a world in which *proletarianisation* calls to mind less a social class—a key Marxist component of course—but now more names 'a process of exploitation, dispossession, and immiseration that produces the very rich as the privileged class that lives off the rest of us' (18). The working class as the historical agent that will facilitate the change of capitalism into communism is dispensed with. In place, she offers the idea of the people as the *rest of us*: it is 'an alternative to some of the other names for the subject of communism—proletariat, multitude, part-of-no-part' (18–19). For Dean, the party and even the state are not dated vehicles for contemporary politics, as 'a partisan sense of collectivity' needs to be fostered, and some sort of organisation—the party—is required to help cultivate the desire for collectivity (12). The party, though, is not quite the instrument by which History's iron laws are carried out, but becomes the experimental organisational form through which politics can truly be politics.<sup>1</sup>

What are we to make of Dean's argument? While I find myself sympathetic to her critique of late capitalism, and the crisis it is in, the arguments put forth are not entirely convincing. One issue is that communism functions as a political rather than as an economic concept. The upshot is that the argument is, as one critic put it, more about 'reviving a theoretical communism, [and] not about the [genuine] possibility of communism in this historical moment' (Khachaturian, 2013: n. pag.). For Rafael Khachaturian:

To approach [communism] ... as a possibility equally available under all conditions and at all times so long as the militant subject is there, which is what I take to be the implication of Dean's argument, means to regress from the nuanced analysis that historical materialism provides us the tools for to a kind of empty, formalistic, wishful thinking. (2013: n. pag.)

Wishful thinking? If so, then another implication that can be drawn is that *The Communist Horizon* is a performative and rhetorical book written to strengthen communism's contemporary

stature, so that it can serve as a counter to a democracy that has failed in the delivery of social justice:<sup>2</sup> 'The fantasy that democracy exerts a force for economic justice has dissolved [in the wake of the US sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2007–09,] as the US government funnels trillions of dollars to banks and the European central banks rig national governments and cut social programs in order to keep themselves afloat' (Dean, 2012: 21).

A critical limitation to Dean's book is that, despite the universal argument she wishes to make, it remains mainly Euro-American in focus—the phrase 'US, UK, and Europe' is repeated on a number of occasions in the book (29, 43). Though there are references to 'elsewhere', such as the Middle East, China—despite being the second-largest economy in the world and with a ruling party that describes itself as communist—only barely exists in the book, mentioned merely as a sign in the crisis of and excesses in capitalism: 'global interconnections make unneeded skyscrapers, fiber-optic cables, malls, and housing developments as much as much a part of China as the US' (51). Only the demise of communism in the former Soviet Union merits attention here. How might we look at China, in the light of Dean's elevation of communism? For example, she suggests that in the 21st century, 'Russia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the other countries previously part of the Soviet bloc tend to be referred to as "post-Soviet" rather than as "new-capitalist",' which she finds more appropriate (35). Would 'communist' China also be a 'new capitalist' entity?

I wonder if part of the challenge of capitalism that Dean might address—but does not—is how *growth* is accepted as a foundational truth in contemporary life in China, quite apart from a large swathe of developed and developing Asia. China clearly wishes to either play a more prominent part in the global system or actually challenge it in its post-communist phase (would the adjective be correct here?)—hence the August 2014 announcement that China, Russia, Brazil and South Africa hope to establish the New Development Bank, based in Shanghai, 'explicitly designed as a rebuke to the IMF and the World Bank' (Eyal, 2014: A25). Is this an authoritarian-communist-capitalism that can be one 'alternative to the extreme inequality, insecurity, and racist, nationalist ethnocentrism accompanying globalized neoliberal capitalism' (Dean, 2012: 39–40)? Can China be part of the 'we' that Dean hopes will solidify into an anti-capitalist collective?

### **Contemporary Art Under the Present Conditions of Late Capitalism**

It is with the larger understanding of the goal of Dean's book that we can proceed to her critique of contemporary art. Contemporary artistic practices as favoured by the Left are only a part of what she takes to be the overall abject limitations to present-day Left politics; and by the 'Left', what Dean has in mind is 'certain segments of the post-structuralist and anarchist Left [whose political actions and theoretical pronouncements, she believes,] only benefit capital' (13). One set of political activities are 'micropolitical activities', as these impede the formation of collectivist thinking (13). The other set of political activities are artistic ones:

Similarly, some activists and theorists treat aesthetic objects and creative works as displaying a political potentiality missing from classes, parties, and unions. This aesthetic focus disconnects politics from the organized struggle of working people, making politics into what spectators see. Artistic products, whether actual commodities or commodified experiences, thereby buttress capital as they circulate political affects while displacing political struggles from the streets to the galleries. Spectators can pay (or donate) to feel radical without getting their hands dirty. The dominant class retains its position and the contradiction between this class and the rest of us doesn't make itself felt as much. The celebration of momentary actions and singular happenings ... works the same way. Some

on the anarchist and post-structural Left treat these flickers as the only proper instances of a contemporary left politics. ... Any 'sense' [such artistic practice] makes, any meaning or relevance it has, is up to the spectator (or perhaps with a bit of guidance from curators and theorists). (13–14)

The art forms that Dean has in mind seem less to be literature or poetry, and more music, film, visual art of various sorts and performance art, and perhaps theatre; consequently, this essay will refer mainly but not exclusively to these latter art forms when the expression *contemporary art* is used.

There is a threefold charge made against the poor politics in art: first, that artists, and a wrongly conceived belief that the aesthetic sphere possesses 'a political potentiality' which classes, parties and unions do not, have led the arts to both remain other to organised struggle and to stymie such activity; second, that such art is mainly spectacle and commodified—literally or otherwise—and therefore, regardless of intention, buttresses, to use Dean's term, rather than weakens capitalism; and third, that artistic actions are fragmentary and hence not sustained enough to effect change anyway. In this regard, there is the hint that the difficulty (or maybe obscurity) of contemporary art practices does not exactly contribute 'obvious' enough meaning for any political effectiveness: if the audience has to be informed what 'difficult' works mean by the cognoscenti ... well, elitist individualism is reinforced.

At a basic level, the charge is a little absurd, as Dean appears to expect art to be literally 'large-scale organized movement[s]', and if it is not that, then it fails (13). If this is the criterion for political art, she is right in her charge. So unless the goal is possibly to go back to some sort of socialist realism that is entirely one with politics, the 'aesthetic focus' will indeed disconnect politics from organised struggle, whether by working people or by the larger rest of us she has in mind (13). The charge seems a poorly nuanced rethread of some old arguments about art (perhaps actually not nuanced at all) and, obviously, the dangers of art having a completely 'committed' link to organised politics have also been discussed many times, not least in an understated ironic mode by the Chinese writer and essayist Lu Xun (1881–1936). In a talk in 1927, Lu Xun said:

I have often felt that art and politics are in constant conflict. Art and revolution are not actually opposites, and in fact they both feel the same uneasiness with the status quo. But politics would maintain the status quo, and naturally its direction is different from art, which is uneasy with the status quo. ... [Nevertheless, r]evolutionary writers and revolutionaries, it's fair to say, are completely different things. ... During the revolution, writers are busy dreaming of what kind of world it will be when the revolution succeeds; after the revolution, look around, the reality is not what they had meant at all, and once again they suffer[ ... for] where in the world is there a revolutionary literature pleased with the status quo? (Lu, 1996: 329; 333; 334)

Art and revolution can be one in demanding change, in this view—but what happens after the revolution, as in China after 1949? When revolution becomes daily politics, or a Cultural Revolution? Art needs to maintain some independence and not become the handmaiden of the new order, even if Dean's 'rest of us' manage to come into charge.

At another level, it is the 'postmodern pluralist approach' that I mention at the start of this essay which Dean sees in contemporary art practice that is under fire (Dean, 2012: 3). Pluralism, no matter how inclusive, is not organised collective struggle. The Left, and the art forms and practices it is interested in, 'accommodated capital, succumbing to the lures of individualism, consumerism,

and privilege, and proceeding as if there were no alternative to states that rule in the interests of markets' (15). Given her stance, I would guess that Dean would not be interested in the gains in *representation* in the contemporary arts, of new or suppressed voices now being expressed, whether of minority cultures within the Western metropole, or of cultures and cultural producers from the periphery or the semiperiphery that the 'pluralist approach' can enable. Such representation has happened, for example, in the way East and Southeast Asians have come to exhibit their own modernist and contemporary artwork since the 1990s—and for 'themselves' rather than mainly for Western consumption.<sup>3</sup>

However, having made the above point, it is important to note that Dean is not wrong in stating the dangers of contemporary art accommodating capital.<sup>4</sup> That may seem obvious, but the dangers of such accommodation have not become less in recent years; as we know, they are increased with what is called globalisation. For example, the 'cultural desert' image that Singapore possessed in the 1970s is one that the People's Action Party government has been trying to shed since the 1990s. What transpired—at a pace that caught many arts practitioners and possibly even many Singaporeans off-guard—was the state's hope to possess what can be called, somewhat clumsily, a 'cosmo-urban globality' that has a use for high culture and cultural institutions. The city-state's creative city policy in 1999 followed soon after Britain's Tony Blair launched his 'Cool Britannia' nation-branding campaign in 1997. The burgeoning arts, museums, lifestyle consumption and the Singapore Biennale that started in 2006, taken *in toto* as a form of symbolic action in which (to quote Guy Debord's famous aphorism) 'the spectacle is *capital* accumulated to the point where it becomes image' (1994: 24), were state-supported to bolster the city-state's economic attractiveness and to contribute to a cultural diversity that can 'expand local creativity in addition to attracting global creative personnel and retaining entrepreneurs' (Tay 2005: 226).<sup>5</sup> The question now may well be whether contemporary art's trajectories can manage to interrupt what cultural critic Paul Gilroy describes as 'the trancelike moods of contemporary consumer culture' (2004: 3).

The 'creative' elements in contemporary art practices are of pragmatic value to the contemporary moment to foster 'critical thinking,' 'interdisciplinary thinking,' 'lateral thinking' and 'thinking out-of-the-box'—the clichés abound and are now part of management theory or public policy discussions on how creativity can energise small- and medium-size industries and support innovation in the creative industries, in industrial design, etc. And so, oppositional literary, critical and cultural theory linked with the 1980s mantra of 'race, class and gender' that came out of the US and British academy have gained or been thrust into an awkwardly symbiotic relation with globalised capitalism. Hence, we have Dean's charge that artistic products function as commodified experiences which can 'buttress capital'—but her charge does not take into account the full complexity of the relations between art and capitalism.

How do we describe the present? The term *postmodern*, now less deployed in literary-cultural criticism, may not be adequate as a descriptor for the cultural situation, not least because the belief in progress has not disappeared—certainly not in the economic, social and cultural developments linked with the emergence within the region, first, of the (so-called) Asian Economic Miracle of the 1980s (with Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong and South Korea following in Japan's economic footsteps), and with China's emergence thereafter. The contemporary moment—or the *contemporary* as an alternative to the *postmodern*?—is marked by a complex and contradictory mix of an 'authentic' progress that is combined with aspects of postmodernism's well-known rhetoric of the decentred, the multiple and the heterogeneous.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary art participates in this moment and Dean is critical of the version of the contemporary outlined here.

### The Ambiguous Starting Position of Contemporary Art in the 1960s?

The above discussion reminds us of the well-known arguments made by Fredric Jameson from the mid-1980s onwards of the postmodern as the stage in capitalism when culture has become, to a greater or lesser degree, coextensive with the economy (Jameson, 1991). This understanding is vital to the critique that Dean makes of contemporary art's unintentional buttressing of late capitalism. In the light of the charge, it may be worthwhile to take a look back at the 1960s, when contemporary art practices, arguably, began to consolidate at a point when artistic modernism starts to lose traction in the art world. A critical assessment of one significant view on contemporary art from the 1960s will suggest an ambiguous starting position for experimental contemporary art with a 'new sensibility'—one that sees art as an extension of life, rather than moralising about life—as this art is framed by a transition in the post-war productive system away from a more 'protestant', sober and self-restrained ethic towards consumption, permissiveness and play. That is to say, towards a certain vision of culture and cultural consumption.

The significant viewpoint here is that of the late critic and novelist Susan Sontag (1933–2004), whose writing made a great impact on experimental art in the 1960s and 1970s. The essay to be revisited is her 'One Culture and the New Sensibility' (1965), which appears in *Against Interpretation* (1966). In the process, I will also revisit two responses to the question of adversary cultures in the 1960s from a historical point close to the 1960s: it is also worthwhile refamiliarising ourselves with 1970s concerns to see if they were justified from our location in the present. While Sontag is not particularly associated with the Left, she does help chronicle the coming about of Dean's 'postmodern pluralist approach' in art. This is an experimental, difficult art that is nonetheless, she contends, pleasurable and embraces a new democratic desire to capture a greater range of experiences; and this art appears at a point, we shall see, when capitalism is transforming itself into a form that has space for the new sensibility.

Sontag's central argument is that in the 1960s, previous arguments about the split between 'two cultures'—the literary-aesthetic and the scientific—are no longer valid.<sup>7</sup> This is because what is transpiring

is not so much a conflict of cultures as the creation of a new (potentially unitary) kind of sensibility. This new sensibility is rooted, as it must be, in our experience, experiences which are new in the history of humanity—in extreme social and physical mobility; in the crowdedness of the human scene (both people and material commodities are multiplying at a dizzying rate); in the availability of new sensations such as speed (physical speed, as in airplane travel; speed of images, as in the cinema); and in the pan-cultural perspective on the arts that is possible through the mass reproduction of art objects. (Sontag, 1966: 296)

The arts are always rooted in experience—but now the range of experience possible has been increased by the expanded and in fact expansive technological capacity in communications. The 'primary feature' of the new sensibility is that the 'model [artistic] product' is no longer the literary work, though 'most literary intellectuals are entirely unaware' of this change (298).<sup>8</sup> The distinctions between 'art' and 'non-art', 'high' and 'low' culture are being challenged, resulting in a 'pan-cultural perspective on the arts' facilitated by 'the mass reproduction of art objects'; as such, we need not be wary of technology as a dehumanising force.

Sontag argues that artistic production can now be seen as a 'new classicism', as 'a reaction' against the romantic version of art: art insists on 'coolness' and refuses 'what it considers to be

sentimentality' exceeding any physical artwork (297). Often, 'the artist's work is only his idea, his concept' (297). The upshot is that literature, 'with its heavy burden of "content", both reportage and moral judgment', is less preeminent and 'the model arts of our time are actually those with much less content, and a much cooler mode of moral judgment—like music, films, dance, architecture, painting, sculpture' as they draw 'upon science and technology' (298–99). Within this context of possibilities, the 'mass reproduction of art objects' need not be feared as an instrument to dumb down cultural standards as it is actually part of the process of expanded arts possibilities enabled by technology, a process that can lead to a 'new (potentially unitary) kind of sensibility' (296). Mass-reproduced art contributes to the blurring of distinctions that may mark a new unified consciousness. The gap between the two cultures is now being bridged.

The new sensibility that Sontag outlines means that the arts need no longer concerns itself with Matthew Arnold's notion of art as the criticism of life, for art is now 'the *extension* of life' (300, emphasis added). To wit:

Sensations, feelings, the abstract forms and styles of sensibility count. It is to these that contemporary art addresses itself. The basic unit for contemporary art is not the idea, but the analysis of and extension of sensations. ... Such art is, in principle, experimental—and not out of elitist disdain for what is accessible to the majority, but precisely in the sense that science is experimental. (300)

This assertion that art deals with 'the analysis and extension of sensations' may seem to contradict Sontag's position that 'the artist's work is only his idea, his concept', but what she seems to mean is that a 'cooler mode of moral judgment' combines with a more empirical attitude towards the world, and this combination makes for the expanded artistic ability to capture 'sensations' and experience than a contrastingly 'hotter' and didactic Arnoldian moralism. The latter limits artistic expression to 'what furniture of ideas we have stocked in our heads' (300). Experimental openness in the arts hence need not be taken as a form of scientific 'dehumanization' (301) at all, but instead leads to 'modern art functioning as a kind of shock therapy for both confounding and unclosing our senses' (302). Contemporary art is both more difficult and scientifically experimental as a consequence, but in turn it becomes more open to sensations and experience than the older literary art.

At this juncture, we come to the question of the eradication of the distinctions between high and low in contemporary cultural life and the ability of capture pleasure and sensation—and with that the possibility that a more plural contemporary art can be captured by industry. Sontag contends that 'the purpose of art is always, ultimately, to give pleasure—though our sensibilities may take time to catch up with the forms of pleasure that art in a given time may offer' (303). The old art was 'associated with edification' (303); contemporary art, though it has music that 'hurts one's ears', and painting that does not necessarily 'reward one's sight', is nevertheless 'more involved with pleasure in the familiar sense than ever' (303): 'If art is understood as a form of discipline of the feelings and a programming of sensations, then the feeling (or sensation) given off by a Rauschenberg painting might be like that of a song by the Supremes. ... They are experienced without condescension' (303). This is a vague assertion about sensuousness in art held together by a sweeping and not fully articulated understanding of the similar 'pleasures of "form" and style' both offer (303). Sontag then adds that the appreciation of "'the new sound" in popular music' among American painters, along with the abrogation of high and low differences among younger artists and intellectuals, constitute neither 'a new philistinism' nor 'anti-intellectualism' (303). Instead, they can be taken as a more unified, 'less snobbish' appreciation of the world—including

multiple levels of cultural production—and not as the abandonment of critical standards (303). She writes:

there is plenty of stupid popular music, as well as inferior and pretentious ‘avant-garde’ paintings, films, and music. The point is that there are new standards, new standards of beauty and style and taste. The new sensibility is defiantly pluralistic; it is dedicated both to an excruciating seriousness and to fun and wit and nostalgia. ... From the vantage point of this new sensibility, the beauty of a machine or of the solution to a mathematical problem, of a painting by Jasper Johns, of a film by Jean-Luc Godard, and of the personalities and music of the Beatles is equally accessible. (304)

The fact of appreciating demotic culture does not turn one into a lowbrow, for indeed, to be open to the world is to be plural and to be open to the comprehensive experience of pleasure.

Writing approximately a decade later, Raymond Williams felt that: ‘The sixties can now be seen as the decade of pop culture, and any analysis of that phenomenon is especially challenging. It seems to me that there has been an important and perhaps irreversible shift in what is seen as the cultural public’ (Williams, 1976: 183). Sontag, from her position in the midst of the 1960s, argues that this ‘shift’ is palpable and moves cutting-edge ‘high’ culture into the new world of pop culture and the expanded cultural public, making this world the realm of the emergent, as Williams would have called it, and making the literary-cultural a residual cultural component.

Sontag effectively captures a world that is recognisably linked to ours, in the presence of ‘extreme social and physical mobility’ (296) that surged in the post-1945 period—the ‘1970s and the 1980s global trends favoured the controlled movements of temporary workers’ (Hirst and Thompson, 1996: 23)—and in the ‘crowdedness of the human scene (both people and material commodities)’ (Sontag, 296). And with novel sensations such as intensified speed. New sensations exist for privileged metropolitan cosmopolitans such as Sontag—and perhaps even for guest workers, at least when they migrate to more developed societies. We see in Sontag an early version of a postmodernist ethos of the plural, the decentred and the heterogeneous combined with a positive attitude towards scientific intelligence and general progress, giving us the mix of the postmodern and the modern that can be called the contemporary. We could of course query how integrated science and the arts are now.<sup>9</sup> However, the main question that might be raised is, what if that being bridged is not science/technology and culture, but capitalism and culture? Perhaps the main problem in Sontag is that she does not assess how the changes in capitalist production that frames the new 1960s cultural consciousness may later lead to the absorption of at least significant parts of the new sensibility into late capitalism.

John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson and Brian Roberts, writing a decade after Sontag and at roughly the same time as Williams, contended that the changes in the 1960s, with the appearance of alternative cultures contesting ‘traditional middle-class life’, must be understood in relation to how the post-war British economy unsettled middle-class culture. The pre-war culture of

‘bourgeois’ man, with its intricate emotional restraints and repressions, ... its commitment to the protestant ‘ethic’ ... forms a rich and complex integument around the developing mode of production. But, as capitalism moved, after the war, into its more technically-advanced, corporate, consumer stage, this cultural integument was eroded. (Clarke et. al., 2006: 50)

A new social and indeed cultural intelligence would be required as an ethos and substitute ethic for this more 'advanced' mode of production:

the shift in the way the mode of production was organised *required* and *provoked* a qualitative expansion in the forces of 'mental production', a revolution in the spheres of modern consciousness. The harnessing of Capital's productive power needed, not only new social and technical skills, new political structures, but a more repetitive cycle of consumption, and forms of consciousness more attuned to the rhythms of consumption, and to the new productive and distributive capacities of the system. ... Traditional middle-class life, they [those members inside the culture] imagined, was being undermined by a conspiracy between progressive intellectuals, soft liberals, the pornographers and the counter-culture. The fact is that this traditional culture was first, and most profoundly, *unhinged*, ... by changes within and stemming from the needs of the productive system *itself*. (52–53)

Sontag's new sensibility of contemporary art, the counter-culture and the new pop culture represented both a crisis from within the hegemonic middle-class culture and the 'revolution ... of modern consciousness' that, in spite of itself, met the new superstructural needs. Unsurprisingly, at least some of the experimental cultural forms that came about could be incorporated into the more 'advanced' mode of production that was coming into being, especially since pleasure and sensation are key components of the new sensibility: 'The new individualism of "Do your Own thing", when taken to logical extremes, seemed like nothing so much as a looney caricature of petit-bourgeois individualism of the most residual and traditional kind' (Clarke et. al., 2006: 53).

Across the Atlantic in 1976, Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell was making a similar argument about the adversarial role of American contemporary art—which he describes as 'post-modernism'—and the counter-culture in relation to the needs of US capitalism: 'A society given over entirely to innovation, in the joyful acceptance of change, has in fact institutionalized the avant-garde and charged it, perhaps to its own eventual dismay, with constantly turning up something new' (Bell, 1996: 35). Bell was convinced that the 1960s manifested an advancement of artistic modernism's aesthetic intentions (which he approved), first, into the 'instinctual', with the result that: 'Impulse and pleasure alone are life affirming; all else is neurosis and death' (51); and, second, into the public realm, and thereby placing itself on the side of disorder (both of which he disapproved). He writes: 'Post-modernism overflows the vessels of art. It tears down the boundaries and insists that *acting out*, rather than making distinctions, is the way to gain knowledge. The "happening" and the "environment" ... are the proper arena *not* for art but for life' (52, emphasis added).<sup>10</sup> We can take this assertion as effectively a criticism of Sontag's position that art must be an extension of life. Unexpectedly, Bell joins Dean in criticising the 'celebration of momentary actions and singular happenings' (Dean, 14).

The fundamental change in the economy that allowed the adversary culture to come to the fore though, for Bell, does not take place in the post-war period, unlike Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts, but has its origins in the 1920s,

when the rise of mass production and high consumption began to transform the life of the middle class itself. In effect the Protestant ethic as a social reality and a life-style for the middle class was replaced by a materialistic hedonism, and the Puritan temper by a psychological eudaemonism. But bourgeois society ... could not easily admit to the change (Bell, 1996: 74).



Into this void, caused by the erosion of 'traditional American values' (74), enters Sontag's new sensibility and the cultural phenomena associated with it. The consequence is a 'radical disjunction between the social structure (the techno-economic order) and the culture'; the former is controlled by 'an economic principle', but the latter is 'prodigal, promiscuous ... [and a zone in which] the self is the measure of the aesthetic worth of experience' (37). We can see how Sontag's new sensibility can help generate a 'materialistic hedonism'.

While we need not agree with Bell's evaluation of either modernism or contemporary art, his book delivers a trenchant examination of the tense role of culture in relation to the techno-economic order of the 1960s, as does Clarke et al.'s book chapter. The broad lineaments of their combined arguments lead us right into the present, and to the appeal that contentions such as the following have for states keen on implementing creative city policies, policies that embrace contemporary art's interest in the diverse, the open and the multicultural:

There is an argument for re-purposing the very idea of 'creativity' to bring it into closer contact with the realities of contemporary commercial democracies. 'Art' needs to be understood as something *intrinsic*, not *opposed* to the productive capacities of a contemporary global, mediated, technology-supported economy. Both art and creativity need to be looked for within the living practices of a multi-cultural, multi-valent population that is neither aristocratic nor dumb. (Hartley, 2005: 8–9)

As this essay concludes, it is important to note that contemporary art is not completely contained by capitalism's adaptive framework, and continues to exceed capitalist 'lifestyle' containment. However, the ambiguous trajectory of its moment of emergence in the 1960s does serve to underline that it cannot be complacent in late capitalism's move to be supremely 'creative' so as the fully renew itself in the present moment of crisis. A too-easy celebration of creativity and plural experience as manifested in the arts, as Dean might say, can be turned into commodified experiences.

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## Notes

1. Dean thus rejects Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's critical position on the 'outmoded' party, stating: 'They emphasize instead the constituent power of desire and the affective, creative productivity of the multitude as the communism underpinning and exceeding capitalism' (2012: 19). The pair shares a similar position with Alain Badiou, who also rejects the party and state.
2. This view of Dean's book is reinforced by the very way she justifies the usage of 'we' rather than 'I' in her book: 'Some might object to my use of the second-person plural "we" and "us"—*what do you mean "we"?* This objection is symptomatic of the fragmentation that has pervaded the Left in Europe, the UK, and North America. ... We-skepticism displaces the performative component of the second-person plural as it treats collectivity with suspicion and privileges a fantasy of individual singularity and autonomy. I write "we" hoping enhance a partisan sense of collectivity' (2012: 12).
3. In the visual arts, see, for example, Patrick Flores (2008), Joan Kee (2004), and C. J. W.-L. Wee (2010). For performance and performance research, see the essays in Jon McKenzie, Heike Roms, and C. J. W.-L. Wee (eds.) (2010).
4. The charge that this or that art has been commodified is used often enough that it is worthwhile noting here that—as Theodor W. Adorno has emphasised—the core issue is not whether art products are

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commodities, for of course they are; it is when they are 'no longer *also* commodities, [when] they are commodities through and through' that the difficulty comes about (Adorno, 1991: 100).

5. On this point, see also Can-Seng Ooi (2011), Can-Seng Ooi and Birgit Stoeber (2011), and C. J. W.-L. Wee (2003).

6. For one attempt to define the contemporary, see the essays in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee (eds.), *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); this term is more often used in the visual arts than in literary criticism.

7. See C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (1998). The title had its origins in the 1959 Rede Lecture delivered by British novelist and scientist C. P. Snow; the Cambridge literary critic F. R. Leavis responded robustly to Snow's argument.

8. Sontag later adds: 'Marshall McLuhan has described human history as a succession of acts of technological extension of human capacity, each of which works a radical change upon our environment and our ways of thinking, feeling, and valuing' (299).

9. Sontag's positive combined attitude towards the arts and the sciences seems at least partially drawn from Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979), whose work was prominent in the 1960s. He writes: 'The liberated consciousness would promote the development of a science and technology free to discover and realize the possibilities of things and men in the protection and gratification of life, playing with the potentialities of form and matter for the attainment of this goal. Technique would then tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality: the opposition between imagination and reason, higher and lower faculties, poetic and scientific thought, would be invalidated. Emergence of a new Reality Principle: under which a new sensibility and a desublimated scientific intelligence would combine in the creation of an *aesthetic ethos*' (Marcuse, 1969: 24).

10. Sontag writes approvingly of Allan Kaprow and happenings in 'Happenings: An Art of Radical Juxtaposition' in her *Against Interpretation* (1986: 263–274).

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