

It was in order to bring together this active critical commentary together that I proposed to edit this collection. The interviews are reprinted in their original form. Only a few editorial notes have been added for clarification.

A collection of interviews is not possible without the work of many people. First and foremost Gayatri Spivak must be thanked for permitting the republication of the interviews. All of the interlocutors, journal editors and the editors at Routledge must also be thanked: Elizabeth Grosz, Geoffrey Hawthorn, John Hutnyk, Scott McQuire, Nikos Papastergiadis, Walter Adamson, Sneja Gunew, Rashmi Bhatnagar, Lola Chatterjee, Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, Angela Ingram, Terry Threadgold, Frances Barkowski, Richard Dienst, Rosanne Kennedy, Joel Reed, Henry Schwarz, Bill Germano, Michael J. Esposito and Jayne M. Fargnoli. Although the interviews are the work of many people, the errors are entirely my own.

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Criticism, Feminism, and The Institution

*In June, 1984, Gayatri Spivak visited Australia as one of the guest speakers of the Futur*Fall Conference, a conference on Post-Modernity held in Sydney. The following interview with Elizabeth Grosz was recorded in Sydney on August 17, 1984. First published in Thesis Eleven, No. 10/11, 1984/85.*

GROSZ Questions of writing, textuality and discourse seem a major preoccupation in your published works. Could you outline what relations you see between problems of textuality and the field of politics, given that, for many theorists, these seem two disparate domains roughly divided along the lines of a theory/practice split?

SPIVAK I think that this split is a symptomatic one. To define textuality in such a way that it would go in the direction of theory, with practice on the other side, is an example of how the institution and also rivalries between and among major intellectuals actually reduce the usefulness of a concept by giving it a minimal explanation. I think the notion of textuality was broached precisely to question the kind of thing that it is today seen to be—that is, the verbal text, a preoccupation with being in the library rather than being on the street. As far as I understand it, the notion of textuality should be related to the notion of the worlding of a world on a supposedly unscribed territory. When I say this, I am thinking basically about the imperialist project which had to assume that the earth that it territorialised was in fact previously unscribed. So then a world, on a simple level of cartography, inscribed what was presumed to be unscribed. Now this worlding actually is also a texting, textualising, a making into art, a making into an object to be understood. From this point of view the notion of textuality within the Western European/Anglo-U.S./international context tries also to situate the emergence of language as a model from the second decade of the twentieth century to see how the location of language or semiosis as a model was in itself part of a certain kind of worlding. Textuality is tied to discourse itself in an oblique way. Classical discourse analysis is not psychological largely because it tries to get away from the problem of language production by a subject. Textuality in its own way marks the place where the production

of discourse or the location of language as a model escapes the person or the collectivity that engages in practice, so that even textuality itself might simply be an uneven clenching of a space of dissemination which may or may not be random. From this point of view, what a notion of textuality in general does is to see that what is defined over against 'The Text' as 'fact' or 'life' or even 'practice' is to an extent worlded in a certain way so that practice can take place. Of course, you don't think this through at the moment of practice, but a notion of generalised textuality would say that practice is, as it were, the 'blank part' of the text but it is surrounded by an interpretable text. It allows a check on the inevitable power dispersal within practice because it notices that the privileging of practice is in fact no less dangerous than the vanguardism of theory. When one says 'writing', it means this kind of structuring of the limits of the power of practice, knowing that what is beyond practice is always organizing practice.

The best model for it is something woven but beyond control. Since practice is an irreducible theoretical moment, no practice takes place without presupposing itself as an example of some more or less powerful theory. The notion of writing in this sense actually sees that moment as itself situatable. It is not the notion of writing in the narrow sense so that one looks at everything as if it is written by some sort of a subject and can be deciphered by the reading subject. I would also like to say that the fact that words like 'writing' and 'text' have a certain paleonymy—that is to say, they are charged within the institution and they can be given the minimal interpretation of being nothing but library-mongering—itsself marks the fact that the intellectual or anti-intellectual who can choose to privilege practice and then create a practice/theory split within a sort of theory, in fact, is also capable, because he or she is produced by the institution, of giving a minimal explanation of words like writing and text and forgetting that they mark the fact that we are, as we privilege practice, produced within an institution.

GROSZ You mention the intellectual. There has been much discussion in Marxist and leftist circles since 1968 about the role of the intellectual in political struggles. Althusser, for example, in his article 'Lenin and Philosophy' has claimed that, in general at least, intellectuals are enroiled in ruling ideologies and act as their unwitting proponents. More recently, Foucault has suggested that the function of the intellectual is 'no longer to place himself 'somewhat ahead and to the side' in order to express the truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge', 'truth', 'consciousness' and 'discourse' " ('The Intellectuals and Power', *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, 207-8). There seems, in other words, to be a debate between the role of the

universal or the specific intellectual. What are your thoughts on this debate?

SPIVAK I want to ask the question—the rhetorical question, really—does the intellectual, *the* intellectual, have the some role in social production in Australia as in France? It seems to me that one of the problems here is that even as the intellectual is being defined as specific, there is at work there the figure of an intellectual who seems not to be production-specific at all. The notion of the different place of the intellectual since May 1968—May 1968 does not have the same impact outside of a certain sort of Anglo-US-French context—I am not at all denigrating the importance of May 1968 within the French context. In fact as a result of reading the material that came out in France about May 1968 ten years later, I was able to see how important the event was. But, even within the US in fact there isn't something that can be called 'an intellectual'. There isn't in fact a group that can be called 'a group of intellectuals', that exercises the same sort of role or indeed power with social production. I mean a figure like Noam Chomsky, for example, seems very much an oddity. There isn't the same sort of niche for him. It is a much larger, more dispersed place which is racially, ethnically, historically, more heterogenous. There, one doesn't think about May 1968 in the same way unless it is within certain kinds of coterie groups. Having lived in the United States for some time, I would say that Berkeley 1967 makes more sense to me. Then if you think about Asia—and I notice you didn't mention that I was an Asian in your introduction; now let me say that I am one—there are intellectuals in Asia but there are no Asian intellectuals. I would stand by that rather cryptic remark. From this point of view I think the first question—the first task of intellectuals, as indeed we are—as to who asks the question about *the* intellectual and *the* specific intellectual, *the* universal intellectual, is to see that the specific intellectual is being defined in reaction to the universal intellectual who seems to have no particular nation-state provenance. Foucault himself, when he talks about the universal intellectual, speaks most directly about the fact that in France, in his own time, there was no distinction between the intellectual of the Left and the intellectual. Now this particular absence of a distinction would make very little sense if one went a little further afield. Having said this, let's look for a moment at Althusser.

I myself find safety in locating myself completely within my workplace. Althusser's notion of disciplinary practice in the essay called 'Lenin and Philosophy' says that disciplines are constructed in terms of denegation. Disciplines are histories of denegation and what in fact disciplinary practice should be redefined as by the intellectual is a savage practice—a wild practice—so that the point was to transform the denegating disciplinary practice—a person within a discipline—*une Pratique Sauvage*.

This is the specific practice of the intellectual within his institutionality, and within it the question of science and ideology must be, Althusser says that text, asked and opened repeatedly. It seems to me sometimes because of the historical constraints upon the figure of Althusser we tend to forget the moment and tend to locate ourselves on the text that is particularly named 'theoretical practice'. I would say that the tendency not to look at the margins, at what escapes the things with proper titles, is in itself caught within this definition of the intellectual.

Foucault, on the other hand, is not really looking at, though I think he is practicing, this kind of wild disciplinary practice, he is looking more insistently at the disciplinarisation of the discipline itself. There I think the strong moment was then recuperated within the construction of what Mike Davis has called the late American imperialism, that is to say, 1953 to 1978, when slowly the notion of power, the specific power that the intellectual must confront, is conflated into power as the same system. I am narrativizing a very complicated itinerary, so clearly I will be doing some injustice to Foucault, who remains a very important figure for me. But it seems to me that at that point, when this matricial concept of power as the same system begins to emerge, is at that point that the intellectual defined in this *very* situation-specific way, which is then seen as 'universal', and against that, the intellectual begins to declare and claim a sort of specificity, that's the moment when the intellectual begins to abdicate. We would say that that claim for specificity which is in reaction against a universality which is itself specific but cannot be given this specificity that it has—that claim for abdication is not a refusal, but a disavowal. We don't think that the intellectual placed in that situation is free to abdicate. I think this is why the discipleship of these great figures in fact transforms them immediately into the kind of watershed intellectual, universal intellectual, that they would like not to be. It's almost as if their desire is being given back to them and defined by the fact that the way they are taken up, the way they're defended, the way they're nervously followed, shows that the intellectual is imprisoned—the Anglo-US-Western European intellectual—is imprisoned within an institutional discourse which says what is universal is universal without noticing that it is specific too—so that its own claim to specificity is doubly displaced. It seems to me that their desire is being defined by their discipleship which is very quickly transforming them into universal intellectuals.

GROSZ This raises the question that if the intellectual is in part defined by the position he or she occupies within an institution, what do you think the relationship between that institution and the non-institutional environment in which it is situated should be?

SPIVAK Here in fact I say something which I have learnt from Foucault. I don't think there is a non-institutional environment. I think the institution, whichever institution you are isolating for the moment, does not exist in isolation, so that what you actually are obliged to look at is more and more framing. And from that point of view, let me add a digression here. It seems to me that if one looks at institutionalisation within the West since the 17th century without looking at the fact that those kinds of institutionalisations are being produced by something that is being perpetrated outside of the West—precisely during these years—then the story of institutionalisation, disciplinarisation of the definition of the man within the West—remains itself caught . . . within the institutionalisation of the West as West, or the West as the world—that is something that needs to be said too—I don't think there is an extra-institutional space. In a moment we might want to talk about how even paraperipheral space in terms of the Centre-Periphery definition is not outside of the institution.

GROSZ There are institutions whose definition is such that they are supposedly defined as places of 'pure learning', and since May '68 in France, since '67 in America, and around '69 in Australia, as a result of the Vietnam War a number of academics have attempted to espouse their political commitments in places beyond the institutions in which they work. This raises possible problems. I wonder if you see any problems with this.

SPIVAK I myself see the step beyond the institution sometimes, not always, as capable of recuperation in a way that confronting the institution is not. It seems to me that within a cultural politics—and this is a phrase I will use over and over again—within a permissible cultural politics which allows enchanted spaces to be created, sometimes alternate institutions which might define themselves as 'beyond the institution' are allowed to flourish so that the work of the production of cultural explanations within the institution can go on undisturbed. Let me take a *very* specific example relating again to my own workplace. I have found over the years that whereas the whole notion of inter-disciplinary work has been allowed to flourish so that it can slowly degenerate into pretentious internationalism, if one confronts questions like distribution requirements, curricula requirements, *within* the structure of the institution, one meets with much more solid and serious opposition. So many more vested interests are at work within a society where repressive tolerance plays a very important function that in some ways it's almost easier to give space for alternate activity. I am not dismissing them, but it seems to me that the whole de-glamourised inside of the institution defines our stepping beyond this.

As an academic myself I would say that if one begins to take a whack at shaking that structure up, one sees how much more consolidated the opposition is. I will go a step further, it seems to me that the definition of the institution as a place of pure learning is itself almost like a definition of the universal against which to become specific. I said a moment ago that when the Western European intellectual defines the universal intellectual and then says, "I am specific as opposed to that universal", what he doesn't see is that the definition of that universal is itself contaminated by a non-recognition of a specific production. In the same way if one looks at—of course the system of education is different here from the United States—if one looks at how things like fiscal policy, foreign policy, the international division of labour, the multi-national globe, the rate of interest, actually conduct the allocation of resources to institutions which take on a defining role in terms of what goes on in the institution, I think to create a straw institution which is a place of pure learning, so that we can then step beyond it, has almost the same morphology as creating a straw universal intellectual so that we can become specific.

GROSZ While you were in Australia you gave a number of lectures on the work of Derrida that were rather controversial. How would you situate Derrida's work in the context of this debate?

SPIVAK Perhaps by the accident of my birth and my production—being born British-Indian and then becoming a sort of participant in the de-colonisation without a particular choice in the matter and then working in the United States, floating about in Europe, Africa, Saudi Arabia, Britain, and now Australia, I think I avoided in some ways becoming someone who takes on a master discourse, and I am always amused to see that I am, as you say, perhaps best known as a translator and commentator of Derrida, because the de-constructive establishment I think finds me an uncomfortable person. So I will say to begin with that I am not particularly interested in defending Derrida as a master figure and from that point of view I find it just by accident interesting that it is not possible for me to follow Derrida in his substantive projects. Within the *enthusiastic* Foucauldianism in the United States there is a lot of that sort of following through on substantive projects. Having said this, what I like about Derrida's work is that he focuses his glance very specifically at his own situation as an intellectual who questions his own disciplinary production. He tries in his latest work to see in what way, in every specific situation where he is in fact *being* an intellectual—being interviewed, being asked to lecture, being asked to write—being asked to do all of these things which an intellectual continues to do whether he wants to or not—he sees in what way he is defined as a foreign body. This has led to some very interesting work, because it focuses not on

what one's own desire is to be specific, rather than universal—non-representing, rather than a spokesperson—it focuses on the perception of the institutionalised other as you as an intellectual are asked to opine, to critique, even to grace and to perform. He notices then specific situational contracts. He will not allow us to forget the fact that the production of theory is in fact a very important practice that is worlding the world in a certain way. At the moment his project is deeply concerned with the problem that, within hegemonic practice, a method is identified with a proper name. In spite of all the efforts to dismantle the notion of watershed or universal intellectuals within the Western context, what is happening to the work done by the powerful intellectuals against that theory is in fact a transformation of that critique into the celebration of these figures as universal intellectuals. And I find it quite useful that Derrida focuses so strongly on the problems that make a method identical with a proper name, in our historical moment. I must say something else too. Where I was brought up—when I first read Derrida I didn't know who he was, I was very interested to see that he was actually dismantling the philosophical tradition from *inside* rather than from *outside*, because of course we were brought up in an education system in India where the name of the hero of that philosophical system was the universal human being, and we were taught that if we could begin to approach an internalization of that universal human being, then we would be human. When I saw that in France someone was actually trying to dismantle the tradition which had told us what would make us human, that seemed rather interesting too.

GROSZ You have argued that "French theorists such as Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze and the like have at one time or another been interested in reaching out to all that is not the West, because they have, in one way or another, questioned the millennially cherished excellence of Western metaphysics: the sovereignty of the subject's intention, the power of prediction and so on" [*French Feminism in an International Frame*, *Yale French Studies* No. 62, 157]. In what ways do you see such French theory influencing your work on the critique of imperialism? (I ask the question partly because such examples of French theory have, at least occasionally, been labeled esoteric, elitist and self-preoccupied; in which case, it may be hard to see their relevance in tackling the questions of exploitation and oppression.) What do you think about this?

SPIVAK Now, I am not going to talk about the critique of the French intellectual's desire to do this; I am going to focus on the other side of your question—how it relates to my own kind of work on the critique of imperialism. I think wherever I have spoken about this desire on the part of intellectuals in the West, I have seen it as commemorating and marking

a repeated crisis of European consciousness—and when I use the word ‘crisis’ I am thinking not only of a crisis of conscience in a limited sense, but also in the broader perspective of crisis theory, the broader perspective of the theory of the management of crisis. If one reverses the direction, and here I am working within a very established deconstructive model of reversal and displacement, what does it say? That you reverse the direction of a binary opposition and you discover the violence. If one reverses the direction of this binary opposition, the Western intellectual’s longing for all that is not West, our turn towards the West—the so-called non-West’s turn toward the West is a *command*. That turn was not in order to fulfill some longing to consolidate a pure space for ourselves, that turn was a command. Without that turn we would not in fact have been able to make out a life for ourselves as intellectuals. One has to reverse the binary opposition, and today of course, since there is now a longing once again for the pure Other of the West, we post-colonial intellectuals are told that we are *too* Western, and what goes completely unnoticed is that our turn to the West is in response to a command, whereas the other is to an extent a desire marking the place of the management of a crisis. Now my critique of imperialism is not a principled production. I found as I was working through my own disciplinary production, the influences that I was working with, where Marxism itself must be included—I found that there was nothing else that I could do. To an extent I want to say that I am caught *within* the desire of the European consciousness to turn towards the East because that is my production. But I am also trying to lever it off—once again this is a deconstructive project if you like—to raise the lid of this desire to turn toward what is not the West, which in my case could very easily be transformed into just wanting to be the ‘true native’. I could easily construct, then, a sort of ‘pure East’ as a ‘pure universal’ or as a ‘pure institution’ so that I could then define myself as the Easterner, as the marginal or as specific, or as the para-institutional. But I am trying to see how much in fact I am caught within the European desire to turn towards the East; but how it has become doubly displaced. I think my present work is to show how in fact the limits of the theories of interpretation that I am working with are revealed through the encounter of what can be defined as ‘non-Western material’.

GROSZ Perhaps we could move away from the question of the intellectual *per se* to look at the role of the feminist intellectual. You have accused First World academic feminists of a double standard: of ignoring, reducing or explaining away the otherness of other women [e.g. “When we speak for ourselves [as academic feminists] we urge with conviction: the personal is the political. For the rest of the world’s women, the sense

of whose personal micrology is difficult (though not impossible) for us to acquire, we fall back on a colonialist theory of the most efficient information retrieval. We will not be able to speak to women out there if we depend completely on conferences and anthologies by Western-trained informants”, ‘Draupadi’ by Mahasveta Devi, *Critical Inquiry*, Winter, 1981, 382]. How is it possible to avoid a politics of representation, speaking for or on behalf of other women, retaining their specificity, their difference, while not giving up our own?

SPIVAK My project is the careful project of un-learning our privilege as our loss. I think it is impossible to forget that anyone who is able to speak in the interests of the privileging of practice against the privileging of theory has been enabled by a certain kind of production. To my students in the United States, I talk about the ‘instant soup syndrome’—just add the euphoria of hot water and you have soup, and you don’t have to question yourself as to how the power was produced; and to an extent all of us who can ask the question of specificity, all of us who can make public the question of feminist practice, in fact have been enabled by a long history to be in that position, however personally disadvantaged we might be. And from that point of view I would say just in answer to a specific question, the project is more of unlearning that privilege as a loss, and it will not come through benevolence, it has to be charted out very carefully step by step. One of the things I am doing which seems, from the outside, very complicated and intellectual indeed, is to search out psycho-biographies, regulative psycho-biographies for the constitution of the sexed subject which would be outside of psychoanalysis or counter-psychoanalysis. It seems to me that when one thinks about the question of women or women specifically as sexed subject either in terms of psychoanalysis or in terms of counter-psychoanalysis, what it leaves out is the constitution of women as sexed subject outside of the arena of psychoanalysis. This is one of the things I am trying to search out. Then you begin to see how *completely* heterogeneous the field of the woman elsewhere is, because there you have to focus on regulative psycho-biographies which are *very* situation/culture-specific indeed; and that effort is one way of using our disciplinary expertise, to see that the constitution of the sexed subject in terms of the discourse of castration was, in fact, something that came into being through the imposition of imperialism, so that the discourse of anti-psychoanalysis is in itself the working within a field which leaves out the constitution of the female subject elsewhere. That’s one of my projects of unlearning my privilege, because in fact what is being done is that this kind of psychoanalytic discourse is being imposed upon the woman elsewhere. Also it seems to me what’s being imposed on the woman elsewhere upon the other

de of her more privileged ethnic sisters is a sort of glorification of sexual division of labour in other kinds of patriarchal/patrilinean/patri-local societies, in opposition to the kind of space we inhabit. So from this point of view I would say that the major project for me is to unlearn our privilege as our loss; however personally disadvantaged we might be, we are still able to specify the problems of female specificity, and that is the beginning. There is much more to say on this issue, but that will be the beginning of my answer.

GROSZ In a number of published texts you have discussed 'universal' oppression of women under patriarchy in terms of the effacement of the clitoris, of women's sexual pleasure whereby clitoridectomy can be considered a metonymy of women's social and legal status. Could you elaborate on this?

SPIVAK I was talking of course not only about clitoridectomies as such but also about symbolic clitoridectomies as marking the place of women's desire; but I should also say that the choice of universality there was a sort of strategic choice. I spoke of universality because universality was in the air on the other side in the talk of female discourse. What was happening was a universal solution was being looked for, and since I believe that one shouldn't throw away things but use them, strategically suggested that perhaps rather than woman inhabiting the spaces of absence, perhaps here was an item which could be used as a universal signifier. I was asking myself the question . . . How can the unexamined universalising discourse of a certain sort of feminism become useful for us, since this is the hegemonic space of feminist discourse? I chose that one and tried to scrupulously work it through in terms not just of actual clitoridectomies but symbolic ones. My own interest, on the other hand, as I have just indicated, is in working out the heterogeneous production of sexed subjects. It is also, to move the question outside of subject-constitution—in terms of recognizing the international division of labour. Here I think one looks not only at the construction of the urban sub-proletariat, since most specifically since 1971, after capitalism in the West became post-modern; not only at the construction of the para-peripheral woman, unorganized peasant labour among women and so on, but also such questions as tribality, aboriginality. And in fact—if I can throw in a aside, since you are an expert on Kristeva—I would say that for me the question of the object is very closely tied to the question of being *ab-origina*l, rather than a reinscription of the object, it is a question of the inscription of the subject. Now, it seems to me it is very useful if one can think of female subject-constitution as well, because one doesn't usually. The kind of discourse you get when you speak of the constitution of the urban sub-proletariat or the para-peripheral woman, or tribality,

aboriginality, etc.: either a very hard, classical Marxist, fundamentalist kind of talk or a sort of celebration of the other. In terms of those psychobiographies I am interested in looking at these women who are being shafted by post-modern capitalism. I am interested in looking at them also in terms of their subject-constitution, which would throw a challenge to being caught within psychoanalysis or counter-psychoanalysis. This is what I meant when I said in answer to your question of how my critique of imperialism relates to the French intellectual's gaze towards the other of the West—I said that I find that the limits of their theories are disclosed by an encounter with the materiality of that other of the West—that is one of the limits. So, I am fundamentally concerned with that heterogeneity, but I chose a universal discourse in that moment because I felt that rather than define myself as repudiating universality—because universalisation, finalisation, is an irreducible moment in any discourse—rather than define myself as specific rather than universal, I should see what in the universalizing discourse could be useful and then go on to see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within that field. I think we have to choose again strategically, not universal discourse but essentialist discourse. I think that since as a deconstructivist—see, I just took a label upon myself—I cannot in fact clean my hands and say, "I'm specific." In fact I must say I am an essentialist from time to time. There is, for example, the strategic choice of a genitalist essentialism in anti-sexist work today. How it relates to all of this other work I am talking about, I don't know, but my search is not a search for coherence, so that is how I would answer that question about the discourse of the clitoris.

GROSZ I don't know exactly how to follow up this question, but I am interested in how to *use* universalism, essentialism, etc., strategically, without necessarily making an overall commitment to these kinds of concepts.

SPIVAK You see, you *are* committed to these concepts, whether you acknowledge it or not. I think it's absolutely on target not to be rhetorically committed to it, and I think it's absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism as it comes in terms of the universal—of classical German philosophy or the universal as the white upper-class male . . . etc. But *strategically* we cannot. Even as we talk about *feminist* practice, or privileging practice over theory, we are universalising—not only generalising but universalising. Since the moment of essentialising, universalizing, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question, is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment, let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it.

the thing that comes out is that you jettison your own purity as a theorist. When you do this you can no longer say my theory is going to stand against anyone else's because in this sense the practice really norms the theory, because you are an essentialist from time to time. So, from that point of view the universal that one chooses in terms of the usefulness of Western high feminism is the clitoris. The universalism that one chooses in terms of anti-sexism is what the other side gives us, defining sex genitally. You pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side, and what you are throwing away by doing that is your theoretical purity. Whereas the great custodians of the anti-universal are obliged therefore simply to act in the interest of a great narrative, the narrative of exploitation, while they keep themselves clean by not committing themselves to anything. In fact they are actually run by a great narrative even as they are busy protecting their theoretical purity by repudiating essentialism. This is how I would describe that situation.

GROSZ You have just made a distinction between feminism and anti-sexism. Anti-sexism, I take it, is a negative, critical gesture towards dominant forms of patriarchy, whereas feminism seems to be much more positive. Would you like to elaborate on this?

SPIVAK Yes. Anti-sexism is reactive in the face of where we are thrown. I am sure you wouldn't agree that notions of feminism could in fact be located in terms of sexual difference understood as genital difference. That is a total reduction of feminism, but as anti-sexism is reactive, it seems to me that there one has to produce a reverse legitimisation of sexism itself. If you just define yourself as anti-sexist you are indeed legitimising sexism. I don't care; as I said, I am not interested in being pure even as I remain an anti-essentialist. It seems to me that that kind of contamination of my own possible theoretical excellence is how situational practice norms my theory. Because if I chose to be pure in that sense, you know, displacing the question of sexual difference rather than legitimising it by acting to confront the discourse of the sexist, it seems to me that all I would gain is theoretical purity, which in itself I question in every way. So anti-sexist work is work on every level, not just the tenuring of women, but the work that goes on in battered-women's clinics, of para-legal work in the women's sections of unions—this is as much anti-sexist as the tenuring of women or structuring a conference so that there is equal representation. In the United States I think this kind of affirmative action is deeply in hock to corporate feminism. So what is one supposed to do, withdraw? And if one doesn't withdraw, this is not just a revisionary argument. This is a practical argument, since it seems to me that anti-revisionary arguments have become fetishized in the context of post-modern capitalism. So from

that point of view one can't choose to be a purist as opposed to a revisionist. It seems to me that in that context one contaminates one's virtues by becoming an anti-sexist rather than a feminist in the sense of looking at subject-constitution—distinguishing between and among women and so on.

GROSZ A feminism which didn't address the question of anti-sexism is in danger of utopianism.

SPIVAK I think it's happening—in fact the example I gave here which is troubling me a great deal, when I was in Urbino at the conference on deconstruction just a couple of weeks ago and I stood up to speak about the foreclosing of the importance of the question of sexual difference or the law of genre in Derrida . . . the people who were most uneasy were the card-carrying female deconstructivists, because they wouldn't touch anti-sexist work because that would only prove once again that they were not being theoretically pure deconstructivists. And what was most marked was the unease—talk about civilization and its discontents. You know that in the German version of the Freud text the word is actually 'unease', rather than 'discontent', and that is what you saw: they were sitting in front and you know from your adolescent days how hard it is to keep up a nervous giggle for, like, 30 minutes. These women were just sitting and giggling because they felt the inclusion of some vulgar anti-sexist person. I wasn't being a 'vulgar anti-sexist' there because I was not talking about body-counts, I was talking about what was being foreclosed in the deconstructive establishment, but they were redefining their other, which was *vulgar* anti-sexism—the word is gynegogy—they were defining that as their other, so that they could be the pure deconstructive feminists. That was happening—the moment anti-sexism was let go.

GROSZ This relates rather neatly to my next question. You have argued in two texts—*Displacement and the Discourse of Women*; in *Displacement—Derrida and After* (ed. M. Krupnick), and 'French Feminism in an International Frame', *Yale French Studies*, No. 62—that, and I quote, "I . . . find in deconstruction a 'feminization' of the practice of philosophy, and I do not regard it as just another example of the masculine use of women as instrument of self-assertion. I learn from Derrida's critique of phallogentrism—but I must then go somewhere else with it?" (*Displacement and the Discourse of Women*, 173). Where is this 'somewhere else'?

SPIVAK It's a question that in part I have answered as I have been responding to your other questions. But let us bring the bits and pieces together, so this will be a sort of repetitive answer. But perhaps it should be said first that the product of the feminization of philosophy has changed within Derrida's own work. It didn't go in the direction of

'*devenir-femme*' in Derrida. I should also point out that the critique of phallogocentrism has itself changed within the context of what Derrida calls affirmative deconstruction—it is more a critique of anthropomorphism. There one can either go in the direction of saying that when a text is purged of anthropomorphism what one should look for is how the text constitutes the narrative of its own production. This is the way that dominant deconstruction is going—there *anthropos* is defined as human. But the direction in Derrida's later work is to see that *anthropos* is defined as 'man' as a sign that has no history. So Derrida then begins to worry about the history of the sign 'woman'. And he goes to the question of the establishment of philosophy or theory as the repeated refinding of the lost subject, and here with all due respect I would say that some of this symptomaticity is seen in *The History of Sexuality*, the repeated refinding of the lost object. This is confused with the question of women so that the Derridean scene changed. But my 'somewhere else' is—I don't know quite what it is—but let me just give an account. One of my somewhere elses is this kind of anti-sexism which is against a sort of purity of the deconstructive approach. Derrida himself is very careful to distinguish woman in some genitalist description from the figure of woman, the question of woman, the law of genre, etc. There I part company. I think it is important to be an anti-sexist. My second way has been not only to see how remaining within a Freudian discourse one can identify the production of philosophy of the refinding of the lost objects but to find some place outside where the regulative psychobiographies construct women in another way. Thirdly, this business about the international division of labour does not exist within deconstructive considerations at all. Not that it exists elsewhere. One of the points that I have made repeatedly is that because the moment of the epistemic violence of imperialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is not really considered, the international division of labour today is allegorised into the situation of the 'guest workers' or the Third World people in First World arenas, which has really very little to do with the larger problem. So looking at the constitution of class structure, the new reconstitution of the class structure within and among women, even as that constitution has to be confused by the question of subject-constitution, has no place within the deconstructive arena. And the final task, which is the unlearning of one's own privilege as a loss—Derrida does it, but it is another privilege that he is dealing with. I think since one can't know where one's 'somewhere else' is because one is also caught within this place, which is, in the context of this question, Derrida's discourse—I can only give shadowy repetitive indications of what that is.

GROSZ One final question. Your work can be considered both deconstructionist, Marxist and feminist. Given that these three fields maintain

something of an awkward, if not tense, relationship, do you think some reconciliation between them is possible?

SPIVAK In a recent interview Foucault has disclaimed his commitment to the notion of discontinuity and has suggested that it was a misreading of *Les Mots et les Choses* to define him as a philosopher of discontinuity. I am going to use the term here because I am really thinking of—to use a very old-fashioned grid—I am thinking of it now synchronically. I really think that, given all that I have said about strategic choices of essentialism and so on, the irreducible but impossible task is to preserve the discontinuities within the discourses of feminism, Marxism and deconstruction. I have seen already here how in questions and answers it can be effaced by the name 'Marxist' and how it can be effaced of course by the imposition of the name 'deconstructivist'. If I have learned anything it is that one must not go in the direction of a Unification Church, which is too deeply marked by the moment of the colonialist influence, creating global solutions that are coherent. On the other hand, it seems to me that one must also avoid as much as possible, in the interests of practical effectiveness, a sort of continuist definition of the differences, so that all you get is hostility. On one side you get a sort of identification of Marxism in the US Left in the sixties, or with what has been happening since the British New Left in Britain, or the party structure in France or other Euro-communist countries, and the slogan "Marxist is sexist" bears this hostility, not understanding that it is a method that is used in very different ways. On the other side you get declarations by figures as powerful as Samir Amin, not to mention figures less powerful like Paul Piccone from *Telos*, in the United States, that feminism has been the movement that has been most against the interests of social justice in our time. Of course deconstruction—we have already rehearsed some of those in your questions—is only textualist, it is only esoteric, concerned with self-aggrandizement, nihilist, etc. It seems to me that the role of the person, or persons, the collectivity, interested in using the immense resources of feminism, Marxism, the much more recent deconstructive morphology, is in the field of work to preserve the discontinuities, and I say ultimately it is an impossible task, for finalisation is itself impossible but irreducible. To preserve these discontinuities in that sort of sense, rather than either wanting to look for an elegant coherence or producing a continuist discourse which will then result in hostility. I think that is what I want to do.

GROSZ Do you have any final remarks?

SPIVAK In fact I've been wanting to say something all through this. I believe that many of these answers would have been impossible if my experience in Australia—and I have given 16 lectures in 2 weeks—had

not almost obliged me to think through the implications of what I have been doing, and in a sense the place of Australia on the map is so problematic, the way in which it relates to and is going to relate to Asia in the coming years, the place in which it seems to construct itself in relation to Western Europe and Anglo-US. It seems to me that if, as someone of Asian provenance working in the United States with a certain *carte d'identité* in Western Europe and Britain, I think I have been really pushed to the extreme—of having to take stock and having to see exactly what it was that I was up to. So thank you.

The Post-modern Condition: The End of Politics?

This interview is a transcript of a discussion between Geoffrey Hawthorn, host for the 1984 Channel 4 Voices series, Knowledge in Crisis, Gayatri Spivak, Ron Aronson and John Dunn.

G HAWTHORN Since the time of the Enlightenment, Western man has been driven by the belief that it's possible to have a direct, unmediated knowledge of reality—the reality of nature, and of our own nature. Progress meant that the application of reason and the edge of reality, would lead to the conquest of natural and social forces, the emancipation of humanity. In Hegel's phrase, we would be at home and more at home in the world.

But even its most fervent present-day protagonists, like the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, agree that this modern project is incomplete, and this is quite a general feeling. For many of us, these are the times, in which older universal traditions and certainties seem to have crumbled, though recently to be quite solid and reliable, no longer offering a sense of security. We still seem far from being at home in the world.

And others have come to insist that it's absurd ever to believe that we could be. They argue from a variety of directions, from Wittgenstein's later philosophy, from American philosophical pragmatism, from Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, that direct knowledge of our own nature is inconceivable. If we can never connect, we can certainly never know that we connect. We can never know the things that there are in the world. All that we can know is what we say about the world—our talk, our sentences, our discourse. There's nothing outside these texts, no extra texts. There's no world to these texts, no pretexts, there are just more texts. Indeed, the world itself is just another text.

And a mistake in the modern project, these people argue, is not only philosophical, it's also moral and political. By this point in the twentieth century, it's clear that too many heads have been broken in the process of too many theories posing as truths. Attempts to control and reform society by applications to one or another kind of reform have become increasingly problematic.

They've thrown up phenomena that are paradoxical, complex, and increasingly difficult to control. The horrors of the modern