

A **Contra** corriente

Una revista de estudios latinoamericanos

Vol. 15, Num. 3 (Spring 2018): 240-268

Dulcinéia Catadora: Cardboard Corporeality and Collective Art in Brazil

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Eloísa Cartonera and Cardboard Networks

From a long history of alternative publishing in Latin America, Eloísa Cartonera emerged in Argentina in 2003, and sparked a movement that has spread throughout South and Central America and on to Africa and Europe. The first *cartonera* emerged as a response to the debt crisis in Argentina in 2001 when the country defaulted causing the Argentine peso to plummet to a third of its value. Seemingly overnight, half of the country fell into living conditions below the poverty line, and many turned to informal work in order to survive. The *cartoneros*, people who make their living salvaging and reselling recyclable materials, became increasingly present in the streets of Buenos Aires.

With the onset of neoliberal policies, people mistrusted and rejected everything tied to the government and economic powers and saw the need to build new societal, political, and cultural models. Two such people were the Argentine poet, Washington Cucurto, and artist Javier Barilaro. Distressed by the rising number of *cartoneros* and the impossible conditions of the publishing market, Cucurto and Barilaro founded *Eloísa Cartonera*. Thirteen years later, Eloísa is still printing poetry and prose on Xeroxed paper and binding it in cardboard bought from *cartoneros* at five times the rate of the recycling

centers. The cardboard covers are hand-painted in tempera by community members, including *cartoneros*, and then sold on the streets for a minimal price, just enough to cover production costs.

The rapidly rising number of *cartoneras* suggests that these alternative publishers are challenging not only the traditional book market, but also the hegemonic economic and social structures of their countries in an unprecedented way. As *cartonera* continues to travel, it is important to follow its path in order to chart the shifts and turns in its movement. Drawing from the work of critics such as Ksenija Bilbija, Craig Epplin, and Cecilia Palmeiro, this account traces the development of an offshoot of Eloísa Cartonera, Dulcinéia Catadora, in São Paulo, Brazil. While most *cartoneras* hold their workshops in studios, Dulcinéia Catadora currently holds its workshops in São Paulo's trash and recycling centers amid piles of sorted and unsorted garbage. Dulcinéia holds weekly workshops where the *catadores* (the term for *cartoneros* in Portuguese) help make books as part of the collaboration between Dulcinéia Catadora and the Cooperglicério recycling collective. The books are sold in the center of the city by Dulcinéia members, and involve "interventions," where for example, the collective dresses in cardboard box outfits covered with *cartonera* books and recites poetry through megaphones. While Dulcinéia uses the term "interventions" to apply to their street actions, it also aptly describes the project as a whole, as the *cartonera* book explicitly recalls global market refuse, *catadores*, and the labor of book making in a workshop. The creation and distribution of Dulcinéia's *cartonera* books inverts marginalized spaces (trash centers) and hegemonic spaces (publishing industry, city center) in São Paulo. The collective's "interventions" problematize distinctions between the actor and the text, and provoke a rethinking of subjectivity and embodiment in the relationship among *catadores*, *cartonera* books, and cardboard waste.

Dulcinéia Catadora and Cooperglicério Collective

Dulcinéia Catadora was founded in 2007 by Lúcia Rosa, a sculptor, who was told that her cardboard sculptures echoed the concerns of Eloísa Cartonera. After making contact with Eloísa, Rosa collaborated with Javier Barilaro on an installation project and a *cartonera* workshop for the Biennial in Brazil (Rosa Recycling). From its inception, Dulcinéia distinguished itself from other *cartoneras* by its strong relationship with the Movimento Nacional dos Catadores de Materiais Recicláveis, which works closely with the cooperatives formed by *catadores* to protect their rights and shift the negative associations with the title "catador" and their work (Manifesto 154). Rosa had

established a relationship with Cooperglicério, the organization that oversees forty-five recycling cooperatives in the Glicério region of São Paulo, as she frequented the collectives in search of materials for her sculptures (Cooperglicério; Rosa). Like in Argentina, the number of *catadores* has risen dramatically due to the economic conditions produced by globalization, including high unemployment rates and displacement from rising housing costs.

The diary of the *catador* Carolina Maria de Jesus—titled *Quarto de Despejo (Child of the Dark)* and published in 1960—is a reminder that *catadores* were at work as early as the 1950's in Brazil. However, the majority of *catadores* joined this line of work only in the last ten to twenty years. In São Paulo alone there are an estimated 20,000 *catadores* who walk over 30 kilometers a day, pushing their carts full of recycled materials collected from dumpsters, trash bags, and the streets (Monteiro). The *catadores* are a prime example of the turn to the informal economy since the 1980's; currently, half of Brazil's workforce is now in the informal economy and 88% of them are self-employed (Rocha 145). In light of these statistics, the collaboration between Dulcinéia and Cooperglicério is an effort to call attention to the persistence of neoliberal policies in Brazil, and the need to reimagine the social and environmental destruction that global capitalism leaves in its wake.

Dulcinéia's project is also invested in the process of book creation that runs against conventional publishing channels. In South America, owning books is a privilege of the elite due to high purchasing costs as well as a market dominated by publishing conglomerates. Although there are a few hundred small publishers in Brazil, a handful of the largest corporations control the Brazilian market (Mello). Recently these larger companies have merged with one another or have sold shares to international investors such as Penguin (Mello). Books in Spanish and Portuguese languages are also published in Spain or Portugal and then shipped to Brazil (Merques 189). Following the literary "Boom" of the 1960's in Latin America, the decisions of which texts will make up the "canon" of a national literature in South America are based on the success of books in the international marketplace. In the case of Brazil, this means that Brazilian authors that are popular in Portugal, or even in translation in other countries, and are then advertised in Brazil as a best-seller amongst their national literature, as was the case with Clarice Lispector's works.

The growth of the private sector has nearly wiped out local bookstores in Brazil, replacing them with mega-bookstores in shopping malls and, for those who can afford them, e-readers and e-books. With high importation and printing costs and a

small readership, the price of books in South America remains inaccessibly high, and further discourages small publishers from taking risks on the works of new and experimental authors. In response to this scene, the *cartoneras* publish renowned texts, but specialize in iconoclastic, contemporary works, particularly those that align politically and aesthetically with the *cartonera* project. Dulcinéia has published writing and visual art from established artists such as Haroldo de Campos, Manoel de Barros, Jorge Mautner, and Paulo Bruscky, as well as contemporary authors such as Xico Sá, Laerte, Ronaldo Bressane, Sérgio Vaz, Andréa Del Fuego, and Bruna Beber. Best-selling authors are published alongside *catadores*, and their books are sold for the same price. In their manifesto, Dulcinéia Catadora describes how they do not consider themselves to be a traditional publisher, because their process and their “product” operate outside the conventional market:

Our books are different from those conventionally published. They have nothing to do with presses or market distribution. Making a profit is not our goal. We don't follow the regulations applied to the operation of a publishing house. We are not a legally constituted entity. We do not exist as a trading entity according to the laws of our country. (Manifesto 155)

Dulcinéia counters the traditional publishing industry, which selects manuscripts based on how much profit is expected in return. Following this logic, only the most renowned authors and popular genres (such as self-help) are seen as marketable. The manifesto is also explicit in relaying their independence from donations or NGOs: “Our purpose has nothing to do with charity; or with communitarian work; we do not depend on the patronage of public bodies or private entities” (Manifesto 153). Sustainability is at the center of Dulcinéia’s mission, and this includes relying only on the small profits they make from selling their books, presentation-workshops at fairs, and occasional installation projects. Their existence outside of the realm of NGOs is a rejection of the ways these organizations rely on support and structures that reiterate neoliberal practices, particularly in their need to quantify data and measure productivity in order to receive grants and donations. It is also essential that Dulcinéia’s work is disassociated from charity because of their collaboration with *catadores* and other marginalized people. The *catadores* are paid for their cardboard and for their time painting covers, assembling books, and selling books. Working for Dulcinéia is a job that augments the wages of the *catadores*, an important distinction because the collective encourages respect for *catadores* as working members of society and does not want to add to the misconceptions of the profession. The *catadores* are also involved in all aspects of the book process in

Dulcinéia, making the movement's namesake the true center of the collective in a way that most of the other *cartoneiras* do not.

Wasteland Workshop

Dulcinéia Catadora has left behind the traditional studio workspace to hold their workshops in the recycling cooperatives, the places where the *catadores* sort through the recyclable materials. The cooperatives are located in Baixada do Glicério in the Liberdade neighborhood in a central sector of São Paulo. Baixada do Glicério is a divided space, as it is in many ways the bureaucratic center of São Paulo, located in the First Municipal Zone, First Electoral Zone, and First Police District. It is also the home of mostly poor and working-class Brazilians, and many of the buildings have fallen into disrepair. Because of the large number of precarious settlements and the presence of the Cooperglicério centers, it has also gained a reputation as a trash barrio. People frequently pass through Baixada do Glicério, for business purposes or driving the six-lane highway that branches into other sections of the city, but they avoid the spaces below the raised roads, the deserted buildings, and desolate lots.



Fig. 1 Dulcinéia Catadora Workshop. Image courtesy of Dulcinéia Catadora.

Cartonera books are brought to life in one of the commonly avoided areas of Baixada do Glicério. Among the putrid stench of garbage, cardboard destined for shredding is rescued and given a new purpose. Dulcinéia holds its workshops on Saturdays, the one day of the week most *catadores* take off from collecting, and occasionally on weeknight evenings when a group of members can gather to make

books (Rosa). The participants in the workshop vary, but it often includes artists, authors, *catadores*, curious visitors, and even the children of the *catadores*. There is no hierarchy among the participants or privileging of any task in the book-making process. Each book is hand-painted without instructions or training. Often times, people paint while listening to the work being read aloud, painting what they hear. This recalls the Cuban cigar shops where cigar rollers had a reader to whom they listened while they worked. In the case of Dulcinéia, the text becomes an oral story, which is then interpreted and depicted by the listener as an image. All of the painted covers, and “all contributions are valued equally” (Manifesto 155). The covers include the title and the author of the book, but are never signed by the artist—every book is attributed to the work of the collective as a whole. Everyone in the workshop is always referred to as a “participant”; there are no labels or job titles to distinguish an author from the young daughter of a *catador*.

The workshop participant resists Foucault’s *homoeconomicus*, or economic man, the entrepreneur who is “an entrepreneur of himself” (226). *Homoeconomicus* is a salaried or waged worker who is considered to be “human capital” and is paid according to how much he has invested in himself, that is in his skills (Foucault 265). On the contrary, Dulcinéia’s workshop participant needs no formal training or skill set, instead she is asked to paint spontaneously. Value exists within her perception and experience of the world, and in the way she wants to paint. The collective also defies the element of competition, which insists that *homoeconomicus*, like all states and institutions, must operate under competition and a driven self-interest in order to maximize profits (Foucault 12). Because all members of the cooperative receive the same wages, and there is no hierarchy of positions, competition is therefore not necessary among participants.

Dulcinéia is also not interested in competing in the book publishing market, as it sees itself providing that which the market does not—affordable, contemporary, avant-garde literature. The cooperative disrupts the for-profit model in that it generates enough money simply to sustain itself, to continue paying participants and create the newest editions of books. Wendy Brown writes “The model neoliberal citizen is one who strategizes for her or himself among various social, political, and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options” (Brown 43). Dulcinéia runs against this “model neoliberal citizen” as it epitomizes collaborative effort which has the intention of altering the physical and social environment, particularly relationships among people across diverse backgrounds. The collective

believes that “knowledge... and meanings are built up collectively” in the process of making books, which is as important as the book (the product) (Manifesto 155).

The learning that takes place in the workshop, what Dulcinéia refers to as “collective knowledge and meaning,” is, like a classroom, a space where thoughts and ideas are exchanged, but do not entail producing a physical product. Although a book is created, the book itself does not encompass the full range of meanings and learning that takes place in the workshop. Referring to the members of Dulcinéia as participants rather than workers emphasizes the act of taking part and sharing an experience beyond the making of a book. In this way, the workshop is a reflection of the ideas contained in Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as everyone is seen as both a student and a teacher in an open dialogue. Just as Freire did not believe that students should have their heads filled with the knowledge the teacher thought was important, the artists and authors at Dulcinéia do not instruct in how to create art. Augusto Boal’s translation of Freire’s theories in *Theater of the Oppressed* also resonates with Dulcinéia’s workshop as Boal overturns the divisions between actor and spectator, turning everyone into a participant. The theater exercises, like Dulcinéia’s workshop, transform everyone into a participant who is asked to analyze the reality around them and take action in a “rehearsal of revolution” (Boal 119). Like Freire and Boal, Dulcinéia creates a space for historically-oppressed people to respond to the social, political, and economic conditions of oppression through dialogue and book making. Seen through Boal’s theater, *cartonera* publishing “seeks to ‘stage,’ through a series of elaborate and somewhat informal scenes, the construction of social life itself” (Epplin, “Theory”).

The recycling centers are often abandoned lots or buildings taken up by the cooperative as a space for sorting collected materials. It is also where the *catadores* bring their filled carts to receive payment for what they have collected. Cooperglicério, like Dulcinéia, is a collective that receives no support from the state. The recycling system in Brazil was created by, and is maintained through, the efforts of *catadores* and the associations they have developed. The *catadores* provide a valuable service to the city, helping to clean the streets, reduce the amount of waste that ends up in landfills, and create recycling related jobs. It is estimated that in São Paulo alone, 20,000 *catadores* pull 8,000 kilos of recyclable material from the garbage on a daily basis (Monteiro). Cooperglicério is representative of the ways in which people have adapted to conditions without the intervention of the state or private sector, yet because they receive no assistance, the *catadores* are engaged in constant battles to defend themselves from laws that prohibit their work and threaten their livelihood. This is mainly done through state

regulations, often provoked by residents or business owners, which prohibit *catadores* from working in certain sectors of the city (Monteiro).

By locating the workshop in the recycling center, Dulcinéia also joins the peripheral cultural movements in Brazil, from literature to hip hop, which promote “cultural actions by artists from the periphery for the periphery”¹ (Buarque 92). However, Dulcinéia also bridges the divide between periphery and center by bringing renowned authors, artists, and their work into the recycling centers, or rather, down to them below the raised highways. This is not an imposition of dominant culture onto the other, but rather a democratization of literature, making books that are an integral part of Brazil’s education systems available to people who often are denied them. Many Brazilians who live in poverty must work to support themselves and their families and cannot attend school; however, *catadores* are often literate. Illiteracy in Brazil is a persistent problem, but it has consistently declined over the past ten years, particularly in urban areas such as São Paulo where the illiteracy rate is around 4%, compared with 9.6% in rest of the country (Leite 70). The presence of literature and art in the recycling centers encourages its presence and dissemination in the periphery and challenges the notion that literature is not valued by *catadores* due to the misconception that they are illiterate.

Holding the workshop in the recycling center allows for more *catadores* to participate while also reimagining the space. The recycling center and Dulcinéia’s workshops in that space are “the opening of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted, where a connection is made between having a part and having no part” (Rancière 36). Outside of the recycling centers, the *catadores* are seen as scavengers or bums. Very few people understand the work of the *catadores*, as their work is not run or endorsed by the state or corporations. The “subject space” of the recycling center-workshop, becomes for them a place for organizing, working, and creating, which validates their presence and their work. The *catadores* also create an “account” by writing or painting, which further validates their subjectivity and renders them countable.

The work of the *catador* is mobile as he walks throughout the streets gathering recyclable materials. Just as the *catador* has no office, Dulcinéia has no publishing house, but rather sets up workshops in unexpected places—the steps of a favela, a plaza, or most commonly, in the recycling centers themselves. The itinerant workshop follows

¹ “[A]ções culturais de artistas da periferia para a periferia” (Buarque 92). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

the winding path of the *catador* in his daily work, and it is also representative of the precarity of labor in neoliberal times. While the lack of a permanent workspace has appeal in its autonomy and spontaneity, it is contingent with the increase in work-from-home and informal labor conditions.

Because Dulcinéia buys cardboard at five times the amount of the recycling center, their transactions in the center show how the work of the *catadores* is undervalued by Brazilian society, particularly on the part of the companies that buy their materials. The recycling centers pay very little, because they in turn are underpaid by the large processing plants that reap the most profits. Dulcinéia's presence affirms the importance of *catadores*, and also encourages the pride that many of them take in their work, as demonstrated in the documentary "Wasteland" (2010), which features the stories of several *catadores* working in a landfill in Rio de Janeiro. While the *catadores* report that they do not enjoy their work, many of them take pride in the fact that they are helping protect the environment and that they earn money in a job that they find respectable ("Wasteland"). The making of the *cartonera* books invigorates this pride, and allows for the transformation of trash into art by the people who have given cardboard value as something other than trash. In the workshop, the recycling center becomes an art studio and a poetry reading, and while these are normally associated with "high" art from the center, Dulcinéia relocates them to the periphery, aligning their aesthetic with their practice.

Cardboard Corpus

Born beneath São Paulo's raised highways, *cartonera* books are proof that the garbage that people "disappear" to the margins does not actually disappear. The Xeroxed pages of prose and poetry are printed on recycled paper, and the cardboard covers carry with them a history of industrialized society and the circulation of goods. While painting the covers, the workshop participants at times incorporate the markings on the cardboard into their cover design, and at others paint over it. Either way, the covers are a constant reminder of the ever-rising tide of consumer trash, which is burned, buried, and tossed into the oceans in hopes of erasing its presence and of liberating humans from the visual reminder of their excessive consumption. In this way, *cartonera* books embody that which society tries to forget, they become an object-body that remains: "This body, given to performance, is here engaged with disappearance chiasmically—not only disappearing but resiliently eruptive, remaining through performance like so many ghosts at the door marked "disappeared" (Schneider 102).

Through its performance as a book cover, the cardboard constantly recalls its past as a box, returning as a specter of refuse. This history can be further considered through the title of Schneider's book *Performing Remains*, which relies on the turns of the words 'performing' and 'remains', both of which lead to a better understanding of *cartonera* books as well. *Performing Remains* points to the act of performing remains, performing that which is left behind, and also declares that performance itself is something that remains rather than disappears. "Remains" is both a verb and a noun, that which continues in the same state or the same place, and that which is left behind or a corpse. The *cartonera* book is both cardboard remains (a corpse) and a corpus, a collection of writings. Insofar as it reiterates its trajectory as a byproduct even in its new purpose as a book cover, the *cartonera* book performs cardboard remains, the refuse of capitalism. Performance remains or stays present, in the *cartonera* book as well. The daily, repeated action of the *catador* pulling out a piece of cardboard is the action that defines his work as a *catador*. If we consider this repeated action as a performance, it is one that remains in the cardboard cover, as it is always marked by its rescue from the trash. The act of holding a *cartonera* book always recalls the many hands that have touched the cardboard, the specters of hands and machines that first made the cardboard, stamped it with words and images, shipped it filled with goods, discarded it, picked it from the trash, and painted it.

As I have already begun to show, *cartonera* books conflate the archive and the repertoire, undoing a binary relationship between them. In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor explores how "writing has paradoxically come to stand in for and against embodiment" (16), opposing writing and text with the embodied and the performative. If the two were mutually exclusive, which I don't believe they are, it would be hard to situate *cartonera* on one side. The *cartonera* books problematize the notion that the written text is relegated to the archive and, because of this, cannot be part of the repertoire:

Even though the relationship between the archive and the repertoire is not by definition antagonistic or oppositional, written documents have repeatedly announced the disappearance of the performance practices involved in mnemonic transmission. Writing has served as a strategy for repudiating and foreclosing the very embodiedness it claims to describe. (Taylor 36)

If performance disappears, then that which is archiveable (the text), is what remains present; however, the *cartonera* book remains through performance while it is also ephemeral. Cardboard contains acids that cause it to disintegrate over time, and because the *cartonera* books have a hand-stitched binding, once the cardboard falls apart, the pages will also detach, leaving the book in pieces. They are books with an expiration

date, unless they are preserved. Today, many of the *cartonera* books are collected by university libraries to be preserved and held in special collections, where they are archived and accessible to an elite few. Most of the *cartonera* books, fortunately, continue to change hands in Latin America, maintaining their transient quality which rejects the traditional archive space. The transience of the cardboard book is also troublesome; however, in that the writings of lesser-known authors, if not published in subsequent editions, they may disappear along with their precarious bindings.

Cartonera books further complicate the archive and the repertoire through the belief that no book repeats itself, that each hand-painted book reflects an individual expression and interpretation. This is also true of the materials, since the cardboard and its markings always bring out a different story and have a different texture. At times, the idea that the books are not copies of one another carries over to the texts themselves. For example, the Paraguayan poet Douglas Diegues has published his collection of poems *El astronauta paraguayo* three times, through different *cartoneras* in Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil, and each time he has published an altered proto-type of the poems. Through this, *cartonera* shows itself to be concerned with the “embodied act” of writing and painting as well as the performativity of discourse, which can be written and re-written, or painted and re-painted depending on the context (Schneider 107). Taylor suggests that, “As opposed to the supposedly stable objects in the archive, the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning” (20). While most texts are viewed as the “stable objects in the archive”, *cartonera* on the other hand “keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning” through its covers, which reveal multiple meanings and interpretations of a text. In this way, the *cartonera* books recall the individual artist who painted the cover in contrast to the mass production of books where one copy is indistinguishable from the next, and where the labor of the worker is erased.

As an alternative book, the *cartonera* book dialogues with a long tradition of disseminating literature outside the confines of the publishing market. Due to the inaccessibility of books for most people, Brazilians, like all Latin American countries, have developed innovative ways of sharing knowledge. The *cartonera* books consciously work within this tradition, as Dulcinéia explains in their manifesto:

Some of the Dulcinéia Catadora books have woodcut engravings on the front page. They are not reproductions, they are xylographs, made one at a time. These are included because xylography is a popular language, frequently used in Brazil, especially in the Northeast, where *cordel* (pamphlet) literature is alive and well. The *cordel* generally consists of stanzas with six rhyming lines. It

records spontaneous oral creation, highly valued by everyday people. The genre includes a variety of themes: daily occurrences, newspaper articles, political measures, and even Brazilian history... These books are sold in popular fairs or in the streets by their authors, who engage in a dialogue with the public. (156-157)

The example of *cordel* literature resonates with Dulcinéia's project because of the spontaneous creation of art that engages with the public both as a piece of literature and through its interactive selling in the streets. *Cordel* literature also oscillates between oral and written storytelling, as the lines begin as improvisational oral rhymes that are recorded and then performed again while they are sold. While *cartonera* literature most often begins in written form, through Dulcinéia's workshops and the selling of the books in the streets, the works are transmitted orally. These instances of oral transmission in popular culture follow the traditions of Native and Afro-Brazilian cultures, as well as the use of oral storytelling and games among lower classes in Brazil. The *cartonera* books also echo the use of scrap material to make books during the dictatorship, when many authors could not be published due to censorship. In order to distribute their works, many writers made their own books using materials and processes similar to those of the *cartoneras*.

The *cartoneras* are also representative of the popular and periphery literatures, both contemporary and traditional, which creatively distribute reading materials of all kinds to the public. These range from the pages inserted into plastic coverings on the back of bus seats, to more recent "poesia no ar" ("poetry in the air") in the south of São Paulo, where writers attach poetry to balloons and release them over the city (Buarque 92). Increasingly, literature is also shared through online platforms such as writer's blogs and websites. Furthering their celebration of open source and copyleft culture, several *cartoneras* now have digital books available online. Dulcinéia's book *De Lá pra cá, de cá pra lá*, made in collaboration with the residents of the Pedro Lisa neighborhood in Rio de Janeiro, is available in *cartonera* and online as a downloadable pdf. Either via pixels or painted covers, the *cartonera* books affirm open access to literature beyond the bookstore shelf.

Book Dissemination as Urban Intervention

As a literature of resistance, Dulcinéia *cartonera* books are sold in the streets, not in the privatized and exclusive space of the bookstore. Although the books are printed with the permission of the authors, they take on the forbidden airs of the pirated

DVDs and other street goods sold around them, giving a new attraction to literature. *Cartonera* books are not only sold in the street by Dulcinéia members, but also involve “interventions” where the collective dresses in cardboard box outfits covered with *cartonera* books. The cardboard is cut to fit over the head of the participant and worn like a coat. After it is painted, the *cartonera* books are attached in rows onto the coat with tape, allowing them to be removed when purchased. Once the participants are dressed in their cardboard outfits, they walk about the streets and plazas of the downtown São Paulo area, many times with a megaphone through which they recite the poetry or prose of one of the *cartonera* authors. All of Dulcinéia’s members are invited to help sell the books, and they receive payment for their work. When asked to describe Dulcinéia’s approach to making artwork, Rosa focuses on the interventions, saying

We act as a collective, performing urban interventions. We go to the street with the cardboard books, always with the *catadores*. This demonstrates an active artistic posture, of being present in public space, and not locked up in a white cube. We want to be troublesome, to force the visibility of something that people pretend every day not to see, to speak about inequalities. That’s why we work with cardboard and *catadores*. (Rosa Recycling)

For Rosa, the act of selling the books is both a performance and a political intervention, one which brings visibility to the social and economic inequalities that are ignored in dominant ideologies and the center of the city. Dulcinéia’s interventions illustrate a Rancièrian relationship between art and politics in that they occur when established distributions of sensibility are contested and reworked.



Fig. 2 Street intervention. Image courtesy of Dulcinéia Catadora.

For Rancière, “The specificity of art consists in bringing about a reframing of material and symbolic space” through disruptions of dominant orders, in the same way that “politics comes about solely through interruption” (*Disagreement* 21).

Dulcinéia’s interventions present a complex layering of the *catador* dressed in cardboard covered in *cartonera* books. This flies in the face of the “white cube” of the art world, creating an aesthetic from trash, which asserts Dulcinéia’s rejection of the autonomy of art in favor of art connected to “life and human relationships” in “social, political and economic contexts” (Manifesto 153). The layers of cardboard reflect the inextricable relationship of the *catador* to cardboard and other recycled materials. By dressing in cardboard, the *catador* recalls the precarity of her housing in the shantytown, which is made of gathered waste materials such as metal sheeting, cloth, plastic, and cardboard. Their livelihood also depends on sorting recyclables; a job which, as several *catadores* have noted, has trained their eyes to see salvageable material in the world (“Wasteland”). In this way, the outfits recall the global capitalist conditions that have led to excessive trash, high unemployment, and a growing number of shantytowns, correlations that define the life and art of the Dulcinéia *catador*. The *catador*’s intervention “challenges our understanding of what is properly within the aesthetic sphere and what is heteronomously located outside of it” as she conflates the realms of social practice and relational aesthetics (Jackson 29). Following Jackson’s exploration of the structures of support behind art practices in *Social Works*, “the Art/Life discourse has a different traction” (29) when the *catador* participates in Dulcinéia’s interventions, because her presence brings to the forefront the recycling services and structures the *catadores* provide.

The urban interventions and cardboard costumes bring to mind the centrality of unconventional performance, and the rejection of bourgeoisie materialism and high art in the avant-garde movement Dada. Although Hugo Ball’s 1916 sound poetry performance dressed in a cardboard suit, or Michel Duchamp’s readymade objects of salvaged materials overlap with Dulcinéia’s project, the eccentric Baroness Elsa might provide the most intriguing comparison. Poet, performance artist, and sculptor, the Baroness Elsa was a part of the New York Dada scene in the mid-1910’s. Considered eccentric even by her Dada contemporaries, she consistently blurred boundaries between art and life and art and the body. Working with found and stolen objects, the Baroness created assemblage art sculptures predating those of Michel Duchamp and dressed in found object costumes she wore down Fifth Avenue. She used teaspoons as earrings, postage stamps as rouge, and donned necklaces of tea infusers and a birdcage

with a live canary. Following the invention of the bra, in 1913, she fashioned her own out of soup cans. The Baroness staged her body as a site of artistic contestation of gender norms and the mechanization and commercialization of the female form in art through her unconventional use of industrial and everyday objects (Gammel 392). Transforming her body into a work of living art, the Baroness interrupted the flow of daily life with her costumed perambulations much in the way that Dulcinéia's participants do as they circulate through the streets. Yet the Baroness and other analogous examples from Dada and interventionist art reveal a tendency to produce art individually, even if the performance gains followers or is considered part of a larger movement. In this way, Dulcinéia and the *cartoneiras* diverge from many historical art interventions through their collective participation, which is not only performed as a group but also under the name of the *catadora* and cooperativas cooperatives.

Dulcinéia's interventions also encourage further exploration of the conflation of the archive and the repertoire through the *catadores'* embodiment of cardboard and the *cartonera* books. The interventions disrupt the systems and structures of power that Rancière calls "the police":

the order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (29)

The center of the city has a contentious relationship with the *catadores*, and in several places, laws have been passed prohibiting them from collecting or bringing their carts into certain areas (Monteiro). This is not because the city has established a recycling system to take the place of the *catadores*, but instead demonstrates São Paulo's policing measures.

The *catadores* disturb the visual and olfactory order of the city center, and their "activity" is seen as indistinguishable from that of a dumpster-diver rummaging for food. Their labor is not seen as work in the eyes of the police or, as its banning in certain areas suggests, it is equated with illicit work, despite the shared benefits of recycling. The *catador*, like the *cartonera* book, enters the streets in which *catadores* are forbidden to collect, the streets that deny the right to their presence. As Derrida notes in *Archive Fever*, the word "archive" is derived from the Greek *arkeion*, which is a house, but also "the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*," who "have the power to interpret the archives" and to "call on or impose the law" (2). By entering the streets

where the state has forbidden them and society rejects them, the *catadores* stage a break-in into the policing house of the archive that refuses them. In the streets, the *catadores* offer up the *cartonera* book to the house of the archive; at times it is their own words written in the text, or that of another *catador*. Their voices and their books fill the street with their poetry and prose, words that the police and the archive have always reduced to noise. The interventions show that “performance challenges loss” and reveals “the missed encounter—the reverberations of the overlooked, the missed, the repressed, the seemingly forgotten” (Schneider 102). The *catadores* and *cartonera*’s words affirm their presence in the space at the same time they awaken the passer-by to “the missed encounters” with marginalized people and their stories.

The bright cape-like costumes constructed and worn by Dulcinéia during their interventions resonate with the outfits of salvaged material created by Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica in the 1960’s. The *parangolés* are wearable capes, banners, and tents made from layers of painted fabrics, tarps, ropes and other materials. Oiticica created the *parangolé* series while living and studying samba in Mangueira, one of Rio de Janeiro’s oldest favela neighborhoods. The *parangolé* draws on the resourceful use of discarded items in the Mangueira community and was designed to be worn while dancing. The combination of the fabrics and movement was, for Oiticica, part of what he called his “search for the infinite dimension of colour as it relates to structure, space, and time” (Barnitz 225). Coming to see samba as central in shaping the relationships of Mangueira’s inhabitants to one another and the world, the series shows Oiticica’s crucial turn to lived experiences (*vivências*) in his work (Barnitz 225). *Parangolé* translates roughly to “agitation” or “an animated situation,” an aim shared by Dulcinéia’s urban interventions. Some of the *parangolés* were made for specific individuals and carried written messages related to their lives such as “Of adversity we live,” “We are hungry,” or “I embody revolt” (Barnitz 225). Through his direct involvement with a minority community and a celebration of everyday materials in a performative, “anti-art” project, Oiticica’s *parangolés* are a clear precursor to the *catadora*.

The *parangolés* and Dulcinéia’s cardboard costumes also recall Brazil’s carnival and a samba aesthetic. Through the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, Schechner describes festivals and carnivals as “comic theatrical events” during which people fill the streets and wear masks in part to disguise or exaggerate themselves, but also to draw out the complexities of individuals (197). The *catador* covered in cardboard literalizes society’s perception of her as “trash” by parading through the streets in it. At the same time, she critiques this view and reveals her multiplicity through the cardboard trash transformed

into books, and herself (as *catador*) into a performing poet. The interventions do not employ farce or parody as in the carnival, but their costumes and books do relay playfulness in their opposition. Dulcinéia's costumes echo the use of a disguise to engage in transgressive behavior, in this case, a movement into the center of the city. The vibrant presence of the *catadores* reminds the passer-by of a person relocated through carnivalesque activities, yet in this case, it is out of the pre-established time for the event. In this way, the *catador* disrupts the imposed order of the space, and simultaneously questions carnival's ritual and temporary inverted social order.

Beyond the aims of dissemination, Dulcinéia's interventions at times engage performance which directly opens a conversation with the public through call and response. In one form of intervention, this is done by circulating in various locations such as bus stops, street corners, and kiosks and asking passerbys a question such as "O que te toca?" The turns of the verb "tocar" could provoke a plethora of meanings including to touch, move forward, motivate, interest, or relate to. The participant could interpret the question in several ways such as what touches you (physically), what moves you to take action, what motivates you, or what speaks to you? (Rosa, Interventions). People write their response to the question in a blank *cartonera* book attached to the coat of the Dulcinéia member. This form of intervention strives to "provoke disruptions in reality, making space for individuals keen to rebuild their subjectivity" while creating "room for critical reflection" (Manifesto 156). As engaged performances, the interventions bring together elements of the visual arts and theater in a juxtaposition of real and imagined space. Read through Boal's *Theater of the Oppressed*, the passerby becomes a spect-actor of sorts who is given the choice to interpret and respond to a question as she wants (Cohen-Cruz, *Engaging*, 62). The encounter of the costumed *catador* and the passerby also echoes Boal's use of intervening in scenes, where every spect-actor can participate and engage with the situation of another person (*Engaging* 46).

When the passerby is handed a pen following the question, she produces a spontaneous, embodied response through writing, which also physically marks the body (the coat) of the *catador*. For Rancière, the practice of art is concerned with "bodily positions and movements" (*Politics of Aesthetics* 19), working in, on, and through the corporeal. The act of physically touching the *catador* and marking her with a response opens a space for the passerby to rethink the ways in which she touches and marks the bodies of others, and how this is done to her. It is also essential that the interventions

are improvisational; the members propose the question at random to people in the streets, and do not lead anyone to interpret the question in any particular way.



Fig. 3 A participant writes a response during a street intervention.
Image courtesy of Dulcinéia Catadora.



Fig. 4 A street intervention performance in São Paulo.
Image courtesy of Dulcinéia Catadora.

The unexpected disruption of daily life in the street also challenges the “continuous control... exercised to preserve property and the certain code of behavior that is followed in a private space” (Rosa Recycling), which inevitably seeps into the public space of the street. The members seek an alternative reaction from people trained to view art, trash, and the *catador* in a particular context. In the private space of a museum, the *catador* and their “trash” art risk fetishization by the spectator who looks *at* them. On the contrary, the streets enable encounters that force people to confront their perceptions of *catadores*, art, and trash outside a designated space and a planned time which inevitably structure the passerby’s response.

The written responses to the “O que te toca?” intervention displayed diverse interpretations of the question, some of which Rosa shared with me through our e-mail interview. Some responses went to the physical side of the question, such as Marcos

dos Santos, who wrote “A hand touches me” (“A mão me toca”), or Maria, who wrote “Hunger” (“Fome”), although the latter could also refer to an issue that concerns her. The interactions with the *catadores* provoked responses related to social issues such as Manoel Sanca’s “Violence, social inequalities” (“Violência, desigualdade social”) and Maria’s “The hunger, misery and suffering of people living in streets” (“A fome, a miséria e o sofrimento das pessoas nas ruas”). Other responses were personal, relating to unrequited love, lying, and the relationship a mother has with her children. The encounter with the *catadores* also led to responses describing how art moves people, such as Manoel’s humorous line: “Rap is coming for my swag (“O rapa vem tomar a minha mercadoria”). The range of responses demonstrates how the intervention formulated what Bogad calls a “tactical carnival,” which goes beyond participation to create interactions which are “a dialogue and a dialect not only between individual[s]... but between the modes of occupying space and opening space” (57). The blank *cartonera* book opens up a forum-space where every person in the street has the opportunity to record their perspective and all of them are considered valuable. While this inversion of social order and space is utopic, Dulcinéia does not categorize their work as such (Manifesto 158), but rather acknowledges that the act of questioning and reimagining through brief encounters has the potential to ripple outward.

Participatory Poetics

Dulcinéia’s members receive suggestions and requests for publication while also seeking new artists to publish in *cartonera*. The collective’s catalog distinguishes itself from other *cartoneras* through the publication of books of visual art, photography, and art-objects. The visual art books feature the work of artists such as Maria Diertrich, a *catedora* and photographer. Dulcinéia’s catalog also includes works created in collaboration with favela communities and social justice groups. In 2016, Dulcinéia published two books with the residents of Hotel Cambridge, an abandoned building in São Paulo occupied by people without permanent housing. *Residência Ocupação Cambridge/Occupy Cambridge Residency* is a collection of poetry, photography, drawings, and interviews compiled by artist-in-residence Ícaro Lira and residents of the building. A second book, *Vocabulário Vivido/Lived Vocabulary*, presents words central to the fight for housing rights, redefined by the occupation’s residents.

While many of the founders of *cartoneras* are poets, Dulcinéia also writes and publishes art and literature as a collective. An analysis of a few poems published by Dulcinéia help illuminate the practices of social and collective art in their own work as

well as the broader contemporary movement of peripheral art in Brazil. Over the course of several workshops with Dulcinéia members in 2009, the group created a series of what they call “visual poems,” published together as *Pluresia*, a neologism of “plural” and “poetry”. In an introductory note to *Pluresia*, Dulcineia describes the “visual poems” as reflective of the collective’s larger project, which entails the “exchanges, interactions, readings, everything contributed to the process of creation and the collective construction of meaning”² (3). The varied poems extend from the concrete poetry tradition in Brazil and include photographs of small objects such as clothes pins and popsicle sticks arranged into designs and letters to form short poems. Other poems are playful mixes of hand-drawn and typed letters placed to create layered meanings through wordplay and the formation of a larger graphic design.

The mixing of genres captured by the visual poems follows the tendency of the Brazilian concrete artists of the 1950’s to cross boundaries between the arts, creating visual poetry with attributes of sculpture, and art objects from letters. Dulcinéia’s creation of concrete poems distinguishes them from the other *cartoneiras* in that they not only have published the earlier works of founding concrete writers such as Haroldo de Campos, but collectively produce new art in this tradition. Reaching further into the history of the Latin American vanguard, the visual poems echo the turns of phrase, neologisms, and experimentation with sound, image, and language in Oliveira Girondo and Vicente Huidobro’s calligrams of the 1920’s.

Two of the poems are of particular interest in relation to Dulcinéia’s aesthetic and social project as the participants positioned their bodies to create letters, which were then photographed from an aerial view, making their bodies legible as words. The poems are both untitled, opening further space for interpretation of the bodies as letters and words. In earlier concrete poems, words become objects and objects become words (Price 172), whereas in these examples, words become bodies and bodies become words. As Rachel Price argues, concrete and neoconcrete poetics centered on the void in order to explore the subject/object relationship, such as in Lygia Clark’s relational objects or Augusto de Campos’s poems. However, Dulcinéia’s visual poems emphasize the shift in contemporary poetics from a preoccupation with the individual artist and a universalized subject/object divide to collective art practices, as well as the particularities of local space and difference.

² “trocas, interações, leituras, tudo contribuiu para o processo de criação e construção coletiva de significados.”

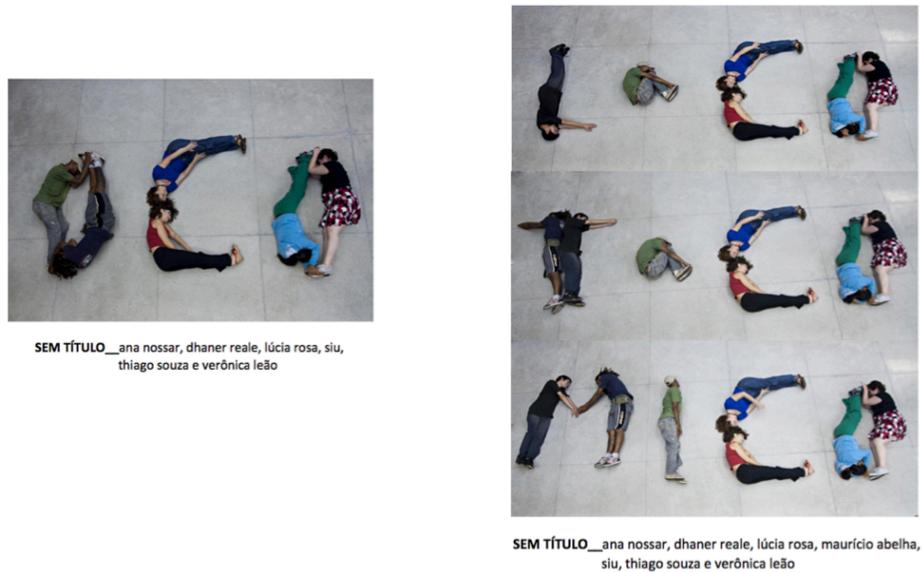


Fig. 5 Two visual poems from *Pluresia*.
Images reproduced with permission from Dulcinéia Catadora (*Pluresia*, 2009).

In the first poem, pairs of touching bodies spell “oco,” a hollow, emptiness, or void. Paradoxically, it is the presence of bodies that render emptiness, and multiple people that create an unquantifiable void. The hollow is simultaneously made by the figures of the people and in the negative space at the center of the letter “O.” In this way, the body is both inside and outside the void, delineating and composing it at the same time. The reader first sees pairs of participants in choreographed shapes, touching head to feet or head to head. This recognition is quickly replaced by the shift of reading the body as a body, to reading the body as a sign. The figures of the individual participants fade as they are recognized as a continuous form in the letter. The subjects are then removed even further as the letters are read finally as a word.

The poem, like the *cartonera* book that houses it, emphasizes the embodied process of its creation through the acts of reading and writing. Oscillating from photograph to poem, people to word, the work recalls the physical participation of the authors in its writing and continues to be marked by their presence. From the aerial view, the reader experiences the disjointed temporality of the poem from the place of the camera. The reader is also a participant, privy to the authors’ corporeal presence as they are seemingly suspended in the act of writing. Similarly, the reader lingers in a continuous act of reading as the poem blurs the boundaries between form and content, the corporal and the corpus.

Positioned on a facing page, the second poem is comprised of three words; however, the ambiguity of the letters surfaces several other possible words and

meanings. The “o” in the first poem is formed through nearly straightened legs with slight bends at the waist to add curvature. In the second poem, the “o” is markedly different as the person to the far right of the page is now pictured with knees bent as though she were seated. This causes the knees to protrude into the center of the “o” shape and a right angle is formed, possibly reconfiguring the “o” as an “a.” The same ambiguity holds for the person balled up into the shape of a lower-case “a” which could also be read as an “o.” Focusing on the participants from above, the poses reveal people in apparent moments of closeness and vulnerability. There is a sense of intimacy and discomfort as we gaze upon the bodies lying down, because the stretched out or tucked positions are generally reserved for the privacy of the home. Holding hands, curled up protectively, the intimacy entails two people talking, or the lingering tension present in resting back to back.

When the body and the word are read together, the poem opens up multifarious meanings. If the three words are read as verbs in the imperative (*loca, toca, mica*), the poem is a dialogue of the bodies of the participants in relation to words. Read as a series of verbs without a written subject or object, the participants themselves become the speakers and recipients of the commands. The bodies of the participants simultaneously speak and perform the verbs, *loca* (situate, locate), *toca* (touch), *mica* (fail). Configured into words, the participants situate, locate and touch one another. Yet despite any legible signs their bodies produce, they always fail to represent the letter or word. Further destabilizing the word and the body, the poem can also be read as three nouns: *laço* (tie, bond), *taco* (den, safe hiding place), and *mico* (a situation that causes embarrassment or shame). Read through these significations, the participants’ bodies form physical and emotional *laços* (ties and bonds). The two people in the bottom left appear bonded as they hold hands while the tucked position of the solitary person forming an “a” transforms the body into *um taco*, a protective hiding space. The hidden and turned faces of the participants echo the humiliation felt in the face of an other prompted by the final line, *mico*. Throughout the shifting interpretations of the words in the poem, the bodies are also re-interpreted. The same people forming the “o” move from forming a tie to a safe den to hiding in shame as the bodies are read through the words.

The relationship between subjectivity and the written word is central not only in the art created by Dulcinéia, but in the works the collective publishes. In 2007, Dulcinéia published *Catía, Simone e outras marvadas*, the first book by Sebastião Nicomedes, who wrote the book while he was homeless. The text exemplifies

Dulcinéia's overt commitment to both the histories and art of marginalized writers, whereas the *cartonero* has generally figured in contemporary South American literature as a fictional protagonist, as in the case of César Aira's 2001 novel *La villa (Shantytown)*. Nicomedes recounts the anxieties and contradictions of living on the streets of São Paulo through mostly unnamed narrators. In "Cumplicidade" ("Complicity") there is a rhythmic chorus of the lines "Booze calls for the body / that calls for the ground / that calls for the body / that calls for the booze"³ (Nicomedes 1-4). The repetition of these lines demonstrates the cyclical and seemingly inescapable reality of homelessness and addiction. Even when "the beggar relifts himself / the industry of misery goes bankrupt / because booze generates taxes / because the body that drinks / falling to the ground isn't bothersome"⁴ (Nicomedes 16-20). The poem highlights the systemic problem of homelessness in an economy and a society in which the value of a person is measured only by the taxes he generates. The sight of a prostrate man in the street fails to disrupt the quotidian routine of the passerby as his body is a naturalized part of the urban order. Throughout the poem, the body is disavowed from the homeless person in a process of dehumanization and disassociation. The speaker inhabits the body of the homeless man who is reduced to the series of requests and desires his body makes of him. In this way, the poem reveals how the cold distance of the undisturbed passerby renders the man invisible, and then reproduces in the homeless man a disidentification with the self. He remains anonymous, referring to "the body" as a detached entity and only later calling the body "the beggar" as it is named and recognized in the eyes of the unconcerned passerby. As a text, *Catía* invites the reader to make herself uncomfortable, to recognize and value the people turned nameless and faceless in the neoliberal city.

Apart from publishing individual authors, Dulcinéia collaborates with favela communities and other art collectives that self-identify as part of the periphery. The opening of the 2007 poetry collection *Sarau da Cooperifa (Cooperifa Soiree)* describes how shortly following Dulcinéia's founding,

...On a truly Brazilian night, wet with beers, Marcelino Freire proposed a visit to Cooperifa. They have a lot in common with your project, he told us. And so we quickly traveled to São Paulo's periphery with Rodrigo Ciriaco. There, in the company of Sérgio Vaz, we didn't doubt the value of that mixture of free rhymes and simple verses, of rappers...and mechanics and improvisers

³ "A pinga pede o corpo / que pede o chão / que pede o corpo / que pede a pinga."

⁴ "e se reerguer o mendigo / a indústria da miséria entra em falência / porque a pinga gera impostos / porque o corpo que bebe / caindo ao chão não incomoda."

and housewives and nephews and teachers and curious people, black, white, yellow, and blue...of repetitions, and insistence as resistance, as a mission. (2)

Weaving fact and fiction, encounters and conversations, this introduction sets the scene for the poems of *Sarau*. The fifteen poems from fifteen different authors were first performed at one of the weekly *Saraus*, or poetry nights, hosted by the poet Sérgio Vaz at the Bar do Zé Batidão since 2001. The *Sarau* is representative of the many cultural and artistic phenomenon produced in the last twenty years in the favelas and periphery of São Paulo, which held a *Semana de Arte Moderna da Periféria* in 2007 (Vaz, “Manifesto”). The event referenced the pivotal *Semana de Arte Moderna* of 1922 where São Paulo’s modernist artists and intellectuals produced and shared their unconventional work. Just as the early modernists provoked and unsettled the public with their art, the *Semana da Periféria* strove to disrupt the “sacred names of elite culture” (Vaz) and gain recognition for the quality and quantity of diverse art production in São Paulo’s periphery. Alluding to Oswald de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropofágico” that proposed the creation of an autonomous Brazilian art through the consumption of various artistic practices, the 2007 event included Vaz’s “Manifesto da Antropofagia Periférica”. The manifesto inserts peripheral literature into the discourse of canonical Brazilian culture and relocates the artistic center as it proclaims “the periphery unites us through love, through pain, through color” (Vaz, “Manifesto”).

The movement is interested in artistic and cultural production as much as it is pedagogy. Vaz explains, “We don’t want to turn everyone into poets, but we do want to turn everyone into readers.” Writer Allan da Rosa, who also contributed to *Sarau* notes, “we are building a bridge between the spoken and the written word, from our ancestry to our present moment.” Because the poems in *Sarau* were written for performance, they maintain an oral quality on the page, many of them approaching the rhyme and repetition of rap or the colloquialisms of a storyteller. In this way, the poems echo the use of popular music and informal language as an aesthetic component in *cartonera*, as in the work of Washington Cucurto and Douglas Diegues, whose lines approach the rhythms and sexually explicit lyrics of *cumbia*.

Vaz’s poem “Sabotage (o invasor)” (“Sabotage (or invader)),” tells the story of Mauro, “a Black man with wings / A bird / With feet on the ground. / “Sound of ebony / With leather skin”⁵ (2-6). The poem interlaces the local time and space of the

⁵ “Era um negro de asas. / Um pássaro / Com os pés no chão. / Som de ébano / Com pele de couro.”

periphery of São Paulo with Afro-Brazilian culture and tradition. For Mauro, poetry is a means of sustenance and reclaiming history as “The past / That the future wanted / Written in charcoal / Turned from dust / To bread / When he indulged in poetry”⁶ (8-13). In his travels as a “Navigator / Of the insolent seas / His compass / Pointed always to the periphery. / Rhyme was his route”⁷ (26-30). Guided by the rhyme of his poetry and songs, Mauro moves continuously toward the periphery, undoing the hip hop rhetoric of striving to leave or make it out. Instead, Mauro’s rhyme originates in the periphery and propels his movement within in it. Mauro becomes a tragic victim of contemporary violence as he is shot at the end of the poem, yet as a nearly mythical man-bird, hope remains as he “Continued travelling / And went to sing in another place”⁸ (47-48). While the violence of the present invades the poem, Mauro’s rootedness in the Afro-Brazilian traditions of storytelling, music, and myth instill hope in the face of desperation, as does the larger project of the *Sarau da Cooperifa*.

In many ways Dulcineia’s cooperative and aesthetic aligns with the Brazilian peripheral artists. These new forms of production center on the creation of images, sounds, and language generated in a local space and carry an impressive power to mobilize. The divides among the author, publisher, and reader are disintegrated in favor of the participant-protagonist. Perhaps most importantly, they create an organic infrastructure where there wasn’t any before. They publish books of poems that otherwise would not be published, and build cultural spaces where they didn’t exist, whether in a bar or the underbelly of the raised highway. Although some state-sponsored cultural events reach the periphery, Vaz notes that “they don’t consult us” and generally it “doesn’t have anything to do with us.” Turning over the top-down model of imported cultural content, Vaz remarks, “We didn’t substitute the state, we created a parallel cultural state. We invented a state.” Similarly, the *cartoneiros* of Cooperglicerio provide recycling for the city, a service the state never offered. The work of Dulcinéia and their collaborators is the work of creative invention and of “insistence as resistance” (*Sarau 2*).

Dulcinéia Catadora and the *catadores* propose a new way of seeing the world: “to identify possibilities, to recognize the potential of diverse realities and the relations that appear as a result of their contact via the collective practices” (Manifesto 158). This

⁶ “O passado, / Que o futuro queria / Escrito em carvão, / Deixou de ser pó / Pra ser pão, / Ao se viciar em poesia.”

⁷ “Navegante / De mares insolentes / Sua bússola / Apontava sempre para a periferia. / A rima era o rumo.”

⁸ “Seguiu de viagem / E foi cantar em outro lugar.”

perspective draws from the eye of the *catador* who sees new life and value in discarded material. Dulcinéia demonstrates the power of inverting spaces by bringing literature and visual art into recycling centers and *catadores* and *cartonera* books into the hegemonic center of São Paulo. For Dulcinéia, both spaces are necessary—the first for artistic creation and building a collective where each member is an equal, and the second for disrupting the exclusionary order of space which, although public, is increasingly restricted and privatized. The collective’s interventions conflate the relationships between the *catador*, cardboard, and *cartonera* books, raising complex questions about subjectivity and embodiment that confront the social, political, and economic conditions in Brazil. As Dulcinéia’s workshops and interventions show, it is through the spontaneous encounter of a *catador* with a paintbrush and a cardboard book, or of a passerby with a *catador* in the street, that we can create openings. The spontaneous encounter creates spaces where the people and objects society strives to erase actively make their presence known.

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