

## **Citizenship and the ‘Other’: Europe’s Democratic Futures.**

Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*. London, Routledge, 2005. 144pp. ISBN 0-415-30521-7

Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000. 304pp. ISBN 0-19-829755-6 (pbk)

Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing Like a Girl” And Other Essays*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005. 177pp. ISBN 0-19-516193-9

For a period during the eighties and nineties there was a debate between political economy and cultural studies that seemed to dominate our understanding as to how we might study culture. Looking back now at this sometimes ill-tempered discussion some of the positions on these questions seem as entrenched as ever. Readers will be glad to hear that I do not intend to rehearse this debate nor shall I point to ways in which all our differences might be reasonably settled. As someone who has ‘done’ both political economy research as well as audience research I will always have divided loyalties on this particular dispute. However I thought then and continue to think now that the missing element within this argument was a clearer definition as to the more political and normative consequences of these discussions. Undoubtedly the argument was about how best to investigate cultural power, but equally prevalent was a politics of citizenship and how we might develop a culturally sensitive participatory democracy. This then was essentially a debate between Marxism and a set of questions that might be more closely associated with feminism and multiculturalism. Indeed if this discussion still informs the present in terms of wider questions of culture and citizenship it also feels outdated. The either/or quality of the discussion sometimes pointed to real differences, but also reinforced a polarised language that

many now find unhelpful. Indeed in respect of recent arguments concerning the increasing dominance of neoliberalism it is clear that the dominance of the market does not work through external mechanisms but is actually a form of culture and identity politics. Neoliberalism organises our material life through categories that include sex, gender and sexuality as well as class. As Susan Buck-Morss (2003:103) argues the ‘recognition of cultural domination as just as important as, and perhaps even as the condition of possibility of, political and economic domination is a true “advance” in our thinking’. Indeed if there is to be a future that is not entirely gripped by the mutually reinforcing neoliberal logic of *privatisation* and the *personalisation of responsibility* then we urgently need to explore displaced cultural imaginaries and alternative modernities. The task of a genuinely cosmopolitan Left then can not be reduced to changing the gender and ethnicity of the powerful, but equally it is not best served through the dominance of an explicitly Euro-centric or masculinist discourse. This is where our thinking about the study of culture and its relationship with the political should start.

In the European setting part of the re-discovery of alternative modernities means refusing the logic of clashing civilisations and considering other possibilities from ‘our’ own past as well as previously displaced and marginalised traditions. If neoliberalism is not to have a monopoly on our collective futures this will mean drawing from critical features from both within and outside of Western modernity. This will crucially involve a dialogue with some of the more critical elements within religion (perhaps most crucially Islam), feminism, multiculturalism and of course democratic socialism and Marxism. Indeed much of the pessimism that currently grips writing on more mainstream features of democracy and citizenship suggest that such a period of rethinking is now long overdue. Much contemporary debate on the future of

Western democracy increasingly describes processes of disengagement amongst the electorate. Prominent here is the view that capitalist driven democracies require weak forms of political engagement. The citizen in this framework is imagined as a cynical post-modern consumer switching political positions like yesterdays clothes. In post-ideological Europe citizens are assumed to be distractedly hopping between dramatic political events and the latest entertainment news. Indeed there is much to despair about in the context of European societies in terms of the growing hostility towards asylum seekers, an increasingly fragile ecological system, the growth of entrenched social inequalities, the retraction of shared systems of welfare and new waves of global violence represented by the war in Iraq. Perhaps not surprisingly many on the political Left have bemoaned the collapse of the labour movement as the force that has historically held in check the worst excesses of capitalism. Further the attempt to rethink social democracy in terms of a 'Third Way' has outside of political parties done little to enthuse the horizons of ordinary people. Whether we view such attempts at rethinking as neoliberalism in disguise or as our best hope in a globalised world it is hard to resist the view that such features are unlikely to breath new life into a politics that offers hope.

From this standpoint there is currently much discussion as to whether the global triumph of capitalism is more accurately represented as a new stage of American imperialism or a neoliberal empire (Hardt and Negri 2001). However what is notable in the context of many of these arguments is an overwhelming sense of resignation and defeat. If socialism and the labour movement have been 'domesticated' then so have our collective hopes of building a sustainable and inclusive future that can seek to humanise some of the more destructive tendencies of our shared world. While the development of the anti-globalisation movement could

yet have a radicalising effect on mainstream politics its ripple effects have only so far affected small groups of people. Indeed I think there are good reasons to be sceptical of arguments that wish to build a global anti-capitalist Left. While protest movements are key forums for the development of new ideas and perspectives democratic citizenship is actually unthinkable outside the maintenance of a recognised polity that is able to grant and negotiate the rights and duties of citizenship. If mainstream politics is withering on the vine of neoliberalism and far Left alternatives offer little beyond permanent activism then the underlying mood of our times is perhaps easier to understand.

That Iris Marion Young continues to resist these more pessimistic claims is reason enough to continue to engage with her writing. Young's argument in the context of democratic societies is that despite the continuation of oppression and exclusion that democracy is a considerable historical advance and should be deepened as far as is possible. In keeping with her previous writing Iris Marion Young's (2000) latest work seeks to argue that only genuinely inclusive societies can be described as just and democratic. Yet where democracy requires uncoerced discussion and debate patterns of social and economic inequality continue to enforce injustice and privilege. In this context, democratic forms of engagement require the building of a public realm on the basis of political equality, inclusivity and reasonableness. The aim of existing democratic societies should be to promote the conditions for the flourishing of democratic forms of citizenship that are not the exclusive preserve of the wealthy and the powerful. Such a project requires that the wider public become aware of the cultural power of the middle class, white and overwhelmingly male political establishment. The fact that many people do not have access to the cultural capital necessary for public speaking and the privileging of dispassionate modes of inquiry

tends to silence subordinate groups. Inclusive democratic discussions are better characterised through disorderly and sometimes discordant forms of communication than the well reasoned rhetoric that is privileged by political elites. A vibrant democracy depends on emotionally charged language, symbolic forms of protest and an understanding of cultural meanings employed by the Other rather than the cold exchange of ideas. For Young our public spheres are increasingly characterised through the expression of cultural difference and this is indeed a precious resource that should be welcomed. In this we should not expect contributions within a multi-vocal public realm to be guided by a shared idea of the common good. Instead Young employs an interactive account of public spaces where the otherness of the Other is explored through the communication of difference.

To this end Young rejects Marxist claims that the multiplication of social movements has splintered progressive politics into different enclaves and nationalist arguments that identity politics undermines a shared sense of solidarity through the nation. In the most engaging section of her book on the connections between democracy and inclusion, Iris Marion Young reminds us of the need to hold a complex line between the need to describe the effect of structural differences while being careful to recognise complex variations within groups. For example, it remains the case that women's lack of inclusion continues to be based upon their role in low status work involving the care of vulnerable persons and children. On the other hand, most 'good jobs' demand that their workers are occupied for at least forty hours a week. This in turn tends to make women dependent upon male earnings and enforces inequality within the family. Yet Young wisely cautions we have to be careful to recognise the normative assumptions derived from heterosexuality implicit in such a discussion. Reworking earlier problems with these questions, Young argues that

structural conditions neither determine how we make meaning or construct personal identities. Despite shared structural conditions their continues to be a number of different ways of becoming 'a mother' or a 'career woman'. The argument is not that democracy needs to give expression to the authenticity of excluded identities, but that difference is a resource in democratic communication. Identity politics is less about the assertion of 'essentialised' group identities than it is the negotiation of respect and recognition of a diversity of identities within and outside of particular groups.

Whereas appeals to the common good or national unity encourage people to set aside their differences, the argument here is for public forms of dialogue that engage with the politics of difference. The inclusion of previously excluded groups and identities then not only alerts 'us' to the partiality of 'our' own perspectives, but more specifically alerts the powerful to expressions of suffering or disadvantage. This is not to 'privilege' those voices and experiences that have been previously excluded or necessarily transform disagreement into consensus. Instead it is to encourage a genuinely deliberative dialogue that potentially calls into question a number of social and cultural divisions.

These arguments can also be connected to Iris Marion Young's (2005) brilliant essays on women's lived bodily experience. From the menstrual cycle to the sensual experience of clothes and from pregnancy to Western cultures ambivalence in respect of the breast these essays outline some of the contradictions and ambivalences of women's shared bodily experience. What becomes apparent here are the tension between commonality and difference within women's experience, but also how so often the category of gender can be seen to cut a number of ways. For example, in her essay on the breast, Young demonstrates how the categories of good and bad as well as pure and impure seek to normalise women's experience. In this Young calls for an

engaged feminist politics that seeks to question the split between the sexualised breast and the nurturing breast of motherhood. This would mean questioning the pervasive myths of virgin and whore that continue to pervade patriarchal Western cultures. The development of a public culture that gives voice to the pleasures of breast feeding as well as the experiences of loss many report after their babies have been weaned has an obvious link to the struggle for a multivocal public realm. Further it would mean an ability to handle complex understandings and fears about breast-feeding in the face of much public ambivalence amongst women themselves and more masculinist attempts to regulate and exclude such discussions. Indeed it is precisely for these reasons that Young describes the breast as ‘a scandal’ in its ability to question the border between motherhood and sexuality. The struggle for an understanding of mother’s as both nurturing and sexual is likely to be complex and fraught in a culture that prefers more easily digestible categories of understanding. Similarly Young’s essay on menstruation points to a deep paradox within contemporary consumer culture that mutually affirms women’s right to be what they choose to be and cultural norms that insist that menstruation remains hidden. The trouble remains with dominant ideas of ‘the normal’ that enforce a sense of shame in respect of women’s experience of the body. The enforcement of dominant masculine norms in respect of women’s bodies (in other essays in attitudes towards clothes and shopping or in ideals of slimness subverted by the pregnant body) suggest a cultural politics that seeks to question ways in which women continue to be policed in patriarchal societies. Notably the kind of multicultural politics embraced by Young goes far beyond simple affirmations of equality in an attempt to question cultural hierarchies and ambivalences.

Such a politics refuses separatist enclaves so feared by multiculturalism’s many detractors. Instead inclusiveness cannot simply be assumed but has to be built

by granting voice to the Other. It is through practices of interaction and exchange within radically pluralized public spheres that such debates need to take place. Yet in ensuring the inclusiveness of democratic debate and dialogue the state continues to have a key role to play. Above and beyond the distribution of resources, the nation-state remains a key actor in the provision of education and training, safe environments and other features that help promote the conditions for inclusive democratic debate. An active civil society remains dependent upon the institutions of social welfare, education and other more material provisions that help promote collective forms of well-being. At this point in the argument what becomes clear is that Young's politics begin to point towards the possibility of reconciling radical multiculturalism and social democracy.

This connection is perhaps most apparent in her essays on age, dependency and privacy. Through the use of autobiography and detailed argument Young beautifully illustrates the importance of the idea of home to our shared sense of personal identity. Accepting the argument that there are deep political dangers evident in the way that consumerism encourages people to see the home as an extension of the capitalist market place – she persists with the view that an idea of home is key to the development of our shared identities. Indeed to be 'homeless' is not only to be materially deprived, but strips us of our capacity to surround ourselves in the familiar objects and routines that give our lives meaning and a sense of place. This is precisely what many older people are deprived of once they enter into a nursing or care home. Young warns against the neoliberal view that the family are responsible for the old as this often means that the responsibility falls disproportionately on the shoulders of women. A just society would be able to provide care for the elderly that both respects their needs for 'a room of their own' while ensuring they continue to receive adequate



forms of respect and care. However such connections are not justified in the context of political struggle or history but through an ethic of self-development. This, as I shall argue, is perhaps the missed articulation of her work. For Young then if our citizens are to grow they need not only material forms of support and educational resources, but also respectful conversations that would allow us to engage with one another.

If Young is mostly concerned with a politics of identity and personhood this does not mean she neglects the need to promote justice beyond the nation-state. Here she engages with a range of cosmopolitan theories and perspectives which have come to question the prevalence of methodological nationalism on questions of democracy and citizenship. Young cautions against those who argue that we only have obligations to those who share our host national societies to argue for more global forms of justice. Again Young maintains a resolutely institutional approach to such questions arguing that there is a primary duty to build effective international institutions that may be able to administer justice at the appropriate level. To this end Young rejects the idea of a global state in favour of mechanisms that seek to devolve power down to the local level while developing global regulatory institutions that seek to address questions of environmental protection, security and the global distribution of wealth. Positive moves in this direction could start with the empowerment and democratic reform of the United Nations. The United Nations in this respect would be able to act in favour of global citizenship against the private interests of global corporations or narrow nationalism in the interests of a globally inclusive democracy. Yet it is notable that these arguments lack the radical edge of her writing on questions of cultural identity and difference. Here Young seemingly asserts the pressing need for global forms of governance without ever considering some of the thorny issues

that are connected with cosmopolitanism. There is little consideration of Eurocentrism or of many of the critical questions that postcolonialism has raised in respect of the dominance of Western ideals and perspectives. Further Young fails to consider that democracy is far from a universal ideal and the recent shifts within power politics at the global level. In particular a more concerted attempt to understand the role of the United States in the global arena is strikingly absent. A consideration of the different kinds of democratic expression that might be suitable under different sociological and cultural conditions would have been welcome at this point.

In reading these two books it became apparent that Young's arguments are at they're most radical in respect of her reflections on the female body rather than her perhaps better-known reflections on democracy and inclusiveness. This was because while her book on democracy offers many serious arguments and perspectives (which I hope I have demonstrated) it is written outside of any recognisable cultural location. The arguments lack any broader attempt to historically or culturally contextualise the struggle for democracy. Indeed it is hard to read the book without becoming aware of a specifically American belief in democratic virtues and the argument that these should be extended to include subordinate groups. If for example, we compare this work to say Edward Said, Franz Fanon, Stuart Hall, C.L.James, E.P.Thompson and Raymond Williams and others who have influenced the development of cultural studies there is a distinctive difference in tone. The more abstract work of Iris Marion Young is seeming handed down from 'no where' whereas the writers mentioned above were all interested in the development of oppositional forms of politics in particular times and places. For example, to read say Raymond Williams now, we immediately become alerted to his neglect of feminism, the subsequent development of multiculturalism, but also of a politics rooted in traditions related to the European

Left. This is not to cancel the view that Iris Marion Young's work may not often find surprising alliances in her deservedly global readership, but it is to make a plea for a form of political engagement built through the contestations of the present. Otherwise I think we risk the drift into a bad utopianism that simply builds models of a future good society that has only the thinnest of connections with an array of social and political forces. We need more contextual understandings of the ways that culture, democracy and citizenship intersect with one another. This need not mean however (a charge that is often made against cultural studies) our arguments become so contextual that they can only address the most limited range of ideas and concerns.

Notably Iris Marion Young in her work on female embodiment handles this particular tension brilliantly. There is no sense in her writing that she is expressing the concerns of all women everywhere but is alive to the complexities of the experience of women in capitalist modernity. Again returning to the European context an exploration of democratic inclusiveness would need to outline an ambivalent heritage that has witnessed the attempt of European societies to deal with the historical legacies of imperialism, war and conflict, the changing experience of women, the collapse of state socialism and the progressive weakening of social democracy. This would not mean that such work would not be full of ideas and perspectives, but that it would inevitably come through particular historical and cultural experiences.

Here I perhaps need to illustrate my argument with an example. As is widely known American society in contrast to Western Europe has had a relatively weak labour movement and thereby has developed more overtly capitalist dominated societies to those prevalent within Europe. Yet this condition is seemingly changing as I indicated in my opening remarks in terms of the prospects for democratic and cultural change. Further Europe during the twentieth century witnessed two world

wars and became the dividing line in the Cold war. However at this historical juncture the ways we might seek to promote an inclusive democracy have inevitably changed. The collapse of the Berlin wall witnessed the global triumph of capitalism and has helped articulate a sense of European futures having to adapt to new threats and challenges. European societies urgently need to respond to the challenges of the 'present' in such a way that avoids the mistakes of the past while seeking to 'socialise' neoliberal capitalism and promote more strongly inclusive multicultural societies. In other words, as the previous generations of authors I mentioned above well understood, how we pursue these arguments is decisively influenced by our shared histories but also crucially by the historical and cultural contexts which we inhabit. Of course one response to such changes could be to burry our heads in the study searching for the 'correct' formulation of democracy. However in the context of cultural studies I think we have long recognised that while terms like 'democracy' and 'citizenship' continue to be important in terms of the maintenance of powerful normative ideas they need to be defended in engagement with a rapidly changing world.

Unlike Iris Marion Young, Chantal Mouffe's writing can be connected to a more easily locatable political project. Since her earliest work, Mouffe has been concerned with the attempt to recreate the European Left. Mouffe's central question is less how might we build genuinely inclusive institutions, but more how might a democratic Left respond positively to the decline of Marxism, the development of new social movements and antagonisms that are not based upon class. Initially her attempt to construct a genuinely post-Marxist politics induced a furious reaction from some Marxist intellectuals. While in the past Mouffe (often unfairly) was seen as overly critical of both Marxism and democratic socialism her position would perhaps

today find a more sympathetic ear in these camps. If in the past Mouffe sought to add more complex and discordant voices into a Marxist tradition today she is more concerned to defend a robust social democratic politics from advocates of neoliberalism and the Third Way. In particular Mouffe aims her intellectual arrows at the 'post-political' vision offered by advocates of the risk society and global cosmopolitanism. Refusing the argument that politics is now 'beyond Left and Right' Mouffe forcefully argues for an antagonistic form of politics where every act of consensus is necessarily built upon exclusion. Such a view automatically questions attempts like Iris Marion Young's to build genuinely democratic and inclusive societies. The moment of the fully inclusive political community can never finally arrive. This is because for Mouffe any attempt to build a political community automatically constitutes an outside of those who are excluded. We cannot then have a fully inclusive community where a 'them' have disappeared. Democracy itself is built less upon inclusive conversation and more upon antagonism, division and conflict. Further what Iris Marion Young seemingly excludes from her argument is the political moment when the demands of excluded groups would need to be translated into manifesto commitments and political programmes. This makes radical politics more a matter of hegemonic articulation than the dream of undistorted communication we would then be better served in re-reading Gramsci's (1971) *Prison Notebooks* than submitting to the sterilised world of deliberative democracy.

From Mouffe's position writers like Iris Marion Young (despite the qualifications she makes) ultimately remains trapped in a liberal tradition whereby universal consensus comes about through the application of reason. Democratic politics for Mouffe is necessarily antagonistic and inevitably involves we/they and friend/enemy distinctions. Yet Iris Marion Young might ask unless we are required to

reason with one another what is to prevent democratic deliberation descending into hatred or conversely plain indifference? For Mouffe (2005:20) it is the task of democracy to convert ‘antagonism into agonism’. By this she means that antagonism needs to be contained by the establishment of institutions and democratic practices. What is at stake in politics is not the discovery of common interests and horizons through the expression of difference, but the struggle between opposing hegemonic projects. Here I think Mouffe’s worldlier political standpoint has much to recommend it. Sometimes Iris Marion Young writes as though the everyday fair of politics is less the mobilisation of support, passionate disagreement and sharp differences of opinion and more the requirement that we discover how we might live together by making space for the Other. If Young’s idealism has much to commend it in a world driven by money and power it remains too distant from the more ordinary forms of hustle and bustle that constitutes modern politics. Indeed the differences between Young and Mouffe are perhaps most apparent on their contributions on cosmopolitanism.

Opposed to the liberal cosmopolitan visions of those like Iris Marion Young Mouffe offers a stinging defence of a multi-polar world. Rather than seeking to defend the universal superiority of liberal democracy, Mouffe argues for a multi-polar view of the global order. As we saw, the liberal cosmopolitan view argues that if we wish to create a world beyond the egoistic ambitions of nation-states and the polarising logic of the global market then we will need to create genuinely inclusive international institutions. This point in the argument often offers the European Union as an example of a cosmopolitan state that has created peace and security which can act as a model for the rest of the world. While Mouffe readily agrees such a politics is preferable to a neoliberal world order the end result would seem to be the imposition of specifically Western ideas and practices on the rest of the world. Practically

Mouffe cautions that such a project would not only provoke strong resistance but is likely to prove to be counter-productive in the long term. Her argument then is that global politics should be guided less by the attempt to find a global rational consensus and more to challenge the prevailing hegemony of the world's dominant superpower. Here our politics should not be driven by the need to build a global rational utopia, but the construction of counter-hegemonic powers and positions. In this respect, Mouffe also remains sceptical of the capacities of the anti-globalisation movement to form a global Left given their attachment to a totalising revolutionary imagination. This point refers back to Mouffe's earlier writing where she sought to alert the Left to some of the dangers of a revolutionary language that seemed to point beyond power and antagonism.

At this point Mouffe's suggestions for an alternative political strategy lack the detail of those offered by Iris Marion Young. Mouffe argues against a Third Way politics where political parties all seek to occupy the centre ground for a resolutely passionate and antagonistic Left politics. Democratic politics is about competition between legitimate adversaries. Inevitably this involves processes of exclusion as those who preach hatred and violence inevitably fall outside of the rules of political competition. In more global terms central to her argument is the building of a Europe that has rejected neo-liberal politics. This would both pluralise the idea of the 'West' and challenge American hegemony. This argument not only connects the cosmopolitan project to a particular world-region where it has found its home but applies the break to the universalising tendency in European thought and political practice. While Mouffe does not spell this out we can only presume that here she is referring to the need to re-create a more radical version of social democracy within Europe and for this to become a post-national project for the Left. Here her writing

comes close to some of the recent work of Jurgen Habermas (2001) and Pierre Boudieu (2001) given their recent public pronouncements urging European citizens to create a European public sphere as an alternative to the imperialistic turn in Washington. Yet if Habermas seeks to create a Europe from above through a constitutional settlement and Bourdieu from below through workers and radical social movements, Mouffe indicates that such a project could only emerge through a reformulated parliamentary liberal socialism. Here I find myself in whole hearted agreement, but concerned about Mouffe's conservative understanding as to what counts as politics. As her writing has progressed what has become increasingly apparent is her neglect of the everyday forms of cultural politics about which Young writes so convincingly. Mouffe's view of the essentially contested nature of culture and politics needs to be expanded to include spheres such as popular culture and education as well as other spheres which fall outside of 'official' definitions of politics. That complex societies are made up of a number of diverse and competing public realms is almost entirely absent from her argument. This is a serious omission, as any attempt to construct an alternative hegemonic project would need to be able to mobilise on a number of fronts all at once. This notable absence may well be the consequence of Mouffe current preference for the work of conservative Carl Schmitt over that of her previous intellectual hero Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci's legacy then remains important not only to understand Chantal Mouffe, but also to appreciate the extent to which diverse and overlapping public spheres have a key role in promoting ideological and structural change.

The current threats to democracy and citizenship are indeed immense. The passing of the hopes of previous generations from the sixties should make us wary of utopian thought that fails to connect with the world as it currently stands. The global



triumph of capitalism threatens to push contested forms of politics to the margins offering increasingly dissatisfied electorates the choice between increasingly similar agendas. Yet it is unlikely to be successful in this venture, and if 'mainstream' politics was reinvented in the eighties, then it can be so again. There is no simple exit from this world or return into the certitude of Marxist theorising. Cultural studies have done too much to break up arguments in respect of the centrality of class to return to these horizons. The need to generate a new politics can only take place through the reconnection of 'mainstream' political forces and spaces to the hopes of more antagonistic citizens. This as Iris Marion Young has pointed out cannot take place in a world where many feel shut out by the debates that goes on within the 'official' public sphere. However attempts by Third Way parties to do just this have lead to accusations by many of tokenism and elaborate exercises in image manipulation. More important for a democratic Left and cultural politics is the ability to forge an inclusive politics that provides an alternative to the hegemony of the Washington consensus. The development of genuinely post-national political imaginaries is crucial in this respect. The recapturing of the contested meaning of being (or indeed becoming) European takes on an added significance at this juncture. The development of a networked European post-national citizenship that seeks to both re-examine Europe's historical achievements as well as the nightmares it helped create has a renewed relevance in our time. The birth of a movement for a multicultural and environmentally sensitive social democracy is perhaps our current best hope for a different world. Such a view would not seek to perpetuate the Euro-centric myth of European leadership, but would seek to reinvent a genuinely pluralist social democracy in dangerous times. Yet such a project is unlikely to come to fruition unless it is able to offer a bridge between everyday anxieties and global problems that

require global solutions. It is likely to be in this complex negotiation that cultural studies still has much to teach students of politics. This would mean not only that political struggle would be located somewhere, but it might breath new hope into our global age.

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