

## Pre-Texts: The Arts Interpret

Literature is recycled material, a pretext for making more art. I learned this distillation of lots of literary criticism in workshops with children. I also learned that creative and critical thinking are practically the same faculty since both take a distance from found material and turn it into stuff for interpretation. For a teacher of literature over a long lifetime, these are embarrassingly basic lessons to be learning so late, but I report them here for anyone who wants to save time and stress.

My trainer was twenty-two-year-old Milagros Saldarriaga, cofounder of an artisanal publishing house named for the childish and chaste patron saint of Andean migrants in Lima, Peru. Sarita Cartonera was the first cardboard publisher to replicate Eloísa Cartonera of Buenos Aires.<sup>1</sup> As far as I know, of the more than thirty Cartoneras that have by now followed Eloísa's lead in Latin America and Africa, only Sarita developed a feedback pedagogy to respond to a local challenge.<sup>2</sup> She had to. It was not enough to make beautiful and affordable books if the books were not in demand. Lima looked like distressed Buenos Aires, with its lack of money together with an abundance of good writers and poor paper pickers. Similar conditions promised similar success for the new Cartonera, until it found indifference to be an obstacle more stubborn than poverty. Unlike Buenos Aires, Lima doesn't read. As for economic crisis, it was chronic for Peru, not the shock it had been in Argentina. It would be foolish, Milagros told me, to invest in publishing without cultivating buyers for the books. So Sarita began to employ its charming products as prompts for producing more readers. What better way to use books!

Even during the economic crash of 2001, haunting photographs of Buenos Aires show people who stare longingly into bookstores and while away unproductive time with books in hand. Just a year after the economy fell apart and long before it recovered, Eloísa Cartonera was responding to the hunger for new reading material with an alternative to the failed book business. Poet Washington Cucurto and painter Javier Barilaro started to use and reuse available materials, pre-owned cardboard and new combinations of words. Cucurto is the stagey name for Santiago Vega who writes sports columns, poems, novels, business plans, and lately lectures for U.S. universities. Before the crash, he was also a publisher of poetry in a small operation that faced extinction after the price of materials skyrocketed. The solution was to recycle. At their storefront retreat from business as usual, the two artists began to buy cardboard from practically destitute paper pickers at almost ten times the price paid in recycling centers. Soon the *cartoneros* themselves came to the workshop to design and decorate cardboard books.

### <Fig 4.1>

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 followed by Mexican Margot Glantz, Chilean Diamela Eltit, and many others. By now, Harvard University's Widener Library has more than two hundred titles from Eloísa Cartonera, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, has more. Several of the former paper pickers in Buenos Aires and in Lima later found work in standard publishing houses; others returned to finish high school. All of them managed to survive the economic crisis with dignity. Today Eloísa is a cooperative of ten members who share the work and the income from book sales and from a recent venture in sustainable agriculture. One member, a chubby

woman affectionately called “la Osa” sells books on the street as if they were empanadas. Captivated by her hawking, distinguished journalist Tomás Eloy Martínez reported on her pitch to potential customers:<sup>3</sup> Do you want the latest in poetry? No, you don’t like poetry? Well, I recommend this memoir. Or, what about a reprint of an out-of-print classic?

Eloísa didn’t set out to be the model for an entire continent and beyond, but her example proved irresistible.<sup>4</sup> Rippling throughout Latin America and before reaching Africa or winning the Prince Claus Award for 2012, the Cartonera project reached Harvard University in March 2007 invited by Cultural Agents for a week of talks and workshops.<sup>5</sup> Javier from Eloísa taught us how to make beautiful books from discarded materials, and Milagros from Sarita showed us how to use them in the classroom.

### **Turn the Page**

This was a moment of truth for me and for other teachers of language and literature crouched on the floor cutting cardboard, and hunched over tables covered in scraps, tempera paints, scissors, string, and all kinds of decorative junk. Until then, the Cultural Agents Initiative had been drawn outward, attending to impressive top-down and bottom-up art projects that humanistic interpretation had been neglecting. We convened, and continue to convene, conferences, courses, and seminars on thinkers who inspire cultural agents of change, and on a broad range of artists who identify their work as interventions in public life.

Even before the major inaugural event of Augusto Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed workshops in December 2003, Cultural Agents 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 Martín Cohen’s Ph 15 in Ciudad Oculita on the fringes of Buenos Aires).<sup>6</sup> The series culminated in two conferences on “Visible Rights” (2006, 2007) where practitioners and theorists from Bogotá to Bangladesh reflected on teaching the art and business of photography from the perspective of children’s rights.<sup>7</sup> We brought Antanas Mockus to teach in 2004, between his second term as mayor and his second run for president of Colombia. A special event in 2005 showcased “The Jewish Latin Mix: Making Salsa” with a conference, master class, and concert that featured the mostly unsung collaborations among Latino and Jewish *salseros*, a testimony to the socially binding effects of making music together. Larry Harlow, Martín 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 enrolled in school. Muralists who direct crews of teenagers to occupy public space and to promote a pride of ownership also figured among our guest speakers. A project called “Cultures on the Air” featured indigenous language radio programmers as agents of autochthonous development in conferences of 2005 and 2009. Alfredo Jaar mentored a dozen Harvard and MIT graduate students in 2011–2012.<sup>8</sup> And a partnership with FONCA (Mexico’s equivalent to the NEA) celebrates a Mexican Cultural Agent of the Year.<sup>9</sup> A similar award partnership begins in 2012 with Colombia, where the National University in Bogotá and Medellín offers a doctoral concentration in Cultural Agents through the Faculty of Social Sciences.<sup>10</sup>

These activities represent other people’s work, and academics like me were taking note for the benefit of colleagues, students, and artists. Then—without anticipating it, but charmed and shamed by two undergraduate maestros at Harvard College—I made a move toward more direct participation. In 2006 Amar Bakshi and Proud Dzambukira had gone to Mussoorie, a small town in India where Amar’s mother was raised and where girls are expected to drop out of school by age nine. Determined to raise expectations and to increase opportunities for more fulfilling futures, the two young men established an NGO that hired local artists to offer after-school workshops. If the girls wanted to make art they had to stay in

school. The almost immediate and sustained success of “Aina Arts” in India justified expanding the project to Proud’s native Zimbabwe by the following year.<sup>11</sup>

Keeping children in school by brokering art lessons was the kind of cultural agency I could manage. This was a wake-up call to direct action. I understood that agency doesn’t require genius or depend on particular professions. It can be a part of modest but mindful lives, my own for example. I am a teacher, after all, and the work of education is urgent almost everywhere, including my university-rich area where poor neighborhood public schools face escalating dropout rates and increasing violence. So I developed a course called Youth Arts for Social Change with Boston’s Leadership Institute for after-school instructors.<sup>12</sup> The course became a regular offering at Harvard’s Extension School, engaging local artists (in dance, music, painting, theater, photography, etc.) to train teachers in creative techniques for the classroom, any classroom.<sup>13</sup> This was to be my culminating effort as a cultural agent, appropriating lessons I had learned from resourceful undergraduates, from seminars, conferences, and artist workshops. We were bringing art back into schools as the motor and medium for engaged learning.

But the Cartonera brought me further when it returned me to literature. Following Sarita’s lead, teaching literature through the arts became the adventure in literacy and citizenship that we call Pre-Texts. “Make up your mind,” some potential partners demand. “Is Pre-Texts a literacy program? Or is it arts education? Or maybe civic development?” The answer is yes to all the options because each depends on the others.<sup>14</sup> Let me explain: (1) Literacy needs the critical and creative agility that art develops; and good reading welcomes interpretation from many readers to achieve depth and breadth. (2) Art-making derives inspirations from critical readings of social issues; and it improves with contributions from informants, colleagues in different disciplines, and public responses. (3) Finally, citizenship thrives on the capacity to read thoughtfully, creatively, with co-artists whom we learn to admire. (Jürgen Habermas bases “communicative action” on creativity. See chapter 5, “Play Drive in the Hard Drive.”) Admiration, we saw, animates civic life by expecting valuable participation from others. Toleration is lame by comparison; it counts on one’s own opinions while waiting for others to stop talking. (See chapter 1, “From the Top.”) Pre-Texts is a hothouse for interpersonal admiration, as a single piece of literature yields a variety of interpretations richer than any one response can be. This integrated approach to literacy, art, and civics develops personal faculties and a collective disposition for democratic life.

Literacy should be on everyone’s agenda because it continues to be a reliable indicator for levels of poverty, violence, and disease, and because proficiency is alarmingly low in underserved areas worldwide.<sup>15</sup> Skeptics will question the cause for alarm, alleging that communication increasingly depends on audiovisual stimuli, especially for poor and disenfranchised populations. They’ll even say that teaching classic literature reinforces social asymmetries because disadvantaged people lack the background that privileged classes can muster for reading difficult texts. Audiovisual stimuli on the other hand don’t discriminate between rich and poor and seem more democratic. But public education in the United States is now returning to “complex texts” and to the (literary critical) practice of “close reading” through newly adopted Common Core Standards that value difficulty as grist for cognitive development.<sup>16</sup> Formalist aesthetics would help to make the transition by adding that difficulty is fun; it offers the pleasure of challenges that ignite the imagination.

Paulo Freire cautioned against the pedagogical populism that prefers easier engagements, because full citizenship requires high-order literacy. His advice in *Teachers as Cultural Workers* was to stress reading and writing in order to kindle the critical thinking that promotes social inclusion. Freire traces a spiral from reading to thinking about what one reads, and then to writing a response to one’s thought, which requires more thinking, in order to read one’s response and achieve yet a deeper level of thought.<sup>17</sup> Teachers democratize

society by raising the baseline of literacy, not by shunning literary sophistication along with elite works of art. The classics are valuable cultural capital and the language skills they require remain foundations for analytical thinking, resourcefulness, and psychosocial development. Without mastery of at least one spoken and written language, youth have little hope for self-realization. Paradoxically, skeptics reinforce the inequality they decry by dismissing a responsibility to foster high-level literacy for all.

By now Pre-Texts has partnered with boards of education, schools, and cultural centers in Boston, Colombia, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Peru, El Salvador, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, and Harvard's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning (see [pre-texts.org](http://pre-texts.org)). Though developed for underserved schools, the approach is a natural for higher education too. Research universities now recognize that art-making can raise the bar for academic achievement, and Pre-Texts makes good on that promise.<sup>18</sup> It has significantly improved my teaching at Harvard, for example. A new undergraduate course called Pre-Textos tackles tough texts by Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Rulfo, Julio Cortázar, Alejo Carpentier, and Octavio Paz, though students still struggle with Spanish. The pilot class in 2011 made maps, choreographed, composed music, created storyboards, acted, and remarked on the mutual admiration that art-making generated in an intensely competitive campus. For a final project the group decided to coproduce a film based on the short story "Death and the Compass" by Borges.<sup>19</sup> Each member contributed a talent for acting, or directing, or music, costumes, photography, and so forth; and all wrote accounts of their work as co-artist with Borges. For another example, my graduate course Foundational Fictions and Film offers a creative alternative to the standard essay assignment: compose one chapter of your own nineteenth-century national novel and write a reflection on the process. The new novels and authors' notes almost always surpass the conventional essays, which hardly anyone elects. Creating a novel demands sensitivity to character construction, to registers of language, historical conflict, social dynamics, and intertextual references. Students will risk this "insider" appreciation of literature if teachers allow it.

Pre-Texts is an intentionally naughty name to signal that even the classics can be material for manipulation. Books are not sacred objects; they are invitations to play. Conventional teaching has favored convergent and predictable answers as the first and sometimes only goal of education. This cautious approach privileges data retrieval or "lower-order thinking." But a first-things-first philosophy gets stuck in facts and stifles students. Bored early on, they don't get past vocabulary and grammar lessons to reach understanding and interpretation. Teaching for testing has produced unhappy pressures for everyone. Administrators, teachers, students, and parents have generally surrendered to a perceived requirement to focus on facts. They rarely arrive at interpretive levels that develop mental agility. Divergent and critical "higher-order" thinking has seemed like a luxury for struggling students. However, when they begin from the heights of an artistic challenge, students access several levels of learning as functions of a creative process. Entering at the lower order seldom leads very far, but turning the order upside down works wonderfully. Attention to detail *follows* from higher-order manipulations because creative thinking needs to master the elements at hand.<sup>20</sup> A challenge to make something new of a text drives even reluctant students to develop an interpretation, which requires understanding, and therefore leads to learning the vocabulary and grammar that had seemed bothersome or out of reach.

With Pre-Texts I finally responded in good faith to my own proposal that we offer our best professional work as a social contribution, the way creative writers do when they donate writing to the Cartoneras. Politics isn't always a pause from one's field of expertise. For me, literary studies became useful for civic development. This dialogue between scholarship and engagement, thinking and doing, is not a double bind, though the self-canceling figure haunts the humanities like a hangover from heady days of deconstruction.<sup>21</sup> With new dedication, I

adjusted the Youth Arts course to take literature as the entry point for reading lessons in various academic fields. Whatever the art we facilitated or the discipline we targeted, a creative text launched interpretations, problem solving, research, and design. From the Extension School course we created a portable workshop that follows the model of Boal's Forum Theater: an interactive approach that adjusts to local circumstances. We train facilitators, the way Boal did, in order to multiply agents and sites for implementation. Complex academic and civic results follow from a simple Pre-Texts approach: (1) Take a text. (2) Spin it using a range of available arts. (3) Reflect on what you did.

After writing, painting, dancing, acting, and so forth, participants sit in a Freirean circle to reflect, like Boal's spect-actors. The question is always the same: what did we do? (Asking what we learned is likely to get unfriendly answers from teens. They sense that teachers want approval or praise and refuse to comply. But if you ask what they did, students will want to justify their work or else they may look foolish.) One reflection follows another, in no set order, until everyone has spoken. After a few sessions the dynamic of universal and brief participation feels natural and necessary. The first few interventions, however brilliant, will not exhaust possibilities. While we wait for more, exercising critical thinking and patience with peers, intellectual and civic skills develop. New facilitators learn to expect original comments from one another and then from students. Participants also notice the democratizing effect of collective reflection; it levels the unevenness between forceful people and shy ones who are worth waiting for.

While readings deepen during the series of visual, literary, and performance interpretations of the same selected text, participants also develop breadth by going "off on a tangent" each week. Choosing a tangential text that they can connect to the shared reading in any way—even if far-fetched—puts students in command and makes them read widely. They peruse books, magazines, and the Internet, using their own criteria to select something they are proud to bring in. The combined dynamic of inexhaustible interpretation of one text and the practically limitless reach of tangents produces deep and broad readers.

### **Recycled Words**

Literature as recycled material; it had never occurred to me before. The Cartonera book covers made of recycled cardboard became objective correlatives for the recycled material inside. This was my simple summary of Milagros's practice, cutting through sophisticated literary criticism the way that Javier cut through cardboard. A daunting vocabulary of intertextuality, traces, iteration, permutation, point of view, focalization, influence, and reader-response, becomes user-friendly when readers abstract literary functions from their practice of making things with literary prompts. The functions add up to a general principle about literature being made up of reusable pieces, cuts and pastes and pastiches.

#### **<Fig 4.2>**

During the Harvard Cartonera week, Milagros demonstrated the literary recycling process through a character portrait exercise that I detail below. Here I'll just mention that she arranged us in pairs sitting back to back, while one person described a character from a story (Edgar Allan Poe's "Man in the Crowd") and the other sketched the description. After the first drawing, partners switched roles. When we taped the portraits onto the "gallery" wall, a visible diversity of interpretation for each character demonstrated that everyone had combined the text with extraneous material from personal memories, preferences, and cultural baggage. We could not clearly distinguish between reading—which had seemed passive for some participants—and the active addition of sketched details. Where was the precise division between receiving and making, understanding and imagining, reading and writing?

This was so effective and painless a lesson in deconstruction and in reader-response theory that I giggled out loud. It was positively fun, and I have repeated the activity many times with similarly profound and pleasurable results. When graduate students or colleagues play at this portrait-making, the fun heightens with reflections on the theoretical principles involved. One of my brightest graduate students celebrated Milagros's inaugural workshop with relief: "I don't hate narratology anymore!" Theoretical terms don't come up when we work with primary school children but in all cases, the lessons are as clear as they are welcome: Each participant is coauthor and authority of the work produced. Interpretation exercises both critical and creative faculties. And the divergent but plausible interpretations stimulate admiration for everybody.

#### <Fig 4.3>

It is obvious, isn't it? that books and plays and poems are made up of words, motifs, plots, characters, grammatical structures, and 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 be understood. Wittgenstein wisely dismissed the possibility of private languages because they cannot communicate between one person and another.<sup>22</sup> All language is borrowed or taken over, including the language of literary masters. Every reader of *Don Quijote* knows, for instance, that Cervantes played with chivalric and picaresque sources to write his masterpiece. But the game of literary lifting goes even further; he shamelessly "admits" to picking up the whole manuscript, written by an Arab author, at a flea market. And Shakespeare is notoriously not the author of his plots, but the genius rewriter of appropriated stories. To introduce students to writing through the liberties that great writers take is to demystify the classics. It is to invite 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 nature of literature is hardly hidden, though we haven't said it so simply. The simplicity can tickle students and teachers of literature while it levels higher-order understanding. Thanks to the jokes generated by Sarita Cartonera's pedagogy—about the fundamental accessibility of literary criticism and also about great literature lifting other people's writing—playful sophistication can have a laugh at elitism. Anyone can get into the fun of writer as robber. Teachers can therefore be more effective and inclusive when they invite students to take pleasure from a text.

### Cucu's Capers

Washington Cucurto isn't subtle like Sarita. The founder of Eloísa Cartonera writes with in-your-face freshness, flaunting the pleasures of irreverent plagiarism. Cucu, or devil as he likes to be called in honor of his dark skin, doesn't let you forget Argentina's racism. At home but out of place in the country's literary tradition, Cucu's iconoclasm is something like graffiti that tags an elaborate name on publicly sacred property. He smudges official histories of Argentina in a mock-historical novel, *1810: The May Revolution as Blacks Lived It*<sup>23</sup> (where the dusky-colored slave-dealing founding father San Martín is greedy, licentious, and out of the closet) and splatters sacred fiction with ruthless fun. *1810* works over *El matadero* by Esteban Echeverría, *Hombres de maíz* by Miguel Angel Asturias, and *Justine* by the Marquis de Sade. One addendum to the novel rewrites Borges's "Aleph" as "Phale" (phallic joke intended, always). Another takes on Julio Cortázar's "Casa tomada" (Haunted House) as "Dama tocada" (Defiled Damsel).

There's no anxiety of influence here, because Cucu 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: literary theft. (Appropriation is the word

postmodern art has used since the time of ACT UP.) “Cucu,”—his alter-ego exclaims as *1810* begins—“this is a historical discovery: all Argentine literature is stolen stuff. It’s crazy! Shameless!” And by the end of this reckless shuttle from orgy to battlefield on a double-crossing 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 descendants of those black soldiers. That is to say, it’s black literature, written by bourgie and bleached out black-begotten Argentines.”<sup>24</sup>

Rewriting is his hobby, Cucurto says, doing more homage than harm to the greats. In fact, he tells his sports column readers that they too had better read the classics if they want to play ball: “OK, everybody, get rid of those PlayStations and read Onetti, or at least Fontanarrosa, read Osvaldo Soriano, at the very minimum. You can’t play good soccer if you haven’t read *Martín Fierro*, or Faulkner. . . . 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.”<sup>25</sup> His literary advice to ball fans, and his hobby of repurposing literary classics for personal fun, made Cucurto the ideal facilitator for Pre-Texts in April 2010 when Cultural Agents came to Roberto Jacoby’s recently established CIA (Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas) in Buenos Aires.<sup>26</sup>

Already and independently, Eloísa Cartonera had set out to educate the neighborhood, sometimes in collaboration with the sculptor Raúl Lemesoff who created the *Weapon of Mass Instruction*. It is a recycled military tank that had participated in terrorizing civilians during the Dirty War (1976–1983). Today the retired but still imposing vehicle is a mobile purveyor of books, flanked on all sides with stacks of fiction, poetry, history, maps, and magazines. It collects books from dumps and rich neighborhoods and then offers them for free throughout the rest of the city.

(A similar inspiration in rural Colombia created “Biblioburro,” a traveling library fueled by two donkeys who accompany itinerant teacher Luis Soriano.)<sup>27</sup> Ever alive to the arts of turning trouble, like the trauma of armored tanks on city streets, into usable trash, Cucurto and friends mitigate the divide between high and low culture. Cucu takes elite taste by the throat (not to mention other body parts). Before he heard about Sarita’s rewriting lessons, Cucurto was there at the forefront of appreciation-by-appropriation. His pleasure in playing with literature, pilfering and redeploying words, plots, and characters, the way all good writers do, is a profound lesson for literary criticism and for education.

## Make Readers

Sarita Cartonera calls its literacy project LUMPA (*Libros, un modelo para armar, or Books, a Model Kit*, playing on a popular title by Julio Cortázar).<sup>28</sup> LUMPA is a loop between publishing and pedagogy in which books become found material for making endless variations. The program covers standard classroom concepts—author, plot, characters, themes—so that teachers meet required curricular objectives while they go further. Instead of just summarizing a plot, students also distinguish plot from story by arranging and rearranging moments of the narrative; and they recognize that a narrator may be lying (what a clever way to underline the nature of fiction) as they reassign the role of narrator to various characters of a story. In teacher-training workshops and then in classrooms, participants rewrite classics through alternative points of view, different times and places, and in a range of literary genres, literally becoming authors as they master the vocabulary and techniques of a pre-text. The activities require both a lower-order focus on the found elements and higher-order interpretation.

From June through August 2007, Cultural Agents developed Sarita’s pedagogy into the multi-arts approach of Pre-Texts by incorporating the experience of “Youth Arts” where

we had painted, danced, sung, sculpted, filmed, cooked, written, acted, and generally played with academic learning. Arts, after all, do more than “express” ideas or emotions; they explore materials and construct meanings. Northrop Frye famously quipped that it was unclear if art imitates nature, but very clear that it imitates other works of art.<sup>29</sup> In our variations on Lima’s lessons, literature explodes with renewed energy every time a different artistic medium interprets a selected text. Ablaze with art-making, even at-risk students hardly reckon the difficulties they deal with or the intense effort they expend. But the sophistication they achieve is evident to everyone.

That first summer, we launched three pilot programs in the Boston area (with the Brazilian American Association in Framingham, the Boys and Girls Club in Chelsea, and Zumix, an out-of school music center in East Boston), thanks to support for a student trainer from David Edward’s course on creative entrepreneurship (Idea Translation, Engineering Sciences 147, Harvard College). The lessons we taught and learned have become a portable program that counts on local artists and teachers to sustain it. Cultural Agents brings nothing more than an iconoclastic approach to develop skills in critique and creativity. A bit more detail about one activity may illustrate how Pre-Texts builds citizenship through lessons in literacy. Take the portraits by partners mentioned earlier. You are welcome to try it and all the exercises listed below.

When participants sketch the same character and see that each image is different from all the rest, they sense that divergence is not a sign of error. This is a revelation for teachers who had assumed that only convergent answers are correct, one per question. During the reflection, participants will identify each personalized interpretation and skill level as factors that intervene. After the portraits are freshly hung in the “gallery” and the “curator” initiates the exposition by inviting a pair of artists to talk about their collaboration, they are usually reluctant to note differences between the description and the sketch. “Is this the figure you had imagined while you were describing it to your partner?” First responses often deny or diminish divergence in a friendly effort to signal collaboration. Even after the facilitator probes an alleged convergence to reveal missed communication (“I meant really fat!”) and liberties taken (“Purple is my color.”) participants prefer agreement. Invariably though, both artists will admit that their interpretations carry references to personal experiences or preferences, or perhaps an embarrassed confession about not drawing very well. With good humor, the facilitator, or “joker” in Boal’s vocabulary, can re-signify a simple stick figure as a work of “conceptual art.”

Only after the curatorial interviews recur with several more portraits does the group begin to anticipate divergences between the partners and to enjoy each person’s particularity. With the recognition that variations are both plausible and pleasant, participants realize that “correct” answers multiply by the number of interpreters. The conclusion amounts to an appreciation for the uncommon genius of each contributor. Variety—even miscommunication and disagreement—enriches the experience of the text, and readers learn to admire peculiarities.

### **Hip-Hop Signifies Close Reading**

Some of Pre-Texts’ best facilitators are unlikely teachers by conventional criteria. They are members of an Afro-Colombian hip-hop collective called the Ayara Family. When Cultural Agents trained local artists and librarians to be co-facilitators for a 2008 workshop of almost one hundred educators in Bogotá’s main library, the Ayaras emerged as star instructors. No one matched the hip-hoppers as we manipulated metaphors and identified clever turns in Colombia’s classic, and difficult, national novel *La vorágine*.<sup>30</sup> The Ayaras knew that young people can turn the challenges of literary masters into dares to outdo the masterpieces. Riffing on found material, or sampling, is the stock-in-trade of rap (rhythm and

poetry). Also called appropriation, the combination of homage to sources and irreverence is the spirit of graffiti, urban choreography, musical mash-ups, and theatrical improvisation. These adventures in artistic displacement show the interpretive intelligence of hip-hoppers and recommend them as facilitators of critical thinking for other young 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 and channels them toward symbolic violence. Otherwise, hostility festers, aggressively. Aggression 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 and don't disappear. If parents pass the test, they merit a child's love. This is Winnicott's formulation for psychic development, advancing through play from hostility to affection.<sup>31</sup> (More on Winnicott in chapter 5, "Play Drive in the Hard Drive.") The Ayaras are a model crew for Pre-Texts. They have by now added high-order literary instruction to hip-hop arts and have done so 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 largest prison.<sup>32</sup>

The popularity of rap in Colombia and throughout Latin America (as well as Africa) should be no surprise, since Black Atlantic cultures of improvisation connect the Americas back to Africa. The international appeal of rap is less a phenomenon of U.S. cultural imperialism than an 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, *contrapunteo* in Colombia, and *repentes* in Brazil<sup>33</sup>—all attest to 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 of African-inspired genres from the United States to South America.<sup>34</sup>

In this transatlantic and inter-American context, is it uncanny or predictable that contemporary hip-hop should connect with a folk tradition of performance and writing in Brazil's Northeast? *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 clothespins, in order to inform, entertain, and entice the public to purchase a copy of the work. We learned this from ArtsLiteracy and appropriate the practice for Pre-Texts.<sup>35</sup> A Brazilian journalist marvels at the connection between this line of writing and African American arts:

I have always been impressed with the strange relationship that exists between northeastern improvisational poetry and American rap. They are separated by cultural kilometers, temporal distances, improbably 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 Northeast. 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.<sup>36</sup></EXT>

The multi-arts approach to interpretation shared by Pre-Texts is as hardwired in the *cordelista* tradition as it is in the culture of hip-hop. Northeast Brazilian poets are often also the guitar-strumming performers of improvised verse that they can later polish and publish

“online.” 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. For example, J. Borges (whose name evokes another writer who played masterfully with variations on a theme) is both an accomplished woodcut artist and a poet turned theorist. He teases an interviewer with a frank formulation of fiction: “I lie. Let’s face it; lies are a quality of all creativity.”<sup>37</sup> *Literatura de cordel* is the third moment of our Pre-Texts workshop.

### Open Shop

The first moment rehearses the bustle of Cartonera publishers, as participants enter and engage their eyes, hands, and brain in the tangible art of making a book. Sounds of high energy come from people cutting cardboard, choosing materials, and constructing covers to be decorated with markers, glitter, buttons, bottle caps, string, and so forth. Then, when designs are sufficiently advanced and attention focuses on manual details, the second moment begins. A voice starts to read out loud the selected text, and the bustle quiets down. Everyone can hear the reading, even if the piece is difficult. The audible silence is a sign that people are listening; another sign is the frequent request to hear the piece again. This scene simulates another popular practice from Latin America: the reader in tobacco factories. Still alive in Cuba, but barely, our intentional throwback to an earlier period revives challenging literature as an object of collective desire and as a foundation for social interaction.<sup>38</sup>

Readers in tobacco factories were celebrated throughout the Spanish Caribbean during the nineteenth and at least the first half of the twentieth century. The practice rippled into workshops of 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 skilled work rolling tobacco into expensive cigars produced great value and therefore gave workers significant power to press demands in negotiations with factory owners who could not easily replace the skilled workers. One standard and nonnegotiable 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-edge 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.”<sup>39</sup> </EXT>

Before Pre-Texts facilitators begin their reading, they prompt participants to think of a question as they listen, the way children ask questions of a story that they hear. In conventional classrooms, teachers ask students about details or themes of a text to see if the class listened and understood. This can bore or offend students who may wonder—as I used to wonder—if the teacher thinks they are stupid or if she needs help to understand the story.

But here the student participants are invited to demand more than they get. Authorities and interrogators, each participant speculates about missing details, motivations, background, and so forth and frames an exploration of some interpretive tangent. After hearing everyone's question, the next move is to choose one and to write a possible explanation or imaginative development of the text. Then the intertexts are hung on a *cordel* for instant publication in this third moment of activity. Each author can then read the contributions of others and marvel at the range of responses. People will often take pains to write beautifully, or at least legibly, to welcome passersby.

### **Civic Self-Efficacy**

Pre-Texts works in schools, after-school programs, summer programs, and out of school with young people at all levels, from kindergarten to graduate studies. The most significant benefit of Pre-Texts is surely to stimulate literacy and higher-order (interpretive) thinking. But the corollary effects of free-thinking, imaginative alterations and admiration for the work of others are significant contributions toward civic development. Consider the history of social and political effects from reading literature, philosophy, history, and the news among cigar rollers. Well-informed 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 for the Cuban War of Independence.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> We sometimes forget that Samuel Gompers, a founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and its president from 1886 until his death in 1924,<sup>42</sup> was first the leader of the Cigar Makers International Union and worked closely with Caribbean colleagues.<sup>43</sup>

Today's "readers" and facilitators for Pre-Texts invite young people to interpret and to deliberate, as the *lectores* did in tobacco workshops. Adding the creative arts identifies appropriation as a social resource. Civic participation depends on creativity, an (aesthetic) knack for reframing experience, and on a corollary freedom to adjust laws and practices in light of ever-new challenges. Without art, citizenship would shrink to compliance, as if society were a closed text. Reading lessons would stop at the factual "what is," rather than continue to the speculative "what if." Toward that imaginative exploration grounded in the "common sense" of shared classics, Pre-Texts proposes:

1. To encourage ownership of classic texts by interpreting creatively.
2. To connect literature to one's own lived experience. Paul de Man put the connection boldly by saying that all (creative) writing is autobiographical.<sup>44</sup>
3. To experience that all texts are open to creative intervention; reading necessarily intervenes through dynamic negotiations rather than impositions.
4. To demonstrate that reading and writing are two moments of a developing process; reading cannot be passive but affords opportunities for coauthorship.
5. To appreciate language itself as an artistic medium, a trigger for other arts. </NL>

### **Implementation**

Pre-Texts is an approach, not a detailed recipe. Years ago, Freire warned us against prepackaged pedagogies that urge innovation and deliver exhaustive instructions.<sup>45</sup> In his spirit, we train instructors to liberate their own creativity through variations on activities that we demonstrate, and through new activities they propose. Youth-leaders and collaborating artist-instructors need to "own" their particular version of the program in order to model independence and good humor about mistakes. Learning from participants, we keep adjusting activities and experimenting with new ones.

Ideally, training workshops last for a week. The formula of spinning a difficult text through an artistic practice and then reflecting on what we did is simple enough to learn in one session. The next four provide practice in appropriation as each participant takes a turn to facilitate an arts activity based on the same pre-text. We train teachers and local artists together so that they learn from one another, and overcome possible assumptions about a lack of creativity on one side and a lack of seriousness on another. During the implementation with children and youth, usually for ten to twelve weeks, Pre-Texts generally meets twice a week, facilitated by a classroom teacher or a counselor and in collaboration with artists who rotate through the classrooms to bring both technical expertise and variety to each group. If resources are limited, teachers themselves can pool their talents to vary the arts employed in class. 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.

The compelling reason to work with a distribution of arts is to make good on the principle of “multiple intelligences,” coined by Howard Gardner, to develop each participant through a range of talents.<sup>46</sup> Once a young person is acknowledged as someone who can paint, or rap, dance, or act, and so on, he/she gains the recognition and self-esteem that encourages taking risks in other arts. Healthy risk-taking in art is a step toward interpretive reading and writing, critical thinking, persuasion, and deliberation.

### **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 arrangements and constructions. 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 art of recycling is no news here. But before the Cartonera came to town, no one had yet made books from found material.<sup>47</sup>

In July 2008, Worldfund hosted Cultural Agents to train a team of educators in Chalco’s admirably dedicated Catholic school, Mano Amiga. Mostly local artists worked with us there, as elsewhere, to ensure sustainability of collaborations with the regular teaching staff. We later brought Pre-Texts to other sites in Mexico, including the Museo Amparo in Puebla, the University of Guadalajara, and two public middle schools in the outskirts of Mexico City, as well as to the secretary of education in Puerto Rico, the Chana and Samuel Levis Foundation, and Caribbean University in Bayamón, Puerto Rico.<sup>48</sup> We trained trainers in Bogotá and Medellín, in San Salvador, and Hong Kong. Even before we ventured out, Cultural Agents implemented Pre-Texts in six struggling grade schools in the Boston-Alston area, through Harvard’s Achievement Success Initiative in collaboration with Boston’s city government. And the Barr Foundation’s citywide project in “Culture for Change” engaged Cultural Agents to develop Pre-Texts for youth at risk in a dozen sites throughout Boston. A spectacular success in Zimbabwe promises important developments after Harvard College student Naseemah Mohamed brought the approach to Bulawayo. There, 85 percent unemployment meant that high school teachers could not motivate students with promises of good jobs, so they routinely resorted to corporal punishment. A season of Pre-Texts showed that pleasure could motivate learning, and it softened even hardened teachers who expressed surprise at the artistic and intellectual talents of their students. Students were correspondingly delighted, and relieved, by the change in teachers. These were the desired effects of Pre-Texts, though they outstripped even Naseemah’s contagious

optimism. But there were surprising side effects too: English lessons began to admit bilingual games with Ndebele, which had been a punishable offense; and the minister of education plans to replicate the program throughout the region.<sup>49</sup> Pre-Texts in Zimbabwe may someday outshine other sites. But so far, Chalco is the most stunning example of appropriation and sustainability.

Maybe it is the intense dedication of the director of Mano Amiga, Lilia Garelli, and of her devoted faculty that determined the exceptional achievement. 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. In fact, on the first day of the training 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, “I wonder, what is the color of the sand?” 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](http://culturalagents.org) website.) The latest developments are a partnership with the nearby public high school to integrate Pre-Texts into youth-mentor training, and another with Mano Amiga’s sister school in Puebla to offer teacher training. Maybe too the success in Chalco owes to the everyday practices of recycling in a poor neighborhood, 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 she had. 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 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.” On their own initiative, participating children also brought Pre-Texts activities home to siblings and neighborhood friends, a multiplying effect we saw in Puebla’s Amparo Museum 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.”<sup>50</sup> At Mano Amiga, teachers and artists appropriated the iconoclastic spirit of the program and they continue to cocreate it.

At this writing it is difficult to predict where Pre-Texts will be when you read about it. But do check the [culturalagents.org](http://culturalagents.org) website for updates and for frequent invitations to join a workshop. Why not prepare some clean cardboard and keep it handy? Here’s a preliminary list of activities if you want to start one:

## Sample Activities

### Warm-ups

These are exercises designed to relax inhibitions, defamiliarize habits, and create a core spirit of trust and cooperation among participants. Many suggestions are described in Augusto Boal’s *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*.<sup>51</sup>

### 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 from home and the street. They design ways to intervene in printed/used cardboard as a preamble for intervening in printed texts.

### Reading Aloud

A facilitator invites participants to think of a question to ask of the text while they listen to it as they continue to make individual books. Recent studies have corroborated the relationship between heightened levels of attention and manual activities, overturning a conventional assumption that a doodling student is inattentive.<sup>52</sup>

### Question the Text

Each participant poses a question. Instead of putting students on the defensive by asking them to repeat given information, this activity targets the text and casts participants as interrogators. Asking a question of the text also reveals that literature is a product of an author's decisions to include some details and exclude or suggest others. The piece becomes vulnerable to manipulation as soon as participants notice that the story could have been told in different ways.

### Intertext

After formulating questions of the text, and sharing them orally, participants respond to a question, theirs or another's, by writing an interpolated paragraph that develops what had been a fuzzy or enticing opportunity in the text.

### Literature on the Clothesline

Participants hang their intertexts on a clothesline with clothespins (or tape) 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

Participants sit back-to-back while one describes a character from the text and the other draws the description. Gallery conversations follow and participants observe that oral and sketched renderings necessarily interpret the text with personal and culturally specific elements.

### Rap, Rhythm, and Poetry

Spoken-word artists are unfailingly good guides to explorations of literary figures and indirect communication that produces estrangement, a favorite signature of art in formalist criticism.

### Movie Music Score

To develop interpretation along with music appreciation, invite participants to develop a music score for a film version of the text. The facilitator plays five or six one-minute music fragments and asks participants to mark corresponding numbers on particular passages that the musical fragment could accompany. Then they explain the choices, literarily and musically.

### Point of View

Photography is an increasingly available art form, thanks to cellular phones. Invite participants individually or in groups to take pictures from a particular character's point of view, or to compose references to a theme. Then project the photos onto a screen for viewing and commentary. The activity makes lessons in perspective and composition quite clear though they seem difficult in literary and social criticism.

### Literary Figures Alive

Image Theater is a practice developed by Augusto Boal to create human sculptures that capture a conflict and freeze it long enough to arouse reflections. But in Pre-Texts it can also

be an invitation to embody literary figures in small groups of participants. Have each group locate a figure in the text (call them surprising descriptions; the terms metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, simile, etc. can be offered later to refine readings) and create a collective human sculpture. While each sculpture is staged, participants from the other groups attempt to “read” the figure by locating it in the text. This game of literary charades turns a possibly abstract lesson in rhetoric into entertainment that can be sustained long enough for everyone to master the power of literary devices. Meanwhile, participants read and reread the text to identify the figure.

#### Forum Theater

Although it is less text-specific than other activities, we often smuggle Boal’s Forum Theater into the program as an opportunity to teach an effective exercise in conflict resolution. Participants identify an apparently intractable problem in the text, and thereby recognize it as familiar, perhaps intimately so. Then groups prepare skits to represent a chosen problem. After each skit is performed, the facilitator invites the spect-actors to intervene, one after another, in ways that can derail the tragedy.

#### Grandmother Tells the Story

Pre-Texts can seamlessly develop into a bilingual arts program by adding activities that depend on a language other than the target language. Since the program multiplies approaches to interpretation, it will not seem foreign to ask participants to retell 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 in another target language; and they can count on family members to contribute to their learning, strengthening bonds of respect and admiration at home.

#### Off on a Tangent

Participants browse widely in libraries, bookstores, homes, cultural centers, and so forth 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 tangent have at least one challenging word. This activity is the only one repeated each week, to encourage participants to read widely.

#### What Did We Do?

After every activity, we ask this question. Each participant is obliged to offer a comment and good civic effects follow: The rule itself levels rights and shares responsibility. Students come to expect interesting responses from everyone, including shy members, so that facilitators need not single out students for taking over or for holding back. The group learns to self-regulate. Intellectually, “What did we do?” stimulates higher order thinking by deriving theoretical observations from concrete practices. Almost inevitably, comments can be given technical names in literary theory, language philosophy, and group dynamics.

### **Play with Me**

Young people love to learn but hate to be taught.<sup>53</sup> They learn best through guided play. I am convinced along with Winnicott that this is true for adults too because play doesn’t stop for human beings. Learning through creative play is not new to education. Over a century ago, Maria Montessori pioneered an arts-based, project-centered pedagogy that managed to educate poor and intellectually limited (today’s special education) children in Italy so well that, without teaching for testing, they scored above average grades in national standardized exams. Like later reformers, including Brazilian Paulo Freire, French Jacques Rancière, and a North American rogue teacher like Albert Cullum,<sup>54</sup> Montessori’s guiding principle was respect for the self-educating capacity of students. “The task of the teacher becomes that of preparing a series of motives of cultural activity, and then refraining from obtrusive interference.”<sup>55</sup> Sequels to her approach or parallel projects, such as the Waldorf Schools<sup>56</sup>

and the Reggio Emilia project in early childhood education<sup>57</sup> confirm the evidence of superior results through arts-based education. 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 now serve privileged classes rather than public classrooms. Cynics aren't surprised; they figure that the real mission of public schools is to train obedience, not to educate initiative.<sup>58</sup> Poor districts, overcrowded classrooms, and deflated expectations all conspire against poor children's creative explorations.

To compound the problem, beleaguered teachers under pressure to produce passing grades on standardized tests suppose that engaging in artistic play is a distraction from academic work. As in Montessori's Italy and Freire's Brazil, the United States and many other states need to address the poverty of imagination in underprivileged schools that resentfully submit to standardized testing and remain risk-averse. South Korea and Finland have dramatically improved their ratings through arts-integration.<sup>59</sup> Pre-Texts recovers some lessons in creative learning, not only from modern educators but also from Renaissance masters such as Leonardo Bruni who taught that great writers are our best teachers. "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."<sup>60</sup> Secular classics offered tool kits of useful vocabulary, clever grammatical turns, and a knack for literary figures. Today's classics include modern and contemporary works. Along with passages from Aeschylus and Virgil, Pre-Texts has used pages by Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Toni Morrison, Ray Bradbury, Maxine Hong Kingston, Víctor Hernández Cruz, Rabindranath Tagore, Octavio Paz, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Mayra Santos-Febres, and Julio Cortázar, among other masters.

As co-creators and connoisseurs in training, students exercise their critical faculties. They poach elements from the classics for their own writing, learning to admire the found text as rich material for variations. They treat texts as raw material for improvising plots, for constructing characters, or changing the register of language. The challenge to change a text leads young readers to engage their analytic capacities in explorations of the original text so that they can propose a personal twist. Critical readers learn to mine the classics for lexical, grammatical, and structural elements. Texts become palpable for young iconoclasts who poach with creative purpose, demystifying literature into usable stuff that can be appropriated. There is no need to select "relevant" reading materials and thereby to limit literary exposure, because youths can authorize themselves to make any text relevant through their own irreverent versions. Young creators develop mastery of a text by refusing its ultimate authority.

Teachers are show-ers not tellers. Real maestros don't explain; they point out materials and techniques and then let students explore. To explain is to preempt another's interpretive capacities. I learned from my Montessori-trained daughter that preemptive explanation, "stealing one's learning," is the dreaded error in this child-centered pedagogy. Romance languages capture the spirit of teaching in the verbs *enseñar* and *mostrar*, "to point toward" or "to show."

This Montessori and Freire-like antiauthoritarian understanding of education is the theme of Jacques Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, a biography of a French Revolutionary teacher of philosophy who urgently needed to leave France after the monarchy was restored. Jean Joseph Jacotot accepted a friend's invitation to teach in Belgium, though he knew no Dutch. The desperate exile preferred to risk looking incompetent rather than risk his life. Luckily, a bilingual edition of a popular novel came out that year; and to his delight,

Jacotot found that his students could teach themselves French by pouring over that book.<sup>61</sup> Students can teach themselves when teachers give them tools and set high expectations.

Teacher training in Pre-Texts takes this lesson to heart as participants first create particular interpretations and then pause to formulate general observations. Explanations, interpretations that converge and diverge, and admiration for the range of creativity all come from the players in eureka moments that reflect on art-making. They add up to a dynamic civic education that takes the form of aesthetic education and brings us back to Schiller.

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## <A>Chapter Four

<NO><sup>1</sup> Ksenija Bilbija, and Paloma Celis Carbajal. *Akademia Cartonera: A Primer of Latin American Cartonera Publishers=Un abc de las editoriales cartoneras en América Latina*. (Madison: Parallel Press, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries, 2009) ~~Au: Publisher name does not match biblio. Subtitle is also longer. Please reconcile.>~~

<sup>2</sup> Kutsemba Cartao in Mozambique is a recent ripple, after Luis Madureira from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, went to teach there and found a need for books. See <http://kutsemba.wordpress.com/>, the official website for the publisher in Mozambique. ~~<Au: Global Query: Please add all web sources here and below to biblio. If only a URL is given in the note, please add an article title, name of website, and/or description>~~

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Tomás Eloy Martínez, “Las editoriales cartoneras: Creadores ante la crisis,” *La Nación*, (Buenos Aires: Sábado 28 de febrero de 2009 ) <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1103987-creadores-ante-la-crisis>

<sup>4</sup> Bilbija and Celis Carbajal, *Akademia Cartonera*.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.princeclausfund.org/en/programmes/awards>. “More than 60 independent Cartonera publishers are currently operating in countries across Latin America and one has started in Mozambique.” ~~<Au: cartonera lowercase in quote OK as is? In the text it is capitalized.>~~

<sup>6</sup>“For over 20 years Fotokids, originally called Out of the Dump, has worked as a non-profit organization breaking the cycle of poverty through training in visual arts and technology.”

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Fotokids, <http://www.fotokids.org/>. Martín Cohen founded but is no longer active in Fundacion Ph 15, <http://www.ph15.org.ar/>.

<sup>7</sup> Shahidul Alam’s project Drik in Bangladesh: <http://www.drik.net>. And Colombia’s Fundación Disparando Cámaras para la Paz: <http://disparandocamarasparalapaz.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> Cosponsored with Artists in Context <http://www.artistsincontext.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> The prize for 2010 was awarded to 656 Comics in Ciudad Juárez; the prize in 2011 to Torolab in Tijuana.

<sup>10</sup> Paolo Vignolo directs the Cultural Agents track of the Centro de Estudios Sociales. See <http://www.unal.edu.co/ces/index.php/nosotros/areas>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/ainaarts/projects/index.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> **Gil Noam of the Harvard Medical School and Daishon Mills of Boston Public Schools both direct the Leadership Institute, associated with PEAR. (Program in Education, Afterschool, and Resiliency)**

<Au: Clarify what PEAR stands for?>

<sup>13</sup> [www.extension.harvard.edu/2008-09/courses/syllabi/.../stare130.pdf](http://www.extension.harvard.edu/2008-09/courses/syllabi/.../stare130.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Lynch explores the effects of aesthetics on civic life in *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960) <Au: Please add source to biblio>

<sup>15</sup> “Today 125 million children do not get any formal education at all; the majority of them are girls. Even more children do not get sufficient schooling because they drop out before they learn basic literacy skills. Children throughout the world are being denied their fundamental right to education. In developing countries, one in four adults—some 900 million people, are illiterate. The human costs of this education crisis are incalculable.” “Education: Tackling the Global Crisis,” Oxfam International, April 2001, [http://www.oxfamamerica.org/files/OA-Education\\_Tackling\\_Global\\_Crisis.pdf](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/files/OA-Education_Tackling_Global_Crisis.pdf).

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<sup>16</sup> The emphasis on natural and social sciences seems to relegate the humanities; but the approach to reading and interpretation returns to humanistic operations.

<http://www.corestandards.org/>.

<sup>17</sup> Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> “Art-Making and the Arts in Research Universities: Strategic Task Forces,” Interim Report, M ArtsEngine National Network, March 2012, <http://arts-u.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/ArtsEngine-National-Strategic-Task-Forces-Interim-Report-March-2012.pdf>; and “Arts Practice in Research Universities,” Harvard University Task Force on the Arts, 2008, [http://www.provost.harvard.edu/reports/ArtsTaskForce-Report\\_12-10-08.pdf](http://www.provost.harvard.edu/reports/ArtsTaskForce-Report_12-10-08.pdf)  
~~<http://arts-u.org/category/research/research/>.<Au: Verify 2009 date and delete question mark?>~~

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAH3ytEFJpk&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>20</sup> See Liz Gruenfeld, “Evaluation of Amparo Cartonera,” internal document, Museo Amparo, Puebla, Mexico. 2008. p. 18<Au: Please insert name of publication, name of publisher, and date, and add to biblio>: “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.”<Au: Please fix quotation marks throughout. There is an open quotation mark without a closed one and a closed one without an open one.>

<sup>21</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).<Au: Please add to biblio>

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Alongside the familiar Spivak of old is a contemporary Spivak who offers a pressing sense of an ongoing dilemma that has only grown increasingly urgent and which she cannot quite resolve even as she articulates it: the double bind that marks the difference between the writing of books to be published for the academy and the teaching of a global citizenry who take their learning beyond the classroom. The abstraction of philosophy is always, for Spivak, as pragmatic an activity as protesting the intellectual property rights of the indigenous, but it is only in thinking about the idea of teaching itself that one reconciles that which has its “place in an essay prepared for the impatience of publisher’s deadlines” and that which takes “its place outside my classroom here.”

<sup>22</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, [1953] 1968), sections 244–271. ~~<Au: Publisher and city info. differs in the biblio and no translator is given. Please reconcile>~~

<sup>23</sup> Washington Cucurto, *1810: La revolución de mayo vivida por los negros* (Buenos Aires: Emecé Editoriales, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> Cucurto, *1810*, pp. 11, 189. My translations.

<sup>25</sup> Washington Cucurto, “Libros sí, playstation no! Se viene la Feria preferida de los lectores, una oportunidad para futbolistas jóvenes,” ESPN Deportes, April 22, 2009, <http://espndeportes-assets.espn.go.com/news/story?id=797885&s=fut&type=column>. ~~<Au: Please add to biblio>~~

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ciacentro.org/node/814>.

<sup>27</sup> Luis Soriano is the teacher-creator. See Simon Romero, “Acclaimed Colombian Institution Has 4,800 Books and 10 Legs,” *New York Times*, October 19, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/20/world/americas/20burro.html>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://proyectolumpa.blogspot.com/>.

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<sup>29</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism, Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 158. ~~<Au: Publication info differs in biblio and biblio has authors as Denham, Robert D., and Northrop Frye. Please reconcile>~~

<sup>30</sup> José Eustacio Rivera, *La vorágine* (Bogotá: Cromos, 1924); and José Eustasio Rivera, *The Vortex*, trans. Earle K. James (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1935). ~~<Au: Neither of these titles matches the version in the biblio. Please reconcile. Note that the biblio entry lists Rivera and James as co-authors rather than James as translator.>~~

<sup>31</sup> D. W. Winnicott, “The Use of an Object in the Context of *Moses and Monotheism*” (1969), in *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, ed. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd, and M. Davis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 245. ~~<Au: Please add co-editors names to biblio, per CMS.>~~

<sup>32</sup> “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>.

<sup>33</sup> See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>34</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1941) ~~<Au: Please add complete details>~~; 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* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Formerly in Providence, Rhode Island, ArtsLiteracy has regrouped as HABLA in Mérida Mexico. See <http://www.habla.org/en/about-us/merida-mexico/>.

<sup>36</sup> Gétulio Vargas, dictator from 1934 through 1954 when he committed suicide.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xuzg51HzzQ&feature=related>.

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Voss, “Reading While Rolling Cuba’s Famous Cigars,” BBC, December 10, 2009, <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.”

<sup>39</sup> Jesús Colón, *A Puerto Rican in New York and Other Sketches* (New York: Mainstream Publishers, 1961). P. 1. ~~<Au: Please provide page number for quote. Also biblio info. differs. Please reconcile. Please also reconcile spelling of author’s name. Biblio entry does not have accents.>~~

<sup>40</sup> 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*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989). ~~<Au: Biblio has 1989. Please reconcile>~~

<sup>41</sup> See Eric Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 333–334. ~~<Au: Publication info. differs in biblio. Please reconcile>~~

<sup>42</sup> Gompers had a one-year hiatus of leadership from 1894 to 1895.

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<sup>43</sup> Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-Class History*, p. 333. U.S. syndicalism develops, Arnesen says, at the “intersection between anarchist internationalism and Cuban nationalism.”

<sup>44</sup> Paul de Man, “Autobiography as Defacement,” *MLN* 94, no. 5 *Comparative Literature* (December 1979). Reprinted in Paul de Man, *Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), pp. 67–82.<Au: Please add to biblio.>

<sup>45</sup> Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 2011). <Au: Biblio has pub date as 2011. Please reconcile>

<sup>47</sup> Pre-Texts retains its original name of Cartonera here.

<sup>48</sup> The workshops for Mexico City’s Secretariat of Education began in March 2011 and for Boston in July 2011. See <http://www.textodepartida.org/>.

<sup>49</sup> See Naseemah Mohamed’s undergraduate thesis, “The Art of Literacy: A Post-Colonial Pedagogical Intervention in Zimbabwe,” for Social Studies and the Department of African and African American Studies, Harvard College, 2012.<Au: Please add to biblio>

<sup>50</sup> Gruenfeld, “Evaluation of Amparo Cartonera,” *Worldfund*, February 2009.<Au: Cited in note 20. Please move publication details to first mention and delete here.>

<sup>51</sup> Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (London: Routledge, 1992).<Au: Please add to biblio>

<sup>52</sup> Jackie Andrade, “What Does Doodling Do?,” *Applied Cognitive Psychology* (2009), published online ([www.interscience.wiley.com](http://www.interscience.wiley.com)), doi: 10.1002/acp.1561<Au: Please add to biblio>; Charles Tijus, “Interpreting for Understanding,” *Conference Interpreting: Current Trends in Research*, ed. Yves Gambier, Daniel Gile, and Christopher Taylor (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1994), p. 46.<Au: Please add to biblio. Complete page range not listed in note entries, per CMS, so deleted here but please add to biblio entry.>

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<sup>53</sup> Alison Gopnik, “Explanation as Orgasm,” *Minds and Machines* 8, no. 1 (February 1998): 101–118.

<sup>54</sup> See *A Touch of Greatness*,

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/touchofgreatness/teacher.html>.

<sup>55</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria\\_Montessori#cite\\_note-search.ebscohost.com-4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Montessori#cite_note-search.ebscohost.com-4).

<sup>56</sup> Developed by Rudolf Steiner in 1919,

[http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/02\\_W\\_Education/index.asp](http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/02_W_Education/index.asp).

<sup>57</sup> Louise Boyd Cadwell, *Bringing Learning to Life: A Reggio Approach to Early Childhood Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2003); ~~<Au: Biblio has 2003. Please reconcile>~~; and Cathy Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini, *Beautiful Stuff! Learning with Found Materials* (Worcester, MA: Davis Publications, 1999). ~~<Au: Biblio info. differs. Please reconcile>~~

<sup>58</sup> See Basil B. Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).~~<Au: Biblio has 1975. Please reconcile>~~

<sup>59</sup> On Korea: <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1400/South-Korea-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html> South Korea—Educational System—overview; and Finland: <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/finland.php?aid=831>.

<sup>59</sup> See Lane Wallace, “Multicultural Critical Theory. At B-School?,” *New York Times* Business Section, January 9, 2010,

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/10/business/10mba.html>. Also Robert and Michele Root-Bernstein, “Arts at the Center,” plenary talk at UNESCO 2nd World Conference on Arts Education, Seoul, South Korea, May 25–28, 2010,

[http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CCwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Feng.arte.or.kr%2Farte\\_eng%2Finclude%2Ffile\\_download.jsp%3FpFileName%3D1.Plenary-](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=3&ved=0CCwQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Feng.arte.or.kr%2Farte_eng%2Finclude%2Ffile_download.jsp%3FpFileName%3D1.Plenary-)

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Robert E. Proctor, *Defining the Humanities: How Rediscovering a Tradition Can Improve Our Schools, with a Curriculum for Today's Students*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. with an introduction by Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, [1987]1991).