

# Double-Bound: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization

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**RUPC Working Paper #1**

Received 1st June 2014, revised 9th July 2014.  
Published April 2015.

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*This publication has been peer-reviewed.*

ISBN: 978 0 7340 5141 7



# Double-Bound: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*

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## Abstract:

*Published in 2011, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization compiles and reconsiders two decades of her arguments about the political constitution of the aesthetic subject. This review essay traces arguments running through the book that reconcile the deconstructive politics of the subject with the resurgent interest in universalist theories that position themselves in relation to global technocapitalism. These arguments provide us with methodological tools for interrogating the "globalisability" of our academic work: the co-option of social movements and the need for epistemological care; Romantic techniques of self-othering toward new collectivities; Marx's legacy of value as form; the powerful role of affect and habit in training the intellect; an expanded theory of reading; the limits of "culture" as a diagnostic; reproductive heteronormativity as a grounding principle; attention to intergenerational gendered structures of responsibility; and finally, a fully secularised understanding of radical alterity.*

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The university has always claimed to hold universal knowledge, but in the wake of postcolonial critique it is clearer that this knowledge been spatialised from Northwestern Europe onto the rest of the world. The rapid growth of the university in both scale and spread in the last half-century, its financialisation and reconfiguration as an education industry, and the networked information technologies that transport its knowledge have combined to provide new conditions for education's "globalisability", its potential synchronisation and distribution over the globe. How could we understand the situation of the "student" as a subject and object of this global circuit, in light of decreased public funding, massively increased participation, and chronic unemployment and underemployment among graduates? How is this linked to the aestheticisation of the economy, the growth of the art market and the art education market, and the valorisation of "creativity" by speculative capital? These questions formed part of a site-specific enquiry the artistic collective Local Time explored at St Paul Street, a university gallery in Auckland, New Zealand, through a 24-day reading group on Spivak's imposing and exciting *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2011), which reconsiders two decades of Spivak's arguments about the political constitution of the aesthetic subject.

Even after receiving the 2012 Kyoto prize for her decades of commitment to activism and teaching, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's name is still inevitably associated with her critique of Western theory's effacement of its gendered others in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). The most visible cultural intermediaries today view these politics of subjective difference as historically noteworthy but ultimately stultifying and immobilising. The debates have been branded "identity politics" and archived into the 1980s, while "feminism" has been reconfigured as "gender", the calculus of a new "global" politics of inclusion and democratisation, aligned with a missionary-style civil-society discourse that Spivak has termed "moral entrepreneurship." Since then, Spivak has continued to interrogate the critical methods of the humanities to renovate their role in the emergent dynamic of the contemporary.

Spivak's essays collected in the book diagnose two important challenges to those of us trying to think the broad conditions of aesthetic "globalisability". Firstly, there is a class-division in who appropriates globality and who is subject to globalisation. In the visual arts, to take an example from my own field, biennialism has emerged as a globalised international circuit of cultural display, incorporating the former non-West as a site to stage its canon, reterritorialising local production with more or less criticality (but rarely engaging curatorial or theoretical agendas from the periphery), while largely disclaiming any responsibility to the broader political economy of these massive circuits of exchange. These colliding scales of politics are visible in various protests against the sponsorship of large scale international exhibitions, such as the artistic boycott against refugee detention centre operator Transfield Services' sponsorship of the Biennale of Sydney in 2014. Secondly, global dynamics are not only experienced differently by women, but to consider that difference changes our perspective on the whole terrain of the global. In Spivak's work, gender is important not simply as a political concern of inclusion, but as "our first instrument of abstraction" (Spivak 2011, p.30 - all future references are to this volume unless otherwise specified), our original way of understanding differentiation in the human, and she demonstrates how feminist analysis provides a continuing ground for the re-evaluation of our critical practices.

Spivak's overarching themes in this volume revisit her 1999 *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, which as the title suggests diagnosed in Immanuel Kant the philosophical rationale for the Enlightenment ideals of universal reason as the highest goal of education, and the accompanying moral valorisation of the aesthetic as a kind of "tuning" or programming of the human. In this analysis Kant is not a guarantor of any kind of truth in the university or in art, but hovers as an unavoidable "discursive precursor" for these questions, for our understanding of critique is "too thoroughly determined by [him] to be able to reject [him]" and thus the need to seek "a constructive rather than disabling complicity between our position and [his]" (Spivak 1999, p. 5-6).

Contrary to the default political economy of contemporary Western globalisation as technological destiny, Spivak traced the uneven development of what Echeverría called the *telepolis* through the colonial imagination, and showed that Kant's aesthetic theory was our best guide to the persistence of uneven "globalisability", even more than his political writings. Kant carefully described a generic public version of the innocent Enlightenment subject who could make sense of the entire globe in their imagination: a default, immunised male citizen whose aesthetic sensibility would come to be seen as objective. We can think of this as a secularised Christian culture of modernist rational subjectivity. The supposed objectivity of this culture has not only been subjected to rigorous critique for its exclusions, but the very "force" of its objectivity seems to lack the aesthetic power to reshape the imagination as its classical university form attempted to. The challenge of reinvigorating or renovating this power in today's corporate university system — without simply retrieving cultural institutions' historical role as the producer of great men in the Western tradition — is an intractable question whose dimensions Spivak's critique illuminates.

The "aesthetic" in Kant's account is not a simple thing, but "a sort of ambivalent refuge" between the creative flourishing of nature and the stern logic of philosophical reason that constitutes humanity (p.24). Spivak adopts Bateson's description of the "double-bind" as a generalisable description of the type of tension between the vital and the institutional (or body and mind) that Kant tries to make sense of. Spivak's title makes explicit reference to the work of one of Kant's contemporaries, Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, which attempted to "revalorise" the aesthetic, proposing the drive for play as not so much a solution to Kant's difficulties but as a force of power that should "naturally" overcome them. And who would not side with the positivity of creativity as a human capacity, after all, over the interminable, turgid prose of the philosopher? However, if we turn our attention to the use-value of creativity today, the operation of terms such as "creative city" or the "creative industries" demonstrates that even if one promotes "creativity for all", not everyone's creativity is equally valorised. Creativity and innovation become rationales for large-scale downsizing of firms, privatisation of public assets and the evacuation of the poor from gentrifying neighbourhoods.

In Spivak's account Schiller had the right idea — an aesthetic education to educate the intuition of the public sphere — but he thought that to do this he must forget Kant's injunction that the imagination cannot be accessed directly. In this suppressing the conceptual in favour of the pragmatic, Schiller falls prey to another kind of idealism. The Kantian figuring of the aesthetic as a double-bind between a creative natural force and a structuring social order could productively be read as a crisis in that logic. It allows the critical to jam the cogs of productivity that we internalise through neoliberal

subjectivity, which lead to the habit of seeing other people as mere resources for our own creative expression. In an “ironic affirmation” of Schiller’s impulse [“Schiller was indeed wrong [...] but who is exactly right?” (p.28)], Spivak’s goal here is to both theorise and demonstrate the possibility that an aesthetic education as the “training of the imagination for epistemological performance” allows us to think the double bind of the political and the ethical.

Without attempting the impossible task of addressing all that the book has to offer, I want to track a few issues running through it that reconcile the deconstructive politics of the subject with the resurgent interest in universalist theories that position themselves in relation to global techno-capital. I inhabit the exegetical mode in this paper altogether more than I would like, but few authors compress more into a sentence than Spivak. The intention, however, is less to explain than to sift out methodological tools for interrogating the “globalisability” of our own work: the co-option of social movements and the need for epistemological care; Romantic techniques of self-othering toward new collectivities; Marx’s legacy of value as form; the powerful role of affect and habit in training the intellect; an expanded theory of reading; the limits of “culture” as a diagnostic; reproductive heteronormativity as a grounding social principle; attention to intergenerational gendered structures of responsibility; and finally, a fully secularised understanding of radical alterity. I also hope, most of all, to encourage the new reader to take their own journey through the twenty five chapters themselves.

Spivak opens by stating that “Globalisation takes place only in capital and data. Everything else is damage control” (p.1). Not only are we not ourselves global, the study of global movements cannot meet its object on the same scale, as we are always located in a perspective. In the broad terrain of the humanities, arts and social sciences, we must be able to think the double-bind that programs our access to the global in its specificity. No universality for the university, then, but this does not mean that the university is useless. Our ability to influence global forces relies upon our skill in reading the specificity of our situation and through writing and teaching in the academy and outside we present that possibility for others to share. But one does not play the political game by writing about it, claims Spivak, and she stages this distinction relentlessly, reminding us that the classroom is the truest test for theory’s “application”: theory is applied in the remaking of a self. Her well-known formula for the practice of humanities teaching is “the uncoercive rearrangement of desire”, and her commitment to this principle is evident in her invitation for us to follow her through her material, without seeking the shortest distance between two politically correct points. Spivak argues that it is by learning to learn how to read the specific idiom of another’s practice that one learns the possibility of un-coerced change, and therefore Spivak will not let us position her as the source of a critical method, but presents herself as an example. We

should learn our methods from the world with no guarantees, learning to learn from the “singular and unverifiable” (p. 2). Spivak revisits Romanticism as the European tradition that opens this possibility.

## **Romanticism revisited**

Spivak's opening concern is the relation between education and habit. Bateson describes habit as the interconnection of feedback loops for solving classes of problems in the “hard programming” of the unconscious (p.5). Under capitalism, our desire to accrue profitable information habituates us into immunity to the desires of others, an ethical deficit that leads to the destruction of social infrastructure. To escape or transform these habits in either the other or the self is no easy task, as shifting the habit of thinking still does not reach the imagination's will to shift habit directly. The aesthetic is a powerful tool here, as it “short-circuits the task of shaking up this habit of not examining [the premises of habit], perhaps” (p.6). Spivak looks to the literary canon to show that we too can still learn by the terms of the “noble failed experiment” of Romanticism, which was attempting to respond to a political-economic conjuncture somewhat like our own (p. 112). She understands the texts of Shelley, Wordsworth and Coleridge as wanting a society where “the imagination, which is our inbuilt capacity to other ourselves, can lead perhaps to understanding other people from the inside, so that the project [of the Industrial Revolution] would not be a complete devastation of the polity and of society through a mania for self-enrichment” (p.111).” Interestingly, Spivak believes that this type of aesthetic pedagogy toward an ethical relationship to others is still being thought through the visual arts, whereas poetry itself has become a “sort of narcissism”:

I am constantly asked to help curators launch shows in museums where they invite the street in and make the barrio (or Brick Lane) into a show. It is exactly like the earlier attempt—except somewhat less well-theorized than Wordsworth's and Shelley's belief that you could with poetry exercise the imagination, train in ethics (“public taste”)—in the othering of the self and coming as close as possible to accessing the other as the self. (p. 113)

The Romantic project, in today's gallery, remains accessible only to a certain class which habitually fails to judge the felicity of its own political-economic inheritance as the subject of history. This has always been the case in Romanticism: “William Wordsworth's project is deeply class-marked, [...] he does not judge habit. He is clear about being superior to others in being a poet, unusually gifted with a too-strong imagination, capable of organizing other people's habits.” (p. 6) We know that the simple figuring of the democratic in the gallery might be an initial provocation to think of a future world, but will not bring that world about. To shift habit requires the institutionalisation and instrumentalisation of the artist/intellectual, or more

accurately an ability to recognise how the intellectual is already institutionalised in our own political-economic conjuncture, as Gramsci has it. The importance of an aesthetic education lies in training of the imagination of the progressive bourgeoisie to understand this gap between formal figure and political structure, “to realize that ‘social movements’ are co-opted by state and elite, with different agendas, ceaselessly” (p. 519). Merely enacting the appearance of democracy or depicting its emergence or decline at a sociological level, in the manner of much “relational” art, not only fails to achieve its aims, but may even insulate artist and audience from engaging with the “real involvement in infrastructure” (p. 112-113) that would bring state democratisation about, particularly in the parts of the world which supply the cultural elite with labour and resources that underpin “creative practices”. Spivak here turns to Marx as a writer who has allowed us to think labour and infrastructure as a system.

### **Marx’s value as form**

The blueprint for Spivak’s aspirations of an aesthetic education are found in Marx’s *Capital*, where he seeks to recode the factory worker from victim of capitalism to the “agent of production”; that is, to encourage the worker to see that their own labour can be conceived in the form capitalism calls “value”. Spivak is insistent that for Marx the value-form is a formal concept, something “contentless and simple” that cannot be arrived at through tallying such and such amount of exchange-value. As form, value asks for figuration and disfiguration rather than empirical documentation. It is an aesthetic question. For Marx the value-form of labour is a specific form of validation of labour by capital that could be levered by workers to organise production for social ends rather than toward capitalist accumulation.

In “Supplementing Marxism”, Spivak notes that there are two ideas of the social in Marx: firstly, the appropriation of capital for “social” productivity; and secondly, the public use of reason toward “social” good. Marx did not theorise the post-revolutionary subject who could enact this second kind of social, and for Spivak this is why transformation of economic management toward socialism has not inevitably resulted in freedom for the unprepared working class subject. Marx’s oversight also limits the kinds of revolutionary subjects that can be thought, as Marx and Engels’ empirical assumptions about the subject were based on the default of colonial Europe, resulting in frames such as the “Asiatic Mode of Production” as an inevitably Eurocentric account of pre-industrialism that has limited leverage in the very social formations it sought to describe. Social movements, following Marx and Engels in failing to theorise the possibility of subjective development through difference (i.e. lacking of a theory of learning), have thus at various points fallen into totalitarianism in the name of freedom.

Spivak reworks Marx's "moral and psychological" efforts to think social freedom as "epistemological," drawing on Gramsci's detailed analysis of the relationship between class formation and subjectivation to show how these two forms of the social allow an aesthetic education to be thought in Marx's framework. For Gramsci, intellectual production is situated not only within a political superstructure atop an economic base, but also within epistemological (meta-psychological) constraints on engaging across differences within society. Education toward freedom can only emerge when one can abstract one's own experience in order to connect it with others, and thus to work together on a shared political struggle. For Gramsci, intellectuals are always "organic", affectively connected to the part of the social body they seek to change. The "organic intellectual" has been valorised by cultural studies as a figure of moral approval, but for Gramsci and Spivak this organic connection was not something one could want, it simply is. What Spivak sees as necessary is not simply consciousness-raising, today led by the "corporate-funded feudality of the digitally confident alterglobalists" (p. 26), but "patient epistemological care" (p. 519 n57) that can train the imagination to reimagine a specific situation.

### **Reading in the expanded field**

Spivak's interest is in the textual nature of this "organic" connection, which can be figured in the literary terms metonymy and synecdoche (p. 436). Her basic principle for social action is the ability to see another's position as potentially substitutable for one's own in the script of life: metonymy. Then, through synecdoche, a part of oneself that can identify as a member of a collective supports collective action *as if* their full interests were represented by this collective (of citizens, workers, or women, or any group organising for political ends). Meanwhile, the subjective part of oneself which does not fit the category is privatised or de-prioritised in the interests of collective action. Political action thus involves a necessary fiction. An aesthetic education expands both the range of scripts one's self can be metonymically inserted into, as well as multiplying the concepts one can use to self-synecdochise. However, the success of this alignment of self and collective context relies on skill in tracing the weave of forces that shape the public and private parts of political change. This skill is not generic information processing in any "natural" pseudo-biological cognitive sense, but a subtly textured cluster of aesthetic identifications and analysis practiced at the limits of one's default subjective formation. It is a skill we can call "reading", practised with the imagination.

Central to Spivak's argument throughout the book is a theory of reading in the broad sense, literary reading in particular. In alignment with Derrida, Spivak views reading and writing as terms that can be used for the operation of sign and trace across all



media, oral, alphabetic, audio-visual, biological: production and reproduction. For Spivak, the term 'writing' describes "a place where the absence of the weaver from the web is structurally necessary" (p. 58). Writing is a trace that is heterogeneous to the authorial self. Reading is the mode where we take up the anonymous written inscriptions left by others in that web and make them our own. Reading is where we make ourselves. In the aesthetic lineage from Kant that splits the writing and reading functions inside the individual, writers are also paradoxically their own first readers. Again, the argument holds across all forms of signification - including the visual, even though here, "in the visual, the lesson of reading is the toughest. There are no guarantees at all" (p.507). The artist does not simply "express" a vitalist force of creativity, but develops a never-achieved reflexive capacity to read one's own traces as others see them, and to adjust their modes of trace-making in turn. It is a profoundly ethical relationship grounded in the social world.

## **Moving culture**

The multicultural agenda in criticism is popularly understood as integrating and including people of colour in the canon. Spivak does not disavow the value of diversity but does not think that this is a sufficient goal. She teaches a precisely British heritage of criticism to channel her North American students into "thinking the other through idiomaticity", because English is the only language in which they are "responsible". Within this language they "cannot help believing that history happened in order to produce them"(p. 116). Their mindset of dominance will not be shaken simply by the benevolent appropriation of translated multicultural literatures into the canon, because the "legitimising codes" of nationalism, internationalism, secularism, and culturalism that underpin the literatures of decolonisation in English are class-divided (p. 57). That class division is inaccessible to the native English reader.

In the chapter "How to Read a 'Culturally Different' Book" Spivak is anxious to demonstrate that nothing in her argument prevents the metropolitan teacher from teaching a book across gender, ethnic, and class divisions. In the era of "globalisability", this teaching across such intractable lines is even more imperative. An ability to read across these divides and thus to teach and learn is the best outcome of an aesthetic education. Under globalisation, a neoliberal political rationality tracks the flows of finance capital, graphing local genres of political agency into data, repackaging social action as tightly policed modes of productivity. This graphing must be undone to engage ethically with other humans, but, as Spivak cautions, one cannot undo the divisions by immediately reaching for the other side of cultural divides in the ethnographic mode, for "in order to do distant reading one must be an excellent close reader" (p. 443). One must enter the text of another's world, and Spivak suggests that the

intellectual can only provide tactical, rather than strategic support to subaltern movements without flattening the unseen differences that are the engine of these movements.

Differential subjectivity must then be attended to as an impossible task. The ethical relation of deconstruction is not a solution to the political-economic problem of subalternity, but a motor that can drive our imagination ever closer to the asymptotic figure of the other, as part of our preparation for political action. Through this training of the imagination, we can learn to perform within the episteme of another person. This is not just an anthropological exercise of language learning for data extraction to publish “back home” in the academy. Spivak cautions us that that one never reaches the subaltern other until one has an intimate understanding of the mother tongue of the subject/object of study, at which point they can no longer be treated as an object in quite the same way. One’s own ability to be transformed to accept and affect the structure of responsibility inhabited by the other remains the critical question: how can one approach responsibility to the other so that rather than pretending to be an innocent observer in the “research” mode, one’s productive capability can be made available to operate in a radically different context, where our own makeup must be provisionally set aside even as it is never rescinded? This is Marx’s question of social productivity through the imagination of the value-form thought in the ethical. Yet this otherness never resolves into “culture.” Spivak suggests we need to explore the cultural difference closer to home:

“We must investigate and imaginatively constitute our “own” unclaimed history with the same teleiopoietic delicacy that we strive for in the case of the apparently distant. The most proximate is the most distant, as you will see if you try to grab it exactly, in words, or, better yet, to make someone else grab it.” (p. 406)

In the chapter “Culture: Situating Feminism”, Spivak gives a brilliant potted definition of the term culture, noting that this anthropological description for the collective human Other has become shorthand for the distinction between the sacred and the profane and the relationship between the sexes. But no equivalent term exists in non-European languages. Ironically, then, the European term culture allows us to remain aloof from the intra-cultural distinctions of sacredness and profanity, or relations between the sexes in different times and places, yet it is the ability to read these intra-cultural distinctions that is required to escape Eurocentrism in humanist thought in non-European settings. The problem with “culture” as explanation is not that it is too abstract a term, but that it emerges from a Eurocentric “culture of no culture”, which is unable to theorise its own distinctions as particular rather than universal. As Spivak has noted previously, this is “not so much a universalisation as seeing one history as the

inevitable telos as well as the inevitable origin and past of all men and women everywhere” (Spivak and Sharpe 2002, p. 617). Therefore, for Spivak, it is imperative that the institutions of culture “precomprehend their instituting culture” (p.161) before producing cultural explanations that marginalise others. “Culture” for Spivak appears as a middle-class term, doing explanatory work only at a safe distance from the ethical relation of genuine engagement across difference, and the economic torque exerted by capital. Other people’s “cultural” defaults are viewed as external to one’s own tolerance, and the researcher of culture’s assumptions are unmodifiable by the answers.

For the benevolent Romantic seeking to save the world, the figure of the gendered subaltern (in, for example, the “global South”) remains inaccessible to political thought and action unless the heterogeneity of the subaltern’s context can be imagined across the gap separating the intellectual and the subaltern. Culture does not help us here. It is at the very basis of the human as a developmental social being that the structure of this imagination can be thought.

## **Reproductive heteronormativity and subjective development**

Spivak’s most arresting move in the book is to situate Marx’s untheorised process of subjective social development in a default category of reproductive heteronormativity (RHN). Spivak believes this must be thought in order to convincingly theorise human action, and psychoanalysis and feminist work are the main fields that have undertaken that labour. Expressing suspicion of European psychoanalytic theory for its universalism, Spivak nevertheless sees in feminist psychoanalysis a technical process of subject formation that allows the development of responsibility to others to be understood.

Drawing on Melanie Klein, Spivak describes how the human is born into a structure of timing and spacing “written” by the mother. (Again, we must hold onto the broad sense of “writing” that exceeds the alphabetic). The development of subjective interiority proceeds through a grabbing “of an outside indistinguishable from an inside [which then] constitutes an inside, fit to negotiate with an outside, going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-system by the thing(s) grasped” (p. 241). This relation between interior and exterior worlds invented and expressed by the creative infant emerges through idiomatic forms of para-linguistic timing and spacing. Spivak suggests that this development of formal exteriority is then translated into the structural (patriarchal) language of the mother tongue by the parent (and media-substitutes), training the infant in appropriate speech, even as the child consistently exceeds identifiable structures of language or “culture.” “It is in this sense that the human infant, on the cusp of the natural and the cultural, is in translation, except the word

“translation” loses its dictionary sense right there” (p. 243). The human is born into a para-psychological “structure of responsibility” which trains the imagination for epistemological performance (aesthetic education), yet also establishes both paternal and maternal “writing” of the child in distinction to each other, bringing the constant presence of otherness.

Spivak’s account of the grabbing impulse is particularly distinctive when compared to neo-vitalist philosophies of emergence. For Spivak, the grabbing impulse emerges from the fundamental gap between what we need and what we can make, a lack that we actively seek to close through the “creative”. This gap for Spivak is a byproduct of reproductive heteronormativity, which mandates that reproduction of oneself is impossible, and so “to be born human is to be born angled toward an other and others” (p.99) — she notes here that the antonym of hetero- is not homo- but auto-. The gap between what one needs (in a form handed down from the past) and what one can make is “filled by neither reason nor unreason yet seems irreducible” (p. 457). Because capital is a form of writing, it can fill the gap with its formulaic programming of commodities. However, literary training can diversify what occupies this gap, to escape the default scripts of capital that aim to make us want the information-rich commodity as the gap-filler nearest to hand.

### **Experiencing radical alterity**

The poetic function, in principle, exceeds the individual, therefore it can contribute to the task of reminding us that our desires are not naturally beneficent. In Spivak’s view we must be able to imagine a singular other metonymically, with oneself in that particular place, in order to orientate oneself toward “others” in a larger public. This is where the ethical potential of Romanticism lies: in order to think the other one must be able to imagine oneself as other. The kind of alterity Spivak is thinking is not located in the individual or their culture, but is the opening to the ethical as such, and in the Romantic tradition the development of the capability to genuinely engage the other will start “at home” in the othering of the self. Once again the visual mode seems important to this opening: “radical alterity must be thought and must be thought through imaging” (p.97). In the chapter “Imperative to Re-Imagine the Planet” radical alterity takes on many names: “Mother, Nation, God, Nature” (p. 178) — Spivak notes that some of these names are more radical than others. There is nothing particularly mystical about Spivak’s version of radical alterity, except that one’s own versions of it are not easily thinkable, as they are a name for the ground of thinking as such: “mysterious and discontinuous — an experience of the impossible” (p. 341). However difficult to mobilise, alterity functions as a check on capital’s reproduction of the same. Without the aesthetic education that allows one to metonymise and synecdochise oneself,

conflicting versions of radical alterity, such as religious conflicts, appear as irreconcilable differences between clans. By default, the different versions of alterity held by a person belonging to another clan are removed from one's structure of responsibility, and inhuman acts are thus justified by the Other's predetermined difference. Enlightened Western secularism is far from immune from this problematic, as it still figures this responsibility through a named Christian-heritage grounding, most commonly "science", while Spivak is adamant that all such grounds must be dislodged in order to think other forms. Seeing other versions of radical alterity as potentially substitutable for one's own through the shared logic of reproductive heteronormativity becomes a critical safeguard against both benevolent neocolonialism and culturalism.

Spivak seeks not to merely describe this possibility but to demonstrate it. She finds her most useful way to think radical alterity in the Muslim concept-metaphor of the haq, "the birthright of being able to take care of other people" (p. 294). Without the grounding of haq-like responsibility, and thus to the precomprehension of an instituting culture to the political, the subaltern other remains buried under the "repetitive negotiations" of neocolonial benevolence. "The subjunctive can move to an imperative only in terms of that responsibility-as-right fixed by a truth-in-alterity collective structure that happened to have been conceptualized as haq" (p. 345). Related structures of responsibility to the planet and people operate in many pre-capitalist high cultures, but Spivak appears to find the haq most useful precisely because it is not "native" to her subject position, yet is connected to the monotheistic tradition that came to structure many political forms of the contemporary world we in the West inherit.

Consistent with her earlier-described decision to teach British Romanticism rather than multicultural literatures in English-language translation, Spivak here seems to be trying to escape the benevolent leftist's "decolonising" agenda of appropriating indigenous cultural forms as political models, when clearly the literary critic is not themselves subject to the responsibility to the "eco-biomes" or ecological worlds that maintain those models. Characteristically, it is in her discussion of responsibility that Spivak's own critical responsibility is most performatively evident. For many years Spivak refused to discuss her teacher-training efforts in Bengal - in 2002 she noted that "if I talk about these places, first of all, I think I would get the kind of approval from your readership which I would much rather earn because of my theoretical work. You know, there is a certain kind of benevolent approval which I really resist" (Spivak and Sharpe 2002 p. 623). It is interesting that her recent willingness to talk through this work coincides with her adoption of the non-indigenous concept-metaphor of the haq to think radical alterity. Spivak has also commented that she started to talk about the Bengal schools once they were doing things by themselves, a conjuncture that links institutional and theoretical autonomy in realpolitik. The negotiation with one's own

ethics of representation will be poignant to anyone attempting to “learn from below” from subaltern worlds, where the gap between playing the game and writing about it is always vividly on display.

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*An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* is a big, unruly book — at a recent conference Spivak joked that as a classroom teacher, she has trouble saying anything in less than fourteen weeks. Although many pieces here are previously published, Spivak the responsible pedagogue repeatedly chastises her prior naiveté or notes a change in the structure of her thinking in acerbic annotations throughout. Spivak is “famously difficult”, not simply due to an attraction to the counter-intuitive, but because her work is constantly surfacing the supports of her theoretical platform. The key to reading Spivak in the face of this “over-readability”, as Bal (2000) explained, is tuning in to her teacherly voice. The theoretical moves in her books come directly from the experience of the classroom, the site where any academic project must find its ultimate effect. Like any class that transforms one’s thinking, it resists attempts to grasp it in advance, but asks us to submit to the text over time rather than to attempt to master it through pop summary. Such responsibility to the site of teaching is inconvenient for the writer rushing toward the more properly ‘urgent’ political manifestations of the global, but for Spivak all theoretical labor is “destined for errancy” (p.28) in the political realm.

Reading *An Aesthetic Education* for a month inside a gallery with a reading group of artists and critics, many were struck by Spivak’s feral indifference to professionalised forms of theoretical discourse. The questions of form in Spivak’s writing also came to the fore - her dazzling, compressed figures (key example: her discussion of “originary” identity claims in the negative, as “like the clutch disengaging to get a stick- shift car moving” (p. 426)) and her striking manipulation of the temporality of reading. Spivak’s resolute literality in the reading of texts brings to mind a characteristic mode of contemporary time-based art, that of diegesis, the experience of being held through narration of a particular time and place, suspending philosophical detachment while nevertheless remaining aware of the lineaments left by historical genres. “What if there is only a vulgar concept of time?” asks Derrida in a formulation Spivak has pointed to more than once. Forging a practice in the thickness of vulgar time would not come from a mastery of global time but through experience gained in a variety of local times. Spivak’s inspirational commitment to gaining fluency in these temporalities, documenting their resistance to synchronisation at the hands of capital and data, is perhaps an aesthetic education that any artist could endorse.

*Acknowledgements: Thanks to the participants in Local Time's reading group on An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization at ST PAUL St Gallery, Auckland, 2012; and Alex Monteith, Natalie Robertson, Jon Bywater, Ruth DeSouza and Nikos Papastergiadis for comments on earlier drafts - all errors are of course my own.*

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**Title:**

Double-bound: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization

**Date:**

2015

**Citation:**

Butt, D. (2015). Double-bound: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization. RUPC Working Papers Series, (1), pp.1-14

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