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THEORISING WITH A PRACTICAL INTENT:
GENDER, POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
AND COMMUNICATION

An Interview with Iris Marion Young

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Background

MD Tell us about yourself and your background. What led you to philosophy?

IMY I grew up in New York City. I'm a product of corporate education at the higher level. I graduated from Queen's College in the City University of New York. At the time I went to college it cost me \$100 a semester. That scenario is long past in the City University system. I am a believer in public education that way. I had a wonderful education in Queen's College from 1966–70. And I also went to public school in the New York City public schools. I think they did well by me.

What led me to do philosophy? I'm not sure I have an account of that. I went to college as an English major, I guess, maybe, because my mother was an English major, and that's what I knew best. And at certain high schools you don't know about philosophy. But I guess, oddly enough, the Presbyterian Church had something to do with leading me to philosophy. We had youth groups where we discussed deep issues like 'freedom and determinism' (*laugh*) and I really liked these discussions. So the two things came together. I became disenchanted with the scholarship that an English major required—you didn't get to

think for yourself—and got led into philosophy by my high school background in ‘debating about metaphysics’. That’s what I learned to find in philosophy as an undergraduate.

MD I myself got drawn into philosophy because I read this article by someone I now know to be an ultra right-wing Hindu nationalist (*laugh*) about the essence of being. I did my graduation in Economics and Mathematics and then changed to do my Masters in Philosophy.

IMY Well there’s something very tempting about any discourse that seems to be telling you the meaning of life! Right! (*laugh*) I think I don’t believe in the meaning of life any more but once I did, you know. When I was at college from 1966–70, Existentialism was very important among youngsters. For me it was very important. I was a great fan of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and Sartre. But also, this was related to my life—Camus’s ‘the meaninglessness of existence’ spoke to me and ‘self-creation’ spoke to me.

On Philosophy and Local Theory

MD I want to ask you about the importance you attach to the conception of philosophy as ‘theorising with a practical intent’. At times you say you find yourself dissatisfied with some feminist writings that are overly theoretical because you find them ‘paralysing’. I wondered if that is your general conception of philosophy, or is it something that you think is particularly relevant for feminist philosophers?

IMY I think I wouldn’t even restrict it to philosophy. Philosophy is a specific kind of theorising, which I think has its important disciplines. It is a specific kind of training that I undertook and I think I provide sometimes to students. But I think this issue of having a practical intent is something that I would endorse for all intellectual life—leaving aside empirical work, which, I also think, should have practical intent. I think of it as a normative principle that theory, that is self-enclosed and is not supposed to

be revealing in a way that could inform action, is only a game! It is not as valuable, humanly speaking.

MD With regards to the possibility of hoping for a single feminist historical materialist theory, you have said that it is 'ambitious and naïve' and you have advocated local theories instead. But don't you think that conceptual innovation allows a variety of 'local experiences' to be captured? Take, for example, two conceptual terms that you have introduced: 'gender as seriality' (Young 1994) and 'asymmetric reciprocity' (Young 1997). They seem to me to capture something, which is, in a sense wider than is suggested by a 'local' theory. They are concepts, which have political application in a wider context. So is it not undermining the role that theory has in your own work to think of it as more valuable if it helps to make sense of 'local' experience?

IMY When I distinguish, in the passage that you refer to, between a kind of general, globalised, totalised theory and local theory, I think I'm using local in the same sense that Foucault uses local. That doesn't mean local in the sense of a particular neighbourhood, or a community. Instead, it means, bound to specific contexts. These could be disciplinary contexts, or historical context, or even neighbourhood contexts. But what's important is that once generated, the question is a problem, which has a location, and there may be other problems in other locations that have a similar structure.

Take the essay 'Gender as Seriality' (Young 1994). It highlights a particular problem, which is, I think more than a local one. Say the problem is: particular feminists in particular communities are having trouble thinking about 'What is this category of woman?' At a particular *time* in the history of feminist theory it becomes a problem. That's what I mean by local. So it doesn't become a problem only in New York, but it becomes a problem at a particular time and we generate a theory

that might then be helpful to another locality. But the intent of the theory is not to have covering laws.

Gender as Seriality

MD In 'Gender as Seriality' (Young 1994) you were looking for a way out of a dilemma. Either we risk essentialism in naming women as a group or we lose the motivational force of the idea of women as a group. You suggest that, from a pragmatic political point of view, we need to have a notion of the identity of women, which can solve this dilemma. Are you happy with your solution?

IMY I would disagree with your formulation in this sense: that precisely what I aimed to do there was to say that it's not about the identity of women. I would suggest that worrying about it in those terms—where identity is about attributes, feelings or senses of identification—was exactly the source of the problem.

MD I'm calling that 'essentialism'.

IMY The source of the problem lies in worrying about 'what attributes the entity, this person, had?' or 'what feelings of affinity these persons have with each other?' I shifted away from this perspective and instead began thinking in terms of positionings.

MD I thought it was also about the movement from the kind of collectivities to which we find ourselves ascribed, to groups that we actually form. In that sense, identification does come in, even though it is not a permanent identification, but instead it is an identification around projects that we might take up.

IMY But there I distinguish between series and groups as Sartre does. (Young 1994, 723–8) And I think it is helpful and important to notice that women, when they are self-consciously identified with one another, never identify with one another only as women. There's always some other organising principle to their mutual identification

The Ideal of Gift and Asymmetric Reciprocity

MD Let us look at another of your conceptual innovations—the term ‘asymmetric reciprocity’ (in Young 1997). You argue that the supposed symmetry in moral relations obscures difference and in fact assumes a reversibility of perspectives that is not possible. You are also saying that symmetrical reciprocity has undesirable political consequences.

You’ve suggested an alternative, which is based on the notion of ‘gift’—you say that ‘opening unto another person is always a gift’ (Young 1997, 50). The other notion you use is that of ‘being with’ another rather than being in the place of, or imagining oneself in the place of, another. You use Derrida in this context—‘For there to be a gift there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift or debt’ (Young 1997, 54). I like the notion of asymmetric reciprocity very much. I myself have written about the difficulty of knowing the other person *from* their standpoint (Dhanda 1994). Acknowledgement, as I see it, fills the gap that is there of not being able to know the other. However I do have a problem with part of your analysis of the notion of ‘gift’. Gifts, too, are part of social practices. Gift—understood as that openness in the presence of the other person—seems to me to be a vision. When you examine real gifts, as they are exchanged, and as parts of social practices, they generate expectations. These are themselves commensurate with the socially structured locations of gift-givers and receivers.

When you apply the same to relations between people, I feel that opening unto another person also becomes habituated. I wonder whether we can retain that sense of wonder, which you are advocating and which seems to be at the back of this notion of gift? It seems more like an ideal rather than something that happens in relationships between people.

IMY But this is true of all normative ideals. 'Gender as Seriality' is about ideals. I'm taking gift-giving as a certain ideal, and I try to invoke what is the concept in the ideal. An ideal is always something invoked in real life, usually for the purpose of a criticism. In this sense I am Habermasian, our ideals arise from the realities of interaction. But what we do with ideals is we formulate them out of the possibilities of our interaction, and our sense of lack in those interactions. So, I think, I am trying to appeal to what is the normative ideal of gift-giving, which is that it is asymmetrical.

In his book on Marcel Mauss, Derrida is claiming that Mauss got it wrong, because he understands gift-giving in terms of an equal exchange (Derrida 1992). And Derrida in his analysis of Mauss's *The Gift* is saying, well, if that's so, then it's not gift-giving. And I'm accepting that. The ideal of gift-giving (even though it is always imperfectly realised and sometimes more perfectly realised than others) is one where there has to be a first move, which is a moment of courage, graciousness and generosity. Here there is not an expectation of return in the sense that one feels one has a right to be disappointed if there is not a return. And I'm trying to generalise that and see what it means to be open, in the sense that you've talked about, and acknowledge that there is the first move.

I'm interested in Levinas in this respect, too—in the response to vulnerability. Someone has to make the first move, and that first move, is a gift. But it's also a reception at the same time. A gift itself is an acknowledgement in your sense, it is a recognition of the other that is asking for nothing in return, as an ideal. But of course, the exchange of things may or may not be gift-giving and gift-giving may or may not involve an exchange of things. There are ways of being gracious or generous which don't involve any exchange of things, and those might be the best gifts.

MD There's another question I had about the same essay. In the course of elaborating the notion of 'asymmetric reciprocity' you've raised a doubt about why we need to be able to imagine ourselves in the situation of the other person. My comment would be that one needs to be able to imagine oneself in the situation of other people because there are times when one cannot actually listen to others. For example, when they are dead, or very far back in an inaccessible past, or yet to be born, or, likewise when they are out of reach because they are spatially inaccessible. So it seems that there still is some use for a notion of reciprocity, which calls for those sorts of imaginings, which are required in situations of temporal or spatial asymmetry. It is a monological imagining, in a way.

IMY I really don't think that we can do much with those not yet born. I'm in agreement with those philosophers who talk about what the basic needs are of those not yet born and do something to ensure that the resources in the future will also be available for those basic needs. I don't think that we can put ourselves in the cultural position of those not yet born, of future generations.

Now, the people of the past are quite different, but they speak to us through texts that we retain. Thus, I would rather think of it as an act of listening, rather than a repositioning of myself. When I read those texts of the ancient Greek philosophers or about the medieval Beguines women I'm still here in the present. It's better for me to acknowledge that I have not left my position in the late 20th century when I listen to those historical texts, and that I listen across time.

MD I think it is very helpful to make the distinction between the supposed identification with future generations and the one with the people of the past. I agree with you that they are not the same. I also agree that there is still that need to really listen to people from the past with care rather than just arbitrarily

thinking those people were like oneself, which would be wrong. There are ways of not listening ...

IMY It is a kind of fantasising. What I say in the piece is that, frequently, the claim that I'm putting myself in the position of others is a projection of my own fantasies about what the others are. And I think frequently when we relate to historical times, that is what most of us are doing as well. Popular history books are big sellers! Why is that? Because they are escapist fantasies for many people! I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. However, I'm not sure we're treating the other, in this case, the historical other, really as different. We're projecting ourselves: 'this is what I would have been like in the 13th century'. And that's fine for play, but when you're thinking of understanding the other by doing that, I think that's not right.

MD The only purpose of this type of history is to reinforce your own image of who you are. It doesn't make you willing to change yourself in the light of what you might learn from the past.

IMY And I think through serious listening to the historical others, in this case, or even contemporary others, we can gain recognition of the difference, the strangeness.

Communicative and Deliberative Democracy

MD I'm going to move on now to the distinction between the concepts of communicative and deliberative democracy. In 'Communication and the Other' (in Young 1997) you've reminded us of the neglected aspects of communication, including aspects like rhetoric and story-telling, especially in political communication. You say that the 'erotic dimension in communication' has an important role to play. I find that a very interesting way of putting it particularly when you say 'Humor, word-play, images and figures of speech embody and color the arguments, making the discussion pull on thought through desire' (Young 1997, 71).

My question here is that there are different kinds of desires. Desire for love would be good, but if it is the desire for admiration which is fuelling the person who engages in rhetoric, isn't that suspect? Isn't there a danger of rhetoric displacing argument altogether? A valid critique might be to suggest that it would be more productive to expand the notion of 'simply argument' to 'argument plus ... ', so as to include all the bodily aspects of communication.

IMY In 'Communication and the Other' my concern is with democracy. What makes deep democracy? And the work I'm doing now expands on this interest in what are the conditions of a deeper democracy. And one of the things you want in a good democracy is citizens who are able to criticise and hold one another, and those who have official powerful positions, accountable.

Now, in the approach to deliberative democracy that I'm criticising there is a notion that what makes a critical thinker, indeed what makes a good deliberative speaker is one who brackets the rhetorical to get to the purity of the argument. I think what I'm advocating in the specific category of rhetoric is that first of all, there is no unrhetorical speech or expression; all expression has an aspect that is affective and meant to move. That's the rhetorical ...

MD Even argument is meant to persuade.

IMY Only the coldest numerical, mathematical forms of deductive reasoning may have the affective purged from it. But in *real politics* reason and affectivity function together. The problem that you are identifying is: 'What if moving people can have different effects and different motivations?' One approach you can take to that danger—let's call it 'the danger of demagoguery—is to say: 'Let's make sure that people are arguing' and 'Let's make sure that people know how to identify whether people are arguing'. While I don't deny that's a good

thing to do, I think something else needs to be done as well. This is to develop critical skills in evaluating rhetoric, in its own terms. That is a far better way of ensuring democratic accountability. So that if it is possible to manipulate desires (which of course it is), then isn't it better for those who might be manipulated to identify the affective element of that possibility instead of concentrating only on the discursive element?

MD And thereby also be able to deal with it.

IMY That is the point. And sometimes you might not deal with it only in argumentative terms! There might be forms of playful response that have a more deflationary effect on the powerful than all the arguments you could produce.

MD That's very helpful as well.

The Family

MD You've often written about the limitations of the distributive paradigm of justice, for example in 'Reflections on the Family in the Age of Murphy Brown' (in Young 1997). In particular you highlight how this paradigm fails to adequately address issues such as sexual liberation and the sexual division of labour. Among other things, you blame the failure on the way in which this approach deals with the institution of The Family. In particular you criticise the assumption that as an institution it is there to stay. You're suggesting that The Family itself should be deconstructed into a series of rights and obligations. How do you think that can be accomplished?

IMY Let me say first that there are many who have said better than I that theories of justice have not attended to the issues of the family ...

MD For example Susan Okin has (Okin 1989) ...

IMY Yes ... So I don't think that I have made a particular contribution in respect of that point. In the essay you are referring to, I'm interested in The Family in capitals, as a trope.

And here again, I think, I haven't been terribly original. Where I think I might have made a contribution is in saying that there's a positive move to make. The critical move is in noticing how 'The Family' functions as a trope in ideological terms, without then denying different forms of intimate relations. I suppose there are some people who don't have ties of that sort, but I think they are very few, at least if you look at their entire life's course. Some people at certain points in their lives will say they don't particularly want to have intimate ties. But most people, at some points in their lives, do.

This raises political and legal issues for all of us. Part of what I wanted to deconstruct was those legal relationships. My argument is to say we don't have to automatically accept what's still 'the Law' in United States and almost anywhere else in Europe. In other words we've got a whole series of relationships that may not be linked, and they should not be linked except by the choices of the individuals.

MD One thing you say is that 'Sex is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of families' (Young 1997, 109). I thought that's a very revolutionary thing to say! The idea that you should not link the idea of sex with the idea of a family contains a lot of potential.

IMY I've just started reading a book by Valerie Lehr called *Queer Family Values* (Lehr 1999). There are lots of people writing about these things far better than I do.

MD I thought that your arguments de-linking sex from 'The Family' contained implications that were wider than simply a gay or lesbian perspective.

IMY Valerie Lehr is interested in the evolution of the demands for the right to marriage, by gay and lesbian movements. She's criticising this on normative grounds. The criticism, which is quite well put, is that the demand continues to assume that the privileged relationship is the sexual relationship. And I quite

agree with her. And she says that to the degree that there's still the assumption of the privileged sexual coupling, that is still within the heterosexual paradigm.

MD Exactly, I think that was your point. You want to declare marriage as unjust, but you want to retain the value of the family. And that's why this de-linking...

IMY of *families*. I want to pluralise it! (*laugh*).

MD Not 'The Family' ... I'm sorry...yes, but 'families', yes, because you say that *families* provide a rooted sense of self.

IMY Well, you know, for lots of people I wouldn't say that it has to be normative. You do have to worry about the way in which access to respect and respectability arises from the privileging of having families. I think that's still a problem in the society I live in.

MD Many people would associate you with postmodernism. I am wondering whether, because of your saying that a family provides a sense of self and of a concrete, mutual caring, they may have been surprised to find you talking about a rooted sense of self. Likewise, in another article that I'll talk about later—'House and Home'—you are talking about identity in a different way.

IMY I've never found labels like 'postmodernist' very helpful for almost anybody. Jean-François Lyotard uses the term 'condition of postmodernity' (Lyotard 1979). Nearly all the other thinkers that are called 'postmodern' have never used the label themselves. This is true of most labels—those called 'communitarians' usually don't call themselves communitarians!

I have found the critiques of 'Enlightenment universalism' that I associate with postmodernism useful. I find Foucault's work very useful for thinking about normativity and disciplinarity and governmentality and so on. But it is more these particular ideas that I find useful rather than some school. In fact I think that it's against the whole spirit of these thinkers to say that they're a school called 'Postmodernism' (*laugh*).

But one thing I have never endorsed is a notion that there is no subject. I think there are good reasons to be critical of substantive subjects. We don't need postmodernism for that critique; Hume did it, and then Existentialism does it.

MD It's the same kind of attitude you have towards 'experience' as well. On the one hand, you reject experience as grounding our knowledge claims of, or as taking you to, an 'authentic' self. On the other hand, you want to retain experience as giving you access to subjectivity.

IMY Your first question was about philosophy with practical intent. I think in both these cases—of experience, the subject/the self or personal life—I want to cling to the practical. By this I mean what is important to me and to most other people when they are not doing philosophy. And to connect conceptual issues and problems to those things that are important to me and to most other people, when we're not in the theoretical mode.

'House and Home'

MD From that perspective I find your essay 'House and Home' (Young 1997) really very inspiring. One grows up with so many conflicting views about the meaning of home and housework. After reading this essay I felt glad that I actually never rejected my own liking for doing certain things in the house like sewing, cooking and gardening ... I like making things with my hands. In particular I found the story about your mother extremely moving. She was just rejecting certain aspects of housework, like cleaning, removing cobwebs, or whatever. But there are other aspects, such as caring for and being with your children, and doing things, which they like to do and you like to do, which are also home-making.

In that short story about your home, a clear distinction came out. We could see that while you reject housework, you don't have to reject home-making. I would like you to say

something about why home-making is important and do you invest your time and energy in it?

IMY All right. The first thing is, I think, that everyone makes home if they can. Some people can't, either because of their temporary situation or, more drastically, because they are in war, they're refugees or they're in prison. This is a deprivation. I've recently written something about my step-father who is in a nursing home and can't make a home for himself, even though he lived alone for a long time and made a home in the sense of arranging his things around him as he chose and living amongst them. In the end I think his case is a tiny existential category.

That essay I think of as continuous with the essays that I have done earlier on the phenomenology of female body experience. There's something phenomenological about the concept of home and indeed I refer to the work of Edward Casey, the phenomenologist, among others, in trying to develop that concept (Young 1997, 183). As in those earlier essays, the project that I take up is twofold. I want to notice the reasons that feminists have found homemaking and housework problematic and at the same time do the kind of recovery, which I've always taken to be part of Irigaray's project, of thinking about 'the feminine' in Western discourse.

In this case the problem with housework and homemaking is the fact that women are expected to both do housework and often make home for other people at their own expense. The fact of the matter is that working or caring, homemaking or caring, are in themselves human values. I'm trying to disentangle what is humanly valuable in this mode of living, this mode of being, and at the same time, notice and criticise what is socially exploitative or dominative. I'm not sure I succeed, but that's the nature of the project.

MD I think there are two aspects there. Your example of preparing a sauce according to 'mother's recipe' was very good, I think, because it captures the role of memory in everyday work. What

you do in preserving your house is very often preserving the memory of your parents. That resonated very much with the experience that I, and others like me, have who are living thousands of miles away from their families. It is not the recipe, but her memory that is important in the process of engagement in housework.

The other aspect, which is a more political matter, was the idea that instead of rejecting home, we have to think of democratising it. It is a privilege that some people have and others ought to have. There are four values of a home that you have written about: that people should have safety; they should have a place where they can individuate themselves; they should have privacy, and they should be able to preserve themselves. What comes to mind is that this work actually narrows the gap between you and the 'humanist' positions that you have criticised in the past.

IMY I think at the end of that essay, in that particular articulation of those values, I am talking about human rights, without qualification. (*laugh*)

Resistance and Empowerment

MD There's one final question I have which is a very difficult one. It is linked to you describing your mother's not doing housework as 'passive resistance'. I want to link this description to your essay on policy for pregnant addicts, 'Punishment, Treatment, Empowerment' (in Young 1997). In this essay you argue that the empowerment approach is better than the treatment or punishment approach. I agree with your analysis. I wondered though, if at another level—and I might be completely wrong here—you were painting a picture of one who takes drugs, or one who is a drug addict, as a passive resistor too. Are they somebody who is refusing to succumb to normalisation in their psychic life? Am I wrong? Am I reading too much in it?

You employ the Foucauldian notion that treatment uses confession as a way of changing the self to support your arguments about why you think the treatment approach is bad. So it could be suggested, if there is something wrong with changing the self of the addict, then there must be something, which is there to have, which you want to preserve. That something could be the element of resistance; that the addict is refusing to become a part of society.

IMY You are suggesting that one possible interpretation of the criticisms I make of treatment approaches as individualising is that perhaps addicts are resisting normalisation. And I think I want to respond that I don't know. I don't think I could speak for addicts or their resistance and furthermore it's probably ungeneralisable. I think I want to say that drug addiction should not be something despised. But it's not a happy state and only rarely would I suspect that it's a form of resistance. From my reading, there's far too little support offered to people whose lives are very wound up with drugs. While they may resist the despising—they can and do resist that—they are not necessarily happy with their lives and would like them to change.

But also embedded in your question was the notion that underneath the confessional mode, there should be a core self that is resisting the confession. And I guess I'm Foucauldian enough to think that in this kind of discourse, the self does construct itself. So the confession is not the revelation of the true self, it *is* the construction. And any who participate in these modes are quite, I think, aware of this.

When I recommend what I call 'the empowerment approach' the idea is that the experience is going to be more politicised and not coercive. Recently, the political theorist, Barbara Cruikshank—she's very Foucauldian and very interested in processes of governmentality in everyday life—has criticised the notion of empowerment as really an extension of the

normalising discourse (Cruikshank 1999). I'm not sure she's wrong, so I might have to reject the essay.

MD Really!

IMY Well probably! (*laugh*) I think that in the light of that particular analysis, I still want to make a distinction between an approach that is individualising—that isolates the individual and puts the sense of responsibility on her alone—and what I call the empowerment approach. This latter approach, as I think of it, is a more collective, outward oriented, and consciousness raising process. I try to offer in the article a couple of examples that I found in social work journals of how this practice is done. But I think that Cruikshank's critique leads me to think that one has to look at it more carefully.

MD In one very obvious sense, this process of involving people who are addicts in forming groups between themselves, exchanging stories and looking through their own analysis, *is* empowerment, because it is giving them the power, instead of telling them what to do, instead of making them confess and ...

IMY No. I think then there one might say, 'what in this is giving them any power?' First of all, the issue is that power has to be given within a structure of governmentality where they are at the receiving end. And power also remains in the institutionalised settings that are really quite controlled. Now, 'what is the alternative kind of practice?' is the question I always have with this kind of critique. I guess the message is that one must always be suspicious when we're talking about vulnerable or stigmatised people.

MD Yes, for this practice itself would deliver some of the answers....You will find it empowers or it won't ...

IMY I guess one of the issues is: Can it? As long as the practice is taking place within certain institutionalised discursive contexts, can it really escape the stigmatisation and asymmetries of power? That's what I mean by 'suspicious'.

Future Projects

MD I think that many readers of *WPR* will be more familiar with your writings on bodily experiences in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays* where you are extending Merleau-Ponty's notion of the lived body to include sexual difference which he seems not to talk about. Your later essays—in particular 'House and Home'—seem to have extended that notion of lived body. Are you planning any future works in the same style of writing as 'Breasted Experience' and the absolutely wonderful 'Pregnant Embodiment' (Young 1989)?

IMY At the moment I haven't done anything at all in this vein. I've been working for some time on a book called *Inclusion and Democracy* (Young 2000), which should come out next year. It's an extension of that article you referred to earlier on communicative democracy. It plays out my critique of deliberative democracy and many other issues such as group-representation that I have dealt with and includes some of my other work.

For the last several years, my work has been more concerned with policy and politics and political theory. I hope not in a disembodied way, but it is not the phenomenology of the orientation of the female bodily experience, which I've always thought of as a kind of different track of my work. I've always thought I had kind of two tracks: a political theory track or a political philosophy track, on the one hand, and this female embodiment track, on the other hand. They really have little to do with each other except that both books are in my study! So, I haven't done anything along those lines recently.

I would like to return to some of those questions. There are two connected things I think I would like to write: two separate pieces about menstruation and ageing in females. They are connected in so far as I think menstruation, as an experience, is about time, so both these pieces are more about

time than spatiality. Menopause needs to be thought more seriously as an experience, although there's been a lot of writing about menopause. I would do one of the things I always do before writing an essay—if I finally do it—which is to read much of what's been written about experiencing menopause, I don't care about the medical stuff (*laugh*). So that's what I had in mind.

MD Increasingly you have written more about questions of political philosophy. In your earlier essays, you have quite explicitly expressed your commitment to the vision expressed in socialist feminism, even though you rejected a totalising theory. While you continue to write in the manner of a socialist critique about radical transformation of patriarchal institutions, the term 'socialism' itself seems to have completely dropped out. I wondered if the suspicion of using the term 'socialism' has something to do with your being located in the USA? Or is it a general giving up of labels?

IMY When I think about all my writings, I don't think I've used the word 'socialism' very much in any of them. Even in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Young 1990), I don't think there's much discussion of socialism. I did talk about exploitation, I talk about the division of labour. I think it should be obvious that there is no question but that things that have always mattered to socialists, matter to me. But I find it much more appropriate to talk about issues such as: exploitation, inequality, division of labour, distribution of resources, work relationships.

Right now, for example, I am thinking about 'work'—the category or the concept and an ideal of meaningful work. I'm about to go to Frankfurt and give a paper at the Institute of Social Research which is the birth place of Critical Theory. This conference is supposed to be celebrating the birth of Critical Theory 75 years ago in the Frankfurt School. I am going to

claim that the ideal of meaningful work is something that leftists in general are no longer talking about.

To answer the question about socialism: this is a socialist interest or it's an interest that's derived from the socialist tradition. But, it's much more specific than saying: 'Well where are we with the socialist principles today'. And I think a notion of meaningful work is something that can make sense to almost anybody, even if they laugh at it. And, today, most people would laugh at the idea of meaningful work; that's how completely the employers have been able to regain control over work and what counts as work. So that's how I would answer that.

I've always been, and never stopped being, concerned I think with the issues that the socialist tradition in particular is concerned with. However I'm concerned with them in their particularity, one thing at a time. I guess I am in the post-socialist age, in the sense that, the label 'socialist' seems like an empty label today and I think we need to rethink what radicalism means. Many of the aspirations of socialism I'm still committed to, but in practical terms—in the world that I live in with my fellows—to quote a famous phrase, 'What is to be done is not at all obvious.' To say that the first thing to do is to separate the socialist from the rest of us seems to me a non-starter.

MD I agree. I have a couple of other questions before we close. You have contributed to a number of different areas. But are there subjects that you would like to see researched, questions that you wish somebody would work on? I'm sure there are going to be a number of younger researchers who would find those to be interesting leads to pursue.

IMY The first thing I thought of—it's a kind of association game—in response to your question, may not be a subject for philosophers! But it might be, I don't know! We have to see. For reasons that are obvious, in the last several months—this is September 1999—I've recently found myself needing to think

an awful lot more about war and violence. It has been forced upon my consciousness by, first, the NATO war, which I found the most ghastly event, pretty much of my lifetime! And actually, it carries for me greater shame, personally, than the war in Vietnam. I won't go into details.

But it has made me think about the feminist views of the late '70s that linked masculinity and violence. Some of those accounts by different wings of the feminist peace movement were crass and oversimplified, but when one looks at the events of the world, one finds that they seem to have a core of truth. My concern lies not so much in the victimisation of women in war—this isn't news and that in itself is terrible, but it doesn't carry for me all that much theoretical questioning. However, it could be very important to take up again the question of the glorification of violence, the connection of violence with power and the connection of violence and power with men. It seems to me that feminists really should have a lot to do, to make that insight plausible, empirically supported and theoretically sophisticated. And I'd like to see someone do that.

MD That's helpful. I'm sure there will be philosophers as well who will be interested in that area. Finally, is there anything that you would have liked to be asked, which my questions have not covered?

IMY Oh, I should say it's a pleasure and honour to be talked to in this way and also to learn about your work a little bit and the work of the journal I've been introduced to through you. I find encounters like this will help international feminism keep going and also the connections of women philosophers—that's pretty important—across oceans. I'm grateful for the opportunity.

MD Thank you Iris.

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Bath, September 1999

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