

Small Presses in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
Exploring Independent Publishing Houses and the Communities They Build  
by  
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## Abstract

The publishing industry has been labeled as being in a time of flux in the years following the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; its future is considered uncertain and as such, rumors of demise and great change abound. This thesis works to calm fears and worries of the digital transition of literature by documenting the work of certain small presses in this time of change. I will present two main case studies, Dzanc Books and *cartonera* editorial houses, to illustrate the diversity of the small-press industry. Both were established after the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and as such it is important to see how these disparate young presses keep themselves alive in these uncertain times, for it is the differences and complexities of the houses that demonstrate how the digital transition is not a cut and dry issue.

The styles of the two publishers are polar opposites: Dzanc Books embraces the advent of digital publishing, while the *cartoneras* view digital media as an afterthought. Dzanc prides itself on presenting forgotten, ignored, or unlikely books in a variety of formats in the attempt to simply circulate the texts on the market. *Cartonera* publishers utilize recycled cardboard material from the streets to create book-objects in which to showcase poetry, fiction, and non-fiction works by a variety of authors to new audiences. The thesis will closely examine some of each press's published materials to determine whether they remain true to their aims and what their goals say about the presses as a whole. Despite their differences in style, the two case studies also work to demonstrate one strength of the small press industry: interactions with local communities. This thesis will illustrate how different presses work with the varying levels and concepts of community, and how their social outreach programs affect the communities.

Ultimately, the thesis will be split into three sections: Dzanc Books and the digital transition; *Cartonera* publishing and their aims as modern cooperatives; and finally the community outreach and work these presses and others accomplish and inspire; in order to give a specialized view of the intricacies of the publishing industry today.



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Short Titles

AC: Bilbija, Ksenija, and Paloma Celis Carbajal, eds. *Akademia Cartonera: A Primer of Latin American Cartonera Publishers*. Madison: Parallel, 2009. Print.

AC-CD: Bilbija, Ksenija, and Paloma Celis Carbajal, eds. *Akademia Cartonera: A Primer of Latin American Cartonera Publishers*. Madison: Parallel, 2009. CD-ROM. *Academic Articles, Cartonera Publications Catalog and Bibliography*. Madison: Parallel, 2009.



### **Introduction: Presses As the Sum of Their Time**

In recent years, the book publishing industry is experiencing the impact of new technology. The “digital transition” or the move towards using computers and the Internet as a means of production and publication is gaining momentum in the publishing world. Dating back to the inception of the printing press, the publishing industry has undergone many changes in the base structures of their technology. Perhaps the most correlative example to technology’s effect on our time is the advent of the typewriter. Like the computer, the typewriter combined the acts of writing and publishing. Manuscripts were now typescripts; typed by a hired typist or the author. Mark Twain sent Tom Sawyer to his publisher as the first typescript in literary history, and he also sent this, a letter to the Remington typewriter manufacturers:

“Gentlemen: Please do not use my name in any way, please do not even divulge the fact that I own a machine, I have entirely stopped using the typewriter, for the reason that I never could write a letter with it to anybody without receiving a request by return mail that I would not only describe the machine but state what progress I had made in the use of it, etc. etc. I don’t like to write letters, and so I don’t want people to know that I own this curiosity breeding little joker. Yours truly, Saml. L. Clemens”<sup>1</sup> (Twain qtd. In Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* 192-3).

This letter to the makers of the Remington exemplifies the curiosity that follows new technology. Mark Twain is frustrated by the seemingly endless attention he receives for his Remington typewriter. The newness of the object, in this case the typewriter, blinds the public to all else. In

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<sup>1</sup> The original text is written in all uppercase as its creation was before the typewriter had the ability to shift between the cases.

the personal case of Mark Twain, he found curiosity to be the dominant emotion of the public. A curious public, however, is not always the case.

Fear is presiding as the most dominant emotion in the midst of the awe and fascination of the digital transition. This fear drives articles that describe the demise of the bookstore experience due to the loss of the physical object of the book. *The Economist*, for example, writes: “Having started rather late, books are swiftly following music and newspapers into the digital world. Publishers believe their journey will be different, and that they will not suffer the fate of those industries by going into slow decline. Publishers’ experience will, indeed, be different—but not necessarily better” (“Great Digital Expectations,” *The Economist* Sept. 10, 2011). The problem is not necessarily the digital transition itself, but rather the accompanying uncertainty of the change. Due to the press that is given, the public’s fears of the digital transition are amplified. The change of technology is nothing short of an apocalypse for the printed word. Books will cease to be, as they are currently known, when literature is exported to the digital world. Great fears surround the digital transition, as its projected consequences seem to undermine core aspects of the cultural history of our current world, specifically the timeless physicality and human dependence on paper.

Fears, however, continually accompany new technological introductions. Heidegger, for example, was extremely mistrustful of the increased use of the typewriter: “This ‘history’ of the kinds of writing is one of the main reasons for the increasing destruction of the word. The latter no longer comes and goes by means of the writing hand, the properly acting hand, but by means of the mechanical forces it releases” (Heidegger, 81). “Destruction” is a recurring claim whenever new technology arrives on the scene. Heidegger fears the alienation of the writer from his work, and thus the destruction of art through technique. The mechanical is forcing the writer

away; his hand is no longer acting “properly” in conjunction with the page, but rather is isolated and communicating with an intermediary. In this way, Heidegger does not see the typewriter in a McLuhan-esque light, as an extension of man. Instead, the typewriter becomes the other, a paradigm for disaster and the “destruction of the word.”

In many ways the typewriter anticipates what is now happening with computer technology and the digital transition. The destruction of “the word” is at the root of the technological fears. As Lethem’s essay “The Ecstasy of Influence” states, however, “despite hand-wringing at each technological turn- radio, the Internet- the future will be much like the past” (Lethem, “Ecstasy” 42). The digital age is once again stirring up the worries of the “destruction of the word.” Publications such as *The Economist* are producing tales to invoke fear of the loss of books themselves:

In the first five months of this year sales of consumer e-books in America overtook those from adult hardback books. Just a year earlier hardbacks had been worth more than three times as much as e-books, according to the Association of American Publishers. Amazon now sells more copies of e-books than paper books. The drift to digits will speed up as bookshops close. Borders, once a retail behemoth, is liquidating all of its American stores (“Great Digital Expectations”, *The Economist* Sept. 10, 2011).

While *The Economist* does not utilize fear mongering to the point of including the word “destruction” there does exist a certain tone of doom to the words. “In the first five months” and “just a year earlier” both stress the impact of technology on the timeline. Everything seems to be happening rather quickly, just a year ago things were normal, but now change is around us (or so the article insinuates). Furthermore this change “will speed up” as the heavy influence of the digitization makes its way into the economy of books. The use of the word “drift” demonstrates

that this fear is caused by uncertainty, and the rapid approach of the unknown. The article stresses that bookshops are closing; the great physical landmarks of the literary world, the brick and mortar stores, are dwindling and thus the change is felt that much harder.

*The Economist's* forecast is not original. Derrida remarks: "Isn't paper always in the process of "disappearing"- dying out- and hasn't it always been?" (Derrida, *Paper Machine* 50). There have always been these fears. Heidegger feared the loss of the handwritten work, and now paper is supposed to follow. I believe that this change, as Lethem believes, is much like the past; Derrida explains:

What is happening to paper at present [1997], namely what we perceive at least as a sort of ongoing decline or withdrawal, an ebb or rhythm as yet unforeseeable- that does not only remind us that paper has a history that is brief but complex, a technological or material history, a symbolic history of projections and interpretations, a history tangled up with the invention of the human body and of hominization" (Derrida, *Paper Machine* 43).

Derrida's creation of the ebb and flow of paper, most likely in response to the claim that it is "always" in the process of dying out, is acutely apt in the case of technology today. Paper is part of a "technological" history, and is in itself a technology. The lifeline of paper is as "complex" as it is inextricably linked to human development. Contemporary mankind grew, and culture accelerated during the era of paper. Something so complex in its cultural origins as mankind's relationship with paper cannot simply die out overnight.

Bruce Sterling in his essay "The Life and Death of Media" explores this idea of the complexity of paper and other media. Sterling comments on the idea of the direct progression of media: "In the Whig version of history, all events in the past have benevolently conspired to

produce the crown of creation, ourselves. In the Whig version of media history, all technological developments have marched in progressive lockstep, from height to height, to produce the current exalted media landscape” (Sterling, “Life and Death” 75). The development of media is not a smooth dialectic; one success does not immediately lead to another. Instead he contends that media develop as “a radiation of species” (Sterling, “Life and Death” 75). There is no single source of inspiration, but rather a community of inspirations: “If you look closely at the evolution of cinema you can see that cinema is not a monolith, it's a radiation of species--- E.J. Marey's *chambre chronographique*; Edison's kinetoscope; Anschutz's tachyscope; the vitagraph, the cinematographe, the theatrograph, the animatograph, the Urbanora” (Sterling, “Life and Death” 75). The development of a medium then becomes a sort of evolution. “Some media shed a few dead species, but the genus goes on living. Other media are murdered,” Sterling states in his essay (Sterling, “Life and Death” 76). Using his scientific wording, new media are ultimately examples of divergent evolution.<sup>2</sup> New media can share the same ancestor, the same source of inspiration, yet end up with very different resulting functions or appearances. The difference being that, as media are not biologically based, they are free to draw inspirations from other genus, other species, and ultimately can evolve and spread into more and more niches.

Yet fears still abound; the digital transition is surrounded by talking heads discussing what is essentially the “murder” of the printed word by the new divergently evolved digital technologies. The truth, however, is not so simple, Sterling’s “radiation of species” points to the complexities inherent in the many different publishing options today. This thesis will attempt to

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<sup>2</sup> As defined in *The New Encyclopedia of Science*, divergent evolution is “the evolution of closely related species in different directions, often as a result of diverging life-styles, ultimately producing two very distinct species” (23).

assuage some of the fears of the digital through close observation of the small-publishing industry. Small-presses are more impacted by change in the industry, and the resilience (or not) of specific houses will show how the variety of methods plays out in today's economic climate. This thesis will present two main case studies, Dzanc Books and *cartonera* editorial houses, to illustrate the diversity of the small-press industry. Both were established after the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and as such it is important to see how these disparate young presses keep themselves alive in an uncertain climate, for it is the differences and complexities of the houses that demonstrate how the digital transition is not a simple issue.

As there exists complexities within the methods of publishing, a simple answer or even a simple prophecy for doom and demise will not apply readily to the situation; a simple forecast cannot describe the digital transition. Sterling paints a picture of the complexity of media as it can be equally applied to publishing: "You see, ladies and gentlemen, we live in the Golden Age of Dead Media. What we brightly call 'multimedia' provides a whole galaxy of mutant recombinant media, most of them with the working lifespan of a pack of Twinkies" (Sterling, "Life and Death" 80). Past media, such as paper, and future media all provide a rich environment for the reproduction and creation of new hybrid media. Furthermore, Sterling blithely describes all the hybrid media as having "the working lifespan of a pack of Twinkies" or essentially, a quality of near immortality. The media are protected to near immortal heights by their complexities and differences, and it is also how the many publishing houses survive— on the diversity of their efforts.

This thesis will be broken down into three separate chapters: Dzanc Books, *cartonera* publishing, and community outreach by the publishing community. The first two chapters will illuminate the presses' modes of operation as well as their goals. The final chapter, on

community, gives examples of how these presses and others inspire and act within their community to form a deep level of commitment and involvement that adds another layer of complexity to their existence in an uncertain economic environment.

The first case study is Dzanc Books as the house exemplifies a small press in digital transition. Established in 2006, Dzanc arrived on the scene just preceding the e-book revolution. The section will detail Dzanc's work with forgotten, unlikely, or ignored texts, qualities central to many of Dzanc's ventures. First, their work with Internet-published literature, as well as Dzanc's method of circulating the texts off the web is described, highlighting their annual anthology *Best of the Web*. The circulation of the *Best of the Web* text then ties into Dzanc's attempts at integrating their press into an e-book future. The Dzanc section closes with a description of their recycling of texts digitally via their rEprint series, founded on their desire to promote the forgotten, unlikely, or ignored.

The thesis then transitions towards *cartonera* publishing, which can be seen as a method of small publishing that is largely indifferent to digital media. *Cartonera* publishers utilize recycled cardboard material from the streets to create book-objects in which to showcase poetry, fiction, and non-fiction works by a variety of authors to new audiences. The section begins with an introduction to *cartonera* publishers: who they are; what they do; what they want to do; and why they want to do it. The second section discusses the importance of community to the *cartonera* houses, utilizing close analysis of a book published by the original *cartonera* house to demonstrate the many ways in which *cartoneras* are connected to the societies in which they work.

Communities and the social outreach by the presses are the focus of the third and final chapter. After an initial introduction, the chapter begins a description of the Paper Picker Press

with a social outreach project created by Harvard University, but originally inspired by the *cartonera* houses. This section will briefly detail some of the community service done by the *cartonera* houses, but will mostly focus on the results from Harvard's Paper Picker Press and a Paolo Freire-inspired discussion of how literary programs such as the Paper Picker Press can affect and help a community. This then transitions to a section describing some of the specifics of Dzanc's involvement with many different levels of community. Finally, the community works of Small Press Distribution and the literary arts center Beyond Baroque are given as further evidence of the overarching trend of community work in the area of small publishing.

These sections hope to give both detailed and large general examples of how certain presses are dealing with the changing times. The image of divergent evolutionary tracks of the publishing houses will come into focus in multiple ways. The complexities evident in their discussions should hopefully illuminate for the reader the difficulty of labeling both the houses themselves and the overall situation of publishing's future.

### **Dzanc Books as a Case Study**

So the book is “dying”. Where do we go from there? A good idea is to turn to the small presses to see how they are surviving in these times. Without massive financial backing, the small presses are more dependent on the ebb and flow of the industry. In this section I will examine Dzanc Books as an example of small publishing and of how the industry is changing in the new millennium.

Dzanc Books was established in 2006, just before the “digital transition” gained momentum in the publishing industry. The house is considered a Detroit-area publishing house yet they are without a brick and mortar home office, depending on non-traditional means to maintain contact with their workforce of fifteen permanent staff, and a changing group of interns (“About Dzanc”). The small, nonprofit press was quickly labeled “the future of publishing” as it is a mix of old and new (Kirch, “The Future of Publishing?” 21). Dzanc features both print and digital books, emphasizing both on their website. They publish works they deem to be unlikely, forgotten, or ignored. In an interview for *Book Business*, co-founder Steve Gillis announces: “If this is a book that excites us, it will find its own market ... We don't ever, ever reject a book by who's going to buy it... There's some unique stuff on our list. That doesn't scare us at all” (Beisser, “Indie Thinking” 44). Dzanc Books thus markets itself by accentuating the “unique” facets of their business.

#### *The Search for the Best of the Web*

A large portion of what is “unique” in their business model is their embrace of digital publishing. It is also the factor that sets them apart as a future model in the eyes of others. They

act as miners in the large stream of information that is the Internet; they are able to find amongst the unending data, examples of what they deem to be great literature for the common reader.

This is extremely important for technology is becoming more accessible to the common person:

The parallels between the dispersal of the products of this new technology in the early sixteenth century and our own experience of technological change in the twentieth century are striking. In our own age computer-based storage and data manipulation systems began their existence only within large-scale institutions or corporations as the preserve of a technocratic elite, but then became so cheap that a PC could be individually owned. Similarly, in the earlier age, the book was gradually to emerge from the cathedral or university library to enter the private study of the humanist scholar (Rhodes and Sawday, "Paperworlds" 6).

The literature of the web, however, is not necessarily following the pervasiveness of technology. Dzanc considers itself the tool to move the literature of the Internet, found in online-only literary journals, into the private homes of readers with their anthology *The Best of the Web*. The aim of the book is to present to the readers in an easily accessible format a collection of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction that was published on the Internet.

Dzanc markets the *Best of the Web* with a continuation of their image, of the idea of lost works finally gaining the attention they deserve. A reviewer of *Best of the Web 2010* in the Chicago Tribune writes: "These pieces offer ground for optimism that those hours at the keyboard, mining for gold in the form of artful language and interesting ideas, are worth hours of search" (Taylor, *Chicago Tribune*). Dzanc chose this quotation, almost the entirety of Elizabeth Taylor's review, to appear in their 2011-2012 PDF Catalog. The selection demonstrates Dzanc's belief that Taylor accurately captures the image of the *Best of the Web*. Is this truly accurate?

Does *Best of the Web* fulfill all the lofty goals Dzanc sets for it, namely highlighting forgotten, unlikely, or ignored works? The content of *Best of the Web* and the sources of the content ultimately will serve to validate or contradict these claims.<sup>3</sup> It seems to do both. *Best of the Web* fails in being truly innovative, yet still demonstrates Dzanc as being open to digital change.

The genres within *Best of the Web* definitely push the book toward the more traditional realm of publication, rather than emphasizing the forgotten, unlikely, or ignored. *Best of the Web 2009* features a collection of poems, short stories, non-fiction, flash fiction (extremely short stories), and interviews with a few of the authors involved. In his introduction to the book, editor Lee K. Abbott describes the positives of writing on the Internet as space, freedom, frequency, and immortality (Abbott, v-vi). The book's inclusion of flash fiction hints at works that will develop after its 2009 publishing date where social media such as Twitter become inspiration to new methods of publishing.

While Abbott focuses mainly on the content within the works in regards to freedom, the many forms of expression available seem to be forgotten in *Best of the Web*. For a publishing house that presents itself as determined to not forget or ignore unlikely works, the manners of expression used by the authors in *Best of the Web* are almost humdrum. The poetry, such as "I'm Not Supposed to Wear This Gorilla Costume" by Arlene Ang, may have attention-grabbing titles, yet they present their work in tried-and-true stanzas, resulting in less experimental work than the past, such as Ginsberg or Cummings, or the LANGUAGE poets. The poetry does not utilize the freedom of space (another one of Abbott's focal points) that the Internet provides, such as the incorporation of hypertext or multimedia, or even the ability to run ceaselessly on a single (web) page. Dzanc pushes only that which it can encapsulate in its book as "the best" of

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<sup>3</sup> In this section I will be referring to *Best of the Web 2009* in my attempts to investigate Dzanc's image.

the web, yet this limitation is more a consequence of the capabilities of formats. Dzanc is publishing the book in both e-book and hard copy physical copy formats, a trend many publishing houses are turning to,<sup>4</sup> the house must ensure that the works included are viable for publication in all (hard-copy included) versions of their text. The poetry and other works selected must be able to work in all the formats available. The poetry found online must work on a physical printed page, and works that wind around a physical page, must be suitable for easy reading on an e-reader or a computer screen. These limitations impact the substance of Dzanc's *Best of the Web*, but while the works are not as innovative as some of those found on the web, they still point the reader towards the literary journals found online that showcase the new styles of poetry in their proper formats.

The traditional familiarity of the genre choices featured in *Best of the Web* most likely also relate back to the marketability of the book. Dzanc chooses works that are “the offensive, the transgressive, the experimental, the indelicate, and the dangerous” in terms of content, while remaining comfortably familiar for the reader in terms of form (Abbott, v). In this way, Dzanc can point to such titles as, “I’m Not Supposed to Wear This Gorilla Costume,” and declare they are fulfilling the destiny of the forgotten, unlikely, and ignored works of the Internet, while still appealing to the non-academic reader. Thus, the non-academic reader is drawn into content they would otherwise ignore. As such, the “mundanity” of the forms is a tool wielded by Dzanc to ensure that the book appeals to an “average,” unadventurous reader.

Does *Best of Web* draw from unlikely, forgotten, or ignored sources in its attempts to collect the best of the Internet? There is no clear answer. The fiction, poetry, and non-fiction provided in the anthology are all drawn from different literary journals, albeit online literary

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<sup>4</sup> James Gray details this trend in his article on academic publishing.

journals. Journals, in general, are anything but unlikely, forgotten, or ignored. Online and electronic journals have gained acceptance more quickly within academic circles than the standard e-book and by 2009 most universities had switched to a “digital-preferred” method of acquiring journals (Gray, 271-2). Yet the journals accepted by universities were simply online versions of long-standing print copies. Recent online journals had a much harder time gaining this acceptance and it was difficult to make headway in the course of the online boom: “There are now so many journals available that it is difficult for academics, university managers, librarians and institutional auditors to determine the currency and relative value of publications in different sub-fields” (Morris, et al., 1441). The sheer amount of options is overwhelming. Elizabeth Taylor in her review compared *Best of the Web* to “mining for gold,” relating the venture to a time-consuming enterprise (Taylor, *Chicago Tribune*).

Nathan Leslie in the “Series Introduction” comments on the reliance on journals in the literary community: “Still, you wonder what percentage of those who read literary magazines are writers themselves? It’s good that writers read, you think. However, if writers are to scuttle out of the literary cave in which they life [sic], you think they could also use readers who aren’t writers” (Leslie, ii). On the surface, he makes his point well. Dzanc is reaching out to new readers, those who aren’t writers trapped in a “literary cave” with the publication of *Best of the Web*. While these journals are not unlikely sources of new literature to academia as they form the “literary cave,” they are new or forgotten by the reading population at large.

Yet *Best of the Web 2009* seemingly contradicts itself by choosing its works from online literary journals. The editor Lee K. Abbott channels Marshall McLuhan in his introduction to emphasize that *Best of the Web* does choose those works that are forgotten, unlikely, and ignored:

In private, the mossbacks among us will tell you that anyone with a computer, basic cyber-savvy, and the money to purchase a domain name can put up an e-zine or the like. Given such givens, quality can't be guaranteed, and thus Li-tra-chure is already in the handcart headed for hell. For these folks, the medium is indeed the message. For others, me happily among them, the message is the message. That is, *it ain't where; it's what* (Abbott, Introduction iv-v).<sup>5</sup>

Abbott is continuing the emphasis of Dzanc on quality with the tail end of the quotation "it ain't where; it's what." *Best of the Web* is very dependent on from "where" the texts come, limiting itself to the literary journals as sources of texts rather than the Internet as a whole. The book's recovery of forgotten texts is restricted by those ignored by people who (as Abbott relates it) refer to literature as "Li-tra-chure." By selecting texts passed over by the elite, yet simultaneously passing over other sources of texts themselves, Dzanc is creating another elite in the book publishing world, or possibly a more reasonable description would be a middle-class of texts. Abbott says of the Internet: "it is, they fear, without gatekeepers," but Dzanc's creation of this middle-class literature or iLit-tra-chure has created yet another gate, rather than skipped into a world free from constriction (Abbott, iv). This middle-class is still a brave new world, however, as trust in online-originating literary journals was still low at the time of Abbott's writing. Furthermore, there was still the issue of sorting Abbott's "what" or the quality works, from the slew of online journals.

Is it fair, then, for the book to be titled *Best of the Web* when it excludes a massive portion of the Internet's literature in its deliberation? It creates its own focus of iLit-tra-chure and for the time this seems to be sufficient. The online literary journals they pull from are forgotten

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<sup>5</sup> Emphasis is mine.

and largely ignored by the literary community that embraces electronic journals backed by the industry stalwarts, houses that have succeeded in print. The journals used in *Best of the Web* vary in size and popularity. Some of the online journals listed in *Best of the Web* have well formatted websites, such as *Juked*, the journal that published Arlene Ang's poem, "I'm Not Supposed to Wear This Gorilla Costume." Others are more difficult to find, even when using a search engine. *Convergence*, for example, is the third journal listed in the Google results for "Convergence journal". Other journals seem to be current, yet nonfunctioning; *Eclectica* reported "service unavailable" with every attempt to reach their material. Thus, the content of these lesser-known journals<sup>6</sup> is unlikely for the typical reader, or even the reader well versed in online journals. Dzanc is taking baby steps towards an e-revolution. A method that might work to draw a large percentage of readers in to what the Internet has to offer in terms of literature or even iLit-tra-chure.

#### *Changing to an E-book Future*

Just as Dzanc utilizes the print format of *Best of the Web* to transition readers into digital literature, they also offer a slow transition to the e-book format. *The Best of the Web* is offered in e-book format in addition to the print formats. Dzanc often proffers a free e-book copy of their customer's print purchase (to avoid having "to wait on the postal service"); *Best of the Web*, for example, is one of the texts where this is possible. This deal acts to lure customers into e-books more gradually, as there will be the print book to return to as an option ("Our Books" *Dzanc Books*). "Dzanc has always been a step ahead of seeing where the market was heading ... we were plotting as early as 2006 and have since become the leader in the e-book industry with our

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.juked.com/> ; <http://www.convergence-journal.com/> ; and <http://www.eclectica.org/> respectively.

ebook club and rEprint series,” Wickett says, detailing the importance of e-books to Dzanc (Personal Interview, Oct. 2011). The interview belies their interest in the market and their “two for one” method of sale works to bolster their e-book presence with a modicum of economic risk. Wickett also claims the dynamics of readership are changing, “without question the e-readers are different from your print readers though in time the gap will shrink and more and more people will be e-readers,” and the method targets this changing reader base (Personal Interview, Oct. 2011). In this way, Dzanc turns what could be an overwhelming experience of literary digitization into something palatable for the technologically shy reader.

Furthermore, the embrace of digital e-books by Dzanc Books is a sharp turn from the fear that pervades other houses. The uncertainty of how to control e-books once they enter the digital market leads houses to remove their works from library e-book catalogues (Lu, *Toronto Star*). Penguin Books removed all of their new books from the possibility of digital viewing due to fears of piracy; Harper Collins placed a limit<sup>7</sup> on the number of times a book may be viewed digitally before it expires (Lu, *Toronto Star*). In addition, “U.S. publishers, Simon & Schuster and Macmillan, do not sell e-books to libraries,” limiting the scope once more of the literature available to e-readers (Lu, *Toronto Star*). This limitation is destructive when the popularity of e-books is growing. In the Toronto Public Libraries “statistics show e-book downloads jumped 196 per cent from 2009 to 2010, and are up 288 per cent so far this year from last year” (Lu, *Toronto Star*). Obviously the population is moving towards e-books, embracing them while the large publishers turn heel and run.

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<sup>7</sup> A number they claim is relatable to the amount of times a physically book may be loaned out before enough damage has been sustained to necessitate a replacement (Lu, *Toronto Star*). This thought process demonstrates the ingrained thinking of both books as an economic commodity, and resistance to the idea of e-books physical invulnerability.

From where does this fear stem? Joshua Gans, a University of Toronto professor at the Rotman School of Management cites economic obsolescence caused by the shareability of e-books: “It’s a threat. It’s very easy to understand where the book publishers are coming from, but the problem is it’s flying in the face of some version of common sense. Publishers still want to hang onto the idea that one individual will buy their book, and that will be it. This has never been true. If you buy a book, everybody in your household reads it. You’ll lend it to friends” (Lu, *Toronto Star*). Gans’ point about the inherent shareability of books is important. A drastic profit drop will not necessarily mark the rise of e-books in the marketplace. Illegal copies of books (such as photo-copied books) have been around for ages and while digitally pirated copy is in a way slightly easier to procure once the DRM<sup>8</sup> is removed, it is difficult to see more people turning away from the norm of book buying.

Dzanc allows for a sharing between devices. All of their e-books are free from DRM, and they use this as an advertising point. They announce that their books can be read on the buyer’s “Kindle, iPad, Nook, Sony Reader, or whatever other platform they choose to use, as well as their PC and whatever newer devices might emerge in the near future” (“E-book Club,” *Dzanc Books*). The format of Dzanc books therefore encourages the sharing of their books. As a small independent press they utilize the shareability of their books to get the word out about their publishing house; it can be seen as a necessity to the survival of their business. They use the age-old habit of book sharing to their advantage, rather than to huddle the books closer to their chest and out of the reach of the public.

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<sup>8</sup> Digital Rights Management: it is a security measure included in many copyrighted digital items to prevent reproduction and sharing across many machines.

*Dzanc's Recycling of Material*

Dzanc uses the “unlikely” medium of e-books in order to publish for a second time many forgotten books that have previously been ignored by critics and the market. They have named their collection the “rEprint Series,” the *E* highlighting the electronic method of production, while the word reprint making clear the recycled nature of the texts. Their aim is for the texts to enjoy an electronic second life:

This series originates out of a belief that many of these titles did not have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential audiences in the time of their original publication, and that a second chance for achieving a wider readership is long overdue. By bringing them back into print in widely-available electronic formats, Dzanc hope to restart the critical conversations around these books, and to get them into the hands of the enthusiastic readers they each deserve. (“rEprint Series,” Dzanc Books).

This short blurb speaks volumes about Dzanc’s purpose in the publishing industry. First there is the importance of their statement “fullest potential audiences.” This seems to demonstrate that Dzanc does understand the possibilities inherent in e-books and the extensive readership that can be accessed. It is imperative that the books get their “second chance” through digital media. Additionally, they phrase this as “bringing them back into print in widely-available electronic formats.” The choice of the phrase “bringing them back into print” is interesting as the very purpose of the rEprint Series is to skip print altogether. This word choice demonstrates that at a fundamental level, the Dzanc press considers digital publishing to be just as valid as traditional publishing, if not more so. Once again, Dzanc refers to the extensive readership in regards to “the hands of the enthusiastic readers [the books] each deserve.” Just as Dzanc is the medium for these books to come to light again, it is the digital medium that allows the works themselves to

enter into the hands of the readers. Furthermore, the readers are “enthusiastic;” this description is an appealing view of readers that corroborates with economists view of matters, rather than the doom and gloom of economic destruction that publishers foretell (*The Economist*; Lu, *Toronto Star*).

The differences in the drop of print sales and the increase of digital sales are more or less evening out. *Publisher’s Weekly* reported in October 2011, “E-book sales from publishers that report to the AAP rose 116.5% in August, to \$88.8 million, compared to August 2010. The gain marked an acceleration in e-book growth compared to July when sales of the format increased 105%, the slowest in 2011” (“E-book Sales,” *Publisher’s Weekly*). Even in the slow month of July, sales of e-books doubled. *Publisher’s Weekly* later reported that it is in fact this boost in e-book sales that made up for the slackening print sales at several publishing houses. In late October, they reported a boost of 16.3% of total revenue at Bloomsbury over a six-month period (“Digital Bolsters Bloomsbury,” *Publisher’s Weekly*). Furthermore, the article states, “a key contributor to the gain was a 564% increase in e-book sales to £2.5 million, 5.5% of total revenue” (“Digital Bolsters Bloomsbury,” *Publisher’s Weekly*).

Jim Milliot for *Publisher’s Weekly* also documents this phenomenon for Simon & Schuster house: “Growth in digital sales in the third quarter was enough to offset print declines giving Simon & Schuster a 1% increase in revenue” (Milliot, *Publisher’s Weekly*). In the article, CEO Carolyn Reidy emphasizes that the loss of Borders definitely impacted the sales of print books (Milliot, *Publisher’s Weekly*). It should be astounding that even with the loss of the huge retailer Borders that the large publishing houses are actually *increasing* in revenue when everything should be so dire. The evening out of revenue between print and digital books demonstrates that there is not a mass exodus of readers from the literary world, but rather a transition to e-books. In

other words, the number of readers is not dwindling; rather, they are just switching the manner in which they read. I believe it is the small, independent presses, such as Dzanc that facilitate this change of reading habits. The public obviously has a growing interest in the possibility of perusing literature digitally, and the easy manner in which Dzanc sets up their own catalogue of books allows for greater sharing, and thus a greater audience.

Dzanc Books utilizes the new digital methods in their attempts to share and propagate their works. Other houses, such as the many *cartonera* houses in Latin America, avoid the use of digital technology in their work. The next chapter will illuminate the history of the *cartonera* method of publishing, and the variety of ways in which the houses interact with those who aid in the creation of their books.

### *Cartonera* Life

Latin America offers the world a unique perspective on publishing; *Cartonera* presses produce books using basic materials, such as cardboard, photocopy paper, staples, and glue. The presses are more or less indifferent to the advent of digital media, unlike the “speed ahead of the times” initiative pushed by Dzanc Books. The primitive materials hark back to the earlier days of publishing, when each book was given artisanal handmade care. The artful nod to the past with the recreation of the book-object is the brand of the *cartonera* publishers. Neil Rhodes and Jonathon Sawday in their introduction to *Renaissance Computer* remark on how the book has otherwise lost its “object” appeal, “Potentially, the book was now a commodity, rather than (as in the manuscript world which the printing press helped to supplant) an exclusive, crafted, object” (Rhodes, Sawday, “Paperworlds” 1). *Cartonera* publishing is switching this distinction around on the book world. The book, itself, is becoming the crafted object. Another facet of *cartonera* publishing is their attempts to remove the exclusivity associated with the book-object; the houses sell the books at cheaper prices with the hope that they will reach a less rarified audience. The initiative to create a new audience for previously out of reach books is similar to the designs of Dzanc. The method of the *cartoneras*, however, avoids all instances of digital media. Rather than propagating their texts on the web, the houses turn towards human billboards wearing cardboard posters announcing their current inventory of books. Rather than an international interface, the workers remain on local street corners.

This chapter hopes to illuminate, in the first section, the history of the *cartonera* houses and the political climate from which they developed. From there, a description of how the communities and surrounding societies of the *cartoneras* interact with the houses and each other

is given in order to give the reader a greater idea of the environments in which the *cartoneras* originate, operate, and develop.

Important to the discussion of *cartoneras* is a note on my source material. For much of this chapter I will reference the anthology *Akademia Cartonera*. Its publication came after a conference for *cartonera* publishing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2009. As the scholarship on *cartonera* publishing is still quite limited and young, this book holds the greatest array of voices from the many different houses and scholars of the genre. While I do include other sources, this book forms the backbone of my support. The bias in the book, written purely by the houses and their fervent admirers, necessitates an explanation early in the work for much of what I cite from the book includes at least a hint of celebration.

### *Creating Cartonera*

What is *cartonera* publishing and where did it come from? The turn to a *cartonero* way of life began in Buenos Aires, Argentina following the economic upheaval of late 2001. The country was thrown into disarray in December 2001, with people taking to the streets and protesting the neoliberal policies and recurring presence of the same politicians in a variety of offices. Many of those affected by the economic crisis turned to a “profession” that was already in existence (though marginally in comparison to the post-2001 results); the people became *cartoneros*. This job consisted of scavenging the streets and trash bins for any and all recyclable material, most specifically cardboard (*cartón*). They were then able to sell the materials to recycling centers and create a pseudo-living for their families. The scavenging quality of their work led to a nocturnal existence, collecting the cardboard off the streets when the rest of society slept.

*Cartoneros* featured little to no formal organization, and as such informal collectives arose within the community of the *cartoneros*, a separate mini-society that attempted to be self-sufficient. Information from “el Programa de Recuperadores” or “Program of Recoverers,” a union of *cartoneros* in Buenos Aires claims that 98.1% of the active *cartoneros* do not belong to a union such as theirs as of 2009 (Basurama, *Cartón y más* 9). They further add that around 100,000 people informally (not on a regular basis) collect recyclable materials in the Greater Buenos Aires area (Basurama, *Cartón y más* 9). As such, there is little official organization in an occupation with a high number of workers. Their community developed into a collective, each member offering support, whether to organize a train to take them from the impoverished suburbs to the wealthy city, or all-night daycares run by the adults no longer able to traverse the streets searching for recyclables (Zarwan, DiMartino, “Ghost Train”).

In 2003 the work of the *cartoneros* entered into the minds of poet Washington Cucurto and artist Javier Barilaro; together the two established the first of the *cartonera* printing houses, Eloísa Cartonera. Eloísa is a non-profit cooperative where the revenue earned is distributed equally among the workers and put towards production costs. The house buys cardboard from the local *cartoneros*, paying five times the rate of the local recycling centers, and together with photocopied texts from authors, recycled the material into books with hand painted covers (Epplin, *Hispanic Review* 386; Bilbija, “Un Recorrido...” AC-CD 6). The texts are often previously unpublished, but can also be forgotten, ignored in their past life of publication, recycled like the cardboard used for the covers. By paying more for the cardboard, the creators were able to make the house into a community service venture as well. *Cartoneros* themselves pick up the paintbrush and aid artists in the creation of the books; a trend beginning after the initial start-up by Barilaro and Cucurto. The fluid roles of the workers cause problems when it

comes to labeling exactly who they are in regards to the house: “the term used to identify the project's members was also a matter of debate; we were artists, writers, and *cartoneros* at first but then we realized that those who assembled the books stopped being *cartoneros* once they entered into the project. We called them 'book workers,' and one newspaper article referred to them as '*cartonero* artists’” (Barilaro, *Akademia Cartonera* 49). At any given day a former *cartonero* can be doing the same work as one of the founders in order to produce the book-art.

Each book is itself a work of art, simply as an object, and the houses prize the uniqueness of each book. The covers of each book, originally painted by Barilaro and Cucurto, are now painted by a cooperative of artists, *cartoneros*, and volunteers. The covers are hand-painted using stencils and a variety of paint colors, generating art separate from the text. Often the results of the cover material's previous life on the street can be seen through the paint— former logos of brand origin, or marks of dirt from the sidewalks. Proudly the Eloísa website announces: “No 2 covers are the same! [¡No hay 2 tapas iguales!]<sup>9</sup>” and the manifesto of Sarita Cartonera, a Peruvian *cartonera* house, states: “Given that each one is cut, painted, and bound in an original way, the books are unique, personal and unrepeatable” (Sarita Cartonera, *AC* 75). Originality and artfulness play a big role in the creation and development of Eloísa Cartonera and the other houses.

The texts of *cartonera* books, however, also feature their own artful qualities. The writers featured are usually avant-garde authors and poets who believe in the social significance of the houses. The *cartoneras* publish a variety of genres; their books feature works of short-fiction, novels, poetry, and non-fiction works. Also, the divisions between the genres in the works can be fluid. *No Hay Cuchillo Sin Rosas*, an informational book on Eloísa Cartonera also features an

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<sup>9</sup> Translation by Craig Epplin

anthology of young Argentine writers in the back. *Cartón y más* features an instructional manual on how to create a cooperative in the first half of the book, and a non-fiction narrative told through a comic book style in the second half. Often the authors demonstrate their support of the Latin American marked venture by choosing to donate their works for publication. Some of the authors published are quite famous, such as César Aira, a prolific contemporary Argentine author, and Ricardo Piglia, an Argentine author who now teaches at Princeton University. Both men have been published by Eloísa Cartonera, and featured on the house's poster (*No Hay Cuchillo Sin Rosas*, included poster). Their works are examples of the donated original works to the houses, and often these famous works are shared between several of the first generation houses (Kunin, AC-CD 43). The "Latin American" branding of the houses is often the impetus of the famous authors donating their works, and the inter-house exchange of the works then furthers this image of Latin American brotherhood.

This book-art project has since spread throughout much of Latin America. Paloma Celis Carbajal, a University of Wisconsin-Madison librarian, and one of the editors of *Akademia Cartonera* writes in her prologue: "At this time the *cartonera* publishers are cropping up with increasing frequency throughout Latin America. Just over a year ago [c.2008] there were about eight, a few months ago there were fifteen, a few short weeks ago there were over twenty" (Celis Carbajal, AC 19). The *Cartonera* movement has spread to countries such as Mexico, Peru, Chile, Uruguay, and Bolivia, both due to the simplicity of the book material, and the social significance of having a *cartonera* press. This social significance is mainly a sense of Latin American pride, born from turning one of the low points of the culture— the high rates of unemployed scavengers— into a work of art. They address problems that do not have boundaries within Latin America: "The *cartonera* publishers are collective and local all at once. They believe in unfixed

identities that go beyond national borders” (Bilbija, AC 32). It is the collectivity; the feeling of community each house builds that truly represents what they stand for and who they are. The Cartonera houses form a family in themselves, “this difference is expressed in the names of each *cartonera*: Eloísa, Sarita, Animita, Yerba Mala, Mandrágora, Dulcinéia...while the common bases will be in the family name: *Cartonera*,” and the “family” has grown to where it is difficult to determine the current number of *cartonera* houses in existence (Bilbija, AC 32). The University of Wisconsin- Madison provides a database<sup>10</sup> that charts *cartonera* houses internationally, yet in reality each sibling of the *cartonera* family is more related to their own local neighborhood than the overarching family tree. In her *Akademia Cartonera* article reporting the expansion of *Cartonera*, author Johana Kunin writes that most of the houses hire former *cartoneros* or their children and work in a process that inspires the youth to gain reading and writing habits, but each house is “locally tailored” to “adapt to local circumstances and needs” (Kunin, AC-CD 31). It is the local qualities and ties that are marketed to their own neighborhoods.

The larger, Latin American *cartonera* family is then marketed to the world. Eloísa Cartonera’s manifesto ends with a demonstration of open-armed familial togetherness: “We're cutting cardboard and making thousands of books as we grow and become better friends. We will drive into the sunset, happy to be together, our work made a reality, editing new titles, with new sons, daughters, and hopes, working more every day, happy together. We're waiting for you!” (Eloísa, AC 64). They end their manifesto with the prophecy of the heroes heading off into the sunset. Most likely to help sustain business, the houses sell victory through togetherness. The publishing houses advertise an open environment: anyone can publish their book if they provide

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<sup>10</sup> <http://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/cartoneras>

the text; anyone can join for a day at the workshop; and people from all walks of life can become a *cartonera* artist (“Eloisa,” AC). The houses apparently exclude no one, with intellectual artists working side by side with former trash-pickers. Kunin describes otherwise, noting that houses often have different rules and varying strictness in terms of who can work in the shop: “At some cardboard publishers, anyone visiting the workshop can paint the books; in others, only low-income youngsters can do so; and in quite a few the editors produce the books” (Kunin, AC-CD 37). As such, the free environment is in fact limited in many ways.

The open environment image, however, is crucial to the trend of “romanticizing” the *cartoneras*; something Kunin sees affecting scholarship of the presses (Kunin, AC-CD 44). Kunin is approaching *cartoneras* from a different perspective as an “Argentine researcher with a degree in Anthropology” (AC-CD 48). She is looking with a scientifically trained eye upon the expansion of the *cartoneras*. The romanticized image of the houses then proliferates through news and scholarly texts written by those trained in other disciplines. Kunin relays her thoughts of this selling of the *cartonera* identity:

I know that both the perversity of the media and of the academic system obliges many professionals to “sell” their articles’ ideas or research topics to their editors, research grant-makers or directors as completely new, exotic, fascinating and unseen. I believe that the cardboard publishers are creative, smart, and striking initiatives, but I find myself with the ethical obligation of situating them within a certain historical and social context, following what I actually hear from its creators (Kunin, AC-CD 44).

Kunin distrusts the push to make the *cartoneras* greater than they are, instead choosing to focus on what she “actually” hears from the creators. Yet, even the creator’s words can be skewed by the romance of literary revolution. In Eloísa Cartonera’s manifesto, the experience of working

with the house is turned into something revolutionary and heroic. It is difficult to determine what they mean by this grandeur, but it is possible that at the moment of writing the manifesto (during a workshop at a large North American University) they were simply caught up in the moment of admiration. Petra Kuppers discusses the consequences of such overwhelming experiences in *Community Performance: An Introduction*: "...when caught up in a communal song, a movement sequence or a production number, it is hard to assess the material critically" (Kuppers, 10). The energy that surrounded the authors of the manifestoes can thus be seen to partially blind them to the realities of the houses.

Jaime Vargas Luna, a former member of Sarita Cartonera, refers to this idealized change in the *cartoneras* self-image as the "Madison Effect" and Kunin adds: "The university might have promoted the presses' inner-communication and thoughts about their group identity by organizing the *cartoneras* conference" (Kunin, AC-CD 44). The Madison conference led the houses to consider their group identity and this consideration was done in an extremely biased atmosphere. The houses were together at a conference celebrating their importance and propagating many of the romantic images of them. Seduction of self-importance is the human response and the Wisconsin conference heightened the possibility for it. Thus, the manifestoes must be read with a critical eye to avoid entrapment by the seduction, something that the creators and heads of the houses seem to have internalized in the process of writing. Manifestos general function is a statement of purpose or intention, and *Akademia Cartonera's* texts present a utopic, idealized vision of the actions of the *cartoneras*, one that is more in line with the romanticization by the press than the formerly uncritical eyes of the houses. Jaime Vargas Luna told Kunin in 2008, "I have the feeling that the '*cartonero* phenomenon' is not something that we are actually doing but a label put from the outside and I think that it would be very interesting to find out

why” (Kunin, AC-CD 43). Sometime between the conversation with Luna and the publication of *Akademia Cartonera*, a switch occurred, and the houses took up the label “from the outside.” Kunin herself reaches the conclusion 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” (Kunin, AC-CD 44). This seems to be the case with *cartonera* publishing, and as such the romanticizing of their aims is a striking side effect.

The romanticized view of the *cartoneras* extends into its relationship with the general population as well as the environment of their workshops. The Sarita Cartonera manifesto states: “Sarita Cartonera tries to put Latin American literature into circulation without prejudice. Being a community project, Sarita constructs a network for voluntary interaction between writers, publishers, artists, and youth from popular sectors with one common goal: to publish books that are attractive, economical, and at a high literary level” (Sarita, AC 75). The key in this statement is the phrase “voluntary interaction.” The houses do not generally go out of their way in order to help the community; people must approach them first. The *cartoneros*, for example, have to travel to Eloísa Cartonera’s shop, No Hay Cuchillo Sin Rosas, if they wish to receive the greater payment for cardboard. The low-income citizens who wish to gain literary knowledge likewise must travel to the *cartoneras* or the nearest book-selling point.

At the same time, the more important community for the houses is between the “writers, publishers, artists and youth from popular sectors,” of which Sarita Cartonera speaks, for it is through the construction of this network that *cartonera* houses work to form a bridge for many different sectors of both the intellectual and mainstream world, combining the elite artists and the poor trash scavengers into a community for the *cartonera* family. The collaboration of artisans

and the public creates an interesting relationship and ultimately a new group of individuals to exist; the increased accessibility to books should in theory create a lower class more educated than their predecessors in the years to come. The distribution of the books, sold in shops, at art fairs, and on street corners, creates this community, developed by the shared understanding of *cartonera* texts. By spreading their works to low-income areas the houses are in the process of creating intellectual communities possessing knowledge of vanguard authors. In “The Role of the *Cartonera*,” part of Animita Cartonera’s manifesto, workshop coordinator Mauricio Mena Iturriaga demonstrates the “Madison effect” in his discussion of spreading intellectualism: “I think we can expect that the *cartonera* spirit will spread not only across the American continent but around the world. I have the unwavering hope that the imitation of the *cartonera* experience on our continent and beyond our borders will allow literature to come down, like good old Nicanor said, from Mount Olympus” (Animita, AC 98). While “Mount Olympus” truly is a great height from which to descend, Animita Cartonera is making a start. On a Peruvian Online Bookstore I browsed the prices for their Peruvian Literature section<sup>11</sup> and the prices were roughly in the range of 25 to 40 Peruvian nuevo soles per book, or about 9 to 15 US dollars<sup>12</sup> at the time of writing this thesis. The Animita Cartonera Blog listed the prices for a few of their most recent titles. All of the prices fell between 1.5 to 3 nuevo soles, or roughly the equivalent of 50 cents to 1 US dollar (“Precios de Catálogo”, Animita Cartonera). This is a significant difference in price, but whether it is drastic enough to enact great societal change, or a new community of low-income intellectuals is hard to determine this soon after its origin. Furthermore, the romanticization of *cartonera* works makes it difficult to pick out the true

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<sup>11</sup> See- <http://www.perubookstore.com/temas/Literatura-Peruana>

<sup>12</sup> All currency conversions made using the Google Finance Converter found at <http://www.google.com/finance/converter>

development of new communities among the idealizations and hopes. The next section of this chapter will go into further detail of the *cartonera* houses interactions with society and their own local communities.

### *Community and Cartonera*

The term, community, has many levels of definition. “Community” can represent many things. Raymond Williams, in his reference book *Keywords*, mentions that there are at least two general senses to the word community: it can refer to “actual social groups” as well as a “particular quality of relationship (as *incommunitas*)” (Williams, 75). For the purposes of this thesis, “community” is the most general of the terms used. A person may be a part of a community and unaware of their role. A network is a different form of community and it occurs when there is communication between different parties, often communities in themselves, such as the network Sarita Cartonera attempts to establish between “writers, publishers, artists and youth from popular sectors” (Sarita, AC 75). The different members of the community are in communication and therefore cognizant of the existence of the greater community. A “family” is a much more close-knit form of a network; the members are more closely bonded than the standard network community, and have greater cause to be in communication with one another.

The *cartoneras* relate to these different terms in a variety of ways. The most basic level of community is the cooperative and publishing house itself—the workers who help with the creation of the books. At the next level of community formation, the community represents the neighborhood in which the house is located: the neighbors, *cartoneros*, and other local citizens who impact, or are impacted by the house in some way. They may sell the house cardboard, purchase the books that are made, circulate the books to help increase literacy, or simply stop by

and have a nice chat with the workers inside. Expanding the view of “community” there is the familial network of the many *cartonera* houses in existence. This is the most tenuous of the definitions as some critics claim that this network does not truly exist, but rather was built on romanticized stories. There are now two generations to the family of *cartoneras* and Kunin states that there is confusion do to these differences in generation:

They have shared texts for publishing, but they have never had a lot of contact among themselves nor thought of themselves as a network. The newer, second generation discovered the first by reading about it in the media. News articles have described the *cartoneras* as a “phenomenon” and a network. Santa Muerte, Matapalo, La Cartonera, Katarina, Textos de Cartón, Cartonerita Solar, Canita, Nicotina, La Cabuda and Patasola were created because they wanted to “be part” of the movement whose identity has been built and described by the media. They started organizing collective activities for the “network” and establishing stronger bonds of communication. Several of the second-generation publishers share a goal of “creating networks with other *cartoneras*.” This situation is like having parents who don’t know that they have a family, and children who desperately want to be part of it (Kunin, AC-CD 43).

There was not a strict network between the *cartoneras* previously, and Kunin claims it is in fact a media creation. There are now new *cartoneras* striving to be the grand pillars of community due to the effect of media representation, and in the process they wish to create the family network. Eloísa’s openness to the creation of other *cartonera* houses was very important in the development of second-generation movement. In a type of open-source development, Eloísa remained aloof from the proliferation of other *cartonera* houses, which increased the perception of the open-armed family. The other houses in the first generation, the houses that did

occasionally share texts, promoted this idea. On the inside cover of *Corpo Porco Alma Lama*, a book by Dulcinéia Catadora, a Brazilian *cartonera* house, there are the words: “[Dulcinéia] forms part of the Latin American network of sister (or sibling) projects including Eloísa Cartonera (Argentina), Sarita Cartonera (Peru), YiYi Jambo (Paraguay), and Yerba Mala Cartonera (Bolivia) [Integra a rede latino-americana de projetos- irmãos Eloísa Cartonera (etc.)]”<sup>13</sup> Dulcinéia Catadora described the other houses as “sibling-projects” as if the houses formed a family. Dulcinéia also shares their slogan with Eloísa: “much more than books!”<sup>14</sup> In the most basic ways there exists some sharing between the houses, slogans and names.

Yet except for these explicit cases, the houses are still tangled in a mess of communication; the second-generation is still lagging in its attempts to create a network. Kunin relates the lack of knowledge sharing between the houses in her first-hand account:

I recall the opportunity when I found out that there was a new press in Ecuador and I went to Eloísa’s workshop in Argentina only to discover that they were uninformed about it. Additionally, the people from Eloísa told me that they want to publish a regional anthology of all the cardboard publishers but they have had trouble achieving this because they did not have the other publishers’ email addresses or a fluid method of contact with them. Until very recently, they did not even know what the others were publishing or about their activities. Knowing this, can one talk about a “network”?

Eloísa’s desire to create an anthology of *cartoneras* demonstrates a move by the first generation of houses to accept the media-imposed family of houses. Yet this anthology is marked by the inability to communicate, and without this basis of communication there is no network, and no

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<sup>13</sup> Translation by Professor Paulina Alberto from the University of Michigan

<sup>14</sup> Found on the inside cover of *Corpo Porco Alma Lama* and on the poster accompanying *No Hay Cuchillo sin Rosas*.

family. Therefore, the inter-house community must be reckoned as in its early stages; the desire and attempts to bring the family to fruition exist, while the communication is haphazard at best.

In fact, the strength of inter-house communications pales in comparison to the networks between each house and their own local area. One of the best physical examples of the strength between the houses and their neighborhoods is the book *Cartón y más*,<sup>15</sup> a collaboration between the social work group Basurama and Eloísa Cartonera. The book instructs on how to develop the interior community in a workplace, such as those of the *cartonera* houses. It is mainly an instructional manual on how to create a cooperative, and in this way it is trying to reach the public community of Buenos Aires in order to spread the tenets of cooperativism as sanctioned by local laws: “This publication offers useful and accessible information to foster the creation of future cooperatives among informal [*cartonero*] collectors [Esta publicación ofrece una información útil y accesible para fomentar la creación de futuras cooperativas entre recolectores informales]” (*Cartón y más*, 7). Eloísa Cartonera is therefore publishing a book that will aid in the creation of other cooperatives. In this way, Eloísa is promoting the idea of communities in the workplace; they view the method of cooperatives and the development of a workplace community as a success. Later in the text, Eloísa states the neighborhood community created them, “by the initiative of the people, neighbors, and our own workers, [por iniciativa de la gente, vecinos y trabajadores mismos]” (*Cartón y más*, 12). Eloísa links itself completely with their local community, and states a dependence on the cooperative of workers. In *Cartón y más*, Eloísa writes that they wish to work “to learn with the job a bunch of things, for example cooperativism, self-management, work for the common good, like a mobilizer of our being [para aprender con el trabajo un montón de cosas, por ejemplo el cooperativismo, la autogestión, el

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<sup>15</sup> Translated as *Cardboard and more*; translation by myself, all future translations as well, unless otherwise stated.

trabajo para un bien común, como movilizador de nuestro ser]”( *Cartón y más*, 12). Each goal they mention ties back to the idea of community in some form. Cooperatives and self-management improve the workplace community, or in the case of Eloísa, establish a community that happens to be a place of work. The common good returns to the idea of a more humanitarian effort to develop a community; they even borrow a word from Portuguese, “movilizador” or “mobilizer” in their efforts to describe the effect they want to have on humanity’s being. They wish to be a force that mobilizes their local community and enacts change. This “mobilizing” desire may stem from the romanticized images of *cartoneras* as *Cartón y más* was published in 2009, the same year as the University of Wisconsin *cartonera* conference. The “Madison Effect” may have already begun to take hold as the houses were forced to think about their roles and their future. A large portion of *Cartón y más* is devoted to a similar consideration of community and the roles of citizens. The book explicitly lists a “practical guide to creating a cooperative, [guía práctica para cooperativarse],” which includes the labor laws of Buenos Aires and how the workers can utilize them for the creation of the cooperative (*Cartón y más*, 25). This guide returns to familial idea of community stating that the ideals of cooperativism are “to work in a group for a common end, to not be egotistical, and to self-manage and organize with your own co-workers, [trabajar en grupo para un fin común, no ser egoístas y autogestionarse y organizarse con sus propios compañeros,” essentially naming the end results of cooperativism as a type of community (*Cartón y más*, 25).

#### *Evidence of Community in Cartón y más*

All throughout *Cartón y más*, there is much evidence for the different types of community, social and geographical networks, existing both in the text and the object of the

book itself. The traditional hand-painted *cartonera* cover of the *Cartón y más*<sup>16</sup> at the University of Michigan is the first hint of the work of community. The paint, a black background over blue cardboard with bright lettering, demonstrates the community of the publishing house itself in that the hand painted cover exists due to the paints provided by the cooperative. Someone in the house spent time designing and decorating the cover. The physical presence of the book itself is a testament to the success of the community. Only with the work of many hands was the book able to become published and sold, eventually reaching the special collections of the University of Michigan library system. Without the community of Eloísa Cartonera, there would be no book in my hands.

At the same time, evidence of the larger community of Buenos Aires is also apparent in the book itself. In *Imagined Communities*, author Benedict Anderson writes of these imagined connections to larger communities: “It is *imagined*<sup>17</sup> because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 6). The cardboard forming the cover of *Cartón y más* demonstrates this communion between individuals of Buenos Aires. Bits of the original product logo show through the paint on the cover. The back of the book has images of a wineglass, an umbrella, and an arrow; remnants of the cover’s shipping past: “Fragile! Do not get wet! This side up!” Most importantly on the back cover, the white block lettering “Industria Argentina” pops off the blue background, a vivid reminder of the cover’s connection to the industrial past, and the book’s connection to the current economic uncertainty. The industry of Argentina is thus intimately connected with the past and

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<sup>16</sup> I say book and not copy, for each book is unique. The cover in my possession at the time of writing will not be found elsewhere. While the interior text will be the same due to its photocopied nature, the materials used in book production are always variable.

<sup>17</sup> Anderson’s emphasis

the present of the book. In this way the book is the product of both the *cartonera* community, and the larger imagined Argentine community, as connections to both are plainly visible on the exterior of the book.

The relationship with the people of Argentina continues inside the book's construction as well. In a way the book represents a cross-section of the nation; Anderson writes that, "[a nation] is imagined as a *community*<sup>18</sup>, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 7). The organization of *Cartón y Más* demonstrates both the inequality and the "deep, horizontal comradeship" of which Anderson writes. The endpapers of the book are made up from pages of a Buenos Aires phonebook. The pages are from the "CAM" section, ending with Francisco Campo. The numbers and addresses are listed, giving a glimpse into the world of Buenos Aires, if only through the mundane repetitive listing of information. These people then surround the substance of the book, which details the problematic existence of the *cartoneros*. In this way, the everyday citizens are separated from the *cartoneros*, their pages coming before and after the account of the *cartoneros*. In society, the two groups remain apart, the citizens sleeping while the *cartoneros* collect the rejected materials of the sleepers. Yet *Cartón y más* links the everyday citizens to the work of the recyclers by the presence of their names before the text.

The text then continues this idea of a connection without communication between the two communities. "To be a *cartonero* is to be a CITIZEN, [Ser cartonero es ser CIUDADANO]" *Cartón y más* explicitly states (*Cartón y más*, 8). This simple statement brings in many political ideas at once. It emphasizes the separation between the world of the *cartoneros* and the world of

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<sup>18</sup> Anderson's emphasis

the mundane citizenry such as those exemplified in the pages of the telephone book. At the same time, the parallelism of the statement, “To be a *cartonero* is to be a CITIZEN,” eradicates any gap or social status: to be “x” is to be “y.” *Cartoneros* and citizens are the same. *Cartón y más* is claiming a social status that is not “separate but equal” but rather total equality.

Interestingly, Basurama, a group focused on the importance of trash, and Eloísa Cartonera first establish the separate status of the *cartoneros* and the “normal” public in *Cartón y más*: “In Buenos Aires, the *cartoneros* carry out an important invisible job: they work with that which the citizens discard (with the surplus of the productive system) and they revalue it [En Buenos Aires los *cartoneros* realizan una labor invisible realmente importante: trabajan con lo que los ciudadanos desechan (con lo sobrante del sistema productivo) y lo revalorizan]” (*Cartón y más*, 8). The *cartoneros* work with what the “*ciudadanos*” reject. Therefore, as the *cartoneros* accept the refuse, they are separate from the other citizens. *Cartón y más* furthers this idea, however, by saying it is this job of accepting and revaluing the refuse that places *cartoneros* on the same level. The job they carry out is “important” yet “invisible.” As their job is invisible they are unable to gain the recognition deserved. Their status is elevated, however, for the *cartoneros* are able to “revalue” the trash they pick up. They have the status and the ability to revalue something; this status is equal to that of a citizen in that they are doing good works for the city. By completing a job essential to the smooth running of society, the *cartoneros* become true, good citizens. In this way, their own *cartonero* community and the smaller, offshoot communities of the *cartonera* publishing houses are not a completely separate society, at least in the eyes of the *Cartón y más* authors; there exists a strong connection to the two worlds, just as the physicality of the book demonstrates.

The physicality of the book demonstrated to me on a personal level each houses' connection to an imagined community of fellow-readers. In *Imagined Communities* Anderson writes of the community of readers: "These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 44). Each book, through its artisanal roots, has the possibility to form a connection between the creators and this community of readers. I discovered a small piece of cardboard, leftover from the creation of the cover, caught between pages 20 and 21 of *Cartón y más*. The remnant of book production seemed like a calling card from Eloísa Cartonera; the connection between reader and maker is tangible. The craft of the creators then becomes directly involved with each reader, simply from the handmade and unique nature of each book, even if each one doesn't contain a surprise such as the scrap of cardboard. This linkage with the reader is thus a bond with a component of what Anderson refers to as "the embryo of the nationally imagined community" (Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 44).

Many small-presses are now focusing on the development of the bonds with readers and other social or geographical communities, such as the illiterate community that is excluded from Anderson's community of readers. The next chapter will describe many programs inspired by or directly organized by small-presses. These programs work to reach out into the community and strengthen the bonds between the people and the presses.

### **Social Outreach by Presses**

As evidenced by the strong connection between the *cartoneras* and the many levels of community, it is not unheard of for presses to ally themselves with the society that surrounds them. This alliance often develops into a more deliberate course of community service and social outreach by the presses. Sarita Cartonera in Peru works towards increasing literacy and their actions inspire Harvard University to create their own system of *cartonera* workshop.

The inspiration for Dzanc Books community efforts came from the founders themselves; their love of community service simply expanded in new ways. Their work is more in line with actions of other small presses and as such I turn from them towards a discussion on the actions of Small Press Distribution and the literary center Beyond Baroque.

The actions by these houses and organizations point to a strong bond with communities, something the divergently evolving houses share. The trend of social interaction exposes another complex facet of the houses, demonstrating that these small presses can be more and mean more than just publishers to their local communities.

#### *Paper Picker Press's Freirian Use of Cartonera*

Harvard University found much to be emulated in the works of the *cartonera* houses of Latin America ("Paper Picker Press- Philosophy" 1). The Peruvian *cartonera*, Sarita Cartonera, led the way with community outreach and are the direct inspiration for Harvard's Cultural Agents Initiative: "Sarita Cartonera replicated [Eloísa Cartonera] in low-literacy Lima and found that sustaining the publishing house depended on multiplying the readership. The brilliant response was to create a pedagogical program that treats literature itself as recycled material available for endlessly creative recycling" ("PPP- Philosophy" 1). This program became known

as “*Libros, un modelo para armar*” (LUMPA), or “Books, a way to create/assemble/arm” (Sommer, 136). The use of *armar* compounds the idea that this program is to help the participants create new works by assembling from the old, and in the process better equip (arm) themselves for their future. LUMPA uses texts as a creative starting point and “supplies a teachers’ manual organized along the standard classroom concepts used in Peru and much of Latin America” (Sommer, 137). The freedom of creativity and implementation of the program alongside conventional procedures are mirrored by Harvard University in their attempts to establish their own LUMPA. In this section I will examine Harvard’s Paper Picker Press while also linking the program to their other inspiration, the political pedagogy of Paolo Freire.

Created in 2007, the Paper Picker Press (PPP) is an attempt to help expand the teaching of critical thinking through the use of the arts in low-income area classrooms (“Paper Picker Press”). Students learn “higher order thinking,” essentially critical thinking through a creative collaboration with the texts they study (“PPP-Philosophy” 1). According to PPP’s Philosophy the students accomplish all this, “by exploring how the original text works; and they learn to mine the original piece for lexical, grammatical, and structural elements in order to replace and to redesign them ... Young creators develop mastery of a text so that they can refuse its ultimate authority” (“PPP-Philosophy” 1). The creativity ultimately leads not only to greater critical thinking but also to a greater grasp of authority on the part of the student. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paolo Freire proposes this practice of creative pedagogy as the most reasonable. He succinctly states: “Liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information” (“PPP-Philosophy,” 1; Freire, 79). This is the goal of PPP, to teach the students to actively think and negotiate authority with the texts they study, rather than to just passively absorb and pass on information sanctioned by the teacher.

In her article “Classroom *Cartonera*: Recycle Paper, Prose, Poetry” included in *Akademia Cartonera*, organizer of PPP Doris Sommer details sample lessons designed to achieve this level of critical thinking. The classes range in style and interaction between the students and PPP instructors, yet common to all is the importance of risk-taking and creativity: “Intervention is the theme of each activity, everything from changing the look of used cardboard to interpolating an intertext and adjusting the course of a play” (Sommer, AC 148). One example of this intervention is when students listen to a text being read out loud while they construct and design their own cardboard book covers. Afterwards they are asked to question the text, to detail what could have been changed or done differently: “Asking a question of the text also reveals that it is a product of decisions to include some details, and only suggest others... Instead of putting students on the defensive, by asking if they have understood or noticed relevant information, this activity puts the text on trial and invites participants to require more information” (Sommer, AC 145). By giving the students the power of authorship and control over the text, it opens their horizons of thinking, allowing them to reach the “higher-order” of creation (“PPP-Philosophy” 1).

In her essay “Thinking Creatively is Thinking Critically,” author Elizabeth Gruenfeld documents this “higher-order” critical thinking in the second graders she interviews. After reading *Moe McTooth: An Alley Cat’s Tale* to the children she describes their own creations of “Moe McFrankenstine,” “Frank Monster,” “Moe McJoe,” and “Joe McTooth” (Gruenfeld, 71,72,76). These creations demonstrate the children’s ownership of the text and their willingness to make any changes they deem fit. Gruenfeld presents this as education through cognition and not a transferral of information. The children do not simply repeat the name of Moe McTooth, but rather expand upon it, combining the story with other bits and pieces of their mind’s contents.

Gruenfeld gives her own spin on the purpose of the PPP program. She focuses on the resulting humanness: “PPP gives opportunities to children from economically underserved communities to participate equally and powerfully in art making and reflection as active parts of learning, civic engagement, and humanness; humanness here becomes the innate right to feel, engage, participate, and be fully alive” (Gruenfeld, 73). In this way the PPP seems to desire (at least in Gruenfeld’s eyes) to not only increase literacy or high-order thinking in children, but rather to increase their “humanness.” In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire declares humanness to be the most important asset of an individual. Oppression is related directly to the ability to be human: “An act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human” (Freire, 56). In this way, PPP becomes a counter-force to oppression with their focus on increasing the humanness of students.

Paper Picker Press manages humanness through a focus on civic and community activity. This imperative for community service can be seen in the PPP “Philosophy”: “Teachers who embrace creativity as a valued *human* faculty promote self-reliance and resourcefulness for young people who can become *active citizens*”<sup>19</sup> (“PPP-Philosophy,” 2). Creativity, an integral part of the PPP form is described as a “human faculty” relating once more to humanness, and it is when this humanness is utilized that the people become “active citizens.” There cannot be an active citizen without humanness, or creativity. Gruenfeld is confident that in regards to fostering creativity PPP is a success:

While interviews varied based on following the unique thinking, pace, and energy of each student group, there were convergences in results. Overall I found that children enjoyed the program; took ownership over stories; felt free to intervene, coauthor and cocreate at will;

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<sup>19</sup> Emphasis is mine.

used imagination broadly and empathetically; and spontaneously synthesized disparate information in creative ways (Gruenfeld, 76).

This ownership and authority of stories demonstrates a level of control over the child's life. PPP's program mirrors Freire's desire to increase man's ownership of his own knowledge: "Almost never do they realize that they, too, 'know things' they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men" (Freire, 63). PPP attempts to show students that they indeed "know things," and according to Gruenfeld they are successful. By viewing the program with a Freirian eye, it comes apparent that this success derives from PPP's avoidance of the traditional system of education.

The typical method of education eschews the control over texts and creativity of Paper Picker Press' program. Freire refers to this standard educational method as the "banking" concept of education, where students are just accounts to be filled; instead he presses for a more active role claiming this will lead to what PPP describes as humanness:

This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits... But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other (Freire, 72).

PPP agrees with the idea of creativity leading to a betterment of the person, to make them more human. Furthermore, Freire distinguishes humans as those who are the praxis of their

environment, and as such those more creatively attuned will ultimately enact more social change in the future: “The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would results from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world ... It is as transforming and creative beings that humans, in their permanent relations with reality, produce not only material goods—tangible objects— but also social institutions, ideas, and concepts” (Freire, 73, 101). Freire sees creativity and the following humanness as crucial to the development and enactment of social change. PPP would agree with these ideas as documented in their philosophy.

It is only on the more radical tenets of Freire’s claim that the PPP may deviate. Freire describes one of the issues with social change that seems contrary to a program established by Harvard University:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. The pedagogy of the oppressed, animated by authentic, humanist (not humanitarian) generosity, presents itself as a pedagogy of humankind (Freire, 54).

In this quotation Freire marks several points that he believes any pedagogy of humankind should hold. The pedagogy must not treat the oppressed as lesser individuals; it must not come from sources of oppression; the oppressed should be the sources of the pedagogy and stand as an example; and the pedagogy must not stem from humanitarian generosity. PPP has a tenuous standing among these values, as it is based at Harvard University, which can be seen as a seat of educational oppression when viewed through a Freirian lens. Furthermore, those at Harvard University represent the academic elite in the world and this draws into question whether the

aims of PPP are humanitarian in their attempts to better education, or whether they are humanist. The lives of the Harvard academics greatly differ from the poverty-stricken Boston public school students; is it possible for those involved to not see their work as humanitarian? Freire speaks of this ambiguity of roles: “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. This conversion is so radical as not to allow of ambiguous behavior. To affirm this commitment but to consider oneself the proprietor of revolutionary wisdom— which must then be given to (or imposed on) the people— is to retain the old ways” (Freire, 60-1). Freire questions the sincerity of the actions of such elite organizations, at least in regards to his view of oppression. Furthermore, the pedagogy of Freire has been so internalized in the contemporary world that it becomes difficult to distinguish when Freire’s pedagogy becomes “the old ways.”

Yet the program draws inspiration from the *cartoneras* of Latin America; in this way, PPP does in fact follow Freire’s claims. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* declares, “The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption,” and the *cartoneras* fulfill this role for the Paper Picker Press; workers within their own neighborhoods. PPP shares many of the same goals as the *cartoneras*, and may in fact be seen as a loophole in Freire’s claims, as “the distinction between systematic education, which can only be changed by political power, and educational projects, which should be carried out with the oppressed in the process of organizing them,” is broken by PPP’s hybrid role (Freire, 54). The *cartoneras*, with their role as the oppressed, do not organize PPP, but rather outsiders, or “converts” in Freire’s pedagogy, utilize their methods (Freire, 61). Simultaneously, PPP may be an example of Freire’s highest goal: “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (Freire, 44). The acceptance of *cartonera* models may

be on the road to the liberation of oppressed and oppressors, an example of “Those who authentically commit themselves to the people” (Freire, 60-1). Freire states: “Only through comradeship with the oppressed can the converts understand their characteristic ways of living and behaving...” yet it appears that an acceptance of methodology of the oppressed also functions to create converts in the pedagogy of oppression (Freire, 61).

Regardless, Paper Picker Press’ goal of the betterment of mankind demonstrates lofty ambitions inspired by a mixture of Freirian ideals, and *cartonera* goals. Like the *cartonera* book *Cartón y más*, PPP details a guide for the development of further branches of the press (“PPP-Philosophy”). Of the five guidelines they list, three can be traced back to the *cartonera* roots:

*1. A work of literature, narrative or poetry, serves as the core material to be interpreted through a variety of artistic media.*

*2. Student journals and books are made from recycled materials.* These can be used to create musical instruments too, and costumes, props, scientific equipment, etc.

3. Each session develops a creative interpretation with attention to details of vocabulary and grammar in the “original” text, treated here as recycled material.

*4. Students and instructors develop “ownership” of their artistic interventions and of the literary material.*

5. A culminating project, exhibition and/or show, displays the work of the PPP to parents and community (“PPP-Philosophy” 2-3).<sup>20</sup>

The focus on literature and then the developed “ownership” of the text is documented in the *cartonera* houses. In the *cartonera* houses, the workers tend to gain a connection with the texts they help produce. Nathaly Sáez, a worker for Animita Cartonera describes the change: “I wasn’t

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<sup>20</sup> Emphasis is mine.

into literature before coming here. Now I try to read the books right here and I like it, you know?" (Animita, AC 99). Sáez's reaction of ownership and attachment to the works is something that is attempted by PPP. PPP hopes for the students of the workshops to gain a similar informal ownership- the creation of Moe McJoes of their own. In addition to their attempts at inciting ownership, PPP adheres to the one major guideline of *cartonera* publishing- the use of recycled materials as the base of the books. The social change to humanness grows out of these five guidelines.

What does it mean that *cartonera* publishing is enacting pedagogical change, especially when only one house, Sarita Cartonera, has an extensive focus on the pedagogical aspect of publishing? This pedagogical change supports the methods of PPP; it demonstrates that inspiration lies outside the control of the original creators, and that the world is a continual recycling of methods and ideas. As the *cartoneras* creatively recycle old texts and the very materials for the books, PPP recycles the methods of the *cartoneras* and funnels creativity towards a pedagogical purpose. Both PPP and the *cartoneras* find a base in recycling and creativity, and it works.

In addition to these two core components, the other strength of similarities comes in the form of the importance of community. The *cartonera* houses thrive in the support of their communities, or as is the case of Sarita Cartonera, they try to build an environment (such as with LUMPA) in which they will thrive. PPP does not have the same deep connection with the community, as their ties to Harvard prevent the urgent fear of failure. The community does not control the fate of the Paper Picker Press; the workers do not come from the community but rather the staff of Harvard University. If PPP fails in Boston, Harvard will remain and will be able to create future community ventures, and already has in Mexico, Colombia, Puerto Rico,

and Uganda (“Paper Picker Press”). But with the Boston schooling district as a collaborator, PPP has established a strong base in the city, and in fact the city’s poor public schooling was integral to the enactment of PPP at the beginning (“Paper Picker Press”).

Pedagogical interaction with literature is the source of other houses’ work with the community as well. In the next section, much of the different social outreach actions of Dzanc Books will be described, including their work with several school districts.

### *What Dzanc Is Doing...*

Dzanc has demonstrated a strong connection to the cyber community, but they are heavily involved with communities outside of the Internet as well. The co-founders present the educationally-oriented community service acts of Dzanc as something integral to their company: “We do the charity work because we feel a responsibility and are happy to do so” (Gillis, Wickett, interview). This focus on charitable work stems from the founders. Steven Gillis established 826 Michigan,<sup>21</sup> a non-profit tutoring and writing center in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The push towards volunteering was already present, and the co-founders simply chose to unite the charitable work with the publishing house.

Interestingly, there seems to be a disconnect between the words of the co-founders and the award of the Dzanc Prize. The co-founders speak of publishing and community work as two separate entities: “As for our presence in the community, truly our charitable arm is independent from our publishing though surely it doesn’t hurt to have a well respected name in the community” (Personal Interview, Oct. 2011). The charitable arm is “independent” from the publishing aspect, yet they are done under the same name, and the Dzanc Prize relates directly to

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<sup>21</sup> See <http://826michigan.org/>

the publishing side of Dzanc as well as the charitable arm. The prize is awarded to an author who has a work in progress and an outline for a charitable program. In fact a summary is listed on the publisher's website:

“In 2007, to further its mission of fostering literary excellence, community involvement, and education, Dzanc Books created the Dzanc Prize, which provides monetary aid in the sum of \$5,000, to a writer of literary fiction. All writers applying for the Dzanc Prize must have a work-in-progress they can submit for review, and present the judges with a Community Service Program they can facilitate somewhere in the United States. Such programs may include anything deemed ‘educational’ in relation to writing. Examples would include: working with HIV patients to help them write their stories; doing a series of workshops at a drop-in youth homeless center; running writing programs in inner-city schools; or working with older citizens looking to write their memoirs” (“Dzanc Prize”).

In this case, while the community service project itself is separate from publishing (for example, there is no charity publishing of books) the charitable work of the Dzanc Prize relates back to literature and writing. For example, the 2008 winner, Kodi Scheer, worked with cancer patients, caregivers, and hospital staff to help them “find a means of expression and a way to share their experiences” (“Dzanc Prize 2008 Winner”). Literature is used to better the lives of others and in the case of Scheer's work, to strengthen the bonds between the patients, caregivers, and staff. The Dzanc Prize was established only a year after Dzanc Books opened their doors, demonstrating the importance of community work in the development of the press.

Dzanc does not limit its community involvement to the Dzanc Prize, however. Other programs have been developed and are a more continual presence in the community. In the article “Indie Innovators,” author David Hamsley mentions that, “in addition to a host of

workshops and scholarships that it sponsors, including funding five high school students to attend the Bear River Writers' Conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Dzanc underwrites a writer-in-residence program in schools in Michigan..." (Hamsley, "Indie Innovators" 71). The aim of the program is to increase literacy in schools in Michigan by placing "a professional author with an individual school or classroom, allowing them to return each week to build a relationship with students and develop their potential as fiction writers and poets" ("Writer-in-Residence"). This program affects the community of Michigan, and also works to build relations between the literary world and the everyday world. In this way, the "Writer-In-Residence" program is similar to Sarita Cartonera's attempts to network between writers and ordinary citizens. The students gain a relationship with the literary community, and are trained to enhance their skills in regards to the community.

Dzanc's networking with literary communities also extends past Michigan into an international scene with Disquiet: The Dzanc Books International Literary Program, held in Portugal. As Halmsley writes: "The goal of the conference is not only to give attendees the opportunity to work with talented writers, but also to provide the opportunity for participants to meet authors from another culture and to experience their country" (Halmsley, "Indie Innovators" 72). The networking between literary and non-literary worlds gain a multicultural edge and a variety of communities come together in the space of Disquiet. Disquiet can be seen as the Writer-In-Residence program expanded to the international level.

The programs, such as Writer-In-Residence and Disquiet, are important to the company, and as such the connections to the community are equally important. In *Indie Innovators*, co-founder Gillis declares: "As long as we can figure out a way to make our programs provide us with the funds to do the charity work that we want to do, we're just going to keep expanding. We

just need to be fiscally prudent, and hopefully more people will recognize what we're doing and support us" (Hamsley, "Indie Innovators" 72). Gillis recognizes the dependence on the community in regards to the further development of future community work by Dzanc. Just as the communities gain from Dzanc's endeavors, Dzanc's endeavors gain from the charity from the communities in turn.

This give and take between communities (literary and otherwise) and small presses are growing in popularity. Dzanc and *cartonera* publishing are not anomalies in this rising trend. We can look towards Small Press Distribution and the houses it works with to see more evidence of a strengthening community spirit.

#### *Small Press Distribution and Beyond Baroque*

Small Press Distribution (SPD) has grown by a developing community of small presses. SPD is essentially the marketing division of many small presses. The company is a non-profit wholesaler that markets and distributes the works of many small and independent presses. Their website claims that they nurture "an environment in which the literary arts are valued and sustained" ("About SPD"). This literary community works by bridging the gap between readers and writers, which "allows essential but underrepresented literary communities to participate fully in the marketplace and in the culture at large through [SPD's] book distribution, information services, and public advocacy programs" ("About SPD"). Essentially, SPD encourages networking within the literary community.

One example of this networking is the creation of Underground California. Small Press Distribution, Poets & Writers, and the California Arts Council created Underground California, "a program that brings independent publishers and independent booksellers together" (Kinsella,

“Indie” 29). Underground California works to strengthen the feeling of community between the “independent” literary cultures of California by creating a network of communication between two often estranged facets of book-selling, independent publishers and independent booksellers. The independent booksellers are able to gain greater access to independent publishers, such as those distributed by SPD, and thus the works of the publishers are able to gain more attention. Simultaneously, the program helps to bring the literary community in contact with local Californian readers: “Through Underground California, now in its second year, 39 booksellers up and down the state featured posters and shelf-talkers and held events celebrating the work of small presses in their own backyards” (Kinsella, “Indie” 29). Through Underground California’s advertisements, the California community becomes more aware of (and hopefully increases business for) the independent booksellers and publishers in their area. Underground California’s direct impact on the literary community is thus the spread of information. The program has minimal direct interaction with the public through workshops or other endeavors. For this reason, the main contribution of SPD to those outside the literary community would have to be their support of the small presses. This support allows small presses and the groups affiliated with them to spend more time and energy supporting their own local community.

One of these presses and literary centers is Beyond Baroque in Venice, California. Their press, Beyond Baroque Books, is distributed by SPD. Like Dzanc books, they focus on “emerging, overlooked, out of print, and experimental writing,” as well as other topics such as “the history and legacy of experimental and alternative writing, poetry, and the arts in Los Angeles” (“Beyond Baroque Index”). The Los Angeles community is extremely important to the imprint and the literary center itself. Beyond Baroque helps the Los Angeles community by increasing the presence of literature. In the *Publishers Weekly* article “Lit Centers: Community

By the Book,” Fred Dewey, the executive director of Beyond Baroque says: “There's so much coming together in a virtual space that it remains vitally important for people to come together in other ways. That's why our logo is a palm tree coming out of a book, not a laptop” (Rosen, “Lit Centers” 32). Beyond Baroque is a literary center eschewing the Internet as a place to unite as a community. This anti-digital sentiment is demonstrated by their basic, no-frills website<sup>22</sup> that offers only information and not social networking. Beyond Baroque’s avoidance of the digital sphere leads to a much smaller community, in this case just the Los Angeles area, rather than Underground California’s state-wide presence, yet they are able to interact with the citizens on a more intimate level.

The mission statement of Beyond Baroque reflects how the narrower focus of the community allows for greater attention to be paid within the community. Each point of the mission statement returns to the community and how to help. This concise focus prevents the center from spreading itself thin over many different communities and methods:

“Our Mission Statement:

- 1) Advancing public awareness of and involvement in contemporary literary arts;
- 2) Providing a challenging program of events, which stresses new work and diversity;
- 3) Fostering a community for the exchange of challenging ideas and nurturing of new work;
- 4) Supporting writers through readings, workshops, book sales, publications, archiving, & resources;
- 5) Encouraging collaboration and cross-fertilization between writers and those working in other artistic disciplines, and

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<sup>22</sup> [www.beyondbaroque.org](http://www.beyondbaroque.org)

6) Using the literary arts to enhance education and increase literacy” (Beyond Baroque, “About Us”).

The community in question is that of Los Angeles, and Beyond Baroque works with both the writers and non-writers within that area, or as Judith Rosen in an article entitled “Lit Centers” describes, Beyond Baroque “create[s] an audience for literature and serve[s] as an incubator for writers” (Rosen, “Lit Centers” 32). Bullet points one, two, three, and six of the Mission Statement refer to those outside the literary discipline, the consumers and partakers of literature. Bullets four and five, on the other hand, are directed to help writers, or the producers *and* partakers in literature. The Mission Statement makes clear that Beyond Baroque is a literary center for the betterment of the community.

Their attention, therefore, is only for the community and ways to help. Judith Rosen compares Beyond Baroque’s attention to those of other literary centers: “Some offer readings, films, concerts and art exhibits. Others promote citywide reading programs or make poetry and literature available through archives, bookstores and workshops. Thirty-nine-year-old Beyond Baroque does all of the above--and then some” (Rosen, “Lit Centers” 32). In this way Beyond Baroque is labeled as the best of the literary centers in the scope of their methods to help the community. Rosen points out that they even go above and beyond these normal methods, offering free workshops that even the homeless of Los Angeles can attend (Rosen, “Lit Centers” 32). Whether the homeless in fact attend these workshops is difficult to prove, but if they did the function of the programs would mirror how LUMPA works for Sarita Cartonera in Peru. One of the programs is a literacy program, a way in which to further the effect of their literary programs later on by increasing the number of literate citizens. LUMPA aims to help Sarita Cartonera by

increasing the literate members of society. Beyond Baroque's programs may be attempting something similar.

These programs seem to be working as Beyond Baroque has succeeded in becoming a cornerstone of the community through their literary efforts. In 2008, the Los Angeles City Council voted unanimously to "allow the literary nonprofit organization to remain at 681 Valencia Boulevard for the next twenty-five years" ("Finally Finalized"). This decision came after "hundreds of impassioned e-mails and phone calls to City Hall offices, as well as missives by literary bloggers," came to the support of Beyond Baroque, urging the City Council to save the non-profit's lease ("Close Call"). The loss of the lease would have removed Beyond Baroque out of its current location of Venice and thus remove the organization from the community it affects so greatly. Beyond Baroque remains, however, and will continue its influence over the community for quite a long time; Fred Dewey, Beyond Baroque director states: "It is victory for poetry and the arts. It is a victory for the preservation of history, the public realm, and the capacity for experiment. It is a rare triumph for the love of language, the written word, books, and the precious spark that community lends to all of us" ("Close Call"). Community is thus many things for Beyond Baroque and the literary world— language, the written word, history, and the ability to experiment— by seeing "community" in this way, social outreach by presses and other literary centers is not surprising at all. This interaction is the next logical step in the development of the literature they produce or circulate.

## Conclusion

The publishing industry thus meets the 21<sup>st</sup> century amidst ongoing change. The complexities of these changes are matched only by the complexities of the institutions facing the change. In “Writing the Life Postmodern,” author Curtis White details the crisis of the postmodern and in the process reveals how literary centers such as Beyond Baroque can be the key to moving past the crisis. White states: “the exemplary fiction writer of the present moment will confront postmodern problems on postmodern grounds” (White, 112). Houses such as the *cartoneras* and Dzanc Books can be seen as the postmodern grounds. The houses flow with the times and change with them as necessary. Dzanc thrives on the changes of the industry, while the *cartonera* method developed out of a national postmodern crisis. Additionally, these houses and others are not facing the post-modern crisis alone, but rather with a network of allies.

The houses’ connections with a variety of communities seem to contradict part of White’s postmodern fear. White states the main problem for literature in the postmodern age is the schism between the readers of theory, the old-school academics, and the post-punk dissidents (White, 112). White’s schism leaves an uncomfortable situation in which “the old literary underground is too “sophisticated” to speak to blunt post-punk receptors” (White, 11). White, writing in 1996, reaches a similar conclusion that these literary centers are the answer to his postmodern crisis. He states, “literary centers like Beyond Baroque in Los Angeles presently provide a place where those who have lost intellectual, cultural, social, and sexual moorings may meet not only as equals but as co-conspirators” (White, 112). White prizes the networking abilities of the houses and centers upon all else, joking that “during the next cultural crisis, perhaps we’ll all meet at Beyond Baroque...” (White, 112).

In his jesting, White has struck an important point: how does this sense of community affect the future of the houses? What will happen upon the next postmodern-digital-cultural crisis? We do not yet fully understand the complexities of these houses and their many relationships with outside communities. It is necessary to take a deeper look at the small publishing industry, for their relationships with social, geographical, or literary communities are of the utmost importance in the forecasting of the publishing world's future. "For me," White writes in his essay, "fiction has no future that is not first socially situated" (White, 112). His words seem to have a prophetic ring from when they were first put down on paper in 1996, as the houses established at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century all are socially situated. It is important that the social works of houses such as Dzanc and the *cartoneras* are watched to see how they function over the long-term, whether their complex roots will allow them to survive for long in these complex times. The press claims it is a time of natural selection for the publishing industry, and these divergently evolved houses each present their own case for survival. Furthermore, it is important to watch for programs inspired by the houses, such as Paper Picker Press at Harvard University, for it demonstrates the ways in which the houses affect people who may lie outside their closed community. The pressure of the economy on the industry and other communities are leading to the acquisition of new methods of development, and symbiotic relationships between many community programs and presses are one such example. The complex lives of these houses are far too full to be altogether encapsulated in the space of this thesis. As such, further research is necessary to not only forecast the future of the industry, but also to gain a little more ground in the ability to properly comprehend the meaning of these small presses.

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