

## Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. **Can the Subaltern Speak?**

<http://www.vhs.or.at/345>

Heide Hammer

Stefan Vater (Verband Österreichischer Volkshochschulen)

<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahini/Slovak.html>

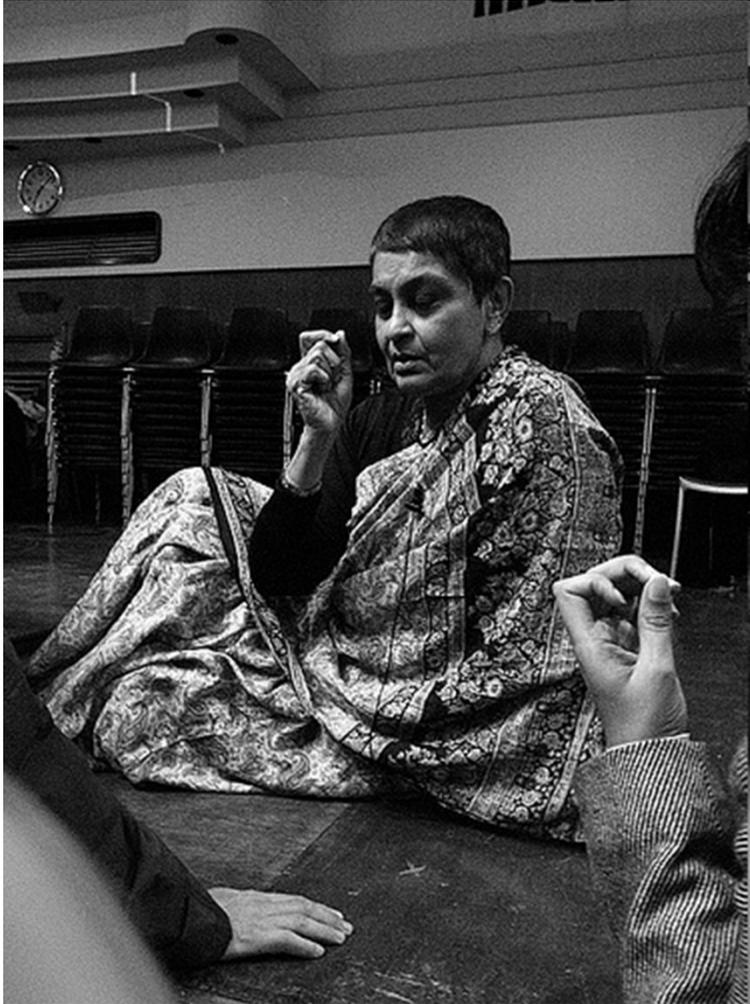
## Biography

Gayatri Chakravorty was born in Calcutta, West Bengal, 24 February 1942 to "solidly metropolitan middle class" parents (PCC).

She did her undergraduate in English at the University of Calcutta (1959), She borrowed money to go to the US in the early 1960's to do graduate work at Cornell.

She "fell into comparative literature" because it was the only department that offered her money.

She received her MA in English from Cornell and taught at the University of Iowa while working on her Ph.D.



<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Slovak.html>  
Her dissertation was on Yeats.

She ordered de la  
grammatologie out of a  
catalogue in 1967 and began  
working on the translation.

Her translator's introduction  
to Derrida's *Of Grammatology*  
has been variously described  
as "setting a new standard for  
self-reflexivity in prefaces"  
(1976)

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<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Spivak.html>

During this time she married and divorced an American, Talbot Spivak.

Her subsequent work consists in **post-structuralist literary criticism, deconstructivist readings of Marxism, Feminism and Postcolonialism** (including work with the Subaltern Studies group and a critical reading of American cultural studies in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* [1993]),

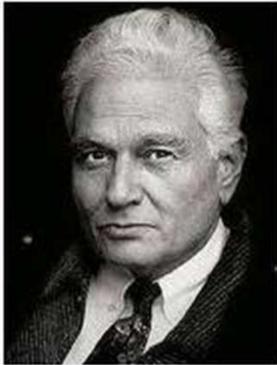
She is currently an Avalon Foundation professor at Columbia.



<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Spivak.html>

**„Literature can train the  
imagination of other  
worlds“**

<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Spivak.html>



Jacques Derrida



Paul de Man



Charlotte Brontë



Rasaweta Devi



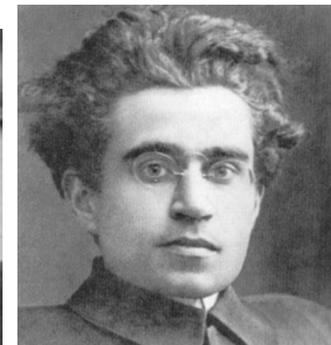
W.B. Yeats



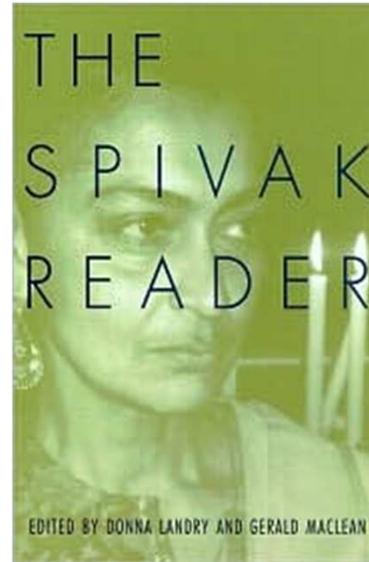
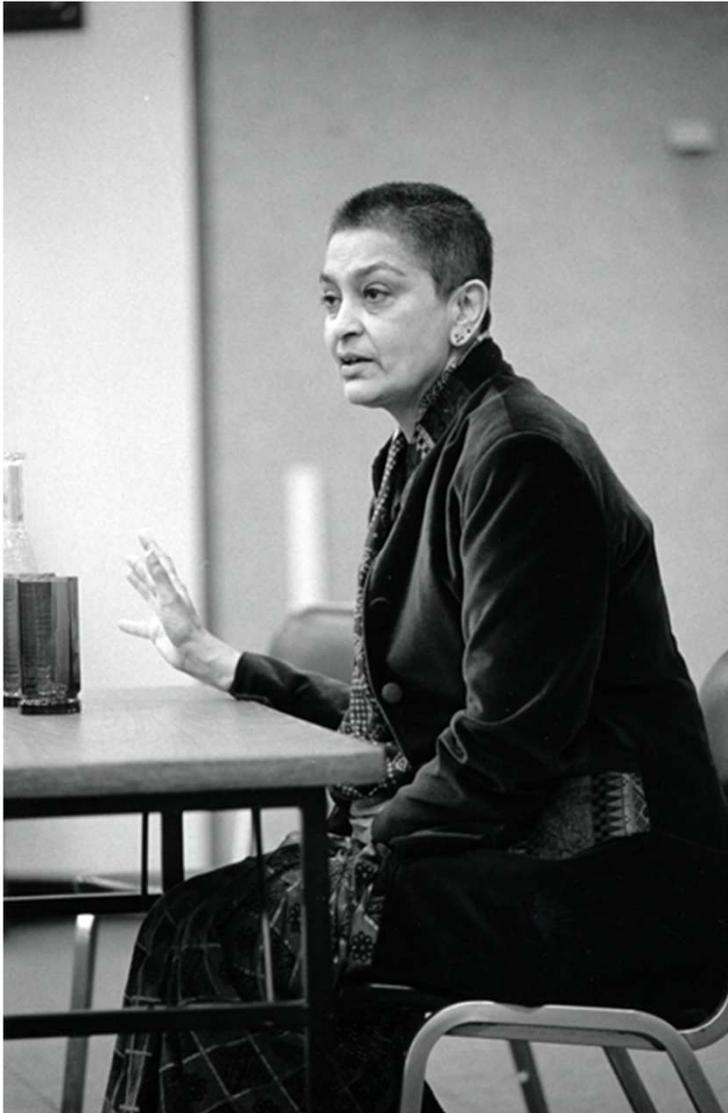
Julia Kristeva



Ranajit Guha



Antonio Gramsci



## THEMENFELDER (lt. Morton 2002)

- Dekonstruktion (Stil, Komplexität..)
- Französischer Feminismus
- Frauenbilder in der Literatur
  - Marx / Wertfragen
- Stimmergreifung >Can the Subaltern Speak?<

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is an unsetting voice in **literary theory** and, especially, **postcolonial studies**. She has described herself as a “**practical deconstructionist feminist Marxist**” and as a “**gadfly.**” (Störenfried)

## Deconstruction

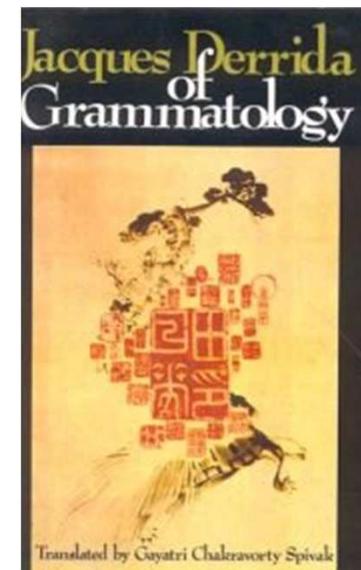
>we know plain prose cheats< (Morton 6)

>texts are unstable< (Morton 4)

Stichworte (nach (Landry/Maclean)

Deconstruction cannot found a political program, it is a political safeguard.

>Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say, without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work< (zum Opfer fallen)



## Postcolonial Thought / Can the Subaltern Speak

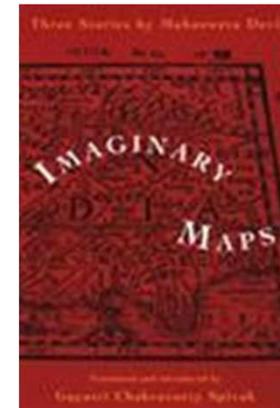
“the constitution of the Other as the self’s shadow” means the analysis of the heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other of the Western/Imperialistic Subject.

>the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female even more deeply in shadow.<

-> object of colonialist historiography/subject of insurgency: the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. (2203)

Ranjit Guha, of the subaltern studies group argues:  
“The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism— colonist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism... (2200)”

Who has “the permission to narrate”  
(Edward Said).



Spivak used the distinction in Marx's famous statement about the peasantry '*They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented*', to examine the dynamics of subaltern 'voice' and 'representation'



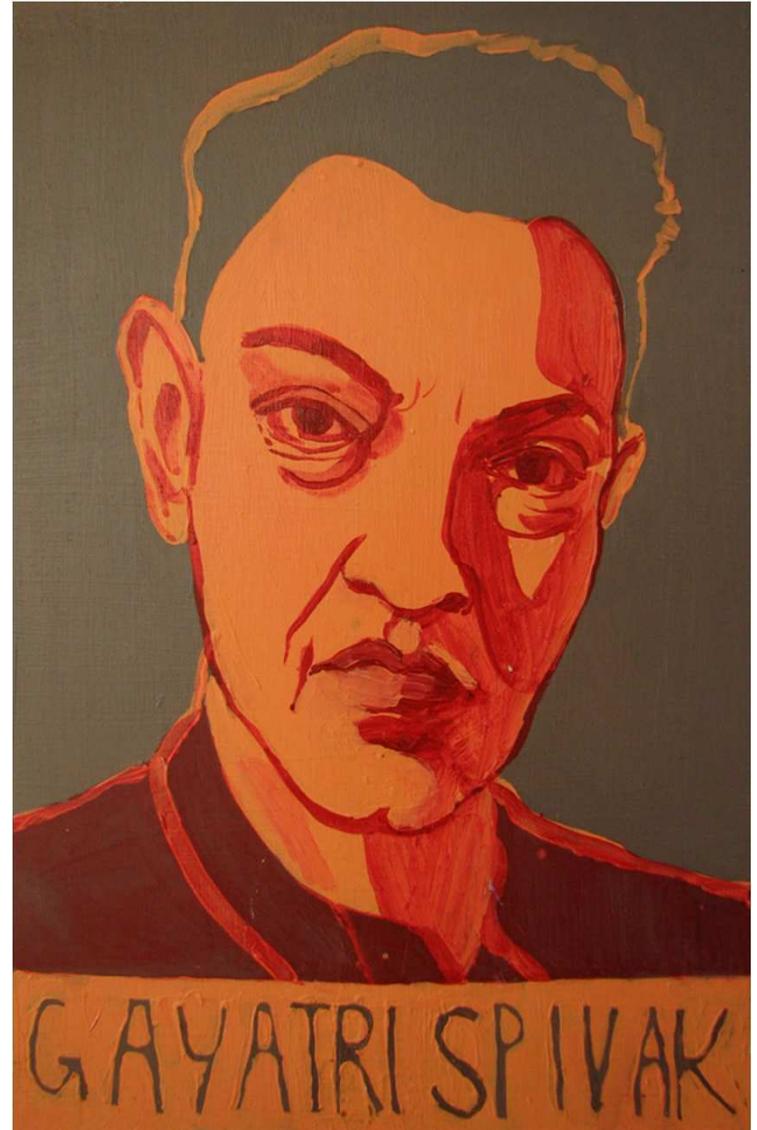
(nach (Spivak-Reader Landry/Maclean)

### Can the Subaltern Speak / Ethics

#### **Unlearning one's privilege as one's loss**

- > working critically back through one's history, prejudices and learned responses
- > the attempt to speak to the others in such a way that they might be able to answer
- >our privileges whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of other knowledge< (Landry/Maclean)

**Ethics are not a problem of knowledge but a call of relationship.**



Feminismus

trotz aller Kritik, die Spivak vorbringt

>the best of a collection of accessible scenarios< (Morton 8)

Internationaler Feminismus als Diskurs des Westens/Nordens, mit paternalistischer Geste, >obsessiver Selbstszentriertheit< (Spivak 88,137, Castro 59) und kolonialistischem Wohlwollen (Castro 59)

*'Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced centre) of the circuit marked out by this epistemological violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat' (Can the Subaltern Speak?)*

*'Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figure of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation' (Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak?)*

*"the subaltern cannot speak", means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That is what I meant, and anguish marked the spot', From 'Subaltern talk', in Landry and Mclean 'The Spivak Reader' (1996)*

Ende

**IN OTHER WORLDS**  
ESSAYS IN  
CULTURAL POLITICS



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak