

Light Onwords / Light Onwards

LIVING LITERACIES TEXT OF THE
NOVEMBER 14-16, 2002 CONFERENCE AT YORK UNIVERSITY



At Both Ends of the Spectrum

by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Taken from:

Light Onwords / Light Onwards

**Living Literacies Text of the
November 14-16, 2002 Conference**

PART FIVE: CRITIQUE

At Both Ends of the Spectrum

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

To read and write is not simply to learn to make and manipulate letters. Is reading and writing responsibly losing ground because of the many advantages of specifically electronic telecommunication? If you ask this kind of question, you are assuming one sort of society. Or can reading and writing not establish itself because of enforced illiteracy, which is quite often mistaken and celebrated by cultural relativists as orality? Now you are talking about another kind of situation. Or, indeed, can it not be practiced because of the trivialization of the humanities in the general education system, which cuts across the university system worldwide?

We betray contempt for the poor when we think of literacy merely as a primary vocational skill, although it is that too, and if we think employability is identical to freedom, although employability is indeed necessary for legitimate social mobility. I speak from experience. My mother was an indefatigable social worker. At age eleven I learned (I was a bit precocious) how to grade papers, because my mother worked day and night to make destitute widows employable. So I am not speaking out of some ivory tower sentiment. My mother and I talked about what employability meant since I was a pre-teen. I do believe that although employability is indeed necessary for legitimate social mobility, to equate it with freedom is a major mistake and it shows contempt for the poor. Have we ever known what it is to read and to write – two separate but related activities – performances that transform our selves and the world (it is not just learning to read and write but learning to read and write ourselves)? Yet it allows us to privatize the public sphere and to contextualize and decontextualize the other. At the same time, all reading transforms and holds the key to making public our most private being.

My father's mother could read a bit but could not write, I've heard. What can it mean to read and not to write? I have taken as my title "At Both Ends Of the Spectrum." All the colours of the spectrum work together to annul difference and make the equality of the selfsame light appear. All our concepts and metaphors of the coming into appearance of the phenomenal world, of the sensible world of space and time, relate to light. Yet we do not all have an equal right to dispose of the phenomenal world. From my own experience over the last thirteen years, teaching the children of the poorest of the poor, and training their teachers, I would say that it is not access to the phenomenal world that we are talking about. It is of the right to dispose of the phenomenal world that we speak. I must think of our everyday light as divided into the ghostliness of the spectrum. The spectrum, and this is its primary meaning, is the ghost of light that we want to deny. In a little, I will show you a bit of writing from the other end of the spectrum from this well-lit place. I have learnt that it is there that the philosophical questions have the greatest purchase and there is no one there to tell me that I cannot be understood.

Let me begin, however, at this end, in New York City, where I also teach. There, too, the ghost of light appears and is denied. I am a university teacher there. I am going to talk about CUNY, the public, urban university, and Columbia, a more elite, private university. And this difference is felt in the division of the City into uptown, downtown, and midtown. From 1990 to 2000 a commission appointed by Rudolf Giuliani investigated the City University of New York (CUNY) and criticized the system because 87% of its incoming graduate class was in remedial English. The mayor's report separated the old minorities

from the new and went on to say, "during the 1990s the white population of New York City declined by 19.3% while the black, Hispanic and Asian populations have risen by 5.2%, 19.3% and 53.5%." This mayor's report makes for very interesting reading.

I sat in on some of those so-called remedial English classes offered by the public urban university, very different from the Columbia campus scene. I perceived the institutional incapacity, even when the teacher had the best will in the world, to come to grips with the actual play of the choice of English as the dominant tongue in the imaginations of working-class, new immigrant survival artists. This is very different from the place of English in India, altogether different. I am speaking of this end of the spectrum. I am involved in teaching English in New York City. The mayor and CUNY were going to banish this spectral light to the lesser colleges of the City University system. I had been asked to provide an alibi, I realized later, in order to be able to say that we had asked radical academics to come and give their opinion. There I was. But what did I know? I am an idiot. I actually went to these remedial reading classes, and that, indeed, completed my education, although it was for nothing. The Haitians and West Africans in those classes whose imaginations were crossing and being crossed by a double aporia, the cusp of two imperialisms, Creole, French, so-called pidgin, and English as a second language crossing into first, or Puerto Ricans and Dominicans and others ringing similar changes with Spanish, taught me that there was a kind of reading/writing that does not graduate into a writing that can be recognized as fully literate because the teacher may live on another planet. Of all the benevolent attempts to help these poor kids, et cetera, that's the thing that riles me most. I mean, even in my Columbia class some student will say something clearly coming from a – I can't call a student racist so let's just say double standard – and then she will say, "Sorry, of course, I am speaking from privilege." And I will say, "No. It is a failure of imagination. It is not privilege. Don't look at it always as the benevolence of the privileged."

Anyway, I remember sitting in one of those remedial classes and silently noting the students' imaginative flexibility, so remarkably stronger than the Columbia undergraduates', which latter is generally held up by the life-support system of a commercializing Anglophone culture that trivializes the humanities. And this ability to manipulate a life-support system is described as civilization.

I remember particularly a student's comment in the remedial class on the return of the daughter from the foster home to the care of her indigent mother in Tilly Olson's "I Stand Here Ironing," a text some of you would know, much anthologized and much taught. "It reminds me of my brother coming back from prison," said this laid-back Puerto Rican student. There was an embarrassed silence. The comment was coded as unsettling for the young East Asian female teacher who had clearly been put there because she, too, was hyphenated. The fact that she was incontrovertibly upper class had, of course, not been noticed. Race was all that mattered, and not even "race," whatever that might be in the abstract, but rather hyphenation with America – that selfsame white light to produce a magical empathy because you are all immigrants. So the student makes this remark. I remained silent, of course. It was not my class. The young man had caught Olson's spirit that the organizational indifference of the welfare state separating the child from the mother can make any institution an imprisonment. He had earned the right to rewrite Tilly Olson's story in his own idiom, offering the same critique of governmentality in however illiterate a form. Here, I do differ some from Ms. Sontag. I don't just think writers are readers. I think good readers reading transformatively earn the right to rewrite the text in its idiom, a Freud reading Hamlet. But the moment could not be acknowledged. The teacher proceeded to an academically approved close and ended the reading with a feminist account of mothering.

I witnessed many such missed encounters in my experience going from remedial reading class to remedial reading class all over New York. There is no guarantee that such flexibility of the imagination in the underclass as instrument of survival would survive gentrification. This is another thing that we need to realize when so-called national origins claim authenticity to avoid doing homework, and I speak as one of them. I speak as one of them. I am totally combative against white racism, but that's also not a good way to go. My Columbia classroom is full of gentrified diasporics. They are, of course, abundantly literate in the minimum sense of the term, but neither cultural instruction nor institutional tradition prepares them for that painstaking and caring practice where the reader reads others' writings with respect and patience as if to earn the right to rewrite the text in the spirit of its writing. This is a simple sentence but it is difficult to understand. The fact of making your sentences simpler doesn't mean that you become easier to understand. This is a scary lesson.

I am a New Yorker and I love New York City and I do believe that it is not like any other place. Nonetheless, sometimes one has to drag one's love into the rational abstractions of logic. This is the way I speak about India also. I would not remain a teacher of the humanities if I did not believe that, at the New York end, standing metonymically for the dispensing end as such, the teacher can try to rearrange desires noncoercively through an attempt to develop in the student a habit of literate reading, suspending oneself into the text of the other, for which the first condition and effect is a suspension of conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs, I am necessarily the end product for which history happens, and that New York is necessarily the capital of the world leading to the United States as the new empire. It is not a loss of will especially since it is supplemented in its stand by its political calculus where the possibility of being a helper abounds in today's triumphalist society.

A training in literate reading is a training in how 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 accessing the other so well that probable action can be prefigured but striving for a response from the distant other without guarantees. This is the reason I am speaking like this. It is not because I want to spin difficult prose, but because I am actually talking about what my undergraduate students do when they go out into the world, either toward Silicon Valley intellectual property or toward human rights, most of them into the corporate world and certainly toward international civil society. I have no moral position against grading or writing recommendation letters, but if you are attempting to train in literate reading, the results are not directly ascertainable by the teaching subject and perhaps not the taught subject either. In my experience, the proof comes in unexpected ways from the other side, but the absence of such proof does not necessarily mean nothing has been learned. This is why I say no guarantees.

Yet this is the one field where databasing is taken to be the last instance. Anyone who has gone to any of the UN organizational meetings in the name of international feminism knows exactly what I am talking about. A desire to redistribute is not the unproblematic consequence of a well-fed society. In order to get that desire moving by the cultural imperative of education you have to fix the possibility of putting not just wrong over against right, with all the genealogical lines compressed within it, but also to suggest that another antonym of right is responsibility, and further, that the possibility of such responsibility is underived from right, so that today we have not the white man's burden, but the burden of the fittest to guilt- and shame-trip the rest of the world into behaving correctly. That kind of implicit social Darwinism is what I am questioning here.

Databasing for literacy among the less well fed bypasses this problem. Training into the general culture is reflected by the fact that Morgan Stanley, Dean Witter, Merrill Lynch and other big investment companies are accessing preschoolers. Children are training parents to manage portfolios. There is a growing library of books making it "fun" for kids to invest and giving them detailed instructions on how to do so. The unquestioned assumption – to be rich is to be happy and good – is developed by way of many educational excuses. The recent dissatisfaction with corporate corruption has not significantly altered this assumption. It has simply produced the awareness that the successful rich cheat us on our way to happiness. Let me quote a brief passage from a book called *Wow the Dow*. "Children are never too young to start grasping the fundamentals of money management." (I am looking at problems at the top of the spectrum because we always speak benevolently of those people who, unfortunately, are getting trampled by us.) "Even toddlers understand the concept of mine." Exclamation point. So why talk about the other? "In fact, it's the idea of owning something they like that sparks their interest in investing. Rest assured you won't turn your child into a little grubber by feeding that interest. Through investing, you are going to teach him more about responsibility, discipline, delayed gratification and even ethics than you ever thought possible." Another exclamation mark. Now this, we have to look at this before we just go on shedding tears for the other end of the world. Such a training of children builds itself on the loss of the cultural habit of assuming the agency of responsibility as located in something that is radically other. However "literate" they are, it is a killing literacy, not a living literacy.

This process is followed through by relentless education into business culture and academic, and on-the-job training, and management and consumer behaviour. At my university, I am told that even at Columbia, education is a business, and so we should look at investment in this way and that way. I have become a little expert. Prepared for by the thousands and thousands of business schools all over the global south as well as the north, training undergraduates into business culture, making it impossible to strengthen the responsibility-based grassroots layer by the ethics of class/culture difference, consolidating class apartheid. Gentrification kills an imagination focused only on survival, the imagination that I met in those remedial reading classes.

However utopian it might seem, it now appears to me that the only way to living literacies, at both ends of the spectrum, is for those who teach in the humanities to take seriously the necessary but impossible task to construct a collectivity among the dispensers of bounty as well as the victims of oppression. Learning from the grassroots comes, paradoxically, through teaching. In practical terms, working across the class/culture difference which tends to misfire or refract effort, trying to learn from children and from the behaviour of class inferiors, the teacher learns to recognize, not just a benevolently coerced assent, but also an unexpected response. For such an education, speed, quantity of information and number of students reached are not exclusive virtues. Those "virtues" are inefficient for education in responsibility, not so much a sense of being responsible for but as being responsible to – before good intentions, so that it becomes reflexive. We have lots of examples of how, in fact, welfare does not by reflex act well toward others. Institutionally, the humanities, like all disciplines, must be subject to calculation. It is how we earn our living. But where living has a larger meaning, as I hope it does in your title, the humanities are without guarantees, and that is their strength. I speak at such length about this end of the spectrum because I am fortunate enough to be deeply involved at both ends. I can speak with confidence against the idea that this end gives and the other end receives, that the death of literacy is only a problem for the poor. I have nothing but contempt for cultural relativism or cultural conservatism, so that is not what you are hearing.

I will now go on to speak of the poor end. When I finish, please, do not have questions only about the distant poor or tell me you or someone you know is doing exactly that kind of thing. Please remember to pay attention to the mortal illiteracy at the affluent end, an illiteracy that contaminates our everyday and perpetuates the divided world. Whoever wishes to involve herself at the poor end (I am sorry at this point I don't have vocabulary for this, so I just use "rich end" and "poor end." You will see what it means by the end. In fact, there is a children's book, *Rich Dad, Poor Dad*). Whoever wishes to involve herself at the poor end must have the patience and perseverance to learn well one of the languages of the rural poor of the South. For the purposes of the essential and possible work of righting wrongs in the political sphere, the great European languages are sufficient, but for access to the mindset down there, you have to really learn the language well. This cannot be done without the language. You know you can't go to a psychoanalyst that doesn't know your language. Teaching is not a well-paid profession like psychoanalysis but, on the other hand, in order to get into this work with the largest sector of the electorate in the global south, you certainly have to learn at least one language. There is no alternative to that at all.

Access to the mindset of those who have been forced down is to devise a pedagogy that respects the delegitimized ethical tradition. This respect must take into account the multiplicity of neglected languages. I have no doubt that English is more convenient for the world to go around, but we are not talking about convenience here. Your title, *Living Literacies*, is not about convenience. This is because the task of the educator is to learn to learn from below, to learn the lines of conflict resolution undoubtedly available, however dormant, within the disenfranchised cultural system, giving up convictions of triumphalist superiority. It is because of the linguistic restriction that one is obliged to speak of just the roots one works for but, in the hope that some who are interested in comparable work will hear these words, I always push for generalization. In order to generalize, I go regularly to a few rural schools in Yunnan province in the People's Republic of China. I used to go to Algeria for this reason until 1994, when it became impossible. I believe these attempts to generalize are not idle. It is instructive to see, all over the world, the cultural assumptions of the already subordinated positions that did not translate, or are not translating, into the emergence of early capitalism. We are now teaching our children in the north, and no doubt in the north of the south, that to learn the movement of finance capital is to learn social responsibility. It is in the remote origins of this conviction – that capitalism is responsibility – that we locate the beginning of the failure of the aboriginal groups of the kind with whom I work. We Indians are also a colony, from millennia before the European incursion. It is in the remote origins of that history that we locate the beginning of the failure of the aboriginal groups that I will go on to touch, their entry into a distancing from modernity as a gradual slipping into atrophy, [a process that is] a few thousand years old. In our case, the colonial encounter started longer ago than in Australia or South Africa.

This history breeds the need for activating an ethical imperative atrophied by a gradual distancing from the narrative of progress, colonialism, capitalism. This is the argument about cultural suturing, learning from below to supplement with the possibility of the subject-ship of rights, of someone who can, indeed, be the capital "I," who speaks inalienable rights for everyone, rather than just the beneficiary of a threatened and menaced state. The subject-ship of rights comes with cultivating an intuition of the public sphere. I will talk about this intuition of the public sphere in a moment.

The national education systems are pretty hopeless at this level because they are the detritus of the post-colonial or post-imperial state, an imposed system turned to rote, unproductive of felicitous colonial subjects like ourselves, at home or abroad. This is part of

what started the rotting of the cultural fabric of which I speak. Yet the state bureaucracy dismisses what it perceives as procedural interference.

I am not just saying that the poor should have "the kind of education we have had." As I have indicated again and again, the need for supplementing metropolitan education, the kind of education we have had, is something I am involved with every day in my salaried work. Here I am talking for a modest fee to a somewhat filled auditorium. When you are actually confronting the post-colonial state, which is much more comfortable with the remote impatience of the United Nations Development Program, it is hard to say, "education like ours is not what we are talking about." Local people who work at that end don't have any idea of what really goes on at the other end. Even if they have been abroad, they wouldn't have been teaching English, the dominant language of the metropolis. The people who produce critical reports are, at best, education specialists from local universities or mid-level government officials. One of the local primary school headmasters said to me after a particularly scathing report was issued, "Sister, what are we going to do with this report? We are not doing our job well, I noticed. But where is the 'how to'?" And his schools are above the level I am speaking about.

This entire question of "the kind of education we have had" is a red herring. There is an immense difference between our social production and theirs. "Same education" applies only to the "same class of people." And when I say rote I am not speaking of a student resorting to it as a quick way to do well on an exam. I am speaking of a scandal in the global South. In the schools of middle-class children and above, the felicitous primary use of a page of language is to understand it. In the schools for the poor, it is to spell and memorize so that you do not understand what you are reading. That, too, is called literacy. I know this especially since I am involved in New York. I know that the actual class difference in educational standards exists everywhere. I am not interested in playing comparative victimage. The dollar income private sector in the countries of the south are comfortable about presenting themselves as national identities, and, when they settle abroad, as victims of exilic sorrow. I will leave that alone. The second group often writes well, with clever self-irony. The folks I'm talking about don't complain about education. The problem is precisely that they think this is normal. They think this is education. They do not even say, "But Sister, you live abroad." The children certainly, and even their teachers, don't know what America is. Is it possible to think that these people vote as citizens, in the so-called largest democracy in the world? They think (and this is an intelligent analysis) that parliamentary democracy is like a competitive sport. Their votes are bought, of course. The party that promises most, pays best, and performs least wins. This is an intelligent analysis and, *mutatis mutandis*, applies de facto to the US. Anything else would be counterintuitive. Trying to explain the principles of parliamentary democracy is absolutely useless there. What we are talking about is the development of the reflexes of democracy, mental habit rather than words. "Teaching democracy" as mere self-interest of the poor leads to fascism.

I am speaking then of the scandal that, in the global south, in the schools for the poor, what one does with the page is spell and memorize, and even that not too well. Consider the following – the misfortune of a local effort undertaken in the middle of the nineteenth century. Ishwarchandra Bandyopadhyay, better known as Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, a nineteenth-century intellectual from rural Bengal was twenty when Macaulay wrote his minute on Indian education. Vidyasagar fashioned pedagogic instruments for Sanskrit and Bengali that could, if used right (the question of teaching again) suture the "the natives" old with Macaulay's new, rather than reject the old and commence its stagnation with that famous and horrible sentence very well known in this auditorium I am sure. "A single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." The

Vidyasagar primer is still used in state-run primary schools in rural West Bengal. It is a modernizing instrument for teaching. It activates the structural neatness, produced in the nineteenth century, of the Sanskrit and Bengali alphabet for the teacher and the child, which is ruined by the new edition. If you read the alphabet up and down rather than from side to side, you see how rationalized the old system is, with the aspiration increasing on the same pattern of consonants. All of this is totally ruined by today's unexamined revisions. As a modernizing instrument, the nineteenth-century primer undermined rote learning by encouraging the teacher to jumble the structure and course of teaching at the same time. The wherewithal is all there but no one knows how to use it anymore. The first part of the book is for the active use of the teacher.

You go to Calcutta and you talk about trying to get recruits. Obviously, one can't do this alone, and I wouldn't join an NGO if you paid me a million dollars. So, when I try to recruit the Calcutta benevolent folks, I hear, "We are writing new textbooks." These rural teachers don't know how to use a book. Writing new textbooks will do nothing, but it's an easier solution. So, the first part of the nineteenth-century book is for the active use of the teacher. The child does not read the book yet, just listens to the teacher and learns to read and write by reading the teacher's writing and writing as the teacher guides. Reading and writing are thus not soldered to the fetishized schoolbook. In very poor rural areas with no books or newspapers anywhere this would still be a fine way to teach if the teacher knew how to read or use a book. (If you have been stumped a hundred times in a lot of places by both teacher and student producing some memorized bit from the textbook when asked to write whatever comes to mind, you are convinced of this. If you just go for a single photo-op you will never know this.)

Half way through the book the child begins to read a book and the title of that page is: Prothom Path, First Reading – not First Lesson. What a thrill it must have been for that child, undoubtedly a boy, to get to that moment. Today, this is impossible because the teachers and the teachers' teachers, indefinitely, are clueless about this book as a do-it-yourself instrument. And this is just one example. Well-meaning education experts in the capital city, whose children are used to a different world (who have probably read John Dewey – *that* class difference is theorized into cultural instruction), inspired by self-ethnographing bourgeois nationalists of a period well after Vidyasagar (Dewey plus Montessori if you like, if young enough perhaps some experience with schools for Bangladeshi immigrants' children in London, et cetera) have transformed the teachers' pages into children's pages by way of ill-conceived illustrations.

In the rural areas, this meaningless gesture has consolidated the book as an instrument for dull, rote learning. The page where Vidyasagar encourages the teacher to jumble the structure is now a meaningless page routinely ignored. I could multiply examples such as this, and not in India alone. Most of the subordinate languages of the world do not have simple, single language dictionaries that rural children could use. Efforts to put together such a dictionary in Bengali failed, lost in false promises and red tape. The habit of independence in a child's mind starts with the ability to locate meaning without a teacher. If the kind of well-meaning experts who put together the pictures in the primer put the dictionary together, it would be geared for the wrong audience. Even the teachers don't understand the dictionary that is produced for class four in the capital city. The generalizing significance of this case is that, at the onset of colonialism/capitalism, when the indigenous system of teaching began to be emptied of social relevance, there *had* been an attempt to undo this. The discontinuity between the upwardly mobile colonial subject and the rural poor is such that the instruments of such undoing were thoughtlessly deactivated.

I am giving you a Bengali example because I am a Bengali Europeanist, but there must be comparable efforts in the other Indian languages. My involvement tells me that if the first language is not learnt well, there is no hope of learning English. If I began to talk about the problems of teaching and learning English at this level, I would never stop.

The fact is there was Indian class collaboration with British education, and why not? What are we doing here, today? You say the British created the desire but what is education but an uncoercive rearrangement of desires? you can't just have those neat formulas, separating colonizer and colonized. You have to think through how these things fall. The metropolitan specialist has no sense of the pedagogic significance of the instruments. My discovery of the specific pattern of the primer was a revelation that came after eight years of involvement with using the primer, five years ago. Since I do not consolidate instruction for the teacher except in response to a felt need, it came only when I was letting the teacher at one school take down hints as to how to teach the students at the lowest level. As I continued, I realized that the primer had pre-empted me at every step.

I hope the impatient reader will not take this as just another anecdote about poor instruction. I hope I have made it clear by now that, in spite of all the confusion attendant upon straying from the beaten track, the practice of elementary pedagogy for the children of the rural poor is a very important weapon. But it is a hands-on, labour-intensive work of training the teacher to change teaching into teaching literate reading and writing. You have to begin from the language. Nothing but the mother tongue allows this. This is not the kind of metropolitan bilingualism where subcultural attention to language is always congratulated: Oh, yes, very nice, but at home you talk Persian. I am talking about something else. It is only through learning the mother tongue that we actually get into that uncanny experience of the synthetic a priori, if you want a European phrase. That the child inserts itself into a language with a history and a language that will continue later and you have to use that in order to make this change.¹

The incident involved the children writing to the state to ask for a tube well. I carried the letter, to no avail. Through the writing of this letter, with mistakes that I did not correct, they actually became aware of the public sphere. They became actors in the public sphere. And they also learnt an important lesson: the heartlessness of the public sphere without short-term resistance talk. Such talk, like the survivalist imagination in the remedial classes, doesn't last. In the best case scenario, resistance talk may be okay as long as it is freedom *from* but it is not okay when it is freedom *to*, because you have not been teaching in this other way, to rearrange desires. *Mutatis mutandis*, I go with W. E. B. DuBois rather than Booker T. Washington. It is more important to develop critical intelligence than to assure material comfort. This may or may not bear immediate fruit. Let me repeat yet again, although I fear I will not convince the benevolent ethnocentrists, that I am not interested in teaching "self-help." Many, many indigenous NGO's have names that mean self-help in the original language. That's another crock that I will not open for the moment. I'm interested in being a good enough humanities teacher in order to be a conduit; Wordsworth's word. I am a bricoleuse between subaltern children and their subaltern teacher. That is my connection with DuBois, who writes a great deal about teacher training.

The teachers on this ground level at which we work tend to be the worst products of a bad system. Our educators must learn to train children by attending to the children. For, just as our children are not born electronic, their children are not born delegitimized. They are not yet "least successful." It is through learning how to take children's responses to teaching as our teaching text that we can hope to put ourselves in the way of "activating democratic structures."²

My experience of learning from the children for the last decade tells me that nurturing the capacity to imagine the public sphere and the fostering of independence within chosen rule governance, is the general hypothesis of democracy, which will best match the weave of the torn but greatly detailed fabric of the culture, long neglected by the dominant. The trick is to train the teachers by means of such intuitions. Uncoercively rearranging desires is a scary thing (but, on the other hand, a teacher is a teacher, and I am speaking of myself). It contests, most often, unexamined desires for specific kinds of futures for the children. No mean trick to rearrange here. For these teachers have been so maimed by the very system of education that we are trying to combat and are so much within the class apartheid produced by that, that they would blindly agree and obey while the trainer was emoting over consciousness raising. Great tact is called for if the effort is to draw forth consent rather than obedience. In addition, the children have to be critically prepared for disingenuously offered cyberliteracy if these groups get on the loop of "development." I am thinking of the way in which Inuit here and Native Americans there are used to open these great cyberliteracy conferences with some so-called tribal rite, et cetera. Think twice about what that means.

The hope is that this effort with the teachers will translate into the teaching of these reflexes in the educational method of the children who launch the trainer on the path of this general hypothesis. The children are the future electorate. They need to be taught the habits and reflexes of such democratic behaviour, even as children at this end are taught how to manage portfolios. Necessary yet seemingly impossible, you cannot gauge this one by way of statistics and photo ops. Produced by this class corrupt system of education, the teachers themselves do not know how to write freely. They do not know the meaning of what they "teach," since all they have to teach when they are doing their job correctly is spelling and memorizing. They do not know what dictionaries are. They have themselves forgotten everything they memorized in order to pass out of primary school. When we train teachers, as I train teachers at the top in my Ph.D. classes at Columbia, we must, above all, leave them alone to see if the efforts of us outsiders have been responsive enough, credible enough without any material promises.

In the interest of time I will simply recapitulate. First, the cultural responsibility is as corrupted here as there, but in different ways. The effort is to learn it with patience from above or below and to keep trying to suture it to the imagined felicitous subject of universal human rights. I teach Kant here. "Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason" is that from the eighteenth century on down, this great text has been psychologized. You must undo that – for at this end of the spectrum the culture is personalist. So, the point is that you have to get into the cultural texts of the students at both ends. Second, the education system there is a corrupt ruin of the colonial model, just as here it is a trivialized replica of social imperialism. The effort is to undo it persistently, to teach the habit of democratic civility rather than talk about a call to arms in the classroom, globalism, post-nationalism, depending where you are teaching, resistance talk in between, and identitarianism. Among the books I read in preparation for this conference two stand out – *Literacy: A Critical Source Book*, edited by Ellen Cushman, Eugene Kintgen, Barry Kroll, and Mike Rose, and *Writing Without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, edited by Elizabeth Boone and Walter Mignolo. The first is a stunningly well-researched book, and yet, in spite of the regulation Paulo Freire piece, it is too thoroughly North American to call itself a source book, but who is noticing? The very first paragraph of the introduction, "Literacy Surrounds Us" makes this abundantly clear. It makes me go back to where I began, with an exhortation to modify, qualify, situate, and imagine, imagine, imagine. Don't just be benevolent. The other book, the book by Boone and Mignolo, brought home to me once again the hurtfulness of history. I have repeatedly deplored the cultural systems that have been delegitimized since the beginning of what we must call our world as we stand in this

room. No project can make that other literacy, that literacy of orality, live again. The literacy of robust orality cannot live again. The best we can hope for is to turn tradition into theatre by way of the museum, the performative into performance, and that is a discussion that belongs elsewhere. Thank you for your patience.

Endnotes

1. Here I had given an example of my attempt to insert the children into the intuition of the public sphere – the intuition that the state exists to serve the citizen. This can provide for the later, rational lesson that the vote is a sign of citizenship, if and when the student is about to graduate. In the current state of play, there is no such operation at work. I have since used the example in "Righting Wrongs," in Nicholas Owen, ed. *Human Rights, Human Wrongs*, Oxford, 2003; and in "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching," forthcoming in *Diacritics*, June, 2004, n.p. Indeed, much of what I spoke of in Toronto had been rehearsed in the earlier essay, at greater length.
2. I contrasted Melanie Klein and Jean Piaget here but that can now be found in "Righting Wrongs."

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is the Avalon Foundation Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, New York. Her reputation was first made due to her translation and preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1976), and she has since applied deconstructive strategies to various theoretical engagements and textual analyses: from Feminism, Marxism, and Literary Criticism to, most recently, Post-colonialism.