theories and methodologies

Response

GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK

I AM NOT ONLY HONORED BUT INSTRUCTED BY THESE ESSAYS. LET ME BEGIN WITH JEAN FRANCO'S ESSAY AND ACKNOWLEDGE HER MOVING expression of solidarity: "coming from Depression-era northern England, I too have early memories of, if not famine, seeing the skeletal bodies of a family starving in the dying heart of the empire[.] Meanwhile, at school we made daisy chains and were told that the yellow center was Britain and the petals the colonies. There is nothing subtle about empire."

Next comes an endorsement of shared views on nationalism. As Jean begins to speak of the subaltern, we realize once again that the subaltern by definition is not generalizable, because subalternity depends on a logic other than the generalizing logic of capital. I will come back to this because, for whatever reason, I have become identified with "Can the Subaltern Speak?," which for me was a symptomatic beginning, not an end.

This soldier wants me to be more hopeful. Jean, I have no faith in the globalized space we inhabit. But I haven't given up! Ben Baer's piece will bring me to that conclusion.

Mieke Bal tells me that I am no longer a teacher but a thematizer of the classroom. This is good to know. She, being who she is, of course enjoys the impacted form that she calls teacherly. I must, however, say that I was relieved by her criticism, because I felt that perhaps I was no longer going to get the complaint of "difficulty" that I receive from the common reader. Mieke kept looking and found a model for transactional reading in the idea of the maxim. This is also helpful to me, because I have forever deplored my aphoristic style, which has provided readers with little formulas that they can immediately claim for themselves—learning to learn from below, strategic use of essentialism, uncoercive rearrangement of desire, and many more—never paying attention to my repeated warning that I was not succeeding at these efforts myself. So when Mieke transforms my maxim-izing into a reading technique, not only do I feel relieved, but I am pleased that the exchange is taking place in so prominent a journal as *PMLA*,

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so that the profession in general will read her words. I am sorry she does not like my piece on *The Guide*. It was written in response to a teacher at a British working-class school, where the usual order was to find mythological Hindu figures. But I am childishly pleased that she appreciates the fact that my rambling style of writing can carry digressions. I am a little embarrassed about this, as I am about my aphorisms. On the other hand, I cannot let go. Jenny Sharpe, who has also responded to *Aesthetic Education*, was, in the early eighties, my teaching assistant for a semester or two; and we remember the occasion when, having gone off into some kind of absurd story in Sophomore Lit., I said to the class, That was an irrelevant digression, and that is what you should avoid! Any port in a storm.

Forest Pyle (whom we all know as Tres) makes the point that the very long quotation from Wordsworth is the only "unread" piece in the book. My unease at having been made by British Romanticism, as it were—a double bind of debt to the enabling violation of colonialism, if you like—indicates something that is altogether helpful to me and that I believe Simon During quite misunderstands. For Tres this becomes an injunction to the good reader, as if the book says, Read this yourself to move the text to a transactional space. Tres reads my claim to a distracted theory into his understanding of my method as a concentrated itinerancy. I will have to think about this, not least in terms of how to place this on a chain of displacements of the relation between scholarship and the peripatetic that has existed in many parts of the world. I cannot forget that Ranajit Guha punned on my two names and called me *chakrabak*, the name of a bird but also, as a literal wordplay, one who speaks while wheeling around.

Simon During's piece on my book reminded me a bit of Vivek Chibber's recent book, where it is proved that Ranajit Guha does not know anything about the British and French revolutions and therefore his work is all wrong. Simon tells us that I am an unacknowledged Althusserian. Unfortunately, I must admit with embarrassment that I have not read the piece that he cites as my model, "Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract." I might well be an Althusserian—but not an "unacknowledged" one. I taught Althusser down to the late nineties, and I know some of the material in *Lenin and Philosophy* (not the Cremonini essay), in *For Marx* I know the essay on overdetermination, I know the book on Machiavelli, sketchily I know *Reading Capital*—but that's about it. In the seventies I used to teach Pierre Macherey and his stuff about the *non-dit*. In a little I let it go, because it seemed a bit simplistic. I think I was taught to read against the grain probably by the influence of New Criticism on my most radical teacher in Calcutta—and then, of course, by Paul de Man, who pointed out that every text laid out its own desire, which poor reading generally took as its fulfillment. During forgets that in 1967, when I was twenty-five, on my own I discovered Derrida, and, if I may cite Edward Baring, *Of Grammatology* "was in fact a radical critique of the Althusserian project" (292). This is in line with Mieke Bal's remark that my "fiercer, more damning critical perspective" in *Aesthetic Education* is "closer to deconstruction than to ideology critique."

During also thinks that I am, like most English students from the British Commonwealth, a Leavisite, although I present myself as postcolonial. I left India in 1961 and have my BA and MA syllabuses. No Leavis in sight. It could well be that I am influenced by T. S. Eliot—we read "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." My encounter with Leavis was at a seminar on tragedy at Cambridge in 1963, when he was on his Lawrence-for-the-British caper, and he did not recognize me or the white American from Harvard (Mark, I think his name was) when we raised our hands.

Roland Barthes once asked us, if memory serves, to respond to some kinds of questions

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with "What's in it for you?" I must say, Simon has often provoked that question in me. Especially since, focusing on nothing but my reading of *Disgrace*, he simply decides that I am ignorant of modernism, because I can't see that both Lucy and Kafka undertook to refuse. Put this over against Mieke Bal's astute reading of counterfocalization and you will see what I'm getting at.

(As I was licking my wounds, wondering why he concluded that I was actually produced by the Commonwealth and only pretend to be postcolonial—incidentally, look how Jean Franco responds to the Commonwealth thing—I opened the most recent issue of *Interventions* and read David Lloyd's amazing dismissal of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" The guilt that it produces in him becomes a universal characteristic of the essay. He thinks the piece is about an immense distance between the subaltern and ourselves. It was actually about the fact that a family member—in other words, someone not at all immensely distant from the woman who hanged herself—had already forgotten in one generation that she had tried to write/speak with her body. And, no, Bhubaneswari was no intellectual but a teenager from a lower-middle-class schoolmaster's family. I have often said that trying to get away from being simply a French-theory expert, I stumbled on a family scandal. A teenage suicide. And then I have spent the rest of my life in working with subaltern groups, trying to insert them into the intuitions of democracy. Lloyd doesn't know anything about this, because I don't particularly write about it—since it is not undertaken for academic transcoding. On the other hand, it is no secret, and I certainly talk about it, more so in recent years as the work teaches me more and more. As I wrote in my review of Chibber, it is a good idea to follow through if you're going to be so negative about someone ["Penny"]. Also in that review I went into detail about Gramsci's distinction between the subaltern and the proletariat, so I will not go into it here. As for my not knowing enough about *Vorstellung* when I discuss the German words for representation, he is of course right. I am just a little leery of that word, precisely because of its connection with "presenting" rather than "re-presenting." And also of course because, as in Schopenhauer's book title, it can also be translated in various ways, including as "Idea." I am obliged to add a few more things: that my entire discussion of representation was there simply because Foucault and Deleuze did not seem to consider the two ways of thinking about representation that I did mention. And, second, that many people recognize these two ways—portrait and proxy, as in the description of the outstanding gendered-citizenship meeting in Norway, celebrating the centennial of universal suffrage. The Marx passage that I was probably thinking about, as I said in an earlier piece, was *geltend machen*, to make something count as resistance ["In Response"]. And that is really the problem with subalterns: their resistance is not recognized as such. They are not constituted, even locally, as a class. They certainly cannot be compared with the international working class. Gramsci calls them "social groups" "on the fringe of history"—all facts advanced in my review of Chibber's book. Left talk about subaltern resistance should take Gramsci into account. Subaltern Studies transferred Gramsci into colonial historiography. My connection with him—"Can the Subaltern Speak?" predates this—is as an educational activist. I have therefore worked with subaltern groups that take their wretchedness as normal, as I have said many times. I am sorry to include a response to someone who is not among the writers of the *PMLA* essays, but the matter is so much a genre: Chibber, During, Lloyd—you decide on the generic name.)

Jenny Sharpe and Ben Baer talk about work with subaltern social groups in the last thirty years. Jenny takes us into classic colonial discourse, a context she has broadened greatly in her own work. She unerringly fo-

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cuses on Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835). Indeed, my postcolonial work relates to it via Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, the great educational reformer, who was a precocious fifteen-year-old when that document came out and changed the face of Indian education. (In social reform he related to caste Hindus. In effect, given the caste system, his educational reform also related to caste Hindus, but, as I have abundantly proved, it could travel beyond ["Righting"].) His way was to say yes to the enemy and put together primers and grammars for Bengali literacy and numeracy and elementary Sanskrit. I have tried to understand the principles of these primers to help with rural education.

Ben Baer has made it his business to learn Bengali and has been trying to train himself into the difference between proficiency in university Bengali and the ability to teach the children of the poorest of the landless illiterate in western West Bengal. And because he knows that we do not want to present a detailed description of this work, since it is about learning the *longue durée* by monitoring failure (who wins loses), he gives an indication through the motif of the hurricane lantern, whose light, incidentally, he has shared. His understanding of subalternity, through this effort as well as Marx, communism, Gramsci, Derrida, produces a sentence that mechanical Marxists will endlessly contest: "*Subaltern* can name classed and gendered divisions of far greater historical depth than mere capitalism."

I thank Simon Gikandi for giving me this opportunity, especially for giving me a mixed bag rather than a gift package.

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