



Greige Room 00

"Post-post and the Invocation of Mouffe"
an interview with and by Mary Dahlman Begley

*this publication made possible by a generous
donation from anonymous donor, who wishes
to remain anonymous*

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“POST-POST AND THE INVOCATION OF MOUFFE”

Mary Dahlman Begley,

Interviewed by Mary Dahlman Begley

MDB: You’ve been critical of Chantal Mouffe’s idea that oppression only emerges as antagonisms because of “the democratic discourse which allows such forms of subordination to be conceived as forms of oppression” – but isn’t it the case that we wouldn’t have known the rent was too high unless we were told “the rent is too damn high”?

MDB: Not at all. It’s ridiculous to suggest that oppression is anything other than a material condition - one which exists without necessarily named as such. To take this position is to discount the lived experiences of others - ignorance is bliss is only invoked by those who believe themselves not ignorant! There is also a problem of scale in this statement - intellectually we could understand this position on a small scale. I do not know I make less than my male counterpart unless there is democratic discourse, and only then I am able to understand this injustice. However, oppression occurs on a global scale, and the democratic discourse is mainly communicated to the population via transmissions from those in power. This is not discourse! As my friend Jean would say, “the sphere of the media speaks and no response can be made.” Mouffe’s argument is predicated on the assumption that there could be democratic discourse. In this reality, the discourse which could maybe liberate us is hierarchical...just like capitalism ;)

MDB: Luckily for us, Chantal Mouffe also gave us the tip that we can fight capitalism from within. As consumers, we have agency to enact important anti-capitalist resistance, don't you think?

MDB: Consumers have a degree of agency, and act within their own self interest, or so the popular understanding goes. If the act of consumption changed the system in any way, there would not be widespread disparity and economic injustice. It's clear that Mouffe is wrong again - or rather limited by her own position of privilege, apparently unable to assume the position of someone disadvantaged by capitalism. She goes on to say that capitalist institutions "neutralize" our demands, and through that neutralization, the institutions are transformed. Allegedly, this change is either for the worse or for the better. On what structural standing may she then argue that the best locus of resistance is in the formation of a consumer identity? It will either get better, or it will get worse. That pathetic future is not good enough for me. Perhaps Mouffe was too quick to identify as *post* and skipped the chapter about there being no ethical consumption under capitalism.

MDB: Well neither you nor she have put forth any good ideas about an alternative to the current systems. It's clear that you're angrier about capitalism and what you perceive as the injustices it causes, or perhaps posturing as such for social capital, but what's so bad about working within the tools of the State? Isn't working the system the best way to get what you want?

MDB: The argument to work within the tools of the State is hung on the idea that the State holds "symbolic resources" needed for us to constitute our political project. It would be cliché to invoke Audre Lorde 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House' but now I suppose I've done it. Using the rules that oppressors - the Kings of Capitalism - have set reinforces hegemony. I am not the only living person who hears "Play By The Rules" as menacing, paternal - an admonition to my freedom. Perhaps I will email Chantal some 'punk rock' mp3s to really shake up her week. She's ignoring that the 'symbolic resources' were leveraged by the creators of capitalism - which does not work for everyone (understatement of the millennium!) - and the norms of capitalism are predicated on philosophical assumptions of liberalism - invalidating her whole deal. No, I don't have any better ideas about an alternative to the current system, not yet at least. I will gloat here that I am unafraid to admit my lack of knowledge and unafraid to continue trying to figure it out. When I get the idea though, you can call it *post-post-Marxism*.

