ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Spivak’s Derrida: exploring the materiality of discourse

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Abstract
This paper argues how it is that woman’s role and function within a global economy works in tandem with her own discursive inscription. By drawing on the work of Gayatri Spivak, it suggests a way in which Jacques Derrida’s discursive treatment of the figure of woman intersects with her material manifestation, her expected roles and functions. It finds that the figure of woman in Derrida’s work can be productively thought in conjunction with living woman’s concrete objectification under capitalism. Most generally, the paper hopes to open one line of discussion into the way that certain oppressive institutions are constructed and sustained.

Keywords: Derrida; Spivak; woman; gender; Third World; discourse

Over the years, a rich and fruitful critical literature has grown around Jacques Derrida’s engagement with the figure of woman. These critiques for the most part used Derrida’s writings to examine the ontological situation of woman. Judith Butler, for instance, sparked a great body of work developing the thesis that gender or sexual difference is not a secondary aspect of, but fundamental to, being.¹ This paper distinguishes itself from this work by not addressing the ontological status of woman. Rather, it examines the figure of woman as the epistemological support for certain social and economic institutions.

Just as Derrida positions his figure of woman as a necessary piece of a grander philosophical discussion, enabling his treatment of society, politics, law, and love, I suggest that we read the socio-political inscription of woman in Derrida in relation to the set of economic structures that it continues to sustain. More generally, I hope to open a line of discussion between woman’s discursive inscription and her material manifestation, her expected roles and functions. I would like to deliver a reading of Derrida’s woman that works in conjunction with an engagement with woman’s position in global capitalism.

I believe that Derrida’s work can help reveal why living woman’s expected and, in many cases, actual role in production is both crucial to and occluded by the system that it serves. I will look at Gayatri

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Spivak’s work on the Third World woman’s role in production to suggest a link to Derrida’s reading of the figure of woman. To this end, I begin with an accessible reading of Derrida’s treatment of woman as embodying an “excess” over a male norm. For Derrida, woman represents excess, both as inert redundancy, as well as a “too-much” that must be guarded against. In this latter capacity, woman comes to embody the possibility of man’s own failures, his own feminization. Epistemologically, she is robbed of herself: woman is robbed of womanhood, which is developed instead according to a specific tropological genealogy to which woman is bound to adhere.

If the figure of woman is the storehouse of emotion that man denies himself in the interests of his society, this paper will delineate a model by which living woman then becomes the storehouse of production, picking up the tasks that must be done over and above legitimate or official labour. With reference to Spivak’s work, I will argue how it is that woman’s role and function within a global economy works in tandem with her own discursive inscription. I want to suggest a way in which Derrida’s discursive inscription for woman intersects with her material manifestation.

My purpose here is not to give an exhaustive reading of Derrida’s treatment of woman, nor to reveal definitively the link between discursive inscription and material manifestation. More than anything, I want to suggest a way in which Derrida’s account of woman can expose aspects of living woman’s positioning within the spaces she inhabits, and a way in which Derrida’s discursive positioning for woman can be productively thought in conjunction with living woman’s specific material objectification under capitalism. The ultimate hope remains that these kinds of explorations will help us understand the way that certain oppressive institutions are constructed and sustained.

**WOMAN AS EXCESS (DERRIDA)**

To begin, I want to suggest what I consider to be the central characterisation of woman explored by Derrida: woman as excess. Woman, for Derrida, is inscribed as “extra” to a male norm. She exists and has her place as an inevitable fixture of life, yet without the sovereignty to wilfully produce her effect on the world. Lacking intention, woman affects the world despite herself. She has an effect on her surroundings, and she has an effect on man; in each case, Derrida claims that woman’s productions exist as that which must be ignored.

I want to draw attention to this prominent and often explicit—yet little discussed—current in Derrida’s reading which positions woman as excess, a persistent uncritical affirmative pressure, a metaphorical protrusion interrupting the smooth running of things. Most generally, “woman” is read by Derrida as an excessive interruption to any attempt to understand the world as an elegant structure.

It is of course clear that his characterisations of woman are not supposed to describe innate, organic or inescapable conditions of her being, or to delimit biologically female tendencies. There is an almost presupposed and accepted approach when reading cultural characterisations of woman, articulated and extended to Derrida by Drucilla Cornell: that

it is not pre-given libidinal “drive” or anatomy that causes masculine privilege and the corresponding subjection and silencing in woman. Instead, patriarchy perpetuates itself through the linguistic structures and cultural conventions that prop up patriarchy and have been repeated until they are melted into the unconscious and, indeed, even are the unconscious.2

For the most part,3 Derrida’s critics accept that his readings of “woman”—which often describe this figure’s great shortcomings—are dispassionate readings of her positioning, that they characterise rather than propagate her frequently patriarchal placement. For Ellen Feder, Mary Rawlinson and Emily Zakin, for instance, Derrida’s treatment of woman undermines “phallogocentrism”: his model of “truth which is gendered feminine, while its possessors are gendered masculine […] exposes the girders which bolster an apparently self-supporting system.”4 In fact, the use of Derrida’s woman as a device to expose the specifics of living woman’s subjugation has been a common theme among many critics, characterising her presence for instance as “a metaphor for indeterminacy,”5 or “a structural […] heterogeneity,”6 delimiting the epistemological lynch-pins of patriarchy. If we follow Derrida’s reading of woman’s discursive inscription carefully, we will find, beyond her discursive subjugation, the coordinates of her specific material subjugation as well.
In general, the figure of woman represents the excesses of “amorous passion,” described by Derrida as feminine “perversion,” which, like “jealousy,” comprises “a stratagem of femininity, an arresting of nature by woman.” Derrida claims that “in modern society […] order has been reversed by woman and that is the very form of usurpation.” Significantly, Derrida claims that these representations of women run right to the heart of discourse. He writes abstractly that “woman” affects the smooth functioning of discourse at a structural level. Her presence in language, as a figure and trope, inherently denies certain possibilities for the discursive spaces, the texts, in which she is found.

Most broadly, Derrida finds it impossible to unify the world as text with “woman” at its discursive centre. Derrida writes of “an account [of the world] without edge or boundary, [an] account [without limit], all of whose visible space is but some border of itself.” It is so inclusive, in fact, that the text must be defined negatively, as a “neither … nor,” such that its characterisation “is essentially classificatory.” As it turns out, only woman can interrupt this neither … nor by its embodiment of a “dubiously affirmative (or … or).” This jarring, excessive, interruption intersects the text as an endlessly accommodating voice accepting every option: “a measureless, excessive, immense yes: both to life and to death.” Man’s “silent, untiring wandering” is punctuated always by the stereotype of woman’s “pretty, pitiable bustling.” As such, she is expected to be the repository for the extra-occurrence, the persistent, often bothersome excesses of “amorous passion,” described by government, alongside the substitution of “moral for physical love,” to “protect[ing] man […] from his destruction through the fury of woman.” In fact, society “imagines” morality itself precisely in order to control “the number and intemperance of women.” In the face of woman’s excesses, “the morality of society [finds that it can] defer or weaken [her excesses] by imposing […] the virtue of modesty.”

However, the existence of “woman” only protects us by forcing an organised vigilance against woman herself. The very divisions and classifications of our world are in a large part an attempt to mitigate woman’s supposedly corruptive influence. Derrida explains that “political command” is forged as an assertion against woman’s “political command,” and the substitution of “moral for physical love,” to “protect[ing] man […] from his destruction through the fury of woman.” In fact, society “imagines” morality itself precisely in order to control “the number and intemperance of women.” In the face of woman’s excesses, “the morality of society [finds that it can] defer or weaken [her excesses] by imposing […] the virtue of modesty.”

Consequently, woman does not belong to herself. Unlike the idea of man, of an individual subject, the idea of woman comprises a device, a fact. She opens and embodies a universal category that can include men as well. “Woman” is the name of excessive acceptance over and against a masculine norm of discernment: “there is no natural or symbolic law, universal law, or law of a genre/gender here [but] only the implicit generalisation of womanhood. While we learn that affirmation (or … or), for instance, is only usually
linked to women, we are told that “it is then more than probable that, as long as I say yes, yes, I am a woman.” As man is linked to the distinctly feminine, femininity is itself freed from its biological tether and, ceasing to depend on living woman, becomes “ever-after.” Even a normative male subject can assume aspects of being a female or of changing sex. Naturally, “woman” must exist as living women as well, who appear to man as the embodiment of an object of desire quite apart from their role as feminine excess: “in the midst of the breakers of his plots and plans, [man] sees perhaps calm, enchanting beings glide past him, for whose happiness and retirement he longs—they are women.”

Though they cause his frenzy, and fill his life with anxiety, living women embody “a certain love story.” But woman’s deeply conflictual effect on the world does not depend on living women; instead, this effect exists perpetually before her: hers “is the name for what has been effaced or subtracted beforehand.” Living women are represented by a discursive presence—woman—that precludes them from a subjecthood enjoyed by man. Like a vanishing mediator, a living woman withdraws herself from the scene to leave only the effects of her excesses, which exist always “at a distance” from herself. Put figuratively, we see a woman dancing but we are deceived: “the dancer is not a woman dancing” but dancing itself; “she is not a woman but a metaphor.”

Living women thus present the figure of woman, eliciting a particular reaction. What “woman” is, does, and represents, however, cannot be altered by any living woman. “Woman” is one of man’s possibilities. And yet man is able to approach woman’s character, articulations and productions as though they were extra to, or in excess of, his own. A living woman remains the embodiment of femininity, but does not control its truth. Consequently, Derrida explains woman in terms of “grammatical,” as opposed to “anatomical,” “sex,” so that it can be applied, exchanged and adopted. As Derrida unlocks the tropological genealogy for “woman,” finding within it the feminine aspects of male identity, he goes as far as to suggest that living woman’s “I” is actually spoken in a man’s voice, or worse, “the ‘I’-less ‘I’ of the narrative voice, the I ‘stripped’ of itself, the one that does not take place, it is he who brings them to light.” Spivak, too, declares, with reference to Derrida’s work, that her “own definition of a woman is very simple: it rests on the word ‘man’.”

Spivak is most adept at finding in Derrida’s texts, “a certain textuality of woman,” wherein man often emerges as “simply the hero of philosophy.” When in Margin of Philosophy for instance, Derrida discovers a trace in language that acts as both cause and effect, and suggests that “Being speaks always and everywhere throughout language,” Spivak emphasises what is at stake in the opposition of cause and effect to uncover the gendered implications of Derrida’s text. Derrida describes an “archi-writing,” before the letter, that suggests “a presence to itself of the subject in a silent and intuitive consciousness.” By this means, he posits a (simulacrum of) presence as a cause and effect within a system of language. Exercising what Michael Syrotinski calls a “healthy disrespect for the ‘authority’ of the proper body of Derrida’s text,” Spivak reads Derrida’s argument—ostensibly for language as an effect that carries within it the trace that simulates cause—as his attempt to halt the conceptual shift from language-as-effect to language-as-cause, where the latter implies a particular predication of “man.” Spivak asserts that “Derrida seemed to have felt that the thinking of the trace would halt the unintended [. . .] securing of the definitive predication of ‘man’.”

I am giving this example to illustrate Spivak’s highly effective method by which her sometimes permissive readings actualise the ethico-political possibilities of Derrida’s work: “Derrida, she is ultimately saying, has simply not gone far enough.” This essay seeks to explicate a particular instance of a Spivakian reading practice. It is because the definition of “woman” rests on “man” that the abstract woman’s productions and articulations are taken for granted, as derivative. They are simply in excess of what is creative or original, as extra to male reality. Could it be that this particular positioning for woman, discovered by Derrida, does not simply have a philosophical provenance, but works in specific conjunction with a greater economic imperative? The following section tracks this possibility to suggest that this straightforward reading of Derrida’s woman as excess must be thought in terms of its economic, rather than its philosophical, provenance. In fact, woman’s positioning as excess is actually
founded upon woman’s productive relationship with global capital.

Looking closely at Spivak’s work, I will argue that this positioning might be best explained by the role that women play or are expected to play in production. By making the link between Derrida’s reading of woman and Gayatri Spivak’s treatment of woman’s role in production, I hope to describe and develop the link between woman’s discursive inscription and her material role in global capitalism, and better understand Spivak’s reading practice as well.

A ROLE AND FUNCTION FOR FEMININE EXCESS (SPIVAK)

As I have suggested, this part of my paper posits a particular way in which woman’s discursive (we could also call it cultural) inscription as read by Derrida can be directly linked to her material positioning. Derrida’s discursive inscription of woman as excess is inextricably linked to the productive function that living woman serves, or is expected to serve. Her metaphorical inscription must be thought of in relation to her material accommodation within capitalism. In particular, I will suggest how the inscription, woman as excess, might be linked to the function of living women as they provide an essential while unacknowledged support for a national economy to which in many ways they do not seem to belong. Due to the way woman is thought, her labour and production can be located, as she herself is, in excess of what is considered necessary. I hope to show how the inscription, woman as excess, might be linked to the function of living women as they provide an essential while unacknowledged support for a national economy to which in many ways they do not seem to belong. Due to the way woman is thought, her labour and production can be located, as she herself is, in excess of what is considered necessary.

For this task, my subject will remain a conception of woman “in general,” referring to a representation of woman in terms of her relationship to man across different situations and locations, while not, however, implying a commonality among its living referents beyond a common relationship to global capitalism. I know that by using the notion of women in general I am proceeding in seeming contradiction of Derrida’s own focussed reading of woman in his Spurs where he takes a generation of feminists to task precisely for being too casual about defending a representation of “woman” lacking a distinct identity for her. And Spivak, too, has over the years delivered an incisive and convincing questioning of branches of western feminism that fail to take geopolitical and economic differences between women into account. As Stephen Morton rightly points out, Spivak has, together with Chandra Mohanty, Farrida Akhter and Trinh T. Minh-ha, called western feminists such as Julia Kristeva and Simone de Beauvoir to account for describing women from what Spivak has collectively called the “Third World” in the terms of western female subject constructions.

It is, however, also the goal of Spivak’s “theory of strategic essentialism [to explore] the ways in which […] gendered subjectivity can be mobilized as part of a political strategy.” While reminding western feminists (including herself among them) that “essentialism is a trap” when it comes to privileging female experience—the experience of women varies too greatly across the world—she does suggest the need for a categorical essentialism or commonality, “an extender of the Platonic mandate to women in general.” My use of the term “woman” shifts focus from category to concept, suggesting that a concept of woman can influence the lives of women. Moreover, I use the term “women in general” in conversation with Spivak’s own “Third World woman,” which also exists conceptually across the multiple countries and cultures of the “global South” as the peoples understood strategically as collectively occupying a single productive capacity relative to the First World. I believe that her strategic construction, Third World woman, comprising “the coded discursive management of [this figure’s] new socialisation,” can be extended to woman’s productive capacity more generally.

Spivak argues that productive work is delimited by the active disavowal of other kinds of work that lack the legitimacy and transparency of an official workplace. Whether domestic or industrial, this kind of disavowed labour takes place chiefly within the home. Domestic chores, and also the
production of textiles outside the factory, are performed outside the field of legitimate or official labour and are considered the purview of women. She finds this productive expectation of woman so pervasive, in fact, that she delivers her reading of "the Third World woman" often as though this term were synonymous with "the Third World" in the context of their exploitation, implying that it is woman who ultimately carries the burden of exploitation within the Third World.

It would seem that, for Spivak, the Third World woman's relationship to her own national economy can be modelled as an extension of her country's relationship to a global economy. As the First World has increased its consumption during a period of "post-industrialism," the Third World has taken on more and more work for the First World, such as the manufacturing of textiles, and the Third World has consequently become "the new focus of super-exploitation." Spivak posits her "Third World woman" as "the worst victim[ ] of the recent ['post-industrial'] exacerbation of the international division of labour." The Third World woman is placed as the last link in a chain of fulfilment (note that we are, as always, proceeding from Spivak's First World perspective). The Third World picks up the excess needs of the First, and woman, in turn, picks up the excess needs of her country. Crucially, these productive relationships are occluded.34

The First World forgets its reliance on the Third, and in doing so, it forgets its reliance on the Third World woman. Yet it is key to notice that this chain of fulfilment can only remain so successfully hidden because the First World, itself, participates directly in a forgetting of woman. The function of the Third World as hidden excess, extending First World capacity while obscuring First World productive inefficiencies, correlates metaphorically with the private (if productive) nature of the household. Production taking place inside the home is in general an unacknowledged excess, supporting production that takes place outside it.

Derrida, and especially the later Derrida, would have agreed that woman's function within capitalism has been hidden from daily view by a particular perspective running through the First World. Though he rarely tackles gender difference directly when writing about capitalism, "the question of woman" is an almost constant background to this work. When describing the social nature of Marx's spectrality in *Specters of Marx*, for instance, he stresses the need to "make [the apparition] speak with so many other tables in our patrimony," and later Derrida confirms that "the question of woman and sexual difference is at the heart of this analysis of spectral filiation."35 Though it is not always obvious, Derrida protests in his response to critics that he is fully aware of "the paternalistic phallocentrism that marks all scenes of filiation [...] in Karl Marx."36

What Spivak adds is that the dominant understanding of the capitalist value system in the First World is based upon an ideology of national self-sufficiency that specifically excludes woman. Spivak quotes a professor of business at Harvard to illustrate the simplicity with which capitalism supposedly operates from a First World perspective: "money is simply electronic impulses. With the speed of light it moves effortlessly between distant centres." As market places expand, there is a belief that "circulation time attains the apparent instantaneity of thought (and more)."37

Spivak notes, however, that in order to maintain this apparent instantaneity, the global circulation of value necessitates a constant "continuity of production" on an enormous scale to safeguard against otherwise inevitable capital shortages. The seeming efficiency of capitalism is built upon the managed occlusion of a massive inefficiency. Consequently, Spivak finds that certain groups must be contracted to maintain a continuity of production. She notes that the instantaneity of capitalism is sustained in part by keeping "the labour reserves in the comprador countries outside [of this] instantaneity":

Whereas Lehman Brothers, thanks to computers, "earned about $2 million for [...] 15 minutes of work" [article in The New York Times], the entire economic text would not be what it is if it could not write itself as a palimpsest upon another text where a woman in Sri Lanka has to work 2,287 minutes to buy a t-shirt.

Spivak uncovers an extra, hidden space which absorbs excesses to maintain the appearance of efficiency: global capitalism's space of excess "is continually being produced by the shifting lines of the international division of labour," that is, by consistently "ignoring the dark presence of the Third World." In light of Spivak's keen insight, we cannot help but notice that certain labour reserves within the First World, namely in the home, must also be
ignored in the interests of capitalism’s supposed efficiency. Both spaces, the home and the Third World, exist as extra to the normal running of capitalism. To explain the occlusion, Spivak posits these hidden excessive spaces as indicative of an “unacknowledged, [internally focussed,] ‘nationalist’ view of ‘productivity’” that facilitates the offloading of extra work without acknowledging it as part of legitimate global production. Spivak claims that this “nationalist view” can only ask the question of value whilst actively forgetting “the actual price-in-exploitation” of its own perspective.38

Spivak’s “nationalist view” suggests that people believe in the efficiency of their nation’s capitalist economy, even when presented with evidence contradicting their belief. Such evidence is simply “forgotten” in the moment of belief. Significantly, the “nationalist view” provides more than a perspective on the mechanisms of a capitalist economy; it amounts also to an ideological attachment to capitalist efficiency based on the active exclusion of specific available knowledge.39 Though unjust trade practices with the Third World, including the use of women and children in sweatshops, are now widely acknowledged, it has been possible to “forget” the role of the Third World woman in First World production. Similarly, though the traditional expectation of a woman’s place in the house in well recognized, widespread, and even widely criticised in the First World, we are no closer to quantifying the value of homework to the capitalist economy. Woman can be encouraged into the official work place, but for those who work in the house, this work is “forgotten.”

Spivak’s reading of woman is situated among an illustrious feminist literature produced in conversation with Derrida’s work. Though certain feminists, such as Elizabeth Meese and Sally Robinson, criticise Derrida for rejecting feminism, many others, such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, have made Derrida integral to their writing.40 Tina Chanter defends Derrida against his feminist detractors: “if Derrida shows no respect for those whose work shows no respect for his, it is not because he is anti-feminist.”41

Woman in general has been framed, as per Derrida’s reading, as an insatiable producer of excesses, and that her productions are ignored as irrelevant. The “gendered body” is directly “encrypted there in the indifference of super-exploitation, of the financialization of the globe.”42

Woman is silenced by her gendered social inscription and determination as reproductive agent. We might recall, for instance, a number of Spivak’s implicit notions or topics that frame woman within capitalism by sideling her productive, in favour of her reproductive, capacity.43 Spivak touches upon a framework by which woman’s objectification as a reproductive agent serves to stage her productive relationship to the world. She suggests, in fact, that the subjugation of woman on the basis of gender cannot be separated from the material exploitation of woman. She remarks that it is impossible, given the role that gender plays in the global division of labour, to oppose the exploitation of her productive capacity as “systemic” and the iniquities of her gender as “anti-systemic”: what we are witnessing is “the undoing of [any] systemic–antisystemic binary opposition” within exploitation.44 Notice also, however, that the overemphasis on her reproductive capacity not only enables her material exploitation, but also the active structural occlusion of her productive capacity.

According to Spivak, woman’s relationship to the world is shaped, first, as a producer of children without independent sexuality or subjectivity. Spivak remarks that the clitoris is universally overlooked as an irrelevant, one might say excessive, signifier of a female orgasmic pleasure that “does not entail any one component of the heterogeneous female reproductive scenario.” We might recall Derrida’s reading of the law as the active curtailing of woman’s corruptive influence. If woman’s inscribed tendency to emotional outbursts, to wear her exaggerated feelings on her sleeve, has no place in society, woman must be given a role that mitigates her behaviour. This role is of a reproductive agent. Her nature, in other words, is made to seem in excess of her proper role. Because “the clitoris escapes reproductive framing,” it serves “as the signifier of the sexed subject that is effaced.” We can see the brutal material effects of a mechanism to efface woman’s subjectivity metaphorically, for instance, in the practice of “cliterodectomy on women.” And in the First World, Spivak remarks that this effacement of woman as subject also occurs metaphorically even if not so brutally: the “effacement of the clitoris” is not physical but includes

the (sex) objectification of women by the elaborate attention to their skin and façade as represented by the immense complexity of
the cosmetics, underwear, clothes, advertisement, women’s magazine, and pornography networks.

Even the “double standard in the criteria of men’s and women’s ageing” and, more specifically, the “public versus private dimensions of menopause as opposed to impotence,” promulgate a specific forgetting of woman. Except as “imitators” of men,” women are only “agent[s] of reproduction.”

Woman is pushed into her role because, as Derrida reasons, her right to emotion must be negated in the interests of the smooth functioning of society. Being a mother is good for woman. Thus Spivak remarks that woman becomes the embodiment of a “displacement [or ‘transplant’] of eroticism.” No matter what woman creates or articulates, such productions will always be read in the context of her rightful, proper role as mother.

Notice again a direct application of Derrida’s reading: woman’s excessive presence stands here as antidote, giving rise to discursive strategies that mitigate her influence. To this end, Spivak specifies woman’s objectification with the notion of “surrogacy,” which establishes woman’s representation through an artificial construction of a “fulfilled female subject of motherhood” that can only be thought predictably, as a neatly “presupposed subject.” Woman’s functional representation as producer of children is linked to an association with “homeworking,” both the production in the home of textiles for export and domestic chores, as “empiricist individualism,” by which a woman does what she feels she is best suited to. In both the Third World and the First, woman’s place in the home remains an enduring stereotype. In every case, the tendency to escape the capitalist value chain within the home functions chiefly as an erasure of woman’s productive work by suggesting that such behaviour comes naturally to her. Within the First World, woman is associated with a “domestic economy,” existing outside the capitalist accumulation of a “political economy.”

Thus production performed by woman within the home is not classified as such. This work is extra to the official or legitimate circuits of production and so only exists as excess. In fact, sewing, stitching and weaving, like cooking, cleaning and child-minding, is “historically named woman’s work or assigned to domestic labour” precisely because woman is expected to perform characteristically excessive actions. Woman’s productive life, like her emotional life, is perceived outside the bounds of legitimacy. What she does is simply done in the natural course of her existence and thus beyond the calculus of an official economy. In general, then, “woman” becomes a figure set up to serve an economic imperative that is immediately only apparent as a biological imperative. The “arrangement of the world in terms of the reproduction of future generations,” implicit in the role of woman, and labelled by Spivak more generally as “the uterine social organisation,” works in close conjunction with a perception of woman as unacknowledged supplement, as excess.

CONCLUSION

We find woman’s material function within capitalism entwined with her discursive inscription as excess at two levels. That woman’s actions, productions and articulations are in general perceived as excessive allows for her effect or signature on the world to be wilfully ignored. Also, that woman is specifically perceived as emotionally excessive has promulgated her circumscription to the role of mother, and to work in and for the home, including the production of textiles for capitalist markets.

In no way do I feel that these connections between inscription and lived reality, or between discourse and materiality, explain the lived experience of any woman. My purpose here has been rather to juxtapose a discursive inscription with its possible potential material manifestations, and to show the benefits of a particular reading. In a sense, this essay amounts to a reminder that Derrida’s reading of woman, as well as his other readings of discursive figures, can still be explored with the aim of revealing the potential impetus behind a particular configuration of the world. By following Spivak in refracting Derrida’s reading through the needs and expectations of global capitalism, and by determining a scope and context for his construction of “woman,” I hope that such an exploration can continue.

Notes

1. See also Anirban Das, Toward a Politics of the (Im)possible: the Body in Third World Feminisms (London: Anthem Press, 2010), especially chapter 4.
2. Drucilla Cornell, “Civil Disobedience and Deconstruction,” in Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida, ed. Nancy J. Holland (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 152.

3. There are exceptions. For instance, Mary Rawlinson reads Derrida’s woman as a device supporting knowledge, a philosophical “lever” which, by resisting codification and normalization, acts as “a material condition for the universal language which is marked masculine” (Mary Rawlinson, “Levers, Signatures and Societies: Derrida’s use of Woman” in Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman, ed. Ellen K. Feder et al. (London: Routledge, 1997), 71, 75). As the “figure of the aporetic, [she] remains, like the question, suspended,” and “preserves for man the dimension of blood and life from which he has become divided” (Rawlinson, “Levers, Signatures and Societies,” 82, 75).

4. Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, “Introduction” in Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman, ed. Ellen K. Feder et al. (London: Routledge, 1997), 22.

5. Gill Jagger, “Dancing with Derrida: Anti-Essentialism and the Politics of Female Subjectivity,” Journal of Gender Studies 5, no. 2 (1996): 192.

6. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Displacement and the Discourse of Woman” in Feminist Interpretations of Jacques Derrida, ed. Nancy J. Holland (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997), 55.

7. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 175–6.

8. Jacques Derrida, “The Law of Genre,” trans. Avital Ronell, Critical Inquiry 7, no. 1 (1980), 70–5.

9. Jacques Derrida, Spurs: Nietzsche’s Styles, trans. Barbara Harlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 47.

10. Derrida, Spurs, 39, 43.

11. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 175–82.

12. Derrida, “Law of Genre,” 75–6.

13. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 175; and Jacques Derrida, Dissemination, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), 251.

14. Derrida, “Law of Genre,” 76.

15. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 45.

16. Derrida, Dissemination, 252.

17. Derrida, Spurs, 39, 47.

18. Derrida, Dissemination, 251.

19. Derrida, “Law of Genre,” 76–7, my emphasis.

20. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics (London: Routledge Classics, 2006), 102.

21. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 199, 197.

22. Derrida quoting Martin Heidegger in Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 27.

23. Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 15–16.

24. Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, 22, 24.

25. Michael Syrotinski, Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 47.

26. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization (London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 22.

27. Syrotinski, Deconstruction and the Postcolonial, 48.

28. Derrida, Spurs, 65.

29. Stephen Morton, Gayatri Spivak: Ethics, Subalternity and the Critique of Postcolonial Reason (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), 135–9.

30. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 194, 207.

31. Morton, Gayatri Spivak, 126.

32. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 119, 123.

33. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Critique of Postcolonial Reason (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 68.

34. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 230–1.

35. Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge Classics, 2006), 190; and Jacques Derrida, “Marx and Sons,” in Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso Radical Thinkers, 2008), 231.

36. Derrida, “Marx and Sons,” 231.

37. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 230, 233.

38. Spivak, In Other Worlds, 230–1, 238.

39. One is reminded here of Slavoj Žižek’s early descriptions of the “objectivity of belief,” by which people are simply able to perform their functions within capitalism, even while disavowing and rejecting it. Žižek suggests that people’s “beliefs, superstitions and metaphysical mystifications, supposedly surmounted by the rational, utilitarian personality, are embodied in the “social relations between things.” They no longer believe, but the things themselves believe for them” (Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso, 1989), 34). Žižek posits that our belief is somehow protected by our socioeconomic positioning, that the things in our lives are created in social relation to one another and that we play these relations out as we engage with them according to their roles and functions. By Žižek’s model, a person can maintain a “capitalist” understanding for the workings of the world, while rejecting capitalism as a notion. Spivak, on the other hand, calls for a more stringent, ideological attachment to a particular aspect of capitalism.

40. Elizabeth Meese, (Ex)Tensions: Re-figuring Feminist Criticism (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); Sally Robinson, Gender and Self-Representation in Contemporary Women’s Fiction (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991); Luce Irigaray, “Veiled Lips,” trans. Sara Speidel, Mississippi Review 11, no. 3 (1983), 93–131; and Tina Chanter, Ethics of Eros: Irigaray’s Rewriting of the Philosophers (London: Routledge, 1995), 35.

41. Chanter, Ethics of Eros, 239.
42. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge Classics, 2009), 106.
43. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 67–8.
44. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview” in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), 327.
45. Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 184–6, 208.
46. Spivak, *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 68.
47. Ibid.
48. Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 111.
49. Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 210, 242.