Conclusion: Of the ‘Possible as Impossible’

The chief aim of this dissertation is to stage a negotiation between ‘deconstruction’ and ‘feminist ethics’. I have tried to argue that the ‘ethical’ can be approached through the notion of a *production in time* rather than seen as an ossified product. That ‘production in time’, in this dissertation, is also called: a ‘work’. The ‘work’ does not coincide fully with ethics, but it persists with the ethical question. In the first two chapters, the problem of thinking such a ‘work without a subject’ (or without any fixed locus of authorising intention) is taken up with reference to a list of specific texts chiefly written by Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida. The concept metaphor ‘cut’ is introduced and related to a thinking of ‘change’ that might take place at the margins of a closure. If re-presentation is staged between the apparently opposing pulls of ‘othering of self’ and ‘self-adequation’, then the work of the ‘cut’, as I argue, is that which supplements and divides both of these tendencies. It is this notion of a ‘work of the cut’ placed *between* intentionality and non-intentionality, that becomes one of the key concept-metaphors which persists all along this dissertation.

In the initial chapters of this dissertation, the question of ethicality is posed predominantly along with the problem of understanding re-presentation as both repetition of the old (previous moment), and introduction of the new (the event-ness of the new). The next chapters try to flesh out the concept further. ‘Chapter Three’, for example, deals with the key question: how to think of an ethics, which does not take recourse to any notion of an originary proper or to the proper-improper binary. This is done following the deconstructive critique of the itineraries of the proper in the Marxian text. Importantly, this chapter also shows the plurality of deconstruction
comparing the Derridian and Spivakian responses to Marx. This discussion introduces the notion of a ‘materiality without matter’, or, as Derrida reads in Marx, a “sensuous non-sensuous” matter (Derrida 1993, 189). A long discussion of ‘time’ and ‘temporality’ is also covered in this chapter, following, on the one hand the Marxian critique of capital’s desire for self-presence, and on the other, the very notion of ‘time’ as staging an aporia between the temporal drift and the ‘nowness’ of the instant. A parallel of the Marxian critique of capital’s desire in sublating the time of production (and hence of its self-renewal) is found in Aristotle’s proposition of the double bind between ‘time as an instant’ and ‘time as temporal drift’. This gives further precision to the discussion of the work of the ‘cut’ which is here set between ‘temporality’ and ‘nowness’.

Still staying with the problem of thinking a work of the ‘cut’ without recourse to a subject, ‘Chapter Four’ examines the openings and limits of thinking a deconstructive subject. Here I introduce the concept of decision as furrowed within (and therefore: ‘de-cision’), as it places itself between the ‘organic’ and the ‘inorganic’, between the ‘event’ and the ‘machine’. It is in this context, that I take up the question of a feminist ethics in the last two chapters. Can the (non) place of the ‘cut’ be claimed for a feminist cause? Is it possible to think of a feminist ethics without using the ontology of the name ‘woman’? In ‘Chapter Five’ a meticulous reading of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Echo” (Spivak 1993a) enables the argument to approach the crux of an ‘intentionality without position’, which might also be called likewise a ‘work without intentionality’. Consequently, ‘Chapter Six’, which is the concluding chapter, puts the entire argument covered in the dissertation in perspective and re-arranges different threads under three broad themes: ‘names’, ‘bodies’ and ‘inscriptions’. These three major threads are then shown to be pointing toward a production of a feminist ethics, which is also an ethics of re-presentation as such.

Under the heading ‘names’, I discuss most vitally the necessities and perils of using the name ‘woman’. To situate things within the postcolonial frame, I read Spivak’s theoretical shorthand ‘native informant’ and the relevance of this ‘name’ from the side of a postcolonial feminist ethics of representation. The sections under the title ‘bodies’ discuss the figure of the ‘willing sati’, and ask what can be a
feminist representation of such a figure. Two textual moments are discussed in turn in relation to this problematic. The first is the account of the suffering of a fairy-tale heroine as penned by the early twentieth century Bengali scholar Dineshchandra Sen. In discussing and valorising the apparently self chosen penance and bodily suffering of ‘Mālañcamālā’, Sen invokes the figure of the ‘willing sati’ by citing an eye-witness account recorded by an European, an official of colonial administration. The dissertation analyses what is at stake in the juxtaposing of a literary-critical analysis of a fictional (female) character and an account with some claim of objectivity and truth, both converging into the figure of a woman presumably ‘willing’ ritualistic death. The dissertation tries to follow this figure in the more recent feminist re-readings of the nineteenth century debate around the legal abolition of the ritual of satidāha. This move puts the crucial key-terms, ‘intentionality’, ‘body’ and ‘choice’ into sharper focus within a feminist paradigm. I try to tease out the dilemmas involved in the feminist confrontation with the figure of the ‘willing sati’. How can feminism confront such a figure? Can the feminist scholar afford to deny the woman-subject even a minute foothold of intentionality and close off any gap through which such a figure (willing sati) may surface? Can there be a supplementary space for a woman’s intention or materiality gesturing toward a feminist ethicality which may elude the intentional structure which is always already male? The dissertation does not offer any conclusive prescription or try to finitely solve these conundrums with definite answers. Instead, the problems are approached through a reconfiguration of the ‘work of re-presentation’. I propose the concept of a ‘feminist inscription’ which is a ‘work’ that remains attentive to the singularity of each moment, and of each body. The inscription keeps to a vigilant responsibility to other singularities. It might be proposed that the notion of ‘inscription’, as developed in the last chapter, is one of the most crucial concept-metaphors that this dissertation produces along with the notion of the ‘cut’, and the ‘work’. I want to especially underline the move where I try to make a distinction between ‘embodiment’ and ‘inscription’ (in Chapter Six). If one connects this to the argument made earlier in the dissertation, that representation works like an embodiment (Chapter Four), then it seems logical to modify that proposition and suggest instead that representation works like an inscription. This might even
prompt one to further deconstruct the title of the dissertation and understand ‘ethics
of representation’ also as ‘ethics of inscription’.

In this concluding section, I would not repeat the arguments already made
about the theoretical positioning of a ‘feminist inscription’, and instead try to further
spell out what is as stake in thinking the ‘inscription’ and the materiality of it. In
doing this I am going to re-invoke some of the key conceptual terms used or
introduced in this dissertation, such as ‘materiality without matter’, ‘de-cision’ and
indeed, ‘inscription’. The following might be taken as a restatement of one of the
central points around which this dissertation is woven: inscription.

An inscription is like an inscribed stretch, a trail that ‘presence’ leaves at its
wake, or simply, like a ‘line’. A ‘writing’ extended in space. It is also a generality
which connects a series of singular moments or ‘points’ in space, even if only from
the side of the generality line, can one recognize singular unique instants or events
as connected in forming an extension. Can it not be said then, that the thought of a
line or an extension, a persistence in time in effect homogenizes singularities of each
event, robbing them off their unique specificities? In connecting two such points, the
generality of the ‘line’ assumes that each is repeatable, each lingers beyond event-
ness. The generality therefore not only denies each event its singularity but also
makes each ‘survive’ beyond their one-time-occurrence, making them ek-sist\(^1\).
Without this ‘ek-sistance’ or standing beyond self, singularities or ‘events’ cannot be
recognized or re-presented as such, they must lose their essence to be known.
Without a memory or re-presentation, no event can be known as an event, even if
representation is also a denial of their event-ness which consists in occurring only
once, only in one particular way. The thought of any ‘line’ therefore, is staged
between the double-bind of singularity and survival. The event ‘sur-vives’ or gets
re-presented only by not being an event. This is also the double-bind of the ‘body’
which can only come to view as an extension in time, and therefore by both denying
and producing singularities. Deconstruction is a work which tries to think of an
extension that nevertheless is attentive to the irreducibility of singular moments into
any itinerary of sur-vival. In other words, deconstruction aims at a notion of the line

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\(^1\) See ‘Chapter Six’.
sensitive to singular points. Such an extension is called an ‘inscription’ or deconstructive-writing, I contend.

This notion of an inscription consequently becomes key in thinking a subject who is not a locus of agency but a mark of a certain ‘work in time’ that cannot be totally subsumed under the sway of an intentional matrix. This proposition radically breaks with the commonsensical division that one makes between the ‘subject’ and the ‘structure’, or between the intending subject and ‘his’ intention. Deconstructed with the category of ‘inscription’, there remains little gap between the ‘locus of intentionality’ and the ‘work of intentionality’. And yet, there cannot be a smooth continuity between the two either. This dissertation makes the argument that one can think of this ‘gap’ also as a ‘cut’ with which the ‘locus of intention’ must supplement itself to be one with the ‘work of intention’. Roughly, this is the gap which Ernesto Laclau thinks is to be both affirmed and plugged by the “jump” which marks the coming of the subject2. I try to critique and go beyond that position in at least two ways. Firstly, I try to figure this ‘gap’ in time, which indicates an unfinished but ever ongoing work instead of a decisive ‘jump’. Secondly, I try to show how this work stretches the analytic of the ‘subject’ along the line of a decision extended in time. Instead of the ‘subject’ therefore, the dissertation proposes an ‘analytic’ of the question ‘who works?’, which is much in line with the “Heideggerian analytic of Dasein”3. ‘Inscription’ then, is also a way of deconstructing the subject through a notion of the ‘work’ (and crucially, the reverse as well). This argument is informed by the discussion around the concept-metaphor ‘cut’, as I have already mentioned. One might note here that the ‘cut’ is an extremely supple metaphor which both stages a moment (or a location) and indicates an incessant work, as if like an open wound, located and yet never running dry (as argued in ‘Chapter Four’). But if the work of the cut is never congealed as matter with full presence, then how can one think of a ‘materiality’ either of the work, or of the analytic of the question ‘who works?’ A re-statement of the basic formations of the notion of ‘de-cision’ as both a work and a production of a materiality might help.

2 Laclau in Mouffe 1995, 54; see ‘Chapter Four’.
3 Derrida 2007, 352; see ‘Chapter Four’. 
In this dissertation, ‘decision’ is written as ‘de-cision’ because any decision as intended production logically goes through a temporal stretch along the duration of calculations and deliberations that lies before the decision as product. Now based on that, can it not be proposed that any discourse that compels one to assume a definite subjectivity or to take a decision, here and now, only forces one to forget how the decision is produced, how the subjectivity is lived, the duration when ‘calculation’ goes on? On the other hand, the thought that stays with the ‘work’ of production is called: the paradigm of ‘work’, which tries to deconstruct any decision as ‘de-cision’ and stays with the process of production. In this specific sense, deconstruction re-inserts ‘experience’ into the textuality of ‘living’ and being, re-claiming the lived experience of calculation and responsibility. We are pursuing therefore, what Derrida calls a ‘restance materiality’. It is commonly proposed that the ‘authorial intention’ curves regularity out of dispersion, but the restance materiality is the possibility of regularity and matter which resists absence but is also not fully ‘intended’. A presence/materiality/regularity that works in-spite of intention. This is a key point central to the arguments made in this dissertation. To repeat: A materiality or production that works in spite of intention. Let me try an example to unpack this concept further. I would however also append the usual cautionary note that like any example, the following has a limited applicability.

Consider the following problem: when one makes a still-photo with a camera, does the ‘still’ catch the ‘instant’ in its pure non-temporal fix? It apparently does. One clicks the camera and fixes a moment for ever, cuts a slice out of the

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4 It can be argued, I believe, that the Marxian paradigm follows a thinking of the ‘work’. Marx tries to deconstruct the process of production, whereas Capitalism justifies its means by its end products and consumption (therefore sur-vival of Capital by self-renewal). Without reconstructing the workers ‘journey’ to the market before he has signed the contract and sold his labour-power, i.e. without (abstractly) assuming labor power as free initially, the Marxian critique cannot deconstruct the text of capitalist production. See ‘Chapter Three’ for related discussions.

5 Derrida mentions that restance is more of a remainder rather than mark of a permanence (see Derrida 1988, 52). Therefore, Derrida insists that one thinks of the ‘restance’ primarily as a materiality without matter, even if it is also a formality without form. See ‘Chapter Four’.
temporal drift. And yet we know that the photograph does not really record an instant, or a point in time, but rather a very small duration of time. Light lingers on the object, even if for a very short span, and so it does on the photographic plate. The photo-graph literally is the writing of light, and writing works in time. The photographer or the machine can only manipulate this duration or this writing (for example one changes the aperture-time) but cannot achieve that impossible zero-distance from the object, as time becomes inscription. In high end cameras one can leave the lens open even for a long duration, but no camera can break the rule of opening at-least for a while. Now note that the ‘materiality’ of the photograph is produced only by delaying the pure matter of the instant, or, by shaping a materiality which is already given, which is written before will. The photograph is not fully intentional, it is rather also a materiality which precedes intention. Intentionality cannot will this materiality fully, it both enables and limits intention, to the extent that it would be im-possible to disentangle it from the very production of intentionality itself. Loosely, this is the kind of production and inscription of a materiality-in-time that this dissertation is after. A pre-propriative materiality which is still not merely fictional and which is written before will. Conversely, it might also be taken to be a materiality which is the unshakable ontological remains which haunts any notion of pure difference, if it ‘cuts’ intentionality then it also is unable to fully remain free of the mark of intentionality.

The point, therefore, is not to think of ‘intentionality’ as something entirely non-material and therefore to be get rid of at the expense of a physicality which is material. The question is rather, how to put that lingering surplus to work, which is both of the intention and yet beyond it and undoes it. Within the context of a feminist deconstruction, the problem would be this: if intentionality desiring full self-presence is structurally of the ‘man’ or phallogocentric, then what is that ‘excess’ which never lets it achieve that fullness, and can that excess be claimed in the name of a feminist politics? This is a problem which this dissertation tries to set up and analyse, even if the question can only be confronted in this specific articulation in the final two chapters. These chapters chiefly construe a critique of ‘intentionality’, asking if it can be thought as always already ‘cut’ from an authorising locus, and if this ‘cut’ itself can be conceptualized as a work which is
unshakably of the intentionality (and therefore a ‘materiality without matter’ or likewise, ‘formality without form’\(^6\)) and yet not fully under its sway. In the concluding half of ‘Chapter Six’, I have explained my reasons for proposing a feminist work which lingers with the ‘ethical question’ never fully achieving or touching that ethicality.

This specific position of the ‘question’ has a key connection to the figure of the ‘willing sati’ as I have explained in ‘Chapter Six’. To recapitulate, it is difficult to think of the figure of the ‘willing sati’, because structurally it cannot have any difference from the production of the event by the hegemonic patriarchal-legal machineries, save by the evidence of ‘intentionality’. But can there be something other than subjective will, or intention that can produce a deviation in the machine-like re-productions of the structure? This is where the notion of a ‘work/inscription without intentionality’ can prove crucial, which I have indicated in the second half of this dissertation.

Can the persistence of such a work without intentionality be claimed for the name ‘woman’? This question is to be addressed at two levels. First, one can ask if any name can at all claim such a work without necessarily stratifying the work, without reducing ‘ethics’ to a ‘politics of action’, giving it a certain ontology? Second, if the name ‘woman’ has any special claim to such an undoing of the matrix of both the structural and the intentional? The first, is the general problem of ethics as such. The second, I believe, is to be addressed through meticulous working-out of the logic of textuality and gendering, which I have tried in the dissertation. In fact my strategy has been to show that the two questions are inextricably linked. This point is developed in the pages of this dissertation and I would not try to restate the same in capsular form here. Instead, I would stress on the point of the materiality of the ‘persistence’ of the work which stays with the ethical question, which is discussed in the last two chapters.

At the end of ‘Chapter Five’, I introduce a notion of the ‘work of the ethical questioning’ that produces ‘life’ not by affirming the logic of life, or by endowing life with any positive content, but by affirming the very question of life, and by

\(^6\) Derrida’s formulation (Derrida 2002, 151), see ‘Chapter Four’. \(^{\text{Derrida’s formulation}}\)
protecting that question from the abyss of ‘death’ as pure meaninglessness. Such a notion of a persistent work which stays with the ethical questioning gesture but does not ontologize the ethical is in line with the Derridian ‘to-come-ness’ which is, in Derrida’s words, an “experience of the non-present, of the non-living present in the living present (of the spectral), of that which lives on” (Derrida in Sprinkler 2008, 254). The future anterior, thought in this way, is not merely something which has not arrived, but instead something which is worked out in an unfinished way through the given ‘present’. It is not simply a future teleology since that would be an universality which would subsume the singularity of each moment into its homogenizing sway. On the contrary, the future anterior poses what I have already mentioned as a ‘line sensitive to singular points’, or an ‘inscription’. This notion of a ‘life lived’, therefore, is distinct from a notion of ‘life’ as a ‘proper’ or a master-signifier which re-draws each singular living into its own itinerary. In ‘Chapter Six’ I have explained the logic of such a homogenising sign ‘life’ while discussing the pro-life positions and the challenges they erect for feminisms. It is not easy to think outside of this given logic of ‘life’ as the authorising principle, other than by thinking of it as undone by an incessant work of self-folding which produces it not as a ‘continuum’, but as an unfinished work of inscription. The ‘work’ therefore, is also to be attentive to the singular events, and keep open the aporia between what I have called the ‘point’ (or the ‘event’) and the ‘line’ (or the sur-vival).

From our more recent experiences we know that after a violent death of a woman (a violence which is overtly and definitely ‘male’, even to the point of losing its resemblance to other, more mundane phallogocentric reproductions), life goes on as usual. One lives, laughs, buys, consumes, sleeps, wakes up ... like before, and there are strong reasons why one must. A certain logic of life compels one to re-produce the ‘daily’. But then, where does the violence leave its mark (after the initial flurry of candlelight vigils, protest rallies and discussions subside), other than in the

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7 Elsewhere Derrida reminds in the same vein: “It is necessary to insist on this in thinking of the future, of a to-come that would be neither a chimera nor a regulative Idea nor a negative and simply impossible impossibility. This politics of philosophers, [...] is not a utopia or a dream. More precisely, it is not a wish, a pious promise[...]. These are difficult things [...] but possible, accessible, practicable....” (emphasis added, Derrida 2005b, 77).
slow grinding of the courtroom law? Can one propose that, if today, here-now, one violent overcoming of one death by the general indifference called ‘life’, even if soon to be swallowed up into a pattern of forgetting, still comes to one as new, as the very first violation, as an unique confrontation with death, as a violence more terrible than anything before, then it might be worthwhile to pause and ask ‘why, why this (violence and no other), why now?’ And other bodies, dead, or mutilated, or violated, other gendered bodies one has forgotten or forgotten to recognise as sites of violence, other reproductions that have already been relegated to an archive of indifference should not stop one in taking this pause here-now. For in knowing this one moment as a fresh moment, one might suddenly realize that one is left now with very little and almost nothing, that each violence each time erupts with fresh pain, in and as a new body. This pain is never like the one before. The one before, was never like this one.

This dissertation is an effort to articulate such a moment of pause when the work of the political does not really stop, but interrupts itself by confronting the complacency of its own reproductions, by the way of staging the singular. If it cannot ever really articulate the singular, then that is not a finite failure to be rejected, but rather an unfinished negotiation which is to be used to question the assured law-like structure of the political. The political may very well work with a grammar, but it also needs to remain ever open to pauses and jolts in facing the unexpected coming of new events, new bodies, inscriptions. It is crucial to remember that the machine-like also affects and protects ‘presence’ and materiality from each such moment of the singular, and in that sense the ‘failure’ at fully articulating the singular works in two ways, in both hindering and producing the political. I have tried to argue, that a work attentive to such an aporia is the closest, thought can take us to an ethicality. At the same time, as I have pointed out repeatedly in this dissertation, one cannot fully get free of a machine-like structure of reproductions and representations. In reading the short story by Rabindranath Thakur, I have concluded that may be it is even necessary for the ‘writing of the woman’ to remain within the logic of calculation and retain the trace of materiality in order to deconstruct the ‘desire of man’. I have also argued how and why, and within what ontological limits ‘ethics’ can be claimed as ‘feminist’. Central to such
an argument is an understanding of the logic of the ‘not-fully present’, or of the ‘quasi’, or of the ‘as if’. Derrida writes that this “experience” of the “perhaps” or of the ‘as if’ would be an experience of “both the possible and the impossible, of the possible as impossible”. He also reminds that the “perhaps is necessarily allied to a yes: yes yes” (emphasis in original, Derrida 2005, 74). I have tried to unpack the logic of such an affirmation through the notion of ‘work’ in discussing the persistence of a feminist ethics.

One thinks of a feminist ethics, and at the same moment one recognizes with a sigh, or a jolt, that ethics eludes. One still works, affirms, affirms the question... as if! As if it were possible, within such limits.