

Classroom Cartonera: Recycle Paper, Prose, Poetry

I learned to say that literature is recycled material from listening to the upstart publishing house of Sarita Cartonera in Lima Peru. After starting up my own variation of that project, I also learned that there is very little distance between creative and critical thinking: both take a distance from found material and imagine what it might mean from a variety of perspectives or frames. These are rather basic lessons for a teacher of literature to be learning so late in life, but I am happy to report them for anyone who wants to save some time and stress. To be precise, my teacher from Sarita Cartonera was Milagros Saldarriaga, one of the young founding members of the unconventional publisher. “Sarita Cardboard Picker” is named after Sarita Colonia, the heroically chaste and childish Patron Saint of poor mostly Andean migrants in Lima. Milagros had come to Harvard University in March 2007, along with visual artist Javier Barilaro from the original Eloísa Cartonera of Buenos Aires. The Argentine initiative had been the inspiration for Sarita to launch its parallel venture of making books from used cardboard and unpublished literature donated by distinguished contemporary writers. As far as I know, of the more than thirty Cartoneras that have by now followed Eloísa’s lead, only Sarita Cartonera developed a pedagogy that uses the beautiful little books it produces as “material” for making readers, and for teaching teachers how. Compared to Buenos Aires where Eloísa initiated the rash of replications, you see, Sarita’s Lima hardly reads literature.

In the Argentine capital, even during the shock period right after the national markets crashed in December 2001, haunting pictures show residents look longingly into bookstore windows, or while away too much time with some reading material in hand. Just over a year after the crash Eloísa was responding to the hunger for new books among readers who were starved because imports ended and local production had stopped. Poet and novelist Washington Cucurto invited painter Javier Barilaro to help invent an alternative to the failed market in books, by using and re-using available materials, pre-owned cardboard along with new first rate literature. About Cucurto, hardly anyone still calls him by his earlier, hardly original name Santiago Vega, except when Santi appears as an alter-ego in his fiction. The stagy new name appears now as sports columnist, poet, novelist, entrepreneur, and lately as lecturer in U.S. universities. Before the crash, he had been director of the small publishing house, Eloísa, but it faced extinction after the price of materials skyrocketed and then stock ran out. The solution was to recycle. At their storefront retreat from standard commercial publishing, the two artists began to buy cardboard from practically destitute paper pickers at a price almost five times the rate paid by recycling centers. And then they proceeded to incorporate the *cartoneros* into the production of individually decorated cardboard books.

The one of a kind covers announce the original material inside: new literature donated by Argentina’s best living writers. Ricardo Piglia and César Aira were among the first, soon joined by Mexican Margot Glanz, Chilean Diamela Eltit, and many others. By now, Harvard’s Widener Library has more than 200 titles from Cartonera editions and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has more. Several of the recycler book-makers in Buenos Aires and in Lima continued their careers in editorial positions at standard publishers; others returned to finish high school; and all managed to survive the economic crisis with a sense of dignity. Today Eloísa is a cooperative of 10 members who share the work and the income from book sales, as well as a recent

development in sustainable agriculture.¹ This engaging initiative didn't mean to be a model for the entire continent, but the example proved to be irresistible.² The rippling inspiration reached Harvard's Cultural Agents Initiative, which hosted the Cartonera week, consisting of talks and workshops that convened participants from Harvard University and from a range of schools throughout Cambridge and Boston. We learned how to make beautiful books from discarded materials and, with Milagros, how to use them in the classroom.

Turn the Page:

This was a moment of truth for me and for the other language and literature teachers crouched on the floor to cut cardboard and hunched happily over tables made invisible under the mess of cuttings, tempera paints, scissors, string, and all kinds of clean junk to add decorative value to the books we were making. Until then, Cultural Agents had been drawn outward from its academic setting to identify and to highlight compelling but under-represented arts that should stimulate scholarly reflection. We had convened, and continue to convene, scholarly seminars on major thinkers who inspire Cultural Agents (Antonio Gramsci and Hannah Arendt, among others) and we still promote a broad range of artists who understand their work to be interventions in public life. Even before the major inaugural event of Augusto Boal's workshops and his participants' presentation of Theater of the Oppressed in December 2003, Cultural Agents seminars had featured photographers who teach desperately poor children to take new perspectives and to reframe their lives. (Nancy McGirr's Fotokids in Guatemala is exemplary, as was Martin Cohen's Ph 15 in Ciudad Oculta on the fringes of Buenos Aires, and Shahidul Alam in Bangladesh).³ The series culminated in two conferences (2006, 2007) on "Visible Rights" that gathered practitioners and theorists from Bogotá to Bangladesh in order to reflect on the dynamics of teaching photography from the perspectives of children's rights, art, and economics. Another special event in 2005 showcased "The Jewish Latin Mix: Making Salsa" with a conference, master-classes and concert that featured the mostly unsung collaborations among Latino and Jewish musicians and filmmakers, a testimony to the socially binding effects of mutual admiration among artists who depend on one another to make music. Larry Harlow, Martin Cohen, Marty Sheller, and Leon Gast starred on that occasion. We hosted related seminars on the power of student dance troupes (such as Bajucol in East Boston) to consolidate communities of youth and to keep them from dropping out of school. Muralists who direct crews of teenagers to occupy public space and to promote a sense of ownership that amounts to safeguarding that space also figured among our guest speakers. A project called "Cultures on the Air" featured indigenous language radio programming as agents of respectful development in 2005 and 2009 conferences. These events and explorations have had some notably lasting effects (see for example the case of Boal's workshops, Chapter 1).

Nevertheless, from my perspective as a teacher of language and literature, the admirable cases we pursued represented other people's work, fascinating as examples to be theorized and even as sources of techniques to appropriate for effective teaching. I am, along with many others, a beneficiary of creative contributions by cultural agents who work outside the language and literature classroom. These *maestros* include two brilliant Harvard College students, Amar Bakshi and Proud Dzambukira, who were determined to stem the drop-out rate of young girls in Mussoorie, India, the home town of Amar's mother. The intervention was to establish Aina Arts which implemented an after-school arts program that required girls to stay in school if they wanted to stay in the arts sessions. The self-sustaining success there meant that by the next year Aina Arts

was also working in Proud's native Zimbabwe.⁴ I hoped to replicate a version of this inspiration in the Boston-Cambridge area, university-rich but public-school poor, where drop-out rates are alarming and youth violence a growing concern. [Boston Statistics of drop-out and reading level; Boston, Chicago] My link onto the lead of Aina Arts is a course for area teachers called "Youth Arts for Social Change," first developed with Gil Noam's Leadership Institute for after-school teachers and then offered regularly through Harvard's Extension School.⁵ Now in its fifth year, the course engages a range of local artists (in dance, music, painting, theater, photography, etc) to train teachers to incorporate creative techniques in their classrooms, any classroom.⁶ I had imagined that this would be my culminating effort as a cultural agent, appropriating lessons I had learned from our seminars, conferences, and workshops to bring art back into schools, not in isolated elective classes but as the motor and medium for engaged learning.

But the Cartonera at Cultural Agents was a personal turning point for me. Literature came back to the center of my teaching and writing, newly energized as an adventure in recycling, and open to unexpected re-combinations in my own work and in that of my students. I could finally respond to my own proposal that each one of us can offer our best work as a social contribution, in the spirit of great authors who donate unpublished material to the Cartoneras, rather than assume that politics is always a pause to protest on the picket lines. The "Youth Arts for Social Change" course, for example, became a forum for developing the Cartonera (called the Paper Picker Press in English) as the hub of many arts. A single literary text throughout the semester becomes the pretext for a series of artistic interpretations through visual arts, dance, music, theater. As readings of the selected text broaden and deepen, participants also develop a breadth of readings by going "off on a tangent" each week, searching for a text that they can relate in any way – thematically, stylistically, or by imaginative association -- to the shared reading. The combination of focus on the inexhaustibility of interpretation for one text, and on the wealth of literature to be perused and selected with the participant's own criteria, creates a dynamic culture of reading even among initially reluctant or indifferent students.

The re-centering affected my graduate teaching too. "Foundational Fictions" is a course I regularly offer at the doctoral level; now it offers an alternative final project to the standard "publishable essay." Students can opt to write an outline and one full chapter of their own "nineteenth century national novel," along with an essay to reflect on the literary construction. Compared to most of the conventional essays, the riskier chapters and reflections show a superior depth of understanding the material in the course. The historical imagination is far richer, as is the sensitivity to registers of language, to historical conflict, social dynamic and intertextual references to classic novels. Students will risk this superior "insider" appreciation if teachers allow it. To acknowledge, in good faith, that teachers of the humanities are cultural agents – perhaps the fundamental agents for Gramsci's organic cultural revolution – is to assume the risks that characterize any creative activity. Among the significant burdens of humanist teachers, after all, is to train taste, hardly a minor responsibility since taste is another name for the judgment that civic life depends on. (See Chapter 5, Art and Accountability.)

Recycled Words:

Literature as recycled material, it had never before occurred to me. The Cartonera book covers made of recycled cardboard were practically "objective correlatives" for the recycled material inside. This was my simple summary of Milagros Saldarriaga's rich presentation, and she graciously appropriated the analogy. It cuts

through much of what we have learned and taught as sophisticated literary criticism, with its daunting terms such as intertextuality, traces, iteration, point of view, focalization, influence. The technical terminology become user-friendly by losing its elite edge and gaining a broad accessibility when readers can abstract particular literary functions to arrive at a general principle about literature being made up of re-usable pieces, cuts and pastes and pastiches. The hands-on workshop that Milagros facilitated during the Harvard Cartonera week developed a few demonstrations of the recycling process. For example, in the character portrait activity she arranged us in pairs of participants to sit back to back, while one described a character from the story we had all read – it was Edgar Allen Poe’s “Man in the Crowd” -- and the partner sketched the description. After the first drawing is done, the participants switch roles, so that in about ten or fifteen minutes both will have described and sketched a character. The amusingly diverse results, visible after we taped the portraits onto the “gallery” wall, showed a range of interpretations and re-interpretations of the same fictional characters. This demonstrated the impossibility to stay neutral while reading or drawing; everyone had filled in missing information, highlighting one or another feature of the text, and adding original details.

We could not clearly distinguish between reading -- which had seemed a passive relationship to literature for some participants -- and the active intervention of completing the text, or writing. Where was the precise division between reception and production, understanding and imagination? I had never before experienced so effective and painless a lesson in deconstruction and in reader-response theory. It was positively fun, and I have repeated the activity many times with similarly profound and pleasurable results. When the participants are graduate students or colleagues, an extra measure of enjoyment comes from reflecting on the theoretical principles involved in the activity and appreciating the significance for interpretation (One of my brightest graduate students celebrated after Milagros’ initial workshop: “I don’t hate narratology any more!” By now the Cartonera is part of Harvard’s training program for new teachers of foreign languages, Linguistics 200.) And when we work with primary school children, the technical terms don’t figure in the reflection. But in all cases, the lessons are as clear as they are welcome: Each participant is an author and an authority of the work produced; interpretation exercises critical and creative faculties; and the range of plausible interpretations is worthy of admiration for oneself and for fellow interpreters. Admiration is the glue of voluntary societies such as democracies, Antanas Mockus taught us, not toleration which suggests one citizen’s largesse in the face of other, implicitly inferior subjects.

It is obvious, ¿isn’t it? that books and plays and poems are made up of words, motifs, plots, characters, grammatical structures, elements that already exist in other contexts and that authors borrow and recombine to produce arresting new works. Novelty is in the poaching and the recombination, not in the material which, logically, must already have been used if the new creation hopes to communicate with a public of readers or listeners. Wittgenstein wisely dismissed the possibility of private languages because they cannot communicate from one person to another.⁷ All language is borrowed or taken over, including the language of literary masters. For example, everyone knows that Cervantes played on chivalric and picaresque sources to write *Don Quijote*; shamelessly, he even claims to have lifted the entire manuscript from an Arab author. And Shakespeare is notoriously not the author of his plots in great plays, but the genius re-writer of appropriated stories. To introduce students to writing through an appreciation of the liberties that great writers take, with recycled words that can be endlessly recombined, is to demystify the classics by showing them to be products of

human interventions and inviting young people to try their own hand at altering texts with every new reading. Through artistic play, participants know that the classics of high culture and higher education are within their audacious reach.

The recycled character of literature is hardly hidden, though we don't usually notice; and it's almost laughably simple to understand. This simplicity brings a chuckle or a wink from students and teachers of literature and it provides a profound lesson in leveling higher order understanding. Thanks to the jokes we can read out of Sarita Cartonera's pedagogy, about the fundamental accessibility of literary criticism and also about great literature lifting other people's writing high and low, playful sophistication can have a laugh at exclusive elitism. In fact, anyone can get the funny point about robber writers and join the gang. Teachers can therefore be more effective, also more inclusive, promoters of intellectual exploration, along with the attendant pleasures of the text.

Washington Cucurto is not subtle like Sarita; he makes the joke with an in-your-face style of freshness and he flaunts the pleasures of irreverent plagiarism as the programmatic principle of his prose. Cucu -- or devil as he likes to be called in honor of his dark skin and Argentina's racist assumptions that he won't let you dismiss -- practices a basically iconoclastic approach to writing. It's something like graffiti that tags an elaborate name on publicly sacred official buildings. He riffs on the classics and leaves his mark, not only on Bartolomé Mitre's official history of Argentina in a mock-historical novel, *1810: The May Revolution as Blacks Lived It*⁸ -- where the dusky-colored slave-dealing founding father San Martín is exposed as greedy and licentious, or at least gets out of the closet -- but also on more honestly fictional national and international classics. Chapters of the novel remember *El matadero*, by Esteban Echevarría, *Hombres de maíz* by Miguel Angel Asturias, *Justine* by Marquis de Sade. One Addendum re-writes Borges' "Aleph" as the "Phale," phallic joke intended, always, where the narrator is inducted into the mysteries of an underworld service industry [Cab-drivers, prostitutes and drug dealers reveal to him a system of organization that outdoes his above-board administrative imagination and stays fueled by ambitions of future decency, possession of the means of production and self-possession]. Another one takes on Julio Cortázar's "Casa tomada" [Taken, or Haunted House] as "Dama tocada" [Touched, or Defiled, Lady].

There's no anxiety of influence here, because he figures that the country is too color-coded to let him pass for the new Borges or Cortázar. So he just catches his country and everyone else at the same game he enjoys: light handed lifting or literary theft. [Appropriation is the word post-modern painters use]. "Cucu," -- his alter-ego Santi practically jumps out of his skin at the beginning of the *1810* novel -- "this is a historical discovery: all Argentine literature is stolen stuff. It's crazy! Shameless!"⁹ And by the end of this reckless shuttle from orgy to battle field on a double crossing literary loom of black and white, hetero and homo but always over-sexual, it turns out that the recycled stuff that Cucu had stolen "and all the other Argentine classics were written by descendents of those Black soldiers. That is to say, it's black literature, written by bourgie and bleached out Black-begotten Argentines."¹⁰

Re-writing is his hobby, Cucurto says, doing more homage than harm to the greats. In fact, he tells his sports column readers, from the desk of a regular paying job, that they too had better read the classics if they want to play ball: "OK, everybody, get rid of those play stations and read Onetti, or at least Fontanarrosa, read Osvaldo Soriano, at the very minimum. . . It sounds crazy I know, but let me tell you that with more cultivated, sensitive, ball players, readers of poetry, Argentine soccer would be a lot better off. And don't let any of those bright kids get on the field if they haven't read

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn for starters. . .”¹¹ His literary advice to ball fans, and his hobby of re-purposing literary classics for personal fun will extend to a pedagogical program, when Cucurto collaborates with Cultural Agents in the spring of 2010 at Roberto Jacoby’s recently established Center for Investigation in the Arts, or CIA. (Leftist Jacoby is funny too).¹² But already and independently, Eloísa Cartonera had set out to educate the neighborhood. My favorite image of Eloísa the educator is her “Weapon of Mass Instruction” – a pickup truck disguised as a military tank with stacks of book-armor that reshape the slow-going vehicle on whose roof someone recites poetry.¹³ Ever alive to the arts of turning trouble, like memories armored cars on city streets, into usable trash, Cucurto is also the head master of mitigating the divide between high and low culture. He takes elite taste by the throat (not to mention other body parts). Before he heard about Sarita’s re-writing lessons, Cucurto was there at the forefront of appreciation-by-appropriation, riffing on the resemblance between venerated writers and their uncouth imitators. His sheer pleasure in playing with literature, pilfering and re-deploying words, plots, characters, the way all good writers do, is a profound lesson in literary criticism, and also an inspiration to liberate teachers and their students from stale lessons in “understanding” literature.

Make Readers:

The replication that Eloísa Cartonera inspired in Lima was the first in the series that continues to multiply.¹⁴ But Sarita Cartonera continues to be a special case, as I mentioned. In Lima, economic crisis is a familiar condition rather than the shock it had been in Buenos Aires. The chronic lack of money together with a richness of writers and a surfeit of poor paper pickers gave Lima a resemblance to distressed Buenos Aires; and the conditions seemed to guarantee a success parallel to Eloísa’s achievement. Yet the new publishing project encountered an obstacle more stubborn than poverty: In Lima the low reading rate made it difficult to establish and to sustain the enterprising publisher. Clearly, it was not enough to make cheap and beautiful books; Sarita Cartonera had to create a public who would buy and read them. It would be foolish, Milagros commented in her public talk, to try to sustain a publishing venture in a place where people don’t read much, without developing a public of readers as potential customers for books. That development project is called LUMPA (*Libros, un modelo para armar*) to play on a popular title by Julio Cortázar.

This brilliant response of the twenty-something year old directors -- Milagros Saldarriaga, Tania Silva, and Jaime Vargas Luna -- linked publishing to pedagogy, by teaching teachers how to use the books to turn teenagers into lovers/users of literature. LUMPA treats texts as incentives for endless creativity in a program that offers workshops for high-school language and literature classrooms along with an instructor’s manual organized along the standard classroom concepts used in Peru and in much of Latin America to teach literature in the most conventional way. Sections of the manual are dedicated to author, plot and characters, in order to cover standard material and thereby to allay teachers’ anxieties about adopting an unconventional approach. But instead of merely summarizing a plot, students are challenged to distinguish plot from the story, to recognize that a narrator may be lying (what a clever way to underline the nature of fiction) and to choose an alternative narrator from among the characters of a story. They are encouraged to re-write demanding classics or new stories from an alternative point of view, from different times and places, and in various genres. Literally becoming authors of variations that compete with the found text, students master the technical and conceptual materials they play with. Mastery of lessons in literature follows from creative play, because choosing to change a text requires readers

to focus on the existing details and mechanisms in order to contest them with alternatives.

During the summer that followed the Cartonera workshops at Harvard, from June through August 2007, Cultural Agents explored Sarita's pedagogical lead and developed a multi-arts approach that incorporates our experience with the "Youth Arts" course to recognize all arts as potential media for interpreting literature. The arts, after all, do more than "express" ideas or emotions; they interpret the world and other works of art. Northrop Frye famously quipped that it was by no means clear if mimesis means imitation of nature; but he was quite sure that it means imitation of other arts.¹⁵ In our variation on Lima's lessons, readings of a literary text explode with ever renewed energy through a broad sampling of different art forms, so that participants are absorbed in the passionate activity of art-making and hardly suspect that they are learning difficult texts and sophisticated interpretive concepts.

That first summer, we benefitted from an "Idea Translation" grant received by one of our associates, Nathalie Galindo, from Harvard's Professor David Edward's class on creative entrepreneurship, "Idea Translation," Engineering Sciences 147. With this seed money, Nathalie and Emily Ullman, who had volunteered her talents as teacher and actor, launched three pilot programs in the Boston area (with the Brazilian American Association in Framingham, the Boys and Girls Club in Chelsea, and Zumix out-of school music center in East Boston). The lessons we taught and learned have by now developed into a replicable program in higher order literacy that adjusts with the site-specific sensitivity we learned from Boal's Theater of the Oppressed. Local arts and artists along with texts chosen by the instructors (as long as they are moderately difficult and slow down perception by breaking out of habitual uses, to remember Shklovsky's formalist characteristics of art) provide the elements of the particular program. We bring an approach, as Boal did, and an invitation to play.

At a time when reading and writing skills, along with critical judgment, are in profound crisis throughout underserved areas of public education, it is crucial to recover an interest in reading, in literature, in arts in general and thereby in creative living. The Paper Picker Press is one initiative that facilitates intellectual curiosity and self-authorizing interventions among today's children and youth so that they can make judicious choices for themselves and for fellow citizens. The program teaches teachers and artists to facilitate workshops for young people by training them in model workshops. By participating in training workshops that interpret a challenging piece of literature through painting, dance, music, theater, costumes, etc, instructors can learn to expect -- and to recognize -- original work among students instead of mistaking originality as simply wrong answers.

A sample activity can help to make the point. The list below briefly describes several possibilities which you are welcome to try. But here let's consider again the portraits-by-partners exercise for its pedagogical opportunities. When participants see that each image of the same character they have sketched is different from all the rest, they sense that divergence is not necessarily a sign of error but may owe to other factors which they will later identify as each artist's interpretation and skill level. This tolerance for divergence will come as a surprise to participants who had assumed that only convergent answers are right, one per question. In fact, when the "gallery" conversation begins, participants are usually reluctant to note that their own oral description doesn't quite fit their partner's visual interpretation. The most common first response to divergence is to deny or to diminish it, in a sincerely friendly effort to cover over the difference lest disagreement offend the partner.

Here is what often happens: Once the sketches are hung in the “gallery,” the facilitator chooses a portrait and asks who drew it, also who supplied the description. “Is this the figure you had imagined while you were describing it to your partner?” Almost always, the first response is yes, even after the facilitator probes the alleged convergence on a concept or a details and gets a reluctant acknowledgment of differences: a missed communication, liberties taken, an expression of surprise about the skill level of the “artist” who either outdid or didn’t quite capture particular features of the description. The next questions are for the sketching partner, to determine the motives for certain flourishes or adjustments. Invariably these will bring up admissions of a preference for a particular color or other detail that pre-existed the reading, or a reference to a recent event in one’s life, and perhaps an embarrassed confession that drawing was never their strong suit. With good humor, the facilitator can then re-signify the lack of skill displayed by a simple stick-figure portrait as a decision to produce “conceptual art” in order to underline the non-competitive purpose of the activity and to honor the interpretive contribution despite the underdeveloped technique. In many cases, partners will stubbornly defend the convergence of their work, unwilling to hurt the feelings of a well-meaning collaborator, even when their differences produce interest and laughter. “You think that’s what fat means? I meant really fat!”

Only after the interviews recur with several more portraits does the group begin to anticipate divergences between the partners and to enjoy the traces of each person’s particularity. At that point, with the recognition that variations are both plausible and pleasant, participants realize that “correct” answers multiply by the number of interpreters, and exponentially by the number of each one’s interpretations. The conclusion amounts to an appreciation for the uncommon genius of each participant. Variety – even miscommunication and disagreement -- enriches the experience of the text and readers learn to admire one another, not for their sameness but for their unpredictable differences that nevertheless communicate the same character. The facilitators in training can now engage students through their divergent intelligences and they can free instruction from the intellectually crippling constraint of simple and solitary correct answers.

Play with me:

Children and youth love to learn but hate to be taught, so they learn best through guided play with materials, including literary material.¹⁶ I am convinced that this is true for adults too, since life-long playfulness distinguishes human beings from other living species.¹⁷ Learning through creativity is not new to education. Over a century ago in Italy, Maria Montessori formulated an arts-based and project-centered pedagogy that managed to educate poor and intellectually limited (today’s special education) children so well that, without teaching for testing, they scored above average grades in national standardized exams. Like later reformers, including Brazilian Paolo Freire, French Jacques Rancière and a North American rogue teacher like Albert Cullum who found little institutional support,¹⁸ Montessori’s guiding principle was respect for the self-educating capacity of students. Teachers show; they don’t explain: “The task of the teacher becomes that of preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, spread over a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference.”¹⁹ Sequels to her approach or parallel projects, such as the Waldorf Schools²⁰ and the Reggio Emilia project in early childhood education²¹ confirm Montessori’s evidence of superior results through arts-based education, even for challenged children. It is clear that engaging children in creativity demonstrably enhances their disposition to learn a range of intellectual and social skills by cultivating concentration and discipline through

pleasurable, even passionate, practices. Yet Montessori and Waldorf schools are now more common among privileged classes than in public classrooms. Skeptics about the declared mission of public schools to educate active citizens, as opposed to preparing obedient workers, will not be surprised by this uneven arrangement of resources and philosophies.²² Poor districts, overcrowded classrooms, and deflated expectations all conspire against children's creative explorations.

To compound the problem, beleaguered public school teachers under pressure to produce passing grades on standardized tests suppose that engaging artistic play is a distraction from academic work rather than its best vehicle. They stick to basic skills through a first-things-first approach: first the factual details of a text and then interpretation, if there is any time left. Teaching for testing this way produces unhappy pressures for everyone. Administrators, teachers, students, and parents all generally surrender to a perceived requirement to focus on facts. This overly cautious approach has cost success to children who remain disengaged instead of experiencing the pleasure that sustains learning, and to both children and teachers who fail to perform well on standardized tests, because the tests measure more than data retrieval. Ironically, directed play is precisely what would bring the scores up. Conventional approaches to literacy can't succeed, because young people who don't explore creative interpretation score badly on questions of interpretation and therefore on ratings of higher order, critical, thinking. As in Montessori's Italy and Freire's Brazil, The United States and other states worldwide need to address the poverty of imagination in underprivileged schools that resentfully submit to standardized testing, where teachers have been understandably risk-averse.

The Paper Picker Press recovers some lessons in creative learning and invents others for a targeted literacy program. The fundamental principle is to encourage students to use literary masterpieces as grist for their own creative mills. As Leonardo Bruni recommended to students when Renaissance humanism was first formulating a curriculum that would last for five hundred years, great writers are our best guides. "Read only those books written by the best and most esteemed authors of the Latin language, and avoid works which are written poorly and without distinction, as if we were fleeing from a kind of ruin and destruction of our natural talents."²³ Secular classics became tool kits that offer up useful vocabulary, clever grammatical turns and a knack for literary figures. Today those classics include modern and contemporary works. The Paper Picker Press has used pages by Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Toni Morrison, Ray Bradbury, Maxine Hong Kingston, Víctor Hernández Cruz, Rabinath Tagore, Octavio Paz, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Mayra Santos Febres, Julio Cortázar, among other masters. Students exercise their critical faculties both as creators and as connoisseurs. They poach elements from the classics for their own writing; and they also learn to admire the found text along with the variations of their peers. Facilitators show what to do; they don't tell students what lessons to derive from the creative practices. The students themselves are encouraged to derive meanings from a workshop, for example in painting portraits of a character whose visual image changes with each iteration, or from a performance of human sculptures that represent literary figures of a shared text. To explain activities to students who have already experienced them is to pre-empt their interpretive capacities. I learned from my Montessori trained daughter that pre-emptive explanation, "stealing one's learning," is the dreaded error in this child-centered pedagogy; it is a well known danger there, but seldom experienced because of its magnitude.

Teachers or *maestros* are not explainers, but those who show or indicate, as Spanish makes clear in the verbs *enseñar* and *mostrar*. To teach is to show. [Jacques

Rancière develops this, Montessori and Freire-like, non-authoritarian and empowering, principle of education in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, a book-length biography of Jean Joseph Jacotot. The French Revolutionary professor of philosophy -- who urgently needed to leave France after the Restoration -- accepted a teaching position in Holland though he knew no Dutch. There, Jacotot found that his Dutch students could teach themselves French by pouring over a bilingual edition of a popular novel that he supplied.]²⁴ Our week-long training in the Paper Picker Press models the same respect for teachers and artists in training. First we facilitate an art-based interpretation and then invite reflections on the effects and on the pedagogical principles at work. The first few answers, however brilliant, will not exhaust the question. We wait for more reflection as an exercise in stretching the critical imagination and in patience with one's peers.

Some skeptics question the urgency of literacy training today, when communication depends increasingly on audiovisual stimuli. They argue that insisting on a literary grounding for culture will continue to plague society with asymmetrical performance and expectations, because socio-economically disadvantaged populations lack the background and the access to training in literature. On the other hand, they allege, audiovisual culture levels the field between the rich and the poor. Our response is to aim above the current base-line and to strive for a higher common denominator, because language skills remain the foundation for critical thinking, resourcefulness, and for psycho-social development. And levels of literacy continue to be reliable indices for poverty, violence and disease.²⁵ Without mastery of at least one spoken and written language, youth have little hope either of self-realization or of active citizenship.

Hip Hop Signifies Close Reading:

To favor training that downplays literature in the name of democracy is self-defeating; it reinforces unequal social structures by denying higher-order literacy training to economically disadvantaged youth. Therefore, rather than compromise the personal and inter-personal contributions of literary education by turning a skeptical ear to the centrality of reading and writing for personal and collective human development, the Paper Picker Press offers the educational contributions of good literature for everyone, no matter what cultural background or taste he or she may bring to the workshop. Some of the program's best facilitators include unlikely masters, from a conventional point of view. They are members of an Afro-Colombian hip hop collective called The Ayara Family. When Cultural Agents trained local artists and librarians to help facilitate a 2008 workshop in Bogotá's main library, the Ayaras emerged as our star instructors. No one understood better how to manipulate a metaphor, or how to appreciate a clever turn in the original text. [We used the first few pages of Colombia's classic, and difficult, *La vorágine* as our "raw material."²⁶] The Ayaras know that young people can turn the challenges of literary masters into dares to outdo the masterpieces through culturally specific, ironic, contemporary riffs. Riffing on found material is the stock in trade of rap (rhythm and poetry) as well as the spirit of graffiti visuals, urban choreography, musical mash-ups and theatrical improvisation. These adventures in artistic displacement show the hip hoppers' interpretive talents to advantage and prepare them to identify and to cultivate critical thinking by guiding the creativity of others, including younger people.

Experienced in violence prevention through the arts, the Ayaras know that artistic ingenuity is a powerful antidote to conflict, because art honors nonconformist energies by channeling hostility toward the construction of compelling new works. Otherwise, the hostility festers, aggressively. Aggression, we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, is natural in children and intense for teens. It is an energy that tests the environment,

starting with the way children test their parents, to see if they are sturdy, don't disappear, and worthy enough to survive the childish hostility and merit the child's love. This is Winnicott's formulation for psychic development; for him, advancing from hostility to love depends on the human propensity to play, that is to engage in symbolic destruction that hardly damages the objective real world, but on the contrary enhances the world with an aura of appreciation.²⁷ The Ayaras are a model "Cartonera Crew." By now they have added high order literary instruction to an array of hip hop activities and, with the support of the Banco de la República (Colombia's equivalent to the Federal Reserve Bank), the Collective facilitates literacy workshops in areas as isolated and underserved as Nariño and Amazonas as well as in the capital's biggest prison.²⁸

The popularity of rap in Colombia and throughout Latin America (as well as Africa) should be no surprise, since the Black Atlantic connects ports in the North and the South back to Africa. Seen as a rhizome, the international appeal of rap is less a phenomenon of U. S. cultural imperialism than of African reconquest. Far flung performance traditions of dueling and outdoing in duet -- irreverent repartee, *signifying* in the United States, *payadas* in Argentina, *debates musicales* in the Caribbean, *repentes* in Brazil²⁹ – all hint at underlying legacies of the African spirit that flashes through a range of musical and verbal genres. Melville J. Herskovits might have guessed at this north-south vector by 1941 when he showed the connections between U.S. black cultures and continuing practices in Africa; then Robert Farris Thompson tracked the ties in books that explore African-inspired genres from the U. S. south to the tango in the south of South America.³⁰

I've In this trans-Atlantic and inter-American context, is it uncanny or finally predictable that contemporary hip hop connects with a rather isolated folk tradition of performance and writing in Brazil's North East? *Literatura de cordel*, or literature on the clothesline, is literally the practice of hanging poems, rhymed news articles, musical challenges, and illustrative woodcuts, on a rope, sometimes with clothes pins, in order to inform, entertain, and entice the public to purchase a copy of the work. A Brazilian journalist comments on the connection:

always been impressed with the strange relationship that exists between North Eastern improvisational poetry and American rap. They are separated by cultural kilometers, temporal distances, improbably societies for singing the same verses. Nevertheless, they are peers, almost twins. In rap, and in improvised "*repente*," the verse is a flash, almost a haiku; it follows a fixed, catchy rhythm that stays in your head; the lyrics are clever, on target, and the listener's mental agility doesn't quite follow all of the words in the song. When "*repente*" poems go on paper, the paper goes onto the clothesline, which in the past might have been called the major newspaper of the North East. People from the Sertao knew what was happening thanks to the popular "news-line." They say that when Gétúlio died, it wasn't until the *cordelistas* hung up the news that people found out.³¹

The multi-arts approach to interpretation that we develop in the Paper Picker Press is as hard-wired in the *cordelista* tradition as it is in the culture of hip hop. North East Brazilian poets are often also the guitar-strumming performers of the improvised verse that they can later polish and publish "on line," the clothes line. At the same artists can double or triple as woodcut masters who call attention to their poetry with clever visual images, sometimes simply to spread news of important events. But other times, they take full freedom as spinners of fiction. J. Borges, for example, is both an accomplished

woodcut artist and a poet who teases an interviewer with a frank formulation of fiction: “I lie. Let’s face it; lies are a quality of all creativity.”³²

Literatura de cordel is one tradition that the Paper Picker Press appropriates for creative literacy training, thanks to lessons from ArtsLiteracy.³³ When participants are invited to ask a question of the text – not respond to someone else’s question about what’s already there, but to ask about tangents in story, the way curious children ask when adults read to them – they also get a chance to write an answer, some logical connection or a flight of fantasy or both. Then the extra pieces of narrative are hung on a clothesline for instant publication, which simply means making public. Each writer can then read the silly or inspired imaginings of other writers, and admire the range of interpretations the group has produced. People will often take pains to write beautifully, or at least legibly, to make their work welcome to passers by. But writing is not the first activity of the Paper Picker Press. In fact, the workshop does not even presume that participants can read, much less write. Instead, the *Cartonera* can capture the attention of even illiterate young people, and older ones, by activating another and better known Latin American tradition: the Reader of the tobacco factory.

Workshops begin with making manual art, eyes and hands and brain all engaged in making something tangible. The bustle of activity starts at high energy as people choose materials, cut cardboard, put together book covers and begin to decorate them with markers, glitter, buttons, bottle caps, string, etc. Then, as a voice begins to read out loud, the bustle quiets down, and participants make audible efforts at concentrating on the oral text. Everyone is engaged by the reading, even if the piece is difficult. One sign of engagement is the common request to hear the piece again, while people continue to pour over their manual work, attend to aesthetic detail, and take care not to distract the reader. This scene simulates an older practice, as venerable as clothesline literature, but as I said, far more widely used. Still alive in Cuba, this intentional throwback to an earlier period elsewhere retrieves a good Latin American practice that is worth reviving.³⁴ Reading challenging material aloud to people absorbed in fine manual labor repeats a workers’ innovation that recognizes literature as an object of popular desire and as a foundation for social interaction.

Readers in tobacco factories were popular throughout the Spanish Caribbean during the nineteenth and at least half of the twentieth centuries; and the practice rippled into workshops in other cigar centers such as Tampa, Florida and New York City. The cigar “factory” was practically a popular university for tobacco rollers. Their silent and precise work rolling tobacco into expensive cigars produced great value for owners and therefore gave workers significant power to press demands in negotiations with factory owners who could not easily replace good tobacco rollers. One standard and non-negotiable demand was that cigar makers be allowed to hire a professional reader and to select the reading materials. All the workers, literate and mostly illiterate, would engage with both classic and cutting age literature from fiction to newspapers and novels, sometimes including incendiary political treatises as they listened and later discussed the readings. Here is Jesús Colón’s memoir of a factory in Cayey, Puerto Rico:

“There were about one hundred and fifty cigarmakers, each one sitting in front of tables that looked like old-fashioned rolltop desks, covered with all kinds of tobacco leaves. The cigarmakers with their heads bent over their work listened intently. In the vast hall of the factory, I looked for the source of the voice to which they were listening. There was a man sitting on a chair on a platform. . . . He was called "El Lector" - the Reader. His job was to read to the cigarmakers while they were rolling cigars. The workers paid fifteen to twenty-five cents per

week each to the reader. In the morning, the reader used to read the daily paper and some working class weeklies or monthlies that were published or received from abroad. In the afternoon he would read from a novel by Zola, Balzac, Hugo, or from a book by Kropotkin, Malatesta or Karl Marx, Famous speeches like Castelar's or Spanish classical novels like Cervantes' Don Quixote were also read aloud by 'El Lector.'"³⁵

Civic Self-efficacy:

The Paper Picker Press has worked in after-school programs, summer programs, and out of school with young people at all levels, from kindergarteners to graduate students in the Boston area, New York City, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Argentina, and the Dominican Republic. Among the benefits of the program, the most significant is surely its effective development of literacy among youth to stimulate both lower (data driven) and higher-order (interpretive) thinking. But the corollary effects of free-thinking, imaginative alterations and admiration for the work of models and peers are also worth appreciating as contributions toward broad civic development. Consider the accomplishments of cigar rollers, for example. Well read and deliberative, whether or not they could read themselves, tobacco workers were largely responsible for José Martí's otherwise unlikely success in organizing a cross-class alliance of Cuban exiles to help win independence in the homeland.³⁶ Cigar rollers are also the first movers of organized labor in the United States, in good part because Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants brought *lectores* with them to U.S. tobacco factories.³⁷ We sometimes forget that Samuel Gompers, a founder of the AFL and its president from 1886 until his death in 1924,³⁸ was first the leader of the Cigar Makers International Union and that he worked closely with Caribbean colleagues.³⁹

Today's "readers" and arts instructors in student literacy workshops can invite independent deliberation and interpretation, like the *lectores* did in tobacco workshops, to showcase the self-reliance and resourcefulness that trains young people to become active citizens. And sites that engage artists to help educate their youth identify challenging literature and the arts as social resources, thereby acknowledging that creativity is a foundation for free societies. Without creativity, the meaning of citizenship loses a sense of active participation, because participation depends on the freedom to adjust laws and practices in light of ever new practical and ethical challenges. Without art, citizenship would shrink to a notion of compliance that considers society to be a closed text that we read for facts about "what is," rather than reading the world as a work in progress that invites us to re-interpret and to explore the "what if." Towards that constructive exploration, the following objectives direct our program:

1. To encourage ownership and authorship of the texts, participants learn to interpret creatively. Ownership of language and authorship of narrative empower young people to become active agents of their own lives and to participate in public life.
2. To enable young people to connect stories with their own lived experience. The range of material is limitless if participants re-write literature through their own imaginary frames. This way, the broad range of cultural production remains open to youth.
3. To reveal that no text is immune to creative intervention, since reading necessarily intervenes in a text and produces as many variations as there are readers. Literature is seen as a dynamic negotiation rather than an imposition.
4. To demonstrate that reading and writing are two moments of the same

process, so that reading cannot be passive but instead affords opportunities for creative co-authorship.

5. To experience language itself as an artistic medium, a trigger for the range of other artistic activities, since the same literary text can serve as inspiration for painting, dance, theater, music, printing, etc.

Conventional teaching has favored convergent and predictable answers to specific questions as the first and sometimes the only way to engage young people in learning. This cautious approach privileges data retrieval or “lower order thinking.” Critical and creative “higher order thinking,” on the other hand, has seemed like an extra and sometimes infinitely delayed luxury for struggling students. But this first-things-first procedure that gets stuck in the given facts without exploring possible interpretations has been stifling for students because it rarely reaches the transition to a second level that would develop their mental agility. Paradoxically, as we have learned, a lower order focus on factual information seldom leads to critical thinking, while attention to detail *can follow* from higher order creative manipulations that locate particular data to manipulate in the found material.⁴⁰

Think about what happens when we engage youth to treat texts as pre-texts for improvising alternative plots, for re-framing characters, or changing the register of language. The challenge to change a text leads young readers to engage their critical faculties to explore the structure and details of the original text so that they can intervene or create alternatives. Critical readers in training learn to mine the original piece for lexical, grammatical, and structural, elements in order to replace and to redesign existing arrangements. Original elements become dramatically visible for young iconoclasts who read with a creative purpose, demystifying literature into usable stuff that can be appropriated in ways that make practically any text “relevant.” There is no need to select customized reading materials and thereby to limit the exposure of particular readers to appropriate texts, because youth can authorize themselves to customize their own irreverent versions of the original. Young creators develop mastery of a text so that they can refuse its ultimate authority.

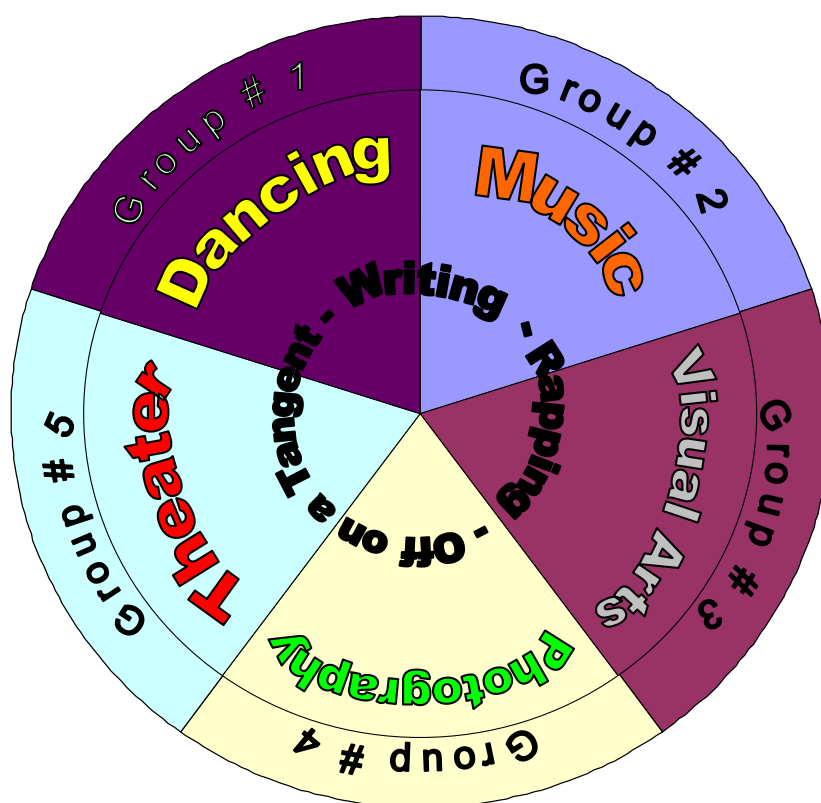
Our approach in the Paper Picker Press assumes the risks and the rigor inherent in any creative process. It offers an antidote to conventional hierarchies of learning that begin bottom-up, identifying data and waiting for mastery before ascending to interpretive creativity. Mastery hardly ever comes that way, as students get bored and stay stuck on the ground floor of learning. Instead of starting from the bottom, the Paper Picker Press starts from the top, initiating youth into the apex of creative interpretation as an incentive to plumb the details that will enable compelling variations on found material or pre-texts.

Implementation:

The Paper Picker Press is not a detailed recipe for implementation; it is a toolkit to construct a customized program. Years ago, Freire warned us against pedagogical packages that urge innovation and then deliver exhaustive instructions to follow. Instead, we train instructors to liberate their own creativity through variations on activities that we have developed, and through their own new experiments. Youth-leaders and collaborating artist-instructors need to “own” their particular version of the program in order to model the independence and good humor about mistakes that we encourage among youth. In that spirit we continue to take liberties with existing practices and to generate new activities with each new site and every artist who has donated his or her talents to contributing a new art of interpretation.

Ideally, creative collaborations throughout the ten-week session of the Paper Picker Press will include classroom teachers, each assigned to one group of students, and artists who rotate through the classrooms to bring both technical expertise and variety to each group. If resources are too limited to engage artists in addition to the classroom teachers, the teachers themselves can create a collaboration that pools their particular talents to vary the arts employed in class. Three to five teachers who adopt the Paper Picker Press can plan to rotate among the classrooms in order to direct the particular activities in which they excel. This arrangement satisfies the principle of artistic variety and exposes the students to several adult mentors without incurring the costs and administrative complexity of hiring another team of artists. In either case -- the ideal collaborations among teachers and local artists or the effective compromise of teacher collaborations -- we train the instructors together during a week-long workshop in order to learn from one another and to model the opportunities for admiration that we will share with students.

The compelling reason to work with a distribution of arts is to make good on the principle of “multiple intelligences,” coined by Howard Gardner who emphasized visual arts rather than the range of creative practices, and to develop each youth with attention to his or her particular talents.⁴¹ Once a young person is acknowledged as someone who can paint, or rap, dance, or act, etc., he/she gains the recognition and self-esteem that encourage the risk in other arts. Healthy risk-taking is the necessary bridge to bring the youth to reading and writing. Perhaps he or she can thrive as an adult without mastering one or another of the arts in our workshop. But the skills of literacy, critical thinking, persuasion, and deliberation are necessary for the development of each youth; and they are basic for any commitment to social justice.



Sample Activities:

Warm-ups. These are ludic exercises designed to relax inhibitions and create a core spirit of trust and cooperation among participants. Many of the exercises are described in Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, New York: Routledge, 1992 as well as in the *Habla* website: <http://www.habla.org/es/blog/?p=14>.

Book-making. Even before any literature appears in the program, participants begin to make book covers by choosing recycled materials prepared for them, or brought in by participants. They design ways to intervene in printed/used cardboard as a preamble for intervening in printed texts. The handiwork engages students in design challenges and also enhances their attention once an oral reading begins.

Reading aloud. A facilitator reads the chosen text in a clear and moving voice while participants continue to make their individual books. The act of reading aloud while others listen intently as they engage in manual labor has a long and distinguished tradition throughout the Caribbean in the practice of cigar manufacture. Skilled workers could insist with factory owners that readers were free to read even revolutionary tracts during work hours, simply because the labor of good tobacco rollers was irreplaceable. Recent studies have corroborated the relationship between heightened levels of attention to speech and manual activities, overturning conventional assumptions that students are inattentive when they play with handiwork.⁴²

Question the text. After hearing the text read, the facilitator may ask participants to develop a question to ask of the text, signaling that the literature is the object of investigation, not the youth. Asking a question of the text also reveals that it is a product of decisions to include some details, and only suggest others; the piece

becomes vulnerable to manipulation as soon as participants notice that the story could have been told in different ways. Perhaps an important detail is missing from the text, or maybe an inconsistency arises. Instead of putting students on the defensive, by asking if they have understood or noticed relevant information, this activity puts the text on trial and invites participants to require more information.

Intertext. After participants formulate a question of the text, and share the questions orally, the facilitator invites the young writers to respond to their own questions, or to adopt another question, producing an interpolated text that develops what had been a fuzzy or enticing opportunity in the original text.

Literature on the clothesline. Borrowing from a nineteenth century tradition especially popular in Brazil where poor poets had no other way to sell their work but to hang copies in the Public Square to be bought by passers by, participants hang their intertexts on a clothesline with clothespins for instant “publication.” The effects of displaying one’s own work and also reading the work of peers include pride in a good piece of writing, greater development of interpretive possibilities, and also admiration for others.

Portraits, back to back, an activity learned from LUMPA. Participants sit back to back while one describes a character from the text that all had heard in the oral reading and the other draws the description. After 10 minutes, they change roles. When each participant has drawn a portrait, we create a gallery and invite participants to the opening talk. Each participant is asked if his or her description was well executed by the partner. The results are always a combination of convergence and divergence, because each participant is actively interpreting as he or she describes, and also as he or she draws. This observation stimulates reflection on the relationship between reading and interpretation, shared experiences and personal differences, and in general social justice in a democracy that negotiates equal rights with cultural and personal differences.

Rap, Rhythm and Poetry, the contestatory energy and non-conformist wit of hip hop culture is a natural for youthful appropriations of classic texts. Spoken word artists are unfailingly the guides to explorations of literary figures and indirect communication that produces estrangement, a favorite signature of art in formalist criticism. One rapper commented on his own use of metaphor that it didn’t give up the meaning too easily and therefore slowed down communication with the pleasurable tension of a riddle.

Movie music score. One way to develop interpretation along with music appreciation in the Paper Picker Press is to invite participants to develop a music score for the film they are preparing from the story used in the program. The facilitator may play about six one-minute fragments of either varied or related musical genres and ask participants to identify particular words or literary figures that should be accompanied by the musical fragment. Students will strain to listen to details and may find unsuspected resonances between elements that elicit the same musical assignation among the listeners. The very effort to enlist the music for one’s own score encourages active listening, so basic to work in social justice. With interest and curiosity aroused about the musical fragments, the facilitator may offer some information and background for the pieces heard.

Point of view. Photography is an available technique in any area where participants may be able to use even a cellular phone in teams of two or three. Invite them to take pictures from a particular character’s point of view, or to compose references to a theme. Then send the photos electronically to an email address, or download digital photos, to project them onto a screen for viewing and commentary. The activity makes lessons in perspective and composition immediately available for

visual analysis and translates easily into otherwise difficult concepts in literary and social criticism. Without a notion of multiple points of view that one can occupy, social debates do not progress beyond signaling one's differences from another person.

Literary Figures Alive. Image theater is a practice developed by Augusto Boal to create human sculptures that capture a difficult dynamic and freeze it long enough to reflect on the conflict. The technique builds dramatic plots in forum theater for conflict resolution. But in the Paper Picker Press it can also be an invitation to embody literary figures in groups of three to five participants. Have them form groups and instruct the participants to locate an interesting literary figure in the text [the terms metaphor, metonymy, synecdoque, simile, etc can be offered later to refine readings]. This activity is training for persuasive and effective communication. The Classics defined rhetoric as the political "art of persuasion." Often a participant or two in the group will not know what a literary figure is, but after working in the design the sculpture that companions identify, they all learn to continue identifying more figures. After each sculpture is staged, participants from the other groups attempt to "read" the figure by locating it in the text. This "perform and response" activity turns a possibly abstract lesson in social rhetoric into entertainment that can be sustained long enough for everyone to masters the power of rhetorical devices.

Forum Theater. Although this technique is less text-specific than our other activities, we often smuggle Boal's Forum Theater into the program as an opportunity to teach a creative and very effective exercise in conflict resolution. Apparently intractable problems are located in the text, and yet the very act of locating them indicates that readers recognize the problem and may well sense a local and intimate connection. Then skits are prepared to represent each of the two or three problems chosen by groups of students. After each skit is performed, the facilitator invites the spect-actors in the audience to intervene, one after another, in ways that can derail the tragedy. The cumulative effect of multiple interventions demonstrates, *pace* Aristotle whose intention was to diffuse rebelliousness, that the socially active definition of tragedy is a lack of imagination. Active citizens create variations on stage that avoid disaster.

Grandmother Tells the Story. The Paper Picker Press can seamlessly develop into a bilingual arts program by adding activities that depend on a language other than the one used in the target classroom text. Since the program multiplies approaches to interpretation, it will not seem foreign to ask participants to re-tell the story from the point of view and the language of a non-English [or Spanish, etc.] speaker. Students will display their virtuosity by performing well in another target language; they will validate the contributions of family members and/or neighbors who don't speak the hegemonic language and who may be illiterate. Language specific genres of speech can enrich the range of interventions. For example, a story can morph into the popular poetry of *décimas*, or *rancheras*, etc.

Off on a Tangent instructs participants to browse widely in libraries, bookstores, homes, cultural centers, etc to find a literary sample that can in some way be related to the core text of the workshop. If the connection is far-fetched, participants will engage in the amusing mental agility of justifying the link. The only specific instruction is that the found text have at least one word that the youth imagines his or her classmates do not know. This activity is the only activity repeated in each of the five modules to encourage participants to read widely among challenging works. By the end of the ten week program, we will have trained curious readers who enjoy a challenge.

Intervention is the theme of each activity, everything from changing the look of used cardboard to interpolating an intertext and adjusting the course of a play. It is also

the principle of activities in social justice, enabled by the combination of risk taking and rigor that undergirds all aspects of the Paper Picker Press.

A lo Chalco:

Chalco is one of the poorest neighborhoods of Mexico City, far enough away from the center along the traffic-clogged highway to Puebla to feel isolated as well as arid most of the year, and inundated the rest of the time. There, migrants from several indigenous and mestizo communities settle alongside one another in precarious constructions and arrangements. Though the government of the Federal District has begun to construct an administrative infrastructure in Chalco, the unpaved streets are still lined with makeshift dwellings put together from any available materials, including cardboard. The arts of recycling are no news here. But before the Cartonera came to town, no one had yet made books from found material.

In July 2008, José Luis Falconi and I – Directors of Cultural Agents – were hosted by Worldfund to train a team of educators in Chalco’s admirably dedicated but rather rigid Catholic school “Mano Amiga.” Mostly local artists worked with us here, as elsewhere, to insure sustainability of the collaborations they establish with the regular teaching staff of a school or an after-school setting; but we also invited Pedro Reyes to create a new activity for the Cartonera. Preparation of the block-type poster he developed with students of Mano Amiga is now featured on the cover of the Cultural Agents brochure. Pedro had worked with Cultural Agents before – including the exhibit “*ad usum*” inspired by the creative Mayor Mockus of Bogotá and shown at the Carpenter Center at Harvard University during the Fall of 2007 before it showed at the Americas Society in New York. Pedro continues the inspiration now by inventing brilliant works of art-solutions to apparently intractable problems. See for example his “Palas por pistolas” (Swords into plowshares) in the same brochure.⁴³

Cultural Agents had brought the Cartonera to other sites in Mexico, including the Museo Amparo in Puebla and the University of Guadalajara. We had also collaborated with the Secretary of Education in Puerto Rico, where Maestro Antonio Martorell was part of the Cultural Agents team of facilitators for the week-long workshop, with Caribbean University in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, invited by resident artist Anaida Hernández. We trained teachers and artists in Bogotá’s main library, the Luis Angel Arango where workshops resumed in August 2009; and even before we ventured out, Cultural Agents implemented the Paper Picker Press in six struggling grade schools in the Boston-Alston area, invited through Harvard’s Achievement Success Initiative in collaboration with Boston’s City Government. Most recently, a city-wide project in “Culture for Change” engaged Cultural Agents to develop the Paper Picker Press for youth at risk in several sites throughout Boston.

In Puebla, the Fundación Amparo hosted the week’s training especially to support its Proyecto Roberto in developing communities. At Puebla’s beautiful Museo Amparo, we benefitted from the participation of two distinguished artists, Paloma Torres (incidentally a student of Martorell) and Betsabé Romero who invented new activities to take advantage of the admirable pre-Colombian collection at the Museo; and we enjoyed the collaboration of Puebla’s office of public education. The enthusiastic responses to the ten week implementation at the Museo Amparo that followed the training and lasted through Fall semester of 2008 include a city initiative to expand into new sites of the school system and also to establish Cartoneras in market places to benefit residents at large. Similarly, at the University of Guadalajara, the privileged precinct of the Arts Academy was an ideal site for training already sophisticated arts educators. At the following International Book Fair in Guadalajara,

November-December 2008, we directed a workshop for over 120 (literacy coaches) with generous help from Cultural Agents abroad, including Mayor Antanas Mockus, Angela Pérez, Cultural Coordinator for Colombia's Banco de la República, and Doris Moromisato, Peruvian poet and Director of the International Book Fair in Lima. Sequels planned for the City of Guadalajara include an expanded workshop at the impressive children's museum, the Trompo mágico, to scale up the program for area schools. But nowhere has the success of the Cartonera been more stunning than in Chalco.

Maybe it is the intense dedication of the Director of the Mano Amiga School, Lilia Garelli, and of her devoted faculty that determined the exceptional achievement of the Cartonera in Chalco. Maybe it is also the refreshing contrast of a creative – even iconoclastic – approach to teaching in an otherwise traditional Catholic school where convergent responses had been the standard value, and where divergent responses tended to be unsolicited and undervalued. In fact, when on the first day of the week-long workshop we asked the ten teachers and ten artists to say what came to mind after listening to “The Two Kings and the Two Labyrinths” by Jorge Luis Borges, all but one gave the moral of the story, satisfied that their coherence was a sign of understanding. The only outlier, a young Oaxacan painter who took time to warm up to the group, mused refreshingly, “I wonder what color is the sand?” But by the end of the week everyone was taking brilliant risks and multiplying the possibilities of the one-page story. Later, throughout the ten-week implementation and up to the present they have been inspiring innovation in their students. [See the weekly photographic reports from Chalco on the culturalagents.org website.] The latest development is to collaborate with the nearby public high school to integrate the Cartonera for youth who can help facilitate the program for children. Maybe too the success there owes to the everyday practices of recycling in a poor but resourceful neighborhood making the Cartonera a natural and giving this scarcity-induced resourcefulness a new legitimacy as art and interpretation.

In her delicate, almost girlish but unflinching voice, Director Garelli would typically address a challenge that required more resources than those available. Good results would follow from deciding to do whatever was needed “a lo Chalco,” Chalco style. Room darkening window shades were an out of the question luxury, but dark crepe paper worked just as well and looked elegant against the clean brick of the new school building. Salaries for five artists, in addition to the five teachers to be paid in these extra-hour collaborations, stretched the school's purse to the tearing point, so two mothers of children at school were invited to donate their skills in photography and in music to complete the design of multiple arts that rotate through the classrooms from third to seventh grades. However one describes the combination of personal, economic and pedagogical factors, they came magically, or providentially, together in “Amiga Cartonera” at Mano Amiga. The participating children too brought the Cartonera to new levels of performance; they would ignite interest in literature among their neighborhood friends and teach the love of reading to brothers and sisters at home as they played with interpretation, a multiplying effect we saw in Puebla too. In the words of one sixth-grader, “My imagination woke up more. Sometimes now, others look at me as if I have something funny in me. I have something inside that doesn't let me be, an active imagination. It was always there, but it woke up more. My thoughts are bigger now. The important thing is what someone carries inside them.”⁴⁴ At Mano Amiga, teachers and artists appropriated the iconoclastic spirit of the program to so admirable a degree that they continue to invent new activities. It is to date our most inspiring success for new developments of the Cartonera.

Among those developments are the pilot with Mexico's Ministry of Culture, Conaculta, starting in an urban arts center, the Faro de Oriente; the growing circuit of Colombia's hip hop collective, Familia Ayara, whose work throughout the country has already been mentioned; several sites in Boston – including the Institute for Contemporary Art, the Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center and the Puerto Rican cultural center of Villa Victoria; a collaboration with the Cambridge Young People's Project that will combine math literacy with higher order reading; and a major initiative in New York City, both in the Lower East Side and in the Museo del Barrio. With each new site, more teachers and artists learn to implement the program in schools and community centers and also to train new facilitators with the multiplier effect we have learned from *maestro* Augusto Boal. At this writing it is difficult to predict where the Cartonera will be when you read about it. But do check the culturalagents.org website for updates and for more invitations to join a workshop. Why not prepare some clean cardboard and keep it handy?

¹ The cooperative now diversifies into organic farming, and explores other fields.

² See Ksenia Bilbija and Paloma Celis Carbajal editors, *Akademia Cartonera: A Primer of Latin American Cartonera Publishers* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2009.)

³ <http://www.drik.net> for Shahidul Alam's project.

⁴ http://pioneersofchange.net/ventures/aina/document_view

⁵ Gil Noam of the Harvard Medical School and Daishon Mills of Boston Public Schools both direct the Leadership Institute, associated with PEAR.

⁶ www.extension.harvard.edu/2008-09/courses/syllabi/.../stare130.pdf

⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, in §§244–271 of *Philosophical Investigations*: The point is that a language in principle unintelligible to anyone but its inventor is impossible, and even for him or herself, because they could not establish meanings for the new signs.

⁸ Washington Cucurto, *1810, La Revolución de mayo vivida por los negros*. 2009, Emecé

⁹ *1810*, p. 11. Santi pegó un salto en su casa del Once de la calle Viamonte. “Cucu, pero si este texto es igualito al ‘Aleph,’ y este otro es igual a ‘Casa tomada’. Tenías razón cuando saliste a decir en las revistas que Borges era un corro.” Santiago revisaba las hojas y le temblaba la mano. ‘Cucu, este es un descubrimiento histórico: la literatura argentina es toda robada, es un chasco, un choreo infame.’”

¹⁰ *1810*, p. 189. “y otros clásicos argentinos que fueron escritos todos por descendientes de estos soldados negros. Es decir, una literatura negra, escrita por aburguesados y emblanquecidos descendientes de negros.”

¹¹ “Lean los futbolistas” <http://espndeportes-assets.espn.go.com/news/story?id=797885&s=fut&type=column>

¹² <http://www.ciacentro.org/>

¹³ See *¡Eloisa Cumbia!*, on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQ4tag3KMok>

¹⁴ See essay by Johana Kunin <http://johanakunin.blogspot.com/>.]The one in Cuernavaca, for example, is called simply “La cartonera” and dedicates itself to publishing local authors who would otherwise not have public outlets. News is just in (January 12, 2012) of a new Cartonera in Puerto Rico:

<http://atarrayacartonera.blogspot.com>

¹⁵ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 158.

¹⁶ Alison Gopnik, “Explanation as Orgasm,” in *Minds and Machines* Volume 8 , Issue 1 (February 1998): pp 101 - 118

¹⁷ Reference to Winnicott?

¹⁸ See *A Touch of Greatness*, <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/touchofgreatness/teacher.html>

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Montessori#cite_note-search.ebscohost.com-4

²⁰ Developed by [Rudolf Steiner](#) in 1919, Waldorf Education is based on a profound understanding of human development that addresses the needs of the growing child. Waldorf teachers strive to transform education into an art that educates the whole child—the heart and the hands, as well as the head.” http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/02_W_Education/index.asp

²¹ Cadwell, Louise B. *Bringing Learning to Life: A Reggio Approach to Early Childhood Education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2002.

Topal, C. Weisman, and Gandini, L. *Beautiful Stuff! Learning with Found Materials*. Worcester, MA: Davis Publications, Inc., 1999.

²² Basil Bernstein et al

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- ²³ In Robert E. Proctor, *Defining the Humanities: How Rediscovering a Tradition Can Improve Our Schools* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998) p. 6.
- ²⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*; translated, with an Introduction by Kristin Ross (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991; originally 1987)
- ²⁵ Oxfam report, other docs; UN?
- ²⁶ José Eustasio Rivera, 1924. See text: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/2561599/La-voragine-de-Jose-Eustasio-Rivera>; English version: Rivera, José Eustasio *The Vortex*. Earle K. James, translator (1928). Panamericana Editorial Ltda (2003).
- ²⁷ Winnicott “The use of an object in the context of *Moses and Monotheism*” 1969, p. 245. http://books.google.com/books?id=7NQvzH9p928C&pg=PA34&lpg=PA34&dq=Winnicott+play+drive&source=bl&ots=r1wJRbOvs&sig=6g-CRPhR8oufnEYGIg7TVCMSD8Q&hl=en&ei=jLLDSvW2B4_RIAesnKDIBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=9#v=onepage&q=&f=false
- ²⁸ “The workshop proved how important it is to encourage young people to read literature, because it will give them the bases for writing their own texts through which they express themselves.” <http://www.ayara.org/news/jun/eng>
- ²⁹ See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- ³⁰ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 1941; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the spirit: African and Afro-American art and philosophy*. (New York: Random House, 1983) and *Tango: The Art History of Love* (Pantheon Books, 2005).
- ³¹ Gétulio Vargas, President and dictator influential or in direct power from 1934 through 1954 when he committed suicide. http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.portalibahia.com.br/blogs/bahiaesporte/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/cordel1.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.portalibahia.com.br/blogs/bahiaesporte/%3Fp%3D347&usq=_jXDyKdklVmj_E4ltCcS8OyMYtco=&h=300&w=400&sz=21&hl=en&start=1&um=1&tbnid=uEjwnnjEIgQTFM:&tbnh=93&tbnw=124&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dliteratura%2Bde%2Bcordel%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DX%26um%3D1
- ³² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xuzg51HzzQ&feature=related>
- ³³ Formerly in Providence Rhode Island, ArtsLiteracy has regrouped as HABLA in Mérida Mexico. See <http://www.habla.org/en/about-us/merida-mexico/>
- ³⁴ BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8406641.stm> “Instead of canned music, many cigar factories in Cuba still rely on the ancient tradition of employing a reader to help workers pass away the day. Grisel Valdes-Lombillo, a matronly former school teacher, has been this factory's official reader for the past 20 years. In the morning she goes through the state-run newspaper Granma cover to cover. Later in the day she returns to the platform to read a book. It's a job Grisel Valdes-Lombillo claims she has never tired of. "I feel useful as a person, giving everyone a bit of knowledge and culture. "The workers here see me as a counsellor, a cultural adviser, and someone who knows about law, psychology and love." Once the newspaper reading is over workers have a say in what they would like to listen to. There's a mix of material ranging from classics to modern novels, like the Da Vinci Code, as well as the occasional self-help books and magazines. On the day I visited the factory Grisel was reading Alexandre Dumas' classic, the Count of Monte Cristo, a long-time favourite here.”
- ³⁵ Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (Mainstream Publishers: New York 1961).
- ³⁶ See Gerald E. Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898*. (Duke University Press, 1999)
- ³⁷ See Eric Arnesen, Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History. Pp. 333-334. http://books.google.com/books?id=zEWsZ81Bd3YC&pg=PA333&lpg=PA333&dq=samuel+gompers+to+bacco+cuban&source=bl&ots=zzV5W9t3KK&sig=VDIYNpnmEVF2FyAVKQXdupOkOc&hl=en&ei=Qd9ISueZNoeYtgefuZ3HBg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=7
- ³⁸ Gompers had a one-year hiatus of leadership from 1894-1895.
- ³⁹ Arnesen, 333. U.S. syndicalism develops, Arnesen says, at the “intersection between anarchist internationalism and Cuban nationalism.”
- ⁴⁰ See “Evaluation of Amparo Cartonera” by Liz Gruenfeld. P. 18: “Museo Amparo Program students were positively impacted in terms of attention to detail, reading comprehension, and student interpretation of stories, as seen by teachers and artists: “Students place more attention in details now. As with the “hypertexts,” they pay more attention to details in the story to be able to reverse the order of events and

say what else might happen instead”. Another teacher added that program students learned more words, resulting in a richer vocabulary.”

⁴¹ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁴² Reference from Klare Shaw

⁴³ <http://palasporpistolas.org/node/3>; see also Juan Enríquez Cabot, “Esperanza” in *Reforma*, May 12, 2008 p. 19.

⁴⁴ From the evaluation of Amiga Cartonera by Liz Gruenfeld, for Worldfund, February, 2009.