Publicity's Secret: How Technoculture Capitalizes on Democracy
Jodi Dean
Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London, 2002, 224pp.
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Cultural theorist Jodi Dean's latest book tackles the issue of the public sphere in a refreshingly contemporary and relevant way by focusing on the role of the technological media in the exercise of public democracy. The argument is that the media creates the idea of 'the public' through setting up a juxtaposition between the ideas of publicity and secret. In controlling both sides of the equation the media is able to play on, and claim to bolster and facilitate, conceptions of democracy which suggest that the only barrier to efficient public decision-making is a lack of relevant facts. Through claiming that these facts are available but concealed and then providing a means by which they are uncovered the information services create a market for their product by being perceived as fulfilling a public service.

This central argument is unfolded over a series of chapters that unpack the ideas of the public and its manufacture and the concept of 'the secret', which acts as the 'other' to the desirability of publicity, by dealing with topics as diverse as conspiracy theories, the synopticon of information society and the manufacture of subjectivity by a drive towards celebrity. The critical framework that serves to tie these areas together relies mainly on a deployment of Žižekian formulations such as his take on ideology, not as the hoodwinking of the people, but as a matrix of desire that can override conscious rational thought and form a pattern of going through the motions' leading to a surface belief in a certain reality. Another important element is Žižek's reformulation of the Lacanian notions of desire and drive. These concepts are used as foils against more traditional conceptions of the public sphere, mainly in the form of Habermas' communicative rationality, which Dean claims have bought into the technocultural framing of public democracy as access to information.

One of the most interesting discussions in the book is that of subjectification in terms of a drive toward celebrity, which seems to suggest, in a Sartrean vein, that we experience existence only in the eyes of multiple beholders. Building on the earlier use of concepts of drive and desire, Dean again turns to Žižek for the idea of 'scopic drive' in which, due to the hidden nature of that which the subject desires, he or she tries to make themselves visible to the hidden point of perception of the desired other. We are, in effect, reflexively self-creating through playing to a hidden audience. Whether or not one accepts this idea as

utilized by Dean, it is certainly an intriguing one in light of the current 'reality TV' phenomenon worldwide.

In the conclusion to the book, Dean advocates an idea of neodemocracy as a way out of the rational (and nationally bounded) public sphere that most of the book argues against. This is an interesting idea that claims to focus on sites of 'contestation and conflict' rather than consensus and seeks to provide a democracy that is as networked as the instruments that may be reclaimed to facilitate it, prime among them being the internet. One is left wanting a little more explication about the nature and possibilities of such a project, however, especially in regard to the nature of the network that links these divergent sites of critique. Some ideas that could have been used, such as Hardt and Negri's multitude, are raised and seemingly let drop, leaving the reader with the cryptic citation of Nietzsche's injunction that it is the doer and not the deed that matters.

The book serves, however, to raise the question of what democracy would look like without the rational monolith of 'the public' and goes some way to clearing the ground that has served to bolster this (from Dean's perspective) dangerous avoidance tactic.

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