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Postcolonial Reason and Its Critique: Deliberations on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Thoughts  
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Narrated by Theodra Bane

The occasion for the papers collected in *Postcolonial Reason and Its Critique: Deliberations on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Thoughts* was a symposium held in 2000 to discuss the publication of Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: A History of the Vanishing Present* (hereafter *CPR*). The papers from the symposium are collected here with some additions and an addendum of responses from Spivak.

These papers respond to Spivak's masterful work on philosophy, literature, history, and culture in *CPR*. Feminists and scholars of all kinds who want to have a deeper engagement with Spivak's thinking in *CPR* would benefit from reading *Postcolonial Reason and Its Critique*. In terms of Spivak's advocacy for transnationally literate vernaculars and the attempt to think otherwise about globality and politics, *Postcolonial Reason and Its Critique* should be read against *CPR* to get a better feel for what it means to imagine scenes of identity-construction and disarticulation that proceed by way of dialogue and dialect rather than by way of the specular authority of a sovereign voice.

Many of the papers in this collection mark Spivak's engagement with Kant's views on aesthetics in *The Critique of Judgment*, most notably Drucilla Cornell's "The Art of Witnessing and the Community of the *Ought To Be*" and Stephen Morton's "From a Postcolonial Critique of Reason to A Critique of Postcolonial Reason." But it is Chetan Bhatt's paper, "Kant's 'Raw Man' and the Miming of Primitivism," that offers the most challenging rebuttal to Spivak's articulation of the native informant figure that, Spivak contends, finds its earliest textual configuration in *The Critique of Judgment* as Kant's "raw man," the native of the global south who is, for Kant, incapable of reading the sublime or, for that matter, European Enlightenment.

For Spivak, Kant's invocation of the "raw man" can be read as setting into motion an "axiomatics of imperialism." Germany's complicity in the financialization of the globe finds its way into Kant's eighteenth-century discourse as the mark of the Other underwriting the European staging of its own subjectivity in globality. But Bhatt criticizes what he believes to be Spivak's historicist stance and argues that her "project is founded on an 'autochthony in time' . . . 'we' all emerged irreducibly in the time of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; only those of us educated appropriately can look forward to an impossible primitivism to which we cannot return as the supplement to our persistent critique of the present that we cannot not want" (198).

But crucially, for feminist scholars of difference working in a transnationally literate vernacular, Spivak is not arguing for an "autochthony in time" or any other analytic of easy historicist reasoning. She is saying that scholars may provisionally track the figure of the native informant from Kant to Hegel to Marx, and that this morphology of the same-in-difference as figure is not merely fortuitous for feminist postcolonial critics unraveling continuist Enlightenment narratives that persist in the current historical conjuncture. She is plotting the subject of Europe within the field of writing across disparate conjunctures. To not mark this

itinerary of figuration that oversteps so many literary scenes (Shakespeare, Kant, Brontë, Mary Shelley, Hegel, Marx, Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri) would make her an irresponsible critic.

Tentatively, the figure appears in Kant (philosophy) and then in Brontë and Shelley (literature), with the morphology of this figure attaining more dimension and "fleshing out" with each textual iteration, down to Marx's staging of the "Asiatic Mode of Production" (history), and finally, today's subaltern on the way to ostensible global citizenship (culture).

More important, as Spivak plots the figure of the native informant across these texts, she reminds her readers that she is not holding Brontë or Marx or anyone else *accountable* for the "axiomatics of imperialism" that surface in their texts, but rather bringing them *to an account*. "I am not accusing Charlotte Brontë, I am rather reminding ourselves that even a brilliant imagination is no guarantee against time-bound failings" (233). The appearance of a figure like Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* may be read as a (historically) located instance of incipient globalization.

Questions of historiography aside, Bhatt's broader critique of Spivak's project founders around the question of Kant's view of who is authorized to make "informed" aesthetic judgments within a given social context. Bhatt states, "Kant did argue that it is primarily cultivated and educated men who can make judgments of taste and sublimity . . ." (189). But strangely, by invoking "taste" as the regime of aesthetic judgment, Bhatt is rehearsing sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's views on Kant's views of aesthetic judgment rather than Kant's.

As Cornell elucidates this topic in her paper, "The Art of Witnessing," critics like Bhatt and Bourdieu miss the point that for Kant, "It is not a group of experts who represent a can[on] of aesthetic wisdom to which Kant is appealing as the basis of an aesthetic judgment" (80). For Cornell, Kant is remarking upon the impossibility of installing one's singular experience of the beautiful or the sublime as the ground for what should be everybody's standard or proper experience of those categories, and this view of Kant cuts against Bhatt's charge of elitism in Spivak's project: "only those of us educated appropriately," and so on. Since Bhatt, following Bourdieu, insists on a misreading of Kant as endorsing a regime of aesthetic elitism, he is forced into a misreading of Spivak, and chides her for a homologous form of aesthetic elitism that she clearly does not endorse.

Cornell's reading of Spivak through Kant is acute. Kant's invocation of aesthetic elites in *The Critique of Judgment* is better thought of as a gesture of deference rather than a gesture of pedagogy. Cornell acknowledges Kant's invocation of an aesthetic regime in *The Critique of Judgment*, but cautions that installing a group of experts to adjudicate matters of taste and art in a given social context, "is not at the heart of his argument" (96). By leaving the native informant in the dark on questions of beauty and the sublime, Kant is not legislating aesthetics for a community "to come." As Cornell writes, "It only reflects his prejudice regarding who is and is not civilized" (96).

The trick, one might say, for Spivak, is to effect this operation of tracking the figure of the native informant without falling prey to postcolonial attitudinizing. In an otherwise strong and fluent reading of *CPR*, Morton's paper, "From a Critique of Reason to a Critique of Postcolonial Reason," proceeds by way of a more Foucauldian analytics on the investments of power in philosophy and politics. He reads Spivak as reading Kant as accountable for the travesties of colonialism--"To further support her argument that Kant's critical philosophy provides a rational justification for colonialism . . ." (144)--which goes against the grain of her

critique. As Spivak writes, "I feel troubled that Morton sees my reading of Kant as an accusation of Eurocentrism" (240).

These may seem like local differences of locution, but they are important. Morton, following the Foucauldian analysis, is within his rights to situate an incipient rationalist globalizing tendency in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, just as Foucault documented Descartes's foreclosure on madness in favor of rationalism in the *Meditations*. Kant may certainly be read as providing "a rational justification for colonialism," but in Spivak's critical vernacular, such a critique risks over-determining the reach of European power/knowledge regimes and inadvertently re-inscribes a kind of impervious European monoculture always on the march and always aware of what it's doing.

This theme of the risks involved in re-inscribing Europe as isomorph of power/knowledge is taken up nicely in Ritu Birla's paper, "History and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Limits, Secret, Value." Birla surveys Spivak's thoughts on time, subjectivation, historical contingency, and the writing of Europe as archon of power. Her exegesis of the "History" chapter in *CPR* answers Bhatt's charge of historicism in Spivak's conception of the native informant figure in the following way: "The attempt here is to think historically while resisting causality naturalized by chronology" (30). On Birla's reading of Spivak, feminist scholars are asked to think in time on questions of theory and literature, but they should be wary of re-inscribing the mark of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* that so frequently accompanies this move.

In *CPR*, Spivak writes on the analytic appeal of the Hegelian "chronotypograph," which persists without irony in so much contemporary historiography that situates everything within history in order to underwrite varying typologies of global development. By locating power exclusively in the isomorph of Europe as archon of power, scholars run the risk of essentializing Europe to the point of absurdity, whereas in Birla's reading of Spivak, feminist scholars are being asked to consider "how to think colonialism without reproducing an intentional, homogeneous colonial author" (30). Birla, reading Spivak closely, asks feminist scholars to consider the possibility of a European monoculture--in economics, history, literature, and politics--that may not always be underway to itself.

One obvious snag in the unfolding of this narrative of essentialist European monoculture comes by way of Greece, which serves simultaneously as an index of European success (birthplace of democracy and culture) and as an index of its failure (capitalist democracy in financial crisis). Maria Koundoura plots the highs and the lows of Greece as archon of European development in her paper, "Rethinking Rights and the Vision of Cultures 'to Come,'" where she considers the possibilities of figuring the modern Greek citizen as aboriginal: "My figuring of the 'Greek', the figure at the philosophical origin of the discourse of 'man', as 'raw,' as an aboriginal . . . in their exclusion from the very discourse they were made the founders of . . ." (165).

This project employs a rethinking of the "aboriginal" in Spivak that might best be thought of in the register of Baudrillard's critique of American global hegemony in the late 1980s, especially his figuration of America as globality's "most primitive society." Clearly, Baudrillard was not arguing that America was globality's most primitive society on a materialist index, but he was arguing that in terms of hyper-managed global development, American society in the late 1980s was where every so-called developing society would be in 50 to 100 years, thus making America the most primitive society, since it would serve as every developing country's future anterior.

This is how Koundoura asks scholars to consider "the Greek" citizen, who serves simultaneously as the abstract average for the perceived failures of European capitalist democracy, and as the abstract political average for every "developing" society "to come." The Greek migrant, especially, for Koundoura, is situated as a snag in a European mono-narrative that is so often employed by geo-politicians to underwrite democratic excursions in every other part of the world, but not within their own borders.

Thinking otherwise about the "aboriginal," globality, feminist ethics, diasporas, indigenous elites, defunct nationalisms, and Kantian aesthetics is what this collection is about. The papers collected in *Postcolonial Reason and Its Critique* are by scholars who have answered Spivak's call to think otherwise about globality; these papers mark their setting to work on these topics. In the rest of the collection, Mark Sanders works on the relays between Paul de Man and Spivak in his attempt to mark a socialist ethnicity, especially around Spivak's notion of history as permanent parabasis; Adrian Parr focuses on the plight of child detainees in Australia; Mieke Bal discusses the unique experience of reading Spivak; and Dina Al-Kassim analyzes the farcical as she looks at how CBS News and Connie Chung try to write "women in development."

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