

ARRESTING DECONSTRUCTION: ON GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK'S CULTURAL CRITICISM

JOSÉ ÁNGEL GARCÍA LANDA
Universidad de Zaragoza

(Resumen)

Como figura destacada de la segunda ola de la crítica deconstructivista en América, Gayatri Spivak ha desarrollado un enfoque crítico en el que la hermenéutica post-estructuralista se dirige hacia la crítica política comprometida con la problemática del post-colonialismo y el feminismo de base marxista. En este artículo se señalan las características metodológicamente progresivas de la crítica de Spivak en su libro *In Other Worlds*, y también la resolución insatisfactoria de algunos de los principales problemas allí tratados. A pesar de su interés innegable, la teoría de Spivak es a menudo inconsistente en sus intentos de conciliar los intereses y metodologías de la crítica retórica y la crítica político-cultural.

.....

Deconstruction, for Spivak, is neither a conservative aesthetic nor a radical politics but an intellectual ethic which enjoins a constant attention to the multiplicity of determination. At the same time, Spivak is absolutely committed to pinpointing and arresting that multiplicity at the moment in which an enabling analysis becomes possible. (MacCabe 1988: xii)

Thus Colin MacCabe in the preface to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *In Other Worlds: Essays on Cultural Politics* (Spivak 1988a). But are the commitments McCabe points out compatible with each other? Should we not assume, rather, that their tension offers the very paradigm of undecidability? How does Spivak negotiate the transition from one commitment to the other?

Most readers will know Spivak mainly as the author of the long introduction prefixed to her translation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. Her book *In Other Worlds*, a collection of essays written in the ten-year period 1977-1987, has on the whole a quite different feel. Here the concepts of the margin and the supplement are personified as woman, the proletariat, the Third World. Derrida's ("non-")concepts become the instruments to analyze ideology, hegemony and the position of the subaltern. Deconstruction is oriented towards international Marxism and feminist criticism. A convergence of these currents of thought will no doubt be fruitful and reciprocally beneficial, and this book is a welcome one.

The issues at stake, however, are complex, and the difficulties of such a convergence are great. Just as this perspective is bound to endorse only certain Marxist or feminist doctrines, it will result in a new version of deconstruction. The "undecidability" school of (ex-)Yale deconstructivist critics (Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Barbara Johnson) does not interest Spivak very much. The integration (or collaboration, or fruitful interruption) of deconstruction with Marxism and feminism requires instead some specific

point at which deconstruction is arrested. Spivak claims to find this point in the logic of deconstruction itself, through

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. . . . (1988a: 180)

Mark this well: the critic-as-subject. Self-deconstruction in the void will not do: it is always done by someone, a subject, with an aim (conscious or unconscious), and from a specific situation. A subject is for Spivak the effect of a complex overdetermination, the convergence of ideological, economic, historical and other strands. It is not a free agent, "a sovereign and determining subject" (Spivak 1988a: 204). But the (subject-)effect becomes now the cause whereby deconstruction can be arrested. No doubt this move could itself be deconstructed. What matters, however, is that Spivak does not wish to deconstruct it--a categorical imperative, if you will, or the absence of free choice. The situation of the feminist or the Marxist critic may be questioned strategically, but that is in order to define it with more precision. In the last analysis it is a given with which she must work.¹ Such a move is bound to be reminiscent of the Sartrean concept of "situation,"² although I imagine Spivak would reject Sartre's humanist perspective.

Fixing the limits of deconstruction thus, with respect to the critic's situation, is not without its problems. A "deconstructive authority" for this move can be found in Derrida, when he remarks that deconstruction always begins in a somewhat arbitrary way:

We must begin *wherever we are* and the thought of the trace, which cannot not take the scent into account, has already taught us that it was impossible to justify a point of departure absolutely. *Wherever we are*: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be. (Derrida 1976: 162)

However, Derrida is not referring here specifically to a social or institutional situation. These can of course be said to be encompassed in the question of method, but I can't help thinking that introducing the critic's personal situation in the analysis will lead towards a new version of humanism.

Following this direction in a rigorous way, Spivak applies deconstructive concepts both to texts and to the contexts in which they are analyzed. She denounces, for instance, the academy's practice of tokenism, through which "the putative center welcomes selective inhabitants of the margin in order better to exclude the margin" (1988a: 107). The examples where Spivak links her theory and her situation as a third-world feminist in the metropolitan academia abound in her writings. "Spivak's theme here," MacCabe observes, "is large: the micro-politics of the academy and its relation to the macro-narrative of imperialism" (1988: x). Indeed, it could be said that Spivak's theme is her own

1. Cf.: "The making-visible of the figure of woman is perhaps not a task that the ["Subaltern Studies"] group should fairly be asked to perform. It seems to this reader, however, that a feminist historian of the subaltern must raise the question..." (1988a: 219).

2. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?"

circumstance, but defined as a subject-position which is the result of multiple social determinations: gender, race, nationality, profession, political agenda, intellectual background.

Her whole approach to theory is feminist in a way which is not always obvious; it is deeply marked by "a certain program at least implicit in all feminist activity: the deconstruction of the opposition between the private and the public" (Spivak 1988a: 103). This self-staging of the critic is dangerous in the sense that it can sound like an *ad hoc* justification at times:

The only way I can hope to suggest how the center itself is marginal is by not remaining outside in the margin and pointing my accusing finger at the center. I might do it rather by implicating myself in that center and sensing what politics make it marginal. Since one's vote is at the limit for oneself, the deconstructivist can use herself (assuming one is at one's own disposal) as a shuttle between the center (inside) and the margin (outside) and thus narrate a displacement. (1988a: 107; cf. also 134, 221)

Spivak seems to be apologizing for choosing to be a professor in an American university instead of returning to India. Still, the academy offers endless opportunities for self-justification, endless strategies to do so, and what they all have in common is not very interesting. We might as well concentrate on their face value. In this sense, Spivak's 'self-justification' is quite convincing. To see her theory as the product of an individual self-justification would be, I think, the shallowest way to apply her teaching that "the exclusivist ruses of theory reflect a symptom and have a history."³ Spivak's justification of her activity certainly deserves to be seen in the wider context she sets it in, a world of subject-positions whether there is no such thing as a sovereign subject or a genuinely individual interest.

A displacement can be narrated. In the first essay of the book, "The Letter as Cutting Edge" (1977), the issues of feminism and the third world, or Spivak's characteristic reflections on her own personal position in the academy and her agenda, are conspicuously absent.⁴ Spivak reads Coleridge in the way Barbara Johnson (or, again, the early Barbara Johnson) might do, showing how Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* deconstructs itself, how its rhetorical structure undoes what the philosophic side of the theory is attempting when taken at facevalue. Like Paul de Man or J. Hillis Miller, Spivak at this point claims that "textuality keeps intelligibility forever at bay" (1988a: 11). But already there are signs of a certain dissatisfaction with deconstruction. In the reflection on the future proliferation of

3. Spivak 1988a: 113. Not all are prepared, however, to accept Spivak's version of her agenda. In Benita Parry's view, "The disparaging of nationalist discourses of resistance" in Spivak's work "is matched by the exorbitation of the role allotted to the post-colonial woman intellectual" (1987: 35).

4. Cf. her comment on the first version of a later article: "What seems missing in these earlier remarks is the dimension of race" (1988a: 81). Read as a novel, *In Other Worlds* presents us with a criticprotagonist developing an increasing sensitivity and alertness to multiple determinations. It may be significant that in Spivak's preface to *Of Grammatology*, the most definite linking of deconstruction to feminism, presenting it as "a shift from the phallogocentric to the hymeneal" occurs precisely while discussing question of how the critic must choose a subject starting from his or her contingent situation (1976: lxxiv-lxxv).

deconstructive readings (1988a: 11), a metatheoretical distancing of Spivak from her own analysis is apparent. And she also shows an interest in the possible ways of arresting deconstruction (whose "philosophical rigor . . . renders it quite useless as a passport to psychoanalytic literary criticism," [1988a: 13]) through the use of "frontier-concepts" (1988a: 13) and playing other disciplines (in this case, psychoanalysis) against the menace of perpetual deconstruction. Spivak defines this as gaining some "elbow room" (1988a: 13) or "turning room" (1988a: 14); she is nearly apologetic for this new turn given to deconstruction when she observes that "the critic might have to admit that her gratitude to Dr. Lacan would be for so object a thing as an instrument of intelligibility" (1988a: 14).

Which instruments of intelligibility is Spivak ready to use? She will certainly use deconstruction. Spivak emphasizes the value of the analyses enabled by deconstruction, notwithstanding the inherent contradictions of the method, as recognized by Derrida himself (MacCabe 1988: xiii). But orthodox literary criticism is not lacking in instruments of intelligibility either (nor in other kind of contradictions), and the moment we step outside of deconstruction we are bound to land in more familiar regions--for instance, an intentionalism that Spivak would like to avoid.

Spivak's commentary of the story "Stanadayini" (by the Indian writer Mahasweta Devi) is apparently yet another addition to the list of anti-intentionalist critical theories.⁵ Apparently, since there are several confusing moves in Spivak's attitude towards authorial meaning. For instance, she claims that "the fear of a critical reading that would question the writer's direct access to his or her meaning is related to the received dogma of the illusion of freedom" (1988a: 97). It seems, however, that what Spivak is aiming at here and in her analysis at large is not the author's access to "his or her" meaning, but rather his or her access to the meaning unearthed by the *critic*. That meaning is "the writer's" only through the critic's representation of the author's ideology and unconscious determinations. It is of course necessary for critics to show that the meanings they find can be said to be the author's in some way (and not the product of the free creativity of the critic), but this does not mean that the author does not have his or her own representation of the meaning of the text. It is obvious that Spivak assumes that Mahasweta Devi has such a representation which can be known and critically evaluated. An intentionalist theory does not ask for much more.

Also, I do not see how, in the "author's reading" of "Stanadayini," "the 'effect of the real' must necessarily be underplayed" (1988a: 244). Mahasweta Devi presents Jashoda, the protagonist, as a mythical mother of multitudes and a patriotic allegory of India; Spivak prefers to focus instead on the literal meaning which conveys that allegory, and analyzes the figure of Jashoda as a paradigm of the exploited subaltern. The effectiveness of the allegory (the "tenor") in Mahasweta Devi's story would seem to depend on the effectiveness of the literal sense (or "vehicle"), rather than draw attention away from it. What Spivak really wants is to rewrite the story. She even chides the author for giving a false turn to the story and forcing an allegorical meaning into it. I happen to agree with Spivak on this particular point; however, I think that what she is rejecting is not merely "the author's

5. Aestheticist versions of anti-intentionalism (like the one in Wimsatt and Brooks 1967) must be distinguished from the deconstructive pronouncements of Barthes (1977) and Derrida ("Signature Event Context", in Derrida 1988). In Spivak, these converge with the Marxist notion (developed in fact by Engels and Lukacs) that a work's reflection of social conditions may go beyond the conscious ideology of the writer.

reading," but also (certain aspects of) the author's *writing* --not merely Mahaswetha Devi's free-floating intention, but the textual authorial intention. And it is clear that in her reading Spivak does not "put aside" the author's "reading," as she claims; rather, she sets it in the wider perspective of the conflict between nationalism and subaltern resistance movements.

In the second essay of the book, a certain "conversion" to feminist criticism is narrated, and it is significant that it occurs in response to the inadequacy of the de Manian doctrine that "the text deconstructs itself" when it comes to articulate an intelligible concept of textual authorial intention.⁶ Ignoring this question turns the radical potential of deconstruction into conservatism. The traditional literary canon, for instance, is left untouched by the de Manian approach to deconstruction. Spivak does not speak of the need to deal with the authorial intention in so many words, but I do not see any other way to interpret her call for a critical methodology which recognizes "the articulated specificity of the 'somethings' that the text wishes, on one level, to mean, and with which it ruses" (1988a: 15). The distinction of these two levels of interpretation, the interpretation of the textual authorial meaning and its deconstruction, would therefore be "the 'minimal idealizations' which constitute the possibility of reading" (1988a: 15). In fact, this is a matter of emphasis; the same distinction is found in Derrida (e.g. 1976: 158) even if sometimes he plays it down. As to Spivak, she often is all too ready to read the author's role as a historical ideological statement (cf. 1988a: 74).

The commentary of "Stanadayini" is an instantiation of Spivak's rule on where to start and what to deconstruct: "You can only read against the grain if misfits in the text signal the way" (1988a: 211). Woman or subaltern modes of representation are the starting points chosen by Spivak.

Spivak analyzes the subaltern as the "absent center" of historiography, "the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic" (1988a: 207). In his analysis of Orientalism, Edward W. Said observes that the subaltern is present as an element of the self-image of the elite: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said 1979: 3). Spivak takes this view one step further, by emphasizing the heterogeneous and fragmented positions that the subaltern colonial subjects are forced into in such an economy, the infiltration of the colonizer in the very self of the colonized.⁷ These analyses are extremely suggestive and useful, and they open whole new avenues for deconstruction.

A desire *not* to arrest deconstruction leads Spivak to arrest deconstruction through feminism, to posit as a center of attention for feminist criticism the autobiographical motivation of feminist readings themselves (1988a: 17). Feminist issues evaporate in deconstruction in the "narrow" sense, deconstruction that systematically undermines its own practice or that ignores the position of the reader vis à vis the ideology of the text.

6. Spivak 1988a: 15, 18. By "textual authorial intention" I am referring to an organizing principle "inside" the text--the historical authorial meaning as inscribed in the text and inferred by the reader, not the prior intention of the author which is dismissed by Wimsatt and Beardsley in "The Intentional Fallacy."

7. Homi Bhabha also emphasizes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which "makes the boundaries of colonial positionality--the division of self / other--and the question of colonial power--the differentiation of coloniser / colonised--different from both the master / slave dialectic or the phenomenological projection of 'otherness'" ("Signs Taken for Wonders" 93-94; qtd. in Parry 1987: 28).

Commenting on how Wordsworth's *Prelude* erases the issues of gender and class which stood at its genesis, Spivak further voices her misgivings about an unqualified notion of "self-deconstructing texts": "If one pulled at a passage like this, the text could be made to perform a self-deconstruction, the adequacy of *The Prelude* as autobiography called into question. But then the politics of the puller would insert itself into the proceeding" (1988a: 76). Here it is clear that Spivak can conceive a self-deconstructing text only by conceiving at the same time a critic who "self-deconstructs" it. The issue is especially relevant for a third world feminist. Spivak shows that the position of woman (both within and without the text) is not neutral and cannot be safely ignored. I find especially interesting her analyses of how women function in male texts as signs or objectified vehicles for a transmission of meaning between male figures (1988a: 15-29; 215-217). The detailed analysis of the intertextuality of Yeats's "Ego dominus tuus" is a fascinating demonstration of the tremendous ease with which such "transmissions of responsibility" are inherited and perpetuated through allusion and stereotype, "from Homer to Virgil to Dante to Milton to Yeats" (1988a: 25). Surely this is one of the best uses which a feminist perspective can make of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The deconstructive moment is therefore a fundamental one in Spivak's analysis, both as a practical strategy of undoing a conceptual construction and as a kind of intellectual imperative not to rest on simple solutions: "It is . . . the deconstructive view that keeps me resisting an essentialist freezing of the issues of gender, race, and class" (1988a: 84). But she despairs of finding a wholly "legitimate" way to stop deconstructing. "It is not possible to attend to the trace *fully*" (1988a: 47), and her reading must ultimately rest on "one possible alibi" of psychological or historical nature (1988a: 47), which is not logically derived from the deconstructive activity. In the later essays there does not seem to be any conclusion reached on this matter. The project of an unending deconstruction is one by which "I [Spivak] am still moved" (1988a: 84) but which will not lead by itself to any political decision. At a certain point,

the investigator seems herself beckoned by the circuit of 'absolute transitivity'.

Without yielding to that seduction, the following question can be asked What is the use of pointing out a that a common phonocentrism binds subaltern, elite authority and disciplinary-critical historian together...? (1988a: 214-215)

We can imagine here Derrida as the *seducteur manqué* whom Spivak sends packing, but it may be telling that eventually it is Terry Eagleton (the original author of the question she asks) who is accused of oversimplification and maybe even a little measure of bad faith (1988a: 215). If Spivak is committed to arresting deconstruction, she is even more clear on the subject of arresting a certain kind of Marxism. Not Marx, though. Together with Derrida, Marx is usually invoked by Spivak as a model of rigor and sure critical instinct.⁸

In Spivak, we find what (as far as I know) we do not find in Derrida: a deconstructive reading of Marx. Spivak identifies in the Marxist theories of the creation of

8. Like most Marxists, Spivak is interested in protecting Marx's original formulations from the interpretations of other Marxists--an last-ditch refuge of individualistic prejudice and authorial authority, or a question of strategy?

value that moment favoured in deconstructive readings, the transitional or marginal element, which makes possible the work of the system while remaining itself in a problematical involvement with the system. The concept in question is that of use-value, which "in the classic way of deconstructive levers, is both outside and inside the system of value-determinations" (1988a: 162). The relation between labor and value is thus not mechanical, but free-floating. According to Spivak, the non-continuist conception of use-value is to be found in Marx's own text in Book One of *Capital*. Spivak's Marx, therefore, is somewhat of a deconstructionist himself. Unlike later Marxists, he abounds in moments of "productive bafflement" (Spivak 1988b: 286) and, like Spivak, he exerts a "prudent" self-restraint by strategically eluding those aspects of his theory that lead to a deconstructive "open-endedness" or an "insertion into textuality" (1988a: 161). This move seems to be ambivalent. Spivak wants to show that we can recuperate Marx by reading him deconstructively, but that very reading apparently shows how Marx retreats from potentially deconstructive moments.

The coherence of Spivak's project is compromised by her adherence to deconstructive doctrines of dubious validity, for instance the claim that as we are structured by languages we therefore cannot "possess" those languages (1988a: 78). This assertion is often found in deconstructive criticism, usually in order to negate the validity of structuralist approaches (in a wide sense). It is, for instance, the objection Derrida raises against speech act theory (Derrida 1988: 39). The problem with this kind of argument is that it is right, and it is therefore given an unwarranted scope. Metalanguage may represent language. It does not thereby jump outside of language to present an objective view of it, but it does enable many semiotic maneuvers that would remain unexplained if we stick to the deconstructivist claim. A dictionary, for instance, uses words to explain words, and its definitions will ultimately found to be circular. But that does not prevent it from being useful as an instrument of communication for the transmission of meanings between speakers. A dictionary does not "possess" language in any definitive way, nor does it attempt to. Rather, it is an instrument that can be used to understand language better in specific circumstances. A similar claim, I think, can be put forward in the case of structuralist models and semiotic theories.

The space thus opened between the circularity entailed by the use of existing codes (or their representations) and the practical effectiveness of this use should not be easily dismissed, since it is the space that justifies the existence and utility of theory. Spivak herself articulates elsewhere such a justification of her own activity as a theorist:

My explanation cannot remain outside the structure of production of what I criticize. Yet, simply to reject my explanation on the grounds of this theoretical inadequacy that is in fact its theme would be to concede to the two specific political stances (masculist and technocratic) that I criticize. (1988a: 110; cf. also 221)

The duplicity of theory does not justify abandoning the enterprise, because it does not invalidate the effectiveness of its results. This is a move which is certainly far away from the views usually associated with deconstruction. Or with a particular school of deconstruction--Spivak is fighting for her version of deconstruction and the direction it should take. MacCabe observes that Spivak's approach "lacks the defining features of deconstruction in America" (1988: xi).

Still, some family resemblances linger on. Another rash equation common in deconstructive writing is the analogy between fiction and other discourses:

In this view [the early Foucault's], it is as if the narrativizations of history are structured or textured like what is called literature. Here one must rethink the notion that fiction derives from truth as its negation. In the context of archival historiography, the possibility of fiction cannot be derived. (1988a: 243).

A similar thrust towards conflating fiction and theory is found in other theorists, like Frank Kermode or T. S. Kuhn; Spivak refers at this point to Derrida's "Limited Inc abc." In a similar vein, Stanley Fish and Barbara Johnson speak of the fictional nature of law and institutions.⁹ I think that this analogy is easily overstated. Fiction and scientific discourse have much in common--precisely those elements of fiction which do not belong exclusively to fiction and therefore can hardly "fictionalize" other discourses in which they also appear. The difference between history and literature is not a mere difference of "effect of the real," as Spivak would have it ("What is called history will always seem more real to us than what is called literature"; 1988a: 243). That is, unless we understand the effect of the real to be no mere optical illusion on the perceiver, but rather the very inaugural structuration of the discourse in question, its pragmatic characterization and social use (this is not the sense of "effect of the real" in Barthes, nor the sense in which Spivak uses it on p. 244). The difference between these two perspectives must be defined in terms of the use to which the discourse is designed to be put in the society that produces it. It may be significant that when Spivak further specifies the "fictive" quality of history, she does not refer to the use of discourse (the structure of its enunciation) but to "the mechanics of representation" (1988a: 244). If Spivak's desire in adhering to this doctrine is to preserve the fluidity and the strategical quality of theory, I would argue that this aim does not necessitate the premise that theory is a form of fiction.

Another weak point of her theory is the articulation between consciousness, agency and ideology, and her reluctance to introduce a concept of false consciousness. Spivak adheres to the philosophical tradition which from Peirce and Nietzsche through Voloshinov and Bakhtin to Derrida affirms that there is no outside of ideology; that human consciousness is inherently semiotic, a continuous chain of signs and systems of signs in a process of endless translation and transformation (1988a: 198). In Voloshinov (1986: 9-10) the Marxist concept of ideology, which originally referred to a hegemonic superstructure, in the sense of false consciousness, has already been identified with semiotic production. As a result, we are left with no adequate concept of false consciousness: if all semiosis is ideological, how can Marxism lay claim to knowledge which is more real than others? Spivak inherits this problem, and does not solve it. Her aim is not so much to provide a true theory as to oppose a set of representations against another, to counter the elite representations with representations formulated from a position which, while it is not that of the subaltern as such, is related to it.¹⁰

9. Fish 1982; Johnson 1985: 60.

10. Spivak 1988a: 203. Her strategy at this point resembles that of Edward W. Said in *Orientalism*. Said, however, is less diffident when it comes to oppose the "real" subaltern to the false image produced by the hegemonic discourse.

Spivak denounces in several American approaches the lack of a concept of ideology which transcends the individual consciousness and will. But when she defines such a concept the role of the individual consciousness and will within it remains problematic. She opposes, for instance, Wayne Booth's concept of ideology as a system with conscious elements and unconscious elements in which "consciousness and the unconscious are understood with reference to a pre-psychoanalytic model, as if they belonged to a continuous system where the mark of good practice was to raise the unconscious into consciousness" (Spivak 1988a: 122). I confess that I thought that this assumption belonged to Marxism as well, and not just to the liberal approach Spivak criticises.¹¹ Surely it is possible and desirable to increase the reflective awareness of the practices and relationships which are at work both in us and between us? Spivak's strictures on the role that Booth allows to the concept of free choice used by Booth may be correct, but certainly the concept of "raising the level of consciousness" is central in Marxist theory. A few pages before, Spivak herself offers her own version of individual agency, which as far as I can see involves much the same assumptions on the role of awareness, however qualified, and even the moral imperative that we be "responsible": "One cannot of course 'choose' to step out of ideology. The most responsible 'choice' seems to be to know it as best one can, recognize it as best one can and, through one's necessarily inadequate interpretation, to work to change it" (1988a: 120). Spivak's quote-choice-unquote still seems to have an element of plain choice, even if it takes place in heavily determined contexts. I suspect that the moral imperative that surfaces here is not at all alien to other moments of Spivak's writing, such as her complex attitude towards deconstruction, her rejection of Hayden White's conception of the meaninglessness of history as facile (Spivak 1988a: 129), or her contention (directed against Deleuze and Guattari) "that subject-predication is methodologically necessary" (1988a: 154), with the subsequent introduction of "subject-effects" (1988a: 155, 204), "I-slots" and "subject-positions" (1988a: 243) or strategic adherences to the doctrine of essentialist consciousness.¹² She is at pains to demonstrate that the essentialist ideology of the "Subaltern Studies" group of leftist historians can be read as if it were deconstruction,¹³ and introduces to that effect the conception of "affirmative deconstruction," taken from Derrida's *Eperons*. In the midst of deconstruction, "affirmative deconstruction" pops out of the blue:

the emphasis upon the "sovereignty, . . . consistency and . . . logic" of "rebel consciousness" [14]¹⁴ . . . can be seen as "affirmative deconstruction": knowing that

11. According to Spivak, Marx has been interpreted inadequately in this respect; "Marx is not working to create an undivided subject where desire and interest coincide" (1988b: 276). But is not a *collective* subject where desire and interest coincide, a non-alienated working class, made of non-alienated individuals?

12. Spivak 1988a: 206. Donna Landry (1987) applauds this move: anti-essentialism, she argues, is not necessarily useful to feminists, who must "take the risk of essence." The same endorsement is found in Alicé Jardine (1985: 27). Spivak is more ambivalent on this matter than these critics seem to think.

13. This move is reminiscent of Bhabha's "deconstructivist" interpretation of Franz Fanon's writings (cf. Parry 1987: 30ff.).

14. Spivak is trying to show that these concepts are not necessarily essentialist in the way they are used by Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*

such an emphasis is theoretically non-viable, the historian then breaks his theory in a scrupulously delineated "political interest." (Spivak 1988a: 207)

This is undoubtedly affirmative, but I do not see why it is deconstruction. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988b: 271f.), on the other hand, Spivak warns against the theory of "subject-effects" in Foucault and Deleuze; there it is seen to lead back to essentialism.

Apparently this double standard is related to the different situations where the concept of subject is used. But in this case it is the notion of situation that has become essentialist and non-negotiable in Spivak's theory (as indeed it would be from the point of view of classical Marxism). Be that as it may, Spivak's theory is not the more rigorous for leaving the nature and the reasons of these ethico-political choices undiscussed.¹⁵

In Spivak's account, theories are always caught within the ideology which produces them, and the privileged position of the theorist is inscribed in them. This is the case even in theories of resistance, whose well-meaning authors are co-opted through tokenism, nationalism or male chauvinism. It is also the case with her own theory: "A theory which allows a partial lack of fit in the fabrication of any strategy cannot consider itself immune from its own system" (1988a: 207). Spivak is torn between the need to formulate a theory of liberation for the women of the third world, escaping the crypto-colonialist assumption that "one must not question third-world mores," and the knowledge that such a theory is bound to objectify the women, and will be self-serving in unsuspected ways:

I should not consequently patronize and romanticize these women, nor yet entertain a nostalgia for being as they are. The academic feminist must learn to learn from them, to speak to them, to suspect that their access to the political and sexual scene is not merely to be *corrected* by our superior theory and enlightened compassion. (Spivak 1988a: 135)

Spivak has italicized *corrected*. But if we italicize *merely* we may get a more accurate picture of the dilemma faced by the theorist. A Marxist theory cannot renounce intervention, or completely relinquish its privileged position.¹⁶ Spivak walks here along the

(Delhi: Oxford IJP, 1983), 13.

15. Perhaps they are not to be discussed? Spivak's interpretation of Marx is curiously reminiscent of Kantian ethics: "If pursued to its logical consequence, revolutionary practice must be persistent because it can carry no theoretico-teleological justification" (1988a: 161). Or again: "the political subject distances itself from the analyst-in-transference by declaring an 'interest' by way of a 'wild' rather than theoretically grounded practice" (1988a: 174). However, in her only joint discussion of Kant and Marx, Spivak affirms: "I do not myself see how a continuous line can be established between Marx's own texts and the Kantian ethical moment" (1988b: 310 n.22). Maybe the subject is worth pursuing.

16. I do not see that Spivak really addresses this question, in spite of her sarcasms on the inescapable colonialism of the First World when thinking about the Third World ("in Senanayak I find the closest approximation to the First-World scholar in search of the Third World we grieve for our Third-World sisters; we grieve and rejoice that they must lose themselves and become as much like us as possible in order to be 'free'" [1988a: 179]). Viewed like this, the situation of the First World scholar studying the Third World is a catch-22.

borderline where Marxism loses its name. Although I believe she does not quite cross it, it is significant that her effective intervention in these essays is not directly on the issues relevant to Third World feminism; it is rather a criticism of the self-centeredness of First World representations of the Third World.

Spivak justifies this indirect strategy: "today the discourse of the world's privileged societies dictates the configuration of the rest" (1988a: 151). From this perspective, however, there is no way to address the lag between the dictation and the configuration. And is not this lag precisely the proper area where the activist can work? I admit I would like to know her views on the way specific Third World issues should be addressed, both from the inside and the outside. Spivak's dealing with clitoridectomy in "French Feminism in an International Frame" is both suggestive and deeply unsatisfactory: the conclusion that clitoridectomy is "a metonym for women's definition as 'legal object as subject of reproduction'" (1988a: 152) is hardly an agenda for third world feminism (indeed, Spivak rejects the idea of suggesting such an agenda). Even as the article traces "the suppression of the clitoris in general," relating Sudanese practice to French feminist theory, its move from the literal excision of the clitoris to the symbolic one seems to suggest that the differences between them are not significant, or should not be a matter of concern for First-World feminists. In the absence of any absence of direction, paralyzed by her desire not to perpetuate colonialist attitudes, Spivak's article comes back full circle to rest on the "structural functionalist" approach which she derided at the beginning of her article.

Not that I think that there is a simple answer to the questions that Spivak addresses or fails to address. Whenever there is an overdetermination of the subaltern by means of conflicting hegemonic structures, such as imperialism and patriarchy, or racism and patriarchy, a theory formulated from a hegemonic position is bound to be self-serving in both obvious and subtle ways. This, I think, is the most definite lesson which can be extracted from her articles on this subject.

Spivak's most definite calls for action occur in her own professional area, pedagogy. She calls for an "alert pedagogy" (1988a: 116), and declares her faith in teaching the elite how to read their canon in a different way as a valid mode of intervention (1988a: 92). She considers "the pedagogy of the humanities as the arena of cultural explanations that questions the explanations of culture" (1988a: 117). In my view, this conception cannot be more than a reminder that teachers of humanities must be aware of the political assumptions and circumstances of their activity. It cannot be understood as a definition of the activity of the humanists (as such, it would be narrow and even circular), and it should not be understood as meaning that the practitioners of other disciplines (law, medicine, business) should be less self-conscious about their own positions. In my view it is wrong (although maybe it is realistic) to privilege the humanities in this respect.¹⁷

Many of the earlier concerns of the New Criticism and of structuralism are transcended in Spivak's criticism in an illuminating way, and articulated with her Marxist-feminist-deconstructive project. For instance, the structuralist interest in metafiction and in the *mise en abyme* of a work's textuality is also a concern of Spivak's analysis of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, but here it is far from aseptic; instead, it is used to articulate a reading from a deconstructive feminist perspective in which the

17. Spivak herself opposes Said's privileging literary criticism over the other humanistic disciplines in this respect (1988a: 126).

attitudes of the characters towards each other are also a debate on how to define a text from differently gendered subject-positions. "I introduce *To the Lighthouse* into this polemic," Spivak says, "by reading it as the story of Mr. Ramsay (philosopher-theorist) and Lily (artist-practitioner) around Mrs. Ramsay (text)" (Spivak 1988a: 30). Reading something "as," Spivak makes clear in relation to Derrida's practice, must be thought of as a strategic move whose validity is not absolute, but derives instead from the assumption that there is not "a 'true' explanation where the genuine copula ('is') can be used" (Spivak 1988a: 106). "Since a 'reading against the grain' must remain forever strategic, it can never claim to have established the authoritative truth of a text, it must forever remain dependent upon practical exigencies, never legitimately lead to a theoretical orthodoxy" (1988a: 215).

In moments such as these, Spivak offers genuine examples of how earlier critical assumptions can be transcended and successfully incorporated into a different project. However, while she often offers successful deconstructive analyses of Marxism, or deconstructive feminist approaches, or participates in the debate on how to articulate Marxism and feminism, somehow I do not feel that the three perspectives are finally integrated into a clear theory, or even consistently used in one given analysis, to the same extent that the kind of structuralist approach I just mentioned is *aufgehoben* into a wider perspective. This is also to be seen in the subject matter of her analyses. The range of the issues which are brought together in these essays is impressive, but sometimes the integration Spivak achieves to articulate between them is shaky, and it does not repay the conceptual effort required. It may indeed be the case that the problems Spivak is trying to deal with "do not yet . . . have the clarity of the already understood" (MacCabe 1988: x). Maybe of the already understandable? The exploratory quality of these essays must not be underestimated.

Spivak seems to regard the relative disjunction of her essays as the inevitable result of the contingency and situationality of the uses of theory. She seems to offer a salutary theory of theory-making as *bricolage*.¹⁸ Accordingly, she always follows a "circuitous route," she fits earlier papers into later frames, and explains her approach as a way to cope with a specific situation. She also rejects the notion of a definitive and totalizing theory (of feminism, for instance, 1988a 84) or a grand sublating synthesis of aesthetics, politics and philosophy in the manner of Kant or Hegel. This aspect of her theory is directly related to the steps she takes out of deconstruction, and, like them, it is not sufficiently theorized. We do not get a clear picture, for instance, of how *bricolage* is to be compatible with intellectual rigor. For instance, Spivak reproaches the members of the Subaltern Studies group for their commitment to the earlier ("structuralist") Barthes: "Any use of the Barthes of the first period would have to refute, however briefly, Barthes's own refutation and rejection of his early positions" (Spivak 1988a: 212). But she does not feel obliged to refute Foucault before she dismisses Foucault's own rejection of his earlier views on how to define the positioning of the subject (Spivak 1988a: 243).

This very question, the positioning of the subject, stands precisely at the point where deconstruction is to be articulated with Marxism and feminism. As I have indicated, its role is problematic. According to Spivak, concrete experience is to be mistrusted (and analyzed); her position is in the last analysis a contingent part of her theory: "that accident of birth and education has provided me with a *sense* of the historical canvas, a hold on some of the pertinent languages that are useful tools for a *bricoleur*" (1988b: 281). But in fact many things revolve around this adventitious "effect." As a Marxist and a deconstructivist, she mistrusts the recourse to individual experience; as a Third-World

person and a feminist, she uses it. She has it both ways, and the tensions are not always resolved. The question is, can they be resolved?

I am not sure whether in some instances Spivak's emphasis on the contingent is not a way of making the best of the present state of the debate between Marxism, feminism, and deconstruction. I agree that no comprehensive or "true" theory, a theory which would not need to be revised, can be formulated, but still some theories are, here and now, more explanatory than others. Radical deconstruction will probably never become subservient to (or even cooperative with) another theory. But the question remains open whether and to what extent deconstructive techniques or deconstructive moves can be used by other theories. Spivak's most successful interventions make us hope that a more integrated approach between Marxism, feminism and deconstruction can be expected in the future (just as her more fragmentary essays make me pray for it), and sometimes she really succeeds in giving us a taste of what such an approach will look like. In the meantime, the dialogue between deconstruction and the theories of resistance is already leading to a reassessment of that strange visitor.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barthes, Roland. 1977. "The Death of the Author." (1968). In Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Noonday. 142-48.
- Bhabha, Homi. "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817." *Europe and Its Others* 1.93-94.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1976. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. (1974). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- . 1988. *Limited Inc*. Evanston (IL): Northwestern UP.
- Fish, Stanley E. 1982. "With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Derrida and Austin." *Critical Inquiry* 8.693-723.
- Jardine, Alice. 1985. "Men in Feminism: Odor di Uomo or Compagnons de Route?" *Critical Exchange* 1 8.
- Johnson, Barbara. 1985. *The Critical Difference*. (1980). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- Landry, Donna. 1987. "The World According to Moi: Politics and *Feminist Literary Theory*." *Criticism* 39 (1).119-132.
- MacCabe, Colin. 1988. "Foreword" in Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, ix-xix.
- Parry, Benita. 1987. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse." *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1-2). 27-58.
- Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1948. "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" *Situations II*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1976. "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. ix-xc.
- .1988a. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- .1988b. "Can the Subaltern Speak?." Nelson, Cary, and Grossberg, Laurence, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp. 271-313. Urbana: U of Illinois 1'.
- Voloshinov, Valentin V. 1986. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard UP. Trans. of *Marksizm i filosofija iazyka*, 1929.

Wimsatt, W. K. and Monroe C. Beardsley. 1967. "The Intentional Fallacy." (1946). Rpt. in Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P.