

## ABSTRACT

As authoritarian regimes became widespread in Latin America in the 1970s, a number of experimental artists and poets found in the Mail Art network a way to circumvent censorship, allowing them to continue to make their voices heard beyond the borders of their respective countries. This extraterritorial network allowed them to circulate their small publications, pamphlets, postcards and little collective magazines far and wide. Several of these publications have recently been reissued: in recent years Naranja Publicaciones in Chile has republished several of Guillermo Deisler's works from the 1970s; while in Montevideo, Microutopía reissued *Instrumentos/74*, a booklet by Clemente Padín, in 2019. Why and how should these publications, conceived several decades ago in a particular political context, be reissued today? Based on two case studies, this article seeks to outline possible ways of understanding this phenomenon and analysing the issues at stake, between preserving a cultural heritage and confronting or engaging with certain current artistic and political developments.

## keywords

REISSUE  
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# Post-dictatorship Re-editions in South America: Two Case Studies from Chile and Uruguay (1970s / 2010s-2020s)

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As authoritarian regimes became widespread across Latin America in the 1970s, a range of experimental artists and poets found in the Mail Art network a way to circumvent the relentless censorship that went hand in hand with repressive politics, allowing them to continue to disseminate their work and make their voices heard beyond the borders of their respective countries. This extraterritorial network enabled them to circulate — and sometimes even evacuate — their small publications, pamphlets, postcards and collective periodicals as far as Europe and North America.

Guillermo Deisler (Chile, 1940–Germany, 1995) and Clemente Padín (Uruguay, 1939–2025) emerged, along with a few others, as emblematic figures of artistic and political activism developed through Mail Art. Both defenders of new poetry and key artists of this ‘marginal media’ (Fischer 1974),<sup>1</sup> Deisler and Padín tirelessly denounced the dictatorships taking hold across the continent through their editorial projects. Nearly five decades after their original release, several of their publications have recently been reissued by the committed independent publishers Naranja Publicaciones, created in Chile in 2016, and Microutopías, launched in Uruguay in 2014.

This article aims to analyse some of the reasons why a new generation of publishers born just after the end of the dictatorship that marked their countries have taken an interest in such small-scale historical publications, produced before or during the authoritarian regimes. Why and how should these works, conceived in a particular socio-political context, be re-edited today? Is it a question of preserving a cultural and artistic heritage, the memory of a situation, or rather of bringing it into tension with the current political reality, marked by new waves of

<sup>1</sup> On the concept of marginality as articulated and defended through Mail Art, see also Navarrete 2019.

authoritarianism? I will examine here the context in which these re-editions are taking place, the choices made by Naranja Publicaciones and Microutopías — from complete fidelity to adaptation — and the possible dialogues between these re-editions<sup>2</sup> and the rest of their catalogue.

## Two committed artists, poets and publishers: Deisler and Padín

Experimental artists and poets of the same generation, Deisler and Padín were active in the same circles.<sup>3</sup> They had many opportunities to exhibit together and their work often appeared in the same collective publications. Both had a very similar approach and conception of publishing, and founded their own self-managed publishing house: for Deisler, Mimbres, initially based in Santiago de Chile in 1963 and then moved to Antofagasta in 1967; and for Padín, Ovum, launched in Montevideo in 1969. These independent structures played a decisive role in their careers, insofar as they enabled them not only to disseminate their own artistic work, but also to circulate the research of other artists,<sup>4</sup> whether through the publication of individual and collective works, or via periodicals, particularly in the case of Padín.<sup>5</sup> The many other independent periodicals to which the two artists contributed were equally decisive in helping to develop and consolidate the international Mail Art network (Boivent 2015). This parallel system of communication and collaboration proved essential since it offered Latin American artists a channel for dissemination when the internal political situation and fierce censorship in their countries no longer allowed them to do so. As Géza Pernecky recalls, the network represented for these artists ‘a key which gave access not to the door of alternative art but instead the gate of the whole contemporary art’ (1993: 56-57).

The parallels between Deisler and Padín’s trajectories are evident also in the authoritarian regimes that took hold in their respective countries: the dictatorship in Uruguay began with the military coup d’état of 27 June 1973, just a few months before Augusto Pinochet’s coup d’état in Chile, which overthrew the democratically elected government of President Salvador Allende in September 1973 and marked the beginning of sixteen years of dictatorship. Both artists were directly confronted with intimidation by the armed forces and were victims of waves of arrests carried out by the new regimes.

However, their paths diverged in that Deisler, who was quickly imprisoned after the Chilean coup d’état, managed to escape and go into exile in Europe (first in France, then in Bulgaria and West Germany). This geographical distance didn’t prevent him from continuing to relentlessly denounce the dramatic situation in his country, taking advantage of the greater freedom of expression he then enjoyed.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, I use ‘re-edition’ and ‘reissue’ as synonyms, even though the former places greater emphasis on the work of reworking and adaptation, while the latter focuses more on the unavailability that characterised the works in question before their release. I prefer these terms to ‘republication’ or ‘reprint’, which seem more immediate and overshadow the necessary editing work at stake in the cases I am dealing with.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank the Fondo Guillermo Deisler, Centro de Documentación de las Artes Visuales (CEDOC), CNAC in Santiago de Chile and the Archivo Privado Clemente Padín / Archivo General de la Universidad de la República in Montevideo, as well as the publishers Naranja Publicaciones and Microutopías (in particular, Darío Marroche), for their generous authorisation to publish images from Deisler and Padín’s publications and reissues.

<sup>4</sup> Padín, for example, published Deisler’s book *Le Monde comme il va* [The World as it is] (1976). Deisler included Padín in his anthology *Poesía Visiva en el mundo* [Visual Poetry in the World] (1972).

<sup>5</sup> Between 1965 and 1986, Padín launched and edited four periodicals: *Los Huevos del Plata* (fourteen issues, 1965–1969); *Ovum 10* (ten issues, 1969–1972); *Ovum 2da. época* (seven issues, 1973–1977); and *Participación* (ten issues, 1984–1986). Deisler published the periodical *UNI/vers(;) Visual and Experimental Poetry* (thirty-five issues, 1987–1995), which coincided with the return of democracy in Chile.

Padín, meanwhile, remained in Montevideo and chose to fight from the inside, which forced him to find strategies to escape censorship. These strategies included the adoption of the principle of assembling for his third periodical, *Ovum 2da. época*, which exempted him from printing the pages and drawing attention to his activities, or the distribution of almost all of his productions abroad.<sup>6</sup> However, Padín did not escape prison; along with his compatriot Jorge Caraballo, he was arrested in 1977 while preparing a counter-Biennale to protest against the Latin American section at the 10th Paris Biennale. The Uruguayan authorities accused the two men of carrying out activities that were ‘detrimental to the morale and reputation of the army’ (Cook 1984: 371).<sup>7</sup> Although this was never officially recognised, it can be assumed that Padín’s clandestine publishing activities were also linked to this arrest. In any case, the detention of the two men caused one of the biggest outcries in the history of Mail Art. The news, widely relayed by the network, prompted countless reactions from artists around the world determined to denounce the situation. This condemnation was relayed through Mail Art channels in the form of numerous artistic interventions distributed worldwide by post or published in the network’s art periodicals, and through official channels, with hundreds of letters sent to the authorities to demand the release of the two artists.<sup>8</sup> Their situation led them to be considered by many as symbols of the violence and censorship that Latin American artists were forced to contend with. Padín was released in 1979 and remained under probation until 1984, the year the military dictatorship in Uruguay officially ended and the first democratic elections were held.

Although Deisler and Padín both worked to denounce dictatorships and their countless human rights violations, and to point out the complicity or direct responsibility of certain Western governments in the establishment of authoritarian regimes across Latin America, they did so in circumstances dictated by their respective geographical locations. Despite these differences, they were united in the fact that they never gave up on their artistic and poetic experiments, which led them to explore and test the possibilities of combining two types of activism. The printed work and production of Deisler and Padín, both as artists and publishers, was precisely the ‘site’ where these forms of activism — artistic and politic — met and merged. This stance, as much as their tenacity, has established them as emblematic figures of artistic and poetic resistance.

<sup>6</sup> ‘On one side [there was] the urgent need of making public the crude violations of human rights which our people suffered and, on the other, which prevented me from publishing anything on my own (with the exception of *Ovum’s* cover)’ (Padín 1996: 29). On the history of the practice of assembling, a principle whereby participants in a collective publication are asked to provide as many copies of their contribution as there are copies planned, see Perkins 2005.

<sup>7</sup> See also Ferranto 1999 and Nogueira 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The actual impact of these actions is impossible to determine, but for Padín, ‘it was precisely that solidarity that made it possible for *Ovum’s* reappearance — complete expression of that artistic interaction — liberated me.’ (Padín 1996: 30).

## Naranja and Deisler

Naranja Publicaciones, based in Santiago de Chile, has been working for some years now to bring Deisler’s works back into circulation. Its founders Sebastián

Arancibia and Sebastián Barranté were running a bookshop dedicated to visual culture, with a particular focus on photography, illustration and architecture, when they came across his work, alongside that of artists such as Ulises Carrión and Javiera Pintocanales (Munizaga 2024). This discovery sparked their interest in artists' publications and the edition and re-edition of such works, which they consider marginal, have now become an integral part of their activities. Since 2016, Naranja Publicaciones present themselves as a 'virtual bookshop, publishing house and collection specialising in artists' publications.'<sup>9</sup>

Naranja Publicaciones publishes works by contemporary visual artists and poets, as well as reissues of historical works, which constitute a significant part of their catalogue. Deisler's publications occupy a prominent place in this category, as the publishers have made it their mission 'to reconstruct and return to circulation the book works that the artist made in Antofagasta between 1969 and 1973 within the framework of his publishing house "Ediciones Mimbre".<sup>10</sup> This programme to bring Deisler's work back into circulation also constitutes an essential complement to research projects begun in the early 2010s by researchers and relatives of the artist working on his archives. They have resulted in exhibitions and the publication in 2014 of two reference books, which brought the artist's work and commitment prior to his exile back into the spotlight (Deisler and Varas 2014; Galeno, Varas and Wittwer 2014).

Several of the artist's artistic and poetic publications have been reissued since 2019 by Naranja Publicaciones, including *GRRR* (1969/2019), *Texto* (1971/2023), *Poesía visual: Deisler* (1972/2022) and *Poesía Visual: Proyecto para hacer un libro* (1973/2021). All these printed works were produced by Deisler during the short period of activity of Ediciones Mimbre, specifically in Antofagasta, over the five years that preceded the establishment of the military dictatorship. Looking back at the themes and issues addressed in these publications is undoubtedly one of the motivations of Naranja Publicaciones, especially since the publishers always include a critical text or commentary into the edition to shed light on the context in which the original was issued. In these publications, Deisler criticises attitudes that herald the collapse of democracy, including consumerism and the growing influence of the media. The tensions of the time are evident in most of his projects, just as his political stances when he denounces the escalation of violence in Chile and other parts of the continent,<sup>11</sup> and the neo-imperialist agenda of the United States towards its southern neighbours.<sup>12</sup>

This dual denunciation is particularly evident in *Texto* [Text], published in 1971 by Deisler and reissued in 2023 by Naranja Publicaciones. The publication takes the form of an almost square printed cover, with four loose sheets inside. The front and back covers depict a target, and the entire edition is pierced. In the first

<sup>9</sup> Naranja Publicaciones. n.d. 'About.' <https://www.naranjapublicaciones.com/whats-naranja/?lang=en>.

<sup>10</sup> Naranja Publicaciones. n.d. 'Poesía visual: Deisler | Guillermo Deisler.' <https://www.naranjapublicaciones.com/producto/poesia-visual-deisler-guillermo-deisler/?lang=en>.

<sup>11</sup> 'It should be remembered that on 6 June 1971, the Antofagasta builder and politician Edmundo Pérez Zujovie was shot by the extremist group Vanguardia Organizada del Pueblo because of the Puerto Montt massacre of 9 March 1969, for which he had been held responsible. It was a troubled time, and other works refer to the idea of gunfire, such as "Bang" and "Untitled"' (Galeno 2014: 83).

<sup>12</sup> On this issue, see for example McSherry 2019.

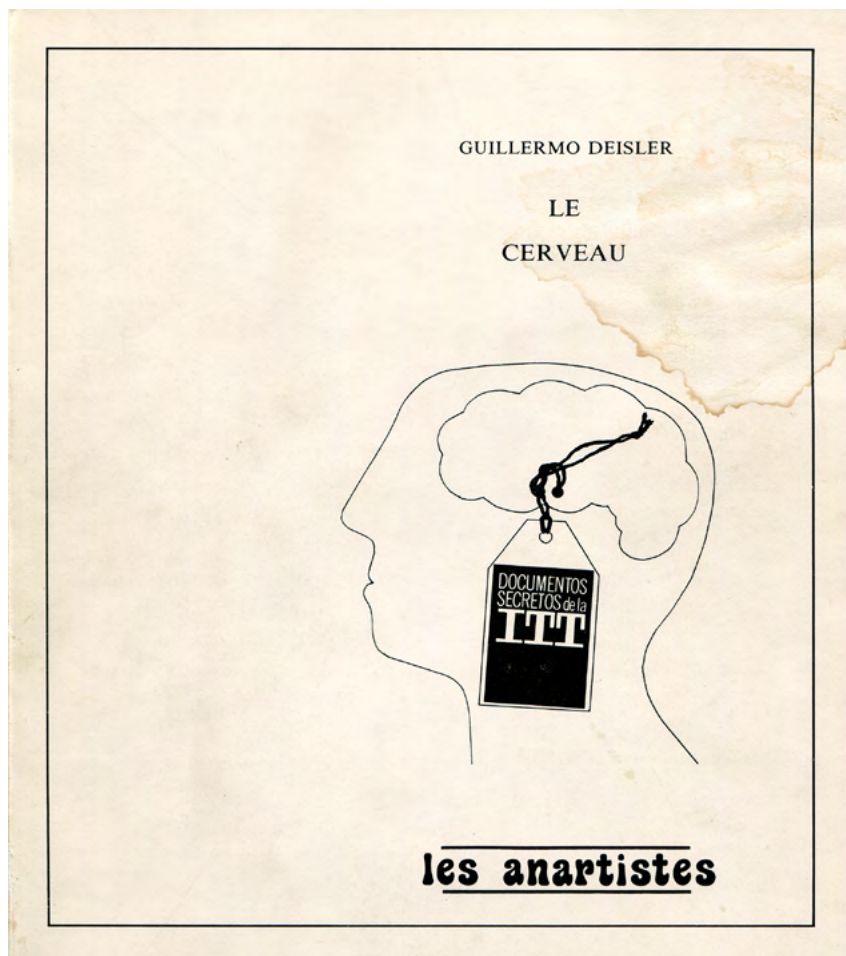


**Fig. 1a, 1b** Guillermo Deisler, *Texto*, 1971, Portfolio, Ediciones Mimbre. Cover and inside page. Fondo Guillermo Deisler, Centro de Documentación de las Artes Visuales (CEDOC), CNAC.



**Fig. 2** Guillermo Deisler, *Poesía Visual: Proyecto para hacer un libro*, 1973 (2022). Ediciones Mimbre / Naranja Publicaciones. Inside page (first page). Image: courtesy of Naranja Publicaciones.

images, the hole appears to be the result of a shot: a bullet seems to have hit the target right in the centre, then the photograph of a crowd, and finally a schematic drawing of an eye. The interpretation of this last image is ambivalent. While the bullet has perforated the eye — causing blindness — the hole also forms the pupil, as if through it a form of clairvoyance has emerged, which allows us to understand the source of the problem. On the next two pages, the hole is no longer the result of the shot, but seems to show us its origin: it first appears in the middle of a smoke cloud, adopting the codes of comic strips and associated with the onomatopoeia ‘pum!’. The last page finally reveals a detail of the weapon responsible for the shot, the hole coinciding with the still-smoking barrel. We read the inscription ‘Made in USA,’ which, together with ‘pum!’, are the only words in the publication, paradoxically entitled ‘Text’ [Fig. 1a, 1b, Fig. 2].



**Fig. 3** Guillermo Deisler, *Le Cerveau*. *Documentos Secretos de la ITT. Les Anartistes*, 1975, Nouvelles Éditions Polaires. Book cover. Fondo Guillermo Deisler, Centro de Documentación de las Artes Visuales (CEDOC), CNAC.

Whatever interpretation one may give to this sequence of images, *Texto* makes clear that, according to Deisler, art and poetry could not exist independently of the context in which they were embedded. The poetic language he would later use to denounce dictatorship (simplified drawings, collages and typographical assemblages) can be found from the outset in his projects published by Mimbres. Many works from this period also feature one of Deisler's recurring strategies: readers are invited, either physically or metaphorically, to manipulate, intervene, cut out, complete, modify or even destroy all or parts of the pages or publications. These 'proposals to be realised' — in line with other poetic research of the time<sup>13</sup> — aim to activate the reader's critical awareness, questioning his or her responsibility towards the work, its understanding, circulation or preservation. The process is taken to the extreme in *Poesía Visual: Proyecto para hacer un libro* [Visual Poetry: Project to Craft a Book] (1973/2021) [Fig. 3]. The publication, undoubtedly the

<sup>13</sup> In 1970, Edgardo Antonio Vigo published the manifesto *De la poesía/proceso a la poesía para y/o a realizar* [From Poetry/Process to Poetry for and/or to be Realised] (Vigo 1970). In 1971, he organised, together with Ellena Pelli and Clemente Padín, the 'Exposición internacional de proposiciones a realizar (investigaciones poéticas)' [International Exhibition of Proposals to be Carried Out (Poetic Research)] at the Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC) in Buenos Aires, in which Deisler participated.

most conceptual and provocative of the period, provides a kind of instruction manual that invites the reader to make a book in order to destroy it. The edition, a portfolio, features one operation per page: tearing, folding, bending, playing, etc. In one of the texts included in the publication, Deisler explains his project as an attempt to denounce the devastating effects of overconsumption:

Every day you are led to do more stupid things than these. Many of them without you being clearly aware that you are being manipulated by the media, which creates needs and aspirations that you neither have nor desire [...] (Deisler 1973: n.p.).<sup>14</sup>

With this paradoxical proposal, Deisler wants readers to consider the process of alienation in which they are caught up, and defends the idea of ‘creating “other conditions” for being oneself through action’ (Deisler 1973: n.p.). Knowing that this edition is considered the last produced by the artist before his exile, we can also see in this invitation to destroy a challenge to the reader’s free will and an evocation of censorship. In a poster created a year earlier and reissued by Naranja Publicaciones in the anthology *Poesía visual: Deisler* [Visual Poetry: Deisler] (Deisler 1972 (2022)) the artist also pointed out that books are the systematic target of authoritarian regimes, which strive to eliminate those they could not control:

proposal by guillermo deisler

to propose is to demand that it be done.

I as a result of human advancement, books enable a vertiginous development of ideas.

II from time to time, since the advent of books, humanity has been driven by powerful forces to destroy them (Deisler 1972).<sup>15</sup>

*El Cerebro* [The Brain] (Deisler 2022), another of Deisler’s projects re-edited by Naranja Publicaciones, is notable for two reasons: it was not published by Mimbres,<sup>16</sup> and it is the only work printed during the military dictatorship, in 1975. One explains the other: the book could appear precisely because it was not published in Chile, but in France, by the Nouvelles Éditions Polaires run by the poet and mail artist Julien Blaine (Deisler 1975). It was therefore first published in French under the title *Le Cerveau*. The history of the manuscript is recounted in the preface: in a letter to his French correspondent on 10 April 1973, Deisler presents the project as a collection of poems exploring ‘how this remnant of servitude that is the brain can be at the same time the key to liberation, the detonator against social injustice’ (Deisler 1975: n.p.). He continues to denounce consumer society and inequality,

<sup>14</sup> The typescript is stapled at the end of the publication, which means it must be torn out to read the content. In keeping with the logic that prevails throughout the publication, it is accompanied by the instruction ‘saque y lea!’ [tear it out and read it!]. All translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>15</sup> Non capitalised in the original. Author’s translation from Spanish: ‘proposición de guillermo deisler / proponer es exigir que lo haga. / I como fruto del desenvolvimiento de la humanidad, el libro permite un desarrollo vertiginoso de las ideas. / II cada cierto tiempo, desde la aparición del libro, la humanidad se ve impulsada por fuerzas poderosas a destruirlos.’

<sup>16</sup> Naranja Publicaciones has also released unpublished poems from 1970 found in Deisler’s archive, under the title *8 poemas de Deisler* [8 Poems by Deisler] (Deisler 2020).

Fig. 4a, 4b Guillermo Deisler, *El Cerebro*, 2022. Naranja Publicaciones.  
Cover of the Spanish edition and inside page. Image: courtesy of Naranja Publicaciones.



and once again invites the reader to interact with the publication. The section entitled 'Document' takes a more explicitly political turn, since Deisler slips in a page that resembles a tract and insists that the triumph of the people — represented by the victory of Salvador Allende in the presidential elections — must be defended. Further on, the artist urges vigilance with a montage that recalls the courage of the new Chilean president, who does not hesitate to 'denounce imperialist aggression in front of the world', particularly that of the United States.<sup>17</sup> In a note added to the manuscript, Blaine explains that the coup d'état in September 1973 and Deisler's arrest a few days later forced them to postpone the preparation of the book. The project could only be restarted when the Chilean artist arrived in France at the end of 1974. On that occasion, the editor tells us, 'his manuscript took on a few more lines' (Blaine quoted in Deisler 1975: n.p.). Deisler justifies this addition: 'If we want the book to be alive, it must remain open. This book had to be opened beyond its ending because, in Chile, once again, MAN has been wounded in his essence, in his dignity' (Deisler 1975: n.p.).<sup>18</sup> As an extension of the previous ones, an eight-page section visually and symbolically highlights the occupation by the armed forces and their crimes, with a double page entirely in red. The addendum, however, ends on a note of hope: 'No, it's not over yet! Chile vencerá! [X5]' (Deisler 1975: n.p.) [Fig. 4a, 4b].<sup>19</sup>

Any re-edition process is likely to prompt informed re-reading after the fact. In the case of Deisler's *Le Cerveau / El Cerebro*, it allows us to retrospectively identify the warning signs of political upheaval. This was already highlighted as early as the following year, when the entire book was reprinted in the first issue of the periodical *Doc(k)s*, published again by Blaine. In the list of contents, the French artist and publisher comments: 'When DEISLER talks about CHILE, before and after,

<sup>17</sup> Several clues indicate that the United States is particularly targeted by this denunciation: first, the label 'Documentos secretos de la ITT' attached to the brain presented in this 'Document' section (which also serves as the cover image), refers to the confidential documents on the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (ITT) conspiracy. Made public in the American press and by the Chilean Government in March 1972, the documents describe in detail, from the inside, the attempts made by the ITT and the CIA to prevent Salvador Allende from coming to power between September and November 1970, and then provide testimony on the relations between one of the leading multinational corporations and the United States government. The second clue is given by the speech bubble coming out of Allende's mouth in Deisler's montage: it displays the deconstructed CIA insignia, under the title 'President Allende denounces imperialist aggression before the world'. In the preceding pages, we also see the barrel of a gun stamped 'made in USA' (the same as in Deisler's *Texto*).

<sup>18</sup> Capitalised in the original.

<sup>19</sup> Author's translation from French, except 'Chile vencerá!' [Chile will prevail], in Spanish in the original text.



Fig. 5 Clemente Padín, *Instrumentos/74*, 1974 (2019). *Microutopías/Ediciones Ovum*. Cover of the two editions. Image: courtesy of *Microutopías/Daño Marroche*.

<sup>20</sup> Capitalised in the original. Blaine in *Doc(k)s* 1–4, ‘Poésies. Expressions d’avant-garde en Amérique latine,’ n.p. Nouvelles éditions Polaires, May 1976.

<sup>21</sup> In *Le Cerveau*, it is specified that Deisler — who did not have a complete command of French (as his exchanges with Blaine testify) — benefited from the assistance of Teresa Ramos for the translation and the development of the French texts (Deisler 1975: n.p.). This suggests that an initial version existed, at least in part, in Spanish.

<sup>22</sup> *Microutopías* has been coordinated since 2014 by Daño Marroche, architect and graphic designer, joined in 2018 by Florencia Lastreto and Victoria Apud.

<sup>23</sup> This aspect can be explained in part by the methods and modes of production available at the time. Industrial processes were subject to significant controls and were probably inaccessible to individuals, making photocopy the most accessible, fastest (compared to engraving, for example, used by artists such as Deisler and Vigo) and safest method, as it was not subject to close surveillance. On the other hand, Padín’s choice cannot be reduced to a simple adaptation to the technical possibilities available: poor materiality could be perfectly accepted, even desired, and seen as an attribute that brought form and content closer. The lack of refinement in *Instrumentos/74* gives the publication a sense of urgency that perfectly matches its subject matter and the political context in which it was produced.

it is to SAY something, and saying it is so important that it was premonitory and became explanatory.<sup>20</sup> However, the re-edition of *El Cerebro* by Naranja Publicaciones has additional motivations. Besides putting a work that had become unavailable back into circulation, the aim is simply to raise awareness of this project in Chile. Indeed, while the publication enjoyed relatively wide distribution in France in the second half of the 1970s, thanks to the Nouvelles Éditions Polaires, and wide circulation the following year throughout the Mail Art network via *Doc(k)s*, probably only a few of the thousand printed copies reached Chile at the time. This is the paradoxical achievement of Mail Art: although the book circulated around the world, it remained relatively unknown to those directly affected by the events it denounced. Furthermore, the two publications produced by Blaine in 1975 and 1976 were in French; by re-editing this manuscript in the Chilean artist’s mother tongue, Naranja Publicaciones has enabled this work to return to its origins.<sup>21</sup> This time, it is not so much a facsimile (mere reproduction) as an adaptation (by means of translation). This is emphasised by the publishers’ choice to wrap the book in a black dust jacket with flaps that covers the original white cover [Fig. 5].

## Microutopías and Padín

Interestingly, the young independent publishing house *Microutopías* based in Montevideo took a similar approach for the 2019 re-edition of *Instrumentos/74* [*Instruments/74*], a small booklet produced by Padín and published by his *Ediciones Ovum* forty-five years earlier.<sup>22</sup> Although the original publication was in English, the publishers chose to reissue it in Spanish (Padín 1974 (2019)). As with *El Cerebro*, the change of language is made clear by a black cover, as if a negative in relation to the first edition. It is enlightening to look at the project itself before examining the context of its re-edition.

*Instrumentos/74* was an entirely handmade publication from 1974, with handwritten text and felt-tip pen drawings (Padín 1974). It takes the form of a modest booklet, simply photocopied and stapled, with no apparent concern for refinement.<sup>23</sup> While the main title, ‘Instrumentos’, appears in Spanish in the original version, the rest of the text is in English, including the subtitle ‘Mechanics instruments for the control of the information’. Padín’s project is based on a double inventory, with an unchanging layout: on each page, an instrument is named and drawn before being used. The instruments in question are, like the publication itself, fairly rudimentary: scissors, brushes, ink and paintbrushes, cheese graters, matches, nitric acid and even hands. Only the gun at the end of the book stands out in this domestic inventory. The actions are carried out directly on the paper: a strip at the

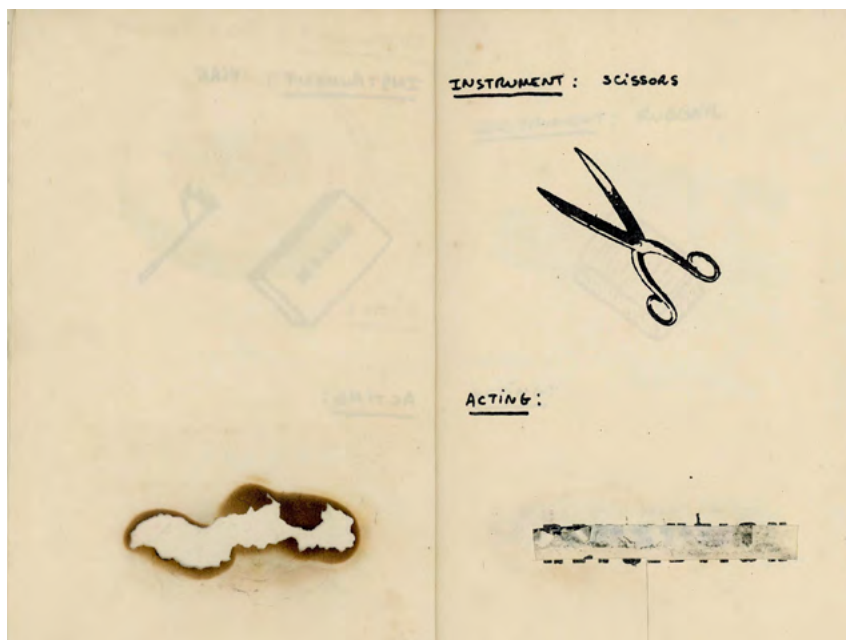
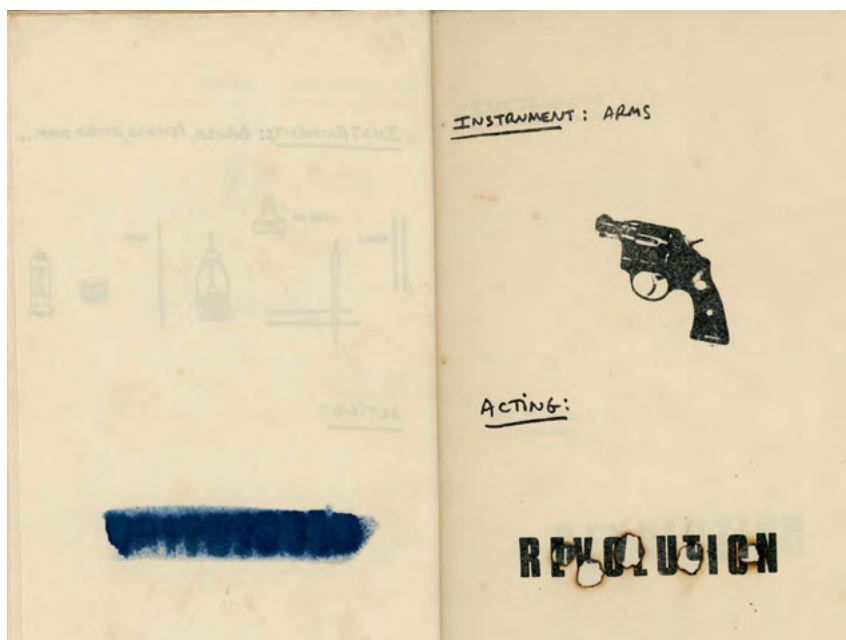


Fig. 6a, 6b Clemente Padín, *Instrumentos/74. Mechanics Instruments for the Control of the Information*, 1974. Ediciones Ovum. Inside pages. Archivo Privado Clemente Padín / Archivo General de la Universidad de la República.



bottom of each page is torn, scratched, blackened, burned, pierced, and so on. The publication or the paper is marked or altered as a medium for a message to be delivered, or, on the contrary, censored: 'Revolution,' written in capital letters at the bottom of each page, is the targeted word. Although omnipresent, the term is difficult or impossible to read because of the repeated damage it has suffered.<sup>24</sup> Only on the last page can it be clearly read, as if awaiting possible action. The readers seem to be invited to carry out the attack themselves, after choosing and drawing the instrument. If they decide to intervene in the book, they find themselves in a twofold position as both censors<sup>25</sup> and co-authors of the work [Fig. 6a, 6b].

<sup>24</sup> The word is more or less readable depending on the version, as the manufacturing process makes each copy unique.

<sup>25</sup> Or even executioners, if one considers that through this violence against paper, Padín evoked another means of controlling information such as torture. Whatever the case may be, the artist explicitly referred to torture in another booklet published one year later, which, judging by its title, appears to be the second volume of the same project: *Instruments/II (Some instruments for to obtain information in Latin America)* (Padín 1975a). The publication presents various methods of torture named in Spanish, along with a brief description in English and an illustration in felt-tip pen depicting the instruments used on, and by, faceless bodies.

<sup>26</sup> Author's translation from French. This text probably alluded to the situation in Francoist Spain, which the Belgian-American poet and artist knew well for having resided in the country between 1965 and 1970. In an article published in a United States magazine the year after his participation to *Ovum 10*, Arias-Misson reported on the tensions prevailing in the Spanish capital at the time, which had complicated the staging of one of his 'Public Poems', which consisted of writing words in the urban space with giant letters. 'You have to understand that the state police in Spain (Guardia Civil) is not as tolerant as the police in America. They arrest and beat you for the slightest manifestation, let alone staging ARMA in front of the Cortes' (Arias-Misson 1972: 85).

<sup>27</sup> Padín described his failed attempt at dematerialisation with the series of works titled *Inobjetal*: 'When I understood the nature of the sign of the language of action, I stopped my research [on inobjetal art] because of the obvious and impossible contradiction that could not be ignored: information needs an object to transmit it, whether it be a sheet of paper or a disk, or an atmosphere or an action. [...] However, the INOBJETAL experiment has been beneficial, if only because it has given rise to other positions that are more coherent and better suited to reality' (Padín 1975b: n.p.). Author's translation from French. Capitalised in the original.

<sup>28</sup> This interpretation is in line with that which can be drawn from the sentence 'Eso sí, la más peligrosa...' [That's right, the most dangerous one] added the same year by Argentine artist Vigo on the cover of his periodical *Hexágono '71*, alongside the stamp 'Arte argentino de vanguardia' [Argentine avant-garde art]. For Ana Bugnone, it should be seen as 'an allusion to the sum of works referring to *politics*,' but it is also 'ironic to note that the "most dangerous" is an avant-garde art magazine, when that term [...] meant the capacity for armed organisations to use violence' (Bugnone 2013: 23).

<sup>29</sup> As Fernanda Nogueira states out about Padín's trial, the police's use of artistic works 'as evidence of subversive activity highlights the repressive government's conviction that these productions and actions have a powerful effect against the current regime. [...] In Padín's case,

It is clear from the title that the actions, which damage the book while altering its message, refer to a particular context alluded to by the year in the title. The book was published only a few months after the establishment of the dictatorship in Uruguay, and its production coincided with the implementation of widespread preventive and repressive censorship in the country. It was precisely this situation — and its direct consequences on poetic practice — that had been prophesied two years earlier in an editorial by Alain Arias-Misson published in *Ovum 10*, Padín's second periodical:

With the dehumanisation of the city, the strengthening of state controls, and the turnstiles of repression, all fluid communication can be cut off, since programmers do not like freedom of expression. [...] This is not a political action, since its effects are not measured in terms of political strategies but rather poetic communication. [...] The line between a political demonstration and a revolutionary poem is becoming thin and blurred (Arias-Misson 1971: n.p.).<sup>26</sup>

On the one hand, *Instrumentos/74* highlights the materiality of the publication, in particular its fragility and mutability; on the other, it also recalls the potential of print as a technique which is anything but immaterial and yet allows ideas to circulate over great distances.<sup>27</sup> What stands out above all, in a manner that is both demonstrative and offbeat, is perhaps the paradoxical tension between this crude, extremely vulnerable object and its power of circulation.<sup>28</sup> As Deisler also pointed out in his projects, albeit in a different way, any publication, however modest, appears powerful enough to authoritarian regimes and their armed forces to be perceived as a threat, making its author the subject of close surveillance.<sup>29</sup> The first print run of *Instrumentos/74* is unknown, but it was distributed fairly widely through the Mail Art network, in which Padín was very active. This makes the note added to the re-edition by Microutopías intriguing: 'It remained lost until 1997 when the German artist Klaus Groh found a copy in his archives and sent it back to the author.'<sup>30</sup> The book, well known to Mail Art enthusiasts, is preserved in numerous archives and collections and can be easily consulted.<sup>31</sup> However, this symptomatic 'loss' can undoubtedly be explained by the fact that Padín probably judged it preferable to disperse the booklets as quickly as possible and get them out of the country, keeping few or no copies for himself (in addition, a large part of his archives were confiscated by the police after his arrest in 1977). Like the reissue of Deisler's *Le Cerveau / El Cerebro* by Naranja Publicaciones, the re-edition of *Instrumentos/74* by Microutopías therefore has a dual purpose [Fig. 7a, 7b, 7c]. It is as much about putting the project back into circulation as about reintroducing it to its country or continent of origin and making it accessible through



Fig. 7a, 7b, 7c Clemente Padín, *Instrumentos/74*. *Instrumentos mecánicos para el control de la información*, 1974 (2019). Microutopías. Inside pages and working tools. Image: courtesy of Microutopías/Daño Marroche.



it was precisely his work based on the dissemination of critical proposals through an alternative, unofficial, precarious, almost uncontrollable medium, and his actions in unexpected areas capable of causing cracks in spaces of control, that posed a real risk to the regime' (Nogueira 2011, author's translation from Spanish).

<sup>30</sup> Microutopías. n.d. 'Instrumentos/74.' <https://risoutopias.cargo.site/Instrumentos74>. English quote from Printed Matter, Inc. n.d. 'Instrumentos 74.' <https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/61693>.

<sup>31</sup> *Instrumentos/74* was distributed in Latin America, Europe and North America: I came across it in archives of Edgardo Antonio Vigo in Argentina; of Julien Blaine and Hervé Fischer (held at the Institut Mémoires de l'Édition Contemporaine and the Bibliothèque Kandinsky, respectively) in France; and in the Artpool Archives in Budapest, Hungary. It is also preserved in collections such as the Fondazione Berardelli, the Kenneth collection at the University of British Columbia, and the archives of the North American collector Jean Brown, at the Getty Research Institute.

<sup>32</sup> Microutopías. n.d. 'Instrumentos /74.' <https://risoutopias.cargo.site/Instrumentos74>. English quote from Printed Matter, Inc. n.d. 'Instrumentos 74.' <https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/61693/>.

<sup>33</sup> Microutopías. n.d. 'Prácticas de publicación y producción gráfica desde Montevideo (UY).' <https://risoutopias.cargo.site/elproyecto>. emphasis in the original.

<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting that a project like Microutopías aligns with the ambitions of the Red Conceptualismos del Sur (RedCSur), a collaborative network created in 2007 — now composed by around forty artists, researchers, activists, etc. — with the aim to 'engage in struggles over memory and the interpretation of poetic-political practices that have taken place in Latin America since the 1960s.' As explained, '[t]he purpose of the Network can be summarized in at least three axes: influence on memory and archive policies; production of knowledge and ways of doing things that allow us to intersect different knowledge; creation of community and international solidarity.' As in the

translation, 'not only for its ideological content but also for its particular conceptual expression and poetic assembly,' which suggest 'new creations of meaning to the readers, involving them politically.'<sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that Microutopías does not claim to have a re-edition programme, unlike Naranja Publicaciones. They present their activities as follows:

We produce graphic publications that explore alternative formats to the traditional book, with printed projects on various anti-fascist and dissident themes and narratives, in which readers are invited to *play at thinking* from an everyday, subjective and micro perspective [...]. We value publication as a material and expressive medium for ideas, and as a tool for communication and the promotion of artistic, poetic and political discourse. We therefore understand our activity as an expanded artistic practice, involving graphic activism and the construction of memory [...]. We consider our work to be the creation of micro-utopias: aesthetic experiences in space and time, with emphasis on the act of publishing not only as a creative act, but also as a reflective, socially committed exercise.<sup>33</sup>

The relation between artistic, political and social engagement that is already suggested by the name of the organisation is therefore at the heart of its editorial project. Microutopías fervently defends publishing as an artistic practice, both through the creation of publications and through the implementation of various actions in favour of this medium, such as the organisation of practical or theoretical workshops, conferences and other events dedicated to print art. The participatory and pedagogical dimension of their project is patent on their website, where explanations and definitions of what an artist's book is are provided through the voices of Paulo Silveira (Silveira 2001) and Ulises Carrión (Carrión 1975). The importance given to the 'construction of memory'<sup>34</sup> is consistent with this same didactic ambition. It is therefore not surprising that Padín's publications have found their place in the Microutopías catalogue, even though their editorial project is more focused on contemporary practices. The strong political involvement that defined Ediciones Ovum is still present, through the dissemination of a counter-discourse and the desire to engage or provoke a reaction from the reader or viewer. Padín could therefore be seen as a mentor for the young publishing house; in any case, he is a key figure in the dual activism championed by Microutopías, which makes the reissue of *Instrumentos/74* a kind of poetic manifesto. The book is echoed in another light publication launched the same year by the Uruguayan publishing house, which reaffirms its position on the importance of the free circulation of information. *Reproduzca esta información* [Reproduce this Information]

is a simple postcard<sup>35</sup> reproducing a fragment from the ‘Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar’ [Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta] by the Argentine writer and journalist Rodolfo Walsh:

Reproduce this information, circulate it by any means at your disposal: by hand, by machine, by mimeograph, orally. Send copies to your friends: nine out of ten are waiting for them. Millions want to be informed. Terror is based on lack of communication. Break the isolation. Feel again the moral satisfaction of an act of freedom. Defeat the terror. Circulate this information.<sup>36</sup>

Although Walsh and Padín were not part of the same circles or networks, this quote highlights the urgent need shared by the Argentine writer and the Uruguayan poet to find new forms of organisation and new ways of circulating information, in order to counter state propaganda and offer alternatives to the official media.

In 2021, Microutopías reissued another of Padín’s publications, this time focused on the writings of the artist as an essential theorist of Mail Art. The anthology *Vanguardia Poética Latinoamericana* [Latin American Poetry Avantgarde] (Padín 2018/2021) brings together a significant selection of essays on experimental Latin American practices written by Padín between 1965 and 2020, some of which unpublished or unavailable due to their dispersion across various confidential publications in the Mail Art network. The desire to ‘highlight the creativity of regional avantgarde movements’ through the voice of their elders is combined in this project with that to ‘open up new dialogues around contemporary creation.’<sup>37</sup>

## Re-editing as an act of activism

The approach underlying the re-editing or reissuing process should be considered in its own right. Publishers led to question both the technical and conceptual adaptations of projects dating back several decades undoubtedly face an exciting challenge, but their practice also raises a number of questions with no definitive ‘right’ answers. For example, the only tools available to artists in the 1970s, or at least the most accessible at that time, were photocopying, engraving or stamping; is it necessary or even relevant to use them today in the context of a reissue, and seek to recreate textures and effects that were — at least partly — circumstantial? Isn’t this falling into a nostalgia that is far removed from the artist’s original intentions? While Padín’s original opus was entirely printed on the same lightweight paper, including the cover, Microutopías chose to differentiate the cover’s materiality, using a thicker paper and screen printing for the cover, and opting for

processes of re-edition studied here, the RedCSur ‘has carried out collective processes of research and the creation of archives for the preservation and dissemination of documents’. Among the tools developed for this project is the ‘Archivos en uso’ platform where, for instance, many publications by Clemente Padín can be viewed in digital format. See RedCSur. n.d. ‘Founding Declaration’. <https://redcsur.net/manifiesto/#quienessomos>.

<sup>35</sup> Microutopías. n.d. ‘Reproduzca esta información.’ <https://cargocollective.com/microutopias/Reproduzca-esta-informacion>.

<sup>36</sup> Rodolfo Walsh’s ‘Carta abierta de un escritor a la Junta Militar’ was circulated by hand in 1977, one year before he disappeared. English translation retrieved from Internet Archive. n.d. ‘Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta’. <https://archive.org/details/openletterfromawritertoth/page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>37</sup> Microutopías. n.d. ‘Prácticas de publicación y producción gráfica desde Montevideo (UY).’ <https://risoutopias.cargo.site/elproyecto>.

risograph printing inside — a technique frequently used in its own publishing projects. Some might consider such adaptation — clearly an approach to re-edition that differs from the production of a facsimile — to betray the original project. However, we should also consider that at present, this process is available to publishers and used to produce a work without formal pretensions. One can indeed argue that the technique of risography, widely used in fanzines or underground publications today, is a very accurate update of photocopying. Furthermore, the concept of betrayal can hardly be applied to these works insofar as, in accordance with the very principles of Mail Art, they have been constantly reworked by artists, publishers or editors of collective periodicals, and subject to multiple adaptations and reinterpretations.<sup>38</sup> It remains nevertheless essential that publishers have sufficient knowledge of the project and its conditions of existence in order to proceed with a re-edition that respects its initial stakes. This work is of course made easier when, as in the case of *Instrumentos/74*, publishers have the opportunity to work on the project with the author and turn the new edition into a true collaboration.

On the contrary, when Naranja Publicaciones chose to scrupulously respect the printing techniques used by Deisler and their material characteristics — as far as today's technical processes and papers allow — it is because these characteristics inform us about the artist's very meticulous approach to the printed medium. As we have seen, similar questions arise when translation comes into play — which, in this case, led both publishers to modify the external appearance of the book, changing the colour of the cover or adding a black dust jacket — and apply the same approach to everything related to the 'paratext' (Genette 1987): where and how to place the mention of the new edition, how to include a publisher's note (added at the end of the volume in the case of *Instrumentos/74*) or a critical text to contextualise the original work (usually inserted in publications by Naranja Publicaciones in such a way that it can be separated from the original content)? Each decision ultimately tells us something about the publishers and their reissue project.

It is also worth noting that in both cases presented here, the publications being reproduced are modest at first glance, but in reality extremely demanding in terms of production. They require a level of attention and time that only small independent structures, less concerned with the issue of profitability, can provide: multiple printing techniques in a single work,<sup>39</sup> the addition of flaps, covers or other mobile elements to be attached or glued, inserts, manual interventions on the paper itself, etc. As Henri Chopin remarked, speaking of an (im)possible reissue of his multimedia magazine *OU*: 'As long as publishers are merchants, it will be unimaginable, because it is not profitable. [...] Or else, they must abandon their commercial mindset and learn how to produce a "marginal" edition' (Chopin quoted in Schraenen 1990: 19).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> As for Deisler and Padín, we should recall Blaine's almost immediate republishing of their works: initially published in the collection 'Les Anartistes' by Nouvelles Éditions Polaires in 1975, both Deisler's *Le Cerveau* [The Brain] and Padín's *De la représentation à l'action* [From Representation to Action] were adapted the following year for the first issue of *Doc(k)s* (May 1976). We can also mention the 'reduced' versions of Padín's *Instrumentos/74* and of Deisler's *Poesía Visual: Proyecto para hacer un libro*. The former had been inserted as a contribution of its conception in the second issue of the Venezuelan periodical *Cisoria Arte* (May 1975: n.p.), coordinated by Dámaso Ogaz, under the title 'Instrumentos mecánicos para el control de la información': only four instruments are presented on the artist's page — a single A4 sheet printed on one side — and the interventions on the paper are no longer material, but photocopied... The latter, also exists in a condensed form, as a protocol published as such by Deisler in the first issue of Padín's periodical *Ovum 2a época* (1973: n.p.). The text is identical to the first page of the Membre edition, except for the addition of a stamp emphasising the need to 'do it yourself' ('Hágalo Ud. Mismo!'). The advent of the internet also led some artists — including Padín — to imagine multimedia adaptations of their works.

<sup>39</sup> For example, the reedition of Deisler's book *GRRR* (Ediciones Membre, 1969 / Naranja Publicaciones, 2019) involves risography, letterpress printing, screen printing and rubber stamping.

<sup>40</sup> Author's translation from French.

Clearly, the reissue of artists' publications demonstrates a significant and meaningful commitment to a certain conception and even ethics of publishing. Despite the artisanal nature of the various editions mentioned here, which could have led publishers to offer rare and valuable re-edited versions, print runs are comparable to those of the time, if not higher. Furthermore, their affordable prices probably do not reflect the time involved in production: this clearly shows that the new publishers are not interested in limiting access to these books to a few rare enthusiasts, but seek instead to make out-of-print works available to as wide an audience as possible.

While networks played a decisive role in the design and distribution of Deisler's and Padín's works, they remain an essential factor for committed publishers like Naranja Publicaciones and Microutopías. Today, just as in the past, integrating alternative distribution networks far from the usual commercial channels — whether in publishing or art — is a *sine qua non* condition for promoting and distributing their work. Naranja's dual activity as a bookseller and 'niche publisher' (Munizaga 2024) necessarily places it within such alternative or parallel networks. These networks are now being established thanks to the internet, but also through participation in international events, fairs and exhibitions, where artists, publishers and enthusiasts gather around their shared interest in socially engaged art publications. Microutopías participates in and maintains these same networks: locally, by organising events such as workshops, reflection sessions, conferences and performances, but also internationally, for example with the organisation of an annual publishing fair, the Feria de Arte Impreso de Montevideo, since 2018.<sup>41</sup> Such approaches to the exchange and circulation of works, which are currently experiencing renewed interest,<sup>42</sup> are reminiscent of the principles adopted by the Mail Art network. In both cases, their participants are convinced that these alternative networks are not, as Padín asserted, 'a simple sui-generis association of artists whose only aim is the diffusion of his works with a view to future insertion in the artist's market but also a worldwide networking creative association, above all joined by moral and ethical principles' (Padín 1996: 30).

The reception of these projects, some fifty years after their conception, is also worth considering: how can they be interpreted in our current context? The work of historical contextualisation undertaken by the two publishers does not prevent them from questioning the resonance that these re-editions may have in our present-day world. Naranja Publicaciones, for example, offers a new interpretation of Deisler's *Texto* in light of recent political and social events: 'Tremendously relevant today, this work appears as a prophecy of the ocular traumas perpetrated by State agents in Chile during the October 2019 Chilean uprising'.<sup>43</sup> The eye pierced by a gunshot in Deisler's edition is reinterpreted following the sad record number

<sup>41</sup> Microutopías' confidence in the agency of publishing networks led them to join the international Publication Studio network in 2021, an activist network based on a logic of large-scale exchange and sharing. It allows anyone willing to do so to print on demand, on the other side of the world, the projects that have been pooled together, considered as co-publications. Eleven studios spread across North America, South America, Europe, and Asia participate in this network. See Publication Studio. N.d. <https://publicationstudio.biz/studios/>.

<sup>42</sup> 'I believe there is a resurgence of alternative practices to hegemonic circuits and commercial artistic production, with print art projects and artist publications (as well as fanzines, DIY, and other forms of guerrilla activism), as was the case with mail art in its day. Our project is recognised alongside others in the region for its activist nature, circulating messages and counter-narratives that contribute other meanings and dissident topics of conversation.' Darío Marroche, email to the author on 15 July 2025.

<sup>43</sup> Naranja Publicaciones. n.d. 'Texto.' <https://www.naranjapublicaciones.com/producto/texto-guillermo-deisler/>.

of protesters injured in the eyes by police firing lead pellets during demonstrations. With this comment, the publishers also connect Deisler's proposal and the project of María Luisa Portuondo, a young artist published in 2020. In *Demanda Pública* [Public Request], Portuondo refers to the same dramatic event, focusing on the protesters' words and what led them to take to the streets (Portuondo 2020).

While Microutopías claims in its manifesto that 'publication is the construction of historical memory,' the publishing house also defends the idea of 'publication as an affirmation of the here and now' and 'a situated artistic practice.'<sup>44</sup> Darío Marroche, one of its founding members, is convinced that the questions raised by Padín in *Instrumentos/74* resonate directly with the political situation in Uruguay. As he points out, at the time of its re-edition, 'the region was the scene of far-right demonstrations, aligned with fascist ideas such as control of information, etc., as in the dictatorial era when Clemente [Padín] conceived this publication. This further strengthened our desire to recover this work'.<sup>45</sup> The political struggle against information control and censorship, which remains more relevant than ever, is thus featured in the Microutopías catalogue alongside other struggles, past and present, to which the publishing house, which defends all forms of creative resistance, offers a space for visibility. Demands for anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, anti-militarisation, social and political emancipation, transfeminism and the right to sexual diversity run through and intersect in Microutopías' publications, which constantly reaffirm the importance of collective and concerted action.

In the 21st century, the process of re-editing artists' publications that are inextricably linked to the era in which they were created deserves to be considered a phenomenon in its own right. The primary purpose of any reissue is, in theory, to make available again publications that are no longer in circulation, either because they are scattered and/or out of print. The challenge also lies in enabling a wider audience to discover or rediscover projects that were prematurely interrupted or ended by the dictatorship, or practices whose course was irrevocably altered. In the case of Deisler and Ediciones Mimbres, the reissue raises awareness of an aspect of the artist's practice that is relatively unknown abroad, because it was overshadowed by the period of active militancy that followed. Conversely, the re-edition, possibly combined with translation, counterbalances the paradoxical effect of networks by making significant publications, almost exclusively distributed abroad at the time of their publication and yet deeply rooted in their history, accessible in their country and language of origin.

<sup>44</sup> Microutopías. n.d. 'Manifiesto. Por un arte-acción del publicar.' <https://risoutopias.cargo.site/manifiesto>.

<sup>45</sup> Darío Marroche, email to the author on 15 July 2025.

Publishers who engage in such projects take on a real responsibility. By restoring the possibility of direct, sensory and intellectual engagement with printed works, they help to revive or keep alive a collective memory, just as they contribute to the preservation of a cultural, artistic and activist heritage. This re-release provides the opportunity for a retrospective reading of the works, but it is important to bear in mind that any re-edition is also likely to raise other questions and issues in their new context of publication, whether editorial, artistic or political. Such publishing initiatives also take on real meaning when they are part of distribution networks capable of giving these projects a new place and a new audience that can welcome them and lend them new meanings.

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