

A ‘Normal’ Life. Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of Law, Dean Spade, Barcelona, Bellaterra Editions, 2015, 276pp, ISBN: 9788472907300. Referential Value: \$26,000 / US\$37.00

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In A “Normal” Life, Dean Spade leads us to ask ourselves what is the problem with rights and what have been the guidelines followed by gay and lesbian social movements in the United States in recent years, positioning legal reform as their cornerstone and the difficulties this has implied for those who have been most excluded from access to rights. On this basis, the author seeks to highlight the transformative potential of a critical trans politics, driven by those who do not fit into the normativity of the state and who are not intelligible under the heteronormative binary gender approach. All this around the central concept of life in neoliberalism, which has been able to co-opt the instances of struggle, distancing them from redistribution and rebuilding them under its own logics with all the difficulties that this has implied but also with all the possibilities and dreams of struggle that we can generate against it.

169

The book was first published in 2011 by South End Press, with a second edition that included additional material published in 2015 by Duke University Press. The book was translated and published in Spanish in Barcelona by Ediciones Bellaterra in 2016.

Spade has been a Professor of Law at Seattle University since 2012, teaching courses on Administrative Law, Poverty Law, Gender and the Law, Surveillance and Incarceration, Law and Social Movements, among others. In addition to his teaching career, Spade has excelled in the field of activism, founding in 2002 the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, dedicated to providing free legal counsel to trans, intersex and non-conforming gender people who do not have the resources to fund it, appealing to a collective governance that prioritizes these leaderships.

Through the development of the arguments, the text evidences the context that influences the proposals that accompany the configuration of critical trans politics, where the

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desires of the anti-prison and abolitionist movement, black feminisms, critical race theory, migrant movements and those who position themselves against ableism collide. With this confluence, Spade seeks to articulate the perspectives of his politics and the way in which his horizons are positioned beyond legal frameworks, transcending the possibilities offered by neoliberal states, with a view towards redistribution and the dismantling of forms of power that marginalize and criminalize life.

One of the fundamental provocations that accompanies the book relates to the failure of legal reform strategies, anti-discrimination and hate crime laws to capture the real nature of power and control and the ways in which they could play a critical role. In doing so, the author calls us to rethink the goals that have guided LGBT rights struggles in a neoliberal context and the way in which this same neoliberalization of life has implied a change in the articulations and goals of social movements.

In the different sections of the book, Spade covers topics such as trans law and politics in the neoliberal context, addressing from a historical perspective the different directions taken by homosexual movements in the US and the ways in which their objectives have been modified within the neoliberal context, thus producing an unequal distribution of the benefits and harms implied by these strategies framed in privilege. It also addresses the commodification of normative strategies, such as anti-discrimination and hate crime laws, showing how these have not led to a significant improvement in the living conditions of the people they seek to protect, especially trans people, establishing a framework of criminal repression and allocating resources to punitive apparatuses that have often been used to incarcerate the people they are supposed to protect.

On the other hand, it analyzes the relationship between transphobia and power from a Foucaultian perspective, involving a perspective of inequality of opportunities that allows us to show how the same type of legislation can affect different subjects in different ways, depending on the intersection in which their lives are read. In doing so, it invites us to question the supposedly neutral ground that has been established in the normative field, asking if this equality of opportunities effectively means that everyone has the same possibilities of access to rights or if, on the contrary, it becomes a justification to reproduce and reify the existing conditions of inequality.

Thus, the author seeks to illustrate how the power dynamics underlying inequality of opportunities can be applied to different areas of the lives of trans people, producing conflicts with institutions due to the difficulty in obtaining identification documents,



gender segregation in institutions of confinement (which often opens the door to abuse, discrimination and explicit violence) and in access to health care. With this, the author seeks to make us reflect on the structural exercise of discrimination, which has sought to be presented, from the normative sphere, as a space of individualized violence. Thus, it is worth asking ourselves what type of discrimination we are seeking to combat: is it a question of focusing only on the exercise of violence at the individual level, on conflict between people? or are we talking about the monopoly of marginalization carried out by the States that make certain lives uninhabitable? Spade seeks to argue that the problem should not only focus on these events carried out by individual subjects, but also on all those structural conditions that foster the existence of conditions of marginalization and violence, betting that the legal reform objectives of trans movements seek to focus more on the impacts that legal regimes have on the lives of those most vulnerable subjects, and less on what the law says or does not say about trans people.

All this constitutes a scenario where questioning the role of legal reform projects in the trans social movement is fundamental, raising the second central provocation of the text: that formal legal equality cannot be the only objective of trans movements. With this, a crossover is established between the path that gay and lesbian movements have followed in the current American scenario, where the neoliberalization of protest has transformed it into a pursuit of legal changes that facilitate the confirmation of the rights of those who are in a more privileged sphere, ignoring the way in which many of these projects have strengthened social systems of exclusion.

All of the above leads Dean Spade to propose a critical trans politics that is organized in mass mobilization, that does not limit itself to legal reform as the maximum horizon, that shows that there are possibilities of action and resistance beyond the margins imposed by the States. A critical trans politics that seeks to show what underlies the notions of neutrality, what type of subject is the one that benefits from the policies of formal legal inclusion and what is the one that, once again, is left on the margins.

This way of thinking makes us question what the trans movement should pursue. Do we seek to be part of and assimilate ourselves within the neoliberal model, coupling ourselves and obtaining a space within it? Do we want to position ourselves critically in opposition to the justification and maintenance of the normative model in which we find ourselves? This is what lays the foundations for what the author calls a critical trans politics, a bid for redistribution and recognition that aims to go beyond simply being named in the normative, evoking images such as the Stonewall revolt, where the



eruption of discontent implied an explicitly contrary positioning to a model that sought to perpetuate the exclusion of certain subjects.

With this, Spade seeks to make us reflect on the consequences that are socially produced thanks to the actions and objectives raised by social movements, within a context where the verification of identity, control policies and governmental management of risks is accompanied by marginalization and criminalization of certain lives. Who are those not falling within the normative framework of the States? What ways of life are we making uninhabitable? What possibilities do we have to question the exercise of power and the monopoly of the use of force exercised by the States? All these questions accompany the reflection on the horizons we seek for our social movements, where critical trans politics is positioned as a possibility at the intersection, to articulate this redistributive proposal that bets on the true liberation of all and not just a consecration of privileges and reinforcement of normativity.

A pending challenge, perhaps more so for ourselves, is to reimagine critical trans politics in contexts distant from that of the United States, since we are well aware that in the Third World the political advance of inclusion has acted in different ways. But it has also followed similar lines, imparted by many neoliberal states in the region, where the co-optation of social movements under financialized logics allows us to establish parallels with the situation that Spade identifies.

172

It is worthwhile projecting the way in which different contexts influence the objectives of critical trans politics and the way to understand its approaches in the Chilean context, particularly after the social outbreak, where we find ourselves with a relevant opportunity to reform the normative system that governs us, but which, if not approached carefully, could confirm the uses and exercises of power used by the State during the post-dictatorship. This makes us wonder how critical trans politics can contribute to the analysis of the current scenario. By seeking to go beyond the limits set by the normativity of the State and ending the practice of legal change as the final solution to the problems of discrimination, we can open the door to reimagine our forms of existence, with a view to an effective redistribution that does not marginalize those who have been left out of the protective action of the State due to the intersections they inhabit.

With this, A “Normal” Life goes beyond a political proposal, being also an invitation to dream about what ways of life we want, what expectations we have and in what ways they are framed, what they respond to and what they make possible. In this, critical



trans politics and the paradigm shift of social movements play a key role: moving away from the central position of legal change and moving towards redistribution becomes not only a way to fight against neoliberalism and the management of power produced from the States, but an invitation to imagine new possibilities to inhabit the world, articulating itself as a new tool to dream of ways of life that allow us to coexist in freedom, especially for those who have been vulnerable, marginalized and criminalized by the exercise of power.

