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An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization: A Forum

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This forum takes as its starting point Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012), a text that has been the subject of much recent critical discussion.[1] Spivak's sprawling book, consisting of 25 chapters, brings together and updates (at times with wry parenthetical commentary) critical essays dating back to the late 1980s. In doing so, Spivak grapples with the fundamental question of what an aesthetic education, including but not limited to literary studies, can do in an era of globalization.

Our forum attempts to engage with the implications of Spivak's project to ask how and why it might matter to us now. In doing so, I feel fortunate to be able to share this writerly space with my colleagues Duncan Chesney and Chi-she Li from National Taiwan University and with David Stewart from National Central University. But before turning to their contributions, I wish to address one point made by Spivak that has stuck with me over the years: her longstanding commitment to thinking through the possibilities of education in the humanities understood as *an uncoercive rearrangement of desires*.[2] Educa-

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[1] See, for example, "Commentaries on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*" in *PMLA* 129.3 (2014).

[2] On this point, see Spivak's "Righting Wrongs" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.2-3 (2004) and revised and republished as part of Spivak's *Other Asias* in 2008. In my contribution to this forum, I follow the 2008 version.

tion in the humanities cannot be forced. At its best, it instead involves what Spivak has called "the 'activation' of dormant structures"—"a imaginative labor that opens the way to a possibility" ("Righting Wrongs," 50).[3] In *An Aesthetic Education*, Spivak returns to this point by asserting that "[t]he world needs an epistemological change that will rearrange desires. Global contemporeneity requires it" (2). But what sorts of "desires" require such "rearrangement"? What could this look like?

Since 2009, I've worked as a faculty member at National Taiwan University, a public institution that is widely regarded as the top university in Taiwan—and one that has historically admitted a disproportionate number of students from the elite districts of Taipei City.[4] It is unlikely to be mistaken for Columbia University (where Spivak of course has taught for many years) but it has a distinct relation in Taiwan to the levers of political power. Among the courses I teach at this institution is First-year English. This is not a "literature" course as such but my section foregrounds the act of reading and viewing texts, and the act of responding to them. An "aesthetic education"? Perhaps an inchoate one, but as I wish to suggest one that involves *learning to imagine subjects that are not present*.[5]

How might this work? At this point, I'd like to take a quick detour to Spivak's remarkable discussion of what she calls "the burden of English" in postcolonial India. For many of us at National Taiwan University, teaching or studying First-year English understood narrowly as a university-wide requirement may indeed be viewed as a "burden"! But in Spivakian terms, this "burden" should be understood in two distinct ways: "the content of a song or account," as well as "a singular load to carry, in a special way" (35). While thinking

[3] Spivak has discussed how in the global North (specifically in this instance in New York) "the teacher can try to rearrange desires noncoercively . . . through an attempt to develop in the student a habit of literary reading, even just 'reading,' suspending oneself into the text of the other." For Spivak, "[a] training in literary reading is a training to learn from the singular and the unverifiable. Although literature cannot speak, this species of patient reading, miming an effort to make the text respond, as it were, is a training not only in poiesis, accessing the other so well that probable action can be prefigured, but teleo-poiesis, striving for a response from the distant other, without guarantees" ("Righting Wrongs," 23).

[4] For an account of student admissions to National Taiwan University dating back to 1954, see Luoh, who observes that from 1997 to 2000, the probability of an 18 year old student in Taipei City becoming an NTU student was 3.06% compared to the national average of 0.89%; the probability jumped to 6.10% if the student was from Taipei City's Da-an District. See also Lin, who has extended the scope of this analysis to encompass the years 2001 to 2010.

[5] Here I wish to acknowledge Sharpe's perspicacious observation that "[d]espite her advocacy of literary studies as reading practices that can resist the totalizing logic of globalization, Spivak is not promoting literature as a privileged site of truth and knowledge. To believe that she is would be to lose sight of the imagination as a conduit for an ethical experience of what we cannot know" (516).

through "the burden" of teaching English literature in India (her focus is on teaching literature, not language), Spivak puts forth an stunning reading of a chain texts by authors ranging from Rabindranath Tagore and Rudyard Kipling, to Hanif Kureishi and Nadine Gordimer. In doing so, she insists that "in the postcolonial context, the teaching of English literature can become critical only if it is intimately yoked to the teaching of the literary or cultural production in the mother tongue(s)"—thereby calling for a modality of teaching and learning that she evocatively calls "'inter-literary,' not 'comparative,' in the presence of long-established institutional divides and examination requirements" (52).

With this in mind, I believe it's reasonable to ask what this sort of interventionary work might look like here in Taiwan. While there are obviously many ways to address this question, I wish to turn to a section of First-year English I taught at National Taiwan University in 2013-2014 and a cluster of texts we discussed in this course addressing the issue of nuclear power. We began our discussion with a 2012 editorial published in the English-language *Taipei Times*, an editorial that pushes off developments in Japan following the disastrous events at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant starting in March 2011. As its title ("Toward a Nuclear-free Homeland") makes clear, this editorial is frankly critical of Taiwan's current nuclear power policy, flatly stating that "[t]he Fukushima nuclear disaster proved that the [Taiwan] government's assurances that nuclear power is 100 percent safe are unreliable. The consequences of a nuclear disaster are simply unacceptable, nuclear waste disposal could cause real problems in the future and nuclear energy is no longer the clean, cheap energy source some have claimed it to be" (8)—especially, I would add, when the massive costs of clean-up and decommissioning are properly accounted for.[6] The editorial's unmistakably conventional anti-nuclear argument calling for Taiwan to become "a nuclear-free homeland" rests curiously however on a distinction it makes between simple declarations (that, on the one hand, the consequences of a nuclear disaster are unacceptable; that nuclear energy is no longer cheap or clean) and, on the other hand, *an uncertain future in which, the editorial contends,* "*nuclear waste disposal could cause real problems*."

In our class, we juxtaposed this English-language editorial with ethnographic filmmaker Hu Tai-Li's 1993 documentary film *Voices of Orchid Island*, a text that reframes our lines of sight by focusing in its powerful concluding section on the impact of Taipower's decision to set up a low-level nuclear waste

[6] According to the BBC, a 2013 estimate indicates that clean-up work following the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear meltdown will take 40 years and cost "at least [US]$ 100 bn"; see http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-24739264.

storage site on Orchid Island (located off the east coast of Taiwan) in close proximity to the homes of indigenous Tao people. In this film, various activists and concerned members of the Tao community express their anger at how this nuclear waste site was set up in 1982 without consultation or consent, as government officials first told residents that they were building a military harbor, and then told them the facility was going to be a canning factory. As one might expect, Hu's film emphasizes the disruptive consequences of Taipower's actions. Yet it also draws our attention to the various challenges the Tao community has faced in attempting to collectively organize resistance to the use of their home as a nuclear waste dump. One of the activists featured in the film, for instance, speaks about the damage inflicted on his community by a Han-centric education, one that has in his view made it difficult for younger members of the Tao community to identify with their home.[7] In Taiwan, understood as a settler colony, we are faced not only with the burden of English but also with the burden of Chineseness—a glimpse of the enormous work that remains to be done.[8]

Back in Taipei, my first-year undergraduate students majoring in engineering as well as law worked individually and collectively to engage with some of the ethical questions posed by these texts. In doing so, they worked across materials in English as well as in Mandarin Chinese and Tao. None of my students are from Taitung County (where Orchid Island is located); at the time of our classroom discussion, none had been to Orchid Island. But many of them were able to identify the environmental racism at work when an indigenous community without access to the levers of political power takes on the risks of the nuclear power industry with scant access to the benefits. One even connected his response on the issue of nuclear waste disposal to the process of gaining admission to National Taiwan University.[9] To be sure, my view of these responses

[7] Speaking in Mandarin, si Pozngit states: "Receiving a Chinese-style education is a painful experience. For the whole nine years of elementary school and junior high, Yami [i.e. Tao] children have no access to their own traditional culture, to the values of their traditional society. Once they finish junior high school it's easy for them to leave their parents and enter the Taiwan job market; they lose the sense of closeness to their homeland. The younger generation don't find it easy to set up home here [on Orchid Island] in the land of their ancestors. They do not identify with the pain inflicted on this land. They have no sense of oppression, shame, or imminent threat to their lives. They have no feeling of being squeezed. So it's hard to explain to them about our stance against nuclear waste"; see Hu.

[8] On this point, see Teng who, in her provocative discussion of what she calls "the impossibility of a postcolonial theory of Taiwan," pushes us to address "the colonial nature of the historical Chinese presence on Taiwan" (252), a move that she argues would enable us to address both the "absence of decolonization" in contemporary China-Taiwan relations *and* the limits of contemporary colonial and postcolonial studies. For a broad overview of settler colonialism as a distinct formation and analytic category, see Veracini.

[9] One student recalled writing on the topic of nuclear energy while taking the entrance examination to join the Department of Civil Engineering at NTU, noting that he "still remembers the feeling

(produced orally in class and more formally in writing) is necessarily partial and incomplete. As Spivak would readily acknowledge, the eventual outcomes of education in the humanities are not fully known to the teaching subject—and perhaps not to the taught subject, either. Yet even with such uncertainties, I remain convinced that my students are good people; like many students, many of them want to do good. Would it be enough for these students to be organized and mobilized (as part of an elite group studying at National Taiwan University) as anti-nuclear activists committed to "righting wrongs"?

Despite the undeniable need for collective mobilization, the answer, I wish to suggest, is "no"—especially if the impulse to "right wrongs" merely reinscribes the agency of subjects in Taipei to yet again act on behalf of others. In a Spivakian sense, an aesthetic education—however inchoate and incomplete—that attempts to cut across languages and institutional divides must necessarily supplement the pressing need to "right wrongs," even as we must confront the striking limitations of this work.[10]

In this way, Spivak's project challenges us to think about our goals as teachers and students in and across the field of literary studies: to attempt to "[transform] the way[s] in which objects of knowledge are constructed; perhaps also shifting desires in the subject" (41)—as always, without guarantees. In so doing, we may (as Spivak observes in her brilliant reading of the work of Assia Djebar) "attempt to figure forth the world's broken and shifting alphabet" (157). This forum is one small attempt to do so: to think through the historical and philosophical bases of Spivak's project, to frankly assess its possibilities and limitations, and to ask what existing and imagined forms of education in the humanities might—or might not—do.

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when [he] wrote that essay now. The feeling is totally different from writing this critical response" in First-year English. While I can't presume to know what this "totally different" feeling might be or where it might lead, it could be seen as one possible starting point for the "rearrangement of desires" theorized by Spivak.

[10] For example, even while the texts we discussed in my section of First-year English cut across writing in English and the complex code-switching between Mandarin and the Tao language in *Voices of Orchid Island*, and even while we strove for the difficult "inter-literary" perspectives championed by Spivak, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the Tao "voices" we hear are framed in Hu's documentary and its arguably primitivist strategies of representation. One might also reasonable ask what forms of such an "aesthetic education" might be available on Orchid Island or elsewhere in Taitung County? These other sites of education would need to be addressed to supplement the "rearrangement of desires" in Taiwan's north—another project that remains unfinished.

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An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization: A Forum

Aesthetic Education and Sympathetic Imagination

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In this brief contribution to the forum, I sketch my sense of the role fiction can and indeed should play in contemporary education, thereby presupposing against the odds that the Humanities themselves will continue to have a place in the post-modern, globalized university. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "productive undoing" or misprision of Schiller's Romantic popularization of Kant in the letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, I outline a contemporary role for the aesthetic quite different from the general aestheticization of the commodity—or commodification of the aesthetic to a point of indistinction between product and image—in the post-modern globalized society of the spectacle. I then very briefly turn to J. M. Coetzee to clarify and substantiate a specific version of the aesthetic in the notion of "Serious Fiction."

In the introduction to *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Spivak describes the idea of her book as "sabotaging Schiller" in the hopes of "an epistemological change that will rearrange desires" (2)—that is to say, in the hopes of changing *how* we know and think, and thus changing *what* we know and think, in order to change what we want, or rather, in order, through teaching, to help change what our students think, know, and want—from their education, as from employment, their societies in general, and their lives. And she offers this (hope, change) specifically against the current dispensation, *episteme*, arrangement of desires, partition of the sensible, and so forth. Thus Spivak is outlining an ethical and political task, rather than a merely pedagogical one. She speaks here and elsewhere in the collection of the epistemo-epistmological

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difference, a chiastic inversion of sorts of the ontico-ontological difference in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, but with the Foucauldian coloring of apparatus (*dispositif*), power, and so forth inhabiting the epistemological/ontic pole.[1]

Regularly teaching radically different groups (Columbia University youngsters like myself, once upon a time, and kids in rural primary schools in Bengal), Spivak has for a long time been devoted to thinking the premises and goals of pedagogy beyond the imparting of skills, techniques, and information. She is rather focused on "Education and the habit of the ethical" (9); that is, education as *formation*, as interpellation and molding towards an *ethos*, a *secondary* habitus as it were, meaning much more than just the imparting of knowledge, but the informing of ways of thinking and sensing, talking and listening, behaving, and so on. While this is more obviously relevant at a primary educational stage, it remains part of the task of teaching at all levels. Spivak speaks of teaching (and of reading) to "displac[e] belief onto the terrain of the imagination" (10): making individually, sensuously perceivable, bringing closer the other in its distance and otherness in order better to assess our beliefs about it, us, and the world. Here the imagination mediates, as it were, between not intuition and understanding, but the epistemic, as the inherited way of being of the primary habitus, the uncritically imbibed language and traditions of the motherland, and so forth, and the epistemological, the educational apparatus, the *episteme* informing scientific knowledge, approved method, and so on.

I will keep discussion here of Schiller to a minimum. The historical context is well known: the letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* are part of a reactionary response to excesses of reason realized in the Terror (after a tepid enthusiasm for the French Revolution in the first place) and address a felt need for a synthesis of the sensuous and the rational in human freedom. Despite its immediate politically reactionary context, the book articulates a version of a modernist critique of over-rationalization, the excess of self-awareness, and concomitant developments, institutional as well as psychological, of compartmentalization, specialization, and general spiritual devastation (which Schiller in the 4th letter calls "barbarism"). This cultural crisis is to be addressed, in a way the Romantics will popularize, through the *aesthetic*. As Schiller writes in the 2nd letter: "if man is ever to solve [the] problem of politics in practice he will have

[1] In a footnote to "The Burden of English," she relates the epistemic to habits of mind, forms of life, ways of being, and opposes this to the epistemological: forms, structures, and regimes of knowing; the point is a palpable gap or difference in sensuous pre-critical everyday lived experience and that experience translated into or appropriated by any secondary descriptive, normative, analytical or other discourse or understanding. Hence the analogy with the ontico-ontological difference. See Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 537 n22.

to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom" (9).

Avoiding as irrelevant in the present context complexities and contradictions in the text, we can basically understand Schiller's position through his account of a profound duality of opposing forces informing human nature, the famous Sensuous- and Form-drives or impulses: the *Stofftrieb* "proceeds from the physical existence of man, his sensuous nature" and is temporal and mutable; the *Formtrieb*, also a gift of nature, "annuls time and annuls change . . . insist[ing] on truth and on the right," and can be roughly equated with reason itself. This familiar dualism is the cause of much strife, and the task of education is to reconcile nature and reason, sense and thought, without repressing or ignoring the natural rights of each. Famously, the key to this in Schiller is the Play drive (*der Spieltrieb*, 14th letter), and here his description of a transcendental psychology mixes with an anthropology *cum* developmental psychology (opening as well onto the responsibilities and possibilities of *Erziehung*, education, rather than simply describing a fact of the relation of the mental faculties). Humans begin life, before reason fully develops, in play. Play is the sensuous, imaginative, naïve activity of children; a little later the rule-governed but purposeless activity of games; and subsequently the model of the aesthetic itself as sensuous, rule-governed imaginative activity with its own autonomy.[2] And in the purposeless purposefulness of games and play (following Kant), as well as the sensuous pleasure involved, we also enter into the realm of Beauty. As Nicholas Saul summarizes, "The experience of Beauty answers simultaneously the sensual demand for material satisfaction (life) and the demand for autonomous rule characteristic of ethical consciousness (form). In this realm of beautiful appearance people are freed from the one-sided dictatorship of form or matter. What is free has no purpose beyond itself. It plays" (206). Beauty indeed is, for Schiller, quite simply the form freedom takes in the realm of sensory experience (*die Freiheit in der Erscheinung*)[3] which then prepares for the greater freedom in moral life.

So, according to Schiller, "merely by furnishing the thinking faculty with the freedom to express itself according to its own laws . . . beauty can become a means of leading man from matter to form, from feeling to law, from a limited to an absolute existence" (131). In short, between sheer sensuous pleasure and play of youth, and the joyful acceptance of the law of reason governing ethical action in the fully formed adult, lies, once and forever, the aesthetic, beauty, that

[2] The play drive is "directed towards annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity" (97).

[3] As Schiller puts it in the later *Kallias* letters; see Bernstein 152.

which teaches us to love formal constraint on sensuous matter.

Now, there is in Schiller a confusion between the aesthetic as a faculty (for the apprehension of beauty) and the general aesthetic harmony of all the faculties realized (through education) in a truly free man, but that is not important in the present context. Essential rather for my purposes is the claim that "There is no other way of making sensuous man rational except by first making him aesthetic" (161)—thereby teaching him to accept formal rule (or as Eagleton says in sarcastic Gramscian terms, allowing Reason to secure domination by consent).[4] This involves a training or disciplining of the imagination, as of the senses, out of which a higher delight and freedom are born, themselves homologous with the higher moral freedom of the *schöne Seele*.[5]

It is here that Spivak wants to borrow from, and sabotage, Schiller. For Schiller, only through rationality can we be said to truly will, to choose, and thus to be free. So the aesthetic is the mediation between man's purely sensuous nature and his rational nature that allows for the possibility of freedom. While there is much here that Spivak does not accept, she does see the supreme value of the Imagination (not exactly as Kant's *Einbildungskraft*, but as this capacity to freely, playfully engage in the work of identification, engagement in plot, scene, and so forth of reading). Elsewhere she defines the imagination as the "great inbuilt instrument of othering."[6] It is what allows us to feel (and see, hear, touch, taste) for and with the other. In other words, it—the aesthetic, the imagination—can give access to the epistemic (and perhaps the ontological as well) and thereby bypass the given epistemological regime, possibly affecting the most basic desires and intuitions. As Spivak would stress: can, possibly. No promises or guarantees. Thus the task of pedagogy becomes: to teach how to read (rather than simply communicate) in such a way that such transformation can become

[4] See Eagleton 104. Frederick Beiser explains, in rather more neutral terms than Eagleton, "The lesson to be learned from the failure of the Enlightenment and the chaos of the Revolution, Schiller argued, is that it is not sufficient to educate the understanding alone. It is also necessary to cultivate feelings and desires, to develop a person's sensibility so that he or she are [*sic*] *inclined* to act according to the principles of reason. In other words, it was also essential to *inspire* the people, to touch their hearts and arouse their imaginations, to get them to live by higher ideals" (94).

[5] "Like the bodily organs in man, his imagination, too, has its free movement and its material play, an activity in which, without any reference to form, it simply delights in its own absolute and unfettered power. Inasmuch as form does not yet enter this fantasy play at all, its whole charm residing in a free association of images, such play—although the prerogative of man alone—belongs merely to his animal life, and simply avoids evidence of his liberation from all external physical compulsion, without as yet warranting the inference that there is any autonomous shaping power within him. From this play of freely associated ideas, which is still of a wholly material kind, and to be explained by purely natural laws, the imagination, in its attempt at a free from, finally makes the leap to aesthetic play" (Schiller 209).

[6] See Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 13.

possible, so that we can learn imaginatively from the other.

At this point there is not space for me to develop this normative, theoretical notion of a critical pedagogy couched in the language of a descriptive account of reading or the aesthetic and to apply it to the work of Coetzee. However, I will offer a quick definition of his, the title and object of my current book project: Serious Fiction. In a critical essay on pornography, Coetzee states, "Seriousness is, for a certain kind of artist, an imperative uniting the aesthetic and the ethical."[7] Spivak herself has explored some of Coetzee's texts in productive ways, for example in her discussion of counter-focalization in *Disgrace*.[8] The Imagination leads us to an aesthetico-ethical task, possibly over and above a text's "intentions," to read against the grain and see a counter-narrative to omnipresent patriarchy and its reaches into our very notions of narrative. The epistemological, in the broadest terms, brought into question in the fictional. Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello books likewise raise ethical questions of the "sympathetic imagination."[9] Questioning the dangers and merits of reading and representation, of fictional seduction viscerally going under the radar, as it were, of normative moral and political discourses.

The point in Spivak's critical pedagogy—and which I see exercised in Coetzee's fiction—is not just the well known modernist idea, best articulated by Adorno, that the aesthetic gives access to forms of knowledge, to sensuous particularity and experience, that philosophy, the natural sciences, and the human sciences cannot discursively capture and communicate, though this insight applies. There is rather more of what Peter Sloterdijk calls an *anthropotechnics*[10] involved, the forming of habits through *practice*, the training of the imagination through fictional othering, so that our very apparatus of judgment can be prepared for a more nuanced engagement with others in "real life."[11] Coetzee's novels can be viewed as great workshops for this sort of activity of serious play linking the aesthetic with extra-textual ethical concerns. In this respect they are model texts for a critical pedagogy in the Era of Globalization. But just as

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[7] See Coetzee, *Giving Offense* 73.

[8] See "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching," *Diacritics* 32.3-4 (2004):17-31; reprinted in *An Aesthetic Education* 316-34. See also "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*," *English in Africa* 17.2 (1990): 1-23.

[9] See Coetzee, *Lives of Animals* 35; *Elizabeth Costello* 80.

[10] See, for example, *You Must Change Your Life* 1-15.

[11] As Chinua Achebe writes, "A person who is insensitive to the suffering of his fellows is that way because he lacks the imaginative power to get under the skin of another human being and see the world through eyes other than his own." But what Achebe dubs "beneficent fiction calls into full life our total range of imaginative faculties and gives us a heightened sense of our personal, social and human reality." See "The Truth of Fiction" in *Hopes and Impediments* 149; 151.

we must do our homework to become, as closely as possible, the implied readers of texts in order to derive maximal enjoyment and "instruction" from them, we must also be sure never to neglect the moment of play, however serious, in a full engagement with their fictional worlds, the *as if*, the make-believe: aesthetic semblance. This playful tarrying is what can secure epistemic engagement and bypass the rationalizing and organizing thinking of the dominant episteme. If we cannot enjoy fictional texts, then we don't stand much of a chance to really learn from them—a cautionary corrective to various methods of the dominant hermeneutics of suspicion that suggests that the wisdom which can come from reading and can help us live better lives cannot be separated from a primary joy and pleasure.

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An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization: A Forum

Figuring Globalization

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In *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak promotes a higher-education program of cosmopolitanism, in which humans are defined by the gregarious intention of being with the Other, and in which comparative literature is summoned to teach students, graduates and undergraduates alike, to develop the imagination for achieving this ethical purpose. One is encouraged be an agent to "ab-use" the European Enlightenment, or render vivid sensuous experiences of singular human beings from outside of the dominant, in the interest of defending global minorities (in her term the subaltern). Such events as 9/11 and her teaching in local schools in India, arguably, have compelled her to think through and even beyond Derridean deconstruction and the legacies of the Enlightenment. After her intensive work of public education, Spivak obviously realizes that one would have to open deconstruction to new possibilities, shifting to Paul de Man for the insight of figuration but still attending to the blindness of language Jacques Derrida always reveals, and accepting the social significance of the unavoidable predicament that communication is bound by the convenience of figuration. In some respects, Spivak is in tune with the ethical persistence of Edward Said. She acknowledges that her remarks on terror, for example, are "a supplement to Said's magisterial work on the secular critic, who resembles the scholar, the *Gelehrte*, the hero of Kantian Enlightenment, in being 'oppositional' to every system, the individual who resists systems" (391). The contribution of Spivak's book is a call for a change from the assumption of rights to responsibility taking, a fundamental rethinking of subjectivity-centered Enlightenment philosophy into a practical project of agent-oriented ethical responsibility for the Other, a

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solid connection-building with those who have been much abused in power. It could inspire teachers of literature to courageously push the envelope of worldly criticism and transform it into a live imagination of displacement in students' minds. Displacement refers to both the act—disruptive dislocation of European hegemony—and the double act of pointing—an avant-garde service to *envision* justice for those who are *identified* to be socially disconcerted, living under the capitalist elites.

This radical cosmopolitanism even threatens to undo Spivak's previous works of deconstruction collected in the same book precisely because she shifts the emphasis from deconstruction to both deconstruction and figuration to form a concept of the double bind of trace and figuration (23). The double bind is derived from Gregory Bateson's theorization of "a double take" in clinical cases in which schizophrenia patients are caught in the demands of two conflicting scenarios (4). If Immanuel Kant brings critical weight on his own works, as de Man contends, perhaps Spivak is trying to do so too. She calls the introduction of the book "a postface" (26), because discontinuities, discrepancy of emphases, etc. in this collection are probably meant to be exposed, all of which seem to encourage the reader to incorporate the chapters of the book not in a synchronic structure but rather along the time of future anteriority. The call for ethical responsibility is definitely not one fully unfolding just before *An Aesthetic Education* appeared in print, but has already happened in the past in a way not quite recognizable and articulated as it is.

In spite of Spivak's immensely rich argumentation, however, this program of fostering the imagination is effectively limited by epistemological idealism: as much as she deconstructs texts and imagine new figures, she does so mostly within the province of Kant's rational secularism. An originary point of the book is Kant's sublime. It shows to Spivak that aesthetics is complex but unreachable epistemologically, and in this way Kant demonstrates a paradigm that marks the limit of reason and the humbleness of it (24). She keeps returning to Kant in order to recuperate this operation of self-limited reason to be unbounded by any transcendalizing attempt in religions or ideologies. In a sense, her ambitious project remains set within the operational grids delimited by the parameters of philosophical idealism because spectrality and the figuration of the Other are the derivatives of deconstructing logocentrism in the attempt to apply the critique of teleology-centered philosophy.

What really matters is not the double bind as a theory but a method. To make this happen, theory has to be bent when a new weight arrives. Yet Spivak's persistence in keeping the book on the same grid generated by a theme of philosophy seems to precariously push too much ahead of itself. The double

bind as it is now might be too tight a formal structure to give the right share of the methodological function back to the imagination. Now the glimpse of the open, it seems, can often be seen as co-opted by known reason, and reappears in figures. This problem particularly emerges at the crucial moment when Spivak seeks to read Kant against the post-9/11 stereotyping of religion(s). She argues that "[i]n 'Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason,' Kant implicitly . . . shifts the task of representation-without-concept—figuration—to the figuring of Grace as near-metalespsis—unverifiable effect of an effect—to a parergon or outside-work of pure reason" (396). In this difficult passage, Spivak modifies Kant's effect of grace into an "effect of an effect" as if to block the possibilities of mediation and opening further away from the representational capacity of language as much as possible. However, spectrality is not everything that can define what is not logocentric. To a practice of the double bind, one might also have to add stronger doses of the embracing of the open. The promise of the open, the radicality of reaching beyond the known structures of reason, should remain other than in the form of the ambivalence and ambiguity of the double bind.

In fact, I had a difficult time determining how to read this book in spite of many hopeful positioning claims of education exhibited in it to guide the reader. The claims include points as follows. A) The attention is switched from colonialism to capitalism. B) Graduate and undergraduate students are the target audience of this book, and the concern of the book is "the reproduction of citizens and teachers" (10). C) Spivak wishes to move outside the specific confines of academic discourse to speak the language of a public intellectual. D) Globalization should be replaced with planetarity for the latter term situates one better imaginatively in a pre-capital alliance with the land. If Spivak is presenting the best of what the discipline of comparative literature has been doing, however, her account remains provocatively one-sided. Back in the 1990s, my comparative literature PhD program in the United States also focused on the problematic of aesthetic education. My former advisor Michael Sprinker encouraged a serious rethinking of the Enlightenment by persistently placing Louis Althusser against Friedrich Schiller. He taught me how the sensuous experience can be the most effective conduit for embedding one into the matrix of the capitalist power. Another teacher, Ban Wang, explained the revolutionary yearning of Communist China in the figure of the sublime. By giving more leeway to Schiller than Spivak, he traced the disquieting ambivalence of the transcendent in the aesthetic. The figure of the sublime can be subject to ideological manipulation; nonetheless, it can also be an inspiration for a hopeful liberation out of the binds of capitalism. The lesson I took from my teachers is this: ideological analysis and aesthetic education should go in tandem; one

should be on guard against capitalist ideologies while also asserting the capacity of the aesthetic for forging new collective identities. Placing Spivak's book against the memory of my comparative literature curriculum, I cannot help finding it dated (in the sense of being temporally marked), since she is still in a heated argument with those Marxists such as my teachers so as to contend that Marxism has no purchase in cultural analysis unless one gives it a poststructuralist spin. Such a debate reproduces too what had happened among the French left intellectuals during the 1960s in their response to the overwhelming invasion of state authorities into everyday life.

Spivak wishes to spread her scholarship from empires to capitalism, but this too results in categorical confusion, since an unquestioned equation of capitalism with postcolonial conditions lurks constantly in the background. In general, Spivak's exegesis of globalization draws much on her personal takes, reproducing some of what I heard and read around the turn of the millennium. A crucial reference to which she repeatedly returns is the generation of postwar immigration and postcolonialism as the expression of what belongs to that generation's "enabling violation" brought about through Western hegemony (28, 446, 459). This begs the question of how much a metropolitan postcolonial scholar constructs a limited perspective of the world outside the topographies of the global cities, including New York.

Above all, Spivak's slippage from postcolonialism to globalization studies occasions an ambiguous understanding of globalization. Even though the problematic of empires is fundamentally different from that of capitalism, she feels compelled to single out several times the term "neocolonialism" to characterize the shape of the present day.[1] The colonialism of European countries, she asserts, now has been changed into the neocolonialism of the United States. Here she evidently means globalization to be Americanization. So one is left to wonder if empires or capital is the real concern. To be fair, Spivak also uses another key phrase "electronic capitalism" to depict a celebrated version of globalization as overtly advertised by economic elites of the United States. She may well be right on this account too, but this is at best an expression of ironic detachment from the official propaganda of capitalism.

Spivak's analysis of globalization can be ad hoc at times, and is not fundamentally different from much of the understanding of globalization afforded

[1] Spivak maintains that instead of de-colonization, "neocolonialism" started in the mid-1940s after the fall of territorial empires. With this concept, she seeks to ask the reader to imagine the current time as "a displaced repetition of many of the old lines laid down by colonialism" (61). This periodization remains stable throughout the book (67, 91, 98, 100-01, 211, 212, 336).

by the left in the last two decades. For example, the concept of dividing the globalized world into the privileged North and the deprived South, and the call of a reading from below, echo the critical studies of globalization of late 1990s and the early 2000s. The more complex resonances of established globalization studies are that this book is underpinned by understandings of space. Two meanings of space thread the book. Yet Spivak acknowledges only one of them, the Derridean spacing, or the slippery in-betweeness of semantic formation, to evoke sensuous imaginations of the impossible, even though the other unacknowledged meaning of space buttresses her criticism against capitalist globalization. By this I allude to Henri Lefebvre's explication, the restructuring of the life world into abstract social space, and how his insights have furthered the critical projects of such scholars as Fredric Jameson and David Harvey. Spivak's critique of the so-called electronic capitalism, if not a form of satire, is substantiated by Harvey's popularization of time-space compression as the domineering mode of capitalist culture. Furthermore, one may pair Spivak's dialectic of globalization and planetarity with Lefebvre's dialectic between space of representation and representational space to discover Spivak also implicitly follows Lefebvre, of the French sixties, in releasing the sensuous experiences to reach beyond the confining cuts of capitalist culture.

I would like to suggest that an ideal teacher of comparative literature would be enabled to undertake an effective analysis of globalization. As Spivak is no doubt aware, some good tools are available for this task. In discussing the culture of global capitalism, Michel Foucault has coined the term governance and Lefebvre has presented the critical concept of social space. As far as I understand them, both key words, in their own ways, address the issue of how everyday life in capitalism is fundamentally reorganized into abstract associations, with the seemingly voluntary participation of those involved. Of course, one is not limited to these two French theories, but without an adequate analysis of capitalist globalization, the imputed limits that are said to be barring to "the subaltern" could also be self-imposed by those who are prematurely trapped in "double binds."

The reader of *An Aesthetic Education* is left with the responsibility to continue the critical work of the new left and deconstructionist Marxism into today's globalization. The datedness of Spivak's project is not as scandalous as it appears, however. Such an explicit laying bare of *An Aesthetic Education*'s weaknesses is a form of urging others to ethically respond, too. In my view, then, Spivak's audacious call to de-subjectivize the humanities for ethical cosmopolitianism could and should be aligned with concrete ideological and politico-geographical analyses.

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An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization: A Forum

Aesthetic Education in an Era of Diminishing Expectation

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* lies between two kinds of writing on the humanities crisis, which is how I take it following an introduction that features the doleful hope that "perhaps the literary can still do something" (3, 30). The first is by faculty, usually at elite institutions, who enjoy the benefits of job security and lament the fact that humanists have done a poor job explaining what we have to offer. They then reiterate the very platitudes on the value of a humanities degree that an increasingly skeptical public no longer buys: personal growth, advanced citizenship, social reform. Some give assurances (oddly incredulous) that people with such degrees do in fact find jobs. Insofar as reasons are given for the crisis, it is blamed on some combination of entrepreneurialism in higher education and the wider drift toward a global neoliberal agenda.

The second kind of writing on the humanities crisis is by those with vocationally oriented jobs, like writing specialists who supervise legions of graduate students and adjunct PhDs who teach the bulk of undergraduate classes in the United States. Views from this sector are different from those of tenured elites. Long marginalized by the literary establishment and with few illusions about the status of writing in the academic food chain, critics like Richard Miller and Marc Bousquet have mounted scathing attacks on English departments from

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the perspective of those who pay the price. Historians of the field also suggest that the current "crisis" is more self-generated than generally acknowledged. In 1968, with stiff resistance from school administrators, English faculty at the University of Wisconsin dropped freshman composition from their departmental teaching responsibilities. By David Fleming's account, they "no longer cared very much about it." Fleming writes:

> [T]he course didn't fit their new post-*Sputnik* image of themselves or their department. They were focused now on research, their own national profiles, and the prestige and productivity of their department; and they wanted to move English studies at UW in the direction of advanced literary study, to help it become a more focused department, one oriented more to the needs and goals of its majors and, especially, its graduate students, not freshmen and sophomores. To do so, they needed to shed, or at least deemphasize, the department's general education responsibilities. (83)

Professional desire in English, at UW and across the country, was encouraged by two factors: government cash flooding American universities to support Cold War research, and a bubble in humanities enrolments, which in 1967 reached 18% of total degrees awarded that year in the United States. But about the time Wisconsin dropped composition that bubble burst, with degrees falling to 6% by 1982, just below the current level. This dramatic increase in PhDs *vs*. less money and fewer students is responsible for many of the worst problems facing the humanities today. English in particular has survived by exploiting the very glut of academic labor it produces.

I cite Fleming's study because just before it cancelled freshman composition, the English department at UW awarded a PhD to Yen Yuan-shu 顏元叔, who then returned to National Taiwan University and, along with Duke graduate Chu Limin 朱立民, set about reconfiguring *Waiwenxi* as a university major and academic discipline. While hard to say what post-*Sputnik* professional desire Yen took away from UW, he and Chu advocated separating literary studies from language training explicitly because the latter corrupted the former.[1] While the effort failed, it is clear that current incentives (pay, promotion, prestige) in English and Foreign Language and Literature departments in Taiwan reflect what George Levine calls "the two nations" of research and teaching, where language teaching bears the same second-class status as composition in the United States. This is unfortunate at a time when school administrators, elected officials, parents, and students have begun asking questions about what literature professors teach and why.

As a book on the humanities crisis, *An Aesthetic Education* interests me in

[1] See Chu.

two ways, both suggesting how we might respond to questions about the value of what we teach. One is how Spivak repeatedly invokes moments of actual classroom teaching, some hypothetical, some from her own experience. Doing so implies, at least in principle, that education is not a content-bearing abstraction, but a social and material practice that, as such, bears pedagogical value. Second is that in chapters like "The Burden of English" Spivak features close reading, not as a critical discipline, but a classroom activity, albeit one meant to effect the "productive undoing" of transcendental virulences (nationalistic, religious) that thrive in a world no less post-colonial for being global. Such "undoing" requires we "look carefully at the fault lines of the doing, without accusation, without excuse, with a view to use" (1). As such, it serves the redemptive mission that in various forms has long defined literary studies as a profession: "sweetness and light," Great Books, Cultural Studies, Critical Pedagogy, curricular activism of the kind associated with multiculturalism and identity politics. Aesthetic education is one of these, and as Fleming's account of a determined but ultimately insecure English faculty at UW would lead us to expect, Spivak is careful to stipulate that it is by teaching literature she hopes to lift the burden of English, not "language as an instrument of communication" (36).

Yet as astute as she is professionally, Spivak locates herself firmly in the classroom, once again, elaborating how to teach students most of whom will indeed earn their livings using English "as an instrument of communication." She also adopts a strikingly vocational tone, describing our aims in instrumental language not usually associated with aesthetics (usefulness, productivity, wanting literature to *do something*). Vocational language, along with Spivak's expressed lack of optimism, suggest that her doubts may be less about what literature can do, than how it has fared at the hands of professional academics. One thing that worries her seems to be our impulse to moralize ("fault lines of the doing, without accusation, without excuse"), which others too see as a problem.[2] But to the extent she seeks to rekindle hope through object-driven practicality ("use"), even while distancing herself from language instruction, Spivak reveals a deeper problem: professional desire has all but eliminated occupational "use" as a reason to teach literature. Even when her concern is academic employment (as it is, for example, in "Teaching for the Times"), she writes not about the sustainability of the profession, much less a living wage for adjuncts, but rather a form of transcendental usefulness she calls "meta-vocational" (138).

Spivak is not the first literature professor to struggle with material value.

[2] See, for example, Brown.

Once, when literature still bore cultural capital (and jobs for English majors were easier to find), practical concerns were dismissed as philistine. While perhaps less glib, Spivak's vocational language resembles another form of this dismissal, the now common conceit that humanists are in the "business of knowledge production." Close reading in *An Aesthetic Education* is also intent on the problems of teachers more than students. And again, Spivak is not alone. Jane Gallop argues that in English we don't teach texts, but how to read them. The value of such reading is not practical, however. Focusing on the minutia of texts avoids projecting an agenda onto them, she says, allowing the "other" within to speak. This reading Gallop calls "ethical." Yet lurking in Gallop's own text is what may be called a meta-vocational secondary agenda concerned not with the other, but with saving the profession from "the instrumentalism that would turn the teaching of English into the mere transmission of some amoral technical ability. Close reading can make students write better, but as much as I value good writing, that is simply not enough" (10).

In university, good writing—like correct English—may well not be "enough." But embracing the ethical as the defining value of what we do, while relegating material use to lesser status based on its *amorality*, not only risks moralism of the kind Wendy Brown—and apparently Spivak—is critical, but widens the gap between Levine's two nations, a metaphor that figures in expressly social terms the alienation of our professional and vocational duties as teachers. Insofar as these have been subjected to a division of labor, they have also been stratified, with the effect being that to make occupational claims on literary studies risks (and justifies) banishment to that "other" nation of the godless and undeserving.

My point is not to challenge the hierarchies of academic labor—others are doing this. But it is essential we understand how these hierarchies prevent us from addressing questions about what literature professors do in an educational context like the one emerging in a post-"economic miracle" Taiwan, where platitudes, old or new, will only produce conditions that plague English abroad. Clearly, more than linguistic gestures are needed to narrow the gap that separates the professional and vocational needs we serve, which some argue is our only hope of realizing a sustainable, less crisis-prone profession.

What the literary does will depend on how literally we take Spivak's vocationalism, and this will not be easy. If close reading has a history in Taiwan, its value is obscured by the form of its adoption, and hostility to New Criticism as the critical school associated with it. This hostility is justified by what Hugh Kenner called New Criticism's tendency "to mistake itself for a critical discipline," which is how it was brought to Taiwan, as a means to verify the greatness of great lit-

erature. But this was not how it was intended. New Criticism was a "classroom strategy," a toolbox of methods meant to provide access to the canons of western literature for those who lacked prerequisite academic knowledge (Kenner 45). This explains the continuing influence of New Criticism long after its intellectual demise as it served the needs of faculty in postwar classrooms filled with students from non-traditional backgrounds. Close reading engaged these students analytically, looking past a text's surface, navigating multiple layers of over-determined meaning, proposing interpretive claims, and defending them, first in class, then in writing. Such reading prepared students for advanced training in a range of service professions that required creativity and intellectual nuance. Formalism's value was the role it played in a system of mass tertiary education the task of which was to foster skills needed in an emerging post-industrial knowledge economy.

So if crisis looms, there are also opportunities for English departments in Taiwan, especially as economists increasingly seek a turn similar to the postwar West from export-driven manufacturing to service industries and R&D. In addition to fostering innovative capacities, these opportunities include seeing what literature can do beyond the department major, where close reading would help students in business and sciences, where English is the lingua franca and elementary usage will no longer do. Yet whatever potential there may be for sustaining, or even expanding, literary education in Taiwan, key features of Kenner's classroom strategy were effectively jettisoned in adopting New Criticism for local use. If populist rhetoric remained, writing played a lesser role in teaching close reading, denying engagements that occur not in reading, but writing. In addition, Taiwanese students typically experienced little resembling the freewheeling call-and-response style of American classroom instruction, where students debate interpretations before staking their own claims and crafting supporting arguments. By Harriet Linkin's account, "performing discussion" is vital to close reading as teachers encourage participation, but intervene as it lapses into "student-centered interpretive anarchy," or inspire "good thesis-driven argumentative student papers," but say no when someone claims that English majors can "say anything they wanted to about literary works, whether true or not, so long as they could make an argument" (171). Here students learn the first lesson of knowledge work: the difference between creativity and a mess.

Reasons for omitting key elements of New Critical pedagogy include language that lacked proficiency to thread the needles of irony and paradox, and an exam-based evaluation system that tends to promote rote learning. And if these problems eased in time, others have arisen, ensuring that university literature electives would be hard to implement: professional anxiety about service

teaching, for example, or political sensitivities likely aroused at any plan to teach English texts *en mass* to Taiwanese students, especially when the texts are western, as are many of the teachers.

But there are incentives, and these are not limited to what literature electives would add to our departmental bottom lines. For anyone who hopes "the literary can still do something," teaching across a university curriculum increasingly burdened by English may be our greatest opportunity, even when Spivak adds, "Or perhaps not" (30). Doubt is good in a field long entangled in mutually corrupting desires for professional status and social reform. Linkin suggests how close reading might help "undo" such entanglements, whether religious, nationalistic, those of the texts before us, or our own often transcendentalized aims in reading them. Interpretation is social, she reminds us, and we teach "not what texts mean but how we locate meaning in texts, a step that makes explicit the need to move from the self-expressive to the argumentative" (174). This "move" from narcissism to sociability is painful, and in classes where all submit to the same protocols of reading, educators are as vulnerable as their students—who if we open our classes to science and business majors would not only give us a stake in the wider university curriculum, but expose us to the persuasions of readers long regarded as foreign, if not the enemy. This is important critically if we hope to mediate the virulences of history and not cultivate them for professional gain. It is important vocationally if we are to avoid providing students causal narratives (in the Nietzschean sense) whereby they explain the pain of learning, then refuse it, especially when that learned is an imperial foreign tongue. As useful as creativity in Spivak's close reading is the sociability of its instruction, where all too apparent are the needs of those who, with English or without, will soon leave us to find their way in the difficult world beyond.

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