

Training the Imagination

A Praxis of Gayatri Spivak's "Aesthetic Education" Using Arundhati Roy's "The God of Small Things" as a Reading in Philippine Schools

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ABSTRACT Presented as a "speculative manual on pedagogy," this article seeks to provide praxis to Spivak's *Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012) using Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) as a reading in Philippine schools. Its aim is to envision pedagogical ways in which a foreign literary text is introduced into a culturally distant setting, thereby prompting educators – the "supposed trainers of the mind" – to resolve: (1) How does one educate aesthetically? (2) How do we imagine the performance of aesthetic education in local classrooms? In demonstrating a theory and its form, the paper first explores Spivak's conception of aesthetic education and then adapts it in a specific case: in Philippine classrooms where learners are confronted by a literary work of the *Other* – particularly, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Aesthetic education, as a theoretic idea, is visualized and imaginatively performed through its capacity to realize an "epistemic revolution" happening in local classrooms worldwide.

KEYWORDS Aesthetic education, Spivak, Arundhati Roy, Ab-use, Schiller, Training of imagination, Close reading, Double bind

Introduction

I write this speculative manual on pedagogy as I imagine Gayatri Spivak's *mantra* (or "sacred utterance" in Sanskrit) on aesthetic education. Speculative, for its aim is to *play*, particularly with theory and practice on aesthetic education – striving to give it shape and to shape it; to form and to perform it in the mind, where learning dwells. Known for her dense and complex prose, Spivak's deliberate concealment of the procedure and form of aesthetic education leaves us – the supposed "trainers of the mind" – to ask: how does one educate aesthetically? If aesthetic education is the last obtainable resource to combat the homogenizing effects of globalization, how does one imagine it being performed in a specific classroom?

At a library here in Denmark, staring at Spivak's *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* laying beside Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, I seek to find "aesthetic" ways to teach the Indian novel in another context: in Philippine schools for instance, where I one day aim to teach. The process, as a result, provides a realistic assessment, not only about my understanding of various concepts on aesthetic education, but

also on my personal reading of a “culturally different” text. Here, as the conceptual (Spivakian theorizing) meets the interpretational (literary reading), its synthesis promptly yearns for a praxis; that is, an application or an imaginative performance of the theoretic form.

Thus the aim is to envision pedagogical ways in which a foreign text is introduced and transplanted into a local setting, thereby demonstrating the relevance of aesthetic education in its capacity to create possibilities of an “epistemic revolution” to happen in varied classrooms worldwide. In this paper, Spivakian concepts are first explored and then adapted to a specific case, in which an educator visualizes theoretical application as being imaginatively performed in another cultural setting. In particular, an Indian literary work is introduced in a culturally distant classroom in the Philippines where learners are confronted with a literary work of the *Other*.

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is my personal choice as a trained educator, not only because of my familiarity with South Asian literature, but also due to my conviction that the work can stimulate students’ imagination and can initiate productive discussions about the shared post-colonial condition between India and the Philippines. The act of justifying my choice of literary text adheres to Spivak’s insistence to remain attentive to *ethics* in teaching, through which an educator’s choice and judgment of a text is considered and valued, especially in literary field.

In *Rethinking Comparativism*, Spivak concerns herself with comparative literature: the discipline which is particularly tasked to teach and deal with literatures from different collectivities around the world. In her assertion, the pertinent aim of the field, in the age of globalization, is not any more about comparison and contrast, but rather “a matter of choosing and judging.”¹ Thus, choosing *The God of Small Things* to demonstrate aesthetic education in Philippine schools guides this educator towards “learning to learn how to teach.”

Theory/Practice

Spivak’s insistence on aesthetic education, while revolutionary and transformational, remains shapeless. In *How to Read a “Culturally Different” Book*, Spivak offers her *reading* of R. K. Narayan’s *The Guide* (1980) in various layers of analysis, hoping to give a “pedagogical advice for those scores of teachers who increasingly find themselves trying to teach a multicultural canon with inadequate preparation, and for whom, as for their students, it is particularly difficult to attend historically and politically to ‘culturally different’ or non-First World texts.”²

While reading and analysis are illuminated in the essay, a concrete praxis on teaching the text is absent, especially when one imagines the text being read in an-*Other* cultural context. To provide praxis on aesthetic education as an instruction, it is crucial to ask: what does Spivak really mean by aesthetic education? More importantly, how is it done in practice? Understanding aesthetic education in the Spivakian way of elusively defining the term foremostly requires fetching key phrases attached to the concept.

Related to aesthetic education are: (1) training of the imagination; (2) creativity; (3) rearrangement of desires; (4) double bind; (5) close reading; (6) singularity; (7) *ab-use* (or use from below); and (8) epistemic revolution. By conflating these relevant terms, it is possible to work on a definition that will generate a portrayed conception of aesthetic education. It goes this way:

In the age of globalization, where the double bind of drives is mediated by the influx of data and capital, it is necessary to rearrange our desires towards the aesthetic; that is, to train the imagination away from universality and uniformity; and towards creativity and singularity. As such, close reading of literary texts is necessary to exercise the mind: specifically in its ab-use (learning from below) of Western ideas as a way to stage epistemic revolution against the uniformizing assault of globalization on language and culture.

While substantial and saturated with meaning, the description above appears complex because it is laden with jargons that complicate one's understanding and interpretation of the main concept. Defining aesthetic education by melding its associated phrases (which are by the way, concepts themselves) is only possible if these terms are explicated, in such a way that their constitution is clearly examined and understood. At this point, it is important that the concepts attached to the umbrella term "aesthetic education" are stripped of their complexities in order for the educator to formulate the proper pedagogical approach in teaching the text.

I. The Double Bind

And for cunning, play of mind, because there are no absolute certainties.

– Gémino H. Abad³

Spivak's use of the "double bind" is an *ab-use* (use from below) of Gregory Bateson's conception of the phrase; originally described in psychology as an irreconcilable dilemma wherein a person receives contradictory

messages with unresolvable response. In *ab-using* the “double bind” to conceive aesthetic education, Spivak utilizes the term to mean “learning to live with contradictory instructions.”⁷⁴ In the general *habits* of our thinking, we are continuously caught in a double bind; present in the dichotomy/duality of views and thoughts that constantly perpetuate and frame our mindset. In other words, the double bind is used to understand the repetitive patterns of thinking – on the way we look at the world in terms of binary oppositions: between good and bad, the Self and Other, man and woman, among others.

However, as Spivak moves to *ab-use* Friedrich Schiller’s *Letters*⁵ in her grounding of aesthetic education, the double bind further broadens its signification to include man’s inherently opposing drives: between the sensuous and the formal, between body and mind, between natural and rational, and between matter and form. The challenge is to escape this double bind *not* through syncretizing these oppositions, but through what Schiller suggests as *play* of these drives (*Spieltrieb*) – to use aesthetics as a “balancing act that will save society.”⁷⁶ But a question is raised: if the double bind needs to be *played*, then what exactly is the game?

Knowing the game requires a description of the playing field. It is situated in the electronically-connected, uniformly-globalized world where a myriad influx of information runs unexamined and eventually destroys “knowledge and reading.” In this field, the power of data and capital reigns over the individual and creates false desires, attuned to passively obey the uniformizing aspects of linguistic and cultural existence. Because of this, double binds arise as a form of *habit* within the mind, which merely view the world in terms of binary opposites: between the individual and society, us and them, the Self and the Other, the past and the present etc.

The challenge is to train the mind *to play* with the double bind – to be able to shuttle one’s self between opposing drives, subjectivities, and positionalities – where one is able to imagine and “at all costs, *enter* another’s text.”⁷⁷ This ability to *play* the double bind is possible through aesthetic education where imagination is trained to recognize and most importantly, to learn how to live in a globalized field, composed of “contradictory instructions.”

The field of comparative literature, for instance, is a discipline that is perpetually *at play* with comparisons; hence, the double bind in understanding the discipline: between literatures, between “methods or object” or between “literature and its interrelations.” Moreover, Spivak herself learns to play with the double bind as a woman from the global South teaching in the “first world academe.” She confronts the double bind by

playing – that is, moving to and from India and the US – in order to teach the privileged to “learn to learn” from the Other, while at the same time the disadvantaged too, learns to *ab-use* ideas from the dominant Other.

As educators like Spivak, we too are perpetually confronted by double binds based on our subject position that define our capacity to choose, interpret, and teach a subject matter. In teaching a novel, constant re-reading and re-interpretation must be done to expand one’s understanding of the text. Once this is achieved, adhering to Spivak’s insistence that we must “learn to learn how to teach” comes next. While suggestive and appealing, the mantra “to learn to learn how to teach” can be understood through “grassroots communication” wherein learning comes from the “ground,” from *below* (as in *ab-use*): that is, from the students themselves who own their creative imaginings.

If viewed this way, then teaching of literature becomes *facilitating*, rather than instructing; that the learning between students *and* teachers should be done *horizontally*, rather than vertically, *from* teachers *to* students. To “learn to learn” from below is to assume that students own their ideas; that they have something to impart – particularly their creative imaginings – which we, the supposed “trainers of the minds,” need only to develop and enhance through our facilitative function. Using this method of understanding, I imagine a classroom as a space wherein the *play* of collective imaginings among students takes place.

In this playing field, the teacher is the facilitator-referee who merely *guides* the flow of discussion, especially towards a collective appreciation and understanding of the text. The teaching of Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, in this setting, will be done in a participatory manner wherein the discussion is dependent on the students’ insights – handled, organized, and *supplemented* by what is known as the “teacher-facilitator.” As an academic playing field, the class will *play* so to speak, with the set of double binds presented in the story: between the Ayemenem/history house, between caste (hierarchy)/equality, and between Big God/God of Small Things, among others.

Using the concept of *play* in class, the challenge is to focus not only on how to stimulate the students’ imagination, but also on how to make them read *outside* of it. As Spivak’s asserts, “reading and knowing” is destroyed in today’s age of globalization. To resolve this, I propose an *ab-use* of Spivak’s concept of “strategic essentialism” and transform it into “strategic *positivism*” which, when applied to teaching, is practiced through administering an objective quiz about the text that will compel students to read the assigned novel.

There is a danger however, that in doing this, the student's appreciation of the text will be hindered by objective memorization. Because of this, it should be emphasized that the impact of test outcomes is considered minimal compared to class participation. What counts most, the teacher-facilitator should explain, is the 150-word commentary that each student will share before the actual class discussion; in doing so, only the most essential themes or ideas will be brought out in class. Then, it will be the teacher-facilitator's task to attentively list down these ideas and classify them as "common" readings of the text.

In *The God of Small Things* for instance, what I imagine would be written on the board are the common readings of the novel; that the story is usually about: the "caste system," "forbidden love," "religious differences," "social discrimination," "Indian history," "class tensions," "betrayal and transgression" among others. This is the first-level of analysis that the entire class can work on. The goal, as emphasized, is not only to stimulate discussion but also to complicate their reading of the novel. This primary process, for the teacher-facilitator, is the point of departure towards aesthetically teaching the text.

II. Rearrangement of Desires

But our world is only our experience of it.

– Gémino H. Abad

Both Spivak and Schiller locate "desire" in the sensuous nature of man, who can only become rational – and thus free and moral – through aesthetic education. In essence, this means that while the self is seen as "naturally sensuous" for Schiller; Spivak on the other hand, sees *the world* as "natural or sense perceptible." In *ab-using* of Schiller's ideas, Spivak refers to today's age of globalization, where the sense-perceptible world is accessed by the capital and not by aesthetics as once imagined by Schiller. The capital, instead of aesthetic, becomes a uniting force that can access the senses – referred to as the home of "desires" – in order to dominate the reason and thus accept the current global order as both rational and natural.

Globalization has the primary capacity to construct and shape false desires of an experiencing subject, such that an individual accommodates the unexamined influx of data and capital as part of the "natural and rational" world order. While declaring that "the world needs an epistemological change that will *rearrange* desires," Spivak is specifically tasking the educators in the humanities to teach in a way that an individual

will learn to recognize and to put into order what should be “desired” as relevant, crucial, and important in today’s globalized world.⁸

Schiller: Nature of Man

Sensuous Rational =
Free & Moral Man



AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Spivak: Nature of the World

Sense Perceptible World Mind =
Globalized World



CAPITAL (AESTHETIC)

In her reasoning, if the cartography of the globe is a product of Western epistemological violence inflicted through colonialism, then it is only sensible to counter it with another project of the episteme called education. Specifically, close reading of literary texts, according to Spivak, will train the mind in “entering the text of the *Other*.” It is important to note that the term used is “rearrange” rather than “change” to significantly imply the *non-coercive* move of aesthetic education to train the imagination.

In the novel, there are various scenes in the story which emphasizes desire or more specifically, colonial desire. The aim of bringing the so-called “white love” among Indians is expectedly a common topic for discussion in class as individuals in colonized countries are able to relate to the colonial mentality of postcolonial subjects with their former masters. It can be said, in fact – in reference to Bhabha – that what sustains the binary (or double bind) between the Self and the Other is particularly the mutual desire for one another.

In the book, the *Ipe* family considers themselves a “family of anglo-philés” because the war has made them “adore their conquerors and despise themselves.”⁹ In discussing the significance of this line in class, it is important to cite that the dilemma of the entire family starts with their encounter with foreign land, people, and ideas. Both Chacko and Pappachi (referred to as the “British shit-wiper”) acquired their education in the West which, while it naturally becomes their source of pride, also becomes the source of societal and familial conflicts due to clashes between the traditional and modern Western values.

In highlighting the desire for the foreign, the story’s villain, Baby Kochamma is known for her bitterness due to infatuation with an Irish priest who had once aimed at disproving Hindu beliefs, but was later converted to “go native.” From this, it should be further explained in class the ways through which Baby Kochamma and the entire family welcomed Sophie Mol and Margaret Kochamma from England to demonstrate their fascination with the former colonizer. At this point, it is the task of the teacher-facilitator to extract these various instances in

the novel wherein the “desire of the foreign” is presented. In this way, students’ shared awareness of the colonial mindset will be articulated and discussed in class.

III. Training the Imagination

Our sense ... of our country is a sustained act of imagination.

– Gémimo H. Abad

Since Spivak does not provide a firm structure for aesthetic education, the task to train the imagination is, in itself, hard to imagine. Educators are left to visualize the training of the mind and are compelled to give aesthetic education its form. In understanding the phrase “training the imagination,” it is helpful to disjoint them first; such that “training” is understood as an activity that will prepare an individual to acquire a particular skill, while “imagination” refers to one’s ability to form mental images of what is absent in the senses as well as in reality.

From this, it is now possible to imagine the phrase simplistically: “training the imagination” – as an *activity* that enables one to gain a particular ability to imagine. Since Spivak emphasizes the role of education in the humanities, it is assumed that the activity in this training is done through close reading of texts, while the skill achieved from it is the ability to imagine what is nonexistent. In other words, as both training and imagining happens in the mind, it is the educator’s task to invite students to “enter the text of the Other” and allow their imagination to place the Self in the Other’s text. Here, the mind is *at play* in the double bind of Self – positioned in the reality – that enters “an-Other” self, which locates itself in the specific “historico-cultural” formation found in the text.

When Spivak defines imagination as “the ability to think of absent things,” it is presumed that what is absent is the thinking of possibilities: of the Self situating itself in the life of the Other, living the imagined life – as it was real – through literature.¹⁰ This is basically what literature does: to transport the self to imagine “an-Other” reality and to present “an-Other” possibility for transcendence through the text. For the privileged classes, it is the ability to examine subalterned lives; while for the subaltern themselves, it is the capacity to imagine possibilities for empowerment. In short, we “learn to learn” from one another.

Learning however, does not immediately start with imagining but through stimulation or the act of rousing the mind to imagine. Stimulation allows the student to “enter the other’s text,” specifically in the novel’s con-

text: India. In starting the discussion about India, the teacher-facilitator should begin by fetching information about the students' impression of the country. However, to further the class' appreciation of Indian culture itself, there is a need to recognize the *connection* between Philippines and India: that there is in fact Indian in the Filipino. As an introduction to the discussion, the teacher-facilitator sets the *game* so to speak, in returning to the pre-colonial connections shared between two cultures.

In Juan Francisco's *Indian Influences in the Philippines*, traces of this connection are evident in our languages, especially between Tagalog and Sanskrit. In his work, Francisco explores Indian migration to the Philippines through Borneo in the 12th to 14th century AD.¹¹ Though the connection is indirect, it is still necessary to bring this into a *short discussion* as part of the appreciation of the country's connection with the great Indian civilization which has influenced Southeast Asia. From the table below, it should be emphasized that the Philippine script *Baybayin* evolved from Sanskrit and that Sanskrit itself is embedded in the Tagalog vocabulary.

Tagalog	budhi	awa	diwa	guro	bansa	bathala	dukha	sampalataya
Sanskrit	bodhi	ava	deva	guru	vamsa	bhatarra	dukkha	sampratyaya
English	conscience	pity	wisdom	teacher	nation	god	destitute	belief

Language – both for India and the Philippines – is hence, the living *site* in exploring and appreciating the pre-colonial bond between two nations. In Francisco's work, the influence of Sanskrit in moral, social, and religious aspects of pre-colonial culture is, until now, evident in Tagalog vocabulary.¹² In this way, we adhere to Spivak's assertion to bring out the "remains of a *trace*" that "there was something before," which suggests that India and the Philippines are connected through the *traces* of linguistic signs.¹³ Moreover, it must also be emphasized that the country's connection with India does not stop in the pre-colonial times, but continues with our shared experiences of epistemic upheaval brought about by colonialism and neocolonialism.

This is of course the reason why there is a need in the Philippine academe to share voices with Indian postcolonial writers and thinkers such as Roy and Spivak, whose concerns on Western epistemological dominance we share as part of Global South nations. It is only when this connection with India is established that the teacher-facilitator shall proceed with the proper imaginative training through aesthetic education, which is done essentially through *imagining images* in order to collectively analyze the novel as a class.

And so, since the book covers multifarious themes and analysis, it is the task of the trained teacher-facilitator to guide the students in recognizing the profound images, which are essential in weaving the story. In this way, students are able to locate the story's plot *not* by the objectively linear way of recalling the plot, but by remembering them through imagining images.

There are, in the novel, five profound images which, at the very least, the teacher-facilitator can work on and work *with* the students. These images are of the following: the Ayemenem house, Paradise Pickles and Preserves, the history house, modern and traditional theatres, and the river. First, the image of the Ayemenem house allows the teacher-facilitator to introduce the story's setting: Kerala and its social environment. Aside from this, the visualization of Ayemenem house – taken from the student's collective imagining of it – allows for the introduction of its inhabitants as the main characters of the story. In this way, the class collectively forms the portrayals of each character.

The next image that students can work together is the Paradise Pickles and Preserves, through which the sociopolitical background in Kerala can be introduced. Students, along with the teacher-facilitator, can work on the factory's image – its production and even the making of its label – in order to relate the details to the surrounding sociopolitical issues such as the condition of workers, the social discrimination among the workforce, the communist influence in Kerala, and the factory's significance in “empowering” Mammachi's as well as her passive subjection to domestic violence.

The third image features the history house, as both imagined by Chacko and interpreted by the twins. Chacko's description of it relates to the conception of history, while the twins' identification of it as “the house where Velutha dwells” relates to the India's caste system. Here, students are tasked to contribute to the significant symbolism of both versions of the history house. Whether as seen from the children's eyes or from a learned adult like Chacko, the history house presents insights on how the dwelling represents the past and the passage of time.

After the discussion of the history house's image is the presentation of two types of theatre in the story: the modern one, which staged the Sound of Music (where Rahel was molested by the Orangedrink Lemon-drink man); and the traditional theatre (where Rahel and Estha enjoy a traditional *Kathali* performance). The theatres can be discussed in contrast with each other: the dying craft and the commercialization of Kathali performances in traditional theatre, while colonial mentality reins with the Ipe family's appreciation of the modern theatre.

Lastly, the image of the river, as the channel which connects and separates the forbidden love between Ammu and Velutha, is expected to generate varied responses from the class. In the novel, the river is depicted as mysterious, dangerous and polluted because of World Bank pesticides and the rapid commercialization that surrounds it. The river, at the height of the story's discussion, can also be seen as the "natural" division that separates the untouchables from the higher classes in society. Overall, in discussing these images, students are also expected to provide other images which can contribute in deepening the story's collective analysis, specifically generated from a class that imagines images.

III. Creativity

When we speak, write, or read a word, we begin to create our world again.

–Gémino H. Abad

Creativity is the *praxis* of imagination; that is, in the close reading of literary texts, students are encouraged to *actualize* the imaginative activity. As imaginative training allows one to envision all possibilities and outcomes in the mind, creativity becomes an outward expression of treating what is imagined as real. Creativity, in this sense, gives the imagination its concrete form; for if, in imagining, one is able to think of "absent things," then creating gives "absent things" its existence in reality. In teaching literature through aesthetic education, creativity is the anticipated fruit of imaginative labor.

Creativity means to create and to innovate: to bring into reality ideas that have only resided in the imaginative plane. Creativity is an outward validation and realization that: what one deeply imagines or "desires" can in fact, become real. In teaching literature, reading allows students to take the mental journey towards living the imagined life of the Other. Writing or any creative engagements on the other hand, allows an individual to reach out towards the Other through creation and innovation.

In the classroom, rousing students' creativity to teach a novel presents a challenge for educators. While one cannot teach imagination without being imaginative, the teacher-facilitator also cannot ask for student's creativity, without being creative. As pointed out, creativity is the *praxis* of imagination because it gives one the power to *create*. In the case of Roy's novel, creativity can be generated by giving students assignments – or activities that enable them to actualize their imaginings.

Here are three sample activities related to the novel which the teacher-facilitator can pursue to stimulate creative thinking among students.

Activity	Description	Creative Outcome
1. Illustrate your conception of a <i>History house</i> .	The drawing must identify the “historical” dwellers of the house and relate its features as well as its surrounding location to one’s conception of history. A short explanation should be provided below the drawing.	This activity enables students to reflect on their own conception of history as represented in their drawings.
2. Construct your own <i>love law(s)</i> .	One’s own establishment of love law(s) follows a free structure which should be stated in simple and understandable terms. One could arrange laws similar to the 10 Commandments or constitution.	The activity will help students define and ponder upon their personal understanding of love, enough to construct “laws” for it.
3. Explain any occurrence in the book using the <i>Philippine words</i> borrowed from Sanskrit.	The student should use at least two Sanskrit words in Filipino to explicate the plot, symbolism, and themes in the story. The student-facilitator will provide a list of words using Francisco’s book as reference.	This activity fosters the “tracing” of pre-colonial connection between India and the Philippines and helps in appreciating the relationship of two cultures.

The task for the teacher-facilitator is to relate the activity to the significant themes found in the novel. These activities must be accompanied by corresponding outcomes which, though imagined, reinforces the teacher’s creative goals. With these activities, the possibility to create – nurtured by our capacity to imagine – becomes possible.

It allows students to form and construct ideas into a concrete form. The act of creating is, thus, empowering. It gives one the power to bring dreams and desires into a tangible and visible existence. Through creativity, one is able to voyage from the inner imagination to the outer creative action. Creation, which is oftentimes also manifested in myths, is power – thereby a means to emancipate the self.

IV. Ab-use

What we understand is not a meaning ... but a meaningfulness of the living of it.

– Gémino H. Abad

Aesthetic education concerns itself with learning to *play* the double bind in order to achieve a “philosophy of balance.” Unlike Schiller and Kant, who struggled to arrive at a synthesis, Spivak resolves that there is no

escape from the double bind except to learn how to *play* with it through one's "recognized and acknowledged mistakes."¹⁴ Spivak demonstrates this kind of play through "*ab-use*" – a word she wrought by disjoining the original Latin prefix "*ab*" which suggests "motioning away ... more than below" and placing it adjacent to the English phrase "use" such that a new word is coined: *ab-use* or "use from below."¹⁵

This is a clear word-*play*, which Spivak deliberately uses, in order to demonstrate how we can deal with the double bind. Spivak specifically urges to *ab-use* "ideas from the Enlightenment" in order to "resist, cohabit, and accommodate" them for subversion and resistance.¹⁶ The use of aesthetic education is a complete *ab-use* of Schiller's idea which Spivak decontextualizes in today's era of globalization. Like the creation of art, this *ab-use* is a demonstration of a *play* in which educators act as trainers (of the imagination), tasked to arm student-players to win the game in the globalized playing field.

The training of the imagination, through close reading of literary texts, is hence necessary to *play* with the double bind and invite an *ab-use* from existing ideas of European Enlightenment. More specifically, in approaching a text, one is encouraged to *ab-use* an idea by distorting and *playing* it, without failing to recognize the process as a "mistake." In other words, aesthetic education guides one to *play* the double bind by *ab-using* an idea – and commit deliberate distortions and "mistakes" for subversion and resistance against the universalizing project of globalization.

The question however is, how can *ab-use* be demonstrated through teaching a literary text? The answer lies in the teacher-facilitator's continued re-reading and re-interpretation of the text. The aim is to recognize, through close reading and training, the author's deliberate *ab-use* of major concepts and themes in the novel. For instance, it is possible to interpret that in relation to the singularity of Roy's writing style is her *ab-use* of English language and its literary conventions. However, when it comes to *ab-use* of ideas from the West, it is important to highlight *not only* Roy's critique of communism and Christianity – as factors which contribute to the continued alienation of untouchables – but also her usage of the concept of God to daringly ascribe it to an Indian untouchable.

For the dominantly Christian students in the *imagined* classroom in the Philippines, this attribution to Velutha as the "God of Small Things" may be seen as literally an abuse of the concept; but at the same time, it is possible to see it as an *ab-use* of the term "God" itself. In the novel, the big God – who relates himself with large affairs in society that affect only the privileged, "touchable" Indians and foreigners – is seen as concerned

only with “big things.” On the other hand, the small God is attributed instead to Velutha whose existence is subverted, hidden, and concealed due to an ancient sociocultural tradition.

Although various changes have taken place in the multicultural and multi-religious India throughout the years, wide unacceptance of untouchables, as revealed in Roy’s book, continue to exist. They still experience social discrimination and are treated “invisible” in society. Roy’s *ab-use* of the concept of God challenges the belief of an omnipotent and encompassing being. At the same time, it invites reflection especially among young readers, who are assumed as believers, in a religious nation like the Philippines. Discussing these points, through recognition of the author’s *ab-use* of dominant themes in the novel, allows the teacher-facilitator to elevate the class discussion as well as to collectively analyze the core content of the text.

V. Singularity

The English language is now ours. We have colonized it, too.

– Gémino H. Abad

Singularity, in the simplest sense, implies uniqueness – or the idea that one is distinctly different from the rest. Spivak’s usage of the term, however, entails a deeper form of singularity [Fr. *singulier*]: one that, to the extreme, emphasizes specificity and particularity. Singularity retains the quality of distinctiveness despite the attempts to *uniformize* the singular. In reference to the singular, it is important to note that Spivak’s use of “singularity” appears in her varied writings to describe many things: ethics, the literary text, the individual, the idiom, and even the literary production.

In the employment of aesthetic education, the singular is ascribed to the literary texts taught in classrooms. In a “productive engagement” with David Damrosch on world literature, Spivak mentions the singular by saying that “our concern [in comparative literature] ... is to ask what makes the literary cases singular.”¹⁷ Since our task is to shape aesthetic education, it is assumed that singularity refers to the treatment of a literary text which not only stimulates the imagination, but also spurs creativity that, in itself, is thoroughly unique and “unverifiable” in order to escape universalization.

In teaching how to read a text, it is thus important to particularize the entire literary landscape which is found in the text: both the specificity of experiences and the historico-cultural condition of the imagined

Other. The move to achieve this kind of singularity allows one to not only inhabit a completely distinct cultural and linguistic reality of an-*Other* text, but it also enables us to celebrate differences and understand oppositions, even if they merely exist on the imaginative plane. As Spivak asserts: the “site of reading is to make the *singular* visible in its ability” – meaning to say that, within the learning space of the classroom, students must be able to “make the singular visible.”

The goal is for students to learn to recognize singularity within them, in such a way that they are able to “desire” to inhabit the Other’s space in the text. But while student’s recognition of the text’s singularity is emphasized, Spivak further complicates our understanding of the singular by saying that though the singular signifies particularity and specificity of the text, it is “always the universalizable, but never the universal.”¹⁸ At this point, it now becomes a task for educators to *play* with the double bind of singularity and univerzability.

In the discussion of the text, as the teacher invites the student to recognize and appreciate the specificities of the Other, it is still important to be able to qualify these singularities as “universalizable” – meaning to say that the particularity of the entire historico-cultural condition of the Other’s space in the text is emphasized, while being related the encompassing historico-cultural conditions of the world. To better understand how this can be done, it is apt to look at *The God of Small Things* as an example.

Roy’s work, as a critique of colonial and neocolonial mindset in India, is a product of postcolonial literature which emphasizes the defiance against the conventional, Western-derived writing. The author’s decision to write the novel in English not only suggests the author’s confidence in the language, but it also demonstrates that English is not anymore solely owned by the English. Roy’s ease in the language allows her, more significantly, to *play* with English in such a way that *singularity* in her writing style is achieved without necessarily adhering to Western literary conventions.

The appropriation of English makes the book’s literary texture distinctly cultural and hence, for the casual reader used to the Western standards, unfamiliar. While the proponents of world literature might have the tendency to appropriate the book as part of an English-based collection of literature around the world, it is important to insist that the novel maintains its singularity, specifically when one looks at Roy’s unique appropriation of the language. In the novel, Roy showers the text with *Malayam* words and more notably, her sentence construction and spelling defies English grammar convention.

Roy employs this style to not only highlight the extent of English influence in India, but also to showcase the absurdity of imitating the foreign. Notice that Roy's capitalization of words in the middle of the sentences renders emphasis to the phrases, thus resisting literary conventions of the foreign. These are the singular qualities of the text that should be noted and emphasized by the teacher-facilitator.

When it comes to recognizing its *universalizable* qualities, the novel brings out the issues and problems common to postcolonial nations such as India and the Philippines. In the novel, for instance, the frequent mention of the Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" parallelizes the Ayemenem River with that of Congo River and the subsequent violence of colonization in postcolonial countries. Aside from this, commonly shared problems on class differences, colonial mentality, poverty, Western relations, and religious differences represent some of the *univerzable* problems, which Filipino students find no difficulty in relating. Kerala, being a multicultural and multi-religious region in India and the *Ipe* family, being Christians are also some of the intersections between Philippines and India which can be pointed out during the discussion of the novel.

VI. Close Reading

So, as you read, you are also read.

– Gémino H. Abad

In her *Introduction* to the book on aesthetic education, Spivak asks for the "interactive reader" to understand her writing.¹⁹ From this assertion, it is possible to define close reading as an activity that involves interaction or engagement with the text. In Andrew DuBois's *Introduction* of the book *Close Reading*, reading is emphasized as an activity that "hardly seems to leave the realm of so-called common sense", such that the text can both appear as "something understandable and vague."²⁰ A double bind, in short: perpetually present in the reading of any texts which, on the part of the educator, is handled by teaching students how to *play*.

Since the text is a double bind between what is vague and understandable, then laying out what is obscure should be placed adjacent to what is easily perceptible. The common ground in close reading, whether one reads in the formalist or non-formalist mode, is the "commitment to literary texture and what is embodied" within the text.²¹ Since aesthetic education mainly dwells on teaching literature, the task is to pay close attention to the details in the story. In this way, close reading *supplements*

imaginative reading as a way to *play* between what is real in the imagined and what is imagined in the real.

In fact, close reading compels the individual to pay proper attention to the text, thereby *training* the mind overtime to acquire the “habit of focus” and “repetition of thought.” Close reading, in other words, is careful reading “in the most robust sense.”²² For these reasons, reading activity is essential in the proper employment and actualization of aesthetic education. Close reading, as a practice, is employed through citing important passages in the novel which the class can collectively reflect and discuss. In this way, the images provided by students will be *supplemented* by the richness of the text.

Since there are passages in the novel which cannot be reduced to merely being images, these sections in the text need further explication and elaboration from readers and learners. At this point, the teacher-facilitator is responsible in determining these passages that relates to the images discussed by the class.

The table below showcases sample passages from the novel:

Sample Passage	Point of Discussion
“They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much.” ²³	Institutionalization of Love
“Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Suddenly, they become the bleached bones of a story.” ²⁴	Conception of History
“Anything’s possible in Human Nature ... Love. Madness. Hope. Infinite joy.” ²⁵	Human Nature
“Change is one thing. Acceptance is another.” ²⁶	Caste System
“He left no footprints in the sand, no ripples in the water, no image in the mirrors.” ²⁷	Condition of the Untouchables
“Rahel never wrote to him. There are things that you can’t do – like writing letters to a part of yourself. To your feet or hair. Or heart.” ²⁸	Relationship of the twins

As these passages or “word-images” are presented to class, the teacher-facilitator is tasked to stimulate the discussion by generating the possible interpretations of the text. This makes students read passages in the book more closely and make them articulate their own understanding of it. Aside from this, close reading help students notice the author’s literary style as well as recognize the richness of the text. Fortunately, Roy’s

novel is undeniably fertile with well-crafted prose that the inability to realize this essence is a pity to learners who fails to closely read the text.

VII. Epistemic Revolution

We are in-formed, we are formed within.

– Gémino H. Abad

Epistemic revolution is essentially the ultimate goal of aesthetic education. Epistemic revolution is a way to “decolonize” the mind from Western-dominated knowledge production brought about by colonialism. In Spivak’s words, if the cartography of the globe is derived from Western epistemological violence on indigenous knowledge through colonialism, then it is only sensible to counter this with another project of the episteme called education. In the age of globalization, where the assault is directed mainly on knowledge and culture, it is crucial that students be armed with an outlook that upholds the aesthetic rather than the capitalistic mindset.

It is also important that they become part of a “collectivity” which aims to preserve “knowledge and reading” as well as celebrate the singularity and diversity of languages and culture. In working towards epistemic revolution, Spivak specifies that the space for this revolt begins in the classroom where students are trained to first imagine (through close reading) and then use the imaginative plane as a space to envision the Other in order to escape the globalist grid-making that uniformizes the mind.

In this way, creativity is developed; such that, despite the domination of data and capital influx on the mindset, desires are rearranged in order to prioritize singularity and diversity over universality and uniformity. Furthermore, in this epistemic revolution, double binds are confronted through *play* and through the *ab-use* of Western ideas, advocated to preserve and enrich our collectivity, thereby working towards understanding, protecting, and empowering subalterned lives against the epistemic upheaval inherent in the global capitalist project.

In moving towards an epistemic revolution, aesthetic education is thus given shape by defining the relevant terms associated with the concept, and then applying it through visualizing an *imagined* classroom in the Philippines. This process is in adherence to Spivak’s insistence that the revolution against the domination of Western episteme begins in the classroom where globalization is countered by aesthetic education. And so, the battle has been set: imagination versus information; art versus the capital.

In this paper, teaching Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* be-

comes a resource in rearranging our desires, in ab-using Western constructs, in preserving singularity, and in training our imagination to think about the individual's connection with the Other. In this setting, training the imagination is given form by imagining its employment in the classroom while adhering to Spivak's understanding of the concept. The class is conceived as a playing field where the teacher, through participatory and horizontal communication, can act as facilitator, who guides the student in understanding the text.

Specifically, the teacher-facilitator contextualizes India by associating its pre-colonial and postcolonial connections with the Philippines. Once this is achieved, "working through images" is then employed because of the multifarious issues presented in Roy's novel. Furthermore, visualizing the text through collective participation is *supplemented* by close reading, which unravels important passages in the novel that highlight its literary texture and artistic depth. Throughout the discussion, Roy's distinct style is explicated as one of the *singular* qualities of the book, which highlights the author's appropriation of English to *universalize* the problems inherent in India such as the caste system, forbidden love, class tensions, colonial mentality, and patriarchal domination.

Aside from the *ab-use* of English, a wider part of the discussion focuses on Roy's specific *ab-use* on the concept of God because, as the book's central theme, it is expected to deliberately draw contentions and discussions among Filipino students. Through her audacious move to identify an untouchable as *The God of Small Things*, Roy is able to *ab-use* how the big God failed to account the "*footprintless*" existence of the untouchables. Discussing the approach in which the author *ab-uses* this widely contested concept elevates the class discussion and analysis.

As a way to give praxis to imagination, creative activities are employed as homework for students so that they can again reimagine (or *re-dream*) the matters discussed in class at home. Aesthetic education, when employed through teaching Roy's postcolonial work, generates *hope* that an epistemic revolution will someday be achieved. For the ethical educator, it will be helpful to *imagine* educating a class that employs aesthetic teaching which someday, *we hope*, will make a difference in this "postcolonial, neocolonized world" of ours.²⁹

Notes

1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 468.

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3. Gémino H. Abad, "Teaching English Language and Literature," *Diliman Review* 59, no. 1–4 (2012): 1–10.
4. Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 3.
5. Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004).
6. Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 19.
7. *Ibid.*, 6.
8. *Ibid.*, 2.
9. Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (New Delhi: IndiaInk, 1997), 54.
10. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Other Asias* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 4.
11. Juan R. Francisco, *Indian Influences in the Philippines: With Special Reference to Language and Literature* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines, 1964), 10.
12. *Ibid.*, 26–31.
13. "Comparative Literature/World Literature: A Discussion with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and David Damrosch," *Comparative Literature Studies* 48, no. 4 (2011), 469.
14. Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 21.
15. *Ibid.*, 3, 11.
16. *Ibid.*, 4.
17. "Comparative Literature/World Literature," 467.
18. *Ibid.*, 466.
19. Spivak, *Aesthetic Education*, 3.
20. Frank Lentricchia and Andrew DuBois (eds.), *Close Reading: The Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 2.
21. *Ibid.*, ix.
22. *Ibid.*, 2.
23. Roy, *The God of Small Things*, 33.
24. *Ibid.*, 32.
25. *Ibid.*, 112.
26. *Ibid.*, 265.
27. *Ibid.*, 206.
28. *Ibid.*, 156.
29. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 1990), 166.