

Moving into other worlds but not into action – Gayatri Spivak's deconstructivist Marxist feminist readings

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In other Worlds. Essays in cultural Politics

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak needs little introduction as a deconstructivist thinker after her translation of Derrida's *De la grammatologie* in English and the erudite introduction to it for which she was responsible. Her importance as a literary critic and theoretician, however, has been established by expert theoretical and critical essays on feminism, Derrida and deconstruction as well as innovative readings of the classics of English literature. These essays were published, amongst others, in *Diacritics* and *Critical Inquiry* and in collections of critical essays such as those edited by Felman (*Literature and Psychoanalysis*, 1982), Krupnick (*Displacement, Derrida and After*, 1983) and William E. Cain (*Philosophical Approaches to Literature*, 1984). Colin McCabe's remarks in the introduction to this, the first collection of Spivak's own essays, describe the theoretical style adopted by the author: "Gayatri Spivak is often called a feminist Marxist deconstructivist. This might seem a rebarbative mouthful designed to fit an all purpose radical identity. To any reader of this remarkable book it will come to seem a necessary complex description limning not an identity, but a network of multiple contradictions, traces, inscriptions". (Foreword: ix)

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Spivak's book is centred around a perceived undecidability of culture and politics. The criticism can justly be called cultural since it places single instances of domination/exploitation within global economic, political and sexual arrangements, exposing and linking the hidden forms of domination in systems such as: the academic establishment, the reading and teaching of English (New Criticism for example), First World and Eurocentric consumerist economy forcing women in the Third World to supply a "surplus army of labour", Eurocentric feminism for its "benevolent colonialism" (Kristeva is included in this attack), scientific and academic epistemological imperialism disguised as the drive for well-informed and objective explanation, "masculism" (to use Spivak's own term), and others. With women in the Third World emerging as a focal point, an impressive criticism of the illusionary identity

presuppositions and oppressive binarisms operated by academic and poetical discourse is developed. Deconstruction renders here a relentless delegitimation of epistemological autonomy. Culture in these essays denotes, not systems of different identities but that web of domination and exploitation which today inseparably links all "worlds". The three sections in which this book has been divided – "Literature", "Into the World" and "Entering the Third World" – indicate this.

Spivak individualistically stakes a claim for this specific form of cultural criticism against materialist or neo-*Frankfurter Schule* versions and against such socio-philosophical critical analyses of society as for example elaborated by Habermas. Those versions ignore the Third World by either reading it as it suits them or by not reading it at all.

Reading in a semi-First World country situated in the Third World, from that country which has provided the world with its most poignant example of domination by differentiation, i.e. *apartheid*, reading Spivak, in other words, as a South African and, furthermore, as a white academic, one detects that Spivak's essays hinge on the well-known dichotomy between theory and practice.

Spivak's awareness of this problem throughout this collection is clear from the insurgent, interventionist mode of her theoretical polemics and, especially, from the redefinition of academic and theoretical practice as pedagogics: "I teach a small number of the holders of the can(n)on, male or female, feminist or masculist, how to read their own texts as best I can." (92) Her involvement with the Subaltern Studies group and her counter-reading of Mahasweta Devi's short story delivered in Calcutta in the presence of the author points to a broad, cross-cultural expansion of this pedagogical stand.

Spivak clears a space for deconstruction as political practice in a way which puritanical deconstructivists might regard as illegitimate. Using especially Derridean deconstructive activity as an epistemology, she finds an argument to see textuality as irreducibly part of the reading. If the text/reader binarism is deconstructed, the complicity between reader and text emerges as the "position" of the reader. Within this textual involvement, deconstruction is then used as technique – Spivak's readings never open the text to that radical undecidability which robs every aspect of the structure of identity, characteristic of Derrida's deconstructive work. "Stand", position – or commitment – and technique render not an undecidable complicity between text, reading and reader, but a clear identity on the side of the reader. The manner in which deconstruction is used indicates this identity as, amongst other descriptors, definitely academic and intellectual.

Spivak carefully and consistently manoeuvres deconstruction and "stand" throughout these essays. Deconstruction is not, phonocentrically, used to motivate the stand. Deconstruction is not used to ground the socially critical conclusions, but merely to activate a reading which leads to the critical conclusion. Moreover, Spivak uses deconstruction, supported by feminist, psychoanalytic and Marxist theory, to expose the (political) practice within theory, and to expose the "mere theory" in political practices – the latter is particularly clear in her readings of Devi's "Draupadi" and "Stanayadini" and

in her criticism of the historiography of the Subaltern Studies group. The complexity of Spivak's textual work is demonstrated by the fact that her feminism depends on critical readings of other "feminisms" and on a commitment to woman in the Third World which never tries to construct identities. If Spivak is termed "Marxist" it must be – as far as this collection is concerned – because she uses Marxian textuality to read Marx beyond Marx.

This complexity too, points to Spivak's real stand or position as the effort of an academic to make theory and practice co-incide. Commitment – like "fear, pleasure and desire" – is not allowed to deconstruct itself. Yet, a South African academic may recognise in this position the very position her/his textual reality is asking her/him to question deeply, if not to forego. The term "deconstructive practice", often used by Spivak, does not hold. A deconstructive attitude might remind one of the illusory and exclusive, forgetful nature of sought-for new political or cultural identities. Even as these facilitate action and might lead to real changes, the very combination of identity and action reveals to what extent identities and actions are unformalisable in the final instance – and closed to political programmes, as was evident in the apartheid programme of formalised separate identities. Spivak's "complicity", derived from deconstruction as epistemology, cannot describe commitment as phonocentric and therefore deconstructible moment.

However, Spivak's refusal to remain within "mere theory" is compelling. She explicitly rejects what could be called metaphysizations of deconstruction which would castrate it as a potential critical practice – "narrow" deconstruction which stops at the self-deconstruction inherent to literary texts, aesthetic deconstruction which re-instates the self-identity of literature *via* a deconstructive specificity of language (De Man as criticised by Lentricchia for example), nihilistic or solipsistic philosophisations of deconstruction as well as libidinal recuperations.

Spivak's deconstructivist move starts at the other end of the deconstructibility of language. Being bound to producing a discourse with its implications of supposed origin and telos, the deconstructive awareness here is an awareness of situatedness, placing – or of taking a "stand". Language used discursively cannot be closed in by this discourse but bears the traces of its usage, its user and the user's history, biography, sexuality: "The aspect that interests me most is . . . the recognition, within deconstructive practice, of provisional and intractable starting points in any investigative effort; its disclosure of complicities where a will to knowledge would create oppositions; its insistence that in disclosing complicities the critic-as-subject is herself complicit with the object of her critique; its emphasis upon 'history' and upon the ethico-political as the 'trace' of that complicity – the proof that we do not inhabit a clearly defined critical space free of such traces; and, finally, the acknowledgement that its own discourse can never be adequate to its example." (180)

The Derridean "trace" is here logocentrically solidified around a discursive position which is also a personal, historical and cultural site, and in those terms part of the larger text of "world" and "worlds". Spivak is aware of this

anti-deconstructivist move, but it seems motivated by the inevitable aporia of deconstruction. Since deconstruction is what it is exactly to the extent that it denies having a better truth or being able to oppose a given text in terms of itself as system or identity of any kind, deconstruction works within language as given, within existing texts. This, however, means that it must itself make a leap contaminated by logocentric epistemology: it must select and read a structure, a figuration, a "trace". Spivak, referring to her use of psychoanalytical interpretative schemata, indicates this aporia: "No discourse is possible . . . without the unity of *something* being taken for granted. It is not possible to attend to the trace *fully*. One's own self-contained critical position as attendant of the trace also leads back and forward. It is possible to read them as references, to consolidate them as one's 'history' and 'politics'. Since the trace cannot be fully attended to, one possible alibi is to pay attention to the texts of history and politics as the trace-structuring of positions, knowing that these two texts themselves are interminable." (47)

Deconstruction does not, as is popularly claimed, deny referentiality but, on the contrary, supremely affirms it. This is most clearly visible in deconstruction's admission that it becomes the endless regression of deconstruction itself when it is used as a consistent "method", and thus re-metaphysized. Deconstruction's aporia then opens up into a stand, a definition based on referentiality.

If the aporia of deconstruction means that it opens up onto "taking" a "stand", the stand is not consistent to any truth or system. It is that textual involvement or reading practised by Derrida. Spivak's deconstructivism accentuates this "complicity" of "trace" (reading deconstructively) and "stand" (the point from which the reading proceeds). One is reminded of Derrida's reading of Freud and Lacan – instances of mapping to expose the map. One is also reminded of the Foucauldian consequence of the discursive position: whilst objectifying by means of discourse, one still remains oneself within discourse. Theoretically speaking, it seems as if deconstruction is used to explain away the paradox of the discursive position, "to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him, persistently transforming conditions of impossibility into possibility". (201)

To be a woman, is to use the available definitions and formulations of woman: "... I feel that definitions are necessary in order to keep us going, to allow us to take a stand. The only way that I can see myself making definitions is in a provisional and polemical one: I construct my definition as a woman not in terms of woman's putative essence but in terms of words currently in use." (177) Feminism can only be related to the Third World by both confronting woman in the First World with Third World definitions of woman, and by admitting to one's own definitions. These manoeuvres by Spivak demonstrate what could be termed textuality in action. It denies all signs of essentialistic definition and interpretation and consistently refuses to offer better, opposing truths. Spivak's readings of feminism and Marxism show this as strongly as her analysis of "Stanayadini" does.

The strength of Spivak's deconstructivist readings rests on the full exploitation of the demolition of outside/inside binarisms, enacted by Derridean

deconstruction. First World theory cannot be separated from First World economical exploitation and Third World woman may displace the very "feminist Marxist deconstructivist" position of this isolated instance of discourse. The American intellectualist critic should remember that "a woman in Sri-Lanka has to work 2,287 minutes to buy a T-shirt" (171), in other words s/he cannot plead for changes in the foreign situation without facing the fact that the system which sustains her/him must be changed, that a global change is necessary before the woman in Sri-Lanka can acquire a T-shirt, which is to say: can have that say which will actualize her human rights.

In this sense, Spivak's critical analysis might seem to claim to be the opposite of the simple re-enactment of the humanist and academic tradition of self-criticism which is based on the binarism individual thought/material existence. What she offers instead is criticism as reading: various texts with their hidden identity and meaning/truth assumptions are allowed to interfere with and subvert each other, thus showing, not a better truth or a random play, but the extent to which meaning operated in one direction can denote the displacement of another meaning, the manner in which the claim to a presence rests on an exclusion or absence. The code of this reading of textuality is "reversal and displacement". (13)

The thrust – and commitment – of these textual readings is to counter-act what the analyses repeatedly expose: that binarism upholds domination. Binarisms analysed here, are, amongst others: man/woman, poetry/history, poet/woman, literature/the world, First World/Third World, use value/surplus value, theory/practice and history/literature. "Reversal and displacement" amount to exposing the hidden text or agenda on which the oppositions employed in a certain discourse, and which ensures its unity, rest, unmasking the trace-like nature of the discourse and its lack of origin as originality. Thus the First World/Third World opposition rests on a hidden postindustrial economical agenda of the First World, whereas Wordsworth's maturation as a poet rests on the exclusion of his real experiences of the atrocities of the French Revolution as well as on the suppression of his own illegitimate paternity. This reading by way of reversal/displacement theoretically explicates Spivak's position, i.e. the "stand".

This deconstructive manoeuvre then refuses an aesthetics of non-meaning as much as it refuses to intimate that its reading is based on the text (as is the case in conventional criticism, e.g. New Criticism) or on a systematisable, non-identical relationship between text and reader (as is the case with Shoshana Felman for example). It acknowledges that displacement too would deny itself should it become a systematics.

These highly informative, intelligent essays then invite the reader to forget a certain systematic gap which could hardly be called an obstacle, but which excludes, even while this issue is thematised, the academic and intellectual position – in the USA, at the universities of high late-capitalism – of Spivak's practice.

The essays deserve individual scrutinising and in the following brief summaries are attempted.

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Spivak's mode of criticism is endorsed in her reading of Coleridge's *Biographia*, the first essay in this collection. With a cunning (rather than a deconstructive) twist the conventional critic's desire to know by interpretation is allegorised in this text's inadvertent submission to the impossibility of enacting a unification of being and knowledge, thought and writing. The letter which definitely divides the text's desire for unitary coherence is read psychoanalytically as self-castration by the author. The insertion of the imaginary letter amounts to a submission to the law of the Other. Spivak does not avoid the conventional critic's implicit question: how can the reader avoid being in some way responsible for his reading, and thereby being the author and law which similarly cuts or amputates the text? Her answer points in the direction of the deconstructivist aporia: epistemological conventions simultaneously enable and disable reading. In the next essay, on the intertextual borrowing between Yeats's "Ego Dominus Tuus" and Dante's "La Vita nuova", the figure of abdication/recuperation which performs the occlusion of woman in the name of the emergence of the poet and poetry, unwittingly comes to describe Spivak's own mode of complicity between text and reader. Deconstruction's abdication from legitimising a stand is the point where deconstruction recuperates a committed (here feminist) viewpoint. At this point, as in many of these essays, deconstruction and a psychoanalytically informed feminism as well as a Foucauldian discourse criticism begin to support each other ("Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing historiography" and "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern; A Woman's Text from the Third World").

Deconstructivists would probably delight in the essay on *To the Lighthouse* in which "making a sentence" – briefly the "copula" – is used to describe the opposing epistemological forms of the logic of non-contradiction and art, which are separated and linked by a discourse of madness, stating the necessity of making a copula. This figure is then used to describe the writing of the book as such, facilitated by a denial of the binarity of author/book or biography/writing. If writing amounts to being the agent of your own copula, instead of the predication of the man's copula, then a psychoanalytical theory of desire may explain the link between writing and woman's ovulation, which is an autonomous productivity independent of actual copulation with or dissemination by a man. Spivak here introduces the notion of "womb envy" in aid of a theory of female literary production.

In the essay on Wordsworth, "Sex and History in 'The Prelude' ", deconstruction of logocentrism and feminist criticism of the ideology of "male universalism" seem to coincide contradictorily. Criticism of ideology presupposes a theory of social truth and untruth and can only function by way of hierarchical oppositioning. In Spivak's reading, textual reading as such is supposed to take the place of ideological criticism. The binarisms art/life and high art/banal reality (biography, politics, reality, sexuality) facilitate a supplementary logic according to which life is comprehended and transcended by poetry, yet these binarisms constitute the poem only by suppression of life

and reality in the name of art. To turn this into social criticism, Spivak once more has to employ psychoanalytic theories of self, imagination and male sexuality. Deconstruction then tends to become an interpretative inventory or argumentative repertoire.

Deconstruction dismantles the opposition between subjective autonomy and history and, in addition, that between the public and the private by tracing the operational effects of these binarisms in specific literary and discursive texts. In doing so, it finds ideology as an effect of the double bind position in which writer and critic find themselves: to be constituted by discourse and language while constituting it. Spivak tries to introduce a deconstructivist revision of the concept of ideology which would seek to explain the latter as heterogeneous and discontinuous effect producing an undecidability where humanist and logocentric convention would maintain a border. Ideology is reversed: no longer the hidden link between production and determination of subject and structure, it is a textual place where reading picks up indeterminacies. To quote an anecdotal example from Spivak: if male academics welcome female academics in their midst because they so convincingly have begun to look like academics, this means that they have begun to look like male academics. At this point the terms "academic" and "equality between the sexes" become undecidable and show up a sexist ideology on the part of male academics.

Speaking about her own application of Marxist and psychoanalytic criticism, Spivak remarks: "To my way of thinking, the discourse of the literary text is part of a general configuration of textuality, a placing forth of the solution as the unavailability of a unified solution to a unified or homogeneous, generating or receiving, consciousness. This unavailability is often not confronted. It is dodged and the problem apparently solved, in terms perhaps of unifying concepts like 'man', the universal contours of a sex-, race-, class-transcendent consciousness as the generating, generated, and receiving consciousness of the text." (78) Spivak's reading tries to stage this textuality: it picks out hidden undecidables in apparent unified meanings (such as Wordsworth's formulations of the imagination; of the poet as androgynous self and of human value as poetic value); it reads absences and suppressed meanings back into the text, thus exposing the disunified nature of poetically formalised meanings (such as Yeats's and Dante's references to women); it refuses to read Marxism or Feminism as closed orders ("Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" and the criticism of French and international Western Feminism); it uses psychoanalytic or other knowledge but never reduces the text to these. In this way a certain textual procedure which is never given a final definition and never formalised comes to the fore (as in the readings of Devi's short stories). Since textuality is never finally defined, reading is open-ended – political, feminist, Marxist or any other extrapolatory means could be used.

Reading then serves to expose and protect the text as trace. In this context, "displacement" comes to denote a double procedure: apparently unified meaning is read as a displacement or perhaps even a symptom, not of psychoanalytical deep structures, but of the poet's effort to formulate an

apparently unified meaning. Secondly displacement denotes the shift of meaning which reading brings to the text and which in fact refers to the reader's position. The refusal to offer solutions expresses the acceptance of being within the economic, political, racial and sexual texts of the world. Yet, obviously, such a refusal has nothing to do with proposing a random play of traces or with the celebration of non-meaning by what Spivak, with an obvious reference to *Tel Quel, écriture* and Julia Kristeva, calls "the cops of the signifier". Spivak insists on a cognitive reading which allows the reading to take up a position in economic, sexual and other contemporary actualities.

Deconstructivist displacement reading as "social theory" is demonstrated in amongst others "Feminism and Critical Theory" and "The Politics of Interpretation". Woman's work deconstructs both the Marxian use value/exchange value opposition and the Freudian family based development of sexual identities, the former since woman's sexuality, *jouissance* and reproduction (as is clear from her other essays on similar topics) do not fit into these categories and the latter because Freud – and this is not new – ignores the historical and political economy co-constituting the family text. What is needed, is not a further refinement of categories, which would amount to a further reinforcement of "epistemic violence", within these two discourses, but an acknowledgement of multitextuality. This may destroy the unity of these discourses, but it may also deliver new readings of political, economic and sexual realities, especially realities such as modern postindustrialist society, which have relied on continuist and analogous readings of Freud and Marx, as Spivak strikingly demonstrates in "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value". Instead of paranoically translating woman's labour into a Marxian category such as wage labour, woman's labour should be allowed to displace Marxian categories and in the process, to uncover hidden potentialities, undecidabilities or suppressed absences in the Marxian text.

Spivak rereads Marx's theory of value in this way, showing that Marx saw the use value/surplus or exchange value opposition as a differential rather than a binarism. Remaining within the binarism, postindustrial society represses the question of alienation, expressed in the analyses of the money form in Marx. This allows economist late-capitalism to forget that it depends on an "international division of labour" for its own reproduction, or in other words on the suppression and exploitation of the worker in the Third World. What Spivak argues is not, of course, that Marx should not be forgotten but, rather, that postindustrial First World society is forced, by the development of its own text, to "forget" the Third World. Forgetting the Third World – to expand on Spivak's argumentation – may take the form of sending in money and food supplies, exporting T-shirts or weapons. "Benevolent colonialism", a characteristic of First World women trying to discover woman in the Third World, is an effect of this forgetting. Global postindustrial economy and international feminism both play on the binarisms which keep their own positions intact.

Spivak exposes and thereby warns against a criticism of ideology and technology which itself rests on humanist presuppositions – those presuppositions which have created these modes of thought and have facilitated

domination in the first place. What is to be sought is a pedagogical practice which would be "the arena of cultural explanations which would question the explanations of culture". (117) Displacement reading and anti-humanism meet here as a social critique - critique since Spivak ultimately exposes not the content or values of ideological and technological exploitative systems but their conditions of possibility. Aware of deconstruction's denial that a sovereign subject can write the text of ideological criticism while retaining full control, the essays work at destroying the remnants of the humanist ideology of self-criticism (as self-improvement which will improve the world by improving its own discourse). Spivak reads ideological displacement as discursive phenomenon in the historiographic work of the Subaltern Studies group which imposes a class consciousness concept on its object (the subaltern in India), by reading certain cognitive and other omissions in the reports of historians of the period as indications - by way of reversal and effect - of a consciousness which the historian could not or would not see. Spivak suggests that the group's reading of the subaltern itself has to function by means of omission or exclusion, effected by a - necessary? - choice of method. Method as (politically committed) position of the historian renders the content undecidable; the historian's stand and his discourse cannot be separated. The subaltern as absence should be *read* rather than used as informative or innovative interpretation.

In her readings of Devi's texts the avoidance of present feminist interpretations is a priority. One could read Spivak to imply that even though woman exists in all worlds, "feminism" perhaps does not and even does not have to. A second priority for Spivak is to remain aware of the way in which the subaltern woman speaks - by not speaking in recognisable forms. Spivak tries to move beyond a binary awareness of the otherness of the other which is bound to find methodological means of covering - and thus maintaining - the distance from the other. The speech of the other woman - the "subaltern" woman of the Third World - would have to be heard as a non-communication, a *différance* enacting reversals and displacements in existent discourses, including the discourse which tries to listen: "... the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic." (207)

The search for similarities, the imposition of quasi identities and sameness between all women, the condescending acknowledgement of values in subaltern women which actually are desired values of western women (black women are sexually more spontaneous, thus more liberated, etc.) is strongly rejected. Any escape route out of the problem of the other by means of a perfect listening device - the logocentric notion of theory and discourse - is strongly rejected, as is the notion that certain theories are "too elitist to cope with revolutionary feminist material" (179) - the withholding of discourse which betrays a similar logocentric judgment.

The critical formulation of that epistemological-ontological confusion which thinks that one cannot speak of (i.e. *know*) the other unless one *is* the other, is an example of the analytical readings of problems of political commitment which deconstruction, as used by Spivak, can offer. A telling example is the feeling that the white man cannot ever hope to be on the side

of the black man. In the academic tradition this confusion gives rise to discourses of conscience parading as discourses of commitment, and perhaps exposing the deconstructability of "commitment". In practice this is often exposed as a lack of commitment. This "confusion" might explain why theoretical discourse is used as a replacement of political activism and is often experienced as the opposite of activism and as threatened by the latter. The belief that racial and economic differences will be overcome once he, the black man, owns what the white man can own, is another example.

While pleading for different forms of reading, the plea rests on the position that any theory of reading ultimately disables reading. In Spivak's hands, this is not a paradox; rather, the refusal to interpret and the suppression of the desire to change textuality into knowledge amount to an opening-up of the possibility not to stop interpreting, not to stop opening up the discourse in which one is.

3

In this section I should like to introduce some critical points about Spivak's "feminist Marxist deconstructivist position", using the South African context as basis.

The choice of context is as necessarily arbitrary as all "framing" is, as Spivak herself argues. Following Spivak, such a framing exposes the position of the critic. If Spivak's deconstructivist practice is questioned as to its specific political relevance within South African political and populist demands, the "stand" of the question is a desire for redeeming theory – the form in which the western academic traditionally experiences her/his social relevance. The desire itself supposes an identity between theory trying to answer the needs of the day and practice being the implementation of such a theory. One could ask whether such an identity presupposition might explain the co-incidence of theoretical puritanism and political activism to which many activist South African discourses bear witness. Such a demand for applicationary validity denies that theory is as much an historical-cultural discursive effect as is practice. Whilst asking for a co-incidence of theory and practice, it implies that theory and practice are essentially different and that the one can stand in for the other, "stand in for" being that which suppresses what Derrida has called supplementarity.

To admit that the black, lower class woman is not included in feminist discourse (it is not sufficient merely to refer to "the maids upstairs in the guest quarters", Spivak notes) is obviously not sufficient to undo the binarism inherent to the effort to "speak about the other"/"not being able to speak about the other"/"wondering how to speak about the other" or, the worst form, speaking for the other (like: doing something for the other). Spivak's efforts at confronting an either mystified or theoretically politicised otherness with flexible Third World identities indicate that white academic identity, as much as black and white radicalist identity, should be read as effects of processes of exclusion or discursive appropriation rather than as identity. If South African blackness at this stage of history articulates itself in, amongst

others, white academic discourse on the problematics of the other, how does black identity articulate itself as that which is excluded by this emergence? Are anti-intellectualist or anti-theoretical responses to academic efforts at post-colonialism not simply affirming the logocentric power claims of these discourses, asking, as they implicitly do, not that theory disappears but that theory should be the truth or language of a practice? Is a tendentious critical reading of Spivak's essays of cultural politics one of the texts in which that which is excluded by anti-theoretical activist discourse emerges?

In describing her own position as well as that of others as a "constituting/constituted" one, Spivak repeats the Foucauldian definition of the discursive subject as being the intertextual meeting point of various discourses – at one and the same time an insertion into and an actualisation of a specific intertextual weaving. S/he is positioned by discourse by her/himself positioning discourse. In the Foucauldian analysis speech and knowledge cannot move beyond this irreducible positioning. An effect of the irony of discourse explicated by the Foucauldian description is that discourse can name but never know the other as its object. Naming misses what it names. The inverse also holds. Since the "other" can only emerge as discursive object, and since referentiality is a discursive function and not a function of reality, discourse is free to speak about anything, in any manner.

Admitting to a subject position, Spivak might model the typical academic who can endlessly discuss discourse. This impasse is one of the epistemological ironies of logocentric thought exploited by deconstruction. However, the irony attains an affirmative meaning in Spivak's readings. Commitment cannot be a simple acknowledgement of historical positioning in the form of a principle, since positioning has always already taken the form of principles, ideologies, positions, etc. Commitment appears to be the acceptance of the position, not in the form of a principle but in the form of a perception that principles are the means towards being mobile within history. Phonologocentric principled identifications – as in activism – celebrate mobility by way of options for positions. The price to be paid for this, is the condition of possibility for mobility: an illusory conflation of theory and practice.

If Spivak's readings of the work of the Subaltern Studies Group and of Mahaswati Devi's short stories support such an interpretation, they would also have to support the further interpretation that Spivak's texts have to be read as reversal-displacement events within academic/intellectual/westernist/late-capitalist/economist/USA textuality. South African cultural activists who reject deconstruction may have a point when they suspect that deconstruction could only emerge in such a text (and in anti-humanist Paris?).

The accusation is a reaction to the feeling that deconstruction institutionalises a systematics of the impossibility of systematics, therefore of the impossibility of those discourses developed on the factory floor amongst repressed workers, amongst politically emancipated black authors who want to reach their communities, etc. Such an institutionalisation is another well-known aporia in deconstructivist discourse.

However, the criticism of deconstruction is not a criticism of the rejection of power Derridean deconstruction implies, but of its failure to provide a

theoretical identity-base for power acquisition. The format of this criticism is a principle – of liberation – substituted for a principle of power, i.e. the real, material means whereby liberation will be achieved practically, a factuality the South African situation at present bears out. Spivak's reading might support the proposition that accusations of decadence and politically defeatist ineffectuality express a desire for the institute, for the police and for power just as the refusal of principle by the principled but neutralised/neutered academic may express such a desire. A point also inherent to *In Other Worlds* is that discursive structures of power are neither right nor wrong, simply on the grounds of their being anti-power or pro-liberation. The eternal truth of liberation might give rise to a temporary truth of equal franchise, leading to a different distribution of power but not to liberation from power. An analysis of the conscious deployment of the non-identity of a term such as "liberation" might support such a suspicion.

Spivak's own discursive position cannot be analysed in terms of how "westernist" or non-committal it is – commitment being also a term for gestures of engagement which do not fully involve and do not harm those making them. To the contrary, these essays beg another question: can "deconstructivist Marxist feminist" analyses be read in terms of political emancipation, based on logocentric presuppositions or are they saying that such a judgment is incoherent from the start? Are they to be seen as a challenge to the demand for commitment? Spivak's engagement belies the latter, yet her position – summarised in the phrase quoted above – invites such a judgment. The answer seems to lie somewhere between. Spivak obviously wants to politicise deconstruction and does so effectively in her readings and pedagogical intentions as discussed in section 2, yet for this purpose deconstruction has to become an epistemology, something it could not be without losing the very reasons why it makes a point, i.e. without losing its consistent negativity while residing in logocentric aporias. Spivak's "framing" of deconstruction says more about her political "stand" than deconstruction could. Since anything could be deconstructed to demonstrate or expose anything, since, as Spivak states from the beginning, a deconstructive practice cannot be read in isolation from the position whence it emanates, are we to assume that deconstructivist strategies are as much a "free for all" as some of deconstruction's opponents claim?

The answer seems to be that a deconstructivist exercise imposes a responsibility it seems to exclude – a responsibility for the way in which it is used, for the purpose or for the lack of purpose, since deconstruction can, precisely, not provide a redeeming theory for the way it is used. It opens up a gap which is that place where the discursive speaker is. If s/he denies this, it is not deconstruction's fault. More scientifically stated, deconstruction could not be used to explain a lack of purpose as little as it could support a purpose selected.

In this context what is lacking in Spivak's essays is an admission to the discursive position in its complexity – *also* USA, *also* academic and sophisticated, *also* at a variance with workerist movements or severely repressed societies. The admission – staying within the deconstructivist sensibility – is

not a disclaimer. When First/Third World reception of deconstruction uses this as a disclaimer, the intertextual reversal/displacements at work in such a contact between the USA and a revolutionary impulse in the South African locality could be read in terms of the discursive positions involved (if not "at stake"). If deconstruction is read as a late-capitalist luxury, then deconstruction is itself where it would wish to be – a differential between texts, a non-entity and without origin, be this Derrida himself or Derridean theoreticians. By the same token, such a difficult lack of stand should not be a disclaimer.

What one has to conclude, at this stage, is that deconstruction has not proved itself able to survive without a stand. This may be sad but it is also consistent. Yet the nagging feeling lingers that this "free floating" materiality is not what deconstruction wanted, at least not at the time of its development in Paris.

In the discussion above, confirmations of Spivak's discursive subject position have been pointed out. Spivak makes a move which inserts her into discourse and, indeed, she finds herself fighting the power games inherent to discourse, and fighting the irony of discourse irreducibly moving at a variance from its object. Spivak's collection of essays proves valid to the extent that they honestly and consistently ask the question their positioning imposes on them: how not to subalternise? how to make criticism of sexism into insurgency and action? how to stop "(m)othering" the other? how to save Marx from discursive idealism on both the consumerist and the modern materialist/Marxist side?

Spivak clearly avoids the pitfalls of an anti-humanist systematization which always tends to defeat itself by becoming a logocentric definition based on epistemologies which deny the subject while not being able to transcend the inherent cognitive, methodological subject-position. Her strongly cognitive analytic admits of a self-identical position from which the analyses are launched. Spivak seems to state that every effort at making a systematics out of deconstruction, in other words at proposing a deconstruction which remains identical to itself, is the very self-deconstruction Derrida and his critics are aware of. Deconstruction "proper" eventually shows that systematization "is" not outside a textual/contextual historical/cultural materiality. If this means that we are in an epistemological dead-end, it also means that we can only break out of it by thinking ourselves out of it. What is proposed here, is nothing less than the viability of such thinking.

To propose this, Spivak, however, has to move out of deconstruction as a discourse which has something to "say" or to do. As she demonstrates the unavoidability of this, she also relates deconstruction to the unpredictability of arbitrary contexts. What is achieved, is the ironical affirmation of the power of systematic discourse and the extent to which subjectivity and action rely on this. Yet, this "achievement" is not what *In Other Worlds* aims at.

Speaking from a context in which the demand for relevance has an important substance, failing to admit to this discrepancy seems a failure of the collection as such. Spivak rejects Kristeva's oppositioning of interpretation and the unnamable (or the "object") since it leads, as Spivak shows, to

revolutionary activity being described as a paranoid effort to re-appropriate the abject object. In this Spivak implicitly denies that revolutionary actions have to involve a certain phonocentrism. The split self of desire is not a deconstructivist term. This admission is not always clearly stated in these essays. Spivak's reading of Draupadi's final triumph over the bureaucratic, pragmatist policeman amounts to the reading of an undecidable moment of "unreasonable fear" evoked by Draupadi for whom this seems to be a moment of libidinal, phonocentric self-identification. To merely displace the argument about nationalism (in "The Politics of Interpretation" in which Kristeva is also discussed) by showing how nationalism is made non-original in male political practice and discourse by virtue of its being infected by patriarchalist ideologies, in fact betrays phonocentric assumptions in the argumentative vantage point.

One may deduce from this "failure" that it is impossible to deconstruct binarisms with critical and political import without by the same stroke activating the binarity of the critical theoretical activity as such: subject/object, discourse/"reality", method/truth, self/other. Spivak's essays need to be read within the productive powers of these binarisms, yet they cannot objectify the textual positionings on which they depend. I would like to suggest, however, that they could be showing that another binarism arises, i.e. between mere deconstructive playfulness (a popular accusation against deconstruction) and power-investment by means of using a theory (the bogey-man of all deconstructivist enterprise). In other words, one would like Spivak to state that the stand in fact comes first, that deconstruction follows and that this in a sense is contra-deconstruction. In a systematic and consistent reading of deconstruction it would not be contra.

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Spivak's deconstructionism reads as an effort to make deconstruction politically valid and thus as a means to once more bridge the gap between theory and practice. However, the essays in this collection also demonstrate that deconstruction can only be politicised under conditions which invite deconstruction.

Derridean deconstruction, which I would like to take as deconstruction in its purest and most consistent form, might have leftish sympathies but as an approach or strategy with intellectual import it is committed to the denial of all epistemological guarantees for action, especially political action which is structured around a specific programme (liberation and change of society). Such action has to insist on the possibility of the co-incidence of word/thought/ideal and reality/world/thing. It has to insist, not on a closed subject of consciousness, but at least on the validity of the phonocentric leap of the subject-in-action, as of the subject-in-speech. It has to insist on the phonocentricity of subjective identification with ultimate political goals, to the point of blind - or self-sacrificial - passionate action. It has to insist on the legitimacy of a discourse of principles as truths, which can and should be actualised.

Deconstruction in its “pure” form introduces and demonstrates the irreducibility of “meaning”. Referential values of language composites may be shown up, but only to the extent that they are forever further translatable while at the same time, and for the same reason, being themselves always already caught up in language, translations of translations. This might certainly mean that the trace partakes of history and of the world, as Michael Ryan has it, but the possible systematics, the pattern or story of such partaking and tracing cannot be disclosed within a strict deconstructive venture. Deconstruction seems most effective when it successfully refrains from posing a counter-metaphysics and radically and consistently remains aware of its own insights. If citationality and translatability, if meaning as the always already said and non-original, are irreducible, then all deconstruction can do is to incessantly seek out the metaphysically synthesizing constructs which define textuality and submit them to infinite regress.

Political interpretations and applications of deconstruction such as Michael Ryan’s do try to halt *différance* and the trace at a point where a referential value is solidified into a cause for action or a discursive value. Ryan in fact takes deconstruction as a discourse with specific, politically translatable, repeatable and applicable referents. Deconstruction in conjunction with Marxism (reread deconstructively) conjures up the utopia of a “radical democracy” or a “radical socialism” which is structured around an admission of heterogeneity. Which Third World revolution will be interested in this? Should society indeed prove itself able to decentralize itself to the point where every minority has full access and power to influence the dominating and organizing structures, what would one have but democratic functionalism with an extremely tight and closed organisation and what else would this be but the metaphysics of democracy come true?

If forced to “say” something, one may guess that deconstruction would point out that the full admission of heterogeneity and differentiability cannot ever be systematised. This surely is a basic logic to which even deconstruction submits itself. Derrida’s work is valid inasmuch as it is consistent to this premise. When deconstruction says this – because it *has* to say this – it also states that it cannot become political. How can a radical socialism or democracy, not to speak of a liberation from racist structures, ever be actualised without socio-political structuration and systematisation?

It seems as if deconstruction becomes political at that point where its adversity to present political activities becomes clear and is acknowledged. Deconstruction might, for example, definitely disclose that political action involves a phonocentric leap in which the subject appropriates itself in the form of a principle or of an action. If referentiality ultimately is the basic form in which the meaning producing subject accommodates itself in the world, it also describes commitment to causes or stands. Deconstruction cannot do more but to demonstrate how discourse, political meaning production and thus also political action implement referentiality metaphysically.

Deconstruction “proper” cannot call such action illusory, false or invalid in any other way. Neither has it done so, at least not Derridean deconstruction.

But every effort to use deconstruction to motivate certain forms of political action implies that it could judge in such a way.

It is this inconsistency which is worrisome in Ryan's application which is strongly influenced by Spivak's deconstructivist work. If deconstruction coincides with Marxism in its disqualification of idealism and of the a-historical a-material subject; if, like Marxism, it renders the subject/"world" binarism undecidable and treats it as an irreducible relationality, it obviously has to do so with *all* forms of ideology and idealism. Ryan's mistake is strategically to let anti-metaphysics and anti-bourgeois ideology coincide, as if a socio-political arrangement which is free from ideology and idealism were predictable on a deconstructivist basis.

These critical remarks on the effort at politicising deconstruction do not constitute a proper Marxist rejection of deconstruction such as Foley wants to offer, but it underscores her conclusions – albeit for different reasons and on the ground of a different reading of deconstruction. Foley's reading, like Ryan's, uncritically turns deconstruction into epistemology. Deconstruction has to deny some basic premises of Marxism proper.

If deconstruction can be used to show why metaphysical presuppositions are the conditions of possibility of discourses of power, and why in fact all discourses, read for meaning, are power games, it does not follow that deconstruction can also explain not only why revolutions re-institute power before, during and after the revolution, but also why this might be wrong and how it can be avoided. Deconstruction can neither abolish nor support power. It cannot – or should not be made to – take up a *bourgeois* stand where all power is wrong in the light of liberalist-humanist values.

The various forms and the contradictory outcomes of Marxist or semi-Marxist revolutions in the Third World demanding redefinitions of Marxism cannot be used to prove a "deconstructivist dogma" of heterogeneity instead of dogma as overdetermination. Surely to imply, as Spivak does, that the forgetting of production and alienation as posited relationally in Marx is the reason for exploitation, poverty and suppression in the Third World, amounts to an effort to re-apply Marx and thus to construct the very kind of continuist discourse against which Spivak repeatedly argues. In this case Spivak uses a deconstructivist "point" to explain why the Marxian critique of political economy still holds and why this is most apparent in the Third World. I am not arguing that this conclusion is wrong, but merely that deconstruction cannot be used in this way. A deconstructive restraint in political matters such as these might demonstrate that Marx is indeed used in the Third World as a discursive referent, as a means to identify oneself, the enemy and one's ideals – but not as a truth about society.

Deconstruction in its political applications thus far comes dangerously close to a mere liberalist-humanist stand. Politicised as a criticism of power, deconstruction will remain within the institution, rendering it utterly vulnerable to the accusations of mere co-optation and mere liberalist self-criticism that have been launched against it.

What disables deconstruction as politics, however, also disables its usage in such a form of criticism: if the referent is denied any stability, power cannot

be accused. South African activists would therefore reject it, and American deconstructivists trying to use it in a belated form of Neo-Marxist or other modes of intra-institutional criticism, deserve the accusation that they support the continuing reproduction of humanist institutions. Deconstruction cannot ground action.

I would like to return to a question stated at the closing of the previous section. Why use deconstruction to motivate a stand, even when this is done extremely carefully as in Spivak's case?

Why – unless the validity of an intra-institutional criticism which might improve the establishment instead of destroying it, is implicitly adhered to? Without accusing Spivak and others of unreflected and conventional bourgeois habits I want to argue that the “application” of deconstruction invites these rejections.

It might have become tiresome to offer further explanations of deconstruction's aporia. Finally, however, if deconstruction *counters* the condition that it has to reject discourse as repression of the trace and if the consistency of such a position demands that the threat of “infinite regress” or the accusation of liberalist anarchy be confronted, then it lands itself in a further aporia and self-contradiction. Its very consistency signals the intrusion of a desire to make signifier and signified co-incide, to *represent différance*. Deconstruction is an impossible project and it is perhaps only in the revelation of this impossibility that its proper value can be appreciated.

What deconstruction does is only possible in theory. Obviously to deconstruct the theory/practice binarism and then to state that such deconstruction is a feature of the world as text does not render deconstruction anything more than a theory of how the binarisms can be overcome, a theory which would then have to be “applied”. What this shows, is that deconstruction behaves like a theory and is used in that way, i.e. as if it were itself still completely caught up in the very binarisms it so ably disqualifies. To “use” or “apply” deconstruction means that the binarism is re-instated.

Deconstruction is consistent to itself in that it does *not* provide that kind of social theory which would close the gaps of efforts to shape heterogeneity and displacement into social forces. In other words, the lack of a social theory which could support a programme for political action is part and parcel of deconstruction proper and no disqualification, as Ryan sees it. Efforts to change this and make deconstruction read the world lead to unsatisfactory demonstrations of open-endedness as the textuality of the world which do not explain where phonocentric action and logocentric social change fit in. This failure might be symptomatic of a certain consistent “failure” in Derrida's work.

If a South African academic in the fourth year of a state of emergency decides that it has become useless to develop literary theory as a means of critical thought, that it has also become useless to believe that such critical thought can be directed and effected as a “subversion of authority”, as the Oklahoma Symposium on “Marxism and Deconstruction” claims deconstruction to be, then such a decision cannot be based on deconstruction. Deconstruction may state that the academic position is a trace which

translates her/him back into social "apartheid" reality, but it cannot explain why s/he should specifically use this kind of retranslation and it cannot explain why s/he should take such a logocentric, centralizing self-definition seriously.

It has been stated (by Marx in *Die deutsche Ideologie*) that social criticism within an institution such as academia is not necessarily illusory and self-protective as such, but that it becomes so to the extent that it refuses to become political and refuses to allow the political conclusions of a "stand" to be realised fully. A well-known strategy for remaining within the humanist strongholds whilst criticising them, is to allow your criticism to be termed scientific, based on a theory, referring back to a systematics, etc. It is merely "academic", merely "scientific" or, even, merely "pedagogical", whatever the aims of the pedagogy and science might be. Criticising the institution might be a *result* of this double-bind situation.

In present day South Africa the effort to politicise the critical theoretical position often leads to dismissal (by the university) and detention (by the police). I submit that deconstruction cannot venture to explain such incisive effects of binary displacements (between theory and practice) since these are run on the demand for phonocentric positioning and for epistemological closure (on the side of the frustrated and doubting academic for example).

Yet deconstruction's refusal to provide answers and its refusal of social theory or political applicability in this sense could be its strongest political statement. By showing that power as well as the subversion of power, domination and revolution are operated by illusory constructs of fulfilled meaning, by an abyss in which, perhaps, Heidegger's "Sein" and "Seiendes" are irreducibly undecidable, and by at the same time showing that the abyss can never constitute a "stand", a philosophical or political position, we are confronted by the stand as a purely personal responsibility which renders us vulnerable to the referent we adhere to as much as it forces us to embrace this referent. This is Spivak's "position". A deconstructivist approach should not make any academic feel more at ease in the seats of institutionalised academia just because s/he sees through its illusory and dangerous metaphysical ploys.

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