Made in Buenos Aires: Eloísa Cartonera and Literary Production in the Post-2001 Crisis in Argentina

By

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments…….....iii

Introduction……..……1

1. Review of Literary Criticism……...……..3
2. Theoretical Framework…….9
3. Methodology……....16
4. Chapter Breakdown…….22

Chapter I – From Autonomy to Heteronomy: Literary Field in Argentina, Historical Perspectives and Current Context……..…29

1. What is a literary field?.....31
2. The Argentine Literary Field…….37
3. Neoliberal drama……53
4. Culture for Sale……..60
5. The place for/of literary field in the 1990s……67

Chapter II – Eloísa Cartonera and the Reconfiguration of the Argentine Literary Field……...82

1. The Collapse and Its Discontents…….84
2. Responses and Reconfigurations in Cultural Production…….88
3. The Logic of Eloísa Cartonera…….91
4. Eloísa: A New Type of Small Independent Press……...93
5. The Publishing Premise of Eloísa Cartonera……...98
6. Consecrated Argentine Authors……102
7. Consecrated Latin American Authors……105
8. Emerging Writers ……..108
9. Reconfiguration and Redistribution of the Field……...112

Chapter III – Literature of Their Own: Eloísa Cartonera's Emerging Writers……119

1. We are Young, New and Argentine……...125
2. "*Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres*"……130
3. Readings and Online Dating……..138
4. Themes and Writings…….141
   a) Pop Culture is Politics……..143
   b) Marginalization and Consumption……...146
   c) Fluid Meta-Fictions……..150
   d) The Future is Bizarre……...155
   e) Authorship and Technology…….157

5. Locus, Representation and the Politics of Literature…….161

Chapter IV Conclusion……170

1. Cultural Agency Turn……173
2. *Cartonera* is Life……175
3. Academics as Cultural Agents……...185
4. Agency(Ac)counts……193

Works Cited……196

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Introduction

What are the aesthetics and politics of post autonomy and post autonomous literatures in twenty first-century Argentine writing? My thesis aims to investigate these two notions and how they are shaped, imagined, and constructed in post crisis Argentina. I challenge traditional literary criticism and Josefina Ludmer's observation that twenty-first century Latin American literary texts, or post-autonomous literatures, have lost literary and aesthetic value, and consequently its critical and subversive power. Ludmer argues that such shift is due to the loss of autonomy of literature ("Literaturas posautónomas"). Following theoretical formulations by cultural critic Néstor García Canclini (*La sociedad sin relato*) and philosopher Jacques Ranciére (*Dissensus, on Politics and Aesthetics*), I argue that the era of post-autonomy, or Ranciére's term heteronomy, is critical and subversive precisely because it transgresses the boundaries of the traditional notions of autonomous fields.

While I dwell on the theoretical background of such claims further in the text, my thesis contributes to these debates by claiming that the post-autonomous literatures not only have subversive power but posses the embodied potential for democratic emancipation. While blurring the conservative notions and boundaries of separation between politics and aesthetics, these texts and their production, circulation and consumption intervene in the social transformation of societies. In other words, the creative potential of art, liberated from the traditional concept of autonomy and the rules which it obeys, creates new subjectivities and new publics. My particular focus centers on the politics and aesthetics of the twenty-first century Argentine emerging writers (such as Washington Cucurto, Fernanda Laguna, and Dani Umpi) associated with the Eloísa Cartonera, Argentine publishing house. I specifically look at the ways in which their

writings and publisher's ventures negotiate the aesthetic principals of literary texts and the politics of literature. My goal is to fuse Eloísa's operations and emerging writers' texts in order to look at it as a whole rather than separate practices. In doing so, I argue that the main principle of their operations is to elaborate the contradiction between aesthetics and politics. Such action is what promises an emancipation. The time span of my research includes literary production between 2003 and mid 2010 in Argentina. However, the context of my research starts with the early 2000s.

The economic crisis of 2001 in Argentina significantly transformed the social and cultural panorama in its national imaginary. High unemployment and its negative impact on the labor force altered the Argentine social, economic and cultural landscape. As a direct result of the crisis, members of the country's poorest socio-economic class underwent a forced transition into *cartoneros* – cardboard-pickers. Since Argentina does not have an established recycling industry, *cartoneros* started collecting cardboard from streets of Buenos Aires. After, they would sell it in order to survive the hardship of the economic crisis. With this social transformation, the cultural landscape changed as well. Since the price of paper increased, small and independent presses vanished because they lacked the resources to sustain their book production financially. Consequently, big publishers such as Planeta were controlling the market and consumption through the sale of mainstream bestsellers.

It is in this context that three friends and young artists Javier Barilaro, Fernanda Laguna and Washington Cucurto started the publishing house, Eloísa Cartonera in 2003. The small press was a response to the economically impoverished status of *cartoneros* and to the low cultural status of emerging writers. As a publishing house, they combined social engagement and

aesthetic aspects of literature by including *cartoneros* in the book-making process. Starting with recyclable cardboard, they produced inexpensive books that were then hand-painted by the *cartoneros* themselves. Just as this new model now transformed labor into a creative process, the books' low costs made them accessible to a wider readership. Additionally, it allowed *cartoneros* to perform a different kind of citizenship; according to Cucurto and Barilaro they were not only workers but also artists and co-creators (Bilbija and Carbajal 2009). Eloísa envisioned a space that appropriated popular aesthetics as a response to the growing influences of the dominant publishing conglomerates in the United States and Spain. Their website states that they publish "unedited, border and vanguard material from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru," and that "it is the publisher's job to distribute Latin American authors." Even though there has been a substantial research to present day on the popular aesthetics of the publisher, little has been said about the "border vanguards" of their texts.

1. Review of Literary Criticism

The goal of my thesis is to look at the publishing project of Eloísa Cartonera and the emerging writers in their dialectical relationship, as part of a whole and circumstances in which the phenomena has been born. In other words, in my readings, Eloísa's operations are inextricably intertwined with the aesthetics of the new wave of emerging writers. Later I argue that Eloísa Cartonera is an obvious result of the aesthetics and politics of emerging writers. Thus, they can only be read together. Javier Barilaro sumed it up by saying that Eloísa Cartonera is not only a social or economic project but an artistic venture which encompasses many facets of artistic practices ("And There is…"). However, most of literary and cultural criticism has read these two ventures as separate. On one hand, the Eloísa Cartonera phenomena has been praised for its

social, economic and cultural impact without taking into consideration the literary aspect, or the writers' texts. On the other, when such attempts were made, the connections between the writers' texts and Eloisa's operations have led to inconclusive observations.

While most literary and culture critics, as well as many journalists, commentators, and magazine writers have commended the Eloísa Cartonera as a model of cultural response and resistance to the demands of post crisis turmoil in Argentina, several critics have created distinct positions in regard to the project itself. Literary and cultural critic Ksenija Bilbija has investigated the Eloísa Cartonera project in its inherent sociological and artistic form. In her 2011 article, "Borrón y ecuento nuevo: las editoriales cartoneras latinomericanas," Bilbija argued that cartonera publishers, as independent houses, are product of a strong motivation and social mobilization in a post crisis society as well as part of a new network of sociability that marks the new millennium. As such, she sees the cartonera publishers as part of new international trends in the artistic world. Nicolas Bourriaud, French art critic, has denominated these new trends as a period of *post production.* According to him, contemporary artworks are created on the basis of preexisting works and materials; more and more artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, or use works made by others or available cultural products (*Post Production*). Such mixing of methods also characterizes the cartonera project.

Similarly, the literary critic Craig Epplin argues that cartonera publishers also present new ways of sociability associated with what he denominates "the new media." Epplin makes a claim that cartonera publishing is not only a phenomena but can be read as a new method of production, distribution, and communication (all of which define a concept of "new media) ("New Media" 387). His advocacy to read Eloísa in terms of new media opens a pathway to

understand a project as an opportunity to create and maintain the new type of community in contemporary Argentina, re-imagined and restructured by the new social agents. Nevertheless, the anthropologist Johana Kunin is cautious when supporting the overly enthusiastic tone of academic inquiry on the cartonera phenomena. She argues that "sometimes insightful projects are more the byproduct of imagination, effort, anarchy, and friendship bonds (between the publishers, in this case) than the result of romantic and revolutionary heroic motivations" (61). However, she does claim, paradoxically, that cartonera publishers serve as an example to NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, or, in more general terms, "Development" practices in Latin America (64).

Regardless of their differences in the method of inquiry, Bilbija, Epplin and Kunin see tremendous political potential in the artistic practices put forward by the publishing house. In addition, Bilbija and Epplin make an effort in two instances to incorporate writers' texts and analyze the phenomena through literary criticism. In her 2008 article on Eloísa Cartonera, "What is Left in the World of Books: Washington Cucurto and the Eloísa Cartonera Project in Argentina," as the title points out, Bilbija separates the writings of Cucurto and the publishing project he creates. While praising the publisher for bypassing the division between high and low culture, Bilbija does not see a similar success for Cucurto's writings. She argues that his literature offers no centerpiece for hope, nor strategy for neither change nor reform without revolution (100).

And yet, sometimes it is all too difficult to separate Cucurto, the editor and Cucurto, the writer, and Cucurto, the fictional character. My claim is that it is precisely this ambiguity and contradiction that makes Cucurto's literature and his editorial practice a perfect example of the

post-autonomous literatures Ludmer was referring to: everything becomes representation and to distinguish between reality and fiction becomes impossible. The blurring of the spheres leads to freeing literature of the traditional rules of autonomy and aesthetics making it open to the new languages. The writer Cucurto, and his affirmation that literature cannot change anything, shows faith in the uselessness of literature, which is precisely what makes the autonomy possible. However, Cucurto as an editor and Eloísa Cartonera project show the opposite. The publishing practices and politics of literature by the new wave of emerging writers change the literary landscape and social mobility of the Argentine literary field. Cucurto as an editor simply does not believe in the autonomy of literature. Literature has the potential here to intervene in the daily life of Argentine citizens.

This contradiction is the primary characteristics of the new wave of emerging writers. While dwelling and elaborating the gap between these poles, literary writings reflect the new forms of symbolic interventions and the modes of being in twenty-first century Argentina. In one word, we find out what are the worlds Cucurto and his writings, among many, inhabit: these writers catch the present and the velocity of the circumstances.

That it is difficult to separate Cucurto and his multiple personas has also been observed by Epplin. However, in his inquiry, Epplin sees Césa Aira as a precursor and a model for writers such as Cucurto. Eloísa's actions are as inseparable from Aira's poetic language and writings. At the center of the idea of writing is the fusion of the act of writing and the process of living. In his well known novella, *Como me hice monja*, Aira encourages his readers to call him on the phone. In Aira's text, the writer becomes obsessed with the process of writing and creating the work of art. For Aira, the limits and boundaries between reality and fiction have been erased. Epplin is

curious to see what are the dimensions of a literary experience imagined by Aira and Eloísa Cartonera. Aira proposes a form of literature that engages with the materials of its construction, and the cartonera presses ultimately enact this sort of literature (Epplin "Theory" 81). Epplin's observations on the connection between aesthetic vanguards of Aira's writing and the emerging writers have also been noted by literary critic Jesús Montoya Juárez. In his chapter on writers such as Sergio Bizzio, Cucurto, and Laguna, Montoya Juárez denominates these writers "airanos" claiming that they follow Aira's influence and reflect similar artistic inquiries into the relationship between neoliberalism, mass culture and new subjectivities. Such subjectivities are precisly what López Seoane and Deymonnaz label as a rebellious subculture of a dominant literary scene, thus exhilarating the "illegal" nature of their literature. These critics state that the authors "don't give a damn about the canon" because they are full "of disrespect for the consecrated figures of literature and for the hegemonic norms of beautiful writing and good expression," thus making it possible for literature to be opened "to a new world of popular, young and improper bright languages" (5).

To sum up, the scholarly investigation on the Eloísa Cartonera publishing phenomena and emerging writers revolves around two methodologies; on one hand, the research has focused on the socio-economic and cultural impact of the publishing house. On the other, the connection between the project itself and the texts of César Aira. Thus far, no literary critic, except Cecilia Palmeiro, has put in dialogue the aesthetics and politics of Eloísa Cartonera publishing project with the emerging writer's texts. In 2011, Palmeiro published her book *Desbunde y Felicidad: de la Cartonera a Perlongher* in which she labels these writers as representatives of what she calls "antiestética de lo trash." Palmeiro traces the emergence of the

new type of writing and intellectual positions based on the politics of difference. Her perspective is tied to the problematic issue of identity politics and the ways Cucurto, Laguna and Cecilia Pavón reformulate the idea of difference and queerness in their literary texts. Literature seizes to be an object of luxury, and it proposes a different kind of socialization. She concludes that literature and politics mutually influence each other. The process Palmeiro sees in these writers she calls the "antiestética de lo trash": "en el sentido de la invención de códigos de la ruptura ligados a procesos de la singularización; formaciones que se proponen como una intervención que saca a la literatura de su esfera y sacude al canon"(17). [1] She sees these writers as a continuation of Néstor Perlongher's poetics and his revolutionary positioning in the literary field in Argentina.

While there are many intertwined arguments between Palmeiro's and my investigation, the points of difference are substantial. She puts writers in dialogue with Perlongher while I put them in dialogue with the Ricardo Piglia and Aira. Where Palmeiro sees ruptures in the canon, I argue that it is not necessarily always the case, especially not with Cucurto. Where she is more interested in the sexual politics and the politics of body, I look at class and race as well. In addition, I pay special attention to the literary and social context in which these writers narrate the post crisis reality. I include the main characteristics of their writing, such as the politics of consumption, the aesthetics of popular and mass culture, as well as the new sociability and technology as salient characteristics of their writings. Finally, where Palmeiro and I differentiate is in the philosophical and intellectual formulations of our inquiries. While she believes that the so-called "anti-aesthetic of the trashy" is subversion of the dominant literary field, I argue that

[1] "In the sense of the invention of the codes of rupture tied to the processes of particularities; formations which propose itself as an intervention that takes literature out of its sphere and shakes the canon." All translations in the text have been done by author of this thesis unless noted otherwise.

such judgment can be reductive. Behind this somewhat campy politics is a serious political venture. “Light yet serious,” in my view, reconciles the gap between politics and aesthetics. In addition, Palmeiro believes that the autonomy of the aesthetic taste exists; only now she calls it the anti-aesthetic. In this Palmeiro is close to theoretical formulations put forward by Josefina Ludmer. My own theoretical formulations try to go beyond these binaries. In this, my line of inquiry resembles the philosophical project put forward by philosopher and theorist, Jacques Ranciére.

2. Theoretical Framework

Since the eighteenth century in Europe and the nineteenth in Latin America, critical debates about the literary value of individual writers and literary texts have been surrounded by the greater philosophical concern whether objective grounds may be established for aesthetic judgments. As a consequence of this apprehension, we can trace the progressive autonomization of art, and consequently, the field of literature. A oork of art can be read as aesthetically pleasing only if the autonomy of aesthetic taste is granted to the art. Point of reference here is Pierre Bourdieu’s writing on the field of cultural production. In his book *Field of Cultural Production*, Bourdieu argues that such field is a site of struggle shaped by the hierarchy of autonomous principles. The French sociologist, as I will show in greater detail in the first chapter, identified autonomy as art’s aspiration to total freedom from market laws and in its own internally focused legitimization. Nevertheless, the study of twenty-first century art goes beyond Bordieu’s claims. The transgressions in the field of cultural production have been vast. New forms of art and mixing of different discourses are emerging with new technologies and greater democratization of accessibility to art. . The autonomy of experience has not traditionally been associated with

the autonomy of the field. In other words, Bourdieu talks abou sociological and cultural aspects of the field but not the products: texts, images, and audio-visual artifacts.

According to anthropologist and cultural critic Néstor García Canclini, the last few decades are defined by objects of art and artistic practices which aim to insert the works in the media, urban spaces, digital networks and participatory forms of social inclusion where aesthetic difference is dismantled (*La Sociedad*). Such shifts and theoretical observations, according to literary critic Carlos J. Alonso have dismantled "any possible claims for literature as an imminent succession of works in time, as the repository of transhistorical truths about the human condition, as a discourse that reveals the ambivalent nature of language, or as a cultural horizon that necessarily engages reality from critical perspective" ("The Novel" 3). The autonomy of the field, thus, collapsed. Following this logic, Josefina Ludmer will label Latin American contemporary literary production as the era of post-autonomus literatures while French philosopher, Jacques Ranciére will denominate this period as an era of heteronomy. Ludmer mourns the loss of autonomy, hence the name "post," and she sees it as the main problem of contemporary literary production. Ranciére shows faith in the concept of "heteronomy" while trying to dismantle the traditional separation and notions of the autonomy of politics and aesthetics in the field but also in the experience of the texts, images, and audio-visual sounds.

In her 2007 essay "Literaturas postautonómas," Ludmer traces the main characteristics of the contemporary Argentine writings. She takes the latest texts by writers such as Bruno Morales, César Aira, and Daniel Link who elaborate the everyday life of the urban spaces of Buenos Aires. Her point of departure is that these texts are the testimony of "the proof of presence" and not the realist register of what has happened. These kinds of texts do not suppose

literary readings; "se instalan localmente y en una realidad cotidiana para 'fabricar presente' y ése es precisamente su sentido" (1).[2] They are considered to be literature but cannot be read anymore according to the criteria and categories of traditional literary criticism:

> Las literaturas posautónomas [esas prácticas literarias territoriales de lo cotidiano] se fundarían en dos [repetidos, evidentes] postulados sobre el mundo de hoy. El primero es que todo lo cultural [y literario] es económico y todo lo económico es cultural [y literario]. Y el segundo postulado de esas escrituras sería que la realidad [si se la piensa desde los medios, que la constituirían constantemente] es ficción y que la ficción es la realidad. (2) [3]

What Ludmer tries to identify in these texts is that the boundaries and distinction between reality and fiction have been blurred. To read the present from the present becomes problematic because literature now incorporates the awareness of its consumption and circulation as part of seeing the present and making sense out of it.

This kind of positioning is precisely what the emerging writers of Eloísa are seeking to establish. They become an example of post-autonomus literatures. They are driven by the present which they try to catch and fabricate into words. Laguna is a perfect example and her desire to become a bestselling autor while she constructs the succsseful biography of a writer in multiple volums of her texts. Her alter ego, Dalia Rosetti is driven by the present, by the velocity of her

[2] "They are installed locally and in an everyday reality in order to 'fabricate the present,' and this is precisely the meaning."
[3] "Post-autonomous literatures [these territorial literary practices of the everyday] are based on two [repetitive, evidently] premises about the today's world. The first is that everything cultural and literary is economic and everything economic is cultural and literary. The second postulate is that reality, when considered from the media that continually produce it, is fiction and fiction is reality."

circumstances and by the momentum in which she lives. And her momentum is often times full of rapid changes of lifestyle and enjoyment of mundane pleasures. However, it is these kinds of writings that Ludmer reproches for the loss of any kind of power because after losing autonomy, or the boundaries between reality and fiction, the literary loses its subversive power:

> Al perder voluntariamente especificidad y atributos literarios, al perder 'el valor literario' [y al perder 'la ficción'] la literatura posautónoma perdería el poder crítico, emancipador y hasta subversivo que le asignó la autonomía a la literatura como política propia, específica. La literatura pierde poder o ya no puede ejercer ese poder. (3)[4]

Ludmer equates the aesthetics with the politics of literature. In her view, literary value and aesthetics have the power to change the worlds. The contradiction here that Ludmer fails to accept is that the autonomy of aesthetic taste is just one way of seeing the world. It is not that the post-autonomous literatures have lost subversive power because there is no more aesthetics, but it is precisely the contradictory nature of aesthetic and politics that these texts seek to elaborate and leave unresolved. This is the trap of the post-autonomous literatures: these texts can no longer be read with the traditional value-judgment criticism that understands the autonomy of art as a pre condition for emancipation. Emancipation lies in elaboration of the dialectical relationship between autonomy and heteronomy.

So what we learn in Ludmer's article is not only about the post-autonomous literatures but also how a value-judgment literary critic feels about it. Her return to the promises of

[4] "After voluntarily losing specificity and literary attributes, after losing 'literary value' (and 'fiction'), post autonomous literature would lose power of criticism, and even the emancipatory and subversive power which was granted by the autonomy of literature as its own specific politics. Literature loses that power and can no longer exercise it."

Modernist political containments of formal autonomy leads to a kind of puritanism that simply ignores the complexity of these texts. Both Ludmer and Alonso collapse into binaries, nostalgia over the "loss" of aesthetic value, and the fear of post-autonomy, or heteronomy.

My criticism here should not be read as an advocacy for retreat from a judgment-value criticism. I do not argue for the politics of postmodernism and its "anything goes" culture of difference. However, I situate these texts as post-autonomus literatures at the intersection between aesthetics and politics where the gap is continually contradicted and needs to be negotiated. The rearticulating of the relationship between aesthetics and politics is needed here in order to show that aesthetics does not need to be sacrificed at the altar of social change. The kind of re-interpretation of the emancipation of echoes the philosophical project put forward by Jacques Ranciére.

French philosopher problematizes first the notion of autonomy itself arguing that there are three regimes of art: the ethical, the representative, and the aesthetic regime. Only the aesthetic regime, which succeeded the previous two, can be associated with a conceptualization of art and politics that aims to catch and elaborate the contradiction. The aesthetic regime offers a new "partition of the perceptible." Thus, Ranciére argues that aesthetic regime of art is a mode of experience which is based on heterogeneity, "such that, for the subject of that experience, it is also the dismissal of certain autonomy" (*Dissensus* 117). So, for him, the work of art does not resolve the gap between politics and aesthetics, nor it is a matter of mutually exclusive antagonistic action. For Ranciére, these two modes of experience should be understood as together constituting the meta-narrative conjuncture that grounds both artistic autonomy and the project to change life. At the same time, this encounter is also a space where these two vanishing

points meet: the danger of art's reduction to mere life and that of its reduction to mere art. Thus, the contradictions we encounter (art/life, high/popular, art/non-art, etc.) are reflections of a deeper and basic contradiction for Ranciére: "art is art to the extent that it is something else than art. It is always "aestheticized," meaning that it is always positioned as a form of life "(118). In other words, conflict, division, and instability are preconditions for the existence of the subversive work of art.

The uniqueness of Ranciére's project, then, is to offer a discussion that goes beyond the dualistic nature of the two modes. In his view, the contradiction between aesthetics and politics is to be elaborated in its heteronymous nature. The nature of art and its emancipatory potential is in an activity that consists in blurring the boundaries between what is considered political and what is considered to be proper to the domain of aesthetics. Only the activity which is capable of capturing such moments can truly be emancipatory. Only the artistic practice which stresses more and more the power of heteronomy that underpins its autonomy can be truly considered new. In Ranciére, only the work of art that internalizes and constantly addresses the dialectical relationship between autonomy and heteronomy without neutralizing the claim can be successful.

However, Ranciére does not believe that such project can be accomplished because the dead-end contradiction, historically, has always been resolved. For Ranciére, art, then, promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy since it is impossible to isolate art from politics. In order to create a new sensorium of life, art has to constantly work against its grounding in autonomy to stop this separation. And this is where Ranciére sees no hope for contemporary art world. Even though, what Ranciére's notion of heteronomy, the contradictory dialectical relationship between aesthetics and politics makes possible is to break away from aporetic

condition itself and seek understand the works of art which manage to elaborate such contradictions. In other words, Ranciére's theory of heteronomy gives critics a tool to move away from value-judgment criticism in order to read literature with fresh eyes. That is, we now seek to understand the *quality* of the contradictions in the heteronomous literatures rather than opting for one-sighted resolution. We seek to understand to what extent heteronomous literatures elaborate the contradiction between aesthetics and politics.

Post-autonomous literatures in Ludmer's terminology, or heteronomous literatures according to Ranciére's notions of art, have subversive and emancipatory power to the point in which they are self-aware and self-reflective about the contradictory nature of promises their texts wish to make. In blurring the traditional notions of boundaries between reality and fiction, aesthetics and politics, culture and economy, these texts wish to present unease and discomfort in order to simultaneously sustain the tension between the two. Thus, these writers and their texts do not wish to be fixed nor defined. Their goal is to constantly change, to move and show contradictions in their writings and intellectual positions. When Cucurto claims the impossibility of literature to change anything and starts a publishing house which changes the cultural landscape of contemporary literatures in Argentina, he simultaneously questions the boundaries of the autonomy and heteronomy of the work do art. That is why these texts have to be read in relations to the promises Eloísa seeks to make. When Fabián Casas laments the impossibility of becoming a great writer because he lost his greatest work "yet," he pokes fun at himself, at literary establishment, and at his readers. While claiming that they do not wish to be considered seriously because literature should be light, these writers reveal a serious project. What becomes one of the main contradictions is that in "fabricating the present," post-autonomous literatures, or

better term would be heteronomous literatures in Argentina, elaborate the contradictions of the present times. The lack of any historical and temporal distance in relation to the present forces these texts to catch the velocity of present. They make sense out of the world for us because we are constantly bombarded by different discourses and the velocity of changes in the present. Post-autonomous literatures and heteronomy have never been closer to catching the immediacy of the present. In doing this, however, the emerging writers' texts are not pretentious. They do not wish to moralize or teach but only to slow down the present for their readers and show what the world is made of. The question here is not whether post-autonomous literatures have failed in their political accomplishment or whether we deem them beautiful. The question is for how long they will be capable of resisting the pressure of the dominant order to resolve the contradictions. And here is where it becomes increasingly important to situate my position as a literary critic and someone who has the potential to pressure for the resolution.

3. Methodology

Josefina Ludmer is indeed right to label emerging writers and contemporary texts post-autonomous. She argues that it does not matter anymore if these texts are considered literature or not. The lines between reality and fiction have been blurred. Post-autonomous literatures reflect shifts in the literary world. In the world of political philosophy and theory, Jacques Ranciére's project is to elaborate these blurry lines in the sphere of politics and aesthetics. His inquiry draws partly on the debate about the autonomy of fields and experiences; that is, in the field of sociology and cultural critique. The question now is where do these shifts in the contemporary cultural, sociological, and political thought leave literary criticism? Are we in the era of post-autonomous literary criticism as well? If so, what does this mean? How do we talk about literary

texts in relation to aesthetics and politics? I turn to contemporary cultural studies as one of the possible answers. I interrogate cultural studies here as an intellectual position, in terms of theoretical paradigms, by looking at the object of study and using this methodology to do literary criticism.

The intellectual history of cultural studies originated in Great Britain when literary critic Richard Hoggart founded the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies in 1964. The group included theorists such as Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams, among many others. The emergence of the cultural studies was a theoretical and historical need to respond to the decline of the working class in the 1970s in Britain. Drawing mostly from the critical Marxist tradition, the objects of study in cultural studies are focused on the examination of the relationship between three key concepts: hegemony, culture, and popular culture. According to Hall, the object of study becomes the lived experience, everyday life in relation to those structures who articulate the power machine in society ("Cultural Studies"). The primary focus is on the relationship between the structures of social life and examination of cultural practices. Cultural studies theorist Graeme Turner argues that the work of cultural studies aims to break with the critical literary tradition that saw popular culture as a threat to the moral and cultural standards of modern society. (3) Instead, the goal is to examine the ordinary and everyday practices that influence our lives. Popular culture becomes the center of the object of study from the mass media to sport and dance crazes. This is why Hall argued that the scope of cultural studies has been vast. He sees it as a discursive formation that has multiple histories, formations and methodologies. The inclusion of popular culture in the academic and intellectual arena has sparked an enormous production and investigation in the past thirty years.

Thus, cultural studies is not a unified theory but a diverse field of study encompassing many different approaches, methods, and academic perspectives; as in any academic discipline, cultural studies scholars frequently debate among themselves. However, some academics, mainly from the literary studies, have criticized the existence of discipline as a whole. Broad and unclear definitions of what cultural studies are and what it can do have attracted many critics-Harold Bloom, for example. The Yale literature professor has been an outspoken critic of the cultural studies model for literary studies. In a 2000 interview for a C-SPAN series called *Booknotes*, Bloom argued that he saw cultural studies as a vehicle of fast success and careerism by academics, instead promoting "essentialist theories of culture, mobilizing arguments that scholars should promote the public interest by studying what makes beautiful literary works beautiful." On the other hand, literary critic Terry Eagleton is not wholly opposed to cultural studies, but has criticized certain aspects of it, highlighting what he sees as its strengths and weaknesses in books such as *After Theory* (2003). For Eagleton, literary and cultural theories have the potential to say important things about the "fundamental questions" in life.

It is not surprising that the strongest resistance came from the literary critics. Literary criticism has been seriously accused of being the gatekeeper of the formalist and structuralist critique, elite taste and hegemonic norms of the canon. Bloom's underlying critique and to certain extent defense is that cultural studies lacks the potential of and for value-judgment criticism. And yet, Bloom himself fails to understand that the value-judgment criticism (what makes a literary text beautiful) is an ideology of hegemonic norms of beautiful taste and elite class. The judgment value criticism becomes one of the centers of critique in cultural studies inquiry. Bloom and his 1994 book *The Western Canon* is a good example of the task of cultural

studies' potential to recognize hegemony of aesthetics at work. In Ranciére's discourse, Bloom and traditional literary criticism fail to recognize that the aesthetics they see as universal taste is only one of the multiple regimes of seeing the world. It is bound to the politics of representation. Cultural studies, thus, questions these disciplines' fundamentals, methodologies, and discourses of legitimization, causing a productive departure at both the intellectual and ideological levels.

The debate grows more complicated if we translate what cultural studies stand for in the context of Latin American literary criticism. The debate over the aesthetic value of the literary text is present and further complicated by the intellectual hegemony of the North American and European academia. According to Mabel Moraña, cultural and literary critics in Latin America have been doing cultural studies inquiries if not before than simultaneously with Anglo-American traditions. In her 2006 essay "Latin American Cultural Studies: When, Where, Why?," Moraña evoked the 1970's work of cultural critics such as Ángel Rama and Jesús Martín Barbero claiming that it "was astonishing to realize that the work that we had fulfilled in previous decades was virtually unknown in North American academy, either due to ignorance or theoretical arrogance"(32). While most Latinamericanists would agree with such observation, the main polemic became obvious in 1996 between two lines of intellectual inquiry represented by Argentine literary critic Beatriz Sarlo and US based scholar John Beverley. Sarlo has become one of the avid critics of the cultural studies turn, claiming cultural studies do not resolve or address the three main tasks of literary criticism: the relationship between literature and the symbolic dimension of the social world, the specific qualities of literary discourse, and the dialogue between literary and social texts ("Los estudios" 35). Sarlo, like Bloom, believes that what is at stake in literary studies is the aesthetic value of the literary text because texts are

simply not of equal quality. Furthermore, according to Sarlo, the greatness of works of art and literature go beyond the ideological considerations. Sarlo believes that preserving the autonomy of the discipline and postulating aesthetic taste as the main source of legitimization is the main task of literary criticism. As a response to such claims, John Beverley has argued that the task of Latin American cultural studies was to democratize disciplines, criticize democratic and university institutions, dismantle the canon and create new spaces for other discourses. Beverly advocated for the inclusion of the marginalized and subaltern identities as well as popular cultures.

At the core of the Latin American debate about cultural studies versus literary criticism is an intellectual misunderstanding. Sarlo and Beverley are criticizing two completely different objects. Sarlo talks about the aesthetics and Beverley about the politics of cultural studies. Rita Felski, literary critic, illustrates very well the confusion between these two intellectual opposites, not unique to Latianmericanists, by claiming that "cultural studies started off not as ideology critique, but rather as a critique of ideology critique." (31) In order words, while Sarlo believes that the object of her study is aesthetics, Beverley seeks to question Sarlo's authority to decide what is aesthetically pleasing and what is not. I would further argue that Sarlo does not see Beverly's subtle criticism: literary critics often see themselves as having a monopoly on what counts as aesthetic experience. Thus, Felski concludes that "cultural studies did not seek to destroy aesthetics but to broaden the definition of what counted as art by taking popular culture seriously. It was always as much about form as about content, as much about pleasure as about ideology" (31). Furthermore, literary criticism does not need to be scared of the loss of autonomy or literary values but to be open to incorporation of other discourses that enlighten the readings

of texts. It seems that a certain kind of marriage between the two proves the most productive: using cultural studies' intellectual inquiry to illuminate the aesthetic value of literary texts and a much wider variety of aesthetically interesting objects. Felski points out that "by training their eye on works once dismissed as aesthetically unworthy, cultural critics challenged the opposition between formally sophisticated high art and content-driven mass culture" (33).

Training the eye, however, is not an easy task. This brings me to defining my position in this debate. I argue that the object of my study, reflection on the aesthetics and politics of Eloísa Cartonera and emerging writers in Argentina, has guided and shaped my intellectual position and methodology. In other words, looking only into the publishing house without putting the venture into dialogue with literary texts, simply did not make sense mainly because the two practices show contradictions worth exposing and analyzing. My object of study is a space where dialectical relationships between the heteronomy and autonomy of literary field and literary text reveal ongoing contradictions and the impossibility of resolving them in twenty-first century cultural production. It is also a space where heteronomy and post-autonomous literatures express its potential for emancipation. I could not have concluded this had I focused only on the close reading of literary texts, gauging whether they were beautiful or not. I argue that there can be multiple aesthetics. On the other hand, analyzing the politics, power and ideology of the project is not only beyond the scope of my professional training but also essentialist and reductive.

Let me summarize then what I see as the distinctiveness of present day cultural studies. First of all, cultural studies is an interdisciplinary mode of inquiry that draws on anthropological, sociological as well as aesthetic ideas of culture, trying to make sense of the full and multiple range of images, texts, stories and practices. It does not exclude high art but wishes to put it into

dialogue with other forms and requires awareness that there is an exchange between different cultural spheres. It also links texts and practices to the analyses of power. Cultural studies involve balancing the gap between the macro and the micro, between observation and textual analysis, between ethnography and social analysis. What this suggests, according to Felski, "is that any attempt to do cultural studies requires a more than superficial knowledge of different disciplines and traditions. It is not about collapsing aesthetics and politics into a general theory of textuality. Rather, cultural studies define itself in relation to the tensions and competing pulls of different fields of knowledge" (39).

Therefore, the methodology of my thesis contributes to balancing acts of these contested narratives. Eloísa Cartonera and the emerging writers are product of the shifts in the contemporary art world. They become a space in the era of heteronomy where aesthetics and politics negotiate and elaborate their contradictions. It is a testimony to the new dominant form that is emerging.

4. Chapter Breakdown

My thesis is structured in three chapters. In order to understand Eloísa's responses to the state of affairs in the literary field of the post-crisis society, I first investigate the mediations that cultural and literary agents negotiate in the field of literary production of the neoliberal years in Argentina. In my first chapter, I review the literature on the birth, development and various levels of the national literary field in Argentina. I start with the mid nineteenth-century literary field because I pay special attention to the period of the 1990s in Argentina. In the Southern Cone, the cultural and literary agents of the 1990s are significantly different from agents in the previous decades. Change in the literary field is the consequence of changes in the field of

economic, political and literary powers. According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, these fields are interconnected and influence each other. Thus, the field of literary production in Argentina of the 1990s can be identified through the neoliberal economic boost, the shifts in the publishing industry due to intense globalization processes and the literary imaginaries of the post-boom generation. In the first chapter I rely on the theories proposed by Bourdieu on the autonomy of the literary field in order to turn to Jacques Ranciére later.

The neoliberal policies implemented by the economic team of the Carlos Menem era (1989-1999) profoundly influenced every sphere (private and public) of Argentine social being. The privatization of the public and state sector introduced fresh private capital where the logic of market and profit was led by the consumerism of its citizens. The era of market economy and neoliberal consensus also reflects the changes and shifts in the publishing industry that started in Latin America in the 1980s. Changes in publishing policies were intensely influenced by the creation of transnational conglomerates that reside in Spain. The amassing of capital, that is, the magnification and incorporation of the national publishing houses into big transnational companies reflects new publishing politics that influence the selections of authors, distribution and consequently, their visibility in the national market. One such example is Planeta, which controls sixteen press houses in Spain and Latin America including Seix Barral, Destino, Espasa Calpe and Ariel.

Daniel Link, writer and literary critic in his article "Literatura de compromiso" has stated that the visibility of Argentine authors to the Argentine national public, paradoxically, was almost nonexistent due to the fact that they aimed at international audiences, mainly Spanish, European and North American. As Jorge Fornet notes in his 2007 essay "Y finalmente, ¿existe

una literatura latinoamericana?" globalization in this sense was acting in favor of provincialism. This somewhat pre-capitalist situation of globalization processes is also reflected in Argentine literature in the 1990s. The dominant literary principle was a response to the grand narratives by the "boom" writers. In other words, the generation of "post-boom" writers in Latin America adopted some of the main characteristics of the postmodern turn: small, personal, micro-narratives became the literary trope in the literary field. Also emergent were the usual characteristics of postmodernism: the bypassing of the high and low culture, hyper production and massive popular culture became prevailing characteristics of the Argentine literary scene (García Canclini 1995). However, Argentine writers of the 1990s were dialoguing not only as members of a generation of "post-boom" writers in Latin America but also as writers within the borders of national literature. In the last decade of the twentieth century, different aesthetic groups ('Shanghai' with Luis Chitarroni and 'Página' with Rodrigo Fresán) gathered around literary magazines (*Babel, Maga*) and publishing houses such as Planeta that represented the Argentine literary field. I establish the historical, social, and cultural characteristics of the context previous to the Eloísa's birth.

In the second chapter I explore the foundation, development and aesthetic of the Eloísa Cartonera publishing house. I commence by explaining the socio-political environment of the economic crisis following Andrea Guinta's claim that the post crisis period does not only influence the socio-political landscape of Argentina but also cultural and literary production. Such new environments presuppose shifts in the ways we perceive production, consumption and circulation of literary texts. The appearance of Eloísa Cartonera was never a *deus ex machina* moment, but rather a conscious endeavor that responded to political, economic and cultural

realities of the specific national literary field: the neoliberal crash, shifts in publishing policies and the domination within the literary field of consecrated writers such as Ricardo Piglia, César Aira, Alan Pauls and Néstor Perlongher, among many others. Put simply, the crash within the economic and political field inevitably influenced cultural production in Argentina. The redistribution and repositioning of agents within the cultural field became necessary.

It is in this context that Eloísa Cartonera emerged in 2003. The group of artists responded creatively to the crisis in two ways; by giving jobs to *cartoneros* and by publishing new and emerging authors. In other words, Eloísa exposed the logic of the national literary while trying to create new networks and alliances. Similar to Ranciére's views on the redistribution of the sensible, I argue that the Eloísa merges the contradictory claims of aesthetics and politics of art. The artistic aspect combined with a social awareness resulted in publishing low cost, hand painted books made of cardboard, making every book a unique object. The cardboard was bought at higher and fairer prices from *cartoneros* who were then also included in the project as creators of the book covers. The varying artistic formation of its founding members (Washington Cucurto, literary autodidact, and Javier Barilaro, an educated artist) came together in the aesthetic proposal of Eloísa Cartonera. While Barilaro was in charge of the visual aspect of the books and its inherent intent to create an artistic mark through the project, Cucurto was the editor in charge of text and book selection that represented the "border" and "vanguard" literature from Argentina and Latin America.

In sum, as a publishing house, Barilaro and Cucurto merged the social and aesthetic aspects of the field of literary production by including *cartoneros* in the book-making process and offering a chance for visibility to authors emerging on the literary scene. Just as this new

model now implied that labor was seen as a creative process, the books' low costs made them accessible to a wider readership. As a side effect of the initial enterprise and consequent success, Eloísa created a new publishing paradigm while refreshing the Latin American literary canon. In addition, I argue that the intellectual position of the new wave of emerging writers put forward by Eloísa go hand in hand with the idea of post autonomous literatures. The emancipatory potential of literature lies now beyond text and incorporates in itself the contradictory and blurry lines between reality and fiction.

I further trace the characteristics of emerging writers' aesthetic in the third chapter. My goal is to show, through literary analyses of the emerging authors' texts, some of the aesthetic and literary principals they share. The main trait is the hunger and impulse for visibility and representation of a writer in today's society. While employing original narrative techniques, auto- and metafictions, these authors are particularly concerned with the intellectual position of the writer in twenty-first century society. Society is not defined only by nation-state boundaries, but also encompasses a context defined in terms of globalized space. The question of the writer's position in contemporary society is, to a certain extent, the assimilation and continuation of various literary traditions. Debate over the intellectual position of the literary author has existed within Latin American culture since colonial times. Starting with Ángel Rama, many critics such as Doris Sommer (1993), Francine Masiello (2001), Idelber Avelar (2001), Jean Franco (2002) assert that throughout Latin American history, writers have had an enormous socio-cultural influence in forging the nation. These writers' texts inform readers that in today's society the space of power for a writer to embody is both in the fictional world and the real one. In the world of fiction, the literary is freed from being intentionally engaged with the politics of the moment.

However, the practices of publishing and the intellectual position of the writers claim that the politics is part of the production of the meaning of text. In other words, these authors use the fictional world as a space to imagine themselves as desired (Fernanda Laguna and Cecilia Pavón) or claim any authority over the written text (Alejandro Rubio, Damián Ríos and Fabián Casas) since neoliberal society fails to recognize writers as productive members of the nation.

The implications of emerging authors' attitudes are political because they posit serious and legitimate questions about writers' intellectual positioning in a nation's cultural field. By warning readers that the place of a writer in today's society is not a mere literary trope, they open this question to a broad debate. In doing so, the authors inevitably try to insert themselves in the established literary field by simultaneously blurring the boundaries of such field. What makes these authors unusual is precisely this specific position that has been granted to them in the literary field that the publishing house created. By being associated with Eloísa Cartonera, where consecrated authors supported the project because it brought solidarity and a new paradigm of production, emerging authors became visible in the literary field with the acquired cultural capital that makes possible their future consecration in the national field. This particular intellectual position by emerging writers based on visibility and solidarity is a different path to the visibility in the literary field.

However, these are also the limits of my inquiry. Due to the immediacy of my research, it has been difficult to delimit the boundaries of emerging writers' positions. Many have been left out. The goal of my thesis is not to pose a definite constellation of new wave of writers but to show the "structures of feeling" currently operating in the literary world in Argentina. These writers should be read as part of a bigger puzzle and not the only piece. For this reason, my

conclusion is extensive. I incorporate the analysis of dissemination of the *cartonera* publishing paradigm through Latin America and the rest of the world. I analyze how the model, constrained by the specific context and its locality, translates culturally to other contexts. In this sense, the Peruvian version Sarita Cartonera started the independent literary scene and created its own readership. The Chilean Animita Cartonera, accordingly to the context, had to be registered as a publishing house. The Bolivian Yerba Mala was aiming at producing the literature marginalized by hegemonic power while the Brazilian Dulcinéia Catadora is the only one that at times publishes literature produced by the cardboard pickers in São Paolo. Concurrently, there are publishing houses that lack the social(ist) aspect and produce artistic objects whose aim is only to market the local artists, such as La Cartonera from Mexico.

In mid 2012, as I conclude this research project, there are over fifty *cartonera* publishing houses. Even though it is impossible to predict how many more will appear, it is safe to say that the model has become a way to voice alternatives. And finally, this has been the goal of this project: to capture those moments of emerging politics which propose alternative readings of language, politics, and aesthetics in order to reinforce the contradiction.

From Autonomy to Heteronomy: Literary Field in Argentina, Historical Perspectives and Current Context

The question I seek to investigate in this chapter is the following: *what* and *who* constitutes the literary field in Argentina in the era of fundamental implementation of neoliberal and globalization policies in the 1990s? Crucial transformations of political and economic systems during the Menem years (1989-1999) undoubtedly had political and social implications but, more importantly here, changed the way critics talk about culture and literature.[5] The 1990s led to the creation of the new discourses. Literary critics started speaking in greater detail about how literature is imagined, produced, distributed and finally consumed at the end of the century in a globalized, technological world. As I argue that Eloísa is an example of a trend to move from autonomy to heteronomy, as a guiding principle of the twenty-first century artistic practice, I wish then to outline what is considered to be autonomy in the national field up to that moment. As a literary but also cultural critic, I see literature here as a space inextricably intertwined with other spheres of society: politics, economy, and religion, just to name few. It is inseparable from the socio-economic realities that make literary production and practices possible. I also see literature as an artistic and stylistic expression that reflects socio-cultural and economic contexts. Ultimately, my position is defined by reading literature at the beginning of the twenty first

[5] I am aware that to define "culture" is very complicated task. The idea of culture during neoliberal years is seen here as a particular way of production of goods as well as discourses where the symbolic function prevails. Raymond Williams, in his book *Marxism and Culture*, differentiates between two most common meanings: first, culture is seen as a way of life, as the North American anthropology defines it. Second, culture is defined in relation to the cultural producers, in this sense, intellectuals and artists among others are considered to be producers. I take culture here in its second definitions and do not distinguish, for now, between popular, mass or elite. Further below, I will define in more specific terms the division of culture.

century as a cultural practice in relation to the market and to the literary field of a particular context.

Thus, in order to answer the proposed question, inevitably, one must trace the dominant rules and logic of the literary field that led up to the era at stake. However, the purpose of my chapter is not to provide a concise history of literary tendencies and genres of Argentine literature. I want to illustrate dominant logic that structured the literary field in Argentina from its constitution in the late nineteenth century and its advance throughout the twentieth century. This long stroke of explanation is due to the fact that every next generation of authors dialogues with its ancestors by going against them while also recycling main ideas. Some of the crucial polemics and debates on the role of the writer and literature in the nation-building process date to the nineteenth century yet were present in the late twentieth century as well.

Further, below I explain why I talk about the literary field rather than literature, but for now, I suggest three moments and categories for my analysis. The moments I chose to speak of here are considered to be those of "rupture." I take "rupture" to signify a flash of change when the way writers see and practice literature alters profoundly. The first moment entails the period of the late nineteenth century in Argentina, as it is seen by most critics as that of the emergence and constitution of the national literature.[6] The second moment is dedicated to the consolidation of the national literary field as the players and agents redefined the logic and rules in the process

[6] Doris Sommer in *Foundational Fictions* ties the question of the birth of nation-state and literature to the emergence of romantic novels that show patriotism and heterosexual love as a space to engender productive citizens*;* Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo in *Ensayos argentinos* and David Viñas in *Literatura argentina y realidad política: de Sarmiento a Cortázar* observes that with the publication of *Facundo* and the emergence of Sarmiento as a literary and political figure, a national literature is born. While these three critics connect the birth of national literature closely with the question of politics and political reality, Noe Jitrik in *Muerte y resurección de Facundo* analyzes the origin of the national literature while keeping in mind literary and aesthetic traits of this work. Be it in aesthetic or social function, these critics all agree on the time of the birth of national literature, the late nineteenth century.

of acquisition of desired autonomy. The period of modernism, between 1900 and 1930 different vanguard literary movements profoundly shaped the ways literary practice was conceived in Argentina. For the first time in its literary history, the emergence of various generations of authors made debates on the purpose of literature and writers in the society possible and desirable. Finally, I will pay special attention to the "boom" and how it was received and defined within the (trans)national literary field in Argentina. This phenomenon created new ways of sociability for writers. Various cultural responses to the period of 'boom' will lead me to define the literary field of the late nineteenth and the beginning of the twenty first century in Argentina.[7]

1. What is a literary field?

One of the ongoing debates among Latinamericanists is over the question of professionalization of the Latin American writer and his/her place within the hierarchy of societal power. Nevertheless, there is also a great confusion about what exactly such a term implies and in what context can it be used. For example, cultural theorists Ángel Rama in *La ciudad letrada* and "El 'boom' en perspectiva" and later Idelber Avelar in *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*, have used it in terms of the relationship between the writer and the market in Latin America. The successful professionalization of the writer is conditioned by the success on the commercial book market. Both critics tied closely and equated successful professionalization as the prerequisite for the achieved autonomy of literature; both

[7] My selection of key moments is not arbitrary and follows the line of consensus by many literary critics and sociologists such as Julio Ramos, Beatriz Sarlo and Ana Wortman. See bibliography for full reference. However, I am aware of its structural problems since some of the literary figures, like Borges, had very long literary careers. To situate Borges in the literary field of the twentieth century is a thesis of its own. For canonical literary criticism on Borges see Beatriz Sarlo's *Borges, escritor en las orrilas* or Naomi Lindstrom's *Jorge Luis Borges: A Study of the Short Fiction.* However, I will refer and constrain him within these specific moments I suggested.

made possible by the "boom" of the 1960s in Latin America. The other line of thought is the one by literary critics Carlos Altamirano and Beatriz Sarlo, who question such a relationship between the writer and the market in their book *Ensayos argentinos*. In their view, and because they speak of Argentina, professionalization takes distinctive meanings in different times. It cannot be reduced only to the relationship between the writer and the market. So, to speak of the "professionalization of the writer" in the nineteenth century in Argentina, for example, does not necessarily imply the close relationship with the market but rather the independence of a new social category in the society regardless of monetary gain. Altamirano and Sarlo further argue that such a shift to the differentiation happened because of national independence and the constitution of the Republic. For that reason, I am closer to the line of thought established by Altamirano and Sarlo because they have the specificity of the national cultural context in mind rather than the continent. Furthermore, these critics talk about issues put forward by Rama through the concepts of the intellectual and literary field. Such a system is far more complex than the mere professionalization of the writer, although the writer does constitute the important aspect of the field. It is such an understanding of literature that takes into account the ways the text is imagined, produced, distributed and consumed. Thus, it is crucial to understand how the publishing policies, magazines, literary prizes, and cultural agents help shape the value of the work of literature. To speak of the literary field is also to trace the separation of literature from the scientific and other dominant fields. These ideas of the literary field were first laid out in the 1970s by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

Bourdieu elaborates such a concept of society that allows talking about a culture's role in the dominating spheres of everyday life as crucial in understanding how society functions. At the

same time, this approach rejects binaries and simple conclusions because it takes into consideration all encompassing spheres of society's public and private life. Thus, one of his main efforts was to show that within society, individuals (agents) mediate and negotiate various dispositions that circulate between different spheres of everyday life. He called these spheres "fields". For Bourdieu, a field is "a structured space of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or capital" (*The Field* 40). However, fields are not structurally organized or controlled. The field is in the constant struggle because each agent and player occupies a different habitus (set of practical skills to navigate different fields) in order to compete for control and resources that are specific to the field to which they pertain. For example, in the economic field, agents and players seek to gain economic profits by means of investments using existing capital. How one does this, how one "plays", depends on the set of practical skills guarded in habitus, which depends on one's class, education and family upbringing. Nevertheless, the players' goal is the same – the power an individual can acquire in a society. For that reason, the field of power, one which is produced and exercised by the formal institutions, is the structuring and hierarchical one.

As it is to be expected, what measures the individual's success in the main field is constructed by two important sub fields: the economic field and that of power. Consider how economic systems structure the hierarchy of power in society; the eternal battle between such systems as capitalism and communism. Luckily, within the field of power, there are various constitutive fields: the educational field, the intellectual field, and cultural fields, including the fields of literature, art, science and religion, which are interconnected and dialogue with one another. For example, the cultural field dialogues with the intellectual and literary fields in

societies where writers can hold high positions in the field of power. The Argentine intellectual, writer and scientist Ernesto Sábato exemplifies this position, especially in his role during the years of post-dictatorship. Sábato's role in the overlapping fields is a reference to his responsibility in the trials of the junta and as the person in charge of the *Nunca más* report in the early 80s.

At the same time, by identifying these key fields within a particular social space, we can gauge the degree to which they are autonomous of each other. Superficially, we could conclude that in Argentina, they are less so, since the overlapping makes them less self-sufficient and more co-dependent. This is why when we look into the particularities of each field in the specific context we can see the ways in which they relate to each other and to the main fields.

The changes and shifts in the economic and political field inevitably have an effect on the field of cultural production and the literary field. We can easily see how the overlapping of different fields can define the field of power in the determined society and vice versa. If this is the case, then the question at stake is an individual's agency. If these fields are overlapping and influence each other, then the room for agency is completely diminished since the determinism of the habitus is indomitable and inevitable.

Nevertheless, Bourdieu elaborated in his work *Free Exchange* that in order for cultural agency to happen, the field of cultural production needs to achieve its full autonomy. In order for the agency of an intellectual, artist or writer to come to full realization, their pertaining fields need to be independent and not influenced by the shifts in the main field. In other words, any shift in the logic of economic and power relations should not project itself on the autonomous literary field. Paradoxically, this is why Bourdieu argues in *Free Exchange* for the necessity of

continued and unfettered government assistance to the arts (40). He wants to establish that there are greater benefits than costs involved in assuring that intellectual and cultural practices are autonomous with respect to the market, and thus, in a certain sense, with respect to the public. So, paradoxically, what will grant such autonomy is the intervention of the State. Furthermore, Bourdieu's advocacy for the intervention is to carefully consider the grounds on which diffusion of knowledge from the ivory tower to the public takes place. It is important above all to maintain the autonomy of each field, to the legitimacy and primacy of that system of authority and awards internal to the intellectual fields. The goal of such autonomy is to prevent quasi intellectuals from seeking false legitimacy of symbolic and cultural capital. Bourdieu writes in *Free exchange*, "we must work to maintain, even to raise the requirements for the right of entry-the entry fee-into the fields of production, and we must reinforce the duty to get out, to share what we have found, while at the same time improving the conditions and means for doing so" (65).

In my understanding of Bourdieu's advocacy and theory, the main concepts can help here investigate the networks, alliances and interpolations as insertions into various fields and their correlation in given societies. Nevertheless, his intellectual position is defined by his particular locus of enunciation. First, he advocates for State intervention in response to disappointment with neoliberal France in the European Union of the 1990s. Secondly, the focus of his theory on autonomy is the historical perspective of capitalist France as a colonial empire with a pre-established civil society dating to the late nineteenth century. The right of entry for intellectuals and the autonomy he is imagining is quite different in Latin America. Rules of autonomy have been constructed since colonial times with visible paradoxes.

Starting with the conquest, Latin America was dominated by the European gaze. Cultural

modernization and secularization in Latin America was always conceived as peripheral to the ones in Europe. It is not unknown that Latin America was always imagined by Europe as a peripheral and marginalized space be it in the political or cultural sense. For example, in her book *Literatura/sociedad*, Sarlo astutely notes the case of Borges's consecration. While he was deeply contested in Argentina at first, the international prizes, quotes and celebratory judgments of the leading writers of the metropolis (Paris, New York and London) contributed to the enormous prestige of Borges within the intellectual field in Argentina (86). She underlines that the inverse operation, that the European writer should obtain the definitive consecration through Latin American cultural capital, would be unthinkable (86). Furthermore, Bourdieu as well as Rama and Avelar relate autonomy closely to the question of the free market. The changes in economic systems in Latin America have been of very diverse nature with several (un)successful attempts to enter modernity as defined by the capitalist economic system. This is why the autonomy of the field, in my view, is a cultural project that is always on going, unfinished and utopian. Particularly in Latin America, at the moment autonomy fully establishes itself, it crumbles precisely because of its structural inability to stay immune to the rapid shifts in the field of power exercised from the national and international centers of power. In that sense, Avelar is right to note that the autonomy was achieved by the 'boom' writers but it was short-lived since it coincided with the explosion of violent dictatorships in the continent.

Thus, the fields are internally organized but also interpolated with other fields. So, to balance and achieve autonomy is also to imply a loss in relation to the other fields, be it in regard to the market or purely aesthetic values.[8] This is why to speak of autonomy is always to

[8] I borrow here an idea from Idelber Avelar who in *The Untimely Present* argues that the autonomy of literature in Latin America in the 1960s also implied a loss since the aesthetic values were subjected to the logic of market. What

speak of its contested nature that as a main topic, as we will see, recycles throughout the history of the Argentine literary field, legitimizing its existence. Every generation of writers will claim that it is precisely they who achieved this autonomy because they opposed everything their ancestors did.

In the case of Argentina, the very constitution of the national literary field had to do more with the definition of the national being and identity put forward by the intellectuals than monetary independence (as was the case in France in late the nineteenth century). Economic and political relationships did not allow the full constitution of autonomy as in Europe. This is why, like Sarlo and Altamirano, I prefer to talk about the literary field. Specifically, I talk about the constitution of the field in the late nineteenth century, the shifts brought by vanguard and new discourses of the 'boom' phenomena rather than the fully achieved autonomy of the literary field in each of these instances.

2. The Argentine Literary Field

It is widely recognized by a critical readership, including literary critics Noe Jitrik and David Viñas that the emergence of the Argentine literary field as a distinctive and political national project starts in the mid nineteenth century, parallel to Romanticism in Europe and simultaneous with the creation of the other nation-states in Latin America. With notable representatives of the elite Creole lettered class, most importantly Esteban Echeverría and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, the foundation of Argentine literature was subjected to the needs of the main field of power. In the mid nineteenth century, the dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas marked the division within the political elite. He, the *caudillo* who refused to modernize the country,

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he means is that "the aesthetic values" created by the writers within the field were now exposed to scrutiny by the new agents emerging in the field but created by the logic of the market economy.

polarized the nation. As literary critic Graciela Montaldo notes in her article "Intelectuales y artistas en la sociedad civil argentina en el fin del siglo," the moment in which Argentine literature arises is the very moment in which there is a consolidation of the lettered elite who stand in opposition to the dictator Rosas (40). Among many, Echeverría and Sarmiento publish their most significant works, "Matadero" (1871) and *Facundo* (1845). These two works sparked debates in Argentine literary field for the next century. Their opuses stand as pillars in the intent to define Argentinean identity. The famous binary established by Sarmiento between civilization and barbarism becomes the prevailing problem for discussion and discourse in political and literary circles. At the same time, the particular intellectual position of these lettered men was that national literature should become the means to deal with identity issues. Literary critic Julio Ramos argues in his *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina* that the project put forward by the intellectuals was to use writing as a space to create order and modernize. At the same time, it was, as is the case with *Facundo*, a project of transcription of oral voices of the Other, "cuya exclusión del saber (escrito) había generado la discontinuidad y la contigencia del presente" (43).[9] Fundamentally, Ramos argues that the symbolic but also real power granted to the lettered men was enormous. In a way, the division between the writer and politician in this first period was null. Just as the politician in the strict sense of the word, represents the Other by the majority of votes, the lettered men were doing the same thing. However, "writers" were not considered to constitute a socially distinct vocation or class. They were politicians *and* intellectuals. The most eminent intellectual figure of his time, Sarmiento, was also a political figure who had the opportunity to implement his visions of Argentina when he became the president in 1868. Nevertheless, the novelty was that the fight for political legitimacy derived

[9] "Whose exclusion from the (written)knowledge had generated discontinuity and contingency of the present."

from his literary practices – he published and wrote literature. In a way, this fight established the future rules within the literary field that were based not on the idea of full autonomy as Bourdieu would suggest, but precisely on the close relationship between the State and the intellectual elite. For example, "Matadero," as the first Argentine short story, can be read as an allegory of the violent struggles of the intellectual for authority and to organize and modernize, as Ramos would suggest. Now, these debates and postures are only one side of the story within the emergence of the literary field.

It was not until the end of the nineteenth century, precisely 1880, that the shifts in the main field of power defined more precisely the alliances, interpolations and relationships of the major agents and players within the literary field. The emergence of national literature did not imply fully the constitution of the national literary field as clearly as one would like to think. In his in-depth study of the history of publishing policies in Argentina, *Editores y políticas editoriales en Argentina, 1880-2000*, José Luis de Diego argues that it was starting in 1880 that the literary field began to separate itself from other fields. This was made possible, of course, by shifts in the field of power. The consolidation of the State, the economic growth led by the "Generation of the 80s" and the initiation of conscious cultural production led to the broadening of readership that Diego sees as a key development of this period (5). The reconfiguration of readership meant that lettered culture ceased to be as homogenous and closed to the wider population. He argues that the division of culture into elite and popular was a result of the democratization among the elite that led to the emergence of the literary field. In other words, if literature was a tool in the hands of the lettered men, by 1880 these elite started to take into consideration the wider popular public due to the initial modernization of the journalistic press,

and the establishment of a publishing market that led to substantial changes and balance of the power. Even though his division between popular and elite culture is too simplistic when tied to the literature,[10] Diego is right to take into consideration the cultural and publishing production of the time and the way it was reflected within the literary field. Among the important cultural moments of the period was the publication of the *Anuario Bibliográfico de República Argentina* that, along with other objectives, traced the number of books published in Argentina between 1879 and 1887 and showed that the number doubled in that decade. At the time, books were subsidized by the government; *folletines*, specialized books that dealt with law, religion, education and other smaller editions. The annual production of the literary texts, mainly novels, was around fifty. With the establishment of the small publishing presses between 1885 and 1887, literature was the space that incorporated the greatest number of innovations. It was also the period of the establishment of the literary criticism, which was published in *La Tribuna*, a literary magazine where José Mármol, Estanislao del Campo and Ricardo Gutiérrez, among many, published their book reviews and articles. Probably the most significant moment of this period was that of the emergence of what Diego calls *literatura criollista popular* and its inaugural moment with *Martín Fierro*, a long poem by José Hernández published in 1872. At the time, according to the Diego's information, it was considered to be the first national best seller with more than eleven editions by 1882 (15). In 1879, the appearance of the second part, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro,* with twenty thousand copies in the first edition, opened a door for successive best sellers within the national literature.

[10] I am thinking of *Martín Fierro* here and Diego's label of this work as part of popular literature. In my understanding, popular literature's goal is to entertain the general reader and has no or very little interest in producing any high degree of engagement from the reader. Thus, to place *Martín Fierro* in this group is problematic since it was written by the lettered Creole man and became one of the canonical texts in Argentine high *urban* literature. According to Diego, the text was an enormous success in the provinces.

These significant changes in the last fifty years of the nineteenth century announced various aspects that would constitute the debates within the literary field of the twentieth century: the question of the professionalization of the writer in terms of vocation and market, the production of literary magazines, the role of publishing presses, the relationship between the lettered elite and readership, and most importantly, the question of national identity. If for Sarmiento the obvious choice for national identity was to be civilized, lettered Creole men, the national success of *Martín Fierro* and the inclusion of the *gaucho* (yet made possible only by another lettered men, Hernández) as a source of the national identity further complicated the question of who enjoys the legitimacy to speak within the literary field. In this sense, the crucial literary production, the consolidation of the literary market, the emergence of the social category of "writer" and its aesthetic shaped around 1900 and 1930 with literary movements such as *Centenario*, modernism and vanguard. Once again, the shifts were a result of changes in the field of power. However, I am not implying here that these shifts and changes were as linear as one might assume. The period of some thirty years in Argentine cultural production was multilateral in the sense that once the avant-garde assumed the role of rupture, the old and the new cohabited in the same space. And this was probably the most important moment in the development of the Argentine literary field. Graciela Montaldo summarizes best those years of the constitution of the literary field when she says that in the age of radical politics in Argentina (the second decade of the1900s), there was no unique aesthetic scheme but a proliferation of different aesthetic projects that had only one common goal: "ir contra lo que ha sido ya instituido" (*Yrigoyen entre* 29).[11] But let us take one step back.

What conditioned the rupture of the avant-garde in the second decade of the 1900s was

[11] "To go against the already institutionalized."

the national reality of the *Centenario* and cultural imports from the European capitals. Sarlo and Altamirano identified this phase as a transitory one in the constitution of the literary field with its own rules (35). In those years, Argentina underwent massive immigration, secularization and modernization. These crucial societal changes were reflected in the field of cultural production, in that the field of literature separated itself from the intellectual field. This meant that the literary field started emerging as the distinctive one with its own logic created consciously from within. This was a period of active, conscious reflection on the process of differentiation of writers and literature from politics and economy. The role of the writer was redefined as a distinguishable social category. Writers ceased to be politicians. So, the idea of professionalization of writer was tied to the economic gain (some could live off their work, as did Manuel Gálvez) but as Sarlo argues, it also implied a newly distinct social sphere of society. The new ways of sociability within the city of Buenos Aires made the urban landscape the center of the literary modern practice where, as Richard Morse notes, the "mind and sensibility awoke to specifically modern features of the Western world view" (118). Writers socialized in literary cafés (the famous Tortoni*)* rather than salons, the conferences emerged as centralized sites of legitimation, visibility and as modern fora the exchange of ideas. At the same time, new players emerged in the field: literary critics and publishers. In 1913 intellectual and literary critic Ricardo Rojas founded the first department of the history of Argentine literature at the University of Buenos Aires. One of his most important works came in 1915 when Rojas edited the 29-volume Argentine classic known as *Biblioteca Argentina*.[12] The publishing industry was consolidated the same year, since there were various private presses founded in Buenos Aires.

[12] An excellent article by Earl T. Glauert, "Ricardo Rojas and the Emergence of Argentine Cultural Nationalism," explores various endeavors put forward by Rojas in order to develop the cultural production of the time. See bibliography for the full reference.

Another source of legitimacy and consecration were literary magazines independent of the scientific ones. The foundation of *Nosotros* in 1907 (until 1943) by Roberto Giusti y Alfredo Bianchi, in which writers and critics published essays, book reviews and literary studies, opened a new space in the field. In 1921, this magazine published a manifest of the avant-garde generation, "Ultraismo" led by Jorge Luis Borges. The next year, *Nosotros* published an anthology of younger poets and in 1923 an anthology of the literary generation that entailed 36 younger poets (Montaldo *Intelectuales y artistas* 35). And then came the year of deep rupture, which according to Sarlo and Altamirano was in 1924 with the foundation of the literary magazine *Martín Fierro*. It was the culmination of polemics and poetics started in many other short-lived magazines in the 1910s and 1920s. The magazine published young poets of avant-garde: Oliveiro Girondo, Macedonio Fernández and Jorge Luis Borges, among many.[13] As a literary movement it was one of a kind in this period, since its members were attacking the pre-existing field that made their appearance possible while paradoxically legitimizing the existence of such field. This moment was crucial to the field. To replace the old system with the new rules created solely within the field advocated for the complete autonomy from the field of power. One of the sources for that kind of legitimacy were debates and polemics in the cultural scene of Buenos Aires that culminated in appearance of a supposedly oppositional literary aesthetics. *Florida*, the group associated with magazine *Martín Fierro*, advocated for pure art, disinterest in economic profit and separation from political and economic life, while and *Boedo* argued for socially engaged art. Although Borges never really accepted that there was any split between the

[13] In my nomenclature, a young writer is someone who is emerging on the literary scene. He/she is a writer who has started publishing and is still to acquire legitimacy in the literary field. A young writer can also be understood in terms of one's age. Sometimes these two aspects coincide as in case of Borges, and sometimes they do not, as in case of Sábato, for example, who became known writer in his later years.

two groups, Leónidas Barletta, a loyal Boedista, claimed that the split was fundamentally between those who understood the Russian revolution and those who refused to, between those pledged to art for revolution's sake and those to revolution for art's sake (Morse 125). The Florida group insisted that a literary review should not deal with politics and that if literature were not taken as a profession, it would remain in the past (Morse 126). Regardless of who was right, what the polemics and division into two groups meant was that the debate was taking part *within* the field. With the support of magazines, prizes and polemics, the literary filed emerged as an arena driven by its own rules. The disinterest of the *Florida* group and *Martín Fierro* in politics and their focus on "literary and artistic problems" (Montaldo *Yrigoyen* 65) served to situate art in Argentine society. Finally, the crucial innovation of the field was a clash and division between the old and the new, the traditional and the innovative. The young now considered themselves to be writers who were detached from the oligarchic families, high society and elitist nepotism (Altamirano and Sarlo 76). Talent for artistic and creative expression was entering an arena as one of the main criteria. This final rupture made possible the avant-garde and the constitution of a literary field that was based precisely on the divisions within created by its players: high and low literature, best sellers and new readership. One could argue that the literary field created its own rules and logic.

Was that the literary field autonomous? In this specific moment, probably. Nonetheless, this autonomy was temporary and short-lived. The close relationship it maintained with the intellectual and political field was still very visible. Even though the new social role of writer was acceptable in society, the writer was still tied to the questions and debates of national identity. Even the main followers of the avant-garde aesthetic, as only one school of thought,

engaged in the discussion of the foundation of national literature, national myths and the source of identity. Borges's intellectual refusal in 1924 to talk about the *gaucho* as a source of national identity was, according to Sarlo, only temporary. Nevertheless, what did happen in this period was an acknowledgment that the literary field as a distinguishable category existed, and it managed to set the rules and logic by the various players who were negotiating the positions. If young writers were no longer associated with the political oligarchy, the new source of alliance and legitimacy was created between the publishers, editors and writers.

As Diego summarizes, the effects of the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) moved the center of Spanish language publishing industry to Buenos Aires, which then enjoyed its golden years in the next few decades. Between 1938 and 1939 the most important Buenos Aires publishing houses were founded: Emecé, Losada and Sudamericana. The consolidation of the publishing field and its internal logic lasted until major changes occurred during the 1950s, 1960's and 1970s with the Cuban revolution, presidency of Juan Perón and the subsequent violent military dictatorship. However, the question of the literary field became more complex as the players and agents took multiple positions. So, talking about the Argentine literary field of the 1960s and 1970s poses complex issues since one can talk about it in relation to the interconnected regional, national, and transnational structures. Here I am referring to the moment labeled in Latin American literary history as the "boom."

Even today, after more than forty years there is no critical consensus on what "boom" is. It is one of the most recognized cultural phenomena known to the mainstream international public. Literary and cultural critics are still talking about it, but the specificity of the term itself is still quite debatable. There is one school of thought that wants to connect the "boom" to a

literary, narrative style of Latin-American fiction. In this realm are critics such as Emir Rodriguéz Monegal (*El 'boom' en la novela latinoamericana*), Donald Shaw (*The Post-Boom in Spanish American Fiction*) and Elizbieta Sklodowska (*Testimonio hispanoamericano: historia, teoría, política*). On the other side are critics such as Ángel Rama, Jean Franco (*The Decline and the Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War*) and Idelber Avelar who argue that the "boom" was a market-based endeavor that contributed to the autonomy of the intellectual field in Latin America and the professionalization of the writer. In addition to this academic split, it was also debated by the member-writers of the literary circle. On various occasions, the "boom" writers Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), Mario Vargas Llosa (Peru), Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia) and Julio Cortázar (Argentina) tried to define the concept themselves as a narrative aesthetic (José Donoso), as an idea tied closely to the problems of the Cuban revolution (Cortázar) and as the creation of the global book market in Latin America (Vargas Llosa). Furthermore, the heated intellectual debates led to a reopening of the existing wounds and furthered the problem of intellectual divisions within the literary field in Latin America.[14]

My particular position is similar to that of the Argentine sociologist and literary critic, Horacio González, who tried to reconcile these perspectives. He observed the "boom" in relation to Argentine literature and claimed that the "boom" was "una manera de situar los libros frente a las sensaciones nuevas e intraquilas del ávido lector de los años sesenta y setenta" (428).[15] These "new sensations" only made visible, in my opinion, all profound relationships, alliances, networks that already had existed within the literary field. The nuance was that the expansion of

[14] The debate between Julio Cortázar and José María Arguedas on the meaning of 'boom' as a betrayal of Latin American reality was published in *Life* magazine in 1969. While Cortázar defended his cosmopolitan and elitist view of the literature as a 'non profession,' Arguedas' standpoint was that his new writing was crucial in giving voice to the Other.

[15] "A way to situate books in front of new and unsettling sensations of avid reader of the 1960s and 1970s."

Latin American literature and the book market spilled over three continents. This was due to several important features. The international commercial success of Latin American writers such as García Márquez and Vargas Llosa was the result of marketing campaigns that for the first time were emerging as the new way to promote literature. Diego notes that in the 1960s, Buenos Aires was turned into a huge billboard with ads to buy books of the new generation of Latin American novelists. Another feature was their social and political engagement in the politics of the continent. For example, García Márquez has maintained a commitment to the Cuban revolution while Vargas Llosa who defended it at first, turned against it due to the famous Padilla case in 1971.[16] Literary prizes made these writers visible to the whole continent. These prizes were conveniently produced by the houses that were printing and publishing the "boom" novels such as Alfaguara and Seix Barral. Both Vargas Llosa and Carlos Fuentes won the prestigious Seix Barral prize in 1962 and 1967 respectively. Debates, conferences, guest lectureship and workshops at universities made alliances between editors, writers, literary critics and academics even more visible.[17] This feature and their commercial success in the international book market merged and bypassed the pre- existing paradigm wherein what was commercially successful was considered to be of lower literary quality (such was the case of avant-garde at the beginning of the century). Furthermore, this success lent legitimacy to contemporary Latin American literature and to the Latin American writer in the world. The commercial success of these writers coincided with their entrance to the (North) American academia. The consecration was now

[16] In 1971, Cuban poet Heberto Padilla was imprisoned by Cuban authorities on vague charges, which brought about vigorous protests by individuals, organizations, and governments. Many of those condemning the Cuban regime had been its supporters, and the controversy divided Latin American intellectuals and artists along party lines. Padilla was made to read a public confession accusing himself and others of vaguely defined attitudes and activities contrary to Fidel Castro's regime, which increased the protests abroad.

[17] Especially in North America; the famous literary workshop at the University of Iowa hosted many writers from Latin America, among them José Donoso.

coming from the writer's success in the market and from his/her visibility to the North American academics and critics who were publishing literary analyses on their texts.[18] If earlier, in the avant-garde commercial success was seen as the betrayal of the aesthetic and ethical values within the emerging national market, here, the rise of culturally transnational market had a democratizing potential. It permitted the writer's visibility and presence in the international market and North and South American academia. Consequently, one of the most important accomplishments was the drawing of attention to other Latin American writers, narratives and literary movements previous to the "boom" moment. These schools, movements, and writers were rethought and reexamined (as was the case with Borges, according to Sarlo) from inside the intellectual and literary field. At the same time it can be argued that the new form of the cultural market had a destructive force, since it led literature to be subjected to the laws of the market. Thus, the question of how "boom" was defined as cultural phenomena created a new discourse inside the field: did this step toward the massive consumer culture of literature have a democratizing or destructive potential? This kind of a discourse that tied consumer culture to the issues of "good" literature enters the debate in the literary field and becomes crucial during the Menem's years in Argentina.

Additionally, the way the "boom" was reflected in the Argentine literary field was through the figure of Julio Cortázar. This exemplary writer, who left Argentina in 1951 opposing the government of Juan Perón, reflected multiple intellectual positions that will be crucial for the literary field of the 1980s and 1990s in Argentina. Cortázar's intellectual positioning will be a space generating an anxiety of influence for the future generations of Argentine writers who will

[18] The major literary criticism in the North American academia starts with Rodríguez Monegal's literary endeavor to introduce the 'boom' to the North American public. The production of books and articles on such topics has escalated since 1972. One only needs to go to the MLA list to see hundreds of articles produced in this period.

define themselves from who Cortázar was and who he was not but should have been. In the eyes of the writers who were coming on the scene, he was an Argentine version of the "boom." He was a Latin American and Argentine writer residing in Paris working as a journalist, a translator with great success in the literary world, a great admirer and disciple of Borges and a writer who shifted his intellectual and political positions (to put it bluntly, from elitist to socially engaged intellectual) while debating the role of a writer and literature in the society. However, the positioning of future generations of writers depended also on the shifts in the field of power. The Latin American military dictatorships of the 1970s dissolved the acquired legitimacy of the literary field in Latin America. The violence performed by state terrorism reconfigured the political, social and cultural structure. The military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983), for example, persecuted students, workers and intellectuals in order to fight subversion, or disobedience to the ideals of patriarchal, Christian and Western civilization that were based on a free market economy. In this kind of political environment, intellectuals and writers changed positions and mediations within the intellectual and literary field. The major effect these ideological crises had on the intellectuals, mainly leaning toward the Left, was the loss of legitimacy. Sociologist Martin Hopenhayn in his *No Apocalypse, No Integration: Modernism and Postmodernism in Latin America* suggests that the greatest source of legitimacy for a Latin American intellectual emanated from the claim for "organic articulation between knowledge production and the radical transformation of social structures" (xvii). In other words, in the past the field of cultural production had been defined by the rules and logic created by the players and agents pertaining to the particular field. The independence of the field, the consecration and legitimacy were now destabilized. In this case, the intellectuals were also the key activists in

voicing structural changes. However, dictatorship as a result of political and technological defeat of developmental policy destroyed such legitimacy since the field of power was now imposing its own rules. Intellectuals and artists were entering an identity crisis due to the loss of legitimacy as other players became knowledge producers. The question of writers' professionalization and monetary compensation during the "boom" ceased to be an issue as the intellectual's role was altered during the violent dictatorship. As sociologist Claudio Benzecry noted, the debate between Julio Cortázar and Liliana Hecker centered on whether an intellectual should stay or leave the country during the military junta ("With a Little" 25). Such debate not only centered on the issues of the "boom" and its place in Argentina, but was also a result of the loss of independence in the literary field due to the interruption created by the autocratic government. In such a political climate, the loss of independence was unavoidable.

However, as the dictatorship collapsed after the Falkland's war debacle, it was time to redefine the field according to the new logic of post-dictatorial Argentina. During the early 1980s Argentine writers and intellectuals were discussing how to overcome the traumatic past of state terrorism. While some were in Argentina (Ricardo Piglia), others were still in exile (Luisa Valenzuela) dealing with the issues of trauma, memory, and violence. These themes dominated the literary scene and aesthetic of writers such as Piglia with *Respiración artificial*, Juan José Saer with *Nadie, nada, nunca*, Valenzuela with *Cambio de armas* and Tununa Mercado with *En estado de memoria*. Additionally, debate again sparked the Cortázar-Hecker binary over the legitimacy of home vs. exile. Thus, the new legitimacy of the literary field was generated in service of overcoming the loss through the process of mourning in the experimental non linear fiction of Piglia, Saer and Valenzuela and testimonial literature of Mercado. The generation of

these authors became labeled in North American academia as "post-boom" and "post-modern." These terms of great confusion define the debates in the literary and academic field to this day.[19] In Argentina, the "post-boom" entailed a disperse generation of writers with different aesthetic and political proposals, with the central figures of Piglia, Saer and Manuel Puig who helped redefine the literary field in the 1980s and 1990s.[20] These writers became the focus of literary criticism, publishing world and literary magazines around which the literary aesthetic of the national writing was shaped. While Puig kept a low profile and a position of self-marginalization, Saer and Piglia's intervention in the field was significant. As Diego notes, the displacement produced by these writers who were also university professors and serious literary critics meant the reorganization and re canonization of the field (95). Piglia's critical labors in magazines, his essays in *Crítica y ficción* on the revalorization of the works of Borges, Arlt, Macedonio Fernández, and his dismissal of Julio Cortázar led to the further "intellectualization" and "hermetic moments" of Argentine literature (96). Such observation implies that the restructuring of the field was due to multiple and simultaneous shifts. These changes isolated and identified Piglia and Saer as exemplary because they emerged as representatives of the *dominant* directions in the field and not as the only ones. As I will explain further below, the younger generations of the authors (born after the 1950s and 1960s), such as César Aira and Alan Pauls, intervened in the literary scene with different opposing aesthetics that will mark the 1990s. However, putting aside the aesthetic values of their work, what also led to a relatively fast

[19] The publication of the book *The Postmodern Debate in Latin America* gathers articles by many crucial Latinamericanists such as José Joaquin Bruner and José Oviedo, among many who argue that 'postmodernism' as a term is very problematic in Latin America and cannot be identified as same as in Europe since modernity is still very polemical term in the continent.

[20] I am completely aware that there are many more writers in the field in the 1980s and many more aspects to it. However, my intention here is not to elaborate on all of them but only on those who, thus far, are considered to be canonical in the North American academia. My reasoning behind this is that I am interested in the main trends and currents in the field and not alternatives. Next chapter will focus of alternatives.

consecration of Piglia and Saer was the state of affairs in the publishing field. According to Diego, the price of paper started rising – by 100% in the late 1990s and the lack of modernization of the publishing companies was visible as companies could not afford to buy new technology that would facilitate printing (120). Argentina was losing the competition with emerging book markets in Brazil and Chile. There was a difficulty in paying for copyright for the best-selling foreign authors. An economic crisis in Argentina was fast approaching. These factors led to the obvious shrinking of the national market but also to the expansion of the publication of national authors as a way to avoid the emerging crisis (116). So, Piglia and Saer were widely published and read partly because they were favored by the local publishers since the copyrights were cheaper and marketing easier.

Thus, one of the main debates that sparked and shaped the field was about the purpose of post-dictatorial fiction and how to situate it in the field.[21] At the same time, such issues helped consecrate these authors. Their intellectual perspective within and outside the country, their position during the years of dictatorship and the presence in literary magazines, workshops, book presentations, academia and conferences to large extent helped consecrate them within and outside the (inter)national field. Simultaneously, the younger generation of writers including César Aira and Alan Pauls started debating their role in re-founding the intellectual field at large and the literary field in particular. While previously consecrated figures of Argentine literary scene were already dealing with the trauma of dictatorial years, the representatives of the forthcoming generations were subjected to the new reality. The political and economic transition of the late 1980s led to major structural changes in the field of power. The presidency of Carlos

[21] A vast amount of literature talks about the purpose of the post-dictatorial fiction and testimonial genre as one of the dominant currents and the aesthetic value. See Sarlo's *Pasado presente*, Avelar's *The Untimely Present,* Elizabeth Jelin's *State Repression and Labors of Memory*.

Menem (1989-1999) and his neoliberal experiment profoundly changed cultural production and the literary field. It can be argued that, after the 'boom', this was the second major break in the lettered city. Various generations of writers were influenced by these changes that transformed the literary field. So, what exactly had happened in Argentina during the 1990s?

3. Neoliberal drama

If everything is allowed in politics, then irony is too. "Síganme, no les voy a defraudar" (Follow me, I will not let you down) was Carlos Menem's electoral slogan in the 1989 elections in Argentina. As a result of a ten year long presidency, Menem is today standing trial because of major corruption. He is accused of being responsible for selling out the country that led to the major economic crash of 2001. He has become the laughingstock of the Argentine political and intellectual world. And yet, in 1989 the slogan was not ironic but promising to most of his compatriots who were facing economic and political chaos.

It is fair to say that the 1980s were years of political and economic transition from authoritarian dictatorship to a democracy that produced new hopes but also deepened existing anxieties. In the first years of the 80s, Argentina was in such a state of ruins that every segment of society required substantial reform, be it political, economic or social. The presidency of Raúl Alfonsín (1983-1989), the first democratically elected president after the dictatorship, marked a period of peace and consolidation. Politically, the country and government were dealing with the trauma of dictatorship that brought about the national reunification. It was the era of the authorities' intent to legally prosecute the military junta responsible for the torture, disappearance and killing of thousands of citizens. The politics of human rights and trials should have guaranteed that the trauma would be overcome. The climate of political tolerance and

peaceful negotiations of conflicts resulted in the country's opening and integration into the international arena of democratic governments. Thanks to such efforts, Alfonsín's cabinet at first gained substantial political capital that additionally enacted social transformations in the sphere of public and private life. For example, the law that made divorce legal was passed in 1987, making Argentina one of the last predominately Catholic countries to do so.

The hopes of democratic reunification, it is believed, are inseparable from economic development and modernization that make democracy possible and stronger. Unlike political decisions, economic policies implemented in the 1980s were often a source of disappointment rather than satisfactions. Most anxieties resulted from the economic confusion produced by the governance of the junta. On one hand, the fight against the communist "subversives" created the binary opposition exercised by the military leadership. Argentina was to become the land of Western, Christian, capitalistic and neoliberal values. The ideological goal was the idea of free market economy. However, according to historian Marcos Novaro and his study *Historia de la Argentina contemporánea. De Perón a Kirschner*, the implementation of such policies was devastating partly due to the fact that the Argentine militaries were not vocational economists. The lack of appropriate knowledge and flexibility resulted in bad economic policies. Heavy external debt, low exports and high interest rates produced high levels of poverty. According to Novaro's sources, poverty line hit 37% in 1982 (64). Thus, Alfonsín inherited a confusing situation. While Argentina was entering the alliance of the free market countries, the nation suffered from autocratic leadership and failed implementation of adequate economic policies. The president's approach to the monetary recovery was a conservative economy based on democratic reform of institutions which would sustain the economic growth. Yet this approach

proved unproductive in Argentina. In 1984, according to Novaro, even though salaries increased by 35%, real inflation hit 625% annually. The inability of the government to handle inflation and the pressure of unions resulted in the program of reorganization in 1987. There were three steps: privatization of state-owned businesses, incorporation of private and foreign capital in the oil industry and fiscal reform (197). Nonetheless, it was the same year of parliamentary elections. Such drastic and systematic reforms would endanger the reelection of the existing party in power. The members of parliament did not want to risk anything with shock doctrines. The implementation of reform failed.

Alfonsin's government was further debilitated by military uprisings throughout the 1980s. Lower ranking officers scared the government by going after not only the main protagonists of the state terrorism but after them as well. The group called *carapintadas* staged protests and threatened the fragile democracy with the possibility of military coup in 1987. So, by mid 1989 Argentina was under collapse. The government's execution of different economic policies resulted in failure. The foreign debt was rising. Poverty hit a record of 47. 3% (Novaro 201). Hyperinflation was rocking the monetary policies. Unable to upturn the country, Alfonsín lost the 1989 election to Carlos Menem, the representative of the Peronist party. Menem's election to presidency in 1989 was profoundly important and marked the 1990s in every possible sphere of society. Politically, the reinstatement of the Peronist party to power was significant since it would mobilize the popular masses that desperately needed political leadership in the times of crisis. It gave hope that ideology of peronism was back in Argentina after more than twenty years. As it turned out, it was a different kind of peronism, a new wave now identified as *menemismo*. It actually proved to be the opposite of classical Peronist's values.[22] Economically,

[22] According to major sociologist and political analysts, *menemismo* combined at first the populist ideology only to

the crisis had to be overcome and Menem seemed to have found the cure. The strict implementation of economic policies suggested by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank initially gave rise to the Argentine economy. Furthermore, with the election of Menem, Argentina was back on neoliberal track. The support for such an endeavor came from the (inter)national investors that made this transition possible. Socially, the reinstatement of the Party and the neoliberal turn shaped the social and cultural stratus of Argentina in the 1990s creating new social players and agents in the era of technological boom and globalization.

The first and major problem Menem encountered was the recession and hyperinflation inherited from Alfonsín. His solution to the problem converged in a series of economic reforms implemented in 1991 that culminated in the Convertibility Plan, where the value of Argentine peso was tied to that of the American dollar. This step was followed by another major project: the privatization of gigantic state owned companies. Menem's economic team made privatization possible for the majority of the national companies: oil companies, the post office, gas, telephone companies, and electricity and water utilities. According to *Le Monde diplomatique* journalist Carlos Gabetta, the main investors were big conglomerates primarily from Spain and the United States. The massive monetary influx of foreign investments helped diminish inflation to single digits by the early 1990s. The economic success made the country one of the leaders in developing countries in the world. The increase in GDP and investments were substantial.[23] These steps in macro politics made Menem popular with foreign leaders. He was at the height of

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abandon it as the privatization clashed with such discourse. See bibliography for full reference for books that explore such issues: Marcos Navarro, John Smith, and Ana Wortman.

[23] According to Gabetta's research published online, the Convertibility Plan "slashed inflation rates (a drop of 1,343.9% in 1990 to 0.1% in 1996), sustained growth in GDP (an average of 4.5% between 1990 and 1996), modernization of the state through privatization ($24,779m between 1989 and 1995) and a steady flow of foreign investment."

his reign and loved by the popular masses at home. Abroad, he was considered one of the crucial voices in the implementation of the Washington Consensus, which advocated neoliberal policies such as privatization and liberalization of the market. The successful turnaround of the country got Menem reelected in the 1995 elections. His second term was dedicated to the social and political reforms that went hand in hand with the economic ideology. For example, Menem decided to withdraw from the Non-Aligned Movement and create strong political ties to the United States. He also was one of the founders of *Mercosur*, the economic union of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay that pursued free trade between countries. At the same time, the major comeback of Peronist party to power was promising. Argentina was living its best and most productive years. The transition to the neoliberal market appeared to have succeeded.

However, the neoliberal dream proved to be a nightmare. The early stabilization of the national economy was followed by a period of economic difficulties when the dollar began to rise in the international markets in 1995. High external debt and the recession accompanying the economic crisis that hit various countries (Mexico, China and Russia) led to higher interest rates in Argentina. Despite the massive loan support from International Monetary Fund, the economy of convertibility and high fiscal deficit proved unsustainable by the late 1990s. The dream of economic stability was crushed once the country entered a vicious circle: in order to pay for external debts, Argentina had to keep borrowing money. This approach caused a major breakdown of macroeconomic policies. So, in 1999, Menem lost elections and Fernando de la Rúa assumed power in a country where unemployment hit 25%. According to the national institute of statistics, *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos* (INDEC), the GDP in 1999 actually dropped 4% and the country was entering a recession. This was the beginning of one of

the major crises Argentina suffered in its history. But how was this possible? The president who consolidated the economic stability was now accused of ruining it. The answer lies in the behind-the-scenes international politics and macroeconomics.

At home, throughout the 1990s Menem had been accused of neglecting human rights and selling the country out through major corruption scandals. One of the most controversial issues at the early stage of his governance was that of the massive pardons to the military issued in the late 1990. Menem's approach was that much needed reconciliation required leaving things behind and moving on. The reality of this approach was a tradeoff. Historian Thomas Wright argues that Menem had traded off pardons in exchange "for further reductions of military budget and staff and a firm commitment by the military commanders to prevent further rebellions" (157). Thus, the pardons were granted partly to ensure that the reform in the military would go without problems. At the same time, the accusations of the sell out went hand in hand with the corruption scandals. Menem was accused of making substantial monetary gains by receiving economic support from large companies due to his loyalty in privatization processes (Novaro 150).

Due to the major structural change in the field of political and economic power – the privatization of State-owned companies, leftist intellectuals such as Beatriz Sarlo, Oscar Terán and Oscar Landi, accused Menem of ruining the welfare state, public sphere and making social exclusion the prime of his epoch. In a country where the role of the State was traditionally highly influential and crucial, the privatization of state-owned companies diminished the role and power that the state initially acquired. The privatization affected the companies producing goods and institutions that were creating the Argentine social being: the health, pension and educational system, and cultural institutions such as theaters, cinemas and publishing companies were also

hit by the sweeping privatization. In a context where everything was subjected to the logic of the market, the role of the state was weakened by the private companies which took over the power to model the population under the new ideology of individualism instead of collectivity. As Martín Hopenhayn points out in the era of post-utopia where all the utopian projects had crashed in Latin America, the alternative imposed by the leading capitalist countries such as the United States implied crucial identity shifts. The state no longer guaranteed social equality and peace since it ceased to be the mediator or controller of political, economic and consequently social changes. The free market economy controlled by the private companies hegemonized this position. Politicians were replaced by experts and technocrats who were imagining Argentina based on the values imported from the United States and imposed by the World Bank.

To better illustrate, one of many victims of such policies was the field of education. The major ideological shift in Menem's educational reform was that education was no longer a social and public good but one of the constitutive components of the market. The privatization of education (primarily, through the foundation of private schools) was subject to the competetiove market and survival of the fittest. Such reformulation was part of the theoretical framework imposed by the World Bank. As Eduardo Domenech argues in the book *Cultura y neoliberalismo*, "la educación es vista como una inversión que hacen los individuos para aumentar su productividad personal y, consecuentemente, su estatus ocupacional e ingresos" (72). Furthermore, education was not only subjected to structural change but a change that is, to borrow Verena Stolcke's term, an "ideological trap" (320). She states that this trap was based on "la ilusión liberal de que la superación socioeconómica depende tan sólo de la voluntad y el esfuerzo individual" which leads to hiding "las verdaderas causas de la desigualdad, a saber, la

dominación y explotación de la mayoría desposeída por una minoría que vive en abudancia" (321). This line of thought was not isolated.

Such a profound alternation of the society had an enormous impact on how cultural production was consumed. The shifts were stricken by the intensity of the neoliberal launch. Argentina by no means represents an isolated case in Latin America.

4. Culture for Sale

The neoliberal turn in Latin America sparked intellectual debates on the novel nature and relationship between market, culture and value of the work of art. Intellectuals, cultural critics and sociologists wrote extensively examining the implication of cultural politics in the 1990s and 2000s in Latin America in general and Argentina in particular. As an example of the sweeping and fast implementation of the neoliberal policies, at least two main intellectual postures developed around such implications. As one of the most influential Argentine intellectuals, Beatriz Sarlo warned in many works and especially in *Escenas de la vida posmoderna: intelectuales, arte y videocultura* about the great dangers of the lack of State's intervention as regulatory body on the (cultural) market and the diminishing role of intellectuals replaced by the mass media culture. On the other hand, Argentine anthropologist Néstor García Canclini advocated in his books *Culturas híbridas. Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* and *Consumidores y ciudadanos. Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* for the democratizing potential of the globalizing, neoliberal market as a space for cultural agency of popular classes that would diminish race/ethnic conflicts in Latin America.

Sarlo's main criticism of Menem's politics was that he allowed market liberalism to shape the cultural production and social imaginary of the country. The social and cultural

imaginary of Argentina changed irreversibly for the worst where symbolic goods imported from the West were assimilated into the national context without any critical distancing. The fundamental problem of such assimilation was that the new political elite saw the State's intervention as an unnecessary evil. To diminish the State's role on every level of society meant that anything, including culture, was now subject to the laws of apparently free market controlled by the private companies. So, the privatization of what once was considered the public sphere led to the empowerment and deeper privatization of private social life. As a consequence, if there was no public sphere, there was no space for political action. The depolarization in the public sphere was probably one of the most commented and criticized aspects of neoliberal political thought.[24] The illusion of individuality replaced the traditional notion of collectivity. Sarlo points out that such a serious clash between politics and society reflects a weakening of public culture ("Culture Under Menem" 1994). She defines public culture as any form of production that is not subjected to the market but guided by the State's intervention. The implementation of the 2388 decree from 1992 meant the reduction of the State's budget in cultural activities. Due to the lack of State budgeting, most of the cultural centers owned by the city of Buenos Aires had to be closed. As a counterbalance, the birth of mass media and the strengthening of the private sphere filled this gap. Traditionally, mass media tends to be the commercial, privately owned TV, radio, and video machinery whose sole purpose is to acquire profit through offering mainstream popular content. In doing so, the mass media inevitably creates a wide network of cultural forms

[24] There have been numerous studies published on this topic in recent years. *Cultura y Neoliberalismo* is a volume edited by Alejandro Grimson that entails how the neoliberal politics challenged many spheres of Latin American societies including education, legal institutions and cultural production. On a similiar note, Daniel Mato gathered various essays of eminent intellectuals such as Nelly Richard, in his *Cultura, politica y sociedad. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas* in which critics explore how globalization and neoliberal politics changed the Latin American societies on the periphery of the Western civilization for good.

to be consumed by the wide audiences. Consider that by 1999, almost 90% of Argentines had TV and 47% were signed up for some kind of cable programming (Wortman *Hay una nueva Argentina?* 33). Such numbers meant that the cultural production that was traditionally offered by wide variety of media (theater, cinema, museums) was replaced by what Sarlo denotes as TV *zapping* – TV images repeated with no regard of sense and thereby losing any kind of semantic density (34). At the same time and least in theory, the free market should have created the fair competition. In reality, the ownership of the mass media companies is fairly concentrated. According to the report by two Argentine journalists Eduardo Alemán and Martin Dinatale, Clarín Group is the biggest conglomerate, controlling the newspaper of the same name in addition to shares in two major provincial newspapers, the sports daily *Olé,* the cable channel Multicanal, the open air channel *Canal 13,* the *Mitre* and FM100 radio stations, part of the news agency *DYN,* the press *Artes Gráficas Rioplatense S.A.,* the publishing company *Aguilar,* the magazine *Elle,* the TV studio *Buenos Aires Televisión,* and other investments, such as a cell phone company. The second largest media company is La Nación S.A., which runs the newspaper of the same name and is partial owner of the national satellite Paracomstat. These two conglomerates control the media market in Argentina.

Such expansion of the mass-media market had real consequences. Ana Wortman, the leading Argentinean sociologist who explores the consequences of the 1990s in Argentina, argues that the legitimacy of intellectuals that previously had been drawn from public work was now being replaced by the work of TV journalists and presenters. Wortman called them the new type of agents in which "no hay un espacio para voces portadoras de un discurso crítico" ("Vaivenes del campo" 25)[25]. Along the same lines, Sarlo argues that the mass media created

[25] "There is no room for critical discourses."

distinctive ways of imagining the social space since intellectuals withdrew to the universities, leaving it up to TV *zapping* to create "an image of unified cultural scene" ("Vaivenes del campo" 3). The illusion of homologous unification of the cultural scene was also caused by the loss of the legitimacy of traditional agents who produced the cultural goods. According to Wortman, the expansion of mass media, the privatization of cinemas and theaters, the diminishing of the national cinematic production, the distribution of the movies in the new space of *shoppings*, the use of free time in the context of social inequalities and urban insecurities created privatization of social life and depolarization in the public sphere.[26] Intellectuals lacked the debate on the cultural politics of the time and lost their legitimacy to TV presenters, technocrats and experts who introduced new discourses of economic growth, expansion, and apparent democratization of everyday life. New social agents came on the scene, young professionals in the marketing industry who were "designing" the Argentine "way of life" (*Pensar* 90). Thus, if we go back to Bourdieu's appeal for agency, one would think that according to Sarlo and Wortman, Argentines in the 1990s were passive consumers of culture produced solely by mass-media and a new kind of "popular intellectuals," TV presenters. The place and space for agency was, then, null. However, this conclusion would not be entirely accurate. This pessimistic reading of, let's say, the devastating processes of cultural hegemony, also refuses to acknowledge that hegemony had existed starting with the foundation of Argentine literary field as lettered men dominated the cultural scene. [27] As Diego has shown, the democratization of the market happened precisely

[26] Ana Wortman argues for this interpretation in many of her recent books but most specifically in *Pensar las clases medias. Consumos culturales y estilos de la vida urbanos en la Argentina de los noventa* and *Cartografía de la Argentina de los 90*. See works cited for a full list of her work on this topic.

[27] I take the term "hegemony" from Gramsci and later Williams, who relate cultural domination connected to the social structure of the ruling classes that maintain the social domination of one class and produce the dominated classes.

with the hyper production and mass publication of popular and high literature.

Thus, there is a simultaneous reading of the neoliberal shifts that allows seeing these turns as a space where a new (cultural) agency could be created as a form of alternative and resistance. In such terms, what neoliberal shift made possible was also a first step in movement from autonomy to heteronomy of the literary field and aesthetic experience. As García Canclini suggests, mass consumption creates a space to envision a new kind of citizenship that will be based on consumerism as identity politics and diminish racial and ethnic conflicts. Furthermore, as Óscar Landi pointed out, the appearance of mass media is a reality that celebrates a certain type of disappearance of division between popular and elite culture.[28] Both of these critics saw the democratizing potential in consumer culture and market as a place of resistance to the hegemonic culture where new subjectivities can be imagined. The resistance was envisioned in various articulations.

Even though there is still lack of serious statistics and data, Wortman suggests that in the 1990s we can notice increasing public participation in the literary and art workshops offered by the Government of the City of Buenos Aires (GCBA),[29] the emergence of the NGOs that support cultural production through groups of artist in particular neighborhoods with the street art that become a popular form in artistic expression. These cultural initiatives imply that although there was obviously a lack of governmental financial and social influence on the cultural production, the alternatives were readily accepted as means for perpetuating artistic expression. In additional to support of the NGOs, another form of financial alliance was the creation of cultural

[28] Landi seems to coincide with Martyin Hopenhayn who makes a very interesting argument. He reads neoliberal policies through the postmodernism as the discourse of its hegemony. One of the main characteristics is the bypassing of the division of popular and elite culture. At this point, I will not elaborate on the issues of postmodernism in Latin America but I am aware of the debates and polemics.

[29] The data is available of the official website: http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/.

foundations funded by big companies. According to Argentine sociologists Leonardo Moretta and Hernán Nazer, these foundations were imagined as a new form of network and alliance, but also as a way to appease the criticism by intellectuals and to support local communities. However, they further complicated the already intertwined relation between the public and private sector, between the elite and popular culture, between the artists and marketing agents. If before, the authority to distinguish between high or low culture was ascribed to intellectuals, academia, and literary critics, these foundations created another hegemonic center under new rules produced by their own agents within. As Wortman suggests, this kind of democratization of the field meant that regardless of the pessimism produced by the mass media culture, it was still in cultural production where legitimizing role in the society was reinforced.

Finally, the 1990s also produced spontaneous responses to the neoliberalism. A new social mobility was noticeable as social inequalities sparked waves of civic protests. One such result were movements of *piqueteros*. It is form of demonstrations on the highway and the *barrio* where protesters demand social justice due the impoverishment brought upon the privatization. In his article "Tango Piquetero: Social Protest through Popular Song", Gillermo Anad explains how the emergence of the *piquetero* movement in the 1990s led to the creation and revitalization of tango after its decline in the 80s. The new style tango now was a response to the new social reality. Additionally, the artistic expression through graffiti and the concept of *arte callejero*, or street art, were manifestations of the change in cultural production.

Whether neoliberal policies were a devastating or blossoming space for new identities to emerge does not exclude one or the other. It is sure is that shifts were inevitable. The changes and shifts brought by neoliberal culture were by no means unique to the field of the cultural

production. As I have previously stated, various shifts in the field of power in different instances led to the changes in the field of culture and literary production. The rise of new critical and political theories, modernization, secularization and demographic alternations influenced every sphere of society and consequently, the way writers wanted to be perceived in such a new society. So, these changes to the mass media culture and production were new in their nature but as a concept in the development of society, such a shift was expected. New modes of mobility and sociability were envisioned by such profound alternations as happened in previous instances. These circumstances also lead to understand heteronomy as a moment in which the literary field allows for new ways of seeing by new generation of writers who question deeply the traditional notions of autonomy and aesthetic experience.

Now, what I am particularly interested in here is to investigate how these mentioned shifts in the field of power and later in the field of cultural production translate into the literary field. There is no doubt that these profound structural alternations impacted the field of literary work. The polarization in theoretical thought between García Canclini and Sarlo is also seen in the literary field. The burning questions of the purpose and role of literature in society still obsesses writers and artist but in the new social arena. The neoliberal publishing policies of the late 1990s definitely erased Argentina from the center of the map of publishing world, literary prizes were hegemonized by the market driven criteria of best sellers and the work of literary magazines created at least two distinguishable literary groups, the so-called *Planetarios* and *Shanghai* groups. So, the question is what is the place of literary field in a society driven by increasing culture of the market economy?

5. The place for/of the literary field in the 1990s

Earlier I showed how in the late nineteen and the beginning of the twentieth century, the relationship between the market and literature was emerging as the society was modernizing by an increase in economic growth, secularization and demographic explosion. The rules by which this relationship would develop changed as Argentine society lived various turbulent years of political dictatorships. However, if the avant-garde reconfigured the role of the writer and literature in society, since it was seen in its dual nature as a socially driven versus an aesthetically pleasing arena, the space for the debate on the role of the market did not really fully develop until the "boom." As I pointed out earlier, the "boom" reconfigured the way we speak of literature in relation to the market and literary field. The number of copies sold and the success of the Latin American writers in the international arena sparked the ongoing debate over the nature of literature and the writer's role. The implication of such a venture had a reflection on the national context in the case of Julio Cortázar and the polemic developed around the patriotic loyalty of the intellectual during the time of the political dictatorship in the 1970s. However, in Argentina, the last decade of the twentieth century sparks the talk about the literary field and the profound impact of the market. The literary field suffered structural changes in its system since the context of neoliberal mass-media culture and globalization mixed with expansion of the new digital technologies reflect how the dominant writers of younger generation (writers born after the 1960s) differentiate and position themselves precisely in these new relationships created between the literature and the market. As I will show below, once again, the question of autonomy of the field becomes the center of debate within the literary field.

In the new reality produced by the neoliberal shifts, various mechanisms come into dynamic play in the configuration of the literary field. Literary criticism points out at least three dominant groups and a generation of writers in the field that I will adopt here. First, during the 1990s, Piglia and Saer will live the full consecration within national literature and will be considered new literary fathers to the generation of forthcoming writers. Secondly, the younger generation of writers will differentiate itself and polarize in a new relation to the mass-media the culture and the market, publishing industry, and also the literary aesthetics put forward by the already existing and emerging tendencies within the transnational arena of Argentine, Latin American and European critical thought. Finally, César Aira with his aesthetic proposal of "bad literature" will start to establish an isolated and sometimes confusing place within the field.

As Diego sharply pointed out, Piglia and Saer have become dominant in the national literary system not only because they were "excellent" writers, but also due to the crisis in the Argentinean publishing industry. As the price of copyright rose because the Argentine peso lost value it was harder to import the internationally known best sellers, so the industry turned to national literature. This is not to say that their success was solely based on this coincidence. The particularities of their narrative proposals were fundamental since both of them reconfigured the way mainstream fiction was imagined in those years. In his novel *Respiración artificial*, Piglia not only addresses the question of trauma and memory as he deals with post dictatorship, but he fundamentally challenges the notion of (hi)story and narration. Furthermore, in his *Ciudad ausente*, he embarks on an intertextual dialogue with Macedonio Fernández, Roberto Arlt and Jorge Luis Borges in order to reinvent the narrative machine in the digital era.

Thanks to their final consecration in the 1990s, through literary prizes,[30] their acceptance by the North American academia and the critical and pedagogical work exercised at the University of Buenos Aires, these writers also brought to light the newer readings of Borges, Arlt and Macedonio Fernández as part of reconfiguring the national canon. Although Borges was never part of the 'boom' generation, his reappearance and canonization in the 1970's came thanks to the visibility and consecration he gained in Europe, as Sarlo pointed out earlier. So, he became the central figure of the literary field and a space for anxiety of influence of younger writers, among them Piglia and Saer. As Sarlo argued in her well known book *Borges, un escritor en las orillas,* the trend of reconfiguring Borges within national literature shifted from the system dominated by him in the 1970s to the Borges who comes from literary theory and a focus of the intertext. For this reason, he also prevails in the 1980s and 1990s precisely because of the ways in which literature deals with collective memory and the trauma of dictatorship questioning Borgesian notions of real(ity), the representation of the impossible, the discomfort and defiance of language. However, with Piglia and Saer there is a consolidation of an aesthetic proposal that is based on a rejection of Borges as an authority in relationship to fiction and politics. Such expected performance of anxiety of influence and the overcoming led them to conceptualize a new theory of the connection between literature and politics. This time, these writers were completely conscious of the additional aspect that the literary needs to take into consideration: the modes of material circulation of the symbolic goods within the market. Diego

[30] There is a famous controversy over Piglia and his award given to him by Planeta. In 1997 Planeta awarded more than $40,000 to the winner of the literary competition. The scandal rose when Piglia, as writer who publishes with the same company that administers the award, won the competition. He was challenged by Gustavo Nielsen, another contestant that he should have not even been in the contest due to the conflict of interest and appealed to the court. The resolution of the polemic came in 2005 when accusations against Piglia were dropped. See Alejandra Larea and her article "Los premios literaios: recompensas y espectáculos" in *El valor de la cultura: arte, literatura y mercado en Améria Latina.*

argues in his article "La transición demócratica: intelectuales y escritores" that this new approach finds itself in a paradoxical situation: "to withdraw literature from politics and the political notion of the ability to show totality in fiction – as it was in the 1970s – the political function of such gesture is reaffirmed" (51). These writers reject the realist notion that real(ity) could be represented in its totality. They also reject the vanguard ideas that aesthetics has potential in acquiring autonomy of literary field. Instead, what becomes the prevailing feeling is what Diego calls *uncertainty* (72). This aesthetic of uncertainty in its epistemological reading coincided with the postmodern disbelief in the existence of one truth and the constant affirmation that we can never really know things. At the same time, it also mirrored reflection of the real uncertainty produced by the transition to democracy and its consolidation. As Menem's experiment had shown its glimpse of stability, paradoxically, it led to uncertainties for the artist in a new social sphere. The omnipresent force of the market, the empire of mass media culture and the polarization of the publishing industry affected the younger generation of the writers in the 1990s.

The profound alterations within the field of cultural production were also visible in the field of the publishing industry. Sociologist Malena Botto, in her article "1990-2000 La concentración y la polarización de la industria editorial", describes the paradox of the 1990s in the publishing industry. She concludes that although there was a great expansion and increase in production in the book market due to the enlargement of the publishing companies, it was not a good time for the *Argentine* book (220). In other words, even though the industry showed increase, this growth affected other fields such as economy, sociology and politics and not that of literature. The enormous success of commercial literature, such as self-help pseudo-psychology

books and imported books from United States and Europe, was flooding the market. Such a shift was due to the polarization of the publishing market: transnational conglomerates versus small independent presses. In the 1990s one of the natural progressions of the neoliberal doctrine was the enlargement of capital. This process meant that large transnational companies would buy smaller ones and eventually control the market. In other words, in Argentina in the 1990s, the market was dominated by a few large publishing conglomerates; Grupo Planeta, controlled from Spain, included other presses such as Seix Barral, Ariel, Espasa Clape, Crítica, Temas de Hoy. Another good example is group Pirsa Santillana that gathers Aguilar, Taurus and Alfuaguara. Finally, Botto argues that the acquisition in 1998 of the last big and national publishing house, Sudamericana, by Random House Mondadori implied the loss of almost any kind of competitiveness in the Argentine market as it led to the complete denationalization of the publishing industry. These groups originated in Spain (Planeta) and Germany (Random House), which dominated the national market (75%) between 1997 and 2000. Furthermore, the presence and permeability of European authors was far more present in the Argentinean market than vice versa. The paradox was that these politics, instead of globalizing the book market, led to its segmentation. As a consequence, in Argentina, it was impossible to buy a book by a Colombian author and vice versa, while European authors were conquering the market. As Jorge Fornet pointed out, these changes led to "provincialization" of literature (3). Fornet's observation leads to Diego's conclusion that the big companies had their own cultural politics which were guided by the logic of monetary gain and commercial success. Thus, the close relationship with mass-media culture reflected the logic behind the publishing policies: as long as it was "new" it was sellable. At the same time, it had to be safe. So, the companies would publish authors that have

proved to be best-sellers or that had already acquired consecration within the academic circle. For that reason, Botto astutely observes that the publishing company Planeta has copyrights of writers such as Piglia, Saer and Borges who were already consecrated and who represented no monetary gamble.

Such politics implied that those who were left behind were then unknown experimental writers such as Alan Pauls who had not yet gained any legitimacy in the literary field. At first, the visibility of these authors in the large conglomerates was problematic since the companies intervened and affected how these younger authors were going to be consecrated in order to be visible in the literary scene. Such politics intervened in the debate over young writers. As an alternative to such cultural politics, the 1990s faced the proliferation of small independent presses whose politics were defying the big conglomerates – they wanted to publish experimental non mainstream and non commercial literature. These small publishing houses were imagined as spaces that would take chances, experiment and diffuse cutting edge ideas in the sphere of art, knowledge and cultural production. Botto notes that in the city of Buenos Aires alone by the late 1990s there were 1,707 registered small independent publishing presses (221). The number increased in the late 1990s by 50%. At the same time, the rise of such publishers was a response to the politics of transnational conglomerates and also led to the specialization of small presses. So, the high number of houses does not mean that all of them were publishing newer authors in the sphere of poetry, fiction and theater. Some publishers were specialized in the critical theory and cultural studies (Beatriz Viterbo started in 1990) and some tried to redefine what high literature is "by rediscovering new poetics of unknown authors" (Paradiso, founded in 1992).

The changes brought by globalization processes, polarization of the publishing industry and Piglia's and Saer's questioning of the reality set the scene for the binary positioning of the generation of younger writers who defined themselves in relation to these processes in the 90s. Sociologist Claudio Benzecry thoroughly defines these coexisting practices. He argues that "the neoconservative privatization of the literary field" by the transnational conglomerates inevitably led to the new strategic practices within the field and especially the reconfiguration of the necessary success in order to triumph in the field" ("With a Little" 58). In other words, writers were now finding new means to gain legitimacy: their success in the book market. The level of consecration was guided mostly by the market and the appearance in cultural supplements of daily newspapers. Benzecry sees the role of suplementes like this: "si bien no tienen el poder de monopolizar la definición legítima de lo literario, que sí tiene la Universidad, el ser 'ninguneado' por los sumplementos (especialmente *Página12, Clarín, La Nación*) es signo de discrédito dentro del campo" ("Subproducto: campo literario" 144). What Benzecry implicitly argues is what Wortman argued earlier about the emergence of the players in society. The new players in the literary field, magazine journalists, gained enough power to grant consecration to the new authors. In this play, even though the university and academics maintained the right to define what is "literary", the question is who really cares? If now the magazines and the journalists were the gatekeepers for the field in the market where readership was increasingly under the influence of the media, then academics were no longer needed.[31] In addition, he concludes that now, what is considered to be "good literature" is left to the market to decide as a new source of

[31] I am not arguing that consecration by academics is irrelevant nor that academics are useless. What I am arguing is that the consecration and the process changed. Furthermore, this argument also contributes to the polemics within the academic field, the increasing crisis in the Humanities and its purpose in creating global citizens. For the beginning of such debate see Doris Sommer and her book *Cultural Agents in the Americas*.

legitimacy. Such a conception of consecration and legitimacy of who decides what "good literature" is created a split within the literary field into two dominant groups of younger writers.

As Benzecry argues, for the *Shanghai* group, "good literature" was high literature, sophisticated, complicated, referenced by German literary authors (Thomas Bernhard and Günter Grass) with theoretical and critical erudition from the historical Left of Argentine literature and their admiration for the metafictional literary genre. This group developed around the literary magazine *Babel. Revista de libros* whose subtitle was the cynical acknowledgment of new reality: "Todo sobre los libros que nadie puede comprar" or 'everything about the books nobody can buy' ("Transformaciones" 545). Publication of *Babel* began in 1988 and although it ceased in 1991, the schism in the field was already strong. Writers such as Martín Caparrós, Alan Pauls, Sergio Chejfec, and Sergio Bizzio were also called "*experimentalistas*". Literary critic and novelist Luis Chitarroni argued on one occasion that their literature was despised by the other group because of their interest in the "tragic problems of language, inter-textual references and the intemperate lack of consideration for the reader" ("With a Little" 34). What Chitarroni was saying is that the *Babel* literature was imagined to be consumed by the few selected readers who would capture the hermeneutical nature of their writing. In this sense, literature was not supposed to be light but serious and heavy and to deconstruct reality and language as Chejfec described in an interview in *Página12* when he said that his novels have a "reflexive narrator who would theorize the development of the trap".

On the other side of the spectrum was a completely different system of cultural references. The group that came to be known as *Planetarios*[32] gathered around Juan Forn, a

[32] The name came out of the association with the publishing house Planeta. The authors were closely tied to the publishing house as they were granted the instant visibility and success by the publisher.

young editor at Planeta of the Argentine series *Biblioteca del Sur,* Rodrigo Fresán who in the early 1990s was as one of the best-selling young authors in Argentina thanks to his *Historia Argentina*, Guillermo Saccomanno and Marcelo Figueras. Literary critic Valeria Sager argues that the main source of legitimation for these writers came out of publishing industry, journalism and the market (Camou 85). The cultural reference for these writers were North American narratives of the 1960s and 1980s, with John Updike as the dominant figure, and contemporary English literature. One of the main contribution, as Benzecry and Sager argue, was the insertion of the mass culture as a legitimate source of literary aesthetics while playing "with the mythologies coined during the 1960s and 1970s" ("With a Little" 39). Literary critic Jesús Montoya Juárez argues that this group had a lot of similarities with the *McOndo* generation of Latin American young authors (98). Writers such as Alberto Fuguet and Edmundo Paz-Soldán saw the reinvidication of the mass and pop culture as the source of the inspiration. In "Magic Neoliberalism" and "I am Not a Magic Realist" Fuguet defined this generation in opposition to the magic realism as they held it responsible for the provincialization of the novel. Fuguet argued that it did not represent quite what he was in the 90s: an urban man surrounded by shopping malls, mass-media culture and global society.

Regardless of who won in this schism,[33] the literary landscape in Argentina changed for good. What these groups considered to be "good literature" led to the division of literary practice between those who thought they were producing experimental cutting edge literature (*Shanghai* group) and those who were producing commercial texts to be consumed by global urban citizens

[33] For example, Benzecry argues that by the late 1990s the conflict dissolved and they all became friends as the Shanghai writers started publishing for Planeta. They also visited each other at the book presentations and took part in conferences. See his article "With a Little Help from My Friends. Intellectual Sociability and Literary Value in Contemporary Buenos Aires".

(*Planetarios*). This developing polarization in the literary field had repercussions on transforming the way literature, the writer and the work insert themselves in the field. Whether the autonomy of the field was achieved mattered less than how to become visible in a literary market filled with thousands of new "excellent" writers. But how to differentiate oneself mattered more for the social practices (adhesion to the group, literary magazine) than the aesthetic value of the written text. This is why Benzecry concludes that in the 1990s literature also becomes the "subproducto del mercado" ("Transformaciones" 535). That is, until Aira created a very contradictory, isolated and different space in the field.

To this day, there is really no consensus on how to read César Aira. Criticism is visibly uncomfortable when it comes to his literary opus mainly because of the hyperproduction (he publishes three to four novels per year) that leaves substantial space for contradiction. Aira's novels and short stories have been the center of contemporary literary criticism that deals with various issues such as nationalism, cosmopolitism, gender, aesthetics and metaphysics.[34] Furthermore, his defiance of academia makes academics hesitant to tackle the problem called Aira. Also, a few North American literary reviewers have labeled him as a "charlatan" and "fraud" whose "prose seem hesitant and not convincing" (Montoya Juárez 53; Ballvé). In this sense, Aira is complicated because, according to literary critic Sandra Contreras, he has been labeled as a multidimensional phenomena due to his multiple and simultaneous interventions in the publishing industry and literary field in the past two decades. For example, Contreras argues that the essential part of the Aira phenomena is his ability to incorporate the act of publishing as

[34] For a full bibliography on the Aira's criticism see Sandra Contreras' book *Las vueltas de César Aira*. Aira has been one of the focuses in Francine Masiello's book *The Art of Transition*, Mariano García's *Degeneraciones textuales: los géneros en la obra de César Aira*, and Nancy Fernández's *Narraciones viajeras: César Aira y Juan José Saer*.

an essential part of his artistic project and action (73). Thus, the "reading" of Aira can be understood as cultural "brand" (Montaldo "An Obscure Case"), as literary aesthetic (Contrerares) or particular philosophy (García). What is peculiar about Aira is that all of these different artistic projects coincide in him. This is why Montaldo prefers to discuss him in terms of literary practice or, as Contreras points out, as a performance outside the text.

Thus far, the reading for Aira that seems most relevant to my argument is the one by literary critic Craig Epplin. In his article "Theory of the Workshop: César Aira and Eloísa Cartonera", Epplin argues thoroughly that what Aira proposes as his aesthetic in narrative texts is precisely what Eloísa Cartonera brings to reality in the form of publishing house; Eloísa makes books out of cardboard and sees embodiment of literary text as a result of collaborative, community work. Since for Aira, the task of writing and job of publishing are seen "as necessarily interdependent processes" (98), Eloísa Cartonera seems to become the foundational reality of such posture. Epplin further argues that Aira seems to be proposing a kind of literature that "engages with the materials of its construction" and "based on a concrete work, a literature that is best conceived along the lines of a theory of a workshop" (99). For example, in Aira's critical text titled "La nueva escritura" he states that the "great artists of the twentieth century aren't those who made books, but rather those who invented procedures for works to make themselves, or not" (2). In this sense, what Aira is undoubtedly interested in is "doing" literature which consists of particular cultural position he creates within the field.[35]

Aira's perspective is defined through his defiance of what is considered to be "good

[35] In the next chapter I will thoroughly develop this relationship with Eloísa Cartonera and emerging authors, but for now I am interested in defining this cultural position as I also see it relevant for what Eloísa Cartonera has been trying to identify with.

literature" and challenging the cultural industry. For example, by publishing three of four novels per year that he always claims he never edits, Aira inevitably desacrilizes the myth of the work of art as a unique and solitary project that writer confined in his room writes all alone. In recent publications in literary magazines, Aira has been named as the writer of marginality and memory, and as the typical representative of experimental vanguard in relation to the surrealism.[36] He dislikes being called "an academic writer."[37] Secondly, he publishes both with big publishers like Emecé and Mondadori but also with small independent presses like Beatriz Viterbo and Interzona. Both Montaldo and Contreras note an ironic relation to the cultural industry as they read this gesture as Aira's revenge: saturating the book market with hyperproduction of novels that are not considered to be commercial. In this sense, Aira is confusing and uncomfortable because by constantly performing his literature, he teases us with his gaze. Once we think we know him he surprises us. As Montaldo notes, "he questions the work of art (as a work of art, as an aesthetic fact, as a form of prestigious and correct culture), by creating more literature; a literature increasingly lacking literary style" ("An Obscure Case" 125).

These gestures also open inevitably a space for a judgment call since his so-called "bad literature" has been marked as banal and a mistake because of the lack of transgressive nature of his writing (Contreras 75). Nevertheless, I am not interested here whether his literary style is *truly* art. After all, it is a matter of consensus in the literary field. What interests me is the fact that Aira's view on the publishing world, hyperproduction of commercial literature and alliance

[36] Aira claimed this position in a 2009 interview with María Moreno for the online magazine, BOMB.
[37] In the 1990s Aira was not as consecrated is he is in 2010. Twenty years after, he is now considered to be indeed an "academic" writer, in the sense that he has become consecrated by the academia, especially in North America. In the past ten years, there has been proliferation of articles on Aira. On the MLA bibliography website there are more than 40 hits on Aira in the past ten years.

with young writers reflect a new modes of envision the literary field; in its inherently heteronomous nature. In Aira I see the visibility of the mechanism and contradictions that question but also legitimize the autonomy and heteronomy of the literary field in the era of neoliberal experiments and digital revolutions. In addition, this posture prevails after the economic crisis of 2001 in Argentina. For that reason, I agree fully with Montaldo when she states that Aira neither celebrates nor critiques literature but rather sees that in the times of mass-media culture, the place of and for literature has changed and that in his hands, "literature becomes fiction that demolishes culture" ("An Obscure Case" 151). His most successful method of carrying such a project is to defy the cultural production and establishment of his time by constantly flooding the market with his short novels and parodying the system wherein "aesthetic correctness [is] rewarded by the prizes, commercial publishers and cultural supplements" (152).

My particular reading of Aira here is that at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century, he represents and reflects as a writer the culmination of the contradictions of what the autonomy of the literary field is. If at the beginning the liaison between the writer and politics was considered to be the part of the field, throughout the twentieth century writers have been trying to define themselves between literature and politics. What the "boom" shed light on were the particularities that exploded in and also formed the literary book market. Notwithstanding, Aira's posture in the neoliberal cultural and literary field is one which constantly plays the game of superproduction. While he publishes with the big publishers literature that is considered to be "bad and not commercial," he exposes all the problems of autonomy. How can a writer who publishes three to four novels per year be considered a "good,

serious" writer? Who is benefiting from his texts and how? Consequently, is Aira telling us that the field is both autonomous and heteronymous? Or, is it all a game since by publishing with small presses such as Interzona, Aira inevitably grants them visibility and economic gain? After all, in an interview with María Moreno he claims he lives off his work. He argues that literature has lost its privileged position, but he "does" literature in a way that proves very productive and economically useful.

The literary scene of the 1990s with all of its traditions and positions assimilated, or rejected from previous literary fathers (mainly, Borges) is where Eloísa Cartonera as a publishing house with new generation of emerging writers inserts itself in the 2003. The literary field of the 1990s was reshaped due to the major policy alterations in Argentine society and understanding that even culture and literature were put up for global sale. Of course, this potential democratization resulted in the polarization of the field with emerging discourses on the role and usefulness of literature in the twenty-first century, and the ongoing debate on what exactly is autonomy and how it can be achieved. Not to mention the crucial debate on what is considered a work of art and "good literature". The major impact of the publishing companies in redefining the readership's taste entered as one of the major issues of the academic and literary circles. While some were arguing in favor of democracy produced by the free book market (*los Planetarios),* some saw the devastating role of such shifts (Piglia), and others defied it in quite ironic ways (Aira). These positions were profoundly altered in 2001 when Argentina was shattered by the biggest economic crisis in the history of the country. Offering an initiative of reconstruction, Eloísa Cartonera, a small publishing press with its own aesthetic and cultural policy, put forward generation of emerging authors in the literary scene.

As I will show in the next chapter, I see Eloísa's nature as confusing and contradictory since it combines some of the dominant and yet contradictory aspects of the literary field of the 1990s. Eloísa was imagined as a space of differentiation and resistance to the various rules in the literary field that granted the visibility to unknown emerging writers and, to some, success on the literary scene. Eloísa is a perfect example of what Ranciére denominated as heteronomy.

Eloísa Cartonera and the Reconfiguration of the Argentine Literary Field

In the previous chapter, I set out to describe a panorama of shifts in the field of literary and cultural production that are deeply influenced by changes in the dominant sociopolitical and economic sectors. Such was the case with the avant-garde and the "boom" generation in Argentina and Latin America. At the core of the ruptures and changes in the literary field throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Argentina was the question of its autonomy in relation to the main field of power. In other words, writers and agents were concerned with their intellectual independence while also claiming the right to interfere in the politics of the nation. According to Pierre Bourdieu in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, this is precisely what made the constitution of the field possible in the first place. Intellectual debates surrounding issues of autonomy of the literary field combined with questions of ruptures and shifts of the field shape the complex realities of contemporary Argentina as well. However, the context and debates are further complicated by various players and agents that correspond to the spirit of the time; specifically, the implementation of neoliberal policies and its consequences.

This chapter will show how the failure of neoliberal policies resulted in a devastating economic crisis in Argentina in 2001. Paradoxically, it also created a venue for the various creative responses that led to paradigm shifts in cultural and literary production. My specific example is based on Eloísa Cartonera, an innovative publishing house from Buenos Aires founded in 2003 as a way to combat the aftermath of economic crisis. My thesis is that Eloísa Cartonera initially set out to creatively challenge poverty and fight for social justice on a small-scale basis. The project would influence only several individuals. In time and due to the many

circumstances that I will trace further in this dissertation, the publishing house managed to produce novel ways of visibility for its writers. In doing so, the house revived the independent publishing scene in Buenos Aires, which had been devastated by the 2001 collapse. It also reconfigured the literary field, bypassing traditional paths of consecration and canonization by reframing and transgressing the boundaries imposed by the traditional players and agents in the literary field. By laying out rules of their own and including the former cartonero, or garbage picker, in the book making process, Eloísa can be read as a cultural product of and response to the post-crisis period in Argentina.

My thesis will be developed around the social and political context that led to the crisis. I pay special attention to the birth of a new social agent, the *cartonero*, and the impact on cultural production. Thanks to Eloísa, former cartoneros have become new cultural players in the literary field. My interest here is to dissect how these inclusions affect and translate to the shifts in the field itself. I particularly consider how the publishing policies and literary catalogue put forward by Eloísa go beyond and often are contradictory to the initial aesthetic promises of its editors. I argue that one of the main reasons for this is precisely Ranciére's notion that emancipatory politics requires art willing to engage with its own contradiction and challenge itself. Thus, Eloísa incorporates and disseminate problematic literary figures that bring together the collective action and operation in response to the commercialization and monopoly of the large transnational publishing companies. Additionally, while looking closely into aspects that make visible literature produced by a new wave of emerging writers, I want to show how Eloísa sets out its own style of literary consecration. In this way, most of Eloísa's operations impact not only

national literary production but also the cultural scene, as they become a model for challenging the post-crisis passivity of Argentina's citizens.

1. The Collapse and Its Discontents

Towards the end of the 1990s, economic policies during the Menem era, mainly the Convertibility Plan and deregulation, proved to be unsustainable. In 1999, Fernando De la Rúa assumed the presidency in the midst of a recession and the public rejection of Menem and his ideology. De la Rúa found himself in a difficult position. In order to maintain the social peace and rule of law, he continued to borrow money from international institutions. The raise in external debt, combined with frequent changes in his economic team, culminated in economic, political and social collapse.

Sensing the collapse, major investors started withdrawing money from their accounts on November 29th 2001. According to the reports by the international media, such as *BBC*, this led to the capital flight and the next day, Argentine citizens withdrew 1.3 billion dollars from their bank accounts. Minister of Economy Domingo Cavallo, on December 1 announced restrictions on the amount of money the public was allowed to withdraw while transforming pension funds into treasury bonds as a way to service the debts. According to Argentine historian Marcos Novaro, unemployment hit 18.3 %, the highest since mid 1998. These measures led to massive protests on the streets of Buenos Aires. Argentina declared a state of emergency on December 19 in order to stop the protests. However, riots combined with the rise of social movements, such as *piquetero*, led to the De la Rúa's resignation on December 21st. The next several months were marked by political and social chaos.

At first, noisy demonstrations, *cacelorazos*, soon included property destruction, often directed against banks and private companies, especially big American and European businesses. The most heated debates started after De la Rúa left office in early 2002. The interim government led by Rodríguez Saá's economy team could not find a way out of economic crisis and could not stabilize inflation. It was not until the elections of 2003, when Néstor Kirchner won that Argentina was soon on the path of stabilization. However, the consequences of the crisis were enormous. According to news reports, Argentina's unemployment rate was close to 25% and it was estimated that it would take years to rebuild an economy crushed by mismanagement and a mountain of debt. According to the reports produced by *CNN* in 2001, nearly 60 percent of the nation's 36 million people were considered to be living below the poverty line, with 10 million living in extreme poverty; this meant that, in a place that in the 1950s considered itself the world's granary, millions were going hungry. Because of this crisis, the social landscape of Argentina was permanently changed. As a result, at least, one new social group become more visible and a point of national concern: the cartoneros.

According to Novaro, previous to the economic collapse, more than 70% of business owners and foreign investors drew all of their money out of the Argentine economy and sent it overseas. Therefore, around 50% of small and medium enterprises closed due to a lack of capital, thereby exacerbating unemployment. In the workforce, one in five people was faced with a sudden loss of employment and no source of income. Workers had to find ways to survive. One of those alternatives was the informal recovery of materials from waste. Consequently, a large number of waste pickers, locally known as cartoneros, could be seen working on the streets of many cities. According to sociologist Francisco Suárez, the number of cartoneros in Buenos

Aires just before the collapse has been estimated at 25,000, with the number of people dependent on these activities at 100,000 (22). The currency devaluation made imports prohibitively expensive. Imported raw materials also became extremely pricy. Factories preferred to buy inexpensive waste materials recovered by cartoneros. The garbage picking usually took place at night or early in the morning. When people took their trash out, cartoneros would separate the recyclable cardboard from the trash and transport it to the potential buyers, factories and industries in need. In her article "What is Left in the World of Books…," Ksenija Bilbija relates that Buenos Aires was never too keen on separating its trash and everything was considered garbage, although according to statistics of the Buenos Aires city government, 96% of it had the potential for recycling (86). For a kilogram of cardboard, the market price was 30 centavos. Sometimes a whole family of cartoneros would earn 50 pesos in one week, or just $15. The government of Buenos Aires was overwhelmed by the raising numbers of cartoneros in the city. There were various short terms projects such as CEASME (a government agency in charge of disposition of residuals of the city) sponsored by the city government to organize cartoneros into a social group and bring them to the formal labor sector. However, this agency, according to sociologist Claudia Reynals, instead of empowering the cartoneros, exploited their labor and offered no social or health protection (2). In response to this disturbing situation, several self-managing cooperatives started appearing as a way to organize the emerging social actors in the post-crisis society. One of the model cooperatives is *Ceibo,* which aims to give 100 squatter families sustenance through organized recycling and neighbor participation in the upscale Palermo district. This rather quick response by the non-government sector has become a kind of phenomena. The re-emergence of cartoneros on the social scene was a constant reminder that the

economic neoliberal experiment failed; at the same time, it was also a moment that, according to Reynals, opened up a space for new social actors that could relate to each other through their practices (3). The activity transformed social relationships and created new ones with local governments, NGOs, transportation companies, and universities, among many. Thus, the crisis reconfigured social actors and their practices. Cartoneros became a physical representation of the shifts in Argentine society. Just as the crisis altered social actors, it is of no surprise that the crisis impacted the process of cultural production as well.

According to the data provided by López and Deymonnaz, more than 200 bookstores closed in Argentina, mainly in the city of Buenos Aires, during the period of 2000 and 2001 (2). The publishing sector suffered a notorious fall in its production: 36.4% in only one year. Due to the 300% inflation of early 2002, the price of books escalated and paper became a pricy and valuable commodity (3). Consequently, the impact of the cost of paper determined the selection of authors published in well-established publishing companies as well as the affordability of books. Thus, contingent upon the market, authors had to promise an instant economic gain for publishing companies through producing highly marketable books. In conjunction with this demand, the crisis further exasperated the problem by ensuring the accessibility of books only to a particular readership - the rich elite, who were able to afford and consume these bestsellers.[38] This is not to say the crisis alone caused this change. The shift in the publishing industry was also caused by the economic process of globalization that started in the 1980s. According to José Luis de Diego, publishing companies had been transformed into transnational

[38] By "bestseller," I refer to books that do not tend to be considered of superior literary quality but are closely tied to the market and its ranking of sales. A great contemporary example is popular top-selling book such as Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, which according to the *Página12* literary supplement, *RadarLibros* sold in the first edition 100,000 copies in Argentina.

conglomerates that would only publish (inter)nationally well-known authors such as Rodrigo Fresán who were highly marketable, assuring instant bestsellers (39). Such restrictions influenced the distribution of the national writers as well. Damián Ríos, a writer and the former editor of Argentine independent publishing house Interzona, expressed in a personal interview that these companies would promote Argentine authors, such as Alan Pauls, in Spain without making them immediately accessible in Argentina. In other words, the availability of Argentine authors to Argentine readers was at stake. The change in the publishing industry and the impact of the economic crisis left Buenos Aires, a city known for artistic and cultural production in the 1950s and 1960s, in such a state of ruin that narratives could no longer (re)present themselves in traditional forms.

To summarize these complex social and economic changes and how they affected the publishing industry: the culmination of the neoliberal policies led to the collapse of the country while reconfiguring the social structuring of Argentine society. However, such reconfiguration was also defined by the spontaneous and creative responses and actions that led to paradigm shifts in the field of cultural production in Argentina.

2. Responses and Reconfigurations in Cultural Production

The neoliberal policies of the 1990s and the collapse caused profound changes in the field of cultural production. The aftermath of the crisis in Argentina lead even further to the paradigm shift in the field. In her book *Postcrisis, arte argentino después de 2001,* Argentine art critic Andrea Guinta argues that in the period that followed the crisis, we can decipher various simultaneous processes that intensified the paradigm shift in the field (5). Such shifts were a result of at least three factors: an increasing urbanization of Buenos Aires, the privatization of the

public sphere and the organization of social actors within the field itself. In other words, the re-articulation of the field and the transformation brought upon it by the crisis were inevitable. This is why Guinta reads the post-crisis not only as a social and political moment, but also as a shift in cultural exchange. Defined broadly, the post-crisis era is a period of recuperation and redistribution of the cultural responses to the shifts of the 1990s.

As much as the crisis in itself was a collapse of a system, it was also an explosion of artistic creativity whose main goal was to defy the apathy of Argentina's citizens and to show resistance to the country's dominant discourses. Thus, protests turned into spaces where citizens bonded through collective experiences, and new ways of making visible citizens' demands for democracy and justice could be expressed. Such demands translated into artistic experiences. One of the biggest impacts of the crisis on the visual arts, according to Guinta, was the emergence of collectives that reshaped artistic practices (22). Collectives are groups of artists formed in order to act as independent organizations. One of the main reasons for coming together as a group was to facilitate access to finances for studios and various projects (as La Barraca Vorticista), or to share the same artistic dynamic and interest (Oligatega Numeric), or for common goals in work ethics (el TPS). The crisis intensified collectivization as a way to respond to the lacks and needs created by a general lack of resources.

These shifts, which can be viewed as collaborative strategies that affect artistic practices, coincided with a shift in the global art scene. This change was labeled by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud as a period of "postproduction" (2). In his view, twenty-first century art is marked by "moving toward a culture of the use of forms, a culture of constant activity of signs based on a collective ideal: sharing" (Bourriaud 9). What Bourriaud means is that rather than

seeking to produce original artwork, today's artists are more dedicated to the creation of artwork based on pre-existing works. More and more, artists interpret, reproduce, re-exhibit, and recycle works made by others. Such a shift contributes to the eradication of the traditional distinction between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. He concludes that artists now work with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, or objects informed by other objects. The achievement of such shifts, according to Guinta and Bourriaud, is that art is now an active agent that challenges a passive culture composed of merchandise and consumption (Guinta 10; Bourriaud 15). In one words, consumers are also producers.

While Guinta and Borriuad mainly elaborate on these ideas in the sphere of visual arts, Eloísa Cartonera is an example of the paradigm shift in the publishing and literary world. Guinta would agree here with an observation that Eloísa, as part of the Argentine field of cultural production, is situated also at the intersection of various parts of a society in which shifts in the national post-crisis culture are also part of the worldwide paradigm shifts in the artistic world, as observed by Borriaud. In addition, Eloísa Cartonera is unique as an example of contradiction as the promise of change is based only on the rapid consumption of the readers. In other words, Eloísa is deeply rooted in the logic of the market. However, even so, it does so in the name of solidarity and social justice. While posing as an agent of social and cultural (ex)change, Eloísa and its members are creating novel positions in the field of literary and cultural production. They advocate for alternative ways of existing for small independent presses that they readily label as parts of a cooperative. They also seek a different visibility for various cultural agents and producers, such as cartoneros and various writers. In doing so, they bring about new artistic

practices. However, before addressing the social spheres, roles and individual figures that are impacted by Eloísa's intervention, let me first tell the basic story of the publishing house.

3. The Logic of Eloísa Cartonera

Eloísa Cartonera was founded in 2003 by three young artists and writers: Javier Barilaro, Fernanda Laguna and Washington Cucurto. According to the publisher's website, the inspiration came from the art galleries and alternative spaces that emerged in the 1990s. Laguna's work in a gallery and a bookstore called Belleza y Felicidad served as a model of producing low-cost books. Cucurto, a writer and an editor, teamed up with the artist Barilaro, who was in charge of the visual imagery for the project. Cucurto and Barilaro decided to use cardboard in making unconventional and cheap books. Laguna, the most known of three in the art world, entered the project more as a financial supporter and lender of cultural capital. Cucurto and Barilaro came up with a circuit for book production that responded to the economically impoverished status of the cartoneros and to the culturally poor status of emerging writers. As a publishing house, they combined the social and aesthetic aspects of the literary field by including cartoneros in the book-making process and offering a chance for visibility to authors emerging on the literary scene.

The circuit of book selection, production and dissemination goes as follows: first, members of the collective select a text to be published. However, it is clear from the interviews I conducted with the members that Cucurto has the last word as an editor. In addition, the book making process sets the genre picks as well. Short stories and poetry prevail since they do not require major elaboration and are cheaper to make. The publishing premise is based on the copy-left idea – as publishers they do not own nor want to maintain copyrights from writers. Authors

donate and give permission for the publication while keeping their copyrights. Second, Cucurto and Barilaro edit and print out the text on recycled paper. Finally, at times up to six former cartoneros make the cardboard covers and hand paint them.

The cardboard is obtained from the cartoneros, who collect the cardboard in the streets and sell it to the house, which buys it at 5 times the market price. As Javier Barilaro points out, instead of remaining cartoneros, they actually become artisan workers and co-creators of the books (10). Each book is unique as no two covers are the same. The community of workers and artists works in a colorful space that functions as a workshop and is always open to the public, either they be interested buyers or visitors. Eloísa Cartonera is set in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, La Boca, traditionally a place inhabited by immigrants and the poor. The intention was to have the house be a part of a community that would participate in the book production, and where the neighborhood would gain from such a project. Thus, the books are given locally, mostly to younger generation of readers who live there. In addition, as the word spread, many academics and journalists started to visit the space. Cartonera books can also be found on street stands and in several book stores in Buenos Aires, mostly with independent publishers who support the project or the organization because of their social justice orientation, as is the case with the bookstore of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Finally, in the last two years, Eloísa has started selling books online. The price of books is low. Most of them are sold for between three and ten pesos (between one and three dollars). By comparison, in 2001, one could buy a book by Tomás Eloy Martínez for around 49 pesos (around $17). Maintaining the low cost of books, as well as the rustic and imperfect look of them, has defined the consumer niche for this publishing house.

Eloísa also translates the aesthetic aspects of the publishing world into a socially just practice by including cartoneros in the book-making process and offering a chance for visibility to authors emerging on the literary scene. They defy the logic of a normative and traditional publishing house; they refuse to keep records of copies sold. Once all the bills are paid, money is evenly split between the members. Eloísa Cartonera does not have an established logo. The publishing house's premise is that the money goes to its self-sustainability, particularly important because it employs six former cartoneros. This cooperative way of working has also helped to develop a new model for the creation of small independent presses.

4. Eloísa: A New Type of Small Independent Press

According to Damián Ríos, the foundation of Eloísa Cartonera was a key moment in the post-crisis era since it brought back hope that small independent presses were still viable, legitimate and necessary options for the literary field. Ríos stated in a personal interview that in these moments of shock, for in 2003 Argentina was only embarking on the road of recovery, Cucurto and Barilaro managed to show that the independent publishing scene could be revived. However, it should be noted that the guiding principles and logistics of the independent scene had already changed by this particular moment.

According to Adriana Astuti and Sandra Contreras, the editors of Beatriz Viterbo publishing house, the dichotomy between independent small presses and commercial transnational publishers in the 1990s meant two things (768). First, large, transnational publishers were responsible for the segmentation of the market and the homogenizing of taste as a means of obtaining economic gain. Second, small independent presses defined their position in relation to these big publishers. Astuti and Contreras further note that while the catalogues

produced by the larger companies were commercial bestsellers, small publishing houses were the guarantors of diversity. Not only did they have to reinforce the presence of local production but they also opened new spaces for the plurality of cultural manifestations that lie outside the imperative of commercial success (792). In other words, they had to create their own catalogues that included everything omitted from those of the global companies. These binaries, of course, are not sufficient to explain the field, but it does constitute the main tension of the era.

After the crisis, however, small independent publishers were faced with a different reality. According to Diego, the main logic and guiding principle in current independent publishing venues is how to "enfrentar la creciente competitividad de un Mercado que ha alterado profundamente el funcionamiento tradicional del mundo de la edición" (60).[39] The logic put forward by independent publishers like Beatriz Viterbo revolves around state subsidies. The reasoning behind this position is that independent publishing is an indispensable tool in the instrumentalization of the cultural politics of a nation and should therefore not compete directly with commercial publishing, since it would inevitably be destroyed by the market. This type of support, however, proved to be unsustainable mainly because of the crisis.

Within the realm of independent publishing, Eloísa set up a different type of independent press which reveals the contradictions in the logic of the book market and literary field. It is a self-sustainable small press that refuses to depend on the subsidies of the state or financial donations. It fully depends on the market it creates, a market characterized by appeals to solidarity and social justice. The ethical turn in the economic logic rests on the political and social inclusion of the marginalized poor. Because of this, Eloísa is an artistic project without

[39] "Face the increasing competitiveness in the market, which has profoundly altered the traditional function of the publishing world."

lucrative ends that is not exclusively a publishing, social or literary project, but one that, according to Barilaro, includes all of these facets (56). Given this founding ideology, the cartonera concept also rests on contradictions necessary to appease these various fields and spheres.

Eloísa's self-sustainability is possible mainly because its costs are low. More importantly, it is possible because writers do not get any financial gain from selling the copyright to a book; authors make money only if several copies of their book sell. By excluding writers from the financial circuit, the inclusion of the marginalized is now possible. At first, there is something fundamentally disturbing in such a vision. It questions and unmasks the fundamental issues around what it means to be a professional writer in Argentina in post-crisis society. At the same time, it brings back on stage old debates around the vocation of a writer: can writers live on what they publish? Should their intellectual work depend on the logic of the market?

This contradiction is elaborated in the following way: Eloísa Cartonera and the writers presented in its catalogue seem to accept the fact that writing in Argentina is more often than not a vocation that brings financial stability only to a very fortunate few. The status of a successful writer financially sustained by selling books is an illusion that, in Argentina and Latin America, has been shattered in the past twenty years. Even the most successful writers, such as Ricardo Piglia, do not live off the proceeds from their writing, but from their academic work which, and this is the key, is possible because of their success as writers. The linear combination of cultural and financial capital does not necessarily coincide in Latin America. And this is precisely where Eloísa situates itself. It resolves this issue by producing different kinds of capital for different kinds of players in a multitude of fields mutually co-dependent in maintaining self-sustainability

and in continuing the circuit of production. In doing so, Eloísa questions the traditional notion of the autonomy of the field.

To the fortunate few cartoneros who work at Eloísa, it brings back the dignity of work and enough financial profit to survive. This possibility results from the communal solidarity at the core of this project. Eloísa easily could have charged retroactively for the idea and "sold" the project as a franchise all around the world if we consider that today there are more than 40 houses that originate from Eloísa's model. They could have asked for money from writers or they could have applied for grants and donations, as many future sister projects have done. Nevertheless, Eloísa has not taken any of these potential avenues for profit. The spirit and desire of their project rests on the premise that interdependency and sustainability are based on solidarity and human dignity. It gave dignity back to former cartoneros by turning work into a creative process and bringing back an aura of uniqueness to book production.

To the book object it brought back symbolic capital: its status of originality and uniqueness, which according to Walter Benjamin has been lost in the era of mechanical reproduction (555). It also reconfigured the space by demystifying the bookmaking process. The shop, the workshop where Eloísa sells its books, is also a space where they create the books and have poetry readings and book presentations. By setting the shop in an economically challenged part of Buenos Aires, Eloísa Cartonera is showing to its readers, mostly of the younger generation or accidental tourists, that anyone can make books. Such agency, however, is hard to measure in numbers. The social impact is significant but not in statistical ways. After all, having six former cartoneros work does not solve the problem of tens of thousands of them. What it does do is show to the wider public that jobs can be invented, and more importantly, it serves as

an example of resistance and resilience. In this way, Eloísa also acquires more of cultural and symbolic capital as a whole project to a number of sectors of society. To writers it grants cultural capital, which they desperately need in order to become more present and visible on the cultural scene. Whether this cultural capital (for example, Ricardo Piglia's prestige and prizes) can be transformed into financial capital (Piglia became a professor at Princeton) is a matter of other factors in the field.

These tensions between cultural, symbolic and financial capital are functional in this particular case because they rely on the premise of interdependency of the agents and players involved and on the intersectionality of various societal fields. For example, in order for an emerging writer to become visible and publish, he or she needs a worker to make the book. In order for a book to appear, there needs to be cardboard sold by the cartoneros. The circuit of interdependency of production works in order to achieve self-sustainability. While such movements are easily traceable, Eloísa simultaneously exposes the existing rules, logic and needs of Argentine society while trying to intervene in national literary production. In addition, such tensions and contradictions between different kinds of capital are fully reflected in the publisher's own catalogue and its micro-cultural politics mirrored in the seemingly contradictory nature of its publishing premises and catalogue. I address below their "official" aesthetic principles while offering the taxonomy of the writers who appear in the house and how such positions correspond - or fail to correspond - to their enterprise. I pay special attention to the ways Eloísa offers visibility to new and emerging writers.

5. The Publishing Premise of Eloísa Cartonera

Eloísa Cartonera claims to provide a space that originated from the "reapropiación de las estéticas populares, ante la colonización estética que se ejecuta desde los países dominantes" (qtd. in Novelle).[40] The publisher's website states that they publish "material inédito, border y de vanguardia, de Argentina, Chile, México, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brasil, Perú: es premisa editorial difundir a autores latinoamericanos."[41] Although the publishing house does not quite define what they consider to be "border" or avant-garde work, one catches a glimpse of these notions via interviews with various members of Eloísa. Cucurto has stated on several occasions that the literature is supposed to be light, fun and liberating.[42] Additionally, Eloísa's publications also seek to give voice to ignored writers and narratives of so-called low literature. When journalist Tamara Novelle asked Alejandro, one of Eloísa's members, to define the literature they publish, he stated: "Llámalo como quieras. Lo marginal, lo alternativo, lo 'gore', 'border', lo que muchos consideran baja literatura de Argentina, Perú, Chile, México, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brasil; tiene un espacio en Eloísa" (qtd. in Novelle).[43]

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from these statements is that, as a publishing house, Eloísa intends to subvert the main centers of power in the literary world imposed by the hegemony of transnational capital in the publishing companies, intelligentsia (institutional and academic) and the publishing industry - all of which mandate the norms of literary taste. Subversion of the hegemonic commercial field within Latin America is evidenced by the

[40] "Reapropiation of popular aesthetics confronting the aesthetic colonization enforced by dominant countries."
[41] "Unedited, border and vanguard material from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brazil, Peru: it is the publisher's premise to distribute Latin American authors."
[42] See his interview with Silvina Friera for *Página12*: "El arte no es lugar para imponer sino para generar.".
[43] "Call it as you wish. The marginal, the alternative, the 'gore', the 'border', what many consider to be low literature in Argentina, Peru, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Brazil; it has a place in Eloísa."

publication of marginalized, alternative literature that is light and escapist as well as defiant of harsh, day-to-day realities. In a 2005 interview with Silvina Friera for Página/12, Cucurto declared: "¿Escribir un gran libro? ¿Para qué? La literatura no influye sobre la realidad ni puede cambiarla."[44] Cucurto's allusion to the narratives of the "boom" as the representatives of the "great" books suggests the publisher's desire to destabilize not only the works of mass commercial literature, but also the master narratives put forward by the "boom" generation of Latin American writers. By insisting on producing ignored narratives, those of low literature and popular culture, Eloísa arguably seeks to become an alternative and independent publisher, offering narratives once omitted (such as those of Enrique Lihn and Ricardo Zelarayán) or entirely neglected by the centers of intellectual power or by dominant publishers such as Emecé (for example, the new wave of emerging writers in Argentina). Furthermore, the identity of alternative publisher is underlined by the fact that Eloísa does not have a traditional editorial committee that decides what and who will be published. According to a statement by María Gómez, one of the members, everyone is welcomed to submit their work for publication.

However, the scope of Eloísa's intervention shows a much more complicated micro-cultural politics than previous cited by Cucurto and its members. On the one hand, the house is partly resting on the binaries previously put forward by Astuti and Contreras (793). As a small independent press, Eloísa does create aesthetics in relation to and as a way to compete with the production of mass commercial literature by transnational companies. Nevertheless, its diversity and plurality is further complicated by the catalogue itself, which comes out of direct response to the gaps in the national market: framing and disseminating what they consider "Latin American literature." It also tries to frame the national literary production by exposing different categories

[44] "To write a great book? For what? Literature does not influence reality nor can change it."

of writers and the intellectual positions they can obtain in post-crisis Argentine society. To label such diversity as only "avant-guard" or "gore" is reductive because the issues that revolve around these categories are much more complicated and expose various facets of nuances in the literary field. These issues become obvious through the numbers in its catalogue.

From the day of its foundation in 2003 until my research in 2011, Eloísa Cartonera has published 123 titles that represent 75 authors. These titles include mostly poetry and short fiction. Readers can buy one published short story or one poem as a book. With few exceptions, such as the writings of Cucurto and César Aira, one does not find longer novels since they tend to be thicker and are consequently rather difficult to assemble in the cartonera book format (Gómez). Just as the selection of genre becomes profoundly marked by the modes of production, the selection of published works is marked by the editorial power. Although Eloísa discursively opposes the existence of an editorial committee, it has been stated on various occasions that Cucurto is indeed the editor. While fully accepting works of prominent published authors, even the ones that surely are not considered avant-garde, Cucurto is invested with the authority to reject manuscripts from unpublished authors (Gómez). These modes of exclusion and inclusion are supposedly based on his literary tastes. Eloísa Cartonera also makes the distinction between a product of national, Argentine production and Latin American fiction. Further below I will address this distinction, but before this, we must identify the various categories of authors included in Eloísa's catalogue in order to understand its contradictions.

Out of 123 published titles, 60 titles correspond to already well-known and consecrated literary figures (Argentine authors are represented with 20 titles and Latin American authors with 40). A consecrated literary figure is an author who, having created and published extensive

literary texts with established publishers has also completed the difficult task of appealing to popular, academic and critical audiences both in their own countries and in the United States. A good example of this type of literary figure is Ricardo Piglia. In Eloísa's catalogue, there are 40 titles produced by known authors from throughout Latin America. One encounters names such as Haroldo de Campos and Waly Salomão (Brazil), Reinaldo Arenas (Cuba), Gonzalo Millán and Enrique Lihn (Chile), Luis Chávez (Costa Rica), Mario Bellatín and José Emilio Pacheco (México), and Oswaldo Reynoso and Martín Adán (Perú). The diffusion of prominent Argentine authors is quite remarkable as well. There are 20 publications by figures such as Ricardo Piglia, Rodolfo Fowgill, Leónidas Lamborghini, Néstor Perlongher, César Aira, Tomás Eloy Martínez and Elsa Drucaroff.[45]

On the other end of the spectrum, there are 57 titles by emerging Argentine authors. In my nomenclature, an emerging author is a writer who has previously published through independent, local publishers like Interzona but has yet to be recognized by cultural entities, (inter)national critical and academic audiences, as is the case with Fernanda Laguna. Finally, there is also a group of unpublished writers in print media like the six winners of the publisher's prize, Premio Sudaca Borders, such as Leandro Avalos Blacha.

The categorization proposed here, one that is based on Eloísa's catalogue, reflects the direct contradictions to and complexities of the publisher's "official aesthetic" previously chartered on their website and interviews. The surprising number of published authors does not correspond to the aesthetic proposed by Eloísa – rejecting the hegemonic canon and publishing

[45] There are two interesting examples that lack grouping. In 2008, Eloísa published a children's book *El sol albanil*. In 2010 and 2011, David Sheinin, a history professor from Trent University, Canada published academic books, known as *El boxeador incrédulo* and *El boxeador poeta,* about boxing culture in Argentina. Only time will tell if Eloísa will open up a space for academic books to be published. In the meantime, I consider these examples as exceptions to the catalogue.

alternative, "gore" and "border" narratives. It is difficult to argue that Piglia or Eloy Martínez are representatives of alternative, low and/or popular culture. In other words, half of Eloisa's published titles are a mere recycling of the canon as created by the same centers of intellectual power and big publishers that Eloísa, ironically, has been trying to subvert and reject. Piglia is featured as one of the bestselling authors at Planeta, which owns his copyrights. This contradiction arises from the complicated relationship between the needs of the market and the politics of aesthetics.

Eloísa Cartonera has become a far greater venture than was initially anticipated. The proposed aesthetic has gone beyond the primary enterprise, particularly because the need to establish publishing alternatives coincided with the economic crisis that affected a great portion of the Argentine population, including various writers. The need to re-start an independent market in the publishing and literary field was based not only on aesthetics but also on economic, political and social factors. It consequently produced different kinds of capital granted to various categories of writers and literature in the catalogue. It is important to consider key positions that were made possible by this venture because the positions in the field of cultural production in post crisis society in Argentina proved not to be fixed. In other words, the distinctions that functioned in previous decades between the categories and interests of writers have now become much more complicated and contradictory than previously anticipated.

6. Consecrated Argentine Authors

The economic alliance between publisher and prominent authors rests on the fact that none of the authors receive monetary compensation for the copies sold by the publishing house. By donating their texts to Eloísa while keeping their copyrights, consecrated writers intervene in a cultural

sphere that is now based upon social relations of kinship and belonging to the independent publishing house. Authors do not monetarily profit from the sale of their texts since this money is directed toward the publisher's efforts at self-sustainability.

In an interview with Thomas Brill for the New Internationalist, Piglia expressed his support for the idea by explaining that "this is an historic alliance. New networks are being created in Argentina, and writers are finding ways to connect themselves to the new social situation. It's not about making a cult of poverty, but rather, not allowing oneself to be intimidated by it." This new political and literary alliance gave authors like Aira, Piglia, and Pauls the opportunity to be associated with the social endeavor that Cucurto and his team were imagining – producing and consuming literature in order to defy poverty. Elsa Drucaroff explains that she published the story "Leyenda erótica" because it coincided with both her and Cucurto's desire to

> democratizar el capital simbólico, de juntar a los que por humildes no pueden acceder al placer de la literatura con los que tenemos el privilegio de gozarla no es un gesto exterior, viene de sus propias biografías, de sus propios orígenes sociales, y eso se nota en Eloísa, en su catálogo desprejuiciado y en la propuesta de libros donde la propia manufactura, el trabajo manual, está subrayado.[46]

In addition, Pauls explains that he published the short story "El caso Malarma" because he liked the project "de una editorial que, en vez de llorar miseria, hacía de la necesidad una virtud, y no una virtud sacrificada, gravosa, sino jovial, incluso festiva. Hay que ver los afiches bailanteros

[46] "Democratize the symbolic capital, to join those too humble to access the pleasures of literature that we have the privilege to enjoy; it is not an alien gesture, it comes from their own biographies, and social origins, and one can notice this in *Eloísa*, in their impartial catalogue, and in the proposition of books where manufacture and manual work are underlined."

con que Eloísa sabía promover sus libros..." (qtd. in Drucaroff)[47]

Piglia, Drucaroff and Pauls all celebrate Eloísa's bypassing of the division between the social classes as a product of the economic and publishing crisis. They underline the role of the publishing house as a bridge between two social spheres that were not previously able to communicate: Argentines of the lowest socio-economic status, which represents the majority of the country's citizens, and those within the higher ranks of privilege, the intelligentsia. However, situating Piglia at the "border" of the literary field is a difficult argument to make, especially since he represents the already established image of the writer and with intimate ties to academia. Nevertheless, this contradiction lends itself to the idea of an alliance based on solidarity and community. Piglia is right to note that the new networks being created go beyond debates existing within the literary field, which is necessary in order to constructively respond to the field of power and economy. This network is not created based on aesthetic principles or the belief in the autonomy that differentiate each position within the field. Rather, these writers gather due to their mutual needs and desires. In other words, the publisher needed influential authors to empower its visibility. Consecrated writers lend their already existing cultural capital to the house. In return, writers also need the publisher in order to create and be part of the new social and political network in the post-crisis socio-cultural context. Well-established Argentine literary figures also embraced the new alliance because it gave them the opportunity to gain further visibility and wider distribution to a national readership, mostly a younger generation unfamiliar with their oeuvres.

7. Consecrated Latin American Authors

[47] "Of a publisher that instead of mourning misery, made virtue out of necessity—neither sacrificing nor burdensome, but jovial and festive…"

Eloísa's literary landscape is further complicated by another endeavor: the diffusion of Latin American authors. The need for this type of network creates a continuity of literary influences within geographical and historical frameworks. It also makes previously ignored narratives accessible to a wider Argentine and international demographic (mainly tourists and academics). This simultaneous effort is evidenced by Cucurto's desire to reintroduce Latin American authors who have been omitted by transnational publishing companies to Argentine and international readership. It is difficult to trace the editorial premise of the inclusion and exclusion of various writers since one can easily get confused by Cucurto's decision. His writing itself, the topic of the next chapter, does not necessary reveal his taste in literature. Nevertheless, what I trace are the different kinds of narratives that expose how symbolic capital functions within the publishing house.

The inclusion of works by Haroldo de Campos, a fixture of contemporary and politically engaged Brazilian literature, illustrates the socio-political efforts that the publisher seeks to undertake by stepping outside of national and linguistic boundaries by reintroducing Brazilian authors ignored by Argentina's publishing scene (Drucaroff). Published in 2007, "El ángel izquierdo de la poesía" is a bilingual, Spanish and Portuguese edition of Campos' poetry in which the poet denounces various social injustices of twentieth century Latin America; this particular book also demonstrates the complex relationship between the literary and cultural realities of the entire continent. It fits perfectly into the publisher's ideology of exposing the alternative ways of responding to both globalization and economic crises. As evoked in the title, the Brazilian poet's extreme leftist aesthetic parallels the relationship between the social realities of the cartoneros with the poetic language with which Campos represents the subaltern subjects,

the poor and victims of the continent's colonial past. The relationship between the book-object and book-text becomes more complicated as the cartoneros' visibility is both present as the authors of the book cover and through Campos' poetic language. Various other narratives fit into this model: that of the Venzuelan poet Juan Calzadilla and his "Manual para incorformistas," and the anthology of Brazil's marginalized poets during the military junta, "Brasil años 70: Poesía Marginal."

Nevertheless, these works do not constitute a predominant model. The social and political aspects within the literary content are not entirely fixed. One only needs to consider the works of Enrique Lihn and his aesthetic. The Chilean poet's inclusion within Eloísa's catalogue evidence Cucurto's admiration for his poetry but is also the revival of an internationally lesser known poet who has been overshadowed by compatriots like Pablo Neruda and Gonzalo Rojas (Cucurto).[48] Lihn's anxiety of everyday life and existential crises as dominants of his poetic expression do not quite reflect the notion of low and popular literature. However, his work encompasses discourses emerging from themes of the human condition and alienation. Similar themes and relationships resonate in the poetry of other Latin American poets, the Chileans Gonzalo Millán, with his "Seudónimos de la muerte," and Sergio Parra with "La manoseada," as well as the Mexican Julián Herbert with "Autorretrato a los 27."

The confusion over who is included and who is excluded from the catalogue can only be explained by the fact that Cucurto publishes according to his own literary taste. However, it would be an oversimplification to accuse Cucurto of bias. While his literary taste is evident, the

[48] This is not to say that Lihn is not considered to be a consecrated author. Numerous books and studies have taken him into account as one of the most respectable authors in Chile. However, my qualifier of a "lesser known poet" is in a relationship to the wide readership in Latin America where he has not been regarded as bestselling author. See C. M. Travis, "Beyond the Vanguardia: The Dialectical Voice of Enrique Lihn."

catalogue also reveals the current needs, holes, and contradictions in the national literary field. Cucurto's sense of responsibility goes beyond his literary taste. The tension between symbolic capital (the presence of Latin American authors in the catalogue) and literary taste (various contradictory kinds of narrative) shed light and reveal contemporary debates of what exactly is considered to be Latin American literature and whether it can exist as a concept.

In the last decade, several literary critics, particularly Jorge Fornet and Víctor Barrera Enderle, have been interested in analyzing the concept of Latin American literature and its survival. In his influential essay from 2007 - "Y finalmente, ¿existe una literatura latinoamericana?" - Fornet notes that in the last two decades there has been a *balkanization* of the idea of Latin American literature as a concept which, according to him, was celebrated by the "boom" generation. Fornet questions whether we can still talk today about Latin American literature as a supranational concept when so much has been lost to the production of national literatures and major publishing houses. While he acknowledges that there is a resistance of various writers to recognize such term, he notes the paradox of our times lies in the publishing market, which dictates the terms under which concepts are born. With the transnational shifts and the enlargements of publishing companies during the last two decades of twentieth century, one would expect that the dissemination and accessibility of various Latin American authors would be higher. The problem lies in the fact that the circulation of Latin American authors on the continent is almost non-existent. For example, in the early 2000s, it was very difficult to find Colombian authors in Argentina and vice versa. The reason is that production, according to Diego, has been centralized in one country: Spain. So, absurdly, an Argentine reader would have to travel to Spain in order to get a book by a Peruvian writer. This "provincialization" of Latin

American literature, as Fornet calls it, is precisely to what Eloísa Cartonera is trying to respond (3). Thus, their endeavor is more tied to the presence and dissemination of authors born elsewhere in the continent who can become part of the mutual network that responds to the homogenization principles of what Eloísa calls on their website "dominant countries" or transnational capital from Europe and the United States. By including writers from different countries, Eloísa uses the symbolic capital granted by these authors to state that the concept of Latin American literature is alive and well.

Thanks to the cultural capital generated by Argentine writers and the symbolic capital from Latin American authors, Eloísa's venture has become economically, socially, and politically visible. Such enterprise came along with tensions which were dependent on the needs of the market in the post-crisis society much more than the publishing premise of producing the "gore" literature. Today is seems that the writers behind Eloísa were conscious that such a project was meant to reveal and then fill those gaps in the post-crisis literary field. Once this visibility was assured, it profoundly affected the emerging authors who were then able to share their voices and narratives with readers.

8. Emerging Writers

As I have shown in previous sections, the catalogue produced by Eloísa represents an independent publishing house that, in the post-crisis society, restarted the independent publishing scene by incorporating the various networks of cultural producers and artists affected by the crisis. However, of all the social players involved in the making of this house, the emerging writers have been most affected by its existence. Big publishing houses rarely, even in good economic times, publish books from not already prestigious writers. In this sense, Eloísa seized

an opportunity to put forward a whole new wave of emerging writers. While I focus thoroughly on the questions of aesthetic and politics of this wave in the next chapter, here I will address how Eloisa made this wave visible through its publication of an anthology of young writers and its literary prize Sudaca Borders.

In 2007, Eloísa Cartonera published the anthology "No hay cuchillo sin rosas: Historia de una editorial latinoamericana y Antología de jóvenes autores," which was sponsored and financed by a German publishing house cooperative, merz & solitude. The connection to Germany comes from Cucurto's residence in Stuttgart when he was writer-in-residence there in 2006.[49] In this book, readers find the names, short biographies and narratives of emerging Argentine writers such as Inés Acevedo, Leandro Avalos Blacha, Gabriela Bejerman, Timo Berger, Fabián Casas, Washington Cucurto, Cuqui, Francisco Garamona, Juan Incardona, Fernanda Laguna, Juan Leotta, Cecilia Pavón, Ramón Paz, Ricardo Piña, Damián Ríos, Alejandro Rubio, Eugenia Segura, Dani Umpi and Ricardo Zelarayán. All of these authors have at least one title published by this house in addition to being included in the anthology.

The anthology breaks with traditional literary canonization because, rather than proposing criteria for selected authors, Cucurto and the members of the cooperative choose to narrate the beginnings of Eloísa Cartonera and its innovative modes of book production, followed by photos of workers and concluding with the writers' texts . The possible 'anomaly' of this structure can be explained by Eloísa's new focus on targeting a foreign market. The anthology can be purchased on the merz & solitude's website; the publisher is linked to the Akademie Schloss Solitude, an institution promoting young and gifted artists via residence

[49] Cucurto's decision to accept such financial support seems rather contradictory to the Eloísa's decision not to receive any support from financial institutions. While the utopian vision of Eloísa's autonomy here has been jeopardized, it was also an opportunity to present a new wave of writers in the international arena.

fellowships and the organization of public performances, readings and concerts. According to the information chartered by their website, Cucurto was a resident at the Akademie in 2005 and 2006. Another 'anomaly' in this particular book is the disappearance of the cartonero visual narrative from the cover. More precisely, while some of the copies feature a cartonero-painted cover, all are adorned with a mass-produced book jacket. This printed cover, designed by Barilaro, contains an interesting image: a boy in a tee-shirt and shorts holding up a book, which is the very same anthology we are about to read. To his right, there is a table stacked with already-published titles by consecrated authors: "Cerebro musical" by César Aira, Ricardo Piglia's "Pianista", an anthology of poems by Enrique Lihn, the aforementioned anthology Brasil 70 and Néstor Perlongher's story "Evita vive". The boy is static but smiling; is he selling us the book or purchasing one himself? The jacket illustrates an attempt, both visual and conscious, to insert these narratives into the Argentine and Latin American literary field. After all, in this new network, they now co-exist under many titles published by this alternative press.

This book is also intended for foreign consumption; in this case, within the European market. The paper quality is superior to that used by the cartonera in Buenos Aires, and the book even features some color photographs. In addition, this project competes with the numerous anthologies of young Argentine writers published between 2005 and 2007 in Latin America and Europe.[50] Does this explain why the cartoneros have visually disappeared from the book covers? Not precisely. The emerging authors/cartoneros press alliance and the network function on deeper levels of production and meaning. Both groups appear from the same shared trauma of

[50] For example, *La joven guardia*, the first anthology of short stories published by Norma in 2005 and edited by Maximiliano Tomás. Two years later, Sudamericana published three anthologies of short stories *En celo*, *In fraganti,* and *Uno a uno,* and finally, Juan Terranova edited a collection of short stories with Entropía titled *Buenos Aires escala 1:1. Los barrios por sus escritores*. In the following chapter, I will discuss these anthologies in greater detail.

the economic collapse of 2001. This appears to be a one-time exception.

While anthology consists mainly of emerging writers previously published by Eloísa, such as Gabriela Bejerman and Dani Umpi, as well as some writers who have published with other independent publishers, such as Alejandro Rubio and Fernanda Laguna, there is also an opportunity for unpublished authors, such as Leandro Avalos Blacha, to gain visibility. Eloísa's prize contest, Premio Sudaca Borders, was imagined as a parody of the prestigious Clarín award. In 2005, Eloísa created a prize contest with judges such as Ricardo Piglia and Fabián Casas, through which previously unpublished authors were to compete to publish their first texts. Even thought there were not any specific categories, the six winners of the prize presented texts dealing with similar themes of decentralized identity and the powerless position of the individual in dysfunctional, post-utopian society. The winners were Dante Castiglione with his story "Cacho el más Macho", Marcelo Guerrieri with "El Ciclista Serial", Juan Leotta with "Luster", Pedro Nalda Querol with "Palomas que no son pájaros", Gonzalo Alfonsín and "El Sr. Velásquez y el Licenciado Ramírez" and Lenadro Avalos Blach with "Serialismo". It should be noted that these first-time published authors have all experienced later success. For example, Avalos Blacha was featured in the mentioned anthology and, in 2007, he was awarded a literary prize Indio Rico by Aira, Pauls and Daniel Link for his short novel *Berazachussets*; this was later published by the independent publisher Entropía.

Eloísa has kept this competition open all year long since 2005. In other words, unpublished authors are able to submit their texts whenever they choose and these texts are published instantly - as long as Cucurto accepts them. On the Eloísa website, there is an ad that invites everyone to submit their texts. In doing so, Eloísa grants visibility to unpublished

authors, as well as the opportunity to be associated with the names of emerging authors. For example, in 2008 they published another anthology of young first time authors from Chaco, an underdeveloped province in the north of the country. The book, *Cuentos del Chaco argentino* was prepared especially for the book fair in Chaco that same year.

The culmination of the tensions between various kinds of capital, profit, and aesthetics that exists in the cartonera project is probably best seen in the category of emerging writers. Through the cultural capital produced by the traditional book object form, a wider social awareness of the Eloísa Cartonera publishing house and its symbolic capital provided by consecrated authors, emerging writers are gaining attention in the Argentine literary scene. This visibility, however, has been made possible by bypassing the traditional route of consecration imposed by the institutionalized centers of the literary field such as traditional prizes by Planeta or anthologies published by big conglomerates. On the one hand, Eloísa published an anthology and offered a literary prize, the most traditional method of consecration. Nevertheless, by mimicking the traditional route of entry to the field, Eloísa managed to put forward its own rules as a small press. It also made visible the new wave of emerging writers with their own politics and aesthetics - writers who share the many social contradictions that are found in the publishing house. This is the focus of the next chapter.

9. Reconfiguration and Redistribution of the Field

Eloísa Cartonera is born out of a paradox and contradiction: there would not probably be any need for its existence today if it were not for the economic crisis of 2001. And yet, it has become unthinkable to imagine contemporary Argentine literary and cultural scene without Eloísa Cartonera. The impact of the project should be understood in symbolic ways. After all, six

former cartoneros who become creators and workers cannot make up for the more than 25,000 others. What it can do is to show how the alternatives to the homogenizing forces of the neoliberal market reflected in the traditional literary field can be achieved. Speaking strictly of the literary and cultural field, the impact is more traceable.

I agree with Guinta that the cartonera publisher is part of a wider paradigm shift in the art world (5). Indeed, most artwork today is the result of recycling existing materials and its reinterpretation. And what better example than using cardboard to make books. It is also true that Eloísa contributes to a better understanding of artistic projects as a part of wider collective action. The collectivization of art and Eloísa's operations go hand-in-hand with the imagining of a community based on solidarity and equality. Putting art in the service of social justice, according to Eloísa, is a cause worth fighting for.

Nevertheless, the house also rests on contradictions which consequently reveal the complexities and ruptures of the cultural and literary field in the post-crisis society of the twenty-first century. It is closely tied to the problematic notion of the traditional issues of autonomy in the many sectors of society, in this case, the field of literary production. In the previous chapter, I traced how Pierre Bourdieu's ideal of the autonomy of artistic fields (art is autonomous since it is useless) is an utopian project that, historically, is unsustainable since in Argentina art, intellectual work or any other field of cultural production was never imagined to be independent from the main field of power and economy (*The Rules of Art* 52). Bourdieu would see this as a definitive lack since autonomy is closely tied to intellectual independence of an artist. In addition, it has proved impossible to separate the political and intellectual work and writing of so many Argentina writers, from Domingo Faustino Sarmiento to Ernesto Sábato. However, while his

thesis serves a productive point for the literary field and debates taking place in Argentina until 1990s, Bourdieu's theory of autonomy of the fields is insufficient in explaining the shifts occurring in the field after 2001. This is the main critique that Jacques Ranciére will direct toward Bourdieu. Unlike Bourdieu, Ranciére thinks that fundamental shifts that have happened in labor history are and should be closely tied to art history (25). In his works on aesthetics and politics, *Dissensus,* Ranciére moves toward the idea of post-autonomy or heteronomy to explain the shifts in the artistic world. In his own utopian vision of artistic expression, he argues that the tensions between the contradictory roles for the artist, as an autonomous creator and a laborer - art can still be free of the restrictions of common craft, but it also doesn't have to be shackled to any particular noble content that distinguishes it from everyday life - prefigure a progressive equality in its attack on old aesthetic hierarchies (65). Thus, the autonomy of art is much more complicated than has been previously thought, particularly at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Ranciére, thus, articulates post-autonomy as a use of art to fight for democracy and equality. In this, he tries to reconcile politics with aesthetics.

For him, the sphere of art can bring about something politically new, or perhaps democracy, because it constantly relies on the representation of those who have been rejected from what he calls "the police order" or the structures in power (56). In the case of Eloísa, the consecrated writer, the Latin American writer, the emerging writer, editor, artist, and former cartonero come together in what Ranciére calls *the politics of dissensus*. Dissensus, in his understanding, puts forward an action by those who have been excluded by the consensus, or majority (85). In order for democracy to fully assert itself, dissensus is necessary as it makes visible the lack of democratic action (86). In his writings on politics, dissensus is important as

the moment where consensus is challenged in order to dispute the inscription of 'several peoples in one' in the aesthetic, legal and constitutional forms of the state. Dissensus exists in the challenge to the closure of meanings associated with the forms of the state, where an excluded group demands a redistribution of "the sensible" from which they have implicitly been excluded (86). It is also the point of contact between art and the political because both deal, on a fundamental level, with the reordering of the "distribution of the sensible," "... the rupture of a certain agreement between thought and the sensible, already lies at the core of aesthetic agreement and repose" (98).

The redistribution of the sensible that has been put forward by Eloísa revolves around the inclusions, alliances and tensions between capitals that are created between the dominant and the dominated - the elite (Piglia) and the poor (cartoneros) - in order to defy poverty and break away from the outsider's domination. By making visible all the players in the field that have been excluded by the consensual politics of the police order, the project asserts Ranciére's notion that the emancipatory promise of art lies in "the fabric of common experience that changes the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible" (110). As such, it allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities for collective enunciation. Thus, according to Ranciére, art does not lose its autonomy because it never had it, since at the core of its aesthetic project is a fight for political expression. It is only when art and aesthetics are intertwined with other spheres or fields that something productive and politically new can be created.

This is precisely how Eloísa functions. It is an example of the transitory potential from autonomy to heteronomy. This process is necessary in order to respond to the tensions in the

literary field in Argentina post 2001. This process, as Ranciére would argue, is always contradictory and transgressive. In a way, the house managed to break with Bourdieu's dichotomies between dominant and mass culture; mass commercialization and the linkage to the political and economic elite versus the dominated; the popular, the art for art's sake and their apparent disinterest in the economic gain (*The Field of Cultural Production* 151-172). In Eloísa's nomenclature, any class distinction disappears since the economic collapse brings together all those severely affected by the crisis or through consensual politics. In this sense, all those brought together by Eloisa represent the push toward equality in the way Ranciére has defined it.

However, the project not only bypasses the division between high and low culture, but it does so by using various devices: recycling, reinterpreting, resituating, desacralizing, parodying and transgressing the logic of the field. First, consider that the book is made of recycled materials. The house also recycles texts previously published in other countries (such as those of Haroldo de Campos) in order to familiarize new generations of readers in a new context. They also reinterpret and resituate various literary figures in the national and international context. The revival of the poetic opus of Enrique Lihn is a part of this project. In addition, the move to include the well-known and established authors from Argentina and Latin America is a step toward bringing back the concept of Latin American literature. Cucurto has declared in several interviews that he is very conscious of his role as an editor in reintroducing ignored Latin American writers to an Argentine readership. At the same, the most important aspect of Eloísa's catalogue concerns the wave of emerging writers who gain visibility in the literary field thanks to the cultural capital produced by the publishing house and the contributions of consecrated writers. The most important symbolic capital is obtained due to the desacralizing aspect of the

books' production. Cartonera publishing challenges and questions the books' symbolism and implications in Latin America: it reflects and questions the practical use of the book object, its role in the particular context and consequently, it reframes the meaning of literature in the region). By using pre-factory modes of production and exposing the book making process, Eloísa unmasks the traditional route of production. The publishing house also challenges traditional book presentations. Poetry readings and presentation of new titles have taken place many times in non-conventional places like sailors' bars in the harbor or low-income-city's city halls or the workshop itself. On those occasions, they have offered *pisco*, beer or other beverages or food (like Argentina´s choripán) instead of the traditional wine or champagne cocktails. While such events adhere to more popular ways of being, there is also a way of parodying the traditional routes of consecration. Take into consideration that the Premio Sudaca Borders was a way to trivialise and mock the book award process in itself by ironic imitation of the Clarín award. When I asked María Gómez why the award was presented at all, she responded "Why not?" - eluding that the absolute authority of Clarín award can be put into question (Gómez).

While bypassing the rules and logic imposed by the institutionalized literary field is what partly defines Eloísa, the truth of the matter is that Eloísa simultaneously relies on the illusion of the existence of the autonomy of the field. Cucurto seems to believe that literature cannot change anything while proving the opposite: by publishing literary texts, he gives jobs to former cartoneros. Also, Eloísa's use of cardboard as the primary material for the book making process shows that recycled cardboard, when used for artistic expression, is far from useless.

Eloísa's fluidity and changes in actors and players can transgress the boundaries of the field. In that environment, then, it is hard to speak of clear cut autonomy of the field. Especially

since, in this case, the field is fluid and constantly absorbing and rejecting elements. In addition, its boundaries are constantly being challenged and can be easily transgressed. As I have shown above, Eloísa sometimes operates on the margins of the field, in the case of emerging writers. Other times, however, it operates as the new center in one part of the field, in terms of new ways of independent publishing. Most of all, Eloísa depends heavily on its niche market: its self-sustainability is tied to the profit obtained from the selling of the books. Finally, Eloísa only tries to insert itself in the existing field. The idea behind it is not to revolutionize or change the literary field. After all, the change would be impossible, as previous literary movements have shown. The idea is to offer another possible window to become part, enter the field and then transgress it and refuse to speak or act from a fixed position while appeasing its audiences. After all, Cucurto did eventually publish with Planeta. In order to do so, to become visible in the field, Eloísa found a way to do so while responding to the demands of various societal needs. If an author becomes associated with Eloisa, the door into literary circles is open, due to the accumulated cultural capital at Eloísa. The house seized the opportunity of the crisis and the economic collapse only to bring about another way to reconfigure the field by showing that tensions, segmentations of various kinds of capital, and the autonomy of art in twenty-first century not only is an impossible task anymore but it needs to be constantly put into dialogue with new forms, images and visions of the world – heteronomy. This vision, interestingly, is also a vision of a new wave of emerging writers in Argentina, which is the topic of the next chapter.

Literature of Their Own: Eloísa Cartonera's Emerging Writers

The neoliberal experimentation of Menem's reign left deep marks on Argentine society and, consequently, on the field of literary production. In his 2002 essay "Literatura de compromiso," Argentine writer and critic Daniel Link envisioned a rather gloomy future for national literary production. Link viewed the 1990s as a moment when the field of intellectual and literary production suffered profoundly because of the loss of political and social rights, a loss that was echoed within the literary scene (15-17). The revaluation of the role of the intellectual in the 1990s paralleled the lack of public debate in the new millennium, when the once vivid cultural scene in Buenos Aires was temporarily ruined by the 2001 economic crisis.

A possible response to Link's pessimism can be found in viewing the post-crisis period from a different perspective. My previous chapter argued that the appearance of Eloísa Cartonera on the cultural scene of Buenos Aires can also be interpreted as a way to bypass the passivity and fatalism of the intellectual elite in post-crisis society. Such action and intervention in the cultural scene, as I read it eight years later, resulted in a reconfiguration of the internal logic of the literary field within a neoliberal market characterized by a consolidation of the independent publishing scene, which combined social justice with matters of literary production. With what turned out to be a complicated and ambitious task, Eloísa produced a new wave of emerging writers. It made these writers visible on the literary scene by granting them legitimacy with cultural capital put forward by the house itself and consecrated authors such as Ricardo Piglia, César Aira, Alan Pauls and Elsa Drucaroff, among others. I believe that Eloísa's operations are deeply intertwined with the emerging writers' aesthetic and social ascendance in the literary scene. I argue that if we are to understand their worldview, we cannot overlook where, when and

how these texts were produced, distributed and consumed. While my first two chapters dealt mainly with the issues of distribution and consumption, this particular chapter will largely focus on the production of the texts.

For these reasons, this chapter aims to explore the central traits of the wave of emerging writers that have been presented by Eloísa Cartonera within the field of literary production in Argentina since 2003. By "traits" I refer not only to the texts but also to the social processes that surround these writers' ascendance in the literary scene. Thus, I will take into consideration four particular aspects of the literary scene, in addition to these writers' literary value. First, I will look into the ways in which the writers interact with each other; that is, I interrogate their relation to their contemporaries and the wave of young writers called the nueva narrativa argentina (NNA). Second, I will trace their connection to literary precursors in order to describe the paradigms of their intellectual positioning within the field. Third, I will identify their social emergence on the literary scene, in the form of activities like book presentations, poetry readings, and the creation of alternative intellectual spaces in Buenos Aires. Finally, I will analyze their texts in order to outline the main themes and characteristics of their writings. Special attention will be dedicated to how their use of technology and social media are shaping the literary world today, as well as a popular and scholarly understanding of literature.

I will first clarify several terms, definitions and criteria that I will be employing in this chapter. In my nomenclature, an "emerging author" is a writer who has previously published through independent, local publishers like Belleza y Felicidad, but at the time of publishing with Eloísa, was yet to be recognized by the traditional routes of consecration: (inter)national critical and academic audiences, literary magazines, journals and prizes. A good example is Fernanda

Laguna. My corpus follows the work of authors who started publishing with Eloísa in 2003 and 2004. For many of them the label "emerging writer" no longer applies, since writers like Washington Cucurto and Dani Umpi are more established and recognized in the Argentine literary scene and are slowly entering the consciousness of North American academia. Nevertheless, my goal here is to trace how these writers started and through what kind of texts they first entered the literary scene.

Second, the term "wave" should be understood here in loose terms. I will avoid using the terms "generation" and "group" to refer to these writers. While most of the writers explored in this chapter were born between 1970 and 1980, by no means do I wish to discriminate against those who are younger or older but who would otherwise be classified as emerging writers. This is why the term "generation" seems restrictive and sloppy. At the same time, the concept "group" seems restraining as well. As I will show below, while I trace the dominant characteristics of their writings and their intellectual positioning within the literary field and their respective debuts on the cultural scene of Buenos Aires, I do not consider these writers to be a unified and consolidated literary group or movement with a clearly and consciously stated manifesto or literary goals, as was the case with the *Shanghai* group in the 1990s.[51] This does not mean, however, that there are no shared similarities or aesthetics between them. On many different levels, the emerging writers overlap significantly. For the purposes of this particular project, I will focus on similarities rather than differences.[52] The similarities come from the literary influences they share, in the vision of literature as an action and cultural intervention and their

[51] In chapter one I have traced the dominant literary groups in the 1990s targeting the *Shanghai* group as the main representative of commercial literature.

[52] The differences are substantial. For example, while Cucurto is closely tied to the aesthetic of the popular *cumbia* and *peronismo*, Dani Umpi is a representative of an urban and camp aesthetic. Alejandro Rubio and Damián Ríos are more conventional in their linear writing than Laguna and Cecilia Pavón.

desire to fluidly move within the literary field untied to any fixed intellectual position. This is why I find the concept of "wave" more adequate since it encompasses similarities but also allows for particular differentiation.

Finally, I wish to address my criteria for the selection of emerging writers and their narratives. I was first tempted to simply select the writers included in the anthology that Eloísa Cartonera published in 2007's "No hay cuchillos sin rosas: Historia de una editorial latinoamericana y Antología de jóvenes autores." According to its editors, this book presented the most important and promising emerging writers in the first four years of Eloísa's existence: Inés Acevedo, Leandro Avalos Blacha, Gabriela Bejerman, Timo Berger, Fabián Casas, Washington Cucurto, Cuqui, Francisco Garamona, Juan Incardona, Fernanda Laguna, Juan Leotta, Cecilia Pavón, Ramón Paz, Ricardo Piña, Damián Ríos, Alejandro Rubio, Eugenia Segura, Dani Umpi and Ricardo Zelarayán.[53] While I respect Eloísa's attempt to canonize its emerging writers, my own approach will be to group them by several shared and salient themes in their narratives. I find this approach more fruitful especially since I am interested in the "wave" of emerging writers. Even though I include the names of Pavón and Cucurto - who are mainly known as poets - I will not include a review of poetry in this chapter. My reasoning is that, according to Pierre Bourdieu, poetry occupies a distinct place in the literary field that does not always correspond to the logic put forward by fiction writers. In addition, when I write "fiction" or "narrative", I refer mainly to short stories. As I have argued previously, the mode of production deeply marks the genre selections. Thus, the absence of long novels is visible.

[53] Ramón Paz is a pseudonym for Pedro Mairal who mostly publishes erotic poetry with Eloísa, while the insertion of Ricardo Zelarayán is interesting as he was well known on the Argentine literary scene in the 1980s but has since been forgotten. Cucurto and Casas have been trying to revive his opus. This issue will be further addressed in this chapter.

Finally, to include all emerging writers would be counterproductive since such categorization is reserved for anthologies. This is why I will work with the most visible and most successful ones who share the closest vision of literature among themselves: Dani Umpi, Gabriela Bejerman, Fernanda Laguna (and her alter ego, Dalia Rosetti), Cecilia Pavón, Washington Cucurto (whose real name is Santiago Vega), Alejandro Rubio, Damián Rios, Fabián Casas, Juan Leotta, Cuqui and Leandro Avalos Blacha. This narrowing sets the stage for an overview of the emerging writers' aesthetic and politics through a close reading of their texts. My contribution to existing literary criticism will be taxonomy of the main features found in twenty-first century literature by emerging writers in Argentina, specifically those who gained their visibility on the literary scene thanks to Eloísa Cartonera. By visibility, I mean the fact that the writers became known in the literary scene and embarked on a path of consecration. One such step is their presence in literary criticism, and it should be noted that these emerging writers' characteristics have only recently been noted in in-depth analysis by literary scholars in the Americas.

In the last two years, there have been several contributions that have dealt with these emerging writers' narratives. Various literary and cultural studies have focused on Washington Cucurto, both a co-founder of Eloísa and an author.[54] Over the past several years, the local and international media have embraced the impact of this publishing house on Argentina's cultural scene. The Guardian, BBC and Rolling Stone have featured interviews with Eloísa's founding members, often celebrating their response to the national economic crisis.[55] However, there has been little intent to engage with the aesthetic of the publishing house and to critically address its

[54] Studies by Ksenija Bilbija, Beatriz Sarlo and Jesús Montoya Juárez have focused on the narrative by Washington Cucurto, while Craig Epplin has explored this venture as a new media.
[55] See Marina Mariasch's "Ediciones alternatives" in *Rolling Stone* and Rosario Gabino's "Cartones y poesía" on *BBCMundo*.

writers and literary texts. When one such attempt was made, there was an instant critical dismissal of Eloísa's published texts. At a 2007 book fair in La Paz, one such critic, Guillermo Mariaca, argued that Cartonera's publications did not make any contribution to literature since he saw neither "originalidad ni diálogo" ("originality nor dialogue") in their texts. Mariaca's generalizations beg the following question: is it really possible that none of these texts made the slightest literary contribution? This concept of a "contribution to literature," as we will see, is not an easy task that any one critic can take on herself. This kind of intellectual positioning is precisely what cartonera publishing houses were attempting to challenge. Not all were as hypercritical of Eloísa's publications. Several critics embraced the writings by some of the featured emerging authors. In a paper given at the 2006 Latin American Studies (LASA) conference in Puerto Rico, graduate students Seoane López and Santiago Deymonnaz celebrated the "illegal" literature of the new Argentine authors, labeling them representatives of a rebellious subculture of a dominant literary scene (3). These texts, they argued, "don't give a damn about the canon" because they are full "of disrespect towards the consecrated figures of literature and towards the hegemonic norms of beautiful writing and good expression," thus, making it possible for literature to be now opened "to a new world of popular, young and improper bright language" (5). While I generally agree with these critics, such observations need further consideration since their texts prove to be much more contradictory and complex than explained here.

It is my understanding that both of these intellectual postures are all too quick to judge the success or failures of emerging writers' texts. After all, any judgment is a reflection of a consensus and such dualism - i.e., good versus bad - oversimplifies their texts. Therefore, the emphasis of this particular chapter will be on exploring how these writers fit into the field of

literary production in a post-crisis Argentina. I am more interested here in tracing the tendencies in their writings and speculating on their possible directions in the literary scene, than in merely judging whether their writings are indeed novel or not. My thesis is that this particular wave of emerging writers in post-crisis Argentina brings about a complex and often times contradictory, unstable and highly performative vision of the aesthetics and politics of fiction writing and literature, while also revealing that the very nature of the field of literary and culture production, in the first decade of the present century, is itself a much more contradictory and unstable category than previously imagined. Underneath their public image as a group of artists who embrace mass culture and shun the archetype of the "serious" writer, there lies an important literary project that exposes the established literary field and its unspoken traditions and rules.

1. We are Young, New and Argentine

The economic crisis of 2001 sets up a new point of departure for interpreting literary production in Argentina. In this particular context, a whole new generation of young writers appeared on the literary scene; they are today are known as representatives of the nueva narrativa argentina (NNA). The labels "young", "generation" and "nueva narrativa argentina" were explicated by established Argentine writers Elsa Drucarroff, Juan José Becerra and Ana María Shua in an article published by *Perfil* in 2008, which traced the main attributes of this so-called new generation. They called them a generation of young authors because all the writers were born after 1970, and nueva narrativa argentina comes from the revival of anthologies of short stories. The anthologies published between 2005 and 2008 are essential in identifying the members and aesthetics of this new generation. The publishing house Norma released the first anthology of 20 short stories, "La joven guardia," whose authors ranged in age from 25 to 35. Among many, the

names of Cucurto, Bejerman, Mairal and Juan Terranova appeared. Two years later, Sudamericana published three anthologies of short stories: “En celo,” “In fraganti” and “Uno a uno.” And, finally, Terranova edited an anthology of short stories with Entropía entitled, “Buenos Aires escala 1:1. Los barrios por sus escritores.” According to Norma’s editor Maximiliano Tomás, the importance of these anthologies lies in the fact that they made visible, in a coherent way, a new generation of young authors. This visibility, by injecting into the Argentine literary world the fresh perspectives of this new wave of young writers, brought renewed critical reflection upon that world. All of these milestones stimulated greater interest in the constitutive nature of this generation.

Tomás and Drucaroff enumerate their main features. First, they agree that all of these writers were raised during Menem’s era, within the context of a vibrant sociopolitical reality marked by intense change and crisis. The political discourse of neoliberal ideology shaped the way they perceived everyday reality. Second, according to Drucaroff, the main theme of this generation, unlike the previous one, is that they do not take themselves, or for that matter, literature, so seriously. Third, as Trubba writes, they have assimilated the Argentine literary tradition without conflict or the need to declare war on their literary “fathers,” as so many previous waves of writers have done. Lastly, and perhaps what most distinguishes these writers from previous waves, is how thoroughly they are engaged with online social media and the Internet. Most of these writers have their own blogs and commonly use weblogs and chat transcripts in their writings. And while they unabashedly embrace the Internet and technology in general, they are still struggling to fully embrace its potential.

Many of the same writers associated with the NNA bristle at such attempts to characterize them collectively. In 2008, Argentine writer Tomás Eloy Martínez of La Nación gathered nine of them, including Florencia Abbate, Samanta Schweblin, Terranova and Cucurto, to talk about the NNA. In the discussion, the writers criticized such characterizations for not really problematizing the diversity and differences that exist between writers, and for giving the false impression that they represent a unified group. Mariana Enríquez, for example, noted that just because there are no outward divisions between groups within the group does not mean that there are in fact any groups (qtd. in Eloy Martínez). Cucurto categorically rejects being associated with the NNA even though he has been presented in two of the main anthologies (ibid). Pavón and Laguna, by contrast, feel comfortable being perceived as representatives of this new wave (after all, how can they argue with the fact that they were born in the 1970s, the main criteria for being associated with the NNA?) (ibid). Both confessed, however, to opportunistically exploiting the association as a way of marketing themselves.[56] Whether Cucurto, Enríquez, Pavón and Laguna are correct is less of a concern. The important point here is that rejecting the NNA label has allowed these writers to position themselves in a different way, or to create work on their own terms. In spite of their discomfort with the label, the NNA has given a heightened visibility to authors who were previously unknown to the wider reading public, marking them as writers to be watched.[57]

If the extent to which these writers identify with the NNA label is ambiguous, no such ambiguity exists when it comes to their attachment and loyalty to Eloísa Cartonera. Beyond

[56] In a personal interview I conducted with *Pavón in 2010 in Buenos Aires*, she said she does not identify with the NNA.

[57] When I say the "wider public" I refer to the fact that the *La joven guardia* was published by Norma, one of the big Spanish conglomerates that distributes in Latin America. According to Tomás, the wider distribution gave the authors more visibility than they would have had otherwise.

identifying themselves with an entire generation of young authors, what has made these writers a group has been their mutual friendship, the same bonds of friendship that led them to publish with Eloísa in the first place. Because of this, they emphasize a different focus of critical attention: Eloísa Cartonera's cultural intervention within the independent publishing scene at the margins of national and traditional literary production.[58] Consequently, the position of differentiation within the field cultivated by these writers comes in respect to the big transnational conglomerates, as one of the main reasons to start and publish with Eloísa Cartonera, but also in relation to their contemporaries. These writers want to create and maintain a marginal position as outsiders since it is precisely the place from which they can intervene and move in the field on their own terms, following their own desires. This is why Laguna to this day refuses to publish with the large conglomerates (qtd. in Alemian). Her loyalty now is tied to Mansalva, which is the publishing house of Francisco Garamona and Javier Barilaro (one of the founders of Eloísa). The house continues to publish the most prominent emerging writers from Eloísa, such as Damian Ríos, Alejandro Rubio and Inés Acevedo.

Further evidence of the importance of these informal personal ties to the NNA is the interreferentiality of their texts. As I will show further below, the interplay of writings between Bejerman, Pavón and Laguna is interesting not only because they are the precursors of Eloísa in the 1990s, with their publishing house Belleza y Felicidad, but also because of the literary dialogue in their texts. Pavón, for example, finishes Rosetti's story "Durazno reverdeciente", naming it as a sequel, "Durazno reverdeciente 2" and giving it a happy ending (33). Bejerman's poetry is full of references to partying with Ceci (Pavón) and Fer (Laguna) (*Pendejo* 2-3, 32-33,

[58] However, some of these writers, like Cucurto, did publish with transnational houses like Planeta, a fact that I have already addressed in the second chapter.

42-46). Cucurto incorporates all of them in his *Curandero del amor* and more importantly, he is the one who wrote the first review and essay on Dalia Rosetti, "Por qué leer a Dalia Rosetti", which was featured on the Eloísa website until 2009, and is now displayed on Mansalva's website (*Curandero del amor* 23-33).

At the same time, it would be irresponsible to completely disregard characteristics put forward by Tomás and Drucaroff. General as they are, it would be hard to deny these categories. Indeed, the writers were deeply affected by the policies of Carlos Menem. These emerging writers did grow up during one of the most turbulent times in recent Argentine history. The economic crisis itself affected their identity as writers by making it impossible to publish their work. More importantly, however, the crisis affected the way they viewed themselves as citizens. Paradoxically, the crisis also gave them an opportunity to branch out into other forms of art once it became clear that making a living as a writer proved to be impossible. Consequently, many of these writers view themselves as multi-performative and multi-racial artists. Gabriela Bejerman, for example, is a published poet but also produces and sings pop albums under the name of Gaby Bex. Fernanda Laguna is an established visual artist, known for her installations and multi-media performances in MALBA (Museum of Latin American Art in Buenos Aires); she publishes both under her own name and the pseudonym of Dalia Rosetti ("or is it the other way around?" she would probably ask). Cecilia Pavón, who studies literature at the University of Buenos Aires with Laguna and Bejerman, is also a translator. Dani Umpi is an Uruguayan photographer, singer and writer who has been assimilated into the Argentine literary scene.[59] While publishing pornographic sonnets under the pseudonym of Ramón Paz, Pedro Mairal explains that this pseudonym gave him "mucha libertad. Me permitía escribir sin pudor estos sonetos cargados de

[59] His short story appears in the anthology of Argentine young authors, "No hay cuchillo sin rosas…"

sexualidad, donde podía detonar todo mi lirismo y también mi vulgaridad. Me permitía llevar mi propia voz poética hasta un lugar tan lejos que casi dejaba de ser mía, sin dejar de serlo."[60] As Ksenija Bilbija explains in her article, "What is Left in the World of Books…", Cucurto is the paradigm of the postcolonial notion of the subaltern subject who, as a self-educated biracial writer, reached the status of bestselling author in Argentina (87). In this way, Cucurto differs the most from previously mentioned authors. Thus, the environment of their literary upbringing was one marked by the market, economic crisis and the increasing use of technology. It produced a cast of eccentric and unstable creative personas who are often mistaken for acting out dilettantism in their own lives and in the world of letters. It is for this reason that Trubba argues in the prologues of mentioned anthologies that this generation has not rebelled against the literary precursors, but rather assimilated to it. However, such an interpretation would not be entirely correct. My argument here is that these writers take the craft and the field of literature very seriously. They know very well who has inspired them, who they wish to emulate, and who and what they wish to subvert. As such, they are anything but casual about their role and intentions in the field of Argentine letters.

2. "Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres"[61]

Traditionally, the very nature of the newcomers' position in the literary scene understands processes typical for the literary field; these processes involve symbolic and real relationships that emerging writers create with their literary precursors. As Harold Bloom argues in his influential book *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, canonized literary fathers are

[60] "A lot of freedom. It allowed me to write, without modesty, sonnets filled with sexuality in which my lyricism and vulgarity could explode. It allowed me to take my own poetic voice to faraway places that almost ceased to be mine but without complete surrender."
[61] "Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are."

sources of contradictory relationships that the next generation of writers tries to resolve. While acknowledging the influences of literary precursors, the new writer must successfully overcome such influence in order to survive into posteriority. Thus, literary fathers serve as sources of anxiety, an anxiety that can only be diminished by the current writer's conscious "misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation" (Bloom 6). This misinterpretation of precursors, while overcome in many different ways, involves several levels of complexity in the case of the emerging writers. As these writers misread and misinterpret the previous generation of consecrated writers, mainly Ricardo Piglia and Juan José Saer, two more enterprises appear: making other writers, such as César Aira, the center of their literary influence and bringing back into visibility forgotten marginal figures, such as Ricardo Zelarayán.

In symbolically distancing themselves from the dominant literary names of the 1990s (Piglia and Saer) and their view of literature, aesthetics and politics, this new wave of writers also articulates the key features and perspectives of their own literary projects.[62] These particular distinctions are useful because they clearly locate the writers' positions within the literary field. As I have shown in a previous chapter, literary critics have described Piglia and Saer as solemn writers with complicated plots and a taste for metaphysical mediations. Their discourse is highly sophisticated and dense, while their literary project imposes its own rules in representing the complex and chaotic post-dictatorial Argentina. Both are viewed as writers whose nonfictional texts on issues of fiction, literature and politics have brought them a high level of visibility in the (inter)national literary scene. They are recognized as members of academic intellectual circles. It

[62] The reason I say "symbolically" is that while emerging writers distance themselves from Piglia, he is also one of the most important writers to have published with Eloisa. His support and his cultural capital gave greater visibility to these writers. This contradiction is explained in my second chapter.

is in part against these characteristics of their predecessors that the new emerging writers define themselves. Cucurto, Laguna, Pavón, Bejerman and Umpi disregard these features as elitist, and, in contrast, situate their literary energies within a different realm of the field. On several occasions, Cucurto has declared that his literature is not to be taken seriously. In a 2005 interview with Silvina Friera for the Página/12, Cucurto declared: "¿Escribir un gran libro? ¿Para qué? La literatura no influye sobre la realidad ni puede cambiarla."[63] A year later in an interview with Matías Cappeli for the online magazine *Inrockuptibles*, Cucurto explains what literature represents for him and argues that:

> La literatura es un entretenimiento; el día que me aburra no escribo más. La 'alta' literatura me aburre. No me gusta cuando se la pone por delante de la vida, cuando cobra un valor trascendental. Prefiero algo más precario. No tratar de escribir superbien, sino buscar una voz propia y trabajar desde otro lugar, una cosa más de pastiche. En general escribo rápido, en poco tiempo.[64]

Cucurto's idea that literature should represent everyday life, and that the writer should be immersed in this reality, echoes some of the traits found in the writings of Fernanda Laguna. The themes of writing quickly and without correction, and the concept of taking a casual approach to literature, are present in the imaginary world of her alter ego and literary character, Dalia Rosetti. In an interview with Ezequiel Alemian, Laguna states that the world of fiction is a space to explore the present and "una velocidad en las acciones y en lo cotidiano, que es la velocidad del

[63] "To write a grand book? For what? Literature does not influence reality nor can it change."
[64] "Literature is entertainment. The day I get bored with it, I will not write more. 'High literature' bores me. I do not like it when it is put before life, when it gets transcendental value. I prefer something more precarious. Not trying to writer super good, but to search for one's own voice, to work from a different place, more of a pastiche. Generally, I write fast and in no time."

momento, del hecho de vivir el momento. Dalia Rosetti está viviendo al día, llevada por la velocidad."[65] Both Cucurto and Laguna are concerned with the present and everyday lives of their marginal characters. As I will show in further detail below, while Cucurto is more concerned with the world of immigrants, Laguna's Dalia Rosetti is a writer immersed in a lesbian sub-culture. In this, she resembles Dani Umpi, whose main literary obsession is the world of pop culture with the campy drag queens of Buenos Aires, visual performances in the music scene, and the inclusion of marginal and bizarre characters. These worlds are fundamentally different from the chaotic, dark and intense post-dictatorial reality populated mainly with white male characters dealing with post-traumatic stress, as explored by Saer in his *Nada, Nadie, Nunca* or in Piglia's *Respiración artificial*, for example. The difference is the emerging writers' view that literature and fiction are supposed to be light, a relief from everyday life and in being so, fun and humorous. It is no surprise, then, that Aira becomes the central figure in their literary world. Alliances and influences are rooted in the mutual friendship between Aira and many of the emerging writers, Aira's personal support of Eloísa Cartonera and his aesthetic influence.

According to the interview I had with Cecilia Pavón, Cucurto, Laguna, Pavón, Bejerman and Aira first knew each other from the literary scene in Buenos Aires in the 1990s . Poetry readings shaped their social ascendance, and Aira was one of the central figures of that scene. These friendships have become obvious in their texts. For example, in 2004, Aira wrote a short novel, *Yo era una chica moderna*, wherein two main characters are called Ceci and Fer. Aira is Dalia Rosetti's ex boyfriend in her "Durazno Reverdeciente" and he appears in Cucurto's *Curandero del amor*, with the protagonist meeting him on a street in Once, a neighborhood of

[65] "A velocity of actions and every day life, which is the velocity of the moment, of the fact of living in a moment. Dalia Rosetti lives in the moment carried by velocity."

Buenos Aires. The game of personal references for these authors created a sense of belonging to certain literary traditions that Aira represented at the time, particularly a fun, liberating and urban literature. In an interview with Cecilia Pavón from 2010, she emphasizes that Aira's personal support (his reading and commenting on their texts) was crucial to the literary development of Laguna, Bejerman and herself .

In 2005, Aira published "Mil Gotas" with Eloísa Cartonera, which has become a sort of bestseller with over 1,000 copies sold. Aira's presence in Eloisa's catalogue granted emerging authors cultural capital and visibility in the literary scene. However, such an alliance is intertwined with Aira's aesthetic projects. Literary critic Craig Epplin has argued in his article "Theory of a Workshop: César Aira and Eloísa Cartonera" that the whole literary, social and political project behind Eloísa Cartonera functions as part of Aira's vision of the literary experience itself (103). The linking of Aira's writing with Eloisa's operations is based on his notion of literature in which the task of writing and the job of publishing are seen as interdependent processes. Epplin argues that Aira's obsessive return to the act of fabrication, invention of procedures and the relation between literature and the market (*Varamo, La princesa primavera and El mago)* is "often seen as an indicative of a resistance to the cultural demands of late capitalism" (99). Sandra Contreras makes a similar point; she sees Aira's literature as an action and performance in which the act of publishing is an essential part of the artistic process (73). Such aesthetic action appears in the fiction of these emerging writers as well.

According to literary criticism that has explored these issues, mainly those pieces written by Jesús Montoya Juárez and Marina Yuszczuk, salient features of Aira's poetic appear as master influences on Cucurto, Laguna and Bejerman (Montoya Juárez 52; Yuszczuk 10).

According to Montoya Juárez and Yuszczuk, as well as to Contreras and Graciela Montaldo, Aira inserts himself into the literary field as simultaneously playing with the appropriation of and distancing from mass culture. He works primarily with pastiche, parody, naïf humor, colloquial language and characters taken from TV shows. The idea of parody of literature or of the role of a writer is one of the dominant features that has been assimilated by these emerging writers.

Yuszczuk observes that when Laguna describes love scenes where "un abrazo se transforma en milanesas de pasión," she is working with language codes that have been constructed through the TV soap operas (8; 23). In a similar fashion, Bejerman uses this discourse of love in her "Presente perfecto" as a way to parody writers and artists (25). In his relationship to Aira, Cucurto is somewhat different. He imagines himself as unique in the literary scene, as not pertaining to any previous literary traditions or movements. Ironically, such a posture is not very unique, but seems typical for any emerging writer who imagines a place for himself in such a field. Just as there are Aira the person and Aira the character, Cucurto is equally interested in this contradiction between literature and life, fiction and reality. He signs some of his novels as Santiago Vega (his true name), some as Cucurto. Often times he cites himself and his biography entry from Wikipedia, such is the case in *Curandero del amor* (1). Montoya Juárez concludes that like Aira, who became fully visible in the 1990s, these writers advocate for the continuous construction of the relationship between literature and the self, and the context that creates such a construction. Paradoxically, according to Montoya Juárez, such construction is to be revealed by the deconstruction of the literary field where new paradigms and discourses emerge to describe these writers (73). One example of this is the above-mentioned use of mass media culture, drag queens and transgender individuals. Thus, the

alliance and loyalty to the figure of Aira serves as a way to make this aesthetic project visible. Such visibility and cultural capital is what eventually will grant their survival in posteriority.

The continuous flow of such aesthetics can also be achieved by incorporating other forgotten figures, such as Ricardo Zelarayán. This forgotten Argentine writer's main work, which was written over the previous three decades is an example of a literary father who also symbolically served as a model for some of the emerging authors.[66] Frequently marginalized within infrastructures of intellectual power – literary criticism, academic institutions, and publishing markets – Zelarayán is also the voice of the marginalized. Argentine critic Nancy Fernández has drawn similarities between Cucurto and Zelarayán, noting that this alliance is foreseeable because Zelarayán "es un autor que trabaja con materiales ajenos a la estética clásica, con restos del lenguaje y desperdicios de la lógica racional. No hay explicaciones que cierren el relato ni fórmulas que garanticen la comprensión integral de la anécdota" ("Cucurto y Zelarayán").[67] According to Fabián Casas, an emerging Argentine author and critic, the resurgance in interest in Zelarayán is, in large part, due to his particular style, which combines "la picaresca criolla con Joyce y Céline, y su obra es una reflexión sobre la violencia del lenguaje" ("Escritor en Pose de Combate").[68] It seems rather unexpected that Casas would compare a singular literary figure like Joyce to a writer who intentionally rejects notions of literary elitism. Despite this contradiction, Cucurto identifies Zelarayán as one of the most influential writers in his own literary development. Within the national canon, he is also a

[66] Zelarayán is a known author in Argentina's literary circles who has neither been consecrated outside of his country nor obtained wide readership. He published four works: *La obsesión del espacio* (1973), *Traveseando* (1984), *La piel de caballo* (1986), and *Roña criolla* (1991).

[67] "Is an author who works with materials foreign to the classic aesthetic, he works with scrapes of language and waste of rational logic. There are no explications which close the story nor formulas that guarantee the whole comprehension of an anecdote."

[68] "[the] Creole picaresque with Joyce and Celine, and his work is a reflection about violence of language."

possible replacement for the ever-present, haunting figure of Borges (Bilbija 102). In homage, Cucurto's first book of poems is titled "Zelarayán". Zelarayán secured his position in Eloísa with the short story "Lata Peinada", which concludes the anthology of young Argentine authors, "No hay cuchillo sin rosas." Despite his physical age, it is not unreasonable for Zelarayán to be considered a "young" author. As a representative of a newer wave of authors, his talent and artistic accomplishments have eased much of the anxiety surrounding the nearly messianic situation affecting the contemporary literary scene: the arrival of a literary figure that will replace the old authoritative model, Borges.[69] This specific relationship is elaborated on in a short story by Fabián Casas, and it's no coincidence that Eloísa Cartonera republished it in 2005. Dedicated to Fogwill, "Casa con diez pinos" narrates an encounter between a Great Writer and the narrator Sergio, also a writer, who exchange ideas on current literary trends. After offering Sergio a job as a secretary, the Great Writer informs him that in order to become a good author, he must read the canon: Borges, Macedonio, Onetti, etc (5). Disturbed by such a command, a young writer is further perturbed once he realizes that the Great Writer has never heard of Zelarayán. Notably annoyed, Sergio seeks his revenge by giving away the Great Writer's "best work yet" to some girls at a party (10). By disseminating his work and destroying it, Casas poses Zelarayán as a model for new authors as he is the only one that, discursively, remains in the canon, now that the best work is gone; Borges' important role is rightly assigned to another.

These "misinterpretations and misunderstandings" are as light and humorous as the works of Cucurto, or so Laguna and Bejerman would like us to believe. However, they are also charged with seriousness. These writers construct and reconstruct a literary system that rejects

[69] Bilbija traces the paradox of Cucurto's writing. She argues that while Cucurto tries to kill Borges as the literary authority, he inevitably falls into Borges' trap and recycles his ideas.

Piglia and Saer, follows Aira and revives Zelarayán in an attempt to make visible new paradigms of twenty-first century Argentine literature. Such an endeavor is further complicated by their mutual relationships and social gatherings.

3. Readings and Online Dating

The ways in which an author moves within the literary circles also defines an emerging writer's position in the literary field. In this fashion, I specifically outline the habits emerging writers develop while interacting with each other, their contemporaries, and their precursors. Writers also interact with their public through book presentations. Traditionally, book presentations, according to sociologist Hernán Vanoli, were imagined as social rituals with a spatial encounter between writers and the numerous cultural entrepreneurs that tend to form the public. Vanoli is fundamentally arguing that the so called public at the book presentations is in fact the intermediaries or different cultural agents that pertain to the traditional literary field, such as other writers who present the work of colleagues, editors, publishers, journalists and literary critics ("Sobre narrativas, experiencias de lectura…"). Vanoli argues that essentially the word "public" is misleading and misused by the institutions since what we traditionally mean by "public" here are those ordinary readers, the anonymous public, who do not have any interest except to see and hear the writer (5). According to Vanoli, the purpose of book presentations is to transform a non-published book into a piece of merchandise, and also to establish its entrance and dissemination within the institutional framework (criticism, review, exhibitions) that guarantee its circulation and publicity (7). Many of these emerging writers take part in traditional book presentations and, according to Vanoli, as representatives of younger writers, Cucurto and Mairal fit into this paradigm that omits the contact with the (real) anonymous public, recycling

the traditional institutionalized ways of publicity. While Vanoli is correct to give the example of Cucurto's book presentation, he fails to admit the nuances brought by Cucurto himself, as well as those of other writers.

Cucurto's 2005 project called, *Hasta quitarle Panamá a los Yanquis*, was based on the following idea: beginning with the first Friday of January, every week by 7 PM - which marked the time before going to dance cumbia at the dance halls Samber and Bronco - Cucurto would post an installment of his novel on the Eloísa Cartonera website. Readers with access to the Internet would have enough time to read the text, get ready to dance and at midnight they would be able to meet the author, who would personally wait for his admirers at the disco Mbarete Bronco. There is uncertainty as to the success of this event, given that it was never repeated. Nevertheless, this way of communicating with the readership bypasses the cultural agents that are traditionally involved.

Other emerging writers have soon welcomed this narrative experiment. Announcing poetry and literature gatherings on Facebook and blogs, Pavón and Laguna organize parties with readings and exhibitions in their small cultural center Tu Rito, located in Once, Buenos Aires. The encounter between readers and writers is always followed by easygoing chatting and a sharing of opinions on their writing. In addition, Tu Rito, like Eloísa's workshop and Belleza y Felicidad, is another alternative center that today promotes emerging writers and is open for texts that the institutionalized mainstream field traditionally rejects.

The "public" that attends these cultural events and readings is usually not followed by the traditional machinery of cultural agents who guarantee the circulation of books. It is marked by access to the Internet and the use of social media, which means that the public is mostly a

younger generation of readers (some anonymous, some not) who enjoy cumbia music, partying and Cucurto's literature. There is also an innovative approach to the use of space. Contrary to the logic of the sweeping wave of privatization of the public space, Cucurto and Laguna are challenging these preconceptions by showing that private space can be open and serve a local community and public; what is required is only a matter of willingness to do it. Finally, unlike turning the book into merchandise, what these writers are more concerned with is getting to know their readers and to disseminate literature with wider accessibility, which means economic gain for the writer, as the Internet has made distribution "free" in every possible sense. Bilbija argues that these writers promote the reading pleasure and dancing euphoria while cutting out the publishing industry, institutions and media. Thus, the shift they are advocating for is the reconfiguration and insertion of a new, different and fluid locus of enunciation. Ultimately, this is the novelty of their approach. Eloísa Cartonera and emerging writers shed light on new experiences and alternative ways in which book presentations can be carried into the public space through a reconfiguration of the place and by differentiating between various kinds of publics.

Nevertheless, these efforts are sporadic and not as continuous and repetitive as they could be. The impact is hard to measure and is probably small. I am not arguing that Eloísa Cartonera and its writers have completely bypassed the institutionalized social rituals of the literary field, nor am I arguing that they fully reject it. Rather, their movement and flow in the various positions and circles in the literary field, coupled with the legitimization that they have been acquiring, allows them to create new ways of sociability through decentralizing the powerful centers of the field that are dominated by big publishers.

4. Themes and Writings

Emerging authors are at the same time creating and dismantling a locus of enunciation, a space for themselves at the margins and sometimes at the center of the traditional literary field. In doing so, their desire is not to be pinned down to one particular place but to move freely and fluidly inside and outside the field. While becoming cultural players within the existing field, these writers are also using the cultural capital granted by the Eloísa Cartonera and offer alternative ways of belonging in the literary scene in Argentina. Book presentations and alternative spaces serve these purposes. At the same time, the texts themselves also serve to reveal a more complex reality of their positioning in the field.

Emerging authors influenced by this crisis suffer the deconstruction and reconstruction of their citizenship. Writing becomes a space where these deconstructed subjects can express themselves on the various levels of the production of meaning. The pluralistic nature of their narratives makes it impossible to determine a unified approach to the representation of reality and writing. However, most of them are deeply concerned by the position of the artist in today's society. These apprehensions exist because of the harsh economic reality of cultural production within a capitalist market and alongside the impact of technology on their generation. While these seem to be prevailing themes, I am here concerned more with writers who make such visions of reality more complex.

Nevertheless, some of the more severe critics of emerging writers' texts seem to dismiss that such vision exists at all. In her review of Cucurto's writing titled "Un populismo postmoderno," Beatriz Sarlo has accused him of being a postmodern populist because he celebrates not the truth of the people, but its capacity "de coger, bailar cumbia, enamorarse y

girar toda la noche."[70] Writer Alejandro Ricagno has pointed out that Belleza y Felicidad was for him pure "menemismo poético" ("poetic menemism") because he felt that to this "cool" lifestyle and aesthetic of beauty and happiness, one had to oppose with "fealdad y sufrimiento" ("ugliness and suffering") as this was the reality of Argentina in post crisis society ("Dos botellas de whiskey"). Hence, both situate these writers in opposition to the serious literature of high quality and prestige and lacking a complicated philosophical language with which to paint the gloomy reality and suffering.

Both of these critics fail to observe that behind this apparent lack of "seriousness," these writers take on a different approach that criticizes this same reality by parodying and making fun of it. Instead of dwelling on the suffering, the authors that I consider here accept the reality as it is while also trying to make the best of it. In this fashion, they also expose a rather complex vision of such a reality and present that is not solely to be criticized for being light and fun. In addition, the combination of social mobility and literary practices that surround texts, emerging writers expose a more complex vision in contemporary Argentina. I will focus on several dominant features that come out of this complexity of the lighter and more serious issues approached in these texts. Issues of marginalization and the fictional construction of characters are imagined through lenses of pop culture and are based on the idea of consumption as part of a twenty-first century, post-crisis identity formation. The representation becomes more intricate when tied to technology and the Internet. Finally, the characteristics of emerging writers also open paths for first-time published authors and newcomers on the literary scene.

[70] "To fuck, dance *cumbia*, to fall in love and go out the whole night."

1. Pop Culture is Political[71]

Most of these emerging authors, while employing different narrative strategies, incorporate the everyday life experiences that they draw from the pop culture that surrounds them, be it pop culture assimilated mainly from North America (e.g., Madonna shows up as a reference in Bejerman's poetry, and Pavón transcribes and translates songs by Pink and Miss Kittin) or from sources of national production (e.g., TV and radio stars). Bejerman and Cuqui, both female authors, as well as Cucurto, are all mainly concerned with the representation of the underground, marginalized landscape of Buenos Aires. Pedro Mairal, who writes under the pseudonym of Ramón Paz, writes porn sonnets about young people in the city. Bejerman and Cucqui's poetry depict female subjects entirely constructed by urban aesthetics and participation in an underground metropolitan culture where characters are immersed in nightlife, parties, drugs, and sexual pleasures. Cucurto has already been labeled as a writer who celebrates the aesthetic of slums and cumbia using tropes similar to Bejerman and Cuqui. These are the styles that López and Deymonnaz have previously identified as "illegal" (2). Consequently, these are also names that would appear as representative of the editor's notion of the border and the avant-garde. Thus, they are praised as being "alternative" for exploring a younger generation's social reality and sexual transgressions. On the other hand, some of these authors, like Pavón, have also been labeled as apolitical.

Cecilia Pavón has been labeled as a typical representative of the cultural consumption of youth. According to the literary critics Ana Mazzoni and Damián Selci, the metropolis of the

[71] Pop culture here should be distinguished from popular culture (*cultura popular*). By pop culture I refer to the complex reality put forward by emerging global mainstream mass media that permeates the everyday life based on the idea of consumption as the prevailing ideology. Even though it is a term coined in the Western world, many of these writers are deeply influenced by North American mass media and pop culture.

world, modern and technological advances are spaces for new adventures and cultural consumption (2). What they mean by cultural consumption is no different than consumption in general terms. Thus, Pavón, in her text "Berlin" from *Pink Punk*, describes Berlin to her close friend in the form of a letter saying that she wants "más de la vida hardcore de Berlín" (more of the hardcore life in Berlin), and in the last sentence she concludes that "quiero más de tus manos duras, quiero más alcohol y más drogas" (22).[72] Berlin becomes a space for youthful adventures aided by music, DJs and drugs. In a similar fashion, a short paragraph story, "Es maravilloso gastar el dinero" ("It's wonderful to spend Money") describes her desire for money:

> Quisiera tener una habitación llena de euros, desde el piso hasta el techo, entrar en la madrugada cuando está todo oscuro y pisarlos; tomaría un puñado sin mirar la cantidad y los pondría en los bolsillos de los invitados, dormiría sobre los euros como si durmiera sobre el heno de un establo. Protegida por la comunidad europea y sus monumentos. (126) [73]

Keeping in mind this excerpt, one can read from Mazzoni and Selci's observation an indirect criticism of the lack of political engagement because this so-called consumption has taken over and "el joven no sueña, ni hace política, ni se pelea con la familia, ni es rechazado por la sociedad: el joven viaja en busca de nuevas experiencias de consumo."[74] What Mazzoni and Selci omit is Pavón's parodic tone. Moreover, they forget that today everybody, including the

[72] "I want more of your strong hands, more alcohol and drugs."
[73] "I would like to have a room full of euros, from floor to ceiling, to come in the morning when everything is dark and to look at them; I would take a handful without looking at the quantity and I would put them in the pockets of my guests, I would sleep on euros as if I were sleeping on the hay of a stable. Protected by the European community and its monuments."
[74] "The youth does not dream, nor is political involved, nor they fight with family, nor the youth is rejected by the society: the young one *travels in search for the new experience of consumption*."

critics themselves, consume. Whether it is music, pop culture or tourism, consumption has become an integral part of global culture, and to argue that this is somehow new would be to ignore reality. Thus, Pavón is not only representing reality but also is also a part of it. She is parodying such consensus by hyperbolizing and overly accentuating the typical representation of consumption: money. Expressing in a melodramatic tone the desire to possess a room full of euros is nothing but a parody of a young Argentine writer who surely will never achieve such position as a merit of her writing.

While fully acknowledging consumption as part of everyday life, Pavón and emerging writers are looking to make distinctions within this same culture. Pavón as a woman writer works with pop culture in terms of money and consumption as another space from which the locus of enunciation is created. However, to accuse her or emerging writers of being apolitical would be misleading since this locus is political and a subversive space of denunciation of the class in power. Consider the short story, again written in epistolary form, "Querida Johanna," where Pavón is asking for an opinion for a project/performance she is about to take on. She wants to create a large network between Lima and Buenos Aires, where she will organize the burning of Nike shoes in both cities on the same day, in front of major monuments: an obelisk in Buenos Aires and the Plaza de Armas in Lima. Pavón sees this as a statement for "la unidad latinoamericana y por la solidaridad comercial de nuestros países." (127)[75]

Pavón challenges and questions the sate of contemporary society, such as the economic hegemony of the United States in Latin America. Nike shoes then operate as a symbol of neoliberal capitalism and also the physical representation of a consumer's must-have. This criticism is suggestive, yet takes place under the mask of a performance of a literary project that,

[75] "Latin American unity and commercial solidarity of our countries."

for Pavón, is also light, bright and playful because, for her, literature should also be liberating. This complexity of "light and yet serious" becomes even more convoluted in the themes of marginalization that are put forth by Umpi and Bejerman, as well as in the fictional characters of Rosetti and Cucurto.

2. Marginalization and Consumption

The idea of marginalization for emerging writers is a complicated task and deeply intertwined with the world of pop culture and consumption. While the texts reveal how writers conceive of marginalization today, their own condition of emerging writers as outsiders is also relevant for this position. Umpi and Bejerman are great examples of this complexity. Umpi has been described by cultural supplements like *RadarLibros* as an artist and performer who is closely tied in with pop culture – TV stars, celebrities admired by their followers, the invasion of popular idols, night clubs and discos. In the same article, he has also been described by Bejerman as a representative of the queer urban porteño world. Both Umpi and Bejerman conceive of the marginalization within the queer world in terms of consumption.

Identity and marginalization, unlike in previous decades and specifically unlike Néstor Perlongher, who saw inhabiting homosexuality as participating in a cultural fight, are now to be conceived in terms of consuming spaces, places, experiences, and above all, goods and products. This is why the world of Umpi in his Aún Soltera and Miss Tacuarembó is full of drag queens and campy characters that go out at night, dance, drink, and have sex. In addition, they adore Dior and are immensely naïve because they don't seem to be able to keep their jobs as perfume sellers. Bejerman has been similarly identified as a narrator who, in her "Pendejo," is concerned with homoerotic love accompanied by a large amount of sex, drugs and alcohol. In the works of

these authors, bodily experiences and lust are also deeply connected with consuming sex.

Such content has led Claudio Iglesias and Damián Selci to conclude that, unlike the queer world represented by Perlongher, these writers do not formulate any moral thesis about "la etología del homosexual porteño: si debe experimentar políticamente en baños de estación de tren o debe someterse a las reglas burguesas del consumo y formar una pareja estable" ("Lentejuelas, mercado y después").[76] And for this, Iglesias and Selci blame the market and capitalism because it is the market that assimilates these identities turning them into consumers which creates the paradox of visibility: "el máximo desinterés por la psicología natural, de parte del capital, que lleva paradójicamente al máximo interés por la descripción sociocultural de los consumidores" (ibid.).[77] Thus, Iglesias and Selci would disagree that the way out of this situation is Garcia Canclini's idea, as argued in Citizens and Consumers, that today capitalism and consumption allow conceiving marginalities and subalterns outside of identity politics which, according to him, are essentialist and sources of destabilization in Latin America . However, I argue that both of these apparently opposite views of consumption politics, in the case of emerging writers, are contradictory. It is at the intersection of these two world views that Umpi and Bejerman situate their reality.

Neither Umpi nor Bejerman see the queer world as a potential space for a cultural fight for visibility, mainly because this battle has already been won by Perlongher's generation. More specifically, they conceive this present world of consumption and citizenship in its inherent contradiction on which they then elaborate. For example, Umpi' short story "Niño rico con

[76] "Etiology of a homosexual from Buenos Aires: if he should politically experiment in the toilets at the train stations or he should oblige bourgeois rules and be in a stable couple."
[77] "The maximum lack of interest for the natural psychology by the capital which leads paradoxically to the highest interest for the socio-cultural description of consumers."

problemas" is about a homosexual relationship between a rich man, Andrés, and a narrator whose relationship is ruined by Andres' realization that with the one identity (a body) that he has, he is still missing out on his life goals and lacks any real referents. The interpolation of harsh and meaningless post-crisis reality onto their own love story is powerful and it will not leave them alone and isolated to live in their world. No matter how financially secure they are, the everyday reality of Argentina permeates every social class and every agent. Andres' anxiety passes on to the narrator who also realizes he is lost but incapable of breaking the traits of his social class and becoming an agent of his own life. Thus, both of them remain impotent to change their realities and reject the possibility of a future, remaining together in nothingness. In a similar fashion, Bejerman's short story "Monja modelo" narrates the adventures of a narrator who meets Henrietta from Milan, a nun who is at the same time a fashion model. She uses her beautiful body to make money so she can give it to the poor. She rather enjoys this life. The narrator decides to follow her around the world, on fashion stages in New York, Paris and London, taking care of her while they bring peace to the poor. The tones and styles of both short stories are rather festive and yet cynical.

Both Umpi and Bejerman underline the absurdity of being both writers and a part of the young generation. They also indirectly parody both Selci's and García Canclini's theories of the freedom of identity shifts. Thus, the return to Perlongher's fight and identity politics, as Selci would argue, would be absurd because it would only mean a nostalgic cry for something that is already there. Absolute ethics has been left behind in grand narratives, further deconstructed by the postmodern shift in the locus of enunciation to pluralistic and multi-perspective epistemology. However, at the same time, the free flow of identities, or García Canclini's

prescription of the self as based on consumption, proves to be impossible in a post-crisis Argentina where the neoliberal market failed to fulfill its promises. After all, it is because of this same neoliberal market that Andrés loses his usual references – before based on the homosexual identity and now impossible to be replaced by anything because the crisis has destroyed it all. While the story about Andrés catches the moment of the total deconstruction of identity politics, paradoxically, Bejerman's story elaborates this crash in a different model. Henrietta can be a model and a nun at the same time without really worrying about moral rectitude precisely because of any lack of referents. Again, Argentina failed in its promise of providing the possible space for citizenship to be based on consumption. Thus, Andrés and the nun are characters that embody and reveal the impossibility to imagine citizens brought together as consumers at the moment that consumption itself is questionable for most citizens in Argentina.

In a previous section, I argued that, in the twenty-first century, everyone consumes. However, Bejerman and Umpi intelligently represent the precise moment in Argentina, that moment of economic crash, in which citizens realized that consumption is also a privilege. They paint the very void, the in-between momentum of crisis in the human condition that happens in the instant at which society is at the brink of collapse. Consequently, they question not only the identity politics of belonging to only one group (such as homosexuals), but also further question what happens with Canclini's notion of citizens-as-consumers when a society suffers an economic crisis. In doing so, unlike many other writers of the NNA, they do not wish their discourse to be constructed in the reality of chaos, apocalypse, or the suffering of mostly white males, which maintains the totality of traditional realism. Rather, their "truth" is revealed through drag queens, model-nuns and transgender individuals. While they themselves do not

want to be taken too seriously - hence the festive and cheerful style of their writing - it does not mean that they are not at all serious. It is with this subtlety of tone that they perceive marginality, and this becomes one of their main traits.

While the marginality is constructed as theme, it also becomes evident in the fictional construction of characters who, in different fashions, represent these complexities.

3. Fluid Meta-Fictions

Fernanda Laguna and Washington Cucurto are at the forefront of the Eloísa Cartonera's wave of emerging writers, both as its founders and, in the last ten years, as firmly established within the literary circles of Buenos Aires.[78] As writers, they work within different literary traditions: Cucurto with Zelarayán's notion of marginality, and Laguna in women writing. Nonetheless, one of the common features in their writing is the fictional construction of characters who represent their alter egos. It is a paradigmatic feature in their shared vision of what literature should be for this wave of writers.

Fernanda Laguna publishes under both her own name and that of her alter ego Dalia Rosetti. What complicates this construction is that Dalia Rosetti also appears as a character in Laguna's writings. In the Laguna-penned "Bailemos igual," Dalia is the main character, planning to attend a book release party for her *Me encantaría que gustes de mí,* a book Laguna had published the previous year under the Rosetti pseudonym. At the party, she is, of course, a star and meets a fan, Alaska, who requests an autograph. Alaska informs her that while they may have different names, they are indeed the same person ("Bailemos igual" 50). This liberating

[78] Laguna and Cucurto published poetry in Belleza y Felicidad and poetry magazines such as *Plebella* in the 1990s. Laguna was also a known visual artist in art circles in the 1990s which later helped her in promoting her literature as well.

statement sparks the eruption of carnavalesque glee once Dalia and Alaska begin to dance identically and the former feels desired and wanted as a writer. The desire of Dalia's auto-reflexive narrative, heightened by this recognition, becomes even more explicit in Rosetti's Sueños y pesadillas, a collection of short stories that appeared individually in four different volumes published over two years. Rosetti's first-person narrative recounts its eponymous content: the narrator/author's dreams and nightmares. Dalia Rosetti's (auto)biographical construction and the embodiment of a bio-fictional author/narrator/writer continues when she tries to further encompass the imagined writer in her story "Durazno reverdeciente," a futuristic glimpse of a 65 year-old Dalia in search of same-sex romance. When conventional methods prove futile, she turns somewhat desperately to the joys and possibilities of the Internet, where she realizes the irreversible shifts in physical intimacy. Cecilia Pavón manages to continue Rosetti's development as a fictional author, writing a sequel to Rosetti's autobiography, "Durazno reverdeciente 2". In this re-imagining of her fictionalized future, Rosetti is no longer a middle-aged lesbian, but is finally a successful, popular writer of bestsellers. A friend's husband who openly despises her writing confronts her, deeming it irresponsible. She writes, he says, merely for the sake of writing and producing missing texts: "La Forma, la única verdad de la Literatura, la Forma el único lugar de redención comunitaria, de vaciamiento del yo burgués, y alcance de lo impersonal, la Forma la única operación por la cual lo estético se vuelve político" ("Durazno reverdeciente 2" 33).[79] The husband, as an authoritative critic, has misread the ambition of these young female authors. They want to move fluidly between life and art, reality and fiction, aesthetics and politics, because it is the only way to maintain the authorship of

[79]"[the] Form, the only truth in Literature, the Form is the only space for communal redemption, for emptiness of the bourgeois *I,* and scope of the impersonal, the Form is the only operation where the aesthetic becomes political."

written texts over the threats of the political, economic, and technological realities that endanger writers' identities. It is also the only way to maintain and elaborate the contradiction as a way to offer something new.

Thus, Dalia Rosetti becomes in essence a model of a writer in a post-crisis society in Argentina. She is driven by the present, and she is not concerned by politics mainly because she is aware that she is the product of everything political and historical that infiltrates her everyday life. Her friends are prostitutes or porn stars partying in Buenos Aires. She has orgies with her contemporaries, and Aira is her ex-lover…among many. She is a failed writer or a successful one, and she also studied literature; she is also surrounded by the reality of mass culture and pop stars. And all that is left is to be immersed into that everyday reality. In the end, all Dalia Rosetti wants is to dance and become a bestselling artist. Hence, the title *Me encantaría que gustes de mí* can also be read as her desire to be recognized by the public and in the literary field.

Washington Cucurto's desire has a similar perspective but with a different approach.[80] His main path is also demystification of the process of writing through his own fictional construction of characters. As Bilbija notes, in Cucurto's texts, "there is neither aesthetic nor ethical glorification of the process of writing" (91). Mainly, Cucurto argues that he writes only for fun. He wants his readers to note that his everyday life is full of sex, violence and cumbia. Thus, he invents another character: Washington Cucurto, the alter ego of Santiago Vega. Cucurto the protagonist is always intertwined with the biographical reality of Vega's life. In his *Cosa de negros*, he is a *cumbia* musician, a Dominican recently arrived in Buenos Aires to take part in the 500th anniversary of the city. The story begins with the theft of the hero's instrument and a mad

[80] To focus on the whole work of Cucurto would be repetitive and a thesis of its own. Several articles have dealt with his literary opus in the past. For further reading, see: Ksenija Bilbija "What is Left in the World…" and Beatriz Sarlo "Un populismo posmoderno."

chase across a neighborhood in Buenos Aires that leaves Cucurto burnt, beaten up, half-naked and minus a saxophone. From then on, things collapse into the bizarre: music, sex, fans, managers, musicians, Ferraris, and a gallery of bizarre characters that pay homage to figures from popular culture. The deliberate lack of narrative technique, the purposeful sloppiness and the spiral of sex and gore have led Cucurto to label his own writing as "realismo atolondrado" ("sloppy realism") (*Curandero del amor* 55). In a similar fashion, in *Noches vacías*, Cucurto, as a supermarket clerk, explores the underbelly of urban life, celebrating the 'unheard voices' of porteño life: the cumbia scene, Latin American immigration, Plaza Constitución, the peculiar blend of languages that comes from the different dialects of Spanish and guaraní, and the diversity of urban life. His references are cumbia lyrics, Latin American culebrones ("soap operas"), a hypersexed reading of bolero sensitivity and every conceivable cliché that has been overlooked or stigmatized by bourgeois society and, particularly, the cultural establishment. However, the narrative twist in Cucurto's work and specifically his alter ego comes with his *Curandero del amor*, published in 2006 with Emecé.[81] In this novel, Cucurto is now a writer, a lover of cumbia and a comedic immigrant who once again reveals the Buenos Aires cartography of Once and Constitución, neighborhoods famously inhabited by immigrants from various countries. He uses his book to mention and reference writers such as Aira, Casas, and Mairal, but also to market his own writing (22). He references seeing his books, such as *Las aventuras del Señor Maíz*, in the bookstores (21). The nuance in character construction is his representation of another social sector: the politically engaged university student who is also his lover. However, the most interesting aspect of his writing is the culmination of language plays. The book is

[81] Cucurto has been attacked in various media for signing a deal with the conglomerate. In an interview with Silvina Friera for *Página12*, he explains that he wanted to reach out to larger audiences and that he does not see anything wrong with this desire.

infused with a festive, carnavalesque and mocking style of neologisms with harsh criticism of highbrow culture which transcends, as Bilbija argues, the boundaries of the nation state and goes beyond the totalizing power of language (95). Cucurto produces a conversational language with neologism such as tickis, yotibenco, and chiris (68). The fabrication and transcription of such discourse is notable because it allows for the reconfiguration and the visibility of the language mostly spoken by the marginalized immigrants and the suppressed voices that constitute the reality of the urban poor in the greater Buenos Aires region. Cucurto rejects sophisticated and stylish language, instead opting to merely transcribe and fabricate onomatopoeically the reality he hears. This has led Beatriz Sarlo to argue that the best effect of Cucurto's writing is that, from a standpoint of an educated and erudite reader, he is pretending to write as someone who does not know how to write. Cucurto himself called this "protoliteratura," meaning that his writing is anterior to high literature and closer to comics, television and blogs (qtd. in Capelli).

For all of the previously described attributes, both Rosetti and Cucurto have been identified as representatives of a populist aesthetic in contemporary Argentine literature. As I mentioned above, Beatriz Sarlo famously accused Cucurto of being a postmodern populist ("Un populismo posmoderno"). As Montoya Juárez argues, both have incorporated aspects from mass culture, making camp aesthetic central in their writings (74). Both Sarlo and Montoya Juárez make valid and interesting points. However, they are also misguided because the literary project behind this writing is much more complex and contradictory than merely centralizing camp aesthetic.

The construction of fictional characters, based on camp and populist attributes of language, operates as a liaison between high culture – criticism and academia – and the popular

urban culture of the marginalized immigrants (Cucurto), women and homosexuals (Rosetti). Both of them are translators of these worlds and their texts, ideally, serve as examples for bypassing such distinctions. This is why Rosetti is finally concerned only with the form and concepts behind the language. In addition, their legitimacy is drawn from their humble origins, self-reflection and ultimate rejection of elitist culture, while fully showing that despite this, they do posses the knowledge of the academy. Thus, Dalia Rosetti is fully capable of engaging in philosophical mediation on aesthetics and politics as she shows herself as an erudite reader of Argentine literature; after all, Laguna majored in literature at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). Cucurto, an autodidactic and organic intellectual, challenges the notions of a Westernized philosophical construction of reality put forward by writers such as Borges and Piglia. Bilbija sharply notes that literature, for him, "is seen as a disposable and reusable material that is not meant to last and eternalize its author or his words" (91). Cucurto, in her view, "questions the high modernist preoccupation with the tragedies of humanity since for him and for his audience they are part of everyday life" (90). While doing so, Cucurto and Rosetti also parody the existing and modernist preconceptions of literature and the literary field in Argentina. This is why Cucurto incorporates various writers who party and enjoy pleasurable moments as a way of relieving their suffering amidst a harsh reality. It is a far cry from the image of the tortured and serious writer sitting in a room of her own. Cucurto argues then that literature does not have to be conceived of in such rigid terms. And the future of this kind of intellectual positioning also questions the concepts of originality and nuance. Such is the case with upcoming writers tied to Eloísa Cartonera, such as Leandro Avalos Blacha.

4. The Future is Bizarre

The recurring themes in emerging writer's texts draw on trends in contemporary Argentine literature. In addition, aside from presenting emerging writers, Eloísa grants visibility to a new wave of unpublished authors who are now being influenced by the emerging writers. Authors published for the first time in print media become visible due to the publishing house, and consequently become emerging authors. Such was the case of Leandro Avalos Blacha, one of the six winners of Eloísa's prize contest, Premio Sudaca Borders; soon after winning this, he was included in the Eloísa's own anthology as an emerging author with a short story "Niña albina."[82]

In 2005, Eloísa created a prize contest with judges such as Ricardo Piglia and Fabián Casas, where previously unpublished authors were to compete to publish their first texts. The six winners of the prize presented texts dealing with similar themes of decentralized identity and the powerless position of the individual in a dysfunctional, post-utopian society. Emblematic of these works is Avalos Blacha's "Serialismo," a short story about an educated man, Anthony James, with an unconventional hobby: killing women and saving their teeth as a symbol of fascination and perfection. One day he decides to create the most original writer, requesting that his victims write down what they were experiencing while he was "taking care of them," threatening to kill them if they do not comply (2). After extracting their teeth, he will use their bones and create objets d'art. Soon he meets Marta, who is his biggest fan. She starts promoting his work, even displaying it at the MALBA (the Museum of Latin American Art in Buenos Aires); subsequently, James is officially named "el creador del 'serialismo', la primera

[82] The other winners were: Dante Castiglione, "Cacho el más Macho"; Marcelo Guerrieri, "El Ciclista Serial"; Juan Leotta, "Luster"; Pedro Nalda Querol, "Palomas que no son pájaros"; Gonzalo Alfonsín, "El Sr. Velásquez y el Licenciado Ramírez."

vanguardia estética de asesino serial" (14).[83] This vanguard becomes enormously popular in museums and the government decides to finance students exploring his work, eventual followers of 'serialismo.' Students start killing communists, then homosexuals, and finally the poor. James becomes completely depressed about the fact that his singular project has been exposed and, after killing Marta, he creates his final project, an exhibition of her bones in New York City (18). After the protagonist dies, artists begin to debate who is going to turn his body into a work of art (25).

This bizarre story by Avalos Blacha is a powerful commentary on the state of affairs in contemporary Argentina, as well as a larger global society and the commodification of the art world. His premise that the 'only' original concept left to explore in art today concerns turning physical violence into art is an attempt to unmask the institutions of power: museums and governments who exploit art for their own gains. As human bodies become commodities, the government appropriates "art" for political reasons as a way to confront the marginalized. In an extreme example, Avalos Blacha turns the issue of originality of art work - what is considered to be avant-garde and who decides what and how it is going to be used - into the main debate to be addressed for future generations of authors and readers. It is no surprise that a story like Avalos Blacha's would find its way into Eloísa Cartonera since it is similar to the questions posed by emerging authors about the marginality of the writer in today's society. Such arguments become even more complicated once the Internet and technology are considered as part of the larger scene.

[83] "[the] Creator of 'serialism,' the first aesthetic avant-garde of the serial killer."

5. Authorship and Technology

The issues of a writer's position, authority and prestige in Argentine society have long defined by the authorial vocation. As I have shown in chapter one, the social position of a writer has fluctuated over the last century and a half. Whether public intellectuals, elitist individuals detached from the mass audience, unknown authors who were later resurrected by their followers or writers who emerged in the world of popular culture, the writers' impact and cultural capital have always been notable in Argentina. In specific moments, such as was the case with the avant-garde, their intellectual positions were determined by themselves, independent from other fields. The fight for legitimacy of their position, foremost, was drawn from the printed text, the writing itself, and accessibility to the public. In other words, the mode of delivery, in late printed capitalism, has been unquestionable. However, issues of authority and the writer's position for this wave of emerging writers at the beginning of the twenty-first century, concerns mainly these issues as well: their visibility and accessibility of a book to the public in the era of a mass media market and culture. As a result, they are mainly concerned with how to make themselves heard and seen, and their texts, as shown above, are deeply involved with this issue. There is a contradictory nature in such positioning. At the root of this issue is the way in which these writers situate the issue of authority with mass media culture, technology and the Internet.

For example, Alejandro Rubio, Damián Ríos and Fabián Casas are among those writers who deal with various aspects of growing up in Argentina and the significance of authorship today. Alejandro Rubio's short story "Autobiografía podrida" is noteworthy because, from its beginning, it provides subjective insight into an individual's life. The reader is forewarned that this is a fragment. A first-person narrative relates Rubio's childhood but later focuses on an

elderly neighbor. We later discover that this geriatric grocer is actually a talented sculptor who has been reduced to selling vegetables to survive because his art is too expensive to purchase. The narrator/Rubio learns this only once a television crew has come to interview the old man. The narrator becomes upset when he realizes that the sculptures are "de la misma cualidad como [las] de García Márquez" but that the artist will receive only five minutes of fame in a local news program (3).[84]

The fragment focuses on the artist's position in a global community and implicitly questions the relationship between power and authority in today's society. The old man will remain marginalized because he lives in a poor neighborhood of Buenos Aires, but, ironically, will live his few brief minutes of fame on a local newscast. If we place Rubio as part of this wave of emerging writers, we can then read his story, implicitly, as a critique not only of the relative criteria to judge the work of art, but also of the accessibility and visibility of the same.

The anxiety over visibility and success in an era of increasing shifts in the world of art becomes even more apparent in the writer's contradictory relationship to technology and the Internet. These authors benefit from options previously unavailable; the Internet and blogging have reconfigured their readership, as we have seen with Cucurto's book presentation. Many of them are using Facebook and Twitter to post their thoughts and reach mainly younger readers. Authors like Pavón and Paz blog and repeatedly post work online. On her blog Once Sur, Pavón posts poetry and essays at least once every two weeks. Laguna and Bejerman are even using chat transcripts in their texts. Cucurto has used blog posts for his book *Curandero del Amor* in order to respond to the previously mentioned criticism of Beatriz Sarlo. One would think that this wave of authors has fully embraced the Internet.

[84] "Equally good as [the] work of García Márquez."

However, this wave seems to be in a transitional period. They use blogging and chats to post their texts online, but they are still deeply concerned with and loyal to the traditional book object form. Even though Pavón has a now famous line from Twitter - "gmail es mi espejo" - she simultaneously produces physical texts.[85] As writers who are obsessed with the immediacy of lived experience and the present, it seems that the Internet would represent the perfect world for them. However, this is not true for all of these authors. Even though Laguna uses chats, she is actually nowhere to be found on the Internet today. She does not have a Facebook or Twitter account. Cucurto has declared on several occasions that constant blogging terrifies him. What seems to produce the discomfort is that there exists an audience expectation that they will be wired all the time. The fear of not being able to conceive of the Internet's impact seems to add to this anxiety.

Juan Leotta's short story "Con las armas" perfectly illustrates these fears. When a virus attacks a writer's computer, he seeks help from a technician who manages to recover the important file containing his best short story yet, conveniently entitled "Imborrable" ("Non-erasable"). The technician then asks if the writer wants revenge upon who or what attacked his PC. He decides not to pursue this search since he does not really have enemies; he is only a writer. However, he grows paranoid with the realization that he is no longer a master of his own narrative in a world where virtual violence becomes more threatening than physical violence. He then believes the technician to be his enemy. When asked about his profession, he begins to lie and replies that he is a shooting instructor (94). Aware of his displacement from an authoritative position, the protagonist can regain control only by constructing a personal fiction or through outright lying. Leotta's emblematic story unmasks the powerlessness of a conventional writer in

[85] "Gmail is my mirror."

a hyper-technological society. Leotta opens an important debate that goes beyond the question of the writer's position in the age of digitalization. He is more concerned with the writer's impotent stance once we recognize that the enemy is a virtual one and consequently, (not) any one.

Rubio, Casas, and Ríos use autofictions to stress the writer's position in the cultural production of post-crisis Argentina as a discomforting condition while discursively maintaining narrative power. In Leotta's case, the cultural context is not only contemporary Argentina, but also globalized society in the cyber age. Nevertheless, as a publishing house, Eloísa Cartonera assures these writers that the alliance created between author, text, and publisher can never be replaced by technology, thus maintaining the supremacy of the written text in cartonero book form. While some of them embrace the possibilities of the Internet and technology, they are still fully aware that their legitimacy is coming from the written book object form. However, these writers seem not to be fully aware of their unique position; it is they who are also giving legitimacy to the Internet and blogging within the literary field. This is why I believe that there is a transition at stake here. It is the next generation of the digital natives who will fully make online blogging a completely legitimate source of author visibility in the literary field. In the meantime, it is writers like Pavón who are creating the path towards this ultimate destination.

5. Locus, Representation and the Politics of Literature

Eloísa Cartonera was originally conceived as a space that would respond creatively to poverty. Cucurto and his friends dared to imagine a space that would make a difference in people's lives while also creating and producing literature. As I have argued in previous chapters, Eloísa becomes an example of how Ranciére's notion of the "redistribution of the sensible" operates in pragmatic ways and reconfigures the field of cultural production (12-13). Such a venture is

indistinguishable from the emerging writer's positioning in the literary field. By drawing distinctions in the locus of enunciation in the literary field, emerging authors insert themselves in the center of several ongoing debates that define the field itself. What defines the contemporary writer, what is the nature of representation in a writer's text and, finally, how does a contemporary writer perceive the politics of literature in modern society? For Laguna, Cucurto and many other writers, the artistic formation does not necessarily have to do with the conservative expectations of what constitutes as writer. Their literary formation is based on the various points of differentiation that configure their locus of enunciation within the field. This space becomes clearer once their relationship to different players in the field has been explicated on a number of different levels. Eloísa Cartonera responds to the market hegemony of big conglomerates, which places emerging writers on the margins of mass commercialization in the field of publishing. In an interview with Ezequiel Alemian, Laguna states that she is not interested in publishing with the big companies ("Entrevista a Fernanda Laguna"). Her attitude points to the political responsibility of maintaining a thriving independent publishing scene. It also operates along the lines of Epplin's argument of Aira's imaginary, in which publishing operations are inseparable from the production of meaning. Secondly, the emerging writer's relationship to the contemporaries, the so-called writers of the NNA, becomes irrelevant since their loyalty is reserved for the space of Eloísa Cartonera's workshop. As such, the distinction of one as the outsider is made in relation to the supposed colleagues. This consensus is based on their mutual friendship, as well as their shared aesthetic principles that do not correspond to the vagueness of the concepts put forward by the NNA. In part, their insertion into the field echoes traditional parricide of literary fathers. Piglia and Saer are set aside while Aira represents the

center of their literary view; Zelarayán represents their own project of reviving the marginal figures. Finally, book presentations and other alternative spaces provide further points of differentiation from the traditional publishing field.

Such a locus leads one to conclude that indeed Cucurto and his friends are the outsiders of the Argentine literary field. But not quite. Their locus of the so-called "gore" and alternative literature is not as fixed in meaning as they wish us to believe. Their locus is defined by the contradictory nature of the high and low literature within the field. For example, Cucurto decided to publish with the conglomerate Emecé, which granted him commercial success. Cucurto and Mairal still take part in traditional book presentations. Laguna has also been part of panels and round tables alongside Piglia and Aira. It may be only matter of time before she will appear in Planeta. Bejerman teaches Argentine literature and gives workshops on writing. Cucurto never rejected the various texts that Piglia donated to the project. These writers are very well versed in what high literature is, how the field operates and how they communicate with their precursors. Thus, rather than conceiving their locus in fixed terms, I believe that the solution is to be found in the redistribution and reconfiguration of the contradictory nature of the locus itself.

I have insisted that their position is imagined within the logic of the field and not outside of it. Their self-proclaimed marginal position within the field makes their movement and change of positions much more fluid and less focused. Consider also the nature of their fiction: constantly blurring the lines between fiction and reality. We often times do not know who Rosetti is; it becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate between Cucurto, writer and character. In addition, it makes their visibility more unique and allows for different voices to be heard. While capitalizing on cultural capital produced by traditional book object forms, the social

awareness of Eloísa Cartonera and the prestige gained from association with consecrated authors, these writers advocate for ways of visibility for the writer that bypasses traditional routes while fully enjoying the possibilities that this same field grants them. Thus, their position in the field conflates, shifts and changes according to the needs put forward by the present moment and the social, political and economic reality that surrounds them. Thus, this is why Cucurto at the same time can publish with Emecé and still maintain legitimacy with Eloísa. The visibility that Emecé grants to Cucurto translates to greater visibility for Eloísa. The echoes of such action should not be seen in terms of a trade off or selling out because, as we have seen, Cucurto and writers use this newly gained cultural capital for the sake of community and solidarity. In addition, the field itself is much more complicated and contradictory than can be explained by a simple binary judgment.

This doctrine of surprise, the mobility and often contradictory nature of such positioning, is conceived of as a way to bring about the redistribution of experience within the field. Fundamental issues revolve around how to bring about the sense of community and solidarity with those who were left out of the field (e.g., former cartoneros). Finally, in doing so, the project brings about something politically new – the sense of their aesthetic and the politics of literature in the reshaped field of cultural production in the post-crisis society in Argentina.

Along an idea of reconfiguration of the field is the framing of the literary texts and the novelties brought about by these writers. They reveal the pop urban lifestyle of contemporary Buenos Aires. The everyday reality and the immediacy of the experience become prevalent points in the texts. However, while their critics argue that such posturing is apolitical, and leads to the endless lightness of partying and sex, I have argued that such a clear-cut distinction is

problematic mainly because their texts appear to do something else.

The contradictory nature of their condition (marginalized homosexual characters who indulge in consumption) leads one to ask: can the texts produced by these emerging authors be considered to be political and serious? My answer would be yes. While posing as writers who do not take themselves seriously, they also use consumption as a politics of identity to expose the very contradictory nature of such a utopian vision in a post-crisis Argentina. Revealing the impossibility for such creation, writers turn to parody. While making fun of literature, reality and criticism, Cucurto and Laguna mainly are arguing that in a world where everything loses sense, the only thing one can do is party, which in turn exposes the fallacies of such a world. And yet, Cucurto and Laguna show us that change is indeed possible thanks to their operations in Eloísa Cartonera and Belleza y Felicidad. And this is where the very complex vision of literature and its politics comes into play, bringing up the problem of how literature and texts are to be framed today. These complexities inevitably dwell on the politics of literature that these writers expose. By politics of literature, I refer here to Ranciere's notion that literature does politics as literature where it is seen as a specific way of framing an experience (198) Thus, Ranciére argues that literature has its own agenda, that is, the politics of human condition as a legitimate way to create social actors. In this, Eloísa and its agenda are keys to understanding Ranciére's ideas of emancipatory promise in artistic world. However, these notions have been rejected by critics such as Sarlo and Josefina Ludmer.

When Sarlo attacks Cucurto for being a postmodern populist, she is misreading his desire not to participate at the center of the traditional literary field that Sarlo herself represents. When Bilbija rhetorically dismisses Cucurto for not offering a strategy for a change or call for a reform

without revolution, she demands him to be a certain kind of revolutionary subaltern that he simply is not (102). Finally, these criticisms lead to labeling such writing and views of literature in terms of what Josefina Ludmer calls "literaturas postautónomas." For her, these are the writings that "no admiten lecturas literarias; esto quiere decir que no se sabe o no importa si son o no son literatura. Y tampoco se sabe o no importa si son realidad o ficción."[86] She further argues that its main purpose is to "fabricate" the present because the difference between reality and fiction has been reduced to the absence of distinction. As she puts it, everything today is representation. This loss of autonomy, as she argues, leads to erase literary identities that were typical in the 60s and 70s. This erasure, according to Ludmer, is what characterizes what she call postautonomous literatures:

> Al perder voluntariamente especificidad y atributos literarios, al perder 'el valor literario' [y al perder 'la ficción'] la literatura posautónoma perdería el poder crítico, emancipador y hasta subversivo que le asignó la autonomía a la literatura como política propia, específica. La literatura pierde poder o ya no puede ejercer ese poder.[87]

Ludmer ties the issue of literary value, as something specifically granted to and indistinguishable from literature, to the autonomy of the field. In Bourdieu's view, such connection would be a misreading of autonomy because what grants autonomy to the field is not tied only to the issues of aesthetic experience but to many other extra-textual relationships, such us the publishing

[86] "Does not admit literary readings; that is, we do not know or it does not matter if they are or not literature. Neither we know nor does it matter if they are reality or fiction."
[87] "After voluntarily losing specificity and literary attributes, after losing 'literary value' (and 'fiction'), post autonomous literature would lose power of criticism, and even emancipator and subversive power which was granted by the autonomy of literature as its own specific politics. Literature loses that power and can no longer exercise it."

industry, criticism, magazines and prizes. Paradoxically, the autonomy partly comes from literary critique, in this case Ludmer herself, who will assign any judgment to the text (the loss of literary value) and turn such text into a part of the field itself. In addition, it seems rather strange that Ludmer would argue such a loss since the ideal of the autonomy of the field was not the way the Argentine literary field was conceived of in the first place.[88] On the contrary, close alliances between intellectuals, the state and the market were always fluctuating in dependent relationships with each other. What is even more disconcerting is Ludmer's loss of faith in the subversive power of literature and in this case, her loss of faith in emerging writers. Such pessimism comes from a refusal to read texts outside of the norms of traditional literary criticism because such a reading is required if we are to understand how emerging writers conceive of the politics of literature.

In this sense, Montoya Juárez is completely right to argue that these writers' texts demand to be read outside of literary and philological analysis because their literary projects reach outside of language reality. In both Cucurto and Rosetti, among many, there is a complex vision of literature and life. Montoya Juárez defined this as literary transvestism that coincides with a series of projects defined as "estética de emergencia" or "relational aesthetic" (Laddaga 3; Bourriuad 2). In this sense, what Laddaga and Bourriuad propose is that contemporary art, and in this case literature, is based on a series of artistic images, texts and sounds that take as their point of departure the whole of human relations and social contexts, rather than independent and private spaces. Thus, art creates a social environment in which people come together to participate in a shared activity. Bourriaud claims that "the role of artworks is no longer to form

[88] I have argued in the previous chapter that the literary field in Argentina was never constructed around the idea of autonomy. Traditionally, intellectuals were always *letrados* deeply involved in political and social issues in the country. See Chapter 1.

imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever scale chosen by the artist" (13). Working off Bourriaud, Laddaga argues that such texts propose an aesthetic production, or Ludmer's "literary value," associated with those operations that tend to modify and reconfigure the constitution of artificial social life and reduce them to the pure experimentation of coexistence (22). In other words, the shift of an artist or a writer to a certain vision of the so-called "non- artist" now serves to promote literature as an action and intervention in everyday life. This is why to read Cucurto and Rosetti outside of Eloísa Cartonera's cultural context can be reductive, since emerging writers and their texts embody works of art that are now observed from a different and shifting locus within the traditional literary and philological criticism. When Laguna rejects being published by big conglomerates because she wants to keep writing about parties, sex, pleasure, her friends and urban Buenos Aires in a technological boom time, while using what is considered improper language, her preoccupation with what literature should do is based on her politics of literature. That is, her loyalty to independent publishing, to a community of readers and an audience that actually relates to the physical reality of what life is in post-crisis Argentina, to former cartoneros, is her politics of literature. Literature is no longer concerned with the universality of human existence nor is it autonomous and separated from the everyday reality of a local cultural context. As Contreras argues with respect to Aira, literature becomes performance where the contradictory nature between the life of a writer and the narrative text become inseparable and intertwined (10). Cucurto is both Cucurto and a character in a text. In addition, publishing operations and mobility on the literary scene become part of the production of the meaning of literary visions as well. This is why literature is also an action and intervention precisely

introduced by these writers.

And this is where the answers lie to Ludmer's loss of faith. The politics of literature, for emerging writers, has an emancipatory potential for the literature of equality. Ranciére's notion of the literature of equality corresponds to the emerging writer's view as well. For Ranciére, the conception of equality is at the core of his political framing of democracy. Politics is not what we conceive of traditional domination and fight for power. Moreover, politics is the expression of equality for those who have often been considered less than equal. Thus, what is at stake in the politics of literature? For Ranciére, it is the reconfiguration of experience, the concept that when a group previously taken to be less than equal (in this case, emerging writers) expresses its own equality, it reconfigures the experience of everyone involved (10-25). In other words, Cucurto's writing, that of unequal in the field, reconfigures the ways in which he himself wishes to become the part of the field; it also reconfigures how Ludmer and Sarlo are seen, from the point of the less equal, as representatives of traditional Argentine-based criticism. Thus, equality in literature does not lie at the level of political subjects and their fights, but at the level of the redistribution and reconfiguration of experience within the field. In other words, for Cucurto to become equal, he needs Sarlo to write about him. And this is precisely the space in which the emerging writer's literature becomes a way of introducing a particular political sensibility, one defined as post-crisis 2001, without simply becoming another form of engaged literature or focusing only on the literary value. The combination of Eloisa's operation with emerging writers' texts represents the embodied potential for emancipation.

Conclusion: *Cartonera* and Cultural Agency Turn

This dissertation project examined cultural and literary interventions as a creative response to the economic crises in Argentina. In particular, the thesis traced the transgressions in the field of literary production proposed by young artists and fiction writing of emerging writers in Argentina. Artists and writers Javier Barilaro, Fernanda Laguna and Washington Cucurto created an independent small publishing press, Eloísa Cartonera, in 2003. The main impacts of the project can be summarized in three aspects: a) creation of an alternative publishing press, b) the inclusion of the marginalized poor, and c) the inclusion of the marginalized emerging writers.

As a publishing house, Eloísa defies the logic of a normative and traditional publishing house. They refuse to keep records of copies sold. As a cooperative, they decide together what gets published. Once all bills are paid, money is evenly split between members. The house does not have an established logo. The publishing premise is based on the copy-left idea – as publishers they do not own copyrights but have authors' permission to publish their work. Authors, both known and unknown, donate their texts and narratives. The publishing house's premise is that the money goes to its self-sustainability as it employs six former *cartoneros*. This cooperative way of working has essentially excluded the possibility of financial gain for the participating authors. Although shocking by Western capitalist standards, the issue here is that writing in Latin America is not considered to be a vocation as it is in the United States. Writers very rarely live off of what they publish. What is important to the authors is creating literature for the sake of social justice; to effect change in peoples' lives and also grant them visibility in an untraditional market.

To the marginalized poor, Eloísa Cartonera gave hope and means to change their status. They created and invented jobs when the whole country was struggling to survive. As a publishing house, they put the aesthetic aspects of the literary field into practice of social justice by including *cartoneros* in the book-making process and offering a chance for visibility to authors emerging on the literary scene. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to envision Eloísa having an enormous impact on society. The small press barely employed six former *cartoneros*. However, it did offer an idea and inspiration for visibility and an alternative to the existing status quo in the midst of the economic shock and its aftermaths in Argentina. By publishing low-cost books made out of recycled cardboard, Eloísa found a way to restore dignity and cultural authority to working people.

The press also made visible a new wave of emerging writers, including Washington Cucurto, Laguna, Dani Umpi and Cecilia Pavón. These writers question the formal and traditional boundaries in fiction writing and in the literary field. The novelty of such an attitude is based on the notion of maintaining the contradiction between aesthetic and political promises of art. As they claim to be alternative to the mainstream canon and field, I argue that their texts inevitably long for visibility within the same canon. Emerging writers are producing self-proclaimed light and fun literature. Even so, their texts are deeply concerned with political and social reality of contemporary Argentina and writer's authority in the post 2001 crisis. This duality "light yet serious" has afforded them with an opportunity to fluidly move within and outside of the literary field while proposing collective social actions and emancipatory promise of artistic practices granted by the Eloísa Cartonera project.

Finally, Eloísa Cartonera bypassed the traditional division between the high and low culture. As one of the founders Javier Barilaro has pointed out, *cartonera* was considered to be an artistic project without lucrative ends that was not exclusively a publishing, social or literary project, but one that included all of these facets and could not envision only one (56). Given this founding ideology, the *cartonera* concept responded to the various social fields while creating new alliances. For example, the alliances between known, consecrated writers, new and emerging ones, and the inclusion of the ex *cartoneros* in the book making process generate mutually codependent spheres of aesthetics, politics and economics. In a literary field, while renowned authors were loaning their cultural capital to the visibility of the publishing house, they were also legitimizing the experimental literature produced by emerging authors. In a broader sense, this project created a network of alliances rooted in both political and social awareness that is necessary in order to maintain and produce literature that corresponds to the aesthetic discourses of our contemporary moment and to the cultural context of national literary production in Argentina. Perhaps more importantly, this project demonstrated that, indeed, literature has an impact on everyday life and thus it is a practical medium that produces goods for different segments of society.

To sum up, local cultural agents, individuals included in the Eloísa Cartonera project, have taken part in the organic formation of the intellectual endeavor out of traditionally "non intellectual" origins. The inclusion and visibility of the *cartonero* worker and the emerging writer alongside that of the consecrated writer, the reader and the critic has created new alliances necessary to challenge the post-crisis apathy of Argentina's citizens. As such, the project is culturally and contextually specific. Nevertheless, the concept Eloísa imagined proved to have a

universal aspect to it. It is without a doubt that challenging poverty is not unique to Argentina. Perhaps it is precisely of its relatedness that the *cartonera* traveled to many societies across the world and posed as a model to changes in respectful societies. Thus, one of the main conclusions of my dissertation research is that *cartonera* has become a transnational concept which served as an example of brining something politically, socially and aesthetically new. Eloísa created a new praxis drawn on political empowerment through literacy workshops, advocacy, and activism. While my chapters revolved around the impact of the project on a local and national scale, in the pages to follow, I wish to summarize the main contributions Eloísa made in several Latin American countries as well as the impact on the North American academia.

1. Cultural Agency Turn

In the last several years, the Eloísa project has become one of the key examples in the cultural agency turn in North American academia. The term, an intellectual position, signifies and recognizes, according to Doris Sommer, "a range of social contributions through creative practices" (*Cultural Agency* 1). Nevertheless, it is superficial to understand cultural agency as something novel. Intellectuals and artists have always been advocates for social change and active players in society, particularly in Latin America. Sommer, who coined the term, recognizes this fact as well (3). Her advocacy for the cultural agency turn is not only aimed at Latin American intellectuals but also at U.S.-based scholars working on Latin American issues. The distinction here is between cultural agents as producers of cultural goods, mainly those in Latin America, and American scholars who seek to create solidarity with the potential cultural transformations in Latin America. Cultural agency theory aims to reframe the distinction into an alliance that avoids the pitfalls of the cultural studies turn. This ambitious project has had its

success and Sommer is quick to enlist it in her 2006 volume, *Cultural Agency in the Americas*. The book is a valuable point of departure mainly because it situates the debate in dialogue with democracy building and civic society, and advocates for the role of Humanists in these ongoing processes.

However, let me dwell here on the term itself. It is my understanding that cultural agency, whether it refers to the individuals' roles as producers, recipients, or reproducers of such agency, entails heteronymous and multifaceted directions of action. In other words, there is no *one* cultural agency. Just as there is no *the* cultural agency, consequentially, there is no unified and consensual contribution to social life. Given such reframing, it remains unclear in Sommer's approach what the benefits are of such a turn. I am not suggesting that cultural agency work needs to develop a broader interdisciplinary call. I am simply wondering how we are to decide what the structures are of action in cultural agency. Sommer wishes to equate artists and scholars' role as producers and reproducers of creative practices. But how do we measure or compare these relationships? The *quality* of the relationships in "cultural agency" are never examined or called into question.[89] Thus, I want to suggest that the cultural agency turn, as much as it is needed in academia, can be unsettling sometimes. In the pages to follow, I will use the (hi)story of the *cartonera* publishing houses in Latin America to show how cultural agency sometimes can create serious contradictions and complexities that, if we want cultural agency turn to catch on, we must address with urgency.

More than 50 *cartonera* publishers exist in the world today, most in Latin American, five

[89] I follow here a similar call made by Claire Bishop in her 2004 article "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetic." Bishop enters a discussion with Nicolas Bourriaud on the role of collaborative art, and how politics and aesthetic can be negotiated in these new forms. While she agrees with Bourriaud that the artistic turn in the 1990s has happened in the world of arts, she advocates that we need to look further in to what *kind* of changes we are witnessing.

in Europe, and two in Africa. At least three small presses are a result of U.S. scholars' interest. Two waves of dissemination were allocated by the first international *cartonera* conference at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 2009. Nonetheless, this idyllic vision of the *cartonera* impact, while it has its practical contributions to democratic life, particularly in Argentina, often times has been misinterpreted, intentionally or not, to serve as a way to recycle the existing hegemonic structures. I will give the most salient examples of the different ways the *cartonera* concept has been used and misused. I will show how the initial enterprise undertaken by the Argentine *cartonera* publishing house, Eloísa Cartonera, traveled through several societies in Latin America. I will consider *cartonera* publishers from the first wave of dissemination, in Peru, Mexico and Brazil. I also trace examples from Puerto Rico and Spain as part of a second wave of dissemination. Finally, I look closely into the relationship that emerged from the *cartonera* publishers and North American academia.

2. *Cartonera* is Life

In 2004, a year after the debut of Eloísa Cartonera, the Peruvian version of the *cartonera* publisher appeared as a result of Cucurto traveling to Lima to share his ideas. Sarita Cartonera was founded by students of literature at the University of San Marcos: Tania Silva, Milagros Saldrarriaga and Jaime Vargas Luna. From day one, Sarita, like Eloísa, was imagined to be a cultural project that combined social justice and the needs of the local context, that of Lima. The endeavor was born, once again, out of the social and political need to respond to the contradictions of cultural production in Peru at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to Sarita's manifesto, Lima, the political and cultural capital of the country, in 2004 was struggling with the process of reconstruction after the long lasting conflict between the

Government and the Shining Path. The political and social instability affected cultural production to such a degree that in 2004, a multimillion urban space, counted fewer than twenty formal bookstores, fewer than ten galleries in the city with no counterculture collectives, and with invisible and inexistent libraries (75). As Ksenija Bilbija underscores, Peru, unlike Argentina, is a country that suffers from a high rate of illiteracy, does not have a developed network of independent publishers and did not foster a great readership audience ("Cartoneros" 42). In such a context, the Peruvian version poses difference to the main model. The basic publishing premise is a shared principle that books are made out of cardboard at a low cost. They publish mostly well-known authors of Latin American literature. However, the emphasis that Argentines placed on experimental literature and unknown authors is missing in Sarita Cartonera. And, in relation to Argentina, the mission of Sarita Cartonera was somewhat different.

The Peruvian publishing house emerged as a *cartonera* publisher with artistic but mainly educational goals. As they pose in their manifesto:

> Peru doesn't have a great tradition of reading and books are consequently perceived as objects of luxury that are useless. It is therefore not enough to simply put good books at the disposal of people who don't normally have access to them. It is necessary to generate interest through reading. (74)

Their goal was materialized in the project *Libros, un modelo para armar* (LUMPA) with the combined strength of Sarita and the Museum of Art at the Cultural Center of the University of San Marcos. LUMPA had a simple premise: if students were transformed into authors (writers and plastic artists) they also became readers, and if they became readers they were also able to

become good readers. Under this premise, Sarita created a workshop and methodology that privileged the pleasure and the freedom of reading with a freedom to give absurd interpretation. Lauren Pagel has argued that "the student's participation in the process of making a text, an image, and then a book, transforms the book into an object that is accessible" (149). The workshop was a success in the public elementary schools of Lima and Pucallpa, and has since inspired similar literacy workshops by the Harvard University in the public schools in Boston. Each time the original *cartonera* concept has traveled to a different local context, an act of translation has happened in order to appropriate the concept to a different cultural and social reality. Furthermore, a double translation occurred when the Sarita model was picked up by public education in the USA and developed into a completely new paradigm within very different cultural and linguistic settings, as I will show below. Nonetheless, the cultural translation envisioned here has various interpretations. While the marginalized group Eloísa aimed to help through the creation of books were the *cartoneros*, in Peru, a similar model of book creation was assured to help that country's own disenfranchised population- semi-illiterate adults/disenfranchised youth. In workshops, adults construct books as they are simultaneously taught reading skills and textual interpretation. However, it needs to be noted that the Peruvian publishing house also responded to one more need of the local context. As Jaime Vargas Luna points out, the implications of what the *cartonera* concept, once culturally translated, can do in Peru were significant. Sarita's role in contemporary Peru proved to be important since it formed part of the emerging independent publishing scene. Nevertheless, as Vargas Luna underlines, the main difference with the conventional independent publishers is:

> El trabajar menos en la elaboración de propuestas de políticas para discutir a nivel macro o el reclamo por exenciones tributarias para la exportación del libro y más en hacer todo eso, de modo más artesanal y – a mínima escala – efectivo (181).[90]

Here, the distinction that has been made between conventional versus *cartonera* publishing is critical in defining the *cartonera* as a concept that in the act of cultural translation subverts the mainstream publishing scene. By creating a clear cut distinction in regard to the traditional publishing industry, Vargas Luna advocates for the subversive nature of the concept itself. The difference is placed on the process of book making, creating communities and going back to the close relationship between the object (the book) and the subject (the worker). In such an understanding, the effectiveness of such an endeavor can be measured not by profit but by the social impact through empowerment of an individual. In this sense, the Brazilian translation poses an even better example. As members of Sarita and Eloísa Cartonera traversed Latin America in order to promote their publishing houses and take part in the book fairs, in 2007 they met members of the future publishing house Dulcinéia Catadora from Sao Paolo, Brazil and La Cartonera from Cuernavaca, Mexico.

The Brazilian publishing press, Dulcinéia Catadora, founded in 2007 by a group of artists, photographers, and formerly homeless adults in Sao Paolo, resolves similar social problems with *cartoneros* through artistic intervention. Under the influence of the Argentine house and with the help of Javier Barilaro, the Brazilian collective has been set up on a principle of "difference." Difference here refers to people with diverse ethnic heritage, creeds,

[90] "To work less in the elaboration of policy proposal to discuss on a macro level or reclaim tributary exemptions for the exportation of books, and also do it in an artisan way and, at least, effectively. "

backgrounds, and lifestyles. This definition is best seen in their various lines of publication. Even though the collective creates books and publishes authors similar to other sister houses, the novelty is marginalized popular literature produced by unknown authors and writers. As they explain in their manifesto, the term "marginalized" refers to writers who formerly were or still are *cartoneros*, some of them homeless or living in low cost hostels, nevertheless maintaining "a share, although tiny, of their rescued self-esteem" (153). The sense of dignity and respect that Dulcinéia attempts to provide to the artistic producers goes hand in hand with their idea of what art is. They "do not believe in the autonomy of art, art disconnected from life and human relationships, from social, political, and economic context" (153).

Via Dulcinéia's creed, *cartonera* becomes a concept that recognizes art as the process for social integration through cultural intervention. Dulcinéia combines book publishing with "aesthetic experience as a collective act" (154). Such a view closely echoes Sommer's definition of cultural agency. Their acting goes beyond the private space where book crafting usually takes place. They partake in urban interventions and believe that artists, journalists, and photographers, traditionally the privileged ones, should also be where the cardboard collectors are: in the streets. As they call attention to the cardboard, they intervene in the public sphere by showing what recycling cardboard can do. They walk through the streets with a "coat" of painted cardboard reading texts and reciting poetry from their collaborating authors. Literature becomes performance visible in public space. This particular publishing house is the most effective in articulating the political implications of what exactly the *cartonera* concept can do. The insistence of the public sphere of their agency is a direct response to the increasing privatization of the public places in Brazil. What is more, the alliance that is created between the artists and

the marginalized goes beyond the simple *vampirisation* or objectification of poverty. The clear and practical effects of the endeavor on the lives of the underprivileged ones are obvious.

However, the glorification of *cartonera* concepts should not be understood here as a perfect recipe for how cultural agency works. The factors that influence the Brazilian creation, mainly the combination of political and aesthetic dissensual agency, are not always as obvious as one would like to think. And this is precisely where the complications come in. In this first wave of *cartonera* publishers, there are obvious examples of small presses who misread, intentionally or not, the complexities of social and artistic responsibility in the complete *cartonera* concept. In February of 2008, La Cartonera in Mexico started publishing literary texts produced by local as well as international writers. This publishing house is very different from its sister projects in Latin America. First of all, no *cartoneros* take part in book production, nor are there any marginalized groups specifically targeted or included in the production process. While they make books out of cardboard, their endeavor is limited to the solely aesthetic purpose of making books as works of art. As they pose in their "Manifesto", the emphasis of their artistic project is upon the "collective work of editors and artists" (179). They publish in order to compete with the big publishing houses. In their own words, their linkage is more to the national antecedents like *El Mendugo* editions by the Argentine Elena Jordana in the 1960s, who published books by Octavio Paz, Ernesto Sábato, and other known writers of the time. This publisher's idea of artistic production differs from Eloísa's in that their books appeal to the collectionist spirit: every book is unique and considered to be a work of art produced by a local artist. Every book is numbered and the publisher has a very specific idea in promoting local art and a "rustic" way of making books. As Ksenija Bilbija notes, since the social aspect of their artistic labor is omitted, then their

project, stripped to solely aesthetic judgment, has become almost anti-cartonera as envisioned by Cucurto and Barilaro ("Cartoneros" 21). During the *Cartonera* Conference in Madison in 2009, it was revealed to me in an off record dialogue that Barilaro was disturbed by the attitude of the Mexican *cartonera* publisher in rejecting the premise of social responsibility. He expressed that the absence of any kind of social engagement on the publisher's behalf or, for that matter, literature, was not compatible with the idea imagined by Cucurto and himself. The Mexican *cartonera* is threatening in that it could fundamentally destabilize what *cartonera* was imagined to be and turn it simply into a franchise and one more Latinamerican "cool" thing to do. Additionally, the very name of *La Cartonera, The* Cartonera, posed fundamental problems for Barilaro.

The Mexican publisher is not the only one who misreads the complexities of the Eloísa project. Atarraya Cartonera, the Puerto Rican small press, was created in November 2009 by the State University of New York graduates Nicole Cecilia Delgado (poet) and Xavier Valcárcel (visual artist). On their official website they give a description of the name of the house and a long essay that includes their manifesto and insight into the project's origins. With the usual reference to the Eloísa Cartonera as a model, the founders explain the book making process of creating 'artisan' and 'unique' objects. As expected, the topic of resistance and resilience to neoliberal logic is a driving force behind the project. The authors connect the crisis of 2001 in Argentina to the political turmoil in Puerto Rico created by the governor Luis Fortuño. At the core of the story is a similar situation found in many Latin American countries where small

independent presses resist the hegemonic and overwhelming power of the transnational publishing companies that saturate local and national production.[91]

As their first intervention, Delgado and Valcárcel came up with an idea to make the first 300 copies of the *cartonera* books from the cardboard boxes collected from the multinational bookstore chain Borders. The bookstore, according to the their website, represents one of the most damaging forces to the local publishing market and literature since it destroys local publishers and has been criticized by local elites for ignoring Puerto Rican literature and displaying only a small section under the title "Of Local interest." The founders summarize their political and aesthetic project where "la especificidad de selección y el uso de este tipo de cartón para los libros es, pues, parte de una lógica y de una estética contra-política, contra-neoliberal, que busca reaccionar frente a la realidad de un país bajo el marco neoliberal, eminentemente dependiente del exterior, saturado de centros comerciales.[92] The apparent contra-political and contra-neoliberal logic, however, fails in their case precisely because the publisher ends up recycling the existing power structures through their insistence that the political cannot be negotiated with the aesthetic, quite contrary to the logic of Eloísa and Dulcinéia Cartonera. Consider that on their website there is an open call for the critical analysis of the *cartonera* phenomena in the Americas under the greater theme of preserving the editorial practice. Thus,

[91] Jorge Fornet pointed out in his influential essay "Y finalmente, ¿existe una literatura latinoamericana?," that the radical changes in publishing policies of the 1990s across Latin and Central America led to the "provincialization" of literature. In other words, dissemination of Latin American authors to Latin American audiences was replaced by the commercial literature dictated by a few large publishing conglomerates: Grupo Planeta, controlled from Spain, and other presses such as Seix Barral, Ariel, Espasa Clape, Crítica, and Temas de Hoy. Another good example is the group Pirsa Santillana that gathers Aguilar, Taurus, and Alfaguara. A similar situation affected Puerto Rico.

[92] "The specificity of the selection and the use of this kind of cardboard for the book making is a part of a counter-political and counter-neoliberal logic and aesthetics that aims to react before the reality of a country under the neoliberal framework which depends on the external forces and is saturated by the commercial centers."

the insistence on editorial practices rather than artistic or social endeavors is essentially replaced by yet another center of power: both founders are connected to the literary and critical establishment in Puerto Rico. The press rests all too comfortably on a linear reading of how hegemony works. As much as it tries to be self-reflexive, it is still addressing those who are exclusive members of the enchanted circle—the literary establishment. In their case, the spirit of community, solidarity, and dignity of the working and popular class is fundamentally absent. In one word, there are no excluded ones who benefit from the existence of the publishing house. The press becomes just like any other publishing house driven by the market for profit and maintains literary practices within the realm of the privileged elite. On one hand, as an alternative publishing house it should be acknowledged for its attempt to defy the transnational conglomerates. However, it should not be understood here as an example of a cultural alternative. The project lacks the fundamental idea behind cultural agency: the social benefit of the local popular daily life. The fundamental criticism here is that Atarraya Cartonera deliberately uses the cultural capital produced by the Eloísa Cartonera to become part of the group of the excluded ones to which it simply does not belong. Not being able to publish books a particular group deems unfair is far from bringing dignity and a new praxis of emancipatory promise back to local space. This misreading of cultural agency needs to be fully recognized.

There are numerous examples of misappropriation of the *cartonera* idea in Europe as well. The Spanish publishing press, Cartonera Ultamarina, was founded in 2010. Aside from publishing *cartonera* books, the small press disseminates literature in digital form. According to their founding ideology, the editors wish to reconcile the two worlds, print and digital. However, rather than disseminating the *cartonera* concept as a form of culturally engaged practice, this

publishing house is in reality branding the concept for mass consumption, commercialization, and consumerism without any social contribution or artistic intervention in the community. On their website, we find out that books are indeed made out of cardboard but with no reference to who is actually making the books. Furthermore, the authors gain financial profit out of the copies sold. While the discourse of inclusion and access to a wide readership is present, the fundamental problem with the small press is the discourse of branding and franchising *cartonera* for simple consumerism. For example, on their page that refers to the line of the *cartonera* book, a photo of a smiling woman sitting next to an old writing machine is seducing the viewer's gaze with a colorful title "Ya estás en la tienda, solo tienes que escoger el que te guste más." [93] This sexually charged advertisement evokes a billboard one would see on a commercial bookstore. What's more, the text below uses a similar discourse alluding to the marketability of the product. The books are made by "nuestros artesanos cartoneros e ilustradas por talentosos artistas plásticos."[94]And finally, for those who worry about the quality of cardboard, the company guarantees that it is a perfect "regalo de lujo."[95] The books cost "only" 25 euros in Spain, 35 euros in European Union and 37 euros in the United States. However, consumers should not despair because the PayPal transaction will secure the payment. And for everything else, there is also MasterCard and Visa.

Without a doubt, both of these projects can be understood in their respective contexts. As such, the Puerto Rican press can be acknowledged for its intent to offer alternative literature. The Spanish press can be read as a parody of the state of affairs in the literary field in Spain. However, the fundamental problem with both publishing presses is the lack of transgression and

[93] "You are already in a store, just select what you like."
[94] "our handy *cartoneros* and illustrated by talented artists."
[95] "luxury gift"

the blurred limits of hegemonic expression. The call for reform remains merely discursive and the positioning of the players is highly problematic. After all, the unanswered question is who benefits from the project besides themselves. It becomes crucial to question whether such positions and attempts do bring about something politically new and strengthen democratic processes. What is more, the initial intervention of the *cartonera* publishers as a project without lucrative ends has been appropriated for completely opposite purposes than was originally intended. Spaniards sell as it as the luxury gift which fulfils instant (reading?) pleasures. Such reframing and the rearticulating of the intervention of the first wave of the *cartonera* publishers is not only unethical but also sends a wrong message which destabilizes the idea itself. Such critiques are crucial in understanding the position of U.S.-based academics as cultural agents who work on the *cartonera* publishing concepts.

3. Academics as Cultural Agents

Thus far, the focus has revolved around artists as cultural agents. In some cases, cultural agency is well defined and successful in its attempt to better the position of those who are marginalized. In doing so, the alliances between the excluded ones start forming the set of complex and often times contradictory relations based on solidarity and social justice. Other times, this idea becomes much more vague and reinforces the dominant view of literary figures as elitists. While such agency or non-agency is constructed in Latin America with the complexities inherent in the local context, the question remains: what are the possibilities and limitations of cultural agency in the U.S.? And here, I do not refer to artists but to U.S.-based scholars who, in their particular ways, try to bridge the void between the North and the South and its traditionally contested nature. In these cases, scholars interpret for local publics the agency created in Latin America.

Such alliances have traditionally created many ways to participate in democratic processes in both contexts. Nevertheless, as there are various kinds of cultural agency, there are also different ways scholars can act as cultural agents. In particular, I am curious about the work of literary scholars at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Harvard University.

The *cartonera* model has served as an inspiration for social and artistic interventions in many spheres of the local community in Wisconsin. Ksenija Bilbija, professor of Latin American literature at the University of Wisconsin-Madison brought the *cartonera* concept critical attention in 2008. She sees *cartoneras* as a way to "bypass the division between the high and low literature," and consequently between high and low culture ("What is Left" 87). Bilbija's definition of what *cartonera* can do—bridge two spheres traditionally separated—reflected the novel ways in which she and several scholars at UW-Madison reframed *cartonera* as a way to bypass and regenerate the division between academia (an ivory tower) and wider publics (the community outside the formal boundaries of the university).

In the summer of 2008, Bilbija presented me with the idea to organize the first international *cartonera* conference at UW-Madison. Together with Paloma Celis Carbajal (bibliographer of UW-Madison's Ibero-American Studies) and graduate student Lauren Pagel, we brought this idea to fruition in October of 2009. This conference was significant for various reasons. As a federally-funded public university, UW-Madison had shown an interest in funding an event that would be relevant not only for academics but also for the wider local community. Further, publishers had a chance to present their work and sell books to wider audiences. The three-day conference also included several workshops for the local community on *cartonera* design in the Madison Children's Museum and with an underserved community of high school

students. In addition, the conference was a point of departure and inspiration for various projects conducted by scholars and graduate students at UW-Madison.

Luís Madureira, professor of Portuguese at UW-Madison, and graduate student, Saylín Álvarez Oquendo, founded the first African *cartonera* publishing house Kutsemba Cartão (Cardboard Hope) in Mozambique in 2010. According to their website, its premise is the same as its Latin American sister projects—it also aims to adapt needs to a local context. It wants to promote the diffusion of literature and literacy in Mozambique, to work toward maintaining the informal network of sister presses, and to develop communal activities that aim to include marginalized, vulnerable, or economically underprivileged groups in book-making workshops and other activities. With only three publications thus far, this new project promotes literature from Mozambique and aims to reach not only academic audiences but also a local/national/international readership. Madureira's agency, thus, aims to promote literature outside of the academic walls while making sure that the local community not only benefits financially but also obtains access to reading and writing.

My own work with the bilingual elementary school students from underserved Latino and Hmong communities in Madison was inspired by the *cartonera* concept and funded by a public humanities grant at UW-Madison. I created and taught a yearlong program for 120 bilingual elementary students in creative writing, Hispanic fiction, and social empowerment using the *cartonera* concept. Today, the *cartonera* model has entered their curriculum, and teachers in the Madison Metropolitan School District use it to introduce new literary works and to teach creative examples of social justice and activism in Latin America.

However, it needs to be acknowledged that the alliance between scholars and the

cartonera publishers is not without its complications. One problem revolved around the book *Akademia Cartonera: A Primer of Latin American Cartonera Publishers*. Bilbija and Carbajal envisioned the book as a testimony of the conference where *cartonera* publishers would contribute their manifestos and scholars would contribute academic articles on *cartonera* phenomena. The book was to be a bilingual edition, subsidized by grants obtained from various public funds. A large portion of the edition, 800 copies out of 1000, was to be donated to the *cartonera* publishers who could then sell the book at the prices they wanted. The idea was to present the *cartonera* publishers to the American audience and also present the essays by scholars in the Americas. The book's website highlights its raison-d'être:

> The goal of this publication is to document the example set by these publishers in the cultural, publishing, and literary realms. This work will include eight manifestos written by the eight cartonera publishing houses that attended the conference, a prologue explaining the reason for this book, a retelling of the founding of some of these publishers, an introduction, nine academic essays, an inventory of cartonera titles, a bibliography, and various images. The objective of this book is to take a snapshot in time documenting the existence of these publishers. (http://www.library.wisc.edu/cartoneras/book.html.)

However, the members of Eloísa Cartonera, particularly María Gómez, did not see the value of such a project at first. She worried that the book was more beneficial to the scholars, that it would not sell in Latin America, and that it represented the usual vampirisation of American scholars on the object of their study, the *cartoneras*. In an email exchange on October 6, 2008, she wrote:

> Creemos que lo que ustedes nos proponen es un libro de ustedes para difundir sus ensayos sobre nosotros, los pobres que hacemos libros con cartón. El libro que ustedes proponen no es un libro nuestro, es un libro de ustedes sobre nosotros, por eso no nos interesa participar de ese libro, si no cambiamos la propuesta.[96]

Instead, Eloísa's offer was to publish a book, similar to the anthology *No hay cuchillo sin rosas,* which would contain only manifestos by the *cartonera* publishers and several authors from each country they would choose. In Gómez' words, such a publication would pay off more since it was more marketable and more likely to be purchased.

Here is the paradox and misunderstanding between academia and *cartoneras*. While the original proposal by the academics should have been understood in the spirit of bridging the gap between the object of study and the agent in a meaningful collaboration, the proposal was rejected because it was not profitable *enough* for Eloísa. It seems that the traditional roles of academia as the vampire and object of study as the victim here were reversed. And this is understandable. After all, why would any reader in Argentina want to read what an American scholar has to say about the *cartonera*?[97] Yet, the paradox goes both ways. Indeed, why would scholars in U.S. academia edit and publish texts by Latin American writers? After all, literary scholars are not editors and publishers. In addition, Eloísa always took pride in rejecting donations, claiming self sufficiency and sustainability. What was misunderstood by the members of the Eloísa collective was that the initial proposal tried to move beyond the two traditionally

[96] "We think that what you are proposing is a book for yourselves to disseminate your essays about us, the poor ones who make cardboard books. The book you propose is not our book, it is your book about us and because of this, we are not interested in participating in this book, unless we change the proposal."

[97] María Gómez and Washington Cucurto often times send contradictory messages. While they were adamant about not publishing scholarly work, interestingly enough two books by Canadian scholar, David Sheinin, appeared in Eloísa's catalogue a year later: short book on boxing in Argentine society: *El boxeador poeta* and *El boxeador incrédulo*. He was also named "Amigo de Eloísa."

antagonistic contexts. The book was imagined as a project that would show that there were ways, if not to avoid vampirisation completely, then to at least acknowledge that both sides could benefit from vampirizing together the book as an object in light of its increasing loss of cultural capital. Ideally, it would be read as another contradiction in Eloísa's imagination.

Several proposals went back and forth explaining that each side in the matter had a certain right to claim the benefits, and a compromise was reached that would appeal to both sides. The bilingual edition featured manifestos by the *cartonera* publishers and contained a CD-ROM attached to the back cover with scholarly articles. The book was also posted online and can be downloaded from the *cartonera* websites. Finally, the publishing house, Parallel Press, donated to each *cartonera* one hundred copies to be sold in their own stores as a way to gain sustainable profit and keep their workshops going. The outcome, as initially hoped, was a great success. And as a result, the second wave of the *cartonera* publishers saturated the book market in Latin America. In the year of the conference and the book publication, more than twenty *cartoneras* existed in the world. Douglas Diegues, one of the founders of the Paraguayan small press, Yiyi Yambo Cartonera, claimed in a personal conversation that this was because the *cartoneras* received substantial attention in the United States with the UW-Madison conference and Bilbija's work. In other words, thanks to the support of literary scholars in U.S. academia, the concept traveled back to Latin America as an example of a successful story.[98] Yet, the question remains: to what extent did such exchange influence the deterioration of the complexity of the project? After all, members of Atarraya Cartonera probably heard about the Argentine success thanks to conference publicity. To what extent academics are responsible for losing the concept

[98] In needs to be remembered that a large part of Argentine public rejected the Eloísa Cartonera publishing concept as a small hit wonder. Daniel Link, then editor of *RadarLibros*, cultural supplement for prestigious leftist newspaper *Página12* admitted ignoring the small press.

in translation? And here is where we need to address the scholar's responsibility and reflect on antagonisms and contradictions in the cultural agency turn. One such problem arises in the case of Doris Sommer, a distinguished professor of Latin American studies.

The Harvard University professor has been one of the leading names in the field of Latin American literature. During her career, Sommer has extensively written scholarly articles and books on canonical literary texts. However, in the 1990s she turned to public scholarship as another way of benefitting the humanities. Her affiliation with *cartonera* publishers fits into the wider project launched in the late 1990s at Harvard, "The Cultural Agents Initiative". The premise of this network of academics, researchers and artists is to promote arts and humanities as a social resource. It is of little surprise why Sommer decided to use some of Sarita Cartonera's ideas on how to foster literacy since she sees artists as agents whose work is an intervention within public life. After the week long *Cartonera* activities and workshops, in 2007, Sommer and different cultural agents intervened in the public schools of Cambridge and Boston by developing similar workshops on how to make *cartonera* books and use them to teach literature to the youth.

As a result of Sarita Cartonera's visit to Harvard, another initiative was born from its introduction to the academy. The Paper Picker Press is Harvard's educational program for teachers in schools and after-school centers to adopt and adapt techniques that:

> Enhance higher order thinking through hands-on engagement with literature. The program offers units of instruction that invite economically disadvantaged students to explore literature as recyclable material, re-writing classic texts

> through creative techniques that incorporate visual and performing arts. (http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~cultagen/programs.htm?paper)

This workshop is a way to foster issues of literacy, as Sommer has stated, "to encourage students to use literary masterpieces as grist for their own creative mills" ("Classroom Cartonera" 204). Workshop is held on daily, weekly and monthly bases for educators. Its purpose is to train teachers and show them how to intervene in public life. The Paper Picker Press charges for a week long training $25,000 for showing teachers how to introduce and present literary texts through the *cartonera* concept.[99] The cost of workshops poses serious ethical issues.

"Cultural Agents Initiative" is putting into question its own purpose. "Art as social resource" becomes only available to the elite colleges and universities since these are the only places which can afford to send their teachers to such expensive programs and training. The high cost is also a surprise keeping in mind that Harvard is a private institution with substantial financial means to support such projects. Last but not the least, Sarita's workshop LUMPA which is fundamentally the same to Harvard's workshop, was never imagined in terms of a saleable product. For that matter, the creators of the workshop were only interested in spreading literacy and helping the others. The issues of copyrighting the workshop were never of interest to *Sarita* precisely because the whole of *cartonera* concept follows a 'no logo' idea. It is then a serious ethical problem that Harvard chose to charge for a workshop that is supposed to be accessible to everyone everywhere. Even taking into consideration the desire for self-sustainability of the Initiative project itself, it remains ethically unfounded. After all, Harvard is

[99] Further information available in the power point presentation. http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~cultagen/programs/images/Guide%20to%20the%20Paper%20Picker%20Press.ppt

one of the most renowned private universities in the world with substantial financial resources to fund such projects. It also puts into question cultural translation as a way to bring about something politically new. Harvard's attitude runs the risk of reinforcing the old colonial paradigms toward the exploitation of Latin American cultural artifacts. Even though it is still unclear how the members of Sarita feel about this happening, the event needs to be acknowledged. The idea of cultural translation goes hand in hand with ethics and power issues precisely because it tries to break these paradigms.

4. Agency (Ac)counts

Sommer wants us to believe that cultural agency is supported by a principle of "mutual beneficial enterprises" between our objects of study and academics (*Cultural Agency* 5). According to Mary Louis Pratt, "cultural agency names both an object of study and particular positioning of scholars in relation to the cultural agents and agencies they study" (329). The scholars' position is defined by a set of actions that "anticipate, promote, energize, reinforce" (330). However, such a socially aware and politically vulnerable position seems to be more natural to some than to others. Social and political scientists have always taken an active role in public life through cultural and educational policy making, pursuit of social justice, and democracy building in the United States. It is literary scholars who feel targeted by a lack of agency and involvement in public life, and who themselves feel uneasy when the topic of cultural agency comes to the table. It should not be a surprise that even in Sommer's book, only three out of seventeen essays are written by self-proclaimed literary scholars.[100] However, I

[100] Out of those three, one essay is the introduction by Doris Sommer and the afterword by Mary Louis Pratt. The only case study by a literary scholar is "Conspiracy on the Sidelines: How the Maya Won the War," by Arturo Arias. See *Cultural Agency in the Americas*.

postulate that in order to avoid the pitfalls of cultural agency theory for literary scholarship, we must take on this combination of transitive verbs: participate and reflect.

By participation, I mean the literary scholar who is able to formulate and articulate his/her cultural agency and research in a way that maintains fidelity and respect toward the concepts imported from the South, while still addressing and appeasing the needs of a local community. By fidelity to the South, I mean acknowledging not only the utopian and exotic visions we bring in, but also critically examining the limits and contradictions of concepts created. In addition, literary scholars need to (re)think the stakes of the human condition on a practical level: in the community they inhabit. Ultimately, the gap we want to bridge is between the communities of the excluded ones in the North and South, especially today with increasing anxieties over economic affairs in the globalized world. Bilbija's and Madureira's work in the community show that the gap is getting smaller. However, the terms of scholars' engagement will never depend on a clear-cut definition of intervention and contribution to social life. One of the main reasons Bilbija's and Madureira's projects are a success is not because they have to generate enough profit for self-sustainability, but because of the financial support from the public university. The lack of pressure for making profit reframes these projects benefiting only as works of solidarity with the community. And yet, these terms and boundaries will always have to be negotiated, redefined, and analyzed in a given context.

And here is where reflection comes into play. By reflection, I mean something that both Sommer and Pratt overlook: the *quality* of the relationships. The cultural agency turn needs to examine the nature of the agency at stake. When Sommer argues that there is always room to "wiggle," I sense that this issue (for her) is unnecessary as long as we wiggle it. This becomes a

problem precisely because, as Ranciére would argue, the very nature of dissensual politics requires that art be willing to engage with its "outside" to challenge itself, rather than to reproduce the hegemonic terms of its "failed totality." Here is where I see scholars' role in exposing the works that simply do not fit the framework in which they are narrated. This is the fundamental problem with Atarraya and Ultamarina Cartonera. Intentionally or not, these small presses not only fail to create "social contribution through creative practices" but even more, under the this mask they cash in on the *cartoneras*' cultural capital while reproducing the existing structure of undemocratic practices.

So, in the case of *cartoneras*, cultural agency is unsettling. And it is also fascinating because it is a nexus of contradictory claims about where the political potential of literature confronts not only its institutional character but also its aesthetic principles. Work that explores and thrives on these particularities needs neither to abandon ethics, nor overlook the difficulties of cultural translation. After all, participating and reflecting will always be irritating because, as Pratt argues, cultural agents are irritants of the State and as such, we need to learn to irritate each other as well. It is only if we enter into this dialogue that we, literary scholars, can claim any agency or academic turn.

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