

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Neocolonialism and the secret agent of knowledge

an interview with Robert J.C. Young

(1991)

RY: This volume of the *Oxford Literary Review* is called *Neocolonialism*.¹ Let us take the concept of neocolonialism first. Do you think it's a useful one? If so, for what? You have spoken of it as if it has a specific historical implication for the United States in the post-war period. The reference here would presumably be to particular instances of foreign policy, for example the Gulf War. Do you regard neocolonialism therefore as a way of theorizing a continuing effect of history, and of relations of power — or has it become a merely defeatist gesture from those who claim to suffer from it, a dehistoricized term that cannot possibly provide a general metaphysics of first-third world relations?

GCS: Neocolonialism is what happened after the beginning of the dismantling of colonialism proper, that is to say, old territorial imperialisms which began with the rise of monopoly industrial capitalism. When that began — before that there were other kinds of imperialisms — this

¹ *Neocolonialism*, edited by Robert JC Young, *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991).

is a very general narrative but we have to speak sweepingly in this way when we are talking about isms of this kind and these general narratives have to be persistently critiqued. Now, having granted this so that it doesn't seem like I'm just being extremely broad stroke here, let me be broad stroke: this kind of colonialism, then, starts with monopoly industrial capitalism which requires territorial imperialism in order to train up the subjects to establish markets, to free labour, and so on. But as post-industrial capitalism grows, this particular thrust of this project has been going on for two, three centuries and in the middle of our century then comes the time when these kinds of territorial undertakings are just too expensive, too old-fashioned, the world has been dividing itself in different ways, they're not necessary any more. So then, with the Second World War and the negotiated independence of India, it begins to change and, as Said and many others have argued, the British Empire passes into the hands of the United States. Now at that point the kind of colonialism that you need is more economic and less territorial: this is neocolonialism, and in fact neocolonialism is like radiation — you feel it less like you don't feel it — you feel like you're independent. The common person feels he or she is independent so that in fact what Marx calls the absence of extra-economic coercions is very broadly speaking true. With neocolonialism comes the idea of a Third World, which as you know was a product of the Bandung conference where people wanted the global monetary policy of a handful of nations to be different so that the newly independent countries could have a different deal. It was because the nature of neocolonialism was economic rather than territorial or cultural that the production of knowledge within neocolonialism seems to have a much subtler role

and it's much harder to pin down. It's not just colonialism over again.

In the 'New World Order' since the Gulf War what we are going to have to look for is a change in neocolonialist practices — I could talk on just this one topic for rather a long time, and you know that I have argued that with the computerization of the great stock exchanges in the seventies already the nature of neocolonialism has changed. But now with the hyperreal war and the imperialist reshuffling of another kind in fact we will have to talk about neocolonialism in a different way. But no, neocolonialism is a very specific kind of thing, which is different from the old forms of colonialism and imperialism.

RY: So the term neocolonialism can be used both ways — it's historically specific, but it's also a generalizable term because we're talking about the economic order in which we live now.

GCS: And which involves also political, military, ideological etc. — the whole paraphernalia. But let me give you a little example. If you go to the Asia-Pacific rim you will find that in the high-growth capitalist parts of Asia the cultural sector is not that strategic because within neo-colonialism they are run much more by ministries of finance. Whereas in a country like Algeria or a country like India, where the so-called Independence initiative came in response to established old-style colonial presences, immediately upon independence the cultural sector became extremely strategically important so that the way in which these kinds of places cope with neocolonialism or neocolonial production of knowledge is very different from the ways in which you get these phenomena in Hong

Kong, in Taiwan, in Singapore or indeed in the Philippines. So, yes, it's not just economic.

RY: Rather there are different orders of neocolonialism, different registers?

GCS: As there was of colonialism. The *missions civilisatrices* of France in Algeria or in Egypt or again in Vietnam were not identical and they were certainly not absolutely comparable to the British presence in India. And then again if you took into account, let's say Nigeria, it was not absolutely comparable to any of these others. So that historically these terms are always heterogeneous and so is neocolonialism. But neocolonialism is not just economic. It's just that whereas in colonialism the ideology often comes out of physiocracy, through mercantilism into free trade and the economic, 'the abstract as such' (Deleuze) was still mired in a good deal of other kinds of imperatives before it could be released — this is not a progressivist argument, but there *is* a certain story line here. Like I said this is one of the great narratives. In fact I remember I started the talk in Southampton in 1989 by saying that this kind of a topic cannot be broached without one — it's one of the methodological limitations of this kind of a topic that you have to posit a great narrative in order to be able to critique it. So it's not just economic, just another different stage, where the economic element is more on the dominant and the territorial less so.

RY: OK. Do you think that it's important to make a distinction between places like Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, that correspond to Naipaul's mimic men — countries that are in some sense more capitalist than capitalism, that have become a more extreme version of

capitalism than that of the United States, Britain, or Western Europe. Should we make a distinction between the cultural and economic situation in those kinds of countries and other ones, such as India or Algeria, where the term neocolonialism in terms of economic and cultural forces seems to be more appropriate?

GCS: Ah no. Neocolonialism is a way of describing these disparities. It is not like it only applies to places that used to be colonialist before. No, I would say that we have to be very careful about saying these countries are more capitalist. No. They are high growth, their capital is high growth — I am not talking about Japan. Japan is a different argument. In order for capital to be high growth you have to revise the idea of the feudalization of the periphery which is an older argument by thinkers like Samir Amin. You have to revise it but not reject it. Let's go back to an even older idea of Marx — where Marx describing nascent foreign trade uses the phrase 'exporting capital's mode of exploitation without its mode of production'. Today we can't quite say that because of course its mode of production is also its mode of social production — its relations of production, its forces of production. It is still Western Europe and the United States that is *more* capitalist (if you count the social productivity of all classes and genders), but the Asia-Pacific is being used with the assent of a certain class there. It is not just a white versus yellow or white versus brown or white versus black. It is a more complicated class argument and sometimes the assent is given unwillingly or unknowingly. Those places are being used for the development of capital without necessarily the overall increase in social productivity, Marx has an ambivalent attitude towards capitalism and recommends using it in order to bring about associated

labour. That argument has been destroyed. The world has used the development of capital in order to foster a more fully active capitalism in places like the United States, where because neocolonial exploitation happens by remote control and is immediately managed by the hyperreal, you have a conviction that this is a society of the rule of law. In places like the United States, except in the absolutely peripheral sectors, the middle class and even a section of the working class truly feels no extra economic coercion. And economic coercion cannot really be felt like domination can be felt. So one cannot say that these places are more capitalist than the United States. If one is going to understand capitalism in a Marxist sense rather than simply as a term of opprobrium, if you know what I mean.

RY: I'd like to move the discussion now towards the specific brief of our last conference at Southampton—'Neocolonialism Now'—namely the need 'to examine not so much neocolonialism abroad as neocolonialism in a particular historical moment and space: the continuing effects of colonialism on contemporary Western academic disciplines and institutional practices; more generally, neocolonialism as the continuing effects of the history of colonialism in the metropolis'. If you will allow the term to take on that inward turning reference, what would you identify as the most significant features of the operation of contemporary forms of neocolonialism in the domestic arena (British or American)? Perhaps as a rider to that question, I could recall that in your talk you weren't so interested in identifying, it seemed to me, the features of that operation, so much as in pointing towards difficulties in current work on colonial discourse, neocolonialism etc. — problems that you felt were involved in the analysis

rather than in the object. Perhaps you could come back to that later on.

GCS: Later on I think, but I could answer the question in a general way. The sense in which we are using the word neocolonialism I have explained. That is a commonly accepted meaning of the word neocolonialism. Neocolonialism is not simply the continuation of colonialism; it is a different thing. That is what I call 'postcoloniality' and I find the word postcolonialism just totally bogus. Neocolonialism is displaced colonialism because you need a different kind of policy when it is territorial imperialism, being *in loco parentis* to the natives etc. It is no longer imperative. But neocolonialism in general, I'm speaking very broadly, has as its alibi a fully fledged cultural relativism. Neocolonialism is also interested in fostering rights talk in a class specific situation.

Now let us think about two ways in which one finds identity. One way is where you actually learn to think differently. So that for example, again since France is much on my mind, you can say that behind the *mission civilisatrice* there is a certain influence of the French Enlightenment. On the other hand, and I made this argument just last week in Princeton in a discussion after a paper by Alice Conklin. The people were wondering in the group, as to whether the model then was the Enlightenment or Rome. Someone said from the back, 'No it was Alexander', some Professor said, 'No it was Napoleon'. Nobody had read *The Eighteenth Brumaire* it looked like. And they were reinventing Marxism in a much less interesting way. But none the less what I proposed there, and I think this is a suggestion we ought to consider, you learn to think differently and that is the effect of the Enlightenment.

On the other hand, you have models that you imitate from a fractured semiotic field, so that you think you *are* something else. So you can actually be doing, can actually be saying I am doing yin and yang, when actually what you are doing is a travestied Hegel. So that in fact they were pretending that they were Romans, or they were Alexander. No ancient Roman would have recognized himself in these Messieurs Vontalamesse. Nevertheless the epistemic transformation was the Enlightenment or a travesty of the Enlightenment. But the models imitated, the identity found was Roman. So in this sense neocolonialist knowledge production in the humanities and the soft social sciences is very interested in the production of these identity models that will seem like they are coming from other cultural spaces. You see what I mean?

RY: Yes, I think so...

GCS: Because this gives an alibi for the entry into the neo-colonial sector. It's exactly on the ideological level that it matches the collaboration of indigenous capital thinking of development, of work, thinking of the way in which Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have paid to become colonized. We shall see that soon U.S.-style feminism will be able to infiltrate into Saudi Arabia. Already in representation on television much has been made of this.

Lilah Abu-Logodh and I have talked about the fact that much has been made of the fact that forty upper-class Saudi Arabian women drove cars. Soon there will be a discourse which will say that the people of Saudi Arabia and the women of Saudi Arabia really are like us. So we must help them to become more like us. We must not identify governments and people. This is also one of the arguments within cultural relativism. And so this way one

of the strongest functioning of unwitting neocolonialism is the production of models of identity from supposedly the history of other places where the epistemic transformation is rights talk among a certain class. Many more examples can be given.

Another way in which it works is to ignore the subaltern in the old colonized areas. *Culturalism* in the other Third World cultures is in itself also a class-based thing. This idea is not so easily accessible. If I remember right there was at the Southampton conference, and I presume therefore is going to be in this collection, a paper by Ania Loomba. She did try to say something about the fact that the government of India was using this kind of Indian identity really for highly dubious political purposes. I think that that is something that could have been taken much further, that is to say not just a negative. Because it seemed to me that in the audience there was a certain kind of bewilderment because as far as the ordinary politically correct person knows in Britain it is good to assert Indian culture because it is another formerly colonized culture. If it is developed further then one begins to see, begins to launch, not just the critique of the government of India but the fact that those kinds of nation-building culturalist activities really have nothing to do with a very important part of the country, which is precisely what I am calling the subaltern. This benevolent multi-culturalism is one of the problems of neocolonialist knowledge-production as well.

The Los Angeles festival a couple of years ago was much advertised as a multicultural event. There was a small sector where a group of female Indian adolescents did some sort of classical Indian dance. First of all the history of the production of these classical dances, their elitization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

century, and what happened to the old dancers, is a story that is extremely important for feminist work in India. But apart from that, we felt, some Indians, that on the Indian subcontinent we have not yet been able to work out what it is to be 'Indian' and as a result at this point the country is drowning in blood. But America knows. America knows: that is the Indian sector in the multicultural festival. Now this is an object lesson of the way in which neocolonialist, multiculturalist, culturally relativist knowledge-production once again leaves the heterogeneity of other spaces aside, and produces an easier politically correct brand of cultural studies.

RY: But does that mean that work on neocolonialism in the metropolitan countries — such as this issue of the *Oxford Literary Review* — can, in effect, simply be another form of neocolonialism — rather on the model of Orientalism?

GCS: Absolutely — in fact you've hit it. I call it the new Orientalism and people are not very happy to hear this. Because they think that it is a negative thing. It is not upbeat. It doesn't help in the fight against racism. And I think to an extent they are right.

It is necessary to assert even this rather pathetic kind of multiculturalism in order to put some sort of platform against the white majority racist argument that humanities education — I don't know about Britain, but in the United States — should be devoted to a study of whatever Western culture is. I quite agree that we have to put forth such a front, but it seems to me that that is the only way in which it is useful, and it becomes very dangerous for us that in order to be reactive to the white majority, we have in fact also, because we do not want to be self-critical, to

become involved in a new Orientalism as regards other places. I don't see a way out of it too clearly because there can be a kind of resentful parochialism among the cultural elite of the other places as well. But I need to keep on saying this and lose friends here as well as there.

RY: That is the problem with this argument — that it doesn't seem to offer a way out. Except on a basis where you let things be. For example, going back to your own question about the position of women in Saudi Arabia, I was struck by the remarks of Zeinab Badawi, a TV journalist, talking recently about the position of women in Islam. She said that as a Muslim — she didn't say which sect — she found problems with what Islam says about the position of women and she acknowledged that there was a problem. But she said, that is a problem for Muslim women. It's not a problem for white feminists. That seemed to me to be a very powerful argument, and one corroborated more recently by Fatima Mernissi's book. But of course it puts white feminists, or anyone interested in the problem of neocolonialism, in a very difficult position. If you participate you are, as it were, an Orientalist, but of course if you don't, then you're a eurocentrist ignoring the problem.

GCS: I don't think that I have made myself clear. It's not just that if you participate you are an Orientalist. If you participate in a certain kind of way you are an Orientalist and it doesn't matter whether you are white or black. Today you don't need to have the right kind of skin colour in order to be an Orientalist. There are lots of us duskies and swarthies who are interested in this easier way, and who in fact — again this is very fraught ground — who are interested in talking about admirable reforms that they

have instituted in their own institution as the be all and end all of anti-neocolonialist work.

RY: But I'm not so sure that being a Muslim falls into the category of that kind of identity politics.

GCS: I was very struck by something said by two participants in an inter-cultural conference in Italy that I went to in February. One of them was Folabo Ajayi, a Nigerian dancer who teaches dance at the moment in the United States. The other was Drew Taylor, a Canadian native American who is a playwright and this question came up, you know, as to who has the right etc. The two of them had not known each other before — they were about as different from each other as you can imagine. But both of them, and I find great comfort in this, because in general of course people would like to hypostatize skin colour and say, you know you just have to *be* something or the other. And there's a great deal of terrorizing of people that goes on in this way which is really bogus — but both of them in fact said, although they too were not heard carefully, both of them said: Listen, if you do it after so much homework, not just of information-gathering but learning, not just knowing — there is a difference between learning and knowing, knowing about the workings of the internal combustion engine is not the same thing as learning to drive. So that if you do it such a way, like Gayle Omvedt in India, for example, if you do it in such a way that we can really talk to you, then there is no problem. But if you just talk about doing it in this nice superficial way so that people can say you are also interested in the Third World, then you will get nothing. It's not *easier* to do than other kinds of work. That is something that is very important because this is completely different from a chromatist

argument — you have to be the right colour, a nativist argument, you have to be from the place — it just says either you do it as carefully as you do your own work or don't do it.

You can't just be a revolutionary tourist and be the Saviour of the world on your off days. This is the message, as I say: you can be a new Orientalist and be one of those. It is a class argument too: you disguise your own desire to be upwardly class mobile by joining in with this easy cultural relativism. This is certainly part of neocolonialism.

RY: Would that be how you would situate yourself and your own work — according to that description?

GCS: Yes, except that I would say that, of course, what my work is much clearer to other people than it is to me. I never really know what my work is. It always seems to me that I am doing my work because I want to do it or I'm under pressure. If something comes up and then later, my teachers, my students will say, my friends will say, the odd person who reads my book will say, that this is what it was. In an interview with Elizabeth Grosz I tried to say that, yes, this turning towards India, turning towards more than India now, was because I taught in the West. I am really now just kind of narrativizing, I don't know if this is exactly how it was. At first I felt that I couldn't just be an expert on French Feminism. I have told this story, I think even in print, so I am not going to say it again. That is how it began. And then I began to see that it was necessary in order to study British literature to consider the cultural self-representation of the British. In order to see this, since Literature was one of the instruments of cultural self-representation, I came face to face with the representation of the colonies hidden in the nooks and crannies of the

work — and doing this I felt that it was not just enough to look at its representation in the Metropolitan literature. I should follow the clue into this a little. It happens that I am bilingual in my mother tongue and English and equally proficient in both; so that accident allowed me to investigate a bit more the Bengali area.

It happens that my Sanskrit is just a little short of serviceable. I can move around with it. And then I got in with the Subaltern Studies group who are themselves not all based in India. So it happened in a happenstance way. But I would say that, at this point in time, I am really very aware of not being trapped by the solution of a multiculturalism that constantly celebrates the other space as just one moment in the metropolitan state, that celebrates the migrant and the hybrid at the expense of the difference at the origin, that therefore ignores the subaltern in other space. I therefore try to send my students in cultural studies as much as possible into the old disciplines that grew up within the old style colonialism and to learn substance from there, languages from there, and politics from us, rather than destroy the good politics by the careless acquisition of gossip as scholarship. This distinction of course is too hard and you would have to undo this as soon as you started talking about individual students' programmes and so on. Speaking programmatically, I would say that that is how I try to be careful about how much my work contributes to neo-colonialist knowledge production.

RY: That would relate to a comment you make several times here and there about the difficult position that you are in, in terms of the space in which you are constituted by others. Paradoxically this is characterized by a constant mobility: in America you are the representative of the

Third World, in India you say you are taken as a representative of the First. If there is a beyond to those two representations, where does that put you and where does that put your work? How do you operate in that particular dichotomy? Which brings me to the first of what you have already cheerfully called the more hostile questions, namely 'might teaching deconstruction in Bangladesh constitute a form of neocolonialism?' Turning it round, it is probably more difficult teaching in India than in the United States from a political perspective. How do you see it? How do you, on the one hand, not be patronizing, for example by refusing to talk about Western theory and so forth, but on the other hand avoid simply transporting theories such as deconstruction to India? If deconstruction has, let it be said, been used there at a literary level for some time, it could nevertheless be regarded as a form of neocolonialist importation.

GCS: The thing is that I didn't have to take deconstruction to India, and I didn't take deconstruction to India...

RY: OK — but recall the account you gave at the Freud conference of introducing deconstruction in a discussion in Bangladesh. But in any case, the point is that you take it with you, wherever you go.

GCS: Absolutely. The thing is though, first off, we mustn't overemphasize my position in India. There are lots of people like me, lots of Indians who like me teach abroad and come to India every year. So I am not as unique as this would imply — I mean I am not unique at all! Seriously. So let us forget that angle.

Apart from that, I would say that I don't take deconstruction to India. I will tell you some stories, though people don't like me being anecdotal.

RY: Why?

GCS: I don't know why. The same people who say women must tell stories — perhaps they have decided I am not a woman. But this is a critique that I have heard. I heard that at one point in Calcutta someone had said to someone, this is how the story must be, that 'Gayatri Spivak comes to Delhi or to Calcutta and speaks as if nobody has read Foucault and Derrida here'. And so you know, I said to my friend, Professor Bagchi, 'you heard me in Paris. You know that Gayatri Spivak is so impertinent that she even speaks in France as if nobody had read Foucault and Derrida'. This is her unfortunate demagogic way of speaking. This has nothing to do with India. The whole back-biting scene à la deconstruction is very alive at home among academics. It is not like Spivak is the prophet — no way.

RY: But that back biting must itself register the fact that people do feel it as a neocolonial pressure?

GCS: I don't think so. I think both of these stories illustrate that they feel that for someone coming from the United States to claim that she knows these things better than the locals is a false claim and a kind of unjustified arrogance. In other words, university professors in India are completely *au courant*, that is the suggestion, completely *au courant* about the international scene. So it must be understood, that otherwise we tend to think — I got into deep trouble for saying this ironically once.

Persons who wanted to lay me low simply decided to quote it without the irony. Therefore I am going to spell it out this time. I said that people sometimes think that there are no universities in India. And therefore the persons who used this suggested that I had said that *I* thought that there were no universities in India. You see that this is exactly not what I am saying. What I am saying is sometimes when we think about the taking of avant-garde schools of thought to India or Algeria or whatever we still have the beads for gold model, whereas the people who teach at universities there get very irritated because they say, look here, we read books you know, it is not necessary to bring this knowledge to us. We know about these things. I think it is to misrepresent the theme to say that the exportation of alien schools of thought is neocolonialist practice.

I think the much more important neocolonialist practice there is, and again I will not name names, is to say 'I do not call myself feminist because feminist is something that is Western. I am interested in the rights of women'. Now you can say in that situation it is important that you don't call yourself a feminist because it is true that feminism is understood as something Western. But I think it is also important that you recognize that the concept of human rights, individual rights, has a deep complicity with the culture of imperialism. If you say this then some anthropological search will isolate and find some native text where something can be translated as 'right'. And I will be told that that is where the concept of right comes from. Again this is a very politically important gesture to say, 'no, we had it all along'. But none the less gesture politics and the production of knowledge are not the same thing. You cannot fight something if you do not acknowledge that what is poison has also historically been

medicine. Homeopathy is the only way. Sometimes homeopathy is called deconstruction.

Therefore what you have to realize is that, even as, counterfactually, it is possible to suggest that if historically this had not happened to us — people like David Hardiman are looking at the development of indigenous capitalism etc. — we would have done it at our own speed. First off, it is not necessary to say that capitalism is good and that every so-called progressive gesture is good. But even if you say so, you can say that maybe at our own speed something else would have happened. But since something else didn't happen it is a real denial of history not to acknowledge that the opposition between women's rights and feminism is false, as much as it is important politically because of the local reputation of feminism: if in the long run one really believes this as truth, as it were, then one is in for a bad time because this is not true and it is going to lead to all kinds of consequences, that in fact in the end, again, is bloodshed in the name of nativism.

Deconstruction is neocolonialist, it's Western, but Bolshevism grew on Indian soil. You see this is what I was thinking about in terms of this spurious kind of production of models of identity. One can say I am a Roman, I am an Indian, I am Alexander, when in fact, the way of thinking is coloured by the last two centuries of exchange. Are they thinking like Medhātithi or Kulluka? I am using these names because I am quite sure most claimants to Indian identity won't know these names. These are the rationalist critics of native thinking in the twelfth century. They have a lot of stuff that resonates better with deconstruction than with Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy. Thus the model of the exportation of deconstructive work is spurious on at least three counts: (i) they read that stuff at the elite universities; (ii) the unacknowledged academic method-

ological model on the ground, defended with great passion, is generally colonial rather than anything else; and (iii) scholars in our fields do not know a great deal, or in textual detail, about critiques of metaphysics within the Indic tradition, perhaps because Sanskrit learning is of less interest to them than knocking deconstruction (when they feel like it).

But I want to add something to this. The idea that deconstruction as an event (Derrida speaks of it as task and event in the Benjamin essay), has some sort of relationship to the postcolonial case — that is to say claiming certain things like the individual rights models etc. without actually having control over their appropriate narrative; turning these things into the catachreses they are even in their proper house — this relationship is in fact known (not by this name) by activists in the Third World, by people who are thinking about politics in the Third World, and here I don't have to teach them deconstruction: this is the deconstruction beside the university.

After a talk on deconstruction in Calcutta in December, the questions related to the political situation in India without my having to make the argument that I have just made about the deconstructive case. In Bangladesh the questions from a group of activists also related to this model. Grass-roots activists (as opposed to urban radicals) in the Third World must use what is at hand, they cannot sit around and decide which individual rights are native. They have to use models that they know, on the field, they have to use models that are capitalist in order to fight the multinationals. In the tribal movement the activists know that the tribals who were considered animals in the fifties and sixties must be encouraged to establish accounts in the banks. Of course this is inserting them in to capitalism. They must be supported when they try to claim citizen's

rights and they know that the constitution is not something that fell into tribal law and culture. It doesn't belong to tribal law and culture, the Indian constitution. There the questions that come relate to difference, relate to the persistent critique of what you cannot not want, relate to catachresis, without particularly my having to teach these words. And there I am not exporting anything.

RY: But there, significantly, you make a distinction between 'activists' and 'people in the universities'.

GCS: I do, yes.

RY: OK. So today, for example, before you came I said goodbye to a friend who I had met in Bengal when I was giving a seminar there on contemporary developments in literary theory. He is visiting Britain on a British Council grant in order to research a book on poststructuralism in Britain. It seemed to me too reverential a project. I said, why don't you write a book on the way poststructuralism has affected thinking in India, or, but this is perhaps in itself a neocolonial demand, investigate the extent to which Saussure, who was a Sanskrit scholar after all though this is scarcely regarded as important in accounts of his work in linguistics, in fact developed many of his ideas on the sign, commonly presented as if coming from nowhere, from Pānini and Sanskrit semiotics. What bothered me about my friend's poststructuralist project was what I perhaps assumed too quickly to be a passive relation, repeating the colonial structure, that there is something in Britain called poststructuralism that is worth academics in India studying, and that seemed a clear case of theory working in a neocolonial way — similar to the way that

Leavis' ideas were exported intact to Indian English departments. It's all still part of the same operation.

GCS: Yes, I would say that that it is a continuation of the old colonial way. I think a neocolonial way is where, that is why I'm saying neocolonialism is different, it is not recognizable like this. Neocolonialism is identity talk. So that what I would say here in deference to our colleague whom I don't know, that what we have to see is how just as just choosing someone who is the right colour skin is not going to help, in the same way, an English department person, just because he or she is Indian is not going to be able to say anything interesting about poststructuralism in India because all that he or she would be able to show for it is universities doing structuralism in a way which is somewhat like either poststructuralism in Britain or post-structuralism in the United States.

RY: Except that it is within a neocolonial context.

GCS: Yes, what's the use? What is he or she going to show? There is nothing much. This is why colonial discourse studies to an extent leave me a little dis- and unsatisfied, both at this point, and you know a story I have told, since you allow me to be anecdotal, the story of our tabla player who said to my father in the fifties that he had noticed a very extraordinary thing which was that whenever there was lightning there was thunder. And my father, who was an extremely gentle person, after all this was a very good tabla player, and there is no reason to knock someone for not having learned about Benjamin Franklin and so on, so my father, I was then pre-teens as it were, although I was quite ready to dissolve into laughter, I noticed that he said, very gravely, yes indeed that is quite

true. Because it is after all true. To an extent, colonial discourse studies, after a certain point, is trivially true. The fact that Indians are doing poststructuralism in universities is also — they are not in a colony any more. To an extent, that they are doing it is obvious in the same way they have been studying Aristotle for some time. There is no reason why they should stop doing it. The much more interesting thing is to see how they are criticizing it.

RY: Certainly.

GCS: Now the way they are criticizing it is quite often, just as you have pointed out, not coming out of a great fund of Indian learning because these people are still in the English department. It is a very dubious assumption that people in English departments will know academically and intellectually about ‘Indian Reality’ because they are Indians. The level, the register, on which they know Indian reality, that is the side I am calling activist when people really engage in it, in order to be able to connect that one to poststructuralism, there is almost no connection because poststructuralism is learned in the bosom of the universities. That is a problem that you can’t solve.

If our colleague is going to talk about that, that is a different thing. But he or she is a literary academic, he or she may not relate to grass-roots activism, and will have a different relationship to the Left, since the State Government is Communist. And post-structuralism in Britain or the United States is also caught in a certain kind of university situation so that when they talk about the Third World they are talking about some hyperreal which has little connection with problems on the ground. When I hear poststructuralist resonances, I read the political

situation like a book, I am not teaching them anything, and the book writers are not writing about this.

And then regarding the second thing, that Saussure did his first book on the Sanskrit vocables. Now this person in the English department, I presume he or she is in the English department, doesn't necessarily know Sanskrit. You can have Ph.D.'s in Sanskrit! And of course if you want to look at how Pānini has been used by the West, the structuralists, people like Todorov, they acknowledge their debt to Pānini, so that is already there. The fact that Pānini's grammar is protostructuralist is well known. The English departments in India don't make a hooaha about it because they are too busy saying individual rights is Indian, or they don't care much about Sanskrit. But that's not a secret; that structuralism found authority in Pānini's grammar.

RY: It may be well known, but its significance remains unacknowledged.

GCS: On the other hand the work that is being done on Indian linguistic theory, Indian ethical theory, that stuff is not given any acknowledgement because that is being done in the bosom of Sanskrit departments. The colleague I am working with, Professor Mahlal, his area, according to a high-level British academic with whom I spoke on Wednesday, is called a minority area. And what work is he doing! Exactly the work I have just mentioned.

To use Indian linguistic theories, Indian ethical theories as instruments for philosophizing rather than cultural objects of fascination is not easy for an Indian scholar of English and in fact most Indian academics haven't a clue what this work is. They think of it, if they do at all, as legitimating cultural tradition. Because of course in order

to do a revisionist reading to the Sanskrit material you have to choose not to study English but to study Sanskrit. That in itself is a choice that will push you into a minority area if you are in the metropolis or into a genuinely native area if you are in India. It is much more complicated, it is not just the choice of an Indian person to do what people in the colonies are doing with poststructuralism.

RY: What I would say to that is that in the metropolis, as you implied, it is now anyway pretty easy to talk about the ambivalence of one's position vis-à-vis East-West relations, knowledge and so forth. But actually people are far less inclined ever to see India or any other country with a comparable relation to Britain, as a source of knowledge, particularly as a source of academic knowledge. That is our continuing neocolonial assumption.

GCS: You see?

RY: I agree with you: that that is one thing colonial discourse theory always stops short of because it will always be saying how ambivalently the native is placed etc. etc. If it sees some form of resistance to Western thinking it will celebrate it, but it will never constitute that space as a space of knowledge as such.

GCS: Agents! Agents of knowledge among other kinds of agents. I say this with a great deal of bitterness, Robert, because I am at the moment a Fellow in the History department at a famous U.S. university. And there are historians of colonialism there who know more about this stuff than I could know in two lifetimes. But all through this year, the thing that I have felt most strongly and have said, to general embarrassment, is that it is almost as if we

don't exist. That is to say colonials, even upper-class colonials, do not exist as agents of knowledge. It is not as though these historians don't know a lot of people like that when they go for their field work and so on. But when it comes to the work that they present we never hear of people. And then there are anthropological style of people who do a lot of breast beating as to how can we know them etc., but you never ever see anything that actually puts them on the same level of human agency. You are exactly right. This gets confused with the resistance to what is called difficult language. Now you can't talk about agency that has not been acknowledged without a little bit of subject-theory talk. God knows we tried very hard to have it — that is why it is so galling to hear deconstruction getting it in the rear from radicals, because they, traditional historians — extremely learned — you know you don't see any of the radical critics sitting there and trying as hard as we are trying. But we try as hard as possible in the bosom of the production of neocolonial knowledge and encounter the difficulties that just cultural studies-wallahs don't face. We are trying so hard to get this in place.

Here's another story. Right from the start this has been going on, this refusal to acknowledge the colonial peoples, post-colonial peoples as agents (forget about women because women are even written off all subaltern classes, they are written even more complicatedly within that agency) has been conflated with a longing for plain prose. If you have plain prose as your slogan, then you can give yourself an alibi that you are really like a good fellow on the ground and these people are elitist. You see now that the whole situation becomes complicated. It allows us to forget that those making the critique are well-established at a very elite university. When I was once again being battered about language, I said I would produce it in

monosyllables — the critique — but you can't stop there. The monosyllabic sentence that came to me was 'We know plain prose cheats'. But what do you do, stop there? Next Friday when there is another paper — every older white male professor, because they are too well bred to say — and also, you know, I bite — to say anything to me, everyone of them complimented the poor young woman, who was admittedly a kind of favourite daughter of the university, who presented her paper, for her lucidity. Nobody had complimented anyone on their lucidity before in these seminars. It became so funny that finally they began to laugh. The first one even said, since a bonehead like me can understand what you have written, you ask for feedback and you *deserve* feedback. So that there was staged this whole, what May Daly calls demeaning befriending — the *deserving* poor rather than us undeserving difficult speakers. What you have focused on, the colonial or the postcolonial as agents of knowledge, even forgetting class and gender, is one of the greatest problems of neocolonialist knowledge.

RY: This puts me in mind of the way in which there seems to be a consolidated effort to talk about deconstruction in terms that are assimilable shall we say to Anglo-American philosophy and such persons, unknown, when they present an account of deconstruction they often talk about Derrida's American followers, by which they mean a literary form of deconstruction. But they rarely talk about Marxist deconstructionists such as yourself in that context. Why do you think that is so?

GCS: I think because the people who talk about American deconstruction in a negative way are really not into Marxism. They don't read us when they read

deconstruction. Most people who go for deconstruction, the very well known names, I won't even say mainstream but the very well known names who go for deconstruction sometimes don't know the difference between money and capital. I am sure they know that something different happens because they invest and so on. But they don't know what it is. They know that money grows and then you have capital. If they don't like Marxism it is because Marxism is communism and totalitarianism. If they like it Marxism is bureaucratic egalitarianism. Now in that kind of arena people really don't have to see any connection between Marxism and deconstruction, and on the other side they have, and again I am speaking from experience, they have 'graduate students' who seem to think that facts are bourgeois. This is how they relate Marxism and deconstruction. Or yet, they can have a third experience among their Marxist colleagues who despise deconstruction by hearsay because they think deconstruction is reactionary because it is against the worker's struggle, or because it denies self-determination. Marxism's opposition to deconstruction (when it is criticism by hearsay) is basically the same as the anti-Marxist objection to deconstruction. That there is no subject, there is no truth, therefore there are no facts and therefore there cannot be either any knowledge or revolution. So basically there is no particular reason why those who talk about deconstruction's American followers should make a connection because they generally are not scholars of deconstruction and since the Marxist consideration of deconstruction is not in the mainstream, there is no particular reason why they should connect the two.

RY: But some people who know deconstruction very much better — mentioning no names — you couldn't make that argument about them, and yet there is a consistent attempt to exclude Marxism.

GCS: I think the popular handbooks on deconstruction that are now being written do include a certain kind of articulation between Marxism and deconstruction where deconstruction really becomes a kind of hyped-up form of ideology critique, so that there is no particular threat to the subject of the critique. The person who is doing the critique remains inviolable. Deconstruction is called Marxist because it too is a critique of rationalism and empiricism. And so deconstruction is tolerable. They quite often will also admit a certain brand, a certain kind of connection, between deconstruction and feminism and multiculturalism, by making deconstruction the discourse of the excluded. I think that both of these are in some senses the trivialization of the risks or dangers of deconstruction. This is also a kind of domestication of deconstruction. But I will say that the handbooks on deconstruction will sometimes include these two versions, that is to say the voice of the excluded, the critique of rationalism and empiricism and therefore the critique of ideology.

RY: But always as a marginal form, never placed in its mainstream.

GCS: Yes, I imagine so. I must say I am not in the habit of reading a lot of these handbooks from cover to cover very carefully. But I do look at them because they are quite fascinating in many ways. And also they are useful in knowing how not to teach. So I do think that there is a way

in which an appeal, is made by a certain kind of handbook writer, to the radical potential of deconstruction by linking it to these two things. So deconstruction becomes a species of feminism or it becomes a species of third worldism or it becomes a species of Marxism. Although I grant you that the regular explicator will look at these as marginal excrescences. There you have it.

RY: In *The Post-Colonial Critic* you argue that 'deconstruction works strongly in the politics of anti-racism'. First of all, how do you see it as working strongly in this way and, as a rider, if it does work so strongly then how come the handbooks on deconstruction do not include anti-racism in their account of deconstruction?

GCS: Well, I think it *can* work strongly if it is used. This is deconstruction as a task. Remember I made the distinction between task and event? It is in Derrida's introduction to Lacoue-Labarthe's *Typographies*. When it works as task in the politics of anti-racism it helps if it is a telematic society. If the project of deconstructive anti-racism is to succeed — they either already have access or they can have access to the teaching of politically savvy deconstruction. I am thinking about people in Samkofa, black anti-essentialists like John Akomfrah or Isaac Julien or Kobena Mercer, people like this. So when there is a possibility of that happening then you can actually clue into the fact when we are dealing with the politics of identity we are not dealing with something that is totally grounded but that it is in fact reactive and it is being used strategically. When South African Indians felt, and I am quoting a former student of mine, 'I do not consider myself as an Indian, I consider myself a Black,' I think that is a significant political advance. This can be explained in terms of the

negotiability of a politics of identity in the interests of struggle. That is no. 1. And the Rushdie affair is a failure of no. 2. You want to claim your rights within a Black Britain. You are not looking to overthrow the nation state format by violent means to bring in another mode of production. That is not what is happening in anti-racist struggles today. Your relationship to that format can be shown, in the way in which Angela Davis, herself a communist, shows it to young African Americans. You have to claim your rights as Americans with a difference. That is in fact the catachresis argument. You know this is not your story, but you must claim entrance into this story with a difference. Those two things together: strategic identity reactively claimed, negotiable for struggle (my South African friend), and a catachrestic relationship to the nation-state format (Angela Davis). These are things that can work but if the project succeeds, they work within the circuit of a telematic society where there can be, or there already, is access to political teaching of this kind of stuff.

But it does seem to me that it works in fact in arenas outside of the metropolis where, after all, racism is not the biggest named problem. In places like Algeria or India racism is not the biggest identifiable problem today. There, I think, as I have said before, it actually works as event without people having to go and talk deconstruction. Because deconstruction is produced in situations like that. Deconstruction is among the things that have to be catachretized. It is much better actually not to bring it in right there. But let it happen. It is already happening because there is no other way in the political arena in decolonized space. There is no other way. You have to relate to the structure — if you don't you have the extreme right. You have the fundamentalists. Where do you go? That is one thing. The second question. Why do people not

talk about it? Well, that has to do with the teaching machine, that has to do with the institution. I mean the nature of disciplines, the nature of the institution, the nature of the teaching machine is basically reactionary, it seems to me. It is placed within individualism and competition, it is placed within the fierce desire for allocation and grants, it is placed within the desire to be validated within that story and the inertia of the tradition of already-produced knowledge which gives you the job satisfaction of being a specialist, the job satisfaction of reproducing yourself among your students. This stuff is reactionary so how do you expect such institutions and such machines to produce recognition?

RY: Well — rather than try to answer *that*, can I pick you up there on a theoretical point? You said just now that deconstruction is anti-essentialist...

GCS: No. I said the Samkofa people and Kobena Mercer etc. talk anti-essentialism. So that politically motivated deconstruction can be taught — no no, I did not say deconstruction is anti-essentialist.

RY: Good! Because I was also thinking not only of them but also of Laclau who takes it to be a form of anti-essentialism.

GCS: No, I admire greatly, I admire greatly the delicacy, subtlety of Mouffe and Laclau's position. But I do think, in spite of Derrida's endorsement, but then Derrida's endorsement is another story, I do think that that's a kind of recuperation of the deconstructive project.

RY: I agree. You said somewhere that Gramsci has become an alibi for not being a Marxist. You weren't thinking of Laclau there?

GCS: Have I really said such a thing? No, no I was not thinking of Laclau there and I certainly was not thinking of my friend Cornel West. I wasn't thinking of Stuart Hall. No — but I know what I was thinking about. You know how Bakhtin is an alibi for certain kinds of work, you don't have to be anti-racist if you talk heteroglossia, then you can seem to be — well, heteroglossia is another name for pluralism. In the same way, if you talk Gramsci you don't have to talk class. And this is one way in which one has got around that. Heaven knows, I certainly wasn't thinking of superb Gramscians like Cornel, no. I was thinking of this on the ground.

RY: Talking of Gramsci — you have mentioned cultural politics a few times. Is there a danger that cultural politics in fact is a Western assimilation of what was certainly developed as a response to the colonial situation?

GCS: You will have to explain this question a bit more.

RY: Right. Gramsci is perhaps the odd man out here but the notion of cultural politics as opposed to that of class conflict was, after all, developed specifically in relation to a colonial situation. It is only recently in effect, since people have given up on the mainstream politics of Marxist theory or, at least, the rigidified economic determination of Marxist theory, that Marxism has been retrieved in the West (via Gramsci in particular) in terms of a cultural politics. But in this version the whole colonial situation has been removed from it and has been virtually lost. Do you

think that the notion of 'Cultural Politics' as such is workable, or must it always be a 'post-colonial cultural Politics', an acknowledgement of the fact that cultural politics as such was a response to the colonial situation (e.g. Ireland, India, Latin America, Fanon, Mao etc.)?

GCS: Yes, now — this is a tangled question and what I am going to try to do is give an answer that is not necessarily only an answer to this question. So my feeling is, my own sense is I didn't even know I was doing cultural politics. It was Bill Germano's subtitle that told me that is what I must be doing because he collected the essays that I had written and he gave it a subtitle — essays in cultural politics. I'm an old fashioned Marxist and my feeling was that cultural politics — if that is what I was doing, was a supplementing of an old fashioned class politics which was (a) metropolis based or metropolitan model and (b) looked at the worker as the agent of the revolution or looked at the progressive bourgeoisie as the agent of internationalism etc., looked at a certain kind of role of the party etc. And assimilated women's struggles into these terms. That is very skeletal, but you know what I am saying. One could go on talking about this, also — that looked at the Union movement in a certain way. I felt that cultural politics was a supplement to all of this and sometimes corrected the details of this rather than being an alternative to this. And there it seemed to me I was in fact following a certain kind of Marxist line which would not accept the other Marxist line on Imperialism. The certain kind of Marxist line that I am describing is in the nooks and crannies of Marx. What I quoted before, the exporting of the capitalist mode of exploitation and not its mode of production. And this kind of Marxism would rewrite the fact that a specifically woman's struggle is not

inscribed into Marxism. In these ways I felt that cultural politics was a certain kind of supplementing and on occasion correcting of Marxist analysis. That is the line that I still tenaciously push. I recognize the tendencies which you were describing and therefore sometimes, especially in the pages of journals like the *New Left Review* or *Telos* there is a certain kind of impatience with cultural studies and I think it is justified quite often. I think as I was suggesting before the whole question of class has been swept under the carpet, especially when, what we described as the new Orientalism becomes the full agenda. You asked me before how I related my own work to this. I think one of the ways is to keep tenaciously also to a certain kind of hard core Marxism.

RY: Would that be an answer to my comment at the end of the discussion of your work in *White Mythologies*, where I say:

On the other hand, and this constitutes the lasting paradox of her work, despite the sophistication of the deconstructive positions which she so patiently establishes, at moments Spivak cannot resist reverting to the imperatives of an individualism, or the continuity of a Marxist narrative not always characterised by the qualified 'dialectic' of a 'Marx after Derrida': so she upbraids her readers, for example, for taking so 'little notice of the politico-economico-technological determinant', of 'masculist-imperialist ideological formations', of the international division of labour, and the like. This residual classical Marxism is invoked for the force of its political effect from an outside that disavows and apparently escapes the strictures that the rest of her work establishes. Spivak speaks of the 'strategic' use of essentialism and universals in certain situations, which describes, perhaps, the way in which class and the economic operate as implicit, undisturbed collectivities against which the anti-

individualism and heterogeneity are driven. For all the carefully constructed disparateness of her work, for all the discontinuities which she refuses to reconcile, Spivak's Marxism functions as an overall syncretic frame. It works, in fact, in exactly the same way as Jameson's — as a transcendentalising gesture to produce closure.

In other words, there are certain moments where you tend to invoke a very orthodox form of Marxism, which seems, on the one hand to disable criticism, but on the other hand to sit uneasily with some of your more deconstructive manoeuvres. Recently, since writing that piece, I read your remark about the difficulties of teaching American and French poststructuralist theory in India. You concluded with the statement that you were always having to prove yourself at the same time an Indian and a Marxist. Does that suggestion of why Marxism remains your base-line discourse offer the best account of its significance for you?

GCS: They are hard questions. You see, this Marx thing, I think what you are pointing at is my use of these Marxist phrases, as a sort of short hand. Politico, economico, technological determinant. I see my own relationship to Marxism as somewhat different from at least the Jameson of *The Political Unconscious*, where he speaks of a base narrative to which everything can be referred. I have no such narrative. In fact, I was just speaking, wasn't I, of the fact that that narrative does not apply to the colonial and postcolonial situation because that production, that class story was not allowed to unroll. So for me there is no base narrative but I will also say that I can see where I am not being a transcendentalist, but I don't make it clear for my readers or my listeners. In the word determinant, for example, if I really pulled it through, my students know that I am using the word determination, *Bestimmung*, as a

critique of causality. In fact if you put the three adjectives together, politico, economico, tecnologico, what you would get is overdetermination, in the sense that I have gone on to learn elsewhere. Overdetermination in the sense of *anders determiniert* rather than just *vielfach determiniert*, not just an arithmetical collection of determinants, but determination — to translate Freud's phrase, otherwise. In other words discontinuous trends that determine so that you can't translate easily. But I do come back to this phrase and it seems as if I am just kind of stopping — making a closure with this phrase. I think I am beginning to learn that that won't do. It is never the case in my teaching of Marx — I do teach a lot of Marx.

In the writing, as you pointed out, yes it looks like closing with the transcendental narrative which is Marx. But I've been able to break this one up in the few minutes of our conversation. In the same way, with masculinist-imperialist ideological formations — the notion of ideology there. Unfortunately that word of course pulls at rather anti-deconstructivist assumptions about consciousness and so on. But in fact the way in which I think ideology has much more in common with the textualist or citationist notion of the place of the subject in the socius, but I don't make that clear, and I use the phrase without the clarification. I think the reader is right in thinking that this is the typical sort of hard-core closure of the deconstructivist openings.

I think in my current work, I hope in my future work, I am more careful about this and in fact what I would point at is my present thinking about the place of Marxism in feminism, after the so-called failure of international communism and America winning the cold war in the new world order. I have written about this already in a Calcutta-based journal called *Frontier*. I was asked to write

about the future of Marxist feminism and since that is not an academic but a political journal I think there is no problem about my seeming not deconstructive enough. In that kind of a journal I have to make it very clear that I am indeed deconstructive, so that it doesn't seem like I am posing as if I am too political, and I think in that arena, the place of Marxism within feminism, I am very careful about precisely not doing the kinds of things that you quite correctly point out — you know like seeming to make a closure.

RY: I wondered whether that is something that you might be inclined to do with an American audience, rather than with an Indian one. So that it depends on your audience whether you throw it in — rather than it being a consistent feature.

GCS: Yes, that is quite true. But it is also true that at that period in my life when I was very anxious to keep my record clean with American Marxists of a certain kind. That is the continuation of the New Left style of Marxism which proves that it is Marxist in the details of everyday life — I think I was misguidedly attempting to keep myself plausible with that strain of American Marxism. I must say that the DSA [Democratic Socialists of America] for example is very different. Whether I go along with them the whole way or not is not the question. But their project is very different from that sort of home-grown post-Vietnam era Leftist academic Marxism in the U.S. I think to an extent these closures are nervous. Because I wanted to keep my credibility with them — don't forget in the early seventies many of the best students were influenced by this kind of Marxism and you don't want to lose your credibility with your students.

I think part of it was unwitting — I am not suggesting that I was deliberately setting out to do that. Of course one also has this feeling of wanting to prove oneself an Indian if one is living by choice abroad and thinking of India in terms of neocolonial cultural politics etc. There is a quite justifiable, although not always correct feeling of colleagues who are teaching at elite universities in India, that somehow the expatriate cannot talk about the Indian example. Having to prove oneself a Marxist in India is a slightly different thing. There has to be among the collectivity of members of the party or the followers of the party, there has to be a certain degree of mechanical Marxism. Then of course there is also the much more legitimate question of how someone who chooses to live in the U.S. coming from a Marxist state, state now with a small 's', that is to say my state of West Bengal, how is such a person in general to be described as a Marxist tax paying person in the U.S.? I think that is a legitimate question. But it also brings with it the question of what it is to be described adjectivally in terms of an ism. It is an extremely complicated question and I don't think you want an answer to that now. I have no objection to it — it would take a very long time indeed! In fact, if you do have anymore questions...

RY: Yes I do. It could be argued that you have achieved much of what had seemed to be the aims of your project — for example, the establishment of a recognition in first-world feminism of the limits of its claims to establish universalising norms for women in general; and the recognition of the possibility that women can also participate in exploitative relations with other women. At the same time, given the enormous burst of interest in what we may schematically call third-world writing, the

dialogue between first and third world literatures — and this works also at a theoretical level — has been opened up, as you yourself envisaged in ‘Stanadayini’. All this has actually been achieved. These are things people in the West think about and are working on and are aware of now — which when you wrote ‘French Feminism in an International Frame’, they weren’t. So you have got successes there to chalk up. Elsewhere you have also said things like ‘my work has been making clear my disciplinary predicament’. I think you have achieved that too and so I would be interested to know how you yourself, given that you have succeeded in these projects, see the next horizon of your work — what are you thinking of as necessary to achieve? Things you would like to put on the agenda in the way that you put these earlier questions on the agenda. In short, what’s next?

GCS: It is very kind of you to say that these things have already been achieved — I must say it doesn’t look like that to me.

RY: They’re on the agenda!

GCS: One of the things, as you know, I believe one must do is the persistent critique of what one cannot not want. This is a formula that no doubt will be much quoted. I shouldn’t say that, it sounds very arrogant! When I look at how it is that third-world writing is being espoused, I feel that I should be not just dogmatic about how you must do it. But I must also be critical because the overall machinery of the teaching machine in producing a certain kind of project is still active — so if you read a piece like ‘The Politics of Translation’ which in fact you helped to print out on your machine in March — that talks about how the

third-world literature that we are solidifying, is being solidified. The piece called 'Post-structuralism, Marginality etc.' — odious title — in *Literary Theory Today* also talks about how the object of investigation is being constituted, and if you look at a piece like 'Once again, a leap into the post-colonial banal', which would probably be printed in *Differences*, you will find an essay which talks about how the Commonwealth literature curriculum is being savaged. So to an extent the job of the critic is never done, the critique in the strong sense, is never done. One cannot say it has been achieved.

But your question really is about my future work. I am very interested in what I call feminism in decolonization so that this is really not just a project about feminism in the metropolis and being critical of it, but a searching out of what happens to so called feminism in the serious arena of women's movements specifically. There are some specific places that I am looking at. I am very struck by the fact that the internationalist voice of global feminism is among the women who had hard access to the culture of imperialism. It is in fact a rewriting of the old vanguardist project of the avant-garde international bourgeoisie, that internationalism. On the other hand in each one of these groups based in a certain culture there is another side, another face, which is in touch with the everyday of its culture. And if one looks at the women in that arena they cannot come forth into the talk of global feminism. This is why just the metropolitan projects which are much more uniform do not interest me that much as spaces of work — intellectual work. Some people read this as a dismissal of that work — not at all — this is an immense project and God knows when one is going to be able to produce anything; as I've said, this might even lead to work

stoppage — if you have to work as we will work. But this is one of the very important areas for me.

I am also interested in looking at Indic sources, source material. Because whenever one talks about ancient texts or origins or anything one thinks of something static. I am interested in that area as also something rather dynamic because of violence in the fundamentalism at home and that leads me to a consideration of non-monotheist agencies of knowledge. These are much more radical in some ways. These are not merely concerned with my disciplinary predicament. I think it was necessary for me to go through that kind of self-interested period, but at this point if I kept myself confined to my disciplinary predicament, given the fact that I am teaching at a fairly good school, and I am a senior academic, is really not of that much interest to my readers — a kind of whining on about this disciplinary predicament in which many people would like to be!

Then there is a thing that I have been working on now for more than ten years (here again I have no clue when anything is going to be produced) which is the idea of a socialist ethics, and of course things change so much in the world that these ideas also change. The notion is that the theory of value is much bigger than just its economic coding; whereas Marx had tried to critique a subject-based philosophy by making Capital the subject of a basically Hegelian determination and then tried to insert the ethical into a questioning of that philosophical justice, since the hero of that determination was the Faust-like monster Capital.

The first involves thinking agency for human beings in certain kinds of pared-down situations that lead one into who knows where. The only discursive formations reporting these situations so far have been either

anthropological or historical testimonial or in some ways palliative where one must in fact try to develop a position that is not the position of the subject of knowledge. I want to keep this last description as mysterious as it sounds. So I hope this is an answer to your question. It kind of trails off into areas rather far away from the United States classroom.

RY: Would you say then that your work on theories of value has been conducted in terms of that project about ethics? Is that how you would formulate what the different essays on value are doing and how they relate to each other?

GCS: Yes, I think the idea that value is the catachrestic, the necessarily misnamed — of course as we said at the Radical Philosophy conference on Socialism and Value, there were those card-carrying radicals who were talking about value in the most reactionary way — truth, beauty, goodness — mostly goodness. Whereas value with Marx is this total misname of some contentless thing secreted by being human which is not pure form and therefore contentless and immediately codable. That's why I said, the theory of value is much broader than just its economic coding, as Marx himself of course recognized. And the ethical — Marx himself inserted the ethical as against mere philosophical justice by making the subject of philosophy Capital rather than Idea. So that the story of philosophy became a nasty story. You can't do it like that, for the speculative morphology will inevitably be read as a kind of realistic blue print. So I am not following Marx's mad venture but certainly I've got the idea of value in the strange non-idea of value in my hand. Yes.

Wadham College, Oxford, 15 March 1991

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